

The Mighty Angel With the Little Book

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord's sermon explores the significance of the mighty angel and the little book in Revelation, emphasizing the themes of divine authority and the dual nature of God's Word as both sweet and bitter.

Scripture: Revelation 10:1-8

Topics: "Divine Judgment", "Biblical Prophecy"

Description

John F. Walvoord delves into Revelation 10:1-11, where a mighty angel descends from heaven with a cloud and a rainbow on his head, symbolizing great power and authority. The angel, possibly representing Christ, holds a little open book, standing with one foot on the sea and the other on the earth, signifying dominion over all. As the angel cries out, seven thunders respond, revealing divine intervention in judgment. John is instructed to eat the little book, experiencing its sweetness in his mouth but bitterness in his belly, symbolizing the dual nature of God's Word - comforting yet revealing judgment. This act commissions John to prophesy to diverse nations and kings.

Transcript

10:1-4 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

Beginning with chapter 10 a parenthetical section is introduced which continues through 11:14. Like chapter 7 it does not advance the narrative but presents other facts which contribute to the total prophetic scene. In the opening verses of chapter 10 a personage is introduced, described as "another mighty angel." The word another (Gr., *allon*) ordinarily means "another of the same kind," that is, an angel similar to other angels which have been previously introduced. It seems evident from the context that this angel is not the sixth angel mentioned in 9:13, nor the angel which sounds the seventh trumpet in 11:15. As no clear statement is made, the interpreter is led to determine the character of this angel by the description which follows.

Some expositors¹⁹⁸ of Revelation believe that the angel mentioned here, as well as the angel of 8:3, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. This conclusion is based on the description given of the angel as

being in a position of great power over the earth and as possessing majesty. Walter Scott identifies the angel as "an uncreated being of divine majesty and power... It is the Lord Himself."¹⁹⁹ Scott goes beyond the text, however, in affirming that the being is "uncreated." In the Old Testament, Christ appeared frequently as the Angel of Jehovah, the first instance being in Genesis 16:7, where the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar. In the book of Revelation itself, Christ is presented in several symbols, the most frequent of which is the Lamb slain as in chapters 4 through 6. William Kelly identifies the angel as the Lord Jesus Christ in that he is "clothed with a cloud" which Kelly holds is "the well-known badge of Jehovah's presence."²⁰⁰

Though this is a plausible interpretation, the evidence seems to support the idea that here is a holy angel to whom has been given great power and authority. J. B. Smith believes it is an error to understand the angel here to be Christ.²⁰¹ The angel of 10:1 is declared to be "another mighty angel" and apparently refers to "the strong angel" of 5:2 who is clearly an angel and not Christ the Lamb. The angel of 10:1 is described as one who "comes down from heaven" and there is no evidence that Christ comes to earth midway in the tribulation. There are many instances of this in Revelation where angels are made the ministers of God for both the punishment of the wicked and the protection of the righteous. In chapter 12 Michael the archangel is mentioned by name as contending against Satan and the wicked angels and casting them out of heaven. Some have concluded that the description given in chapter 10 must be a reference to Michael as the chief of all the holy angels. Though the angel is presented as one having great majesty and power, there is no clear evidence that his function or his person is more than that of a created angel to whom has been entrusted great authority.

The description of the angel, however, is in very graphic terms. He is declared to be "clothed with a cloud" and has "a rainbow upon his head." His face is described as glorious as the sun and his feet compared to pillars of fire. John sees him in a most dramatic pose, with his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot upon the earth, implying a position of power and authority over the entire earth. All of this, however, is introductory to the point of primary importance that in his hand is a little book which is opened.

In Revelation 5, the Lamb has in His hands a seven-sealed book which in successive chapters is unrolled, unfolding the judgment symbolized by the seals. This book, by contrast, is already open and specifically called "a little book," referring to its small size. Some have tried to connect this book with the scroll of chapters 4 through 6, but there is no clear identification which would make these the same. The name of the book itself is different. In 5:1 the scroll is described by the Greek *biblion*, whereas here the diminutive form is used, *biblaridion*.

The contents of the little book are nowhere revealed in Revelation, but they seem to represent in this vision the written authority given to the angel to fulfill his mission. As John beholds the vision with the angel standing upon the sea and the earth, the angel cries with a loud voice like a lion's roar. In answer to this cry of the angel, seven thunders are heard.

It would seem evident that the seven thunders contain a further revelation consisting of some articulate voice which John could understand. Scott relates the seven thunders to the seven times the voice of Jehovah is mentioned in Psalm 29:3-9, and states, "The seven thunders point to 'the perfection of God's intervention in judgment.'"²⁰² When John was about to write what he had heard, however, he was instructed not to do so, as recorded in verse 4, "I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not." Though the principal purpose of the vision given to John was to enable him to write the book of Revelation and thus pass on divine revelation

to the church, in this instance the revelation is for John's ears and eyes only, and he is not permitted to reveal what he heard. This illustrates a divine principle that while God has revealed much, there are secrets which God has not seen fit to reveal to man at this time.

Announcement of the End of the Age (10:5-7)

10:5-7 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there shall be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

One of the indications that the angel portrayed in this vision is not Christ Himself is the fact that he swears by God, implying that God is greater than the angel. It is, however, a very solemn oath. Attention is called to the special character of the authority of God over the earth as the One who lives forever and as the One who created all things in heaven and in earth. Thus, abruptly, is brushed aside the foolishness of men who try to create a universe out of resident forces apart from God. As the Creator, God is also the sovereign Ruler who can declare that there shall be no more time, that is, no more delay. This expression (Gr., *chronos*) has sometimes been misunderstood 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. The end is now to be consummated. Even in eternity, there will be a time relationship in that one event will follow another.

Oscar Cullmann comments,

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."²⁰³

J. B. Smith compares the expression "there should be time no longer" to the similar expressions "there was no more sea" (21:1); "there shall be no more death" (21:4); "neither shall there be any more pain" (21:4); "there shall be no more curse" (22:3); "there shall be no night there" (22:5). Smith observes, "In each there is the negative no, the verb to be and the word *eti* translated more."²⁰⁴

In explanation of the statement that there shall be no more delay, verse 7 declares that the sounding of the seventh trumpet, here referred to as the voice of the seventh angel, brings about the completion of the mystery of God as declared to His servants the prophets. Kelly identifies "the mystery of God" as

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.²⁰⁵

The reference to the mystery of God seems to mean truth concerning God Himself which has not been fully revealed.

It is often overlooked, however, that the mystery is said to have been "declared to his servants the prophets" (v. 7). The mystery of God which is declared as subject to fulfillment is unfolded therefore in the Old Testament in the many passages which speak of the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The prediction is related to the full manifestation of the divine power, majesty, and holiness of God which will be evident in the glorious return of Christ, the establishment of His millennial kingdom, and the creation of the eternal state which will follow. The ignorance of God and the disregard of His majestic person which characterize the present age as well as the great tribulation will exist no longer when Christ returns and manifests Himself in glory to the entire earth. In that day all, from the least to the greatest, will know the Lord, that is, know the important facts about Him (cf. Jer. 31:34).

The Eating of the Little Book (10:8-11)

10:8-11 And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

After the utterance of the angel, John hears another voice from heaven apparently to be identified with the same voice he heard in 4:1. John is commanded by the voice to take the book previously described as "open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth." This is the third time in this chapter when the reader is reminded that the angel stands upon the sea and upon the earth. In each of the three instances, sea is mentioned before earth, though the normal order in the book of Revelation is to mention earth before sea (cf. 5:13; 7:1-3; 12:12; 14:7). John is more impressed by the fact that the angel stands on the sea than upon the earth, but the symbolism in either case indicates complete authority over the entire earthly situation.

In obedience to the command of the voice, John goes to the angel and requests that he be given the little book. In reply the angel instructs John, "Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey." Verse 10 records John's obedience, and, as he eats the book, the prophecy of the angel is fulfilled. The incident of John's eating the book should be compared to the similar experiences of Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:9-10; 3:1-4, 14) and Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16-18).²⁰⁶ The angel informs John, "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings."

This experience of John naturally raises a question concerning the meaning of his eating the little book. No interpretation of the experience of John is given in the Scriptures, but it is obvious that the symbolism is supposed to convey meaning without necessary comment. John by eating the book partakes of its content, and in his act of obedience appropriates the statements, promises, and affirmations contained in the book. The book itself seems to be a symbol of the Word of God as it is delivered to men, that is, divine revelation already given. This seems to be confirmed by the word of the angel to John in the last verse of the chapter where John is commanded to prophesy to many people. The testimony to which John is called is that of faithfully delivering the Word of God as it is committed to him. Such a commission with obedience to it has precisely the twofold effect mentioned. To John the Word of God is sweet, in that it is a word of promise, a word of grace, and a revelation of the love of God. Though he is on the Isle of Patmos in the

flesh and experiencing the bitterness of persecution, the Word of God is a precious assurance of his eternal salvation, a basis for his present fellowship with Christ, and the ground for his hope of glory to be fulfilled in the future.

Partaking of the Word of God is indeed sweet. How precious God's written revelation should be to the child of God. As David wrote in Psalm 19:9-10, "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

The Word of God which is sweet to John's soul also has its bitter aspects. John is experiencing this in his exile on the Isle of Patmos and is enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, separated from friends, afflicted by age and discomfort, and tasting somewhat of the suffering of Christ. More particularly, however, the Word of God is bitter in that it not only contains promises of grace but, as the book of Revelation itself abundantly illustrates, it reveals the divine judgments which will be poured out on the earth as God deals in wrath with the wicked world. God who created heaven also prepared the lake of fire for the devil and his angels. It is probable that the little book in chapter 10 of Revelation is the Word of God itself. Though John as a child of God will never know the bitterness of being lost or the afflictions of eternal punishment, he knows what it is to be like his Master, despised and rejected of men.

The invitation to John to partake of the little book and eat is, of course, the invitation of God to all who would participate in the blessing of the Word of God. Though there may be trials and afflictions for the saint, like the Apostle John he has been promised eternal blessing when the Lord comes for His own. The trials during the brief span of the Christian's life in this world, as he seeks to serve the Lord, are only the prelude to the eternal blessing which will be the fulfillment of God's grace to those who trust in Christ. Like John, every saint should take and eat with the assurance that the Word will be sweet, whatever sufferings and trials he may be called upon to bear.

John is informed that he must prophesy before "many peoples." Swete commenting on "many" (Gr., *pollois*) states that the word "emphasizes the greatness of the field. It is no one Empire or Emperor that is concerned in the prophecies of the second half of the Apocalypse; not merely Rome or Nero or Domitian, but a multitude of races, kingdoms, and crowned heads."²⁰⁷

198 Cf. Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 219; J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, p. 223.

199 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

200 *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, p. 200.

201 Cf. J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 153.

202 Scott, p. 221.

203 *Christ and Time*, p. 49.

204 Smith, p. 157.

205 Kelly, p. 206.

206 Cf. extended discussion, Smith, pp. 161-63.

207 Henry B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, p. 132.

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