

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 10

The Mighty Angel with the Little Scroll

When trying to understand any passage in the Bible, we need to take great care to read out of the text that which it is telling us. The theological word for this is exegesis, which literally means, “to lead out of.” Too many commentators and preachers, especially when trying to explain the book of Revelation, use eisegesis, which literally means, “to lead into.” With eisegesis, the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants, in spite of any evidence otherwise.

The opening part of this chapter is an excellent example of how many commentators and preachers inject their own beliefs into the text. They reach these false conclusions because they think that similar sounding descriptions must be referring to the same thing and they ignore the clear facts that their assumptions are wrong. The bottom line is that we don’t know for sure who this mighty angel is. But rest assured, it is not Jesus Christ.

Two of the three woes have passed. Now there is a brief interlude in which we are introduced to a mighty angel with a little scroll in his hand. Though some believe this is Jesus Christ, the evidence in this chapter suggests otherwise. When he calls out with a loud voice like a roaring lion, John hears the sound of the seven thunders. Apparently, John recognized what the seven thunders were saying, because he was about to write what they said, but he was told not to.

This mighty angel then proclaims that there will be no more delay, which apparently is an answer to the prayers of the martyrs under the altar recorded back in chapter six. He says that as the seventh trumpet is sounded, the mystery of God will be revealed, an apparent reference to the millennial kingdom of God.

John is then instructed to take the little scroll from the mighty angel and eat it. As he did, it was sweet as honey in his mouth, but when he had eaten it, his stomach was made bitter, and he was told that he must prophesy about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.

Revelation 10:1

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.

“another mighty angel” – As we noted above, some claim that this is Jesus Christ as the “angel of God” who appeared in the Old Testament. This supposition is based on the description of this angel (rainbow on his head, face like the sun, feet like pillars of fire) and the fact that he is clothed with a cloud, since clouds were a symbol of God in the Old Testament and Christ ascended into heaven on a cloud. There are several problems with this interpretation, however. The first is the fact that nowhere else in the New Testament (no time after His incarnation) is Christ referred to as an angel (He is referred to as **the** Angel of the Lord, but only in the O.T.).

Also, as we pointed out back in chapter 8, every time that Jesus is introduced in the book of Revelation He is specifically identified: (the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth, the son of man, the first and the last, etc.)

And, again as in chapter eight, this mighty angel is referred to as “another ... angel.” The word “another” is from the Greek word *allos*, which means “another of the same kind.” The other Greek word translated “another” is *heteros*, which means “another of a different kind.” Since this verse uses *allos*, it means that this mighty angel is a mighty angel of the same kind. But the same kind as what? Either the same kind as the “presence angels” having the trumpets

Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.
(Revelation 8:2)

or the same kind as the mighty angel mentioned in Revelation 5:2 (the word translated “strong” in Revelation 5:2 is the same as the word translated “mighty” in Revelation 10:1).

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" (Revelation 5:2)

We really don't know which of these it is, but since the expression “mighty angel” is used to describe him, it is probably the latter.

Another indication that this is not Christ comes from Revelation 10:6 where this mighty angel takes an oath by him who lives forever and ever (see notes on verse 6). Finally, one more reason why this is not a picture of Christ is the fact that this angel sets his feet on the sea and land (see Revelation 10:2). Jesus will not set His feet on this earth again until the “second coming” which, throughout scripture, is pictured as a return in vengeance and judgment on the “the Day of the Lord.” The appearance of this angel is peaceful and merciful (the sign of the rainbow in the clouds – Genesis 9:8-17).

Clearly, this is a huge, powerful, holy representative of God sent to deliver a message to John just as other angels have been sent to him. To assume that this is Christ, however, is presumptuous and unwarranted.

“wrapped in a cloud” – Clouds are a symbol of God's presence throughout the Bible (Exodus 16:9, 10; 24:16; 34:5; Numbers 11:25; 1 Kings 8:10; Psalms 97:2; Acts 1:9; Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; Revelation 1:7). Although this angel is probably not the Son of God, he is characterized as having God's authority.

“with a rainbow over his head” – The rainbow is a symbol of God's covenant of peace and His promise to never again destroy the earth with a flood (see Genesis 9:8-17)

Although we are not told specifically who this mighty angel is, it is possible that this is the Archangel Michael. We see from Daniel chapters 10 and 12 that Michael is referred to as the “Prince” of Israel who will appear during the Tribulation.

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. (Daniel 12:1)

Revelation 10:2

He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land,

“little scroll” – This is a different word form from previous references to books (scrolls) in Revelation. The word “book” or “scroll” is typically the translation of the Greek word *biblos*, or *biblios* whereas this particular Greek word is *biblaridion*, which is a diminutive of *biblos* and means “a little book.” Today we might call it a booklet. The fact that the book is opened (not sealed) indicates a message for mankind that is not hidden, and yet we are not told what the message is. It may contain the message of the seven thunders mentioned in verse four, which may well be additional judgments.

“his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land” – This is an indication of the immense size of this angelic being, a symbol of his authority over both the land and the sea, and an indication that this is not Jesus Christ (see notes on verse 1).

Revelation 10:3, 4

and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."

“called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring” – Some have taken this as an indication that this is Christ speaking since He is “the lion of the tribe of Judah.” But, just because two things have similar characteristics does not indicate that they are the same thing. What this does tell us is that this “mighty angel” who is huge in appearance, possesses a terrifyingly loud voice.

“seven thunders sounded.” – Exactly what is meant by the utterance of the seven thunders is nowhere explained. Some commentators claim that these seven thunders are the response of the rulers of this earth (demons) in defiance of the voice of the mighty angel. This, however, is pure speculation and is not supported by any other scripture.

What we do know is that thunder in Scripture often represents God’s judgment. For instance:

Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. (Exodus 9:23)

As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were routed before Israel. (1 Samuel 7:10)

you will be visited by the LORD of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire. (Isaiah 29:6)

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the seven thunders are seven additional judgments against the earth dwellers.

“I was about to write” – Whatever the source of these thunderous sounds, we know that they communicated something that was intelligible to John, for he was about to write the content of what they said.

“I heard a voice from heaven” – This is a clear indication that John’s vantage point is on the earth, unlike the previous visions that were from a heavenly vantage point. Remember back in Revelation 1:19 John was commanded to “Write the things which you have seen, and the things

which are, and the things which will take place after this.” In obedience to God, John was about to write, but this voice, which may be from God, forbade John from writing down the content of what the seven thunders said. Even though this is the book of Revelation, meaning “uncovering” or “making known,” we have to realize that God does not reveal everything to us. None of us has a complete understanding of God’s Word

Revelation 10: 5-7

And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

“The angel ... raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever” – This is further evidence that this mighty angel is not Jesus Christ. If it were Jesus, he would have sworn by himself as shown in God’s promise to Abraham.

and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, (**Genesis 22:16**)

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, (**Hebrews 6:13**)

“that there would be no more delay” – The content of the oath taken by this mighty angel is a reference to time. The word translated “delay” is *chronos*, which is usually translated as “time.” Because of this, some commentators have portrayed this as a declaration that time is about to cease, that is, eternity is about to be ushered in. However, in order for that to be true, we would have to completely skip over the Millennial reign of Christ. Also - according to John Walvoord in his book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*:

This expression (Gr., *chronos*) has sometimes been interpreted to mean that time will cease. The expression here, however, does not refer to time as a succession of chronological events; rather it means that time has run out, that is, that there will be no further delay.

And Oscar Cullmann in his book *Christ and Time* says,

None of the New Testament expressions for time has as its object time as an abstraction. This is not even the meaning of *chronos*, “time” ... In the New Testament we find this word for “time” used in concrete reference to the redemptive history; it may have the meaning of “season” or of “age,” or it may signify simply some space of time that is to elapse. Thus, even the well-known passage in **Rev. 10:6**, where it is said that there will be no more *chronos*, is not to be understood as if the era of timelessness were meant; rather, on the analogy of **Hab. 2:3** and **Heb. 10:37**, we must translate: “there will be no more delay”

This reference to the ending of delay is apparently a response to the prayers of the martyrs under the altar recorded in chapter six:

They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (**Revelation 6:10**)

John is told that the ending of the delay occurs with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. With this trumpet blast, the mystery of God will be finished.

“mystery” – This is a transliteration of the Greek word *mustērion*, which according to the Complete Word Study Dictionary, refers to “a truth which has hitherto been unknown but which now is being revealed.” So, we have to ask ourselves what mystery John is talking about. According to William Kelley in his *Lectures On The Book Of Revelation* it is:

the secret of His allowing Satan to have his own way, and man too (that is to say, the wonder of evil prospering and of good being trodden underfoot). God checks, no doubt, the evil in a measure, partly through human government and partly through His own providential dealings.

This mystery that was “**announced to His servants the prophets**” must, therefore, be speaking of the many references by the Old Testament prophets to the earthly kingdom of God - the millennium.

By drawing all this together, we see that the mighty angel is, in fact, announcing the imminent judgment of evil and the ushering in of the millennial kingdom. This judgment of evil will happen with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which contains all seven of the bowl judgments poured out in rapid succession.

Revelation 10:8

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

The same voice which forbade John to write the utterances of the seven thunders now commands him to take the book from the hand of the mighty angel. Based on John’s description of the size of this angel and the fearful sound of his voice, it must have been no small thing for him to approach the angel and take the book out of his hand. Both the words “go” and “take” are in the imperative mood, indicating that they are not suggestions, but commands.

Revelation 10:9, 10

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.

John, knowing that it would be futile for him to take the little book from the angel by force, nonetheless demands the angel to relinquish possession to him (“give” is the Greek word *didomi*, written in the imperative mood). The angel then instructs John not only to take the little book but to eat it.

What, exactly, is the meaning of the eating of the little scroll? If we look at the Old Testament, we can see several examples of scroll eating and what is meant by it.

And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. And he said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and

... speak with my words to them. ... The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me. (Ezekiel 2:9 - 3:4; 3:14)

Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16)

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalms 119:103)

The angel's command for John to eat the scroll indicates that he was to digest the contents of what was written on it. Based on the angel's proclamation regarding the end of delay and the coming of the woe of the seventh trumpet, it appears that the scroll contains a description of these coming judgments. The consumption of God's Word produced in John a sweetness, just as the consumption of God's Word by us today produces a sweetness that is unmatched by any other activity known to mankind. And yet, when we understand the judgments recorded in His Word which will be poured out upon those who reject Him, it gives us reason to shudder at the horror of the vengeance of a holy God against unrepentant mankind. As John understood the severity of God's wrath about to be poured out, it literally "turned his stomach."

Revelation 10:11

And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

"again" – Having consumed God's Word, John is now told that he must prophesy again. The word translated "again" is *palin*, which means "back, back again, or again, as simply implying to return back to a former place, state, act, or time." This is an indication that the prophecy that is to follow in John's writing is actually about something that chronologically occurred before the things he has just written about. In other words, the events in Revelation 11:1-14 occur sometime chronologically before the sixth trumpet.

So What?

Throughout the Old Testament we see that God spoke to the Jewish people through prophets and angelic beings. And, although John is a Christian, the entire book of Revelation is about God dealing with Jews once again. So, it's not surprising that John is acting as a prophet. Back in chapter one, this book was referred to as prophecy:

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. (Revelation 1:3)

And, repeatedly in chapter 22 the book of Revelation is referred to as prophecy.

And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. (Revelation 22:7)

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near." (Revelation 22:10)

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19)

So, it is not at all surprising that this prophetic message is delivered to John through angelic beings. To Christians it is somehow romantic or exciting that in the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to his people through the prophets and through angelic beings. But – that’s not how He communicates with his adopted children (Christians). According to the opening of the book of Hebrews:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

As I have said before, God is dealing with Christians differently than He dealt with the children of Abraham and God has a different plan of the ages for Christians than He has for Jews. Christians have a unique relationship with God. We are his adopted children and we are engaged to His only begotten Son. Christians are also very special in God’s plan of the ages.

So, when we read about how God spoke to the Jews through the prophets and through angels, we may want to be partakers of this same communication process. We may want to have prophets and angels speak to us as well. But that’s not the way God talks to Christians. Throughout the Bible, Christians are the only people who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God: Adam wasn’t, Seth wasn’t, Noah wasn’t, Job wasn’t, Abraham wasn’t, Moses wasn’t, Elijah wasn’t, John the Baptist wasn’t, even Mary, the mother of Jesus wasn’t, at least not before the resurrection. And, during the Tribulation and Millennium there won’t be anyone indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Do you see what a special place that puts us in? We, of all people throughout history are the only ones with Emmanuel, God with us, living inside us!

We don’t need God to send us prophets or even angels to speak to us and to teach us. This same John who wrote the book of Revelation also wrote down the words of Jesus when He said:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)

The Father speaks to Christians through His son and through His Holy Spirit. We don’t need to have prophets or angels bring us His message. We can hear it directly from Him. He speaks directly to us through His Word, the Bible. And, He speaks directly to us through His Spirit.

Now - I’m going to be really bold here, so bear with me. “The main reason that we don’t hear God speaking directly to us is because we aren’t listening!” There are too many other enticements in the world around us today. They are all shouting their messages to us, trying to get our attention. But God does not impose His will on us. He waits for us to want to do His will. What we need to learn to do is to block out all those noisy siren calls of the world system and listen to God the same way that Elijah did.

And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. (1 Kings 19:11-12)

God doesn’t shout at us, He whispers. And only those who are listening intently to Him, and to Him alone, will hear Him speaking to them. Are you listening to all the noise that the world is

making? Or are you listening for God to whisper to you? It's hard to do, and it takes a lot of practice, but the reward is great.

Whisper in my ear, oh Lord, my God! Your servant is listening!

Let's pray!

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.