



THE REIGN OF SIN

The Victory of The Church Part 1

August 6, 2017

Revelation 10

The Angel and the Little Scroll

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. 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, 3 and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. 4 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." 5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven 6 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, 7 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.

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." 9 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." 10 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. 11 And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

h. An interlude (10:1–11:14)

As in the case of the seals, there is an interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpets. In both cases the effect is to set off the seventh visitation as particularly important. We are all keyed up for the climax but it does not come. This is not simply a literary device, but part of life. We cannot predict how God's judgments will work out. They take unexpected courses. There are delays which give opportunity for repentance.

This interlude centers on an open book, which is surely the Word of God (10:2). John is to eat it after which he will prophesy 'about many peoples, nations, languages and kings' (10:11). The gospel is to be preached everywhere before the End comes (cf. Mark 13:10). John has dealt with the fate of sinners during the days leading up to the climax. Now he turns to the church during that time. It has duties to perform and troubles to undergo. John warns it.

i. The little book and the seven thunders (10:1–4)

Some of the things in Revelation are more mysterious than others. With the seven thunders we come to something so secret that it may not be revealed.

1. *Another mighty angel* looks back to 5:2 (cf. also 8:3; 18:21). John saw him in the act of *coming down* (present participle) from heaven (cf. 18:1; 20:1). The direction perhaps means that John is now on earth (cf. also vv. 4, 8), whereas he has been writing from the perspective of heaven (e.g. 9:13). Ladd reminds us of 'the fluidity of apocalyptic thought; one can move from heaven to earth in vision without explanation'. Up till now little has been said about the appearance of angels, attention being rather on what they did and said. But this one's appearance is described fairly fully. Each of the points mentioned has elsewhere some connection with God or with Christ, so this angel is clearly important. Some (e.g. Stoffel) have identified him with Christ, but this is not justified. Christ is never called an angel in this book (let alone 'another angel') and this angel is not accorded divine honours. He is not worshipped, for example. The swearing of an oath 'by him who lives for ever and ever' (v. 6) does not look like an action of Christ. The angel was dressed in *a cloud* (cf. Ps. 104:3 for the clouds as God's chariot), his hat was *a rainbow* (cf. the rainbow round the throne, 4:3), *his face* was like *the sun* (cf. 1:16), and *his legs* like *fiery pillars* (a pillar of fire was the symbol of God's presence with his people in the wilderness, Exod. 13:21–22). Several commentators see the rainbow as produced by the sunshine of the angel's face falling on the cloud.

2. The mighty angel of 5:2 was associated with a book, that one being written inside and out. It was called a *biblion*, and in this angel's hand was also *a little scroll*, a *biblaridion*. This word is not previously attested so we do not know whether the diminutive termination is to be taken seriously or not (*biblion* is also a diminutive). The distinction between a 'book' and a 'little book' is apt not to be so very marked when it is merely the question of the length of a roll. If the present word means a genuinely small book the significance will be that it contained part only of the revelation of God's purpose. The book *lay open* (the perfect participle may point to

permanence; the book is not concealed nor likely to be). The angel *planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land*. The reason for the choice of foot is not apparent, but treading on both land and sea probably indicates mastery over both (cf. Ps. 60:8). He treads the sea as easily as the land. It also means that his message is a universal message. It concerns all, whether on land or sea.

His posture is also an indication of gigantic size. The world despised Christians as members of a little, insignificant church. It held all that they stood for as of no account. But their faith was based on the word of God and that word is in the hands of this colossal figure, who, though only dimly seen through the enveloping cloud, spans both land and sea. God's word is supremely significant. It towers above all the affairs of men.

3. The previous mighty angel cried out with a loud voice (5:2), and so does this one. His voice is likened to that of a lion roaring (actually the verb *mykaomai* is mostly used of the bellowing of oxen, but the use of its cognate noun for the roar of lions is attested). His shout is followed by *the seven thunders*, where the article points to a definite group. Some see a reference to the sevenfold use of 'the voice of the Lord' as that voice is likened to thunder (Ps. 29). But if there is an allusion to some such definite group we have no means of identifying it with certainty.

4. The seven thunders not only sounded but *spoke*, uttered sounds with meaning. John was about to write down what they said but was forbidden. The *voice* that forbade him is anonymous, but it was divine in origin (*from heaven*). *Seal* (*sphragizō*) is found in the New Testament in the sense 'keep hidden' only here and in 22:10. Sealing was common in the ancient world, but mostly as a means of identification or of certifying and authenticating. In apocalyptic, however, it does seem to mean 'keep hidden' (cf. Dan. 12:4). Charles speaks of it as a technical term in this sense. But its use here for 'sealing' something spoken, not written, seems unparalleled. The meaning is clear, however, and it is reinforced by the following *do not write it down* (there is some emphasis on 'them'; NIV, *it*).

Human nature being what it is there has been a good deal of speculation as to what the thunders said. Most think that a series of judgments is meant, and some hold that, as enough of judgment has already been disclosed through the seals and the trumpets, to write more would be unnecessary, especially as the subject of the book is now to be the church rather than the world. But such an explanation makes the thunders completely inexplicable. **Why would God make a revelation that was unnecessary? It is better to think of the thunders as conveying a revelation to John (clearly he understood them), but which he was not to pass on to others. Paul speaks of such experiences (2 Cor. 12:4). Not all the counsel of God is open to everyone (cf. Colclasure, 'there is much, much more to the eternal plan of God than we can ever imagine'). It is timely to be reminded that there are some parts of it which people like John can know but which are beyond ordinary people like ourselves. A further value in our knowledge that the thunders are sealed is that it is a warning against the kind of date-fixing that has characterized some schemes of prophecy based on this book. On John's own showing we do not have all the information. God**

has kept some things back from us. Let us not proceed as though all has been revealed.

ii. *The angel's oath (10:5–7)*

The angel solemnly proclaims the imminence of the fulfilment of what he calls 'the mystery of God' (v. 7). This stands for the whole divine purpose (see note) and conveys to John's readers the assurance that there is an answer to the perplexities of history. The mystery of God will be completed. Prophecy will be fulfilled. The angel solemnly confirms this with an oath.

5. *The angel* is identified with him of verse 1 by his *standing on the sea and the land*. He now swore a solemn oath. He lifted up his hand to heaven, a common accompaniment of oaths in antiquity (cf. Gen. 14:22; Deut. 32:40; Dan. 12:7).

6. The oath is made very solemn by its prolonged reference to God. The angel singles out his eternity and his activities in creation. This brings out the point that what follows is not some panic device to which a surprised deity must resort in reaction to unexpected machinations of evil men and evil spirits. He is supreme over time and over creation. He fulfils what he plans. 'The last days, no less than the first, are in His hands' (Kiddle). The content of the oath is that *there will be no more delay*. AV translates 'there should be time no longer', and this has been made the basis for a view that in the next life there will be no such thing as time. We will live in a great eternal present. But the angel is not contrasting time with eternity. He is solemnly swearing that the events of which he speaks will take place certainly and speedily when the seventh angel blows his trumpet. NIV is correct.

Charles thinks that John had in mind the reference to 'a time, times and half a time' (Dan. 12:7; cf. Dan. 7:25), words which refer to the period of the antichrist's power, which is already present in the visions of Daniel, but here is still future and is to be introduced by the seventh trumpet. This is possible, all the more so since the angel is speaking between the sixth and the seventh trumpets. From that vantage-point he assures John that when the necessary conditions have been fulfilled there will be no delay. The End will come. The fact that the seventh trumpet does not sound until 11:15 is no contradiction. The intervening sections do not describe a series of happenings intervening chronologically between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Rather they represent a parenthesis in which the task of the church throughout the ages comes before us.

7. *But* is the strong adversative *alla* and signifies, 'but, on the contrary'. This strengthens the view that 'delay' rather than 'time' is meant in verse 6. The time is defined more exactly as *in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet*. For *mystery* see on 1:20. The word is not uncommon in the New Testament and the very expression we have here occurs elsewhere (1 Cor. 2:1 [see mg.]; Col. 2:2; the plural without the article in 1 Cor. 4:1; cf. Eph. 1:9). Moffatt translates it here 'the secret purpose of God'. The word is usually associated with the gospel and this may be in mind when John uses the verb *euāngelisen* (*announced*), which usually means 'preach the gospel'. There is that about the gospel which unassisted reason would never attain. Left to ourselves we would never have worked out that God would save men in this

way. It has to be revealed.

The good news was proclaimed to *his servants the prophets* (cf. Amos 3:7). We should probably understand *prophets* here to mean the New Testament prophets as well as the great prophets of the Old Testament. God has one purpose through the ages and it comes to its climax at this point. From the very beginning he has planned to bring his people to salvation, and thus his whole purpose is coming to its culmination. It involves the judgment of evil, but also the deliverance and vindication of his people. John's readers are to reflect that the mighty world forces of which they were so conscious, far from being triumphant, are about to be overthrown decisively. A purpose that God has planned before the world and has matured throughout all ages will not lightly be abandoned. *The mystery of God* will indeed be accomplished.

iii. *The little book (10:8–11)*

John takes the scroll from the angel's hand and eats it. This gives him the message he must use in prophesying to many peoples. Charles regards the contents of the little book as 'a *proleptic* vision of the reign of the Antichrist' (on v. 1). It is not necessary to be so specific. It is the word of God to John. But since he does not specify to what it refers with any precision we are on dubious ground when we attempt to improve on him.

8. John now hears again *the voice that I had heard from heaven* (v. 4). Once again there is no indication of the speaker, but the command is authoritative. The voice instructs the Seer to take the book from the angel, who is described for the third time in terms of the places where his feet rested. Clearly his position on both land and sea is seen as important. The word for *scroll* is *biblion* whereas both before and after the word is *biblaridion* (vv. 2, 9, 10). There appears to be no difference in meaning, and it is not clear why John should use *biblion* just this once. The book is again said to be *open*. This is important. The revelation is not hidden.

9. So John went to the angel and asked him for the little book. The angel said, *Take it and eat it*. This last verb, *kataphage*, means 'devour it', 'eat it down', i.e. 'make its contents completely your own', 'take them into your innermost being'. The angel proceeds to assure John that it *will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey*. Jeremiah had a similar experience when he ate God's words and they became joy and delight (Jer. 15:16). So did Ezekiel. He was commanded to eat a scroll and as he did so it was sweet as honey in his mouth (Ezek. 3:1–3). Neither, however, reports John's experience of bitterness in the belly. Being God's word it is necessarily sweet to the believer (cf. Pss 19:9–10; 119:103). But when it contains stern denunciations and tells of woes on evil-doers it is also bitter. We should not miss the point that it is the belly of John, the firm believer in Jesus Christ, which is made bitter. As verse 11 makes clear, the scroll is concerned with the message he must proclaim. The true preacher of God's word will faithfully proclaim the denunciations of the wicked it contains. But he does not do this with fierce glee. The more his heart is filled with the love of God the more certain it is that the telling forth of 'woes' will be a bitter experience.

Some interpretations miss this. Thus Hendriksen understands the bitterness to refer to the

persecutions the believer must undergo. While it is true that suffering is inevitably the lot of the faithful disciple, that scarcely meets the present case. Here the bitterness is internal, something within the believer. It is not external like the persecutions that come from without. Again, Kepler misinterprets John when he says, ‘The book is “bitter” because its message foretells persecution and death; but when the message is digested, it is “sweet as honey,” since the rewards of the “New Jerusalem” await those martyred for their faith.’ The fact is that the sweetness is in the mouth, and the bitterness when the message is digested. Kepler has reversed John’s sequence. The wickedness of man grieved God at his heart (Gen. 6:6), and the true preacher of God’s word enters to some degree into this suffering.

10. Now we have the fulfilment of the angel’s words. Twice John was told to ‘take’ the scroll. He asked the angel to ‘give’ it to him. But the angel told him to ‘take’ it. And in the end he did ‘take’ it. The revelation of God is something the messenger of God must take for himself. He cannot be passive. So John took the scroll and devoured it. He found it in his mouth *sweet as honey*. But it made his *stomach bitter*.

11. *I was told* is more literally ‘they say to me’, which is curious for up till now there has been a single speaker. NIV is probably correct in taking it as equivalent to a passive.

Again is a little strange, for up till now John has not so much prophesied as heard and seen things. But he has also recorded his visions, and throughout it has been clear that he will proclaim the things he has seen. He has spoken of his book as a prophecy (1:3), so he can be said in a measure to have prophesied already in what he has recorded. But now he is called upon to prophesy again, and to do so on a larger scale, *about many peoples, nations, languages and kings* (for this expression see on 5:9; this is the only one of seven similar expressions which includes *kings*). The word of John is concerned not with any one group of people, be it church, nation, or empire, but with many. This has had a striking fulfilment through the centuries. The reference to *kings* is appropriate as reminding us that the word of God through his prophets is superior to even the highest among men (cf. Jer. 1:10).¹

REVELATION 10:1–11

A Little Scroll

¹Then I saw another strong angel coming down from heaven, dressed in a cloud. Over his head was a rainbow; his face was like the sun, and his feet were like fiery pillars. ²He was holding a small scroll, open, in his hand. Placing his right foot on the sea, and his left on the land, ³he shouted in a loud voice like a lion roaring. When he shouted, the seven

¹ Morris, L. (1987). *Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 20, pp. 134–140). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

thunders answered with their own voices. ⁴When the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven. ‘Seal up what the seven thunders said’, instructed the voice. ‘Don’t write it down.’

⁵Then the angel whom I had seen standing on the sea and the land raised his right hand towards heaven ⁶and swore an oath by the One who lives for ever and ever, who made heaven and what it contains, the earth and what it contains, and the sea and what it contains. This was the oath: that there would be no more time, ⁷but that God’s mystery would be completed in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, who was going to blow his trumpet. That is what he had announced to his servants the prophets.

⁸The voice I had heard from heaven spoke to me again. ‘Go’, it said, ‘and take the open scroll from the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.’ ⁹So I went up to the angel.

‘Give me the little scroll’, I said.

‘Take it’, he said to me, ‘and eat it. It will be bitter in your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.’ ¹⁰So I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand, and I ate it. It tasted like sweet honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach felt bitter. ¹¹‘You must prophesy again’, he said to me, ‘about many peoples, nations, languages and kingdoms.’

One of the most famous baseball umpires of all time, Bill Klem, earned his reputation by insisting that the umpire’s word was not only final, but in a sense creative. On one celebrated occasion, he waited a long time to call a particular pitch. Some umpires would say that the ball was, in its own right, either a ‘ball’ or a ‘strike’, so that the umpire would merely be acknowledging the facts of the case. Klem was made of sterner stuff. ‘Well’, asked the player, ‘is it a ball or a strike?’ ‘Sonny’, replied Klem, ‘it ain’t nothing ’til I call it.’

Klem’s belief in the power of his words may have annoyed both batters and pitchers in his time, but the idea of speaking words which create a new reality is an ancient one, finding classic expression in the great prophets. They are not only given visions or revelations of things that are to come. They are to speak words which somehow generate that new situation. The words, like God’s own words (which the prophet believes is exactly what they are), perform actions; they do things. ‘By the **word** of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth ... he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm’ (Psalm 33:4, 9). And when God puts words into the mouth of prophets, the same thing happens. The prophet doesn’t just describe what is going to happen, like (as it were) a newsreader in reverse. By saying it, the prophet brings it to pass. Prophecy makes things happen.

This now puts John in the hot seat. There are new things yet to happen as part of God’s purpose, *and John’s words will bring them to pass*. This is the meaning of the angel bringing him the little scroll from **heaven**, which though ‘little scroll’ is not the same word as the ‘scroll’ of chapter 5, seems to be the same reality. The lamb has removed the seals; now the scroll can be

read, and John is to be the one to do it. This, it seems, is the reason why he was invited into the heavenly throne room.

This is how prophecy works. God's words are to become John's words in order that they may become reality. This is part of what it means to say, as in Daniel 7:14, 22 and 27, that God's people will share his rule over the world. He rules by his word, as the lamb will do in the final judgment (19:15); but here his word is the word given to the prophet to eat, to digest and then to speak.

Like every gift of God, the scroll is sweet as honey to the taste (Psalm 19:10; 119:103). But once John has digested the scroll, he discovers that its **message** is bitter. More dire warnings are to follow, as there were when Ezekiel (2:8; 3:1–3) was commanded, in the same way, to eat the scroll of God's prophecies.

'Eating the scroll' is a vivid metaphor for the way in which the prophet, then or indeed today, can only speak God's word insofar as it has become part of the prophet's own life. It may be nourishing; it may be bitter; it may be both. This is part of what it means to say that God desires to act in the world through obedient human beings. Prophecy—speaking words which bring God's fresh order to the world—is one specialist aspect of the larger human vocation, and here John shoulders that responsibility. What will follow, not least in chapters 12–20, will be God's word, spoken through him, bringing about the terrible judgment and the glorious, victorious mercy in which 'God's mystery would be completed'.

This gift of the little scroll, and the vocation to turn its words into prophecy which will bring God's purposes into reality, all takes place as we are waiting with bated breath for the seventh trumpet to sound. Yes, says the angel, it is coming soon, and when it comes it will complete 'God's mystery' (verse 7). There will be no more time (verse 6): not, I think, in the sense that 'time shall be no more', leaving everything in the timeless 'eternity' beloved of some non-biblical philosophies, but rather that 'time will have run out' for all those who are presuming on God's patience. This time things will reach their goal. This reminds us that the sequence of the seven trumpets is not meant to stand chronologically between the other 'seven' sequences—the letters, the seals and the bowls—but is one key dimension of the same basic sequence. We are building up, at the end of chapter 11, to what could be the final climax of the book—except for the fact that we still have the entire second half of the book to come, in which the same story is approached from a radically different angle, spelling out in depth all sorts of aspects of the story which cannot be told until these preliminary tellings have done their work.

The angel described at the start of the chapter bursts onto the scene in a blaze of light, all the more welcome after the gloom and horror of the previous section. He comes from heaven with God's word for the earth, dressed in a cloud which, we may suppose, is the sign that God himself is present but hidden in this message. The rainbow over his head reminds us of the throne-vision of chapter 4, and of the ancient biblical echoes awoken there. His face is like the sun, as was that of the **son of man** in the first chapter, and his feet, like fiery pillars, remind us of the pillar of fire in the desert, the flaming sign of God's personal presence. This is no ordinary angel, and when

he speaks we know why: his voice is like a lion roaring. He comes with the words of the lion-lamb, the **Messiah**. He embodies the sovereignty of the creator God over the whole creation: the sea and the land (verses 2, 5) are the two spheres of ‘earth’, as heaven and earth are the two spheres of the whole creation and male and female are the two spheres, as it were, of the animal world. It could hardly be made clearer that the message he brings is from the creator, since in verse 6 he swears an oath by the one who made heaven, earth and sea and all that they contain. Any suggestion, then, that the message he brings will collude with the forces of destruction and declare that the present world is a piece of trash, to be thrown away and replaced with something completely different, is ruled out. When God’s mystery is complete, it will be the fulfilment of creation, not its abolition.

We brace ourselves once more for the seventh trumpet. But before it sounds the churches for whom John is writing need to know where they stand in this great cosmic scenario. Are they after all just spectators, or do they themselves have a particular role to play?²

Preview: The Open Little Scroll and the Commissioning of John (10:1–11)

The **mighty angel** that John saw **coming down from heaven** has characteristics similar to those of Christ in the inaugural vision (1:12–20). He is **wrapped in a cloud** like the Son of man (Dan. 7:13; cf. Rev. 1:13; 14:14) with a **rainbow over his head** (cf. 4:3), **and his face was like the sun** (cf. 1:16), **and his legs like pillars of fire** (cf. 1:15). He spoke **with a loud voice, like a lion roaring** (1:15b; 5:5). The cloud also recalls God’s revelation on Mount Sinai, and the rainbow which surrounded God in the throne room vision (4:3) recalls his covenant with Noah. The angel’s appearance is appropriate for his task as representative of God and the Lamb, and his gigantic size is equal to his loud roaring voice. **His right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land** marks him as representative of God and his Messiah who have authority over land and sea. He held in his hand **a little scroll** that was **open**. The reader would now like to know the content of the little scroll, but our text does not tell us. The most we can perceive is a contrast between the sealed scroll and the little **open** scroll. The content of the latter was accessible to all, because the scroll was open, even though it needed prophetic interpretation. Instead of hearing about the content, an interruption occurs in the vision narrative.

When the angel **called out, the seven thunders sounded** (Psalm 29), and John understood what they said. When he **was about to write** what he had just heard, **a voice from heaven**—perhaps from an angel, named Voice—called out, **“Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.”** This prohibition is surprising in view of the twofold command to write in the inaugural vision (1:11, 19; cf. 22:10). In contrast to the usage of Dan. 12:4, to **seal** here means not to write at all. It is obvious that what the seven thunders had spoken is not contained in John’s apocalypse, so there is no way for us to know what the seven thunders

² Wright, T. (2011). *Revelation for Everyone* (pp. 92–96). London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox.

actually said. Yet we must ask, Why did John narrate this episode which interrupts the flow of the narration of his new commission? Why tease the reader or hearer and tell of the prohibition against divulging this particular message? Two suggestions may be in order. One, by narrating this prohibition John tells us that his book does not contain all there is to know about the end. It is not an all-embracing prophecy. Two, with this teaser John *may* have marked the difference between his own prophecy and that of other apocalyptic prophets. They tried to predict apocalyptic timetables and figure out the date of the day of the Lord and the date of the parousia. John's book of prophecy, from the first to the last chapter, is a testimony that it is not for us "to know the times and seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). God knows the day and the hour of Christ's parousia (Mark 13:22). All that true prophets and the church need to know is that he is coming "soon" (Mark 13:30; Rev. 1:1; 22:6, 12, 20). The transmission of calculations is prohibited because it would constitute false prophecy. Incidentally, the reference to 2 Cor. 12:3–4 as background to this prohibition is beside the point, since John is pictured as being on earth and not involved in a heavenly journey.

Then **the angel ... lifted up his right hand to heaven**. Standing "on sea and land" and raising his hand "to heaven" the angel is touching the basic elements of creation. And he **swore by him** who is the creator of **heaven ... the earth and ... the sea** and all that exists within them **that there should be no more delay**. The background of this oath is Dan. 12:4–9. After Daniel had sealed his book "until the time of the end," an angel swore "by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time" (= 3½ years) until the end arrives and the oppression of God's people ceases. In contrast to Daniel's prediction, God's strong angel swore that there shall be **no more delay** (cf. 6:10), but when the trumpet call of the **seventh angel** is sounded (11:15–19), then **the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled**. The combination of the imminent-end expectation and the prohibition against calculating the dates of the end is typical of early Christian prophecy (cf. Mark 13:26–33; 1 Thess. 5:1–3). The **mystery of God** is not identical with mysterious calculations or reading heavenly tables or scrolls about the end. It is "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1) in judgment and in salvation. This "open" mystery is announced by the loud voices in heaven after the blowing of the seventh trumpet: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (11:15). This mystery of God's purpose with his creation comes to full realization only at the end. God's purpose in creation and the redemption made possible by the blood of Christ will be brought to fulfillment, and that purpose is the kingdom of God on *earth* (cf. Matt. 6:10: "Thy will be done on *earth*"; Matt. 5:5: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the *earth*"). God's saving purpose, his reign over his creation as king, was **announced** by him as good news (Greek, *euangelisen*) to his **prophets**. According to Amos, "the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). John saw himself in continuity with Old Testament and New Testament prophets, even though he never explicitly applied this title to himself. It is the prophets' all-consuming task to communicate a vision of God's kingdom and to inspire trust in the certainty of its future coming. The next verses will attend to this task.

Then the voice ... from heaven, the voice that had prohibited him from writing down the message of the seven thunders (v. 4), spoke to him **again**, commanding him to **take the scroll**

which is open in the hand of the angel. In turn, the mighty angel commanded him: **“Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.”** And John **took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it** and found it to be **sweet** and **bitter**. The background to this commissioning in the form of a prophetic symbolic action is found in Ezek. 2:8–3:3. There the prophet is asked “to eat a scroll” which tasted in his mouth “as sweet as honey.” Ezekiel 2 and John’s subsequent interpretation of this symbolic action make it clear that the point is prophesying rather than eating books (10:11). The prophet’s task is to appropriate and internalize God’s message entrusted to him. This message, symbolized by the little scroll, does not originate with him but comes from God. The prophet’s mission is, first of all, to make that message his own, to assimilate it. The word of God has to become his or her own word. John’s commission, in contrast to Ezekiel’s, will also be a **bitter** experience because as a prophet he will be subject to opposition. The two prophetic witnesses (11:7–10) suffer death in the war with the beast. He too will encounter the world’s opposition. He himself will be involved in suffering that precedes the salvation of Christ’s followers. Trials and even martyrdom are the road into the kingdom of the last day. Hence the scroll is bitter. Yet the prophetic task of representing God and proclaiming salvation and victory is also **sweet** like honey (cf. Jer. 15:16). It is God who preserves his church through trials and even death, and hence the scroll tastes sweet. The cruciform church will share in the glory of the new day with the Lamb that has conquered through death.

And I was told (literally, “and *they* say”; Greek, *kai legousin*, the angel-voice *and* the mighty angel), **“You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”** After the prophet internalizes God’s word, his mission is to announce it. **He must again prophesy about many peoples and kings.** And so he does in the visions following the trumpet cycle. But there is a small problem with the identification of the “peoples” and the “kings.” Also, the translation of the Greek preposition *epi* (with dative) is uncertain. If its meaning is “against” (e.g., Acts 11:19, “against Stephen”), then the “peoples” and the “kings” are pagans. In favor of this meaning is the prophetic activity of the two witnesses in 11:3–11 which infuriates the beast (king) to the point of killing them. And “the peoples . . . gaze at their dead bodies” and rejoice. If the meaning of the preposition is “to” or “about” (so RSV; e.g., John 12:16, “about him”), then there are two possibilities. One, John’s task may be to prophesy about the future destiny of (pagan) kings and peoples, as he does in the rest of the letter. Two, the “peoples” and “kings” may refer to Christ’s inclusive, royal community, consisting of many tongues and peoples (cf. 5:9) in which all are equal, kings and queens before God. It is “about” the church that John must prophesy, about the church’s immediate future under persecution by beasts and its ultimate future in the presence of God and the Lamb (cf. 21:1–22:5). Of the three options, I would prefer the first because it ties in with the last part of the interlude.

Considerable discussion has taken place also concerning the content of the little scroll and its relation to the sealed scroll of Revelation 5 on one hand and to the rest of John’s letter on the other. The sealed scroll, some argued, extends only from 6:1 to 11:19, while the little scroll covers chaps. 12 to 22. In that case, the little scroll (Greek, *biblaridion*) would be “longer” than the sealed scroll (Greek, *biblion*, 5:1). This is improbable. Hence other interpreters proposed that since the little scroll with its bitter-sweet taste has to be shorter than the sealed scroll, its content

is found in 11:1–13. Hardly—because 11:1–13 is part of the same vision. Still another approach would see the content of the little scroll in “the mystery of God” (10:7) which includes the “bitter” ordeal for the church, chaps. 12–16, as well as the “sweet” reversal of the conquerors in 15:2–4. Finally, one could see the content of the little scroll in the authorization of John to prophesy again (10:11).

We should keep in mind that John did not specify the content of either scroll. Therefore it would seem to be a questionable undertaking to try to refine his writing and specify what he had left open-ended. When he used difficult symbols he always provided an interpretation, for example, eating the little scroll means to prophesy. All we can say with certainty is that the little scroll is **open**. John’s commission and message are open for each and all to hear and scrutinize. Moreover, the **sweet** and **bitter** taste expresses the theme of victory through tribulations (cf. 11:4–13), and John’s new commission entails his existential participation in this theme.³

John is recommissioned to prophesy about judgment, concerning which he paradoxically rejoices and mourns (10:1–11)

Just as there was an interpretative parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals, so again there is a similar parenthesis between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Here the parenthesis extends from 10:1 to 11:13. Ch. 10 is the introduction to the main content of the parenthesis in 11:1–13.

In this new vision, John is recommissioned to prophesy. His task is twofold. He is to prophesy about the persevering witness of Christians which brings them suffering, and about the destiny of those who react antagonistically to their witness. The prophecy he is given concerns the relationship between believers and unbelievers during the church age, culminating in the final judgment, at which point he resumes and concludes the relating of the trumpet vision, in which that judgment is set forth. Chs. 10–11 are put within the cycle of trumpets to connect the two halves of Revelation together. This is a literary device of interlocking, which functions to introduce the second part of the book while also linking it to the first part. The parenthesis does not chronologically intervene between the sixth and seventh trumpets but offers a further interpretation of the same period of the church age covered by the first six trumpets.

Even as ch. 7 shows that Christians are sealed against the spiritually destructive harm of the six trumpet judgments, so 11:1–13 reveals that they are sealed so as to bear an enduring and loyal witness to the gospel, which begins to lay a basis for the final judgment of those rejecting their testimony. This vision thus explains the theological basis for the judgment on the wicked in the first six trumpets. Non-Christians are punished by the trumpet judgments throughout the church age because they have persecuted believers. This expresses more explicitly the hint of the preceding chapters that the trumpets are God’s answer to the saints’ petition for their vindication

³ Krodel, G. A. (1989). *Revelation* (pp. 212–217). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

and punishment of their oppressors (so 6:9–11; 8:3–5; 9:13–21). 10:6b–7, together with 11:14, announce that there will be no delay to God bringing an end to history (11:11–13, 18) when the full number of suffering believers has reached the predetermined number (6:10; 11:7a) and impenitence has reached its intractable height (9:21; 11:7–10).

1 John sees **another strong angel coming down out of heaven**. The first **strong angel** appeared in 5:2 and likewise proclaimed “with a loud voice.” This is the first among a number of references which deliberately link this chapter in a significant manner with ch. 5. These links indicate that the revelation to this angel will be similar to the revelation given by the angel in ch. 5. This angel is not an ordinary angel, but is given divine attributes applicable in Revelation only to God or to Christ. He is **clothed with a cloud**. In the OT, it is God alone who is said to come in the clouds, except in Dan. 7:13, where the subject is the Son of man, but note that in Rev. 1:7 the one “coming with the clouds” in v. 7 is identified further in 1:13 as “like a Son of man,” who in Daniel is given the attributes of the divine Ancient of Days. Another reference to clouds in Revelation occurs in 14:14, where John sees “a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a Son of man” (cf. continued references to this cloud in 14:15–16). In this light, the figure in 10:1 is probably equivalent to the “angel of Yahweh” in the OT, who is referred to as Yahweh Himself (e.g., Gen. 16:10; 22:11–18; 24:7; 31:11–13; Exod. 3:2–12; 14:19; Judg. 2:1; 6:22; 13:20–22; cf. Zech. 3:1–3 with Jude 9; see also Dan. 3:25; Acts 7:30, 35, 38). The angel has a **rainbow ... upon his head**, as did the appearance of God in Ezek. 1:26–28. The Ezekiel reference has already been drawn on in the portrait of the Danielic Son of man in Rev. 1:13ff. The pattern of the Ezekiel 1–3 vision is followed again later in Rev. 10:2, 8–10, where the heavenly being like that in Ezekiel holds a book, and the book is taken and eaten by a prophet. Note also that the rainbow is around God’s throne in Rev. 4:3. The angel’s **face was like the sun**, just like that of Christ in Rev. 1:16, and this is an exact reproduction of the phrase describing Christ’s transfigured appearance in Matt. 17:2. His **feet are like pillars of fire**, similar to the description of Christ’s feet as “burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace” (Rev. 1:15).

The fact that the feet of the angelic figure are called **pillars of fire** evokes the presence of Yahweh with Israel in the wilderness, where He appeared as a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire to protect and guide the Israelites (Exod. 13:20–22; 14:24; Num. 14:14; Neh. 9:12, 19). In Exod. 19:9–19, God’s descent on Sinai “in a thick cloud” and “in fire” is announced by “thunder” and “the sound of a trumpet,” which reflects the pattern of Revelation 10, where God’s presence by His angel in vv. 1–3 is followed by thunder and the imminent trumpet sound in vv. 3–4, 7. The point of the reference here to God’s presence with Israel in the wilderness is that the same divine presence protects and guides the faithful witnesses of the new Israel in the wilderness of the world, as the following chapters reveal (so 11:3–12; 12:6, 13–17). Therefore, the angel is the divine Angel of the Lord, as in the OT, who is to be identified with Yahweh or with Christ Himself. Enhancing this identification is the observation that Christ is compared to a lion in 5:5, and so is the angel in 10:3.

2 The divine angelic figure (Christ) **had in his hand a little book which was open**. What is the content of this little book, which John eats (vv. 9–10), and out of which he then prophesies

(v. 11)? We know at least from the conclusion of ch. 10 (v. 11) that John’s prophecy is to be against “many peoples and nations and tongues and kings,” as in the universal formula used in subsequent chapters for multitudes who undergo forms of judgment (11:9; 13:7–8; 14:6ff.; 17:15). “Kings” is inserted into the formula to anticipate the “kings” in the later visions who will be judged (so 16:12, 14; 17:1–2, 10–12, 16, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:18–19). Furthermore, while it is true that Rev. 11:1–13 elaborates on ch. 10, chs. 12ff. continue the elaboration. Therefore, the **little book** includes reference, at least, to the contents of chs. 11–16, since another prophetic commission may be indicated in 17:1–3, which unleashes a new series of prophetic visions. The ch. 10 scroll may also include chs. 17–22, if the prophetic commission of 17:1ff. is merely a renewal of the previous one.

The **little book which was open** in the hand of the angel here and in the following verses is difficult to identify unless it is linked with the scroll that the Lamb was to open in ch. 5. Though there are some differences (the book is smaller; John takes the book instead of the Lamb), the similarities are far more significant:

not only are both “books opened,” but

they are held by Christ (in 10:1ff.),

who is compared to a lion;

both are allusions to the scroll of Ezekiel,

are associated with a “strong angel” who cries out

and with God who “lives forever and ever”;

both books are directly related to the end-time prophecy of Daniel 12;

in both visions someone approaches a heavenly being and takes a book out of the being’s hand;

part of the prophetic commission of John in both visions is stated in near identical language (“I heard a voice from heaven speaking”; cf. 10:4 and especially 10:8); and

both scrolls concern the destiny of “peoples and nations and tongues and tribes [kings].”

Therefore, a reasonable assumption is that the meaning of the scroll of ch. 10 is generally the same as that of ch. 5. In ch. 5, the scroll was symbolic of God’s plan of judgment and redemption, which has been inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection. The interpretation of 5:9–10 by the hymn of 5:12 also pointed to the book of ch. 5 being a testament or will which contained an inheritance to be received. God promised to Adam that he would reign over the earth. Although Adam forfeited this promise, Christ, the last Adam, was destined to inherit it. The reception of the scroll from God on the throne and the opening of it in ch. 5 connoted Christ’s taking of authority over His Father’s plan and beginning the execution of it. On the basis

of His death and resurrection, by which He redeemed His people, He was worthy to take the book, assume authority over the plan in it, and establish His kingdom over the redeemed (see on 5:2–5, 9–10, 12). The plan of the book encompasses history from the cross to the consummation of the new creation, since a summary of the scroll’s contents is revealed in chs. 6–22. It outlines Christ’s sovereignty over history, the reign of Christ and the saints throughout the course of the church age and in the new cosmos, Christ’s protection of His people who suffer trial, His temporal and final judgments on the persecuting world, and the final judgment. Ch. 5 revealed, though, that perseverance through suffering is the ironic means Christ used to overcome and take sovereignty over the book as His inheritance. The book of ch. 10 is also associated with the same ironic pattern, to be explained in the following verses (see further on v. 7).

The possession of the scroll-like testament means that now Christ has dominion over the entire cosmos, symbolized by the angel standing on both sea and land (placing one’s foot on something indicates sovereignty over that thing, as in Josh. 10:24–26). This is the basis for the command to John to prophesy about Christ’s sovereignty to “many peoples and nations and tongues and kings” in v. 11. The heavenly being’s sovereignty over **sea** and **land** shows that God is also ultimately in control over the dragon, who stands on the “sand of the sea” to conjure up the beast “coming out of the sea” (13:1) and the “beast coming up out of the earth” (13:11).

3–4 The angelic figure **cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars**, thus further identifying the angel with Christ, the “Lion that is from the tribe of Judah” (5:5). Following this, **the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices**. The seven thunders are probably to be identified with the voice of a heavenly being, like the living creature of 6:1 who cries out with a voice of thunder, or like the heavenly host of 19:6, whose voice is as the sound of thunder (see also John 12:28–29 for the voice from heaven like thunder), or it could be the voice of God or Christ. As John was about to write down what the seven thunders had said, he **heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.”**

In the OT thunder often indicates judgment (five times in Exod. 9:23–34; 1 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 29:3; Isa. 29:6; and many other occurrences), as it does in Rev. 6:1, where it introduces the seven seals. References in Revelation (with slight variations) to thunders, sounds, lightnings, and an earthquake mark the last judgment (see on 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). The source of the thunders may be Psalm 29, where God’s thunders of punishment are equated with “the voice of the Lord,” an expression which is repeated seven times in the Psalm. The Psalm’s thunders are now employed to underscore the newly obtained sovereignty of Christ (v. 2), which has been handed over to Him by the eternal God (“Him who lives forever and ever,” v. 6a). Christ’s sovereign authority is expressed by His (or His angel’s) voice, which unleashes the revelation of the seven thunders. The use of the definite article (**the seven peals of thunder**) could point to the fact that this was something known (presumably from Scripture) to John (and likely to his readers). On the basis of the use in the OT and elsewhere in the book, the image of “thunders” here could designate some judgment *preceding* the final judgment. On the same basis, they might be *premonitions* of divine wrath, as in John 12:28–31. The latter is indicated here by the use of the word by itself, apart from the fuller expressions of chs. 8, 11, and 16, and by the fact that the seventh trumpet,

introducing the final judgment, has not yet been sounded.

The **seven peals of thunder** probably represent another sevenfold series of judgments parallel to the sets of seven seals, trumpets, and bowls, but not to be revealed. They would give yet another perspective on the same events as the seals, trumpets, and bowls, which would make sense in light of the four sets of seven judgments in Leviticus 26 that God says He will send against His people if they disobey Him. The thunder judgments are not revealed here perhaps because they are so repetitive of the previous two synchronous sevenfold cycles of seals and trumpets that they reveal nothing radically new. Enough has been said about the various punishments unleashed against the unrepentant throughout the church age. The focus is now on the relationship between the unrepentant and the faithful witnesses during the same time when the seals and trumpets occur. The *reason* for the punishments is the focus. The wicked suffer because they reject the message of the witnesses and persecute them, as 11:1–13 makes clear.

The command of v. 4b reflects the similar command given to Daniel by the angel, who is the model for the angel here and in vv. 5–6. The “sealing” in Daniel 12 referred partly to keeping hidden from Daniel and others how a prophecy was to be fulfilled. John, like Daniel, receives revelation, but, unlike Daniel, he understands it. The definite article with “thunders” may imply that the thunders are known to him (perhaps from an understanding of Psalm 29), and the fact that he is about to record the revelation of the thunders also suggests that he understands their significance to some degree. Nevertheless, like Daniel, he is still not to make it known to his readers. Also in line with Daniel 12 is the possibility that the sealing could allude to the seven thunders as judgments that, in contrast to the majority of the other sevenfold series, were events yet to occur in the distant future.

5–6 The angelic figure John **saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever**. In contrast to the preceding command to seal up the revelation of the thunders, the angel makes an oath to God which is a revelation about the way redemptive history culminates. The description here is a direct allusion to the angel in Dan. 12:7, who stood above the waters, raised his hands to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever. These words in turn mirror the prophetic words of God to Moses in Deut. 32:40–43, where God swears that He will judge the ungodly. In Deut. 32:32–35, God’s judgment is described as “the wrath of serpents and ... of asps,” and one Aramaic version of Deut. 32:33 (the Palestinian Targum) compares the plans of the wicked to “serpents’ heads” and “the head of asps,” which was a significant image in the preceding context (Rev. 9:19). And in the same passage (Deut. 32:34–35), God says that His judgments are “sealed up” (cf. v. 4) and will be released in due time, as they were in Israel’s subsequent history.

This Deuteronomy background is a further indication that the seven thunders which are to be “sealed up” in Rev. 10:4–5 are another series of seven judgments, whose contents are not revealed but whose execution is ever imminent and even has begun, in that they are parallel with the seals and trumpets and that the first six woes of each series are inaugurated. The Christ who describes Himself here in the same words as His Father did to Moses in Deut. 32:40 orders the judgments of the seven thunders to be sealed in Revelation 10, just as His Father told Moses that

His judgments were sealed. God is described as **Him who ... created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it**. The reference to heaven, earth, and sea, followed in each case by the phrase **and the things in it**, serves to underscore the absolute sovereignty of God in creating *all things*. This connects God's sovereignty over the beginning of creation to Christ's rule over creation in the latter days of the church age and into eternity, as symbolized by the angel's posture in vv. 2 and 5. The same connection between God's sovereignty and that of Christ was made between chs. 4 and 5, in reference to the book of ch. 5 coming from God but opened by Christ (see on chs. 4–5). The oath the angelic figure utters is that **there shall be delay no longer** (or literally “that time shall be no longer”) but that, as in Dan. 12:7 (see above), everything will be “completed” or “finished.”

7 The more precise meaning of the preceding phrase concerning delay (or time) is now given: **In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished**. The continuation of the oath explains further how the meaning of the oath from Daniel is altered. The prophecy in Dan. 11:29–12:13 concerned the end-time suffering of God's people, God's destruction of the enemy, the establishment of the kingdom, and the reign of the saints. The prophetic events were to lead up to and result in the consummation of history. Dan. 12:7 says that these prophetic events will occur during “a time, times, and half a time,” after which God's prophetic plan will “be completed.” John views the “times, time, and half a time” of Daniel as the church age leading up to the final judgment (see further on 11:3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).

The identification of this time formula from Daniel is evident in Rev. 12:4–6, where the period begins at the time of Christ's ascension and is the church's time of suffering (so also 12:14; see on 12:4–6, 14). In the context of the book, this period must cover the church age and be concluded by Christ's final coming. Therefore, vv. 6–7 are speaking of the end of this period, which is the end of time or of history. The angel told Daniel that the meaning of the prophecy was sealed up until the end time, when it would be revealed. In contrast to Daniel 12, the angel's oath in Revelation 10 begins an emphasis on *when* and *how* the prophecy will be completed, which is amplified in ch. 11. When the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, the prophecy of Dan. 11:29–12:13 will be fulfilled and history (Daniel's “end of the age,” 12:13) will come to an end (i.e., historical “time shall be no longer”).

A strong verbal parallel between 10:6b–7 and 6:11 shows that the content of the mystery in ch. 10 concerns God's decree that the saints suffer, which leads directly to the judgment of their persecutors. At this time, the mystery of God will be finished. When in 6:10 the saints cry out as to when the judgment of God will come on those who have persecuted the church, the answer is that there is (literally) “yet a little time” (6:11) until the full number of those who are to be killed is completed. Now God says that there will (literally) “no longer be time” (v. 6b), but the mystery is to be fulfilled or finished. The prayer of the saints in 6:10 is thus answered by the events to be precipitated by the sounding of the seventh trumpet. V. 6 has alluded to Dan. 12:7 and Deut. 32:40, both of which speak of God's vindication of His people after their suffering. In Dan. 12:7, the angel says that “as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.” The days of the voice of the seventh angel probably refers to the

definitive time when the decisive blow of the last judgment is struck, for there is to be no further delay. The **mystery of God** (= God's mystery) is, **as He preached to His servants the prophets**, an allusion to Amos 3:7, where God "reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets" (though the actual word "mystery" is not used, Amos 3:4–8 also pictures God as a lion roaring and has a trumpet blowing).

The gospel of Christ, including both salvation and judgment, was prophetically announced by God to His prophets in the OT (**preached** here is literally "preached the gospel" [*euāngelisen*]), and its inaugurated fulfillment has been announced to the prophets of the new age. The fulfillment of the prophesied gospel is occurring, and will continue to occur, in a mysterious and unexpected manner from the human perspective. The suffering of the saints will give way to their eventual vindication. Only those to whom God reveals the mystery can understand the meaning of this history. The reason the revelation can be made is that the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ have inaugurated the "latter days" and the fulfillment of the prophecies from Daniel which were to occur in the "latter days." In fact, the prophecy of the "latter days" in Dan. 2:28–45 is repeatedly called a "mystery" (Greek *mystērion*) there (vv. 27–30). Christ's removing of the seals from the scroll in ch. 5 connoted precisely the same idea of new revelation due to the inauguration of the difficult-to-understand latter day prophecies from Daniel 12 (see on 5:1–5, 9; and see Dan. 12:4, 8–9), which have been combined here with the "mysterious" prophecies of Daniel 2.

Note the striking parallel to Rom. 16:25–26, where Paul speaks of the mystery of God revealed according to God's eternal command by the Scriptures of the prophets and made known to the nations. This mystery is that of the cross. Where the word "mystery" occurs elsewhere in the NT, it often refers to fulfillment of OT prophecy in a way different than would have been expected in Judaism or was not so clear in the OT (e.g., Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; 2 Thess. 2:7 [cf. Dan. 8:23–25; 11:29–45]; Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:3–4, 9). The angel is beginning to explain to John the "when" and "how," which Daniel did not understand about his own prophecy: John is told that the "latter days" prophesied to Daniel have *now* begun, and that this has been set in motion *through* the "mysterious" manner of Christ's death and resurrection. That is, the prophecy of God's defeat of the evil kingdom is being ironically fulfilled by this evil kingdom's apparent physical victory over Christ and the saints. The mysterious nature of the saints' victory is to be understood through the ironic way in which Christ obtained victory through His apparent defeat by the same evil kingdom.

The legitimacy of this comparison is based on the prior observation that ch. 10 is parallel to ch. 5 and to be interpreted in its light. In ch. 5, Christ's death was already a beginning victory, because He was a "faithful witness" resisting the spiritual defeat of compromise (1:5) and because He was accomplishing the redemption of His people by paying the penalty of their sin (so 5:9–10; 1:5–6). Jesus' death was also a victory because it was an initial step leading to the resurrection (1:5; 5:5–8). Likewise, ch. 10 is saying that those who believe in Christ will follow in His footsteps. Their defeat is also an initial victory, because they are faithful witnesses withstanding the spiritual defeat of compromise, and even their death is a spiritual resurrection, for they will receive a crown of victory (2:10–11). The same pattern will be shown in the

following context of 11:1–13, where the persecution and defeat of the witnessing church is the means leading to their resurrection and their enemies' defeat.

Thus, just as Christ, so Christians have their “book,” which is also symbolic of their purpose: they are to reign ironically as Christ did by being imitators on a small scale of the great cosmic model of Christ on the cross. And this may be why Christ is portrayed as a large, cosmic figure overshadowing the earth. Therefore, the little book is a new version of those same purposes symbolized by the book of ch. 5 insofar as they are to be accomplished by the people of God.

8 Now the heavenly voice of v. 4 commands John to **take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land**. This command continues the contrast of vv. 5–7 with v. 4, where the angel began to reveal truth about the climax of redemptive history in antithesis to the prohibition in v. 4 to seal up the revelation. In vv. 8–10, more revelation issues from the hand of the same angel in the form of the book. John's approach and taking of the book has similar significance to the Lamb's approach and taking of the book in 5:7–8. The Lamb's taking and opening of the scroll was symbolic of His newly gained authority, and John's similar action shows that he participates in and identifies with Jesus' authority in executing judgment and redemption, even though only Jesus has redeemed humanity and is sovereign over history. Ch. 11 will reveal that what is true of John as a prophet and of his reigning through suffering is true of all Christians in general. This is clear in that both John and the “two witnesses” of ch. 11 (representing the church: see on 11:3) are referred to as prophets (11:6, 10; cf. similarly 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6, 9). This close identification with Christ's reigning through suffering is another instance of the notion found elsewhere in the book that believers “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (14:4). We will also see that in 11:3–12, the two witnesses' career of testimony is patterned after that of Christ.

9–10 John's reception of the book symbolically connotes his prophetic call. The command and the carrying out of the command to take the book and consume it is a picture portraying his formal recommissioning as a prophet. His call has already been stated in terms of Ezekiel's commissioning in 1:10 and 4:1–2, and the parallel here continues with specific reference to Ezek. 2:8–3:3, where, as part of his commissioning, the prophet eats the scroll, which is sweet but followed by a bitter response (3:14) because of the people's rebellion. The angelic figure, giving the little book to John, tells him to **take it, and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey**. The eating of the scroll indicates the prophet's complete identification with its message (cf. Ezek. 3:10). The effect of “eating” or identifying with the book is that it is sweet because it contains God's own life-giving words (Deut. 8:3; Pss. 19:10; 119:103; Prov. 16:21–24; 24:13–14), in which the prophet will briefly delight. The bitterness comes from the scroll's purpose, which is to announce judgment and its effect in terms of the rebellious response of the people. Ezekiel was warned in advance that, except for a remnant who will respond and repent (9:4–6; 14:21–23), those who would listen were a rebellious people and would not respond. Therefore, his message is primarily one of judgment. This is explicitly emphasized by the description of the scroll: “it was written on the front and back; and written on it were lamentations, mourning, and woe” (Ezek. 2:10).

Note also the close parallel to Jer. 15:15–18. First, the prophet finds joy in his commission: “Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart” (v. 16). Yet, as his words are rejected, his joy turns to bitterness: “*I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers ... for Thou didst fill me with indignation. Why has my pain been perpetual ...?*” (vv. 17–18; Jer. 15:19–21 further shows that vv. 15–18 are part of a prophetic commission). Likewise, John found joy and bitterness in his prophetic commission. In contrast to Ezekiel and Jeremiah, John is warning not Israel of old, but the church, the visible new Israel, against unbelief and compromise with the idolatrous world, as well as warning the world of unbelievers (see on v. 11 and 11:1ff. below).

John, along with the angelic creatures and the deceased saints in heaven, actually takes pleasure in God’s pronouncement of judgment, because God’s word represents His will, which works all things for His glory (11:17–18; 14:7; 15:3–4; 19:1–2). It does so in at least three ways:

because God’s righteousness is demonstrated when He punishes sin,

because such punishment vindicates Christians in their suffering (cf. 6:9–11; 18:4–7), and

because part of the message about judgment is an encouragement to remain true to God’s word (as in 11:1–13).

Nevertheless Christians, like God, do not take sardonic, emotional pleasure in the pain of punishment considered as an end in and of itself separately from its broader framework of justice.

The sweetness of the scroll likely includes reference to God’s redemptive grace in the gospel to those believing, and its bitterness to the fact that this grace must be experienced in the crucible of suffering (cf. 2 Cor. 2:15–16). This is evident from recalling that the little scroll connotes the Christian’s purposes on a small scale in imitation of the large-scale purposes of Christ signified by the larger book of ch. 5. Certainly, part of these purposes is the experience of divine grace through suffering. Part of the gospel’s sweetness is that Christians already begin to be vindicated because of their persevering testimony when they reach heaven (6:9–11), and this process is completed when God vindicates them before all eyes at the end of history (e.g., 11:11–13, 18).

Yet it is the bitterness which will linger, for John’s actual experience is revealed in the next verse: **it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter**. The reality of the non-repentant response to his message by others in the church and the world is a “bitter” or mournful thing for John to contemplate, as it was for the OT prophets and for Jesus Himself (Luke 19:41). The only other time “bitter” appears in Revelation is in the third trumpet plague (8:11), where many die because of the bitter waters, thus showing that the period of bitterness (the world’s rejection of the church’s message) extends throughout the church age (during which the third trumpet plague occurs) and cannot be confined to the period immediately before the return of Christ.

The emphasis on judgment in relation to the scroll is paramount, as seen against the Ezekiel

background and the following chapters of Revelation, which focus more on judgment than on reward, especially ch. 11. This is confirmed if we recall that the scroll of ch. 5 highlighted judgment, because it was modeled on Ezekiel 2–3; Dan. 7:10; 12:4, 9; and other OT theophanies introducing messages of judgment. The seven seals showed further that the ch. 5 scroll was primarily a scroll of woe.

11 This verse, containing John’s further recommissioning, is directly linked by **and** (having the sense of “therefore” or “and so”) to the sweetness, and even more to the bitterness, of the scroll in v. 10. John is to announce the bittersweet judgment of the scroll against the ungodly peoples of the earth because that is the message which he has been commissioned to deliver. Having digested the contents of the scroll, he must now make its contents known to others. The symbolic version of John’s recommissioning portrayed in vv. 8–10 is interpreted to mean that he is to **prophesy again**. The use of **again** indicates that this is a *recommissioning*. He has been commissioned on at least two previous occasions (1:10–20 and 4:1–2), although the first includes the whole book as well and the second probably includes also the remainder of the book. These two previous commissionings directly resulted in the prophetic tracts of chs. 2–3 and chs. 4–9. The inclusion of **again** here indicates a continuation of the same kind of prophesying about the same people as in chs. 6–9. The commissioning here results in the prophetic tract of 11:1–13, and, as we saw on v. 2 above, this commissioning likely extends at least from ch. 11 to ch. 16, and perhaps even all the way to ch. 22.

Therefore, in 10:11, John’s previous prophetic commissionings are renewed and deepened, as was the case with Jeremiah (Jer. 15:15–21). He is told to **prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings**. He is addressed by a plurality of heavenly beings: **And they said to me**. John is commanded to **prophesy again concerning** or, more accurately, “prophesy against” (where “against” represents the Greek preposition *epi*). The usual meaning of the phrase in the LXX is one of judgment, and is often used that way in Ezekiel, which is the primary OT background to this passage. Use of the scroll image from Ezekiel 2–3 in the immediately preceding context of 10:8–10 also points to the theme of judgment. Finally, note the negative manner in which John uses variations of the fourfold phrase “peoples and nations and tongues and tribes” in the remainder of the book (11:9; 13:7; 14:6; cf. 17:15).

The verb “prophesy” does not refer just to predicting of future events but also to providing God’s revealed perspective on what is happening in the present. Note how John exhorts his readers to “hear” and “keep” the words of prophecy in this book (1:3; 22:7, 9). The prophetic message of Revelation is designed not only for the future, but also for the present—for those who are currently hearing and reading its message and who are constantly being called to put it into practice in their lives now. This understanding of prophecy is consistent with the OT idea, which emphasizes a revealed interpretation of the present together with the future (forth-telling as well as foretelling), demanding ethical response from those addressed, who are primarily God’s people. Therefore, John’s prophesying is not only against the ungodly who reside outside the covenant community of the church but also against compromisers within the visible new Israel, who are from all “peoples and nations and tongues and tribes,” and who ally themselves with the world from which they have purportedly been redeemed. Just as Ezekiel directed his

message against old Israel, so John also directs his partly against unrepentant, compromising elements of the visible church, new Israel.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON 10:1–11

On the divinity of Christ. As presented here (10:1–6) and in many other places in the book, the divinity of Christ is a major and consistent theme in Revelation. The divine angel of the Lord, identified often in the OT with Yahweh, is here also identified with Christ, for which idea the commentary provides much support. Has a shallow reading of Revelation, with a focus on misguided eschatology, drawn us away from its presentation of the exalted Christ? What has drawn us to focus on (often poorly understood) eschatological timelines and miss the heart of the book, which is the glory of God and of Christ?

On the authority of Christ expressed through the church. John draws a strong parallel between the book of ch. 5, presented to Christ by God, and the little book of ch. 10, presented by Christ to John and, by extension, to the church. This shows that all authority comes from Christ, but that He chooses to invest His church with a measure of that same authority. If the book, as the commentary suggests, represents the inheritance of Christ in terms of His rulership over the cosmos, then the little book represents the inheritance of the church. What does this say about the authority that God’s people exercise? The nature of our authority is linked here with the proclamation of the gospel message and the judgment of God. It is also linked with the sweetness of God’s word to his people *and* with the bitterness that comes from the inevitable widespread rejection of that message and the consequent suffering of the church. Consider Jesus’ words: “I lay down my life that I may take it again... I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from my Father” (John 10:17–18). How is our authority linked with that of Jesus? Have the times of the church’s greatest temporal authority been the times of its weakest spiritual authority? How do we measure the true dimensions of the authority (as defined by John) of the church we are part of or that of the wider church in our own nation?

On the mystery of God. John states that the mystery of God will be finished or completed at the last judgment (the sounding of the seventh trumpet). The commentary contends that “mystery” in the NT involves the fulfillment of OT prophecy in ways that would not have been expected in Judaism or were not completely clear in the OT. The mystery is expressed above all in the cross. If the mystery is to be “finished” at the last judgment, when did it begin? How is this mystery worked out in the life of the church? How does it relate to Daniel’s comment about the shattering of the power of the holy people (Dan. 12:7)? In the third century AD, Tertullian stated that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (*Apology* 50). Was he speaking of this same mystery? How do we find rest in God when the forces of evil seem to be triumphant? Is the mystery John spoke of adequately reflected in the preaching of the church today?⁴

⁴ Beale, G. K., & Campbell, D. H. (2015). *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (pp. 198–212). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.