

## **“The Little Scroll” (Revelation 10)**

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How do you know? That’s an important question. In fact, whenever we get into any kinds of debates, that should be one of the most important questions we ask. (Another one is, “Says who?”) How do you know what is true? How do you know these supposed facts? How do you evaluate them? How do you know what is morally right and wrong? How do you know what life is all about? The issue of knowledge is so important that one of the major branches of philosophy is dedicated to it. That branch of philosophy is called epistemology, the study of knowledge.

Well, how do we know what life is all about? How do we know what the purpose of life is, if there is one? How do we know what God is like? How do we know how we can be right with our Maker? We can know the answers to these questions only if God reveals them to us. Otherwise, we’re just guessing. Science can’t help us here. Science is a wonderful discipline that helps us understand the natural, physical world. Scientists have given us medicine and technology. But science can’t tell you who God is, or what life is all about, or even what is morally right and wrong. But science leads us to only a very small slice of knowledge. There are other ways of knowing. And the way that we can know ultimate truths, the ones that matter the most, is through revelation.

If that’s true, then the question is, how does God reveal these ultimate truths to us? There are many ways that he could do this. He could speak directly to each one of us, or perhaps he could speak to crowds of people. He could write words in the sky. Perhaps each day we could look up at various cloud formations that spell out letters and words and sentences. He could give us vivid dreams each night. He could speak to one person on earth, who then reports to the world what God has spoken. Or he could give us one book, written by dozens of different people, all moved by the Holy Spirit to write what God wanted them to write. And this book would be the same book for God’s people for centuries and even millennia.

Well, that is what God has done. He has given us one book, or a collection of books, the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and twenty-seven books of the New Testament, this anthology we call the Bible. It’s better for us to have one unchanging book, because then the subjective elements of revelation are minimized. For example, if God spoke to each one of us directly, then I could claim God told me that you should give me all your money, and you might

claim that God didn't tell you that, and then we would be in the difficult position of knowing who was right. It's better for God to give the same revelation to scores of generations, so that they have the same knowledge of God, and the same standards by which their lives should be lived. It's better for God to give us one book written by dozens of authors over centuries, so that God's revelation wasn't filtered through one man, who may or may not be trustworthy. The Bible is not the product of one person, or one secret committee who met and decided what God did and didn't say.

For example, the New Testament was written by at least eight different men over the course of about five decades, writing in different places within the Roman Empire to different places within that vast empire. So, these books weren't orchestrated by one person or even a team of people. And yet the New Testament presents a consistent message of God, his Son, Jesus, our need for Jesus, and how to have a right relationship with him. It also tells us of judgment for those who reject Jesus, and of a day when Jesus will come to earth again in glory to judge the living and the dead and to make all things new.

Why do I make so much of God's revelation this morning? One reason is to explain why we make so much of the Bible in this church. Another reason is that in the passage that we will read today, Revelation 10, we get some information about what God reveals and how he does it. We will see that while God's revelation is extremely important, there are some things that God has not revealed. Some mysteries remain hidden. But what we need to know has been revealed to us, and we need to pay attention to that.

Without further ado, let's read Revelation 10:1–3:

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.<sup>1</sup>

Just a quick reminder of what we've seen so far in Revelation: John—most likely the apostle John—was on the island of Patmos, exiled for his Christian faith. While he was worshiping on the Lord's Day, a Sunday, Jesus appeared to him and told him to write down what he saw. In fact, right at the beginning of the book, we're told that this is a revelation of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Christ, given from God, through his angel, to John. This revelation is given from God (the Father) to Jesus (the Son of God) to the angel to John.

We see the same thing happening here. John says that he saw another angel come from heaven. And this angel has a particular appearance. He's wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, his face shines like the sun, and he has legs like pillars of fire. Each description is rich in meaning. Clouds are usually associated with the appearance of God. That's true in the Old Testament and the New Testament. When Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt during the exodus, God was with them, appearing as a cloud by day and fire by night (Exod. 13:21–22; 14:24; Num. 14:14; Neh. 9:12, 19). In Daniel, we're told that one "like a son of man" came to God "with the clouds" (Dan. 7:13). We're told that Jesus will return to earth "with the clouds" (Rev. 1:7). Despite what the rainbow is associated with today, it originally was associated with a covenant God made with all creation after the flood during the days of Noah. God promised that he would not destroy all creation through a flood again (Gen. 9:11–17). When God appeared to the prophet Ezekiel, roughly six hundred years before the time of Jesus, he had the appearance of a rainbow (Ezek. 1:28). God told Ezekiel to prophesy a message of judgment to Israel, but it was also a message of hope to those who trust in God. The idea seems to be that the rainbow is associated both with judgment and mercy. Earlier in Revelation, we're told that Jesus' face shone like the sun (Rev. 1:16). And, as I said, fire is associated also with God's presence.

It seems that this angel represents Jesus, such that some of the imagery associated with Jesus appears with this angel. One commentator, Greg Beale, thinks that this angel is Jesus, though I don't think that's correct. But he concedes, "It is possible that the angelic figure . . . is merely an angelic representative of Christ who therefore possesses Christ's traits."<sup>2</sup> This angel has a little scroll in his hand, which we'll get to in a moment. And he puts one foot on sea and another on land. The idea seems to be that he owns both land and sea. That's certainly true of God. In Exodus 19:5, God says, "all the earth is mine" (see also Exod. 9:29; Deut. 10:14; Job 41:11). Psalm 24:1 says,

The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,  
the world and those who dwell therein.

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<sup>2</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 526.

The way this angel acts represents the fact that God owns the whole earth. The angel also calls out “with a loud voice, like a lion roaring.” Jesus was earlier called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5). There are times in the Old Testament where God’s voice is likened to a lion (Isa. 3:14). Hosea 11:10 says,

- <sup>10</sup> They shall go after the LORD;  
    he will roar like a lion;  
    when he roars,  
    his children shall come trembling from the west;  
<sup>11</sup> they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,  
    and like doves from the land of Assyria,  
    and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.

When God’s voice roars like a lion, it is a threat of judgment to those who are against him, but it is also a promise of homecoming for his people. God’s voice roars like a lion and it’s as loud as “seven thunders,” yet another reference to the number seven, which represents fullness and completion. Imagine all the thunderclaps that have ever resounded on earth—that’s what God’s voice would be like if we were to hear it.

There’s another reference to God’s voice roaring like a lion, and that is in Amos 3:8, which says,

The lion has roared;  
    who will not fear?  
The Lord GOD has spoken;  
    who can but prophesy?”

That gets to the heart of what is happening here. Who can speak on behalf of God? Only those whom God has chosen. And one of those prophets is John.

Let’s now read verses 4–7:

<sup>4</sup> 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.” <sup>5</sup> And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven <sup>6</sup> 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, <sup>7</sup> 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.

Earlier, John saw a little scroll that was open in the angel’s hand. He also heard the seven thunders of his voice. John is about to write down what he heard, but then he is told not to do

that. Instead, he is told that the seven thunders should be “sealed up.” The idea of sealing is that there are some things which are not revealed. The concept of sealing also means that some of God’s plans are not ready to be executed. We saw this earlier in Revelation. In chapter 5, we’re told that there is a scroll sealed with seven seals (Rev. 5:1). I said that this scroll contained God’s plan of salvation and judgment, which could only be set into motion by Jesus, the one who was worthy to open the seals. It might be that the seven thunders are other judgments, like the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. Or it might be that they represent things that God has chosen not to reveal. I think that latter option makes sense. There are some things that God has not revealed to us. John likely saw and heard much more than what he wrote here. In fact, that’s true of John’s Gospel. At the end of John’s account of Jesus, he says, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book” (John 20:30). The Bible is not an exhaustive account of God. Then John adds, “but these are written to that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). What John wrote in his Gospel was intended to bring people to faith in Jesus. John ends his Gospel with this comment: “Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

The idea of some things being revealed and other things being hidden appears elsewhere in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 29:29, it says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” There are mysteries about God and his ways that he has not revealed. Perhaps if he revealed them, we wouldn’t understand them. God is infinite, and he is involved in the most minute details of the universe. If everything that could be known of God were written down, “the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” And there is much that we simply couldn’t fathom. But God has revealed important things about who he is, about our condition as people made in his image and yet who sin against him, and about the one remedy for our sin, Jesus. And as Deuteronomy says, those things that God has revealed belong to us, that may we do what God wants us to do.

One of the things that God has revealed is that his purposes will be fulfilled. There will be a final judgment against sin, a condemnation of sinners who refuse to come to Jesus, a purging of all evil from the world, so that a new creation, one not stained by sin and evil, will

come into being. We get a hint of this here. In this passage, the angel who stands on the sea and land raises his right hand to heaven. Sea, land, and sky—these represent the realms that God has created. But this also calls back to Daniel 12:7, where a “man clothed in linen” raises his hands toward heaven and swears by “him who lives forever and ever” that this age will end and that God’s plans will be fulfilled. Daniel didn’t understand what was being revealed, but he was told that the words would be sealed “until the time of the end” (Dan. 12:9). Here in Revelation, John is told not to write some things down, but to know that when the seventh trumpet is blown, there will be no more delay. The “mystery of God” will then be fulfilled, there will be a final day of salvation and judgment, just as God had announced to “his servants and prophets.” We’ll read about that seventh trumpet at the end of chapter 11.

One of the things that God had revealed is “the day of the Lord,” a day of salvation and judgment. What was mysterious, at least to people during the Old Testament era, was that the Lord would be the Son of God made flesh. God himself would become a man, he would live a perfect human life, the one that God had intended for humans to live, and he would die in place of sinners so that God could punish all sin without destroying all sinners. Jesus did this for us. He lived a perfect life so that all who trust in him can be credited with that righteousness. He died an atoning death so that all who trust in him have their sins punished already, so that they can be forgiven by God, reconciled to him, adopted into his family, and given the promise of eternal life. God promised that such things would happen, and he announced these promises to the world through his prophets. But what the prophets of the Old Testament said about the Messiah wasn’t entirely clear; those who had ears to hear recognized Jesus to be the Messiah, but many who knew the Hebrew Bible very well didn’t recognize the Messiah when he came. But that mystery has been fully revealed in the New Testament, as the apostle Paul says. In Ephesians 1, Paul says of Jesus,

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1:7–10).

Part of the mystery of God was that Jesus would come a first time to secure salvation for his people. Another part of that mystery was Jesus would come a second time to judge and to renew the earth. When judgment day comes, there will be no more delay. God’s plans will be fulfilled.

By the way, the word translated as “announce” is the same word that means “evangelize.” The word in Greek is εὐηγγέλισεν, from which we get the word “evangelize.” Evangelize means “to announce good news.” The good news, the evangel, is the gospel. It is that message of salvation that centers on the identity and work of Jesus. John is told to announce this news to the world. He is also told to prophesy against those who reject Jesus. We see this in the final part of chapter 10, verses 8–11:

<sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And I was told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

John is now told to take this little scroll from the angel. What is this little scroll? Some see parallels between this scroll and the scroll of chapter 5. There certainly are parallels. But this scroll is intentionally called a “little scroll.” By the way, the word translated as “scroll” is βιβλίον, and the plural of that is βιβλία. That’s where we get “Bible” from. “Bible” could mean scrolls or books. At any rate, this “little scroll” seems to be the remainder of the book of Revelation. It represents the things that God has revealed, the things that John wrote down.

When John receives this scroll, he is told to eat it. That’s strange. But it comes from the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. At the beginning of that book, Ezekiel is given a scroll that has “written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe” (Ezek. 2:10). In other words, it has words of judgment written on it. Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll, to digest it so he can then pass on the contents to Israel in his speech. When Ezekiel eats the scroll, he finds that it is sweet in his mouth as honey (Ezek. 3:3). However, he later says that he was in a state of “bitterness” (Ezek. 3:14).

To some, God’s word is sweet. That’s something that the Bible says repeatedly. Psalm 19:10 says,

More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalm 119:103 says,

How sweet are your words to my taste,  
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Proverbs 16:24 says,

Gracious words are like a honeycomb,  
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

Proverbs 24:13–14 says,

- <sup>13</sup> My son, eat honey, for it is good,  
and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.  
<sup>14</sup> Know that wisdom is such to your soul;  
if you find it, there will be a future,  
and your hope will not be cut off.

Notice that in those verses, God's people find God's word to be sweet, like honey. But they don't say simply because they have a personal preference for his words. They acknowledge that God's word brings health and wisdom and hope. God's people understand the value of God's word. That's one of the marks of a Christian. We understand that God's word is true. We know that it doesn't just say things that comfort us. God's word does comfort, but it also corrects. It confronts us. It tells us things we don't want to hear, but things that we need to hear.

Yet some people don't find God's word sweet. To them, it is bitter. It is offensive. They don't agree with what God has revealed. It rubs them the wrong way, and because of that, they don't want to hear from God. But if we cut off God's word from our lives, we're cutting God off from our lives. If we deny God's correction, we also deny God's salvation.

The fact is that if the Christian story is true, God is a perfect being and humans are very imperfect. God is perfect. He doesn't need to change. He is perfectly wise, and he knows everything. We, on the other hand, are finite, we don't know everything, and we don't have perfect character. We have wrong desires, and we do wrong things. So, we need to change. If God cares for us, he wants us to become better people. So, it stands to reason that his word would correct us.

Tim Keller points out that in a personal relationship, we would expect people to correct us when we're wrong. He says, "If you don't trust the Bible enough to let it challenge and correct your thinking, how could you ever have a *personal* relationship with God? In any truly personal

relationship, the other person has to be able to contradict you.”<sup>3</sup> He says that if husbands want wives who only agree with them, they won’t have real wives, but Stepford wives; they’ll have robots, not humans. He then says,

Now what happens if you eliminate anything from the Bible that offends your sensibility and crosses your will? If you pick and choose what you want to believe and reject the rest, how will you ever have a God who can contradict you? You won’t! You’ll have a Stepford God! A God, essentially, of your own making, and not a God with whom you can have a relationship and genuine interaction. Only if your God can say things that outrage you and make you struggle (as in a real friendship or marriage!) will you know that you have gotten hold of a real God and not a figment of your imagination.<sup>4</sup>

If you want to know the real God, not a God of your making, you must allow for the possibility that he will confront you and correct you as well as comfort you. If you take that posture towards God, you will find that his word is sweet and brings health, wisdom, and hope. But if you reject God’s word, the word for you is only judgment, and that is bitter.

Judgment is a large part of what John prophesied. In verse 11, he is told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.” He has already spoken about the coming judgment. He is told to declare that judgment again. Our translation says, “You must again prophesy about many peoples,” but it could be translated as, “You must prophesy *against* many peoples.” This is a prophecy of judgment, judgment that will come on all kinds of people, from different nations, who speak different languages. We have already seen that there will be people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation who are redeemed (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). There will also be people from all those groups who are condemned. And there will even be kings who are condemned. That last element of verse 11 might be surprising. God’s word isn’t just for the poor and humble. It speaks to the rich and powerful. It is for everyone. The dividing line among people isn’t gender or skin color, ethnicity or language, poverty or wealth, education or ignorance, Republican or Democrat. No, the dividing line is between those who have trusted in Jesus and those who haven’t. Those who trust in Jesus recognize their need for God’s salvation and his word. Those who reject Jesus run from God’s word.

So, my question for us is this: Do you find God’s word to be sweet or bitter? Do you hunger for it, or do you have no room for it in your life? Are you willing to let the true God

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead, 2008), 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

correct you, or do you want a Stepford God, or no God at all? If you run to the true God, you get correction and salvation, wisdom and hope, and, in the end, ultimate health. If you run from God, you will find bitter judgment in the end. The choice is yours.

If you want to know more about God's word, I would love to help you. We have Bibles here for you if you need one. We have some resources to help you understand the Bible better. The important thing is to take it and, metaphorically, eat it, so that you may live.