

Bittersweet

The Trumpets of Seven Archangels – Part IV

Revelation 10:1-11

Introduction

If you traveled back in time to the year 1665, you would find yourself living in a nightmare world. The great bubonic plague had wrapped its invisible arms around entire cities; in fact, entire countries. Six thousand people were dying every single day from this plague.

In modern cities, like London, at the height of the bubonic plague, people barely ventured outdoors. In fact, it was generally believed that the disease was being carried into the city by fresh air. They did not know about microscopic organisms spread by fleas, which were carried around by ordinary mice, rats, cats, and dogs.

Since people actually believed the enemy was fresh air – carrying the disease from who knows where – they sealed themselves up inside their homes and burned foul-smelling potions to ward off the fresh air. The College of Physicians even recommended that guns and cannons be fired into the air, believing that this would blow away the deadly air.

In the meantime, chimneys were partially sealed and rooms become gray with smoke as people sat with their eyes stinging and their lungs congested, inside their homes. They were convinced, or at least hoping, they were out of the reach of this deadly plague.

Millions would die as this plague made its way into these tightly sealed homes.

What an illustration this is of the heart of sinful, unbelieving mankind toward the coming judgment of God.

Perhaps if one seals themselves with some form of religion; maybe burns a few candles, says a few prayers, or gives away a little money to the guy ringing the bell outside Wal-Mart at Christmas time; perhaps shows up at church every so often or tries to be as sincere as possible, they can escape the encircling judgment of God and the predestined appointment before His throne.ⁱ

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no way to seal out the ultimate consummation of God's plan, not only for the planet, but for every individual person.

By the time of Revelation chapter 10, time is running out for the people of Earth! By the end of the first six trumpet judgments, half the population of the planet has been wiped out.ⁱⁱ

It is almost time for the seventh and final trumpet judgment to sound. Contained in this seventh trumpet are the seven bowls which pour out final judgment, a final battle, and the second coming of Christ.

We are now well into the final three and a half years of the Tribulation. However, before this trumpet is sounded by the seventh archangel, there is a pause in the action.

The Strong Angel

Let us pick up at John's opening words in Revelation 10, verse 1, the first part of the verse,

I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven . . .

By now we recognize the fact that angels play a prominent role in the Apocalypse – the Revelation. They are involved in serving, worshiping, praising

God, announcing messages, delivering judgments, pronouncing doom, and more.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is, in fact, one angel who will even have the privilege of throwing Satan into the abyss. Satan will stay confined there for a thousand years while Christ reigns on Earth in the Millennial Kingdom.

I have the sense from studying Revelation thus far that the angels have been looking forward to these days. I believe they have been anticipating, with great desire, serving in the consummation of the ages as God delivers full and final judgment to those who have scorned their Creator and to their fallen brother angels who betrayed Him and battled His will, His work, and His people for thousands of years.

In this verse, John introduces us to yet another good angel with a special mission.

Now there are some who believe that this strong angel is none other than Jesus Christ. Certainly, in the Old Testament, Christ often appeared as “the angel of the Lord,” in what theologians call Christophanies – appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ. However, after the incarnation, there is no record of Christ ever appearing as an angel again.

Add to this the fact that the Lord is never referred to as “an angel” in the book of Revelation or, in fact, in all of the New Testament.^{iv}

Furthermore, we will soon notice that John the apostle will not worship this angel.

The primary reason I do not believe this is Christ is the Greek language itself. John writes,

I saw another strong angel . . .

In other words this angel is the same essence as the other archangels who have already appeared to sound their trumpets.

This angel’s appearance actually matches much of the description of Gabriel in Daniel 12. More than likely this strong angel is another archangel – a high order of special angels used by God to deliver messages to mankind.

So, before the seventh trumpet is blown, this rather amazing angel comes down to deliver an announcement.

The Angel’s Appearance

Notice six rather amazing features that John writes of this angel.

1. First, in verse 1, the angel was clothed with a cloud.

Clouds are often the vehicles on which heavenly beings ascend or descend. However, according to

this verse, the clouds seem to be his clothing – more than likely covering much of his body.

2. Secondly, also in verse 1, John writes of the angel that a rainbow was upon his head.

The Greek word for “rainbow” is “iris” (ιρις), which refers to a circle of color. The Greeks used it to refer to the brilliant colors surrounding the circles in a peacock’s colorful feathered tail. It is also used to refer to the circle of color in a person’s eyes.

This past Friday, I took my youngest daughter to the Division of Motor Vehicles to get her driver’s permit. It is no longer safe to drive on Penney Road! Actually, she is a good driver – of course my eyes are closed and I have confessed all known sin, several times, so I am prepared, just in case. The officer filling out her permit had to type in the color of her eyes. She has her mother’s beautiful blue eyes. I am just trying to dig out of the hole, but actually, this part is true.

The Greeks had created in their pantheon, a goddess named Iris – which is the same word – who personified the rainbow and served as a messenger for the gods.^v

This has a kernel of truth, although it is corrupted by idolatry. We know from scripture that the original rainbow was indeed a message from the true and living God – a message that has lasted to this day. There was a message in the rainbow that was given to Noah as a sign that there would never be another universal flood (Genesis 9:11-17).

This angel’s head is surrounded with amazing colors. The same word used in this verse for the rainbow is that which we saw earlier in Revelation chapter 4 to describe the rainbow that encircled the throne of God. This reveals that this angel represents the authority and throne of God, and the message he will deliver is from God.

3. Thirdly, the angel’s face was like the sun.

This angel was simply brilliant and bright. He is like the angels who appeared at the tomb of Christ to announce His resurrection – they shone with dazzling brilliance (Luke 24:4).

4. Fourthly, in verse 1 as well, the angel’s feet were like pillars of fire.

This is suggesting the angel’s announcement will have something to do with further judgment of God on Earth.

5. Fifthly, and most importantly, according to verse 2, the angel had in his hand a little book which was open.

The word used for “little book” is so rare that we never see it in the New Testament except in this verse in Revelation chapter 10.

This is not the same scroll which Christ has already opened in chapters 5 and 6. However, it would be correct to believe that this little book contains a small portion of the judgments yet to come.

This is a “biblaridion” (βιβλαριδιον) which simply means “a very small book”.^{vi}

This was a small booklet, so to speak, of God’s revelation to John.

By the way, this Greek root word gives us the word “Bible” as well, which simply means “the book”. We attach the word “holy” to it and call it the Holy Bible because the apostle Paul referred to it as holy (II Timothy 3:15). “Holy” means it is set apart; distinct from every other book that has ever been written.

Why is this true of the Bible? Because unlike any other book, its author is God. We are told, “All scripture is inspired by God,” or literally, “God breathed” (II Timothy 3:16).

This angel is holding in his hand a small “biblaridion,” not *the* Bible, but simply a small book.

6. The sixth and final descriptive phrase concerning this angel is about his size.

In verse 2b we are told,

... He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land;

This angel’s appearance to John was huge as his feet spanned an incredible distance – one foot on the sea and one foot on the land.

There is no reason not to understand this literally, which allows for symbolism. We can easily recognize that the angel’s posture symbolized that his authority and his message from God was universal.

Notice verse 3a.

and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars ...

Now this does not mean he is not communicating truth, it just means his voice reverberated like the roar of a lion.

John writes,

... he cried with a loud voice ...

This comes from the words “phone megale” (φωνη μεγαλη), which we reverse to create the word “megaphone”. It is incredibly loud.

Look at verses 3b-4.

... and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.

When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them.”

Let us step back for a moment and I will give an aerial view of what is happening.

This angel descends in a cloud, places one blazing foot on the sea and the other on land, and then shouts something so loudly that it reverberates around the planet. Afterward, seven thunders sound.

Thunder throughout the book of Revelation, refers to the voice of God’s judgment. David speaks of the God of glory thundering (Psalm 29:3), as well as Job who writes of God’s voice thundering in marvelous ways (Job 37:5).

Seven thunders would imply the full and complete revelation of all the details of judgments yet to occur.

This is not just some loud booming sound because John is about to write down what the thunder says. Notice again, in verse 4, John says, “I was about to write it down, but God said to keep it sealed up.”

In other words, God said, “John don’t reveal to anyone what you’ve just heard. Keep it a secret.”

This is one of the clearest texts I have found that reveals the truth of something I have often said to people. The revelation of God is not exhaustive, it is sufficient. In other words, what we hold in this Holy Biblion is not everything we would like to know, but it is everything we need to know.

John wrote earlier, in his gospel account about the life of Christ,

And there [were] also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:25)

In other words, we do not even have a fraction of what Jesus Christ taught and did while on Earth.

Would you not love to have a little more information? One more verse; something about His childhood; another miracle; another sermon or two;

perhaps an answer to someone's question that would cause you to say, "That's the question I've been asking for years!"

We do not have an exhaustive record, but it is a sufficient record for you and me. We do not know everything we would like to know, but we have been given everything we need to know.

Can you live with that? Can you live with the fact that God has chosen to keep some things to Himself; that there are secret things that belong to Him alone; that He has chosen to withhold information and not reveal it to us? Can you live with that?

Saying "God knows the answers and I don't" is not necessarily a cop-out. It may be your greatest statement of faith. However, make sure you do not use it as a cop-out – as a glib statement that underscores your lack of interest.

Do not use this statement like the college student I read about who was taking his final exam at the end of the fall semester. He had not studied and when he saw the test, he knew he was in trouble. He did not know the answer to any of the questions. So, he decided to play on the mercy of his professor and wrote at the top of his exam, "Only God knows the answers to these questions." He turned in his exam and went home for Christmas break. During the break, he received his exam in the mail. His professor had written in large letters at the top, "In that case, God gets an A and you get an F – Merry Christmas."

We do not avoid the challenges of life by shrugging our shoulders and saying, "God knows." But we can say it and trust it as a matter of faith.

Perhaps where you are living right now – without an answer; without an explanation – some present dilemma in your own personal experience that remains an unanswered question, saying, "God knows" is the belief that proves faith and trust in Him.

"John, keep this a secret. No one will know until I explain it later on. They'll just need to continue trusting that I've revealed only what they need to know."

Now notice what the angel does next, in verses 5-6a,

Then the angel whom I 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 . . .

This is the strongest reason yet to know that this angel is not Christ. The angel is swearing an oath to tell the truth and he is swearing this oath on the authority and person of God.

By the way, this is the origin of the custom of the witness placing his left hand on the "biblion" – the Bible – and raising his right hand and swearing an oath to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

This very text was the basis for officials taking an oath of office.^{vii}

This is a practice that certainly no longer attaches itself to the existence of God.

In a few days a new president will be sworn into office. Would that he perform the tradition brought about by George Washington who, when he was sworn in as our country's first president, placed his left hand on a Bible, raised his right hand, and said, "I solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of the President of the United States and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." He then however, departed from the script, bowed his head and kissed the Bible, and spontaneously added the words, "so help me God."

In the *History of America and the Birth of the Civilized World*, by Jay Winick, that I am currently enjoying whenever I get the chance, he recorded that at this moment the crowd broke into applause and burst into tears.^{viii}

It was a solemn moment in the history of America.

This that John records is a most solemn moment in the history of the world.

Imagine this angel – in his hand is the revelation of God. His right hand is raised toward heaven, swearing that his words are the truth. And his oath is based on the truth of what? Notice verse 6,

. . . by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it . . .

In other words, this angel's oath is based on the literal creation of the world and everything in it.

How important is a belief in theistic creationism? Ladies and gentlemen, it is the defendant for the truthfulness of God's word.

It also justifies God's judgment. Since He is the Creator of all things, He has the prerogative of

destroying all things and replacing it with His new creation, if He pleases.^{ix}

However, if God did not create all things, He would need someone's permission to destroy it – unless He is simply impolite.

No, this is God's creation. John, in this verse, divided it into its classic three sections: the heavens, the earth, and the sea. Then, he repeats three times for emphasis, so there is no shadow of a doubt, the words,

... and the things in it . . . and the things in it . . . and the things in it . . .

I had lunch with our seminary faculty last week, along with a former seminary president who is helping as a consultant to the dean and faculty during the process of accreditation for Shepherds Theological Seminary. He made the comment that one particular college, which was once known as an evangelical college, has recently adopted the view that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are not literal, historical fact. In other words, this institution has denied a literal creation in favor of some form of evolution.

The problem this college has created for itself is that now, every other passage in the Bible that supports creationism has to be thrown out as well. If, in fact, the historicity of the first eleven chapters of the Bible is denied, then the same must be denied of the last eleven chapters of the Bible because these chapters reinforce the reality of a literal creation.

This angel is swearing an oath upon the truth of God being the Creator that everything in the heavens, on the earth, and in the seas originated by the creative handiwork of God.

I find it interesting that the major religious systems of the world that do not follow the scriptures literally or entirely or solely, adopt some form of evolution. Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, Animism, Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, and liberal Protestantism allow for some form of evolution.

By the time Paul was preaching the gospel, Buddhism had already reached the Mediterranean world. So, what does Paul preach as he delivers the gospel?

... We . . . preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. (Acts 14:15)

This sounds just like the apostle John in Revelation 10.

The truth of the gospel is not the truth without a living, creator God who created all there is.

Furthermore, this book of Revelation is not the truth without a creator God for we see in chapter 10, a reference to a literal creation. And we will see in chapter 21, a literal new creation!

Does one not demand the other? In other words, if God was not able to create the first universe, how in the world do you think He can create a new one?

How do you hope to get there?

You are planning on a resurrection, are you not? You are planning on a home God created for you in heaven, right?

If God is not able to create, He is not going to be able to recreate, and He certainly is not going to be able to resurrect anyone.

All that we believe hinges on the reality of our God being the creator of all there is and everything that is in it (Revelation 10:6).

The Angel's Announcement

Now notice the angel's announcement. Listen to the content of the angel's message, in Revelation 10:6b-7.

... there will be delay no longer,

but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.

In other words, there will be no further delays as God accelerates His kingdom program. The seventh angel is about to sound and all the judgments delivered by the prophets concerning this day of the Lord – this time of great judgment – will be finished; culminated.

The word "mystery" appears often in scripture. It is a word that refers to divinely revealed truth, once hidden, which is so profound that there remains an aura of mystery about it.^x

In the New Testament, we read about:

- the mystery of the kingdom – Mark 4;
- the mystery of Israel's blindness – Romans 11;
- the mystery of the rapture – I Corinthians 15;
- the mystery of Christ and the church – Ephesians 5;
- the mystery of the incarnation – I Timothy 3;

- the mystery of God’s unfolding judgment, prophesied by the prophets of old – Revelation 10:7.

One author wrote, “To those who have believed in Christ during the Tribulation – living in the world now overrun by demons, murder, sexual immorality, drug abuse, thefts, and unparalleled natural disasters – the promise in this verse that God’s glorious plan is actually on schedule and the promised kingdom is near, when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14), will bring great comfort and hope in the midst of Earth’s judgment.”^{xi}

Now something strange happens, and I want to cover it briefly. We have seen the angel’s appearance. We have heard the angel’s announcement. Now let us notice the apostle’s application.

The Apostle’s Application

Notice Revelation 10:8-10.

Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, “Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.”

So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, “Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”

I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

It is fascinating that John is now to become an object lesson for us all.

Every word of God is sweet; in fact, as sweet as honey. Yet, as its truth is understood or digested, it can bring bitter tears, sorrow, uneasiness, and discomfort because of its message.

John is to literally eat the revelation of God’s further judgment. The words of God are sweet to him, but the truth brings him bitter sorrow.

This idea was also performed by Ezekiel when he ate a portion of God’s revelation and then delivered His message to the people of Israel. Ezekiel recorded that,

. . . [the] scroll . . . was as sweet as honey in my mouth. (Ezekiel 3:3)

Understand that this concept was not as strange to the ancient world as it is to us.

In the ancient Jewish world, a young boy would learn the alphabet, motivated by the fact that he wrote out the letters with a homemade mixture of flour and honey. As he sounded out the letters correctly, which he had written on his little slate board, he was allowed to literally lick the letters off the slate as his reward.^{xii}

To this day we speak of “devouring” some book; “digesting” some truth.

So John is literally eating this scroll, which will then become a literal illustration of the bittersweet truth of God’s judgment.

- It is sweet because it is God’s word.
- It is bitter because it speaks of God’s judgment.

Have you found the same to be true?

A gentleman came to me recently with tears in his eyes, telling me that his father had recently passed away without accepting Christ. His tears were not because he believed God to be unkind or God’s word to be anything less than true, but because of the bitter sorrow that came from knowing what the word of God revealed about his father’s eternal condition.

Sometimes the word of God becomes a great burden. It requires of us obedience that is difficult. It speaks of testing and trials and they are never sweet, but painful.

By faith we accept both honey and bitter; both sweet and sour; both pleasant and painful aspects of all that God’s word demands.^{xiii}

The church is often represented by pastors and teachers who do not want to deliver the bitter news of God’s judgment. They appear on *Larry King Live* and refuse to say anything about a coming judgment, an eternal hell, or even this coming day of wrath we have studied thus far.

God knew the temptation would be there for even those who truly know Him to resist the bitter announcement; the offensive nature of the gospel; the truth about heaven *and* hell.

So, God addresses this temptation even with John in the last verse of Revelation chapter 10,

And they said to me . . .

This is a reference, by the way, back to the thunderous voice of God. It is third person plural as an indefinite reference. This is the thunder of God’s voice from verse 4 now speaking to John.^{xiv}

Notice verse 11,

. . . ***“You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”***

In other words, “John you *must* deliver the truth.”

“Don’t hold back – it won’t help you and it certainly won’t help the human race. Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It’s bittersweet, but deliver it all. Obey it all – the easy parts and the difficult parts too!”

In 1955, Billy Graham was preaching the truth of heaven and hell; the gospel of Christ literally around the world and at only thirty-five years old, his reputation was internationally renowned. He was in London that year, holding an evangelistic crusade at Wembley Stadium, when he received an invitation to No. 10 Downing Street, the residence of England’s prime minister. Upon his arrival, Graham was introduced to a weary-looking, but keen-eyed Sir Winston Churchill. As it turned out, this was to be Churchill’s final year as prime minister after a long and illustrious career. Chomping on his unlit cigar, Churchill looked young Graham over with a penetrating eye and then said, “Young man, I’ve heard a great deal about these crusades you are having up at Wembley. Now, I want to ask you a question. You know the troubled shape the world is in. Personally, I don’t think the world has much

longer to go.” He paused hesitantly and then said, “Can you give an old man any hope.”

Let me read further, “It seemed to Graham that Churchill was seeking hope not merely for a troubled world, but for an aging and troubled man. So, he took out the pocket New Testament he always had with him and showed the prime minister that the Bible offers not only hope for the world in the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ, but hope for individual human beings in the plan of salvation. If Churchill ever made a decision, Billy Graham never learned about it.”^{xv}

Nine years after this singular conversation, Winston Churchill passed away.

Ladies and gentlemen, the only hope for anyone is in Jesus Christ. What have you done with Him?

Would you be like the woman who wrote to me this past week, announcing the wonderful news that she had been able to pray with a friend of hers who finally believed the gospel of Christ and prayed to receive the gift of eternal life?

I pray that you will be like the man who sat in my office a few days ago and prayed to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior.

My friend, there is no other hope apart from Jesus Christ. What have you done with Him?!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/2/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 126.

ⁱⁱ Edward Hindson, Revelation: Unlocking the Future (AMG Publishers, 2002), p. 113.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 114.

^{iv} Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 60.

^v John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1999), p. 280.

^{vi} Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 834.

^{vii} Ray C. Stedman, Revelation: God’s Final Word (Discovery House, 1991), p. 203.

^{viii} Jay Winik, The Great Upheaval: America and the Birth of the Modern World, 1788-1800 (HarperCollins, 2007), p. 151.

^{ix} Thomas, p. 67.

^x Stewart Custer, From Patmos to Paradise (BJU Press, 2004), p. 116.

^{xi} MacArthur, p. 286.

^{xii} William Barclay, The Revelation of John, Volume 2 (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 57.

^{xiii} Kendell H. Easley, Holman New Testament Commentary: Revelation (Holman, 1998), p. 179.

^{xiv} Thomas, p. 74.

^{xv} Stedman, p. 199.