

Notes for Revelation 10

David H. Linden, University Presbyterian Church, Las Cruces, NM USA (January, 2013)

The Second Interlude, Revelation 10:1 – 11:13 The seven seals had a break between seals 6 & 7. Now between trumpets 6 & 7 we have a similar section. This is intentional and helpful, because in apocalyptic literature, observing the position of a theme is essential to good interpretation. The first interlude focused on the people of God and their experience: sealed and protected, though afflicted and murdered, but then alive, victorious, praising their Lord God, eternally sheltered and shepherded by the Lamb. In that interlude, we are also shown how vast the number is of the redeemed, a company so great no number is supplied, and no man can count all of them. In some fashion, this complex theme is repeated and enlarged in the interlude of Rev. 10 – 11:13. Eventually, a marker appears (11:14) to show that the interlude has ended, and that the narrative has returned to the trumpets by bringing up the last one.

10:1,2 The Angel with the Scroll These verses require identifying two things: a specific mighty angel, and the scroll in his hand. If anyone is uncertain of either, it is worthwhile to delve into identifying both. Revelation makes more sense when we connect chapter 10 with chapter 5. These questions have been argued at length in scholarly circles, and a consensus is building concerning the scroll. The identity of the angel in 10:1 is still debated, and “debated” often means a positive discussion.

I think the answer is clear and simple: the scroll of chapter 10 is the one received by Christ in chapter 5, which He opens in chapters 6 and 8. The “mighty angel” is the one who in 5:2 proclaimed in a loud voice “Who is worthy to open” that scroll. In 5:2, he did not ask as if he did not know; rather by his question he was drawing attention to the scroll, knowing that when it is opened, his role would be to hand it to John.

In v.1 the “mighty angel” is *another* angel because he is not the angel who blew the sixth trumpet. He is not however, another mighty angel in distinction from some other mighty angel. The descriptive adjective in 10:1 and 5:2 is the same word in Greek. Revelation does not present two angels described as mighty. The fact that this mighty angel “preaches” his question in chapter 5 fits his spectacular descent and awesome appearance in chapter 10.

It is not surprising that some conclude that this angel is Christ. The comparisons with Christ are striking and intentional. In v.1, the angel’s legs were like pillars of fire; in 1:15 the Lord’s feet appeared like hot glowing bronze. The other likenesses are a powerful voice and a face like the sun (1:15,16). But none of these descriptions match Christ exactly. Having a face like the sun is not unusual in apocalyptic literature, but Christ’s is “*like the sun shining with full strength*” (1:16). In 14:14-16 Christ is seated on a cloud; this angel is wrapped in one. The Lord’s throne is circled with a rainbow 4:3, while this mighty angel has one over his head. Thus he is unusually like the descriptions of Christ within Revelation, yet he is called an *angel*, and in Revelation Christ never is. The mighty angel in 5:2 is obviously not a divine being, so he is not a divine being here in spite of the great likeness. We should expect something unique of the singular angel who receives the scroll from Christ to give to John. Revelation does not explicitly say that he received it from Christ, but with only one scroll from the Father to the Son, there was no other way for this angel to have possession of it. Revelation follows closely the path announced in the very beginning. Note the order: 1) Father, 2) Christ, 3) His angel, 4) John, 5) God’s human servants. Now note 1:1:

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God [1] gave him [Christ] [2] to show his servants [5] what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel [3] to his servant John [4] ...” This one, called simply *His angel*, is the immediate link in this revelatory chain between Christ and us. In 22:16 it is, “I, Jesus [2], have sent my angel [3] to testify to you (a plural pronoun which includes John) [4] about these things for the churches [5]”. Because of this angel’s unique role in this chain, we should expect something surpassing the majesty of all the other angels. That is certainly what Revelation shows.

Is it worth the bother to identify the angel and the scroll as the same angel and scroll seen first in chapter 5? I say, quite frankly, that without this we lose the narrative. That scroll in chapter 5 was of such crucial importance that John wept at the thought of its contents being denied. If this is not the same scroll, then that very important item never appears again, and we are left hanging, unable to connect all the elements of Revelation to the first heavenly scene in chapters 4 & 5. The starting point of the unveiling of “*what must take place after this*” (4:1) begins in the vision in heaven. When the identity is certain, we continue to have an unfolding story, but without this vital reappearance of the angel and the scroll we are left with a narrative in which a central item evaporates. As Revelation comes to an end, we are reminded in 22:6: “*These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.*” This looking back has reference to content (things that must soon take place) and reference to means (the Lord sent His angel to show). The role of the mighty angel is vital to the unfolding revelation. For such an angel to have such a vital role, as 1:1 declares and 22:6 repeats, and then never to appear elsewhere in the book, as doing anything other than his question in 5:2, is preposterous.

The glory of God has a limited but real reflection in man, made in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). That is the case here with even greater glory. This angel is made in this vision to look like Christ, because he is the special angel of Christ to show the content of this mysterious scroll he has received from Christ for God’s servants. Thus he is wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, with a face like the sun and legs like pillars of fire. That catches our imagination, but to stop there defeats the purpose of the splendor. He has in his hand a scroll.

How do we know for sure that this is the same scroll when the word for scroll in Greek is different? Imagine two adults talking and one says “Do you take your children to school? Does someone else come back with the kids, or do you go back to get them?” In many conversations words are used interchangeably, such as *ad* and *advertisement*. In these examples they mean the same; the children are the kids, though one word is more colloquial. Most scholars have waded through the evidence and have ended up certain that the different words used by John for the scroll have no real difference. Variations in Revelation are common. Those who conclude that there are two scrolls, a little one in chapter 10 and the one mentioned in chapter 5, have three problems:

1. There is no further mention of a second scroll,
2. If there is a second scroll, we do not have different content for each.
3. Within chapter 10 a word for *scroll* appears four times. The Greek text uses *both forms* of the word to refer to the same thing. They are synonyms. There is one scroll.

We can breathe a sigh of relief; there is one scroll; the narrative is coherent. Secondly, that written and highly privileged document in the hand of the One on the throne and in the hand of the Lamb is about to

be delivered to a human servant of God and thus to us. Revelation has a message for us. The scroll has been opened. Remember the path. It is from God to us, and in all of Revelation this book was the only thing reported as being in the hand of the One Who sits on the throne. Since Revelation has the purpose to “*show to his servants things which must soon take place*” (1:1), this scroll must be closely related to revealing something important. (See also 4:1 and 22:6.) Furthermore, it will show the nature of the cosmic conflict, and how in the will of God we are to fit into it.

The sealed book in Daniel Revelation 5 begins with a scroll written within and on the back, but this book was sealed. We are not presented with an ordinary book, but one which needed to be opened for us. This Christ has done. He broke the seals. Revelation makes much of these seven seals being opened, and thus read, understood, and implemented by God. The Prophet Daniel prepares us for this. There we find a book with some mystery of God being sealed and kept from Daniel.

Daniel weaves from information affecting the near future to Gentile activity and domination over Israel until the time of Christ, but as it does this it sometimes mentions *the end*. It links closely with Revelation in a variety of parallels. We shall need to make reference to passages of Daniel as we move further into Revelation. Note the “How long?” of Daniel 8:13, corresponding to Revelation 6:10, and the death of the saints in 8:24,25, corresponding to Revelation 6:9; 13:7; & 17:6. Other parallels will appear later. This statement deserves much attention: “*When the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished*” (12:7).

In visions an angel is sometimes seen as a *man* in Daniel (see below) and in chapters 9 & 10 of Ezekiel. This Daniel angel is so much like the angel of Revelation 10:1, I wonder without certainty if we have the same angel.

Daniel “I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, *his face* like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and *legs* like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the *sound of his words* like the sound of a multitude” (Daniel 10:5,6; see also Daniel 12:7 below).

Revelation “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. 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, and called out with a *loud voice*, like a lion roaring...” (Revelation 10:1-3).

Other similarities in the order in which they appear in Daniel prior to chapter 12:

- The vision is for the time of the end (8:17)
- He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end" (8:19).
- The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now (8:26).
- to seal both vision and prophet (9:24).
- until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator (9:27).
- to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come (10:14).
- But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince (10:21).
- ... until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time (11:35).

We should note that in Daniel's day some valuable information was withheld, delayed. Now in Revelation 10:6 the angel gives an oath that there will be no more delay, and that something will be fulfilled in the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet (10:7). The time is near (22:10).

The linkage to Revelation increases greatly in Daniel 12:

Daniel 12:4 But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.

Daniel 12:6 And someone said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, "How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?"

Daniel 12:7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.

Daniel 12:8,9 I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end."

Daniel 12:13 ... go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days."

The angel in Daniel has likenesses in appearance with Revelation 10:1. However, it is the matter of a scroll, sealed in Daniel but open in Revelation, that is the most striking connection and contrast. Other parallels will emerge in Revelation 11. The time factor of "*a time, times, and half a time*" (Daniel 12:7) appears first in this interlude (Revelation 11:2) and continues beyond. More is coming about "*shattering of the power of the holy people*" (Daniel 12:7), as more is revealed about the persecution of believers and God's accomplishments through such shattering. Daniel prepares us to understand Revelation.

10:3 The lion's roar reappears in Revelation. He had some appearance like Christ; now in v.3 he sounds like the Lord. Those listening to Revelation being read (especially Jewish believers) would recognize the remarkable likeness to Amos 3:8: "*The lion has roared – who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken – who can but prophesy?*" Verses 7 & 8 in Amos 3 mention prophets prophesying. Chapter 10 is moving to John being commissioned to a prophetic role (10:11). But Amos adds more, "*Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.*" Revealing God's plan is what the scroll is about. God is a God of action which involves His servants, giving His prophets His message, and so speaking to all through them. The prophet called to speak the Word of the Lord is as fearless as a lion. Good preaching is not chicken-hearted. It does not stroke the back of sinners or acquiesce in their disagreements with God. It roars like a lion, without yelling like a madman. The issue of fearless preaching comes to the fore in chapter 11. The lion's roar prepares for it.

10:3,4 The Seven Thunders This tantalizing report of the seven thunders appears in little more than one verse. One can readily see how it would fit a pattern in Revelation which already has seven seals, seven trumpets, and then later will have seven bowls. But it is also out of place in the rhythm of the book, and things structural in Revelation are intentional. The seventh seal opens up to become the seven trumpets. At this point in Revelation 10 the seventh trumpet has not yet sounded. It could have included the seven thunders the way the seventh seal includes the seven trumpets. These thunders appear in the text

in order to be retracted. They are there for a sobering effect. If the seals spell terrible judgment for a quarter of the earth, and the trumpets bring even more misery and death, what might these thunders hold?

Before we might learn what the thunders hold, an emphatic voice came from heaven, which can only be the voice of God. This divine order had two sides: positive (seal up) and negative (do not write). Already I have suggested a common conjecture about the nature of the thunders. If they are sealed then there is something there to be sealed. Guessing what is in a divinely retracted and sealed-shut message is a questionable moral deed. However, this conjecture has been based on the objective pattern in play earlier in Revelation. Seven opened seals and seven blown trumpets signaled judgment on sin. The seven bowls poured on the earth in chapter 16 comprise God's unrestrained judgment on unforgiven sinners. The hearers of Revelation would quite naturally expect upon hearing of seven thunders, that more judgment will be announced. Seals, trumpets and bowls in a literal sense have quite neutral connotations. We do not tremble at a bowl of rice. It is not so with thunder. In nature thunder frightens; in theophanies they make mortals tremble. In Revelation, thunder might bring delight (14:2 & 19:6), but it always shows vigor, either by God or man (4:5; 6:1; 8:5). In 16:18 thunder spells pure terror.

But a very different angle emerges. In this apocalyptic narrative, trumpets five and six were severe judgments, ending with no repentance from those suffering the judgments. Is more judgment the way the Lord will produce a world full of godly worshippers of the true and living God? Every judgment is deserved; mercy is owed to no one, and grace can never be deserved. God's justice is as holy as His grace. But God has willed not only to react to sin, but also to display the wonders of His grace (Ephesians 3:10). Saving grace can be shown only to sinners. There cannot be forgiveness if there is no sin to forgive. The lack of repentance in 9:20,21 shows that man does not repent, cannot repent, because he will not repent, no matter how much judgment descends upon him. By the lion's roar and the existence of the seven thunders God intimates what He can do. By suppressing what the thunders said, ordering no leaks, the Lord has orchestrated in dramatic fashion that He will turn to a different way of dealing with unworthy sinners: He will save them. The Lord could have instructed John to make no mention of the thunders at all. If there were no mention at all, we would never know they were part of the vision John saw, but it has been placed there in Scripture for us to consider. It is also at the juncture in Revelation where a different activity of God is about to be announced.

10:5,6 That mighty angel was sent to roar. The roaring is over; he was also sent to declare. The revelation, the open scroll in his hand, is based on more than the impressive majesty of the angel. He swore in the Name of the Lord Who sent him. He stood on the same land and sea, so cursed and pounded in the first trumpets, and from which the beast and the false prophet will emerge (13:1,11). The surface of our planet is simply land and sea, and what the angel will declare affects all who live in every part of the earth. He raised His right hand to heaven to swear (note Daniel 12:7), and as he did he affirmed God's eternity. This finite creature, a worshipping angel, praised God as the One Who lives forever and ever, the Creator of all things. These truths grip loyal angels with holy wonder, as they delight in their place and privilege under their Creator. When we meditate on the difference between the Lord and us, His transcendence stimulates our worship. We need to remember that we are recent and that God has had no beginning. He has ever lived, depending on nothing to support His life. Only God is self-existent without need.

10:6,7 The content of the angel's oath

1. There will be no more delay. Had the seven thunders been allowed to run their course, that probably would have signaled more judgments. The ultimate judgment is not removed from God's agenda. The world has experienced restrained judgments from the day man fell in Eden. If more were announced in the thunders, that would also indicate some delay in the final judgment. When history reaches the final showdown, events will transpire quickly. Note above the statements in Daniel of delay and a distant end. Revelation 10:6,7 reverses that. The angel's oath ties the end to the seventh trumpet.

As Revelation progresses, the sense builds of very little remaining time. In the seven bowls, God will announce, "*It is done!*" (16:17). He says the same at the commencement of the eternal state (21:6). This indicates a unity in time of the final judgment and the onset of the new heaven and new earth (21:1). When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, the 24 elders praise God saying, "... *The nations raged, but your wrath came, and **the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants** ...*" Note both happen at the same time.¹ (11:18). This is exactly what 10:7 said would come at a specific time in this narrative, namely "*in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel.*" The devil knows his time is short (12:12). The seven plagues (the result of pouring out the seven bowls) "*are the last, for with them the wrath of God is **finished***" (15:1). Thus with a final judgment on Babylon and Christ coming in judgment riding a white horse (chapter 19), it becomes very hard to picture another judgment coming 1000 years later. The wrath of God will be finished. The end comes with a bang not in repetitions *it is done*" spread out over time. The mystery of God will not be fulfilled in delays.

Time was a painful element in the prayer of the martyrs in 6:10. They asked, "*How long?*" The trumpets explicitly show (in 8:1-5) that God reacts in judgment in response to the prayers of the saints. Now in the oath of the mighty angel God indicates that time is on His mind, and that He commits seriously to bringing history to a timely consummation. His saints need only "*rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been*" (6:11). A divine time limit is such an important assurance for God's children that the angel swears by his eternal God and ours that there will be *no more delay*. The seventh trumpet will sound. It is tempting to call it the last one, because it sounds a bit like 1 Corinthians 15:52. It is better, however, to compare the trumpets in Revelation to the seven days Israel marched around Jericho (Joshua 6). Seven priests blew seven trumpets; on the seventh day they marched around Jericho seven times. On that day the judgment of God struck with great suddenness. There was no delay; on God's schedule Jericho's walls fell flat, and not a minute later. We should live as those aware of impending judgment and with the prayer in our hearts, "*Come, Lord Jesus.*" So far in His sovereign wisdom, He has judged with restraint, and He assures us, "*Surely I am coming soon*" (22:20). He will arrive on time. "*Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay*" (Hebrews 10:37).

¹ In my teaching of Revelation, I have pointed out that references to the coming of Christ throughout the New Testament are in the singular. It never refers to His comings, or to future judgments in the plural. The text above (Revelation 11:18) states that one singular time has in it very different elements: judgment and reward together in one time. The coming of Christ is the time for both. Thus I have coined the phrase "the ubiquity of the singular". Another example of this singular time is 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10. There the singular *time when* of the Lord's return combines relief for His saints and vengeance on those who reject the gospel.

2. The angel swore, “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 (v.7).”

Something promised will be fulfilled. There is a time of completion. It is at whatever time is indicated in the seventh trumpet. We have become so used to a number of promises not yet fulfilled that we might slip into low expectations. That is a failure of faith. (Note 2 Peter 3:1-4.) Everything that comprises “*the mystery of God*” will be fulfilled and fulfilled rapidly. Revelation 15:1 proclaims that the wrath of God is *finished* with the seven plagues. That judgment is an element of the mystery of God not yet seen in this world. In other words, the people of the world have not yet wilted in fear at “*the great day of their wrath*” (6:17). It is a real mystery that Almighty God has not pounced already on all who owe Him His due respect and remain rebels against Him. This is a brief mystery; it will suddenly change.

There is much more to come than all the judgments proclaimed. Tears have not yet been wiped from the eyes of God’s children. Nor is the New Jerusalem here yet. Much blessing is in store when the mystery of God will be fulfilled. In chapter 10 Revelation is on the verge of declaring God’s saving grace for the nations. Note this song: “*Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed*” (15:3,4). In spite of all that Satan tries, when the mystery of God is fulfilled all nations will come to worship the Lord. In 11:13 a host of unbelievers with a new fear of God will suddenly “gave glory to the God of heaven”. That is the clear reversal of the previous response of mankind (9:20,21).

The glory of God gives the New Jerusalem its light, and that light is the Lamb. *In that light* the nations will walk. Nothing unclean will enter, but these nations will. So all the persistence in idolatry and the refusal to repent in 9:20,21 will change dramatically. All along, unseen by any eyes but God’s, a vast host no man can number (7: 9) had their names in the Lamb’s book of life (21:23-27). Their names had always been there (13:8). This amazing inclusion in the grace of God was neither known to them, nor caused by them. They did not write in their own names in eternity past. The *mystery of God* being fulfilled includes the grace of God in action. It shows in the release of God’s enormous, pent-up eagerness for the salvation of the nations. All that God has “*announced by His servants the prophets*” over the centuries will be fulfilled. When the angel said that in his oath, he referred to a huge store of previous revelation. This appears in the Psalms and a number of prophets. Note Isaiah 2, 11, 24, 52, 54, 55 & 65. Here is one in Isaiah 49:

And now the LORD says, he who formed me [Christ] from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him – for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength – he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; **I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**” Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: **“Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”** (Isaiah 49:5- 7)

10:8–11 John commissioned as a prophet In typical apocalyptic fashion, John was told to eat the scroll. First, he was to take or receive it, the same verb used in 5:7.8. This means that, finally, the revelation in the open scroll has been delivered. Its contents are now shown to John. He like Ezekiel is to

eat it. I wonder if that is a way to show that the Word of God must be internalized in all who proclaim it. He ate one scroll not two.

And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. And he said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them (Ezekiel 3:1-4).

Like the Prophet Ezekiel, John was to proclaim the contents of the scroll. The voice telling John to eat is not the voice of the mighty angel. The voice John heard here was the voice of Christ again (1:10), just as he had heard it years before from the Lord in His days on earth (John 20:21). At that time he was being commissioned to serve as one sent by Christ.

The sweetness of the scroll is the gospel, a delight to share. The bitterness is the word of certain judgment on sinners, which the servant of God groans to give and yet must declare in the face of hostility. John ate it, and it tasted just as he was told. John was a very old man; other than prophesy there is little he could personally do in a worldwide outreach with the message of God's saving gospel and God's convicting law. To limit him further, he was on the Isle of Patmos, perhaps as a prisoner. But what he received was to be handed to God's servants (1:1). And note, it has come all the way to us from that small island in the Mediterranean Sea centuries ago. It was delivered to the seven churches, copied, preserved, and distributed throughout the earth (22:16). Something never revealed in any previous Scripture appears in Revelation 11. With the scroll open and ingested by the prophet, we will receive from him the contents of the scroll.

The prophecy of which John was a unique link in a chain was appointed for many peoples, nations, languages and kings. This set of four words appears seven times in varied word order and with two changes of nouns as here. Here is a change of word from the usual combination of four: peoples, nations, languages, and tribes (10:11). *Tribes* (or families) is replaced by *kings*. Those kings enter the holy city, bringing their glory with them (21:22-27). There they find the tree of life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the *nations* (22:2). John's eating that scroll, and the resulting worldwide proclamation of God's message, will bear such great fruit among Gentile nations that they too shall give glory to God. This proper response to the gospel, called for in 14:7, occurs in 11:13. The nations will cast aside their idols in genuine repentance, and in submissive fear of God. Remember the bleak picture in 9:20,21. What the judgment of God on sinners did not accomplish, the gospel of God proclaimed in the message of the scroll does. In that message, freedom from judgment is only accomplished by the blood of Jesus (1:5).