

Session #10: Revelation 10:1-11 & Review

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Let me begin by welcoming everyone back after our Christmas and New Year's break. Before we get back into the text and where we left off, I want to take a moment to remind us where we have been. If your brain functions like mine you are probably asking yourself, "Now what book of the bible are we studying?" In case you are wondering... the Book of Revelation. So, in quick step I just want to go back through the Introduction and the chapters to reclaim the information we have already covered.



- Introductory Comments:
 - While there are theories that others actually authored the book of Revelation, most scholarship support the idea that it was the Apostle John.
 - He wrote while in captivity on the Island of Patmos which he testifies to himself in verse nine of chapter one.
 - There is much controversy in regard to the dating of this document. For hundreds of years the Catholic Church has followed the wisdom of early Church fathers such as St. Irenaeus who believed the book of Revelation to have been written around 90 AD. Current Catholic scholarship is challenging this idea interpreting key elements as supporting that the book as having been written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temp in 70 AD.
 - The overall focus of the book is a series of visions that St. John receives in which, depending on which vision we are looking at the near future (present Churches in Asia Minor and 70 AD and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple), the ongoing future of the Church and the world (the blowing of the seven trumpets), and the end of all time, (which we have not really gotten to yet.)
 - There are two main themes we encounter throughout the book of Revelation in these visions:
 - Liturgy – Several times we have encountered the great high liturgy as we studied St. John's visions of heaven
 - Chapter four: In St. John's initial entrance into heave and experiencing the worship of God the creator

- Chapter five: The calling forth of Jesus to take His rightful place at the right hand of the Father, doing so by accepting the scroll
- Chapter seven: The calling of the 144,000 sealed in the blood of the Lamb.
- Beginning of Chapter eight (verses 1-5): the breaking of the seventh seal
- One final comment to this theme of Liturgy, we discussed how our participation in the Mass, especially on Sunday/weekend is not only meant to be a foretaste of our eternal reward of heaven, but is a brief moment of our participation in the “now” moment of heaven. At Mass we are joined with the heavenly choirs and standing before the throne of God.
- Judgement – The book of revelation is also a book of God’s judgment raining down upon those who choose to turn away from God.
 - In the immediate future (1st Century):
 - The seven churches of Asia Minor, (Those main churches St. John saw himself as pastorally responsible for) Chapters two and three: affirming their best practices, pointing out their failures and challenging them to their own ongoing spiritual growth... or else. St. John points out what will happen if they continue in their sin.
 - Those who choose to ignore the presence of God incarnate in Jesus Christ as he walked the earth and brought about His death and persecution by the foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (Chapter Six)
 - The judgement all of humanity brings upon itself throughout time by our choosing to not live in right relationship with God and the created world (chapter eight and nine)
 - The judgement of God at the end of all time (chapter nine and further in our study).

Hopefully this helped to ignite those dormant brain cells that may have forgotten what we have studied so far. POINT.

So, today we resume our study of the book of Revelation by taking up chapter ten. Stepping back again so as to bring us up to full speed in chapter eight we saw Jesus opening the seventh seal of the scroll and, after a moment of silent prayer within the heavens, seven angels with seven trumpets came forth, each blowing their trumpet in turn. With the blowing of each of the trumpets yet another judgement came down from the heavens:

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- Trumpet one: hail and fire mixed with blood came down from the heavens destroying a third of the earth
- Trumpet two: something like a great burning mountain fell into the sea destroying a third of the life within and upon the sea
- Trumpet three: A star called wormwood fell to the earth destroying a third of the rivers and springs of water turning them bitter and undrinkable
- Trumpet four: A third of the sun, moon and stars were darkened plunging the world into darkness for a third of the day.

As a reminder the number “one-third” is not meant to be taken literally but figuratively meaning “a lot but not all”. Also, unlike the breaking of the seals of the scroll, these judgements come not as a specific time or place but is the results of the ongoing sinful life of humanity and happen throughout all time here on earth.

We had a moment interruption as a eagle flew throughout the earth proclaiming three woes that were to come with the next three seals. These woes are nothing new to any Christians who is a serious student of scripture because they are merely echoes of the woes that Christ offered and we read in the book of Matthew (chapter 23).

What we studied in chapter nine was the continuation of the blowing of trumpet five and six which brought with them the fulfillment of the woes and God’s judgement upon those who continue to turn their back on God.

- Trumpet five: the opening of the gates of hell and the unleashing of the devil and all the dominions of evil.
- Trumpet six: with the gates of heaven now open all the dominions of evil are now unleashed upon the earth.

Before turning our attention to chapter ten and after being reminded of the evil that exists within the world, as Christians, as believers we hold fast to the belief that regardless of what happens God is in control. As Christians, as practicing, faith filled believers we hold tightly to the conviction that regardless of what transpires in our life (the pain, disappointment, evil...) that God can, as scripture has it: *makes crooked place/lines straight* (Isaiah 45:2). Or in other words brings life out of death which is founded in our belief in the resurrection.

So, now that we are all caught up to speed we turn our attention to chapter ten, and just as there was an interlude of two visions (the sealing of the 144,000 and the praises offered to God by all nations (chapter seven)) following the breaking of the sixth seal; what we will look at today is a similar pause after the sixth trumpet to hear of two visions:

1. The vision of a powerful angel bringing the scroll, now with all seven seals opened (10:1-7).

2. St. John being commission to prophesy about all that he has seen and experienced in these visions (10:8-11).

A Powerful Angel and the Little Scroll 10:1-11

10:1 Then I saw: We turn from the destruction of chapter nine and turn our eyes once again to the heavens where we see a ***mighty angel come down from heaven***. This angel is similar to the angel we encountered in chapter five (verse two) in that they both come to introduce another element of God's vision to St. John. Some scholars wonder if they aren't the same angel. Either way this angel comes as emissary of God because we are told of his divine characteristics:

- ***wrapped in a cloud***: As we talked about before, especially in the Old Testament clouds can be understood as the dwelling place of God. The primary example of that is how God traveled with the Israelites in the desert in the day, manifesting as a pillar of clouds (Exodus 13:20-22).
- ***with a halo around his head***: Most will not argue the fact that a halo, a circle of light encircling the head of someone is symbolic of holiness, purity and being in right relationship with God. We should also remember back in chapter four there was a circle of light or a rainbow that encompassed the throne of God (4:3).

There are those scholars who argue for the case that this "angel" is not an angel but the risen Christ. They take this point because of the two descriptions below which are similar to the description St. John gives of his vision of Christ in chapter one (verses 14-15).

- ***his face was like the sun***:

Brightness and intensity with symbolizing the radiance of God and God's power.

- ***his feet were like pillars of fire***:

Most scholars offer that this apparition is not Jesus Christ but an angel, possibly the same angel from chapter 1:1.

10:2 In his hand: The description of this angel goes on to offer that in his hand ***he held a small scroll that had been opened***. Once again scholarship is divided. Is the scroll the same one that was handed to Jesus in chapter five or a different scroll. Those that argue different point out that the description of this scroll is that it is *small*. Those that argue for the idea that this scroll in chapter ten is the same as the one in chapter five point to the fact that later in this chapter St. John will be commanded to *Take it and eat*, a similar commissioning to prophecy by Ezekiel 2:8-10. Either way the scroll represents the Word of God. Verse two goes on to describe the angel's stance placing ***his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land***. This stance is meant to communicate to all that this angel has the authority of God to speak to the whole earth and therefore all should listen.

10:3 and (he) called out: Just in case you are not stopped and stilled by the posture of this angel which communicates to us that he/she speaks with the authority of God, the angel speaks but in a ***loud voice as a lion roars***. I once had the opportunity to hear a lion roar when visiting the Detroit Zoo. Regardless of the animal chatter throughout the zoo, when that lion roared

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everyone stopped and moved to the lion's den. It was loud and fierce and filled with command and importance. This is the image that St. John is drawing on, a voice that is filled with command and importance. Scholars believe that St. John is also drawing on the words of the prophet Amos 3:8: *The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?* But St. John has also already called Jesus the *Lion of Judah* (5:5) drawing from the prophets: Isaiah (31:4) and Hosea (11:10). The verse goes on to say that when the angel spoke ***the seven thunders raised their voices too***. There are those who would interpret this passage literally looking for seven angels or individuals, but we must remember that the numbers we encounter in the book of Revelation are almost always figurative. We have already discussed how the number seven stands for the idea of complete, needing nothing more. Catholic scholarship understands this passage to mean that God is speaking. The angel gets everyone's attention, he/she is a herald for another and in this case the "other" is God. It is not only the number seven that clues in scholars to the identity of the voice being God but in the book of Exodus (19:16-17) the Israelites encounter God in the thunder: *On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God.* There is the possibility that the seven thunders could be the Holy Spirit speaking. We have already encountered within this book, St. John identifying seven with the Holy Spirit: *seven spirits* (1:4) and *seven torches* (4:5).

10:4 When the seven thunders had spoken: Drawing from the command of God (1:19) to write what he saw and heard, St. John's immediate response to the voice was ***to write it down*** as he has down so far in the experience. But the voice of thunder, God speaks again and says: ***"Seal up what the seven thunders have spoken, but do not write it down.*** We can wonder and discuss and contemplate all that we want as to why God does not want this message to be revealed but if nothing else it reminds us that God is God and we are not. This is not the first time we have encountered in scripture the reality that there will always be things that God is not ready to reveal (Daniel 12:4; 2 Corinthians 12:4).

10:5-6 Then the angel I saw: What we have here is the angel swearing an oath by raising ***his right hand to heaven***. This image should come as no surprise because we carry it forth to this day in most courts of law. As someone comes forth to give testimony they swear to tell the truth and do so by raising their right hand. We read on in verse six just who this oath is being sworn to: ***the one who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them.*** Just in case you are not sure who that "person" is, it is God. Raising of a hand to swear an oath dates all the way back to Moses and the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:40). Why the right hand? Most believe it has to do with being the one closest to the heart and the period of time when everyone believed it was within the heart that the person's soul was found.

10:7 At the time: As we draw this section to a close, we are told when this "secret" message will be revealed: ***when you hear the seventh angel blow his trumpet, the mysterious plan of***

God shall be fulfilled, as he promised to his servants the prophets. Throughout the last two millenniums we have had non-biblical prophets and scholars identify that the “end was nigh”. Jesus Himself told us that we will not know the day nor the hour when all time will come to an end (Matthew 24:36; 25:13). Regardless of our guesses God will announce the final and complete end of time by a trumpet blast and Christ coming once again to earth.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Many years ago I heard a speaker say that at believers we are to live each and every day as if it were the last day here on earth because it might be. Tomorrow we could hear that seventh trumpet blow for the universe or for us individually. We need to school ourselves in delayed gratification, something we experience throughout the book of Revelation (seven seals, seven trumpets and soon we will encounter the seven bowls followed by seven visions). If we can live each day as a practice in understanding that “the best is yet to come” then when we encounter pain, disappointment and darkness we will be less likely to allow those elements of evil to overpower us with discouragement and we will live in greater peace with our eyes turned heavenward.

St. John Commission as Prophet 10:8-11

10:8 Then the voice that I had heard: In this verse St. John turns from being merely a spectator to becoming a participant in his vision. He is commanded by God to **“Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”** God is calling. Just as you and I (hopefully) have moments when we understand that God is calling us to act, St. John is experiencing a new dimension to his overall call as an apostle of Jesus. Now that he has experienced the life and teaching of Jesus, has experience the resurrection, not only is he to share all that he has seen but as we will see in the next verse St. John is being commissioned to prophecy.

10:9 So I went up to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll.: St. John does as he is commanded and in doing so accepts the call of God, whatever it might require. What we read next resembles what happened to the prophet Ezekiel in his commissioning.

But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe. He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey. (Ezekiel 2:8-3:3)

Once again St. John is drawing on his Jewish theology to communicate a profound experience. The scroll given to Ezekiel had writing on the front and the back as does the scroll St. John saw in chapter 5:1 and most Catholic scholars believe is this same small scroll. Ezekiel is

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commanded to take and eat as St. John is being asked to do the same. This image of “consuming” God’s Word is a powerful one for me. It is said that we “become what we eat”. What we physically eat does become broken down in a variety of ways, whether to feed our cells and organs or stored as fat, what we eat does become our bodies, literally. What we bring into our conscience – the shows and movies we watch, the books and materials we read, the activities we choose to participate in are taken into our conscience and souls and can also become the building blocks that form our lives. To read, reflect on, study and pray with God’s holy Word should be a primary block in our building our lives. There is another way to look at this. Why did Jesus command us to “Take and eat... take and drink” (Matthew 26)? It is God’s call to us to become one with God, to take on the characteristics, attitudes and actions of Christ, to become Christ in the world. St. John being asked to “**Take and swallow it** (the scroll) clearly is an image of being commission to take in the Word of God until it becomes a part of him and he can prophesy to the world.

When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart.
Jeremiah 15:16

The verse goes on to say that the Word of God will **turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will taste as sweet as honey.** This too echoes what we have read from the prophet Ezekiel. There are many ways we can choose to understand what is meant by something being sweet in the mouth but sour to the stomach. Most scholars agree here that it is the bitter-sweet reality of God’s judgment. The message that St. John receives promises hope that God will vindicate all the saints and martyrs of faith but because it entails patience and endurance as they/we suffer through the evils of the age until God’s victory is made known, it sours the experience. Who doesn’t want to be named the champion without having to endure endless time practicing, building strength and skills and even the challenge of the game. All too often we stop before we begin (our stomach sours at the prospect) when we think of all that we have to endure to achieve the goal. By this time, a little over a week into the New Year, most have given up on their “New Year’s resolutions, just as an example.

10:10 I took the small scroll: St. John does as he is commanded and he **swallowed it**. He confirms what the voice told him that in his mouth it **was like sweet honey**. The presence of God. The love and devotion of God is greater than any good we can imagine. But, St. John’s and our need to live through this world’s present evils does sour the stomach.

10:11 Then someone said to me: This chapter ends with a divine commissioning. **“You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings.”** St. John is being called to a new phase of his prophetic ministry, to speak to all the lands and peoples, of different nations and tongues and to those in high authority (kings) as well to the common folk what is the content of the scroll he has eaten.

A final thought: It is not just St. John who is being called to “consume” the Word of God. Nor is it just St. John who is called to prophesy. Walter Brueggemann in his book *The Prophetic*

Imagination speaks of how the prophets were given God's specific Word to proclaim but these were very much men who sought to know God's heart and mind so well they easily could speak for God. This is our call as believers. St. James (1:22) challenges all those who wish to follow Christ to not just be hearers of the Word of God but to be doers as well. We may not be called to a specific prophetic ministry but each of us is called to continue emphatically learning of God's ways leading us to not only live as God would have us live but calling others to be one in Christ as well.

Picture on Page One: Rev. McKendree Robbins Long, Sr., Vision from Book of Revelation

Reflection Questions:

- Our experiences of God help us to connect to God's presence in our life as well as lead us to our next steps. How often do you take the time to reflect on your life and seriously look at how God is manifesting Himself to you? Having a Spiritual Director is an opportunity to commit yourself to this reflection. It is not their job to interpret your experiences but to listen and companion you on the journey
- Do you have a balance in your life of the sweetness of God and the sourness of life? Why or Why not?
- Have you every thought of yourself as a prophet? Can you identify ways or moments you have had to speak the Word of God to those who didn't really want to hear it.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Prophecy as a gift: 2004

Evil as still having power in the world: 671

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