

The Eating of the Little Book

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The events connected with the vision recorded for us in Rev. 10 touch upon a vital issue that divides the church today. The issue simply stated is this, what reaction must we expect to the faithful preaching of the gospel. We must relate this to our personal experience first of all and ask, is the message of the gospel pleasing to our flesh? Besides this, is it pleasing to the general public, do men everywhere come flocking to church because they hear a word that appeals to their carnal nature? Must we work for this and is this the purpose of the preaching of the gospel?

You certainly understand that this is a vital issue in the church today. The answer we give will determine for us whether we are the faithful church of the false church. It is a fact that leaders in the great churches of our land are more concerned today about the "image" of the church than they are about obeying the Word of Christ. With them, issues of top priority are all the popular issues that appeal to the masses. To be sure they do not search the Scriptures to hear what God has to say, rather they clamor for that which is pleasing to man. Their concern does not center in the reconciling blood of Jesus Christ which alone can free man from the poverty of sin and death, rather it centers in a general brotherhood of man and human rights. You may be sure that this position is the popular one and the church that speaks the loudest in favor of such a position is the popular church that draws the limelight.

Yet, the Word of God expressly warns us that this is not what we should expect, nor should we strive for it. There is something fundamentally wrong when the message of the "gospel" is conditioned by its popular acceptance. In the passage of Scripture that we desire to consider, we are told that John, the prophet of God, must eat the little book which is sweet to his taste, but makes his belly bitter. From this we must learn that the Word of God is pleasing to us by faith, it brings to the true believer reason for hope, peace in the midst of war, joy when earthly sorrow abounds, riches in the sphere of poverty, and life out of death. For the flesh this produces only heartache, pain, suffering, and persecution. This fact, however, does not arouse us to change the gospel and make it different, for this book is the Word of God and to change God's Word makes one subject to the terrible warning, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book, and if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city and from the things written in this book," Rev. 22:1-19.

We quote the passage under consideration, "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. 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 are therein, that there should 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 and prophets. And the voice which I heard from heaven spoke 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 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 as 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," Rev. 10:1-11.

This chapter forms an interlude in the progressive unfolding of the vision given to John on the Isle of Patmos. Glancing back for a moment, we recall that John saw a window in heaven and climbing up was thus enabled to gaze into the splendor of heaven. He saw a throne and He that sat upon the throne was surrounded with 24 elders, four beasts, thousands of angels and the multitude of saints. In the right hand of Him that sitteth upon the throne was a sealed book which the only Lamb that was slain was qualified to open. It was sealed with seven seals which the exalted Christ forthwith opened. The first four seals were the four horsemen, the fifth seal revealed the souls under the altar who were martyred for the sake of the gospel, the sixth seal contained a horrible display of judgment upon the earth. The seventh seal in turn became seven trumpets the first four of which were judgments of

God upon nature bringing an increase of destruction, one third instead of one fourth as with the seals. The fifth trumpet brought the hordes of locusts from the abyss, signifying the release of evil spirits that go forth throughout the earth deceiving men and bringing them to spiritual destruction. The sixth trumpet involved the four angels which released the armies of horses which symbolize the powers of war that destroy men. This brings us to the vision of the tenth chapter.

According to the events thus reviewed, we notice that time has come when the seventh trumpet must be blown and looking ahead we notice that this trumpet again turns into seven vials. The vials contain the final expression of God's judgment upon the earth for its devastation is not one fourth as with the seals, nor one third as with the trumpets, but 100% or total destruction. The pouring out of the vials symbolize the issuing in of the end of the world.

Before the awesome details of this destructive force will be made known to John and the church, a vision is given to prepare us for it. John must be comforted and assured that as a prophet he will have to make known terrible things, yet for the church and the people of God even these terrible events will cause Christ to come upon the clouds of heaven and bring the final consummation of glory.

These truths are brought out in the two phases of this vision. The first part deals with the Mighty Angel who stands with one foot on the earth and the other on the sea. He is the one who holds in his hand the little book which is open. This Mighty Angel calls for the seven thunders and lifts up his hand heaven ward, swearing an oath that the mystery of God shall be finished. The second part deals with the orders that John take the little book from the Mighty Angel's hand and eat it with the result that it is sweet to his taste, but bitter in his belly.

If we examine the details a little more closely, we notice at once that the Mighty Angel is surely someone extraordinary. The question that is raised is simply this, does this angel represent Christ or must we interpret it as a reference to one of the many heavenly hosts, who serve God as messengers. Nowhere else in the book of Revelation is Christ referred to as an "angel." It is also striking that John does not worship this angel as he worshipped Christ in Rev. 1:17. Nevertheless, the rest of the evidence is in favor of interpreting this Mighty Angel as a representation of Christ. Since the vantage point is back on earth, we see Him standing with one foot on the earth, the other on the seas. Clouds are His clothing, a picture of Christ coming in judgment on the clouds of heaven, Acts 1:11, a rainbow was upon his head, the sign of God's unchangeable covenant of grace, Gen. 9:12-13, His face was as it were the sun of righteousness who shall burn like stubble all the workers of iniquity, but who shall rise with healing in His wings for His own, Mal. 4:1-2.

His action confirms this interpretation. First of all, He cries out with a loud voice, as a lion roars and this brings forth the seven thunders which utter their voices. Here, too, the voice of thunders speaks of judgment, see Ps. 18:13, "The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice; hail stones and coals of fire." The fact that there seven voices of thunder indicate that the purpose of this judgment is to bring the realization of the kingdom of heaven. The number seven in the book of Revelation represents the covenant of grace, three for the triune God and four representing the four corners of the earth, taken together God and His people are joined in Christ Jesus. Even judgment serves to bring the return of Christ in glory. The content of these voices was understood by John, but he was forbidden to write it down. We must understand this to refer to the secret counsels of God, the complete detail of which must be known to God alone. This includes all the details as to who exactly anti-christ will be, when he will reign, what time will Christ personally appear, all these things are known to God alone and must remain such. Here John heard the seven thunders symbolizing their reality and so assures the church that God knows, and this must remain His secret. The only thing John must tell is what is contained in the little book, this follows later.

The second act by Christ is recorded in verse 5 and 6, He lifted His hand heavenward and swore an oath. What He swears is that there shall be time no more, or more correctly, there shall be no more delay. The judgments shall be poured out and Christ shall forthwith return. The fact that Christ should swear an oath is not strange, since He as the exalted Lord, remains according to His human nature the servant of God, bound to execute His will. Did He not pray while on earth, why should it be any different that He swear an oath while in heaven?

From all of this we conclude that Christ is now exalted in heaven working all things so that through judgment He will return and take us to our heavenly home. He is perfect and absolute control over all things, in nature, in the midst of the nations, in the hearts of men. He promises upon the authority of God that nothing shall delay His coming again. His coming is not in spite of evil and troubles (the content of the seven thunders) rather, through these judgments upon the peoples and the nations He is coming again. The terrible plagues described in the following chapters are not outside of Christ's control, they are to take place as Christ executes the perfect will of

God. Even troubles themselves bring men to destruction, but serve to save the church and thus work all things for Christ's return.

Now we must still see what all this has to do with the little book in the hand of the Mighty Angel, Christ.

The little book must be identified with and yet to be distinguished from the book recorded in Rev. 5:1. If we review a moment what was involved in the former reference, we will recall that the book in the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne was sealed, it was written on all sides, yet it was closed and the question was asked, who is worthy (qualified, meaning who has the right and power to open it. The silence in heaven revealed that no man was worthy, only the Lamb that had been slain was qualified. The exalted Christ then took the book and began to break the seals and reveal the content not only, but also realize them. This book obviously represented the secret counsel of God that contained all the detail of what had to transpire in order that Christ might realize His kingdom.

In this interlude, we notice that the book is called "little" and it is open. This tells us that it has been reduced in size because much of its content has been fulfilled since it now open! Yet, it is not the same book for John must eat it, and certainly John must not eat the remaining part of the book that was in the right hand of God which Christ was worthy to open. The seventh trumpet of the seventh seal which contains the seven vials must also be revealed and realized by Christ, no less than the others. Rather, we must understand that this book has a special purpose, its contents are the seven vials that are to be poured out, which John must receive and of which he must prophesy. John must be warned ahead of time, that Christ, the Lord of Judgment, Whose feet are upon the earth as His footstool, commissions him to preach also the remaining message which will be terrible, more so than that which preceded. He must not be afraid to preach the truth, for in sounding it forth, he will be a messenger of the covenant preaching judgment upon the wicked and mercy upon the people of God.

Hence John is called upon to eat the little book. Obviously, this is a vision and John does not do so literally, for a book is not to be eaten but read. The idea is that John must pay close attention to what is about to be revealed to him and not be afraid to "tell it to the churches." By the eating of this book we learn what a true prophet of God must really do with the Word of God. John had to take it, chew it, swallow it, and thus to digest and assimilate it into his system. What was figuratively true for John must be literally true for all prophets. Ministers of today must be students of the Word of God and search its contents, it must become part of their life, they must become gripped by the message. Note with me how this condemns modern day Biblical criticism which ends over backward to find errors and contradictions in the Bible and then literally forsake the true meaning of Scriptures as being irrelevant to the needs of the modern church. To save face they say that the Bible is alright, but must be made applicable to the church of today. Genesis is full of "stories" and the miracles are "kids' tales." All who do this are not prophets, for a true prophet must literally eat the Word of God, they must reverence it, believe it and thus it must live in their heart and soul.

This Word of God is sweet to the mouth, but bitter to the belly. This does not simply mean that parts of the Bible's message are sweet and parts bitter, rather when one truly worships in the preaching of the Word, it is sweet. We all realize this to some degree. When we sit under the preaching of the Word we feel forgiven, consoled, encouraged, and we rest content under the shadow of the Almighty. Yet, when that Word affects our lives, it brings bitterness. How? Christ's kingdom is coming in the way of development of sin, in the way of the persecution of the church, in the way of anti-christ and wickedness. This produces great opposition and suffering. According to chapter 11 of Revelation, the witnesses are found dead in the street. This is bitterness to the belly, it causes the church to be a reproach for Christ's sake.

No wonder John had to be assured that Christ would bring about this state of affairs. As certainly as Christ gave him the message to preach, Christ also would use that message as it fitted His purpose, viz. the condemnation of the wicked in the development of sin and the salvation of the church by the Word of God. When the church must preach hell fire and condemn the world, yea even the false church world, she must rest assured that her message will be rejected, the gospel will be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Even then, it is the Word of God in Jesus Christ and she must expect this and not be dismayed and surely not forsake it.

We need this encouragement, even as John did or if we look to the Old Testament, Ezekiel also did, see Ezekiel 2:8, 3:3. It is not easy for the faithful prophets to preach a message of judgment upon the wicked. It is not easy to tell the people of God their portion will be that of suffering for the sake of Christ. Yet, it is the gospel.

The true prophet who will be filled with the Word of God and rightly divide it according to the will of God by eating and devouring the Book day by day, will find it sweet to the taste, but bitter to the belly.

This fact, however, must not cause the church to forsake the Word. It must be preached so that the church may be gathered and the world found guilty before God. Such is the calling of true prophets.