

*There is a story of an Amish family who went to the big city for the very first time and they were awe struck by everything they saw. Having grown up and lived all their lives on a rural farm – everything was new, amazing and exciting to them. Eventually, they made their way to a towering skyscraper, the tallest in the city, and so the father and son decided to go in while they left Ma in the horse buggy outside. As the boy and father entered the first floor of the building, they came to two shiny doors that could move apart and back together again, which left them spellbound. They stood watching these doors until the son asked his father, “What is this, Father?” The father, never having seen an elevator before, responded, “Son, I don’t know what it is, it’s a mystery to me.”*

*While the boy and his father were watching in amazement, an elderly lady in a wheel chair rolled up to the moving shiny doors and pressed a button. The doors opened and the lady rolled her way into the elevator. The doors closed and the boy and his father watched small circles with numbers in them light up above the doors. A few moments later, they watched the circles above the doors light up again, but this time in the reverse direction. Then the doors opened up, and to their surprise, a beautiful young woman stepped out, to which the father responded, “Boy, go get your Ma!”*

Given the circumstances, there are some things that will be mysterious and uncertain to us – there will be things we are not sure about, and this morning, like this father and son, we are going to be faced with some mysteries and uncertainties from the Apostle John that will leave us with more questions than answers.

If you recall from last week, we looked at what will happen to the unrepentant people of the earth during the last portion of the Tribulation period after the fifth and the sixth trumpets are sounded by the angels. I described it as a *hell on earth*, where demons come, in two separate waves – first to inflict agony and torment for five months, and then later to kill a third of the earth’s population. It’s a small taste of hell – where people will experience how they will be treated for eternity if they do not repent and come to the Lord.

Last week, we concluded with the sixth trumpet, and now, as we make our way to the seventh – we come to pause in the action. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 10** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

**<sup>1</sup>I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; <sup>2</sup>and he had in his hand a little book which was open.**

Let's stop there. In **verse 1**, John tells us he sees something new – it's not an angel with a trumpet – instead, it's a “**strong angel coming down out of heaven**” and this angel is clothed with a cloud, has a rainbow upon his head, the face like the sun, and feet like pillars of fire, and the obvious question is – *who is this*, and in all honesty, I'm not sure. I don't think anyone knows for certain who this is, but there are two clear trains of thought – that being this is either the Lord Jesus Christ Himself appearing as an angel or it's a mighty high-ranking angel.

Now, from the description we are given by John, some suggest this is Jesus, and in many respects, I can absolutely see that – face like the sun, feet like pillars of fire – both of these are similar to the description of Jesus back in **Revelation 1**, and I guess if Jesus wanted to present Himself as an angel like many believe He did on occasion in the Old Testament, then Jesus could surely do so here, but with that said, I don't believe this is Jesus that John is describing. I believe, it is a high-ranking angel and I say this for a couple of reasons.

First, in regards to his appearance, it would be reasonable to expect that high-ranking angels who have been in the presence of God, like Gabriel, may very well reflect the image and the glory of God in their appearance. I think we saw some of that with the four angelic creatures who surrounded the throne of God back in **Chapter 4**. If you recall, their descriptions seemed to represent certain aspects of God's nature and His creation.

A second reason I believe that this is a high-ranking angel is because Jesus is never mentioned as an angel in the book of Revelation or anywhere else in the New Testament for that matter. In fact, in the book of **Hebrews**, Jesus is clearly described as being far superior to any of the angels.

But lastly, and I think most importantly, is John's use of the word “**another**” in the first verse. That word “**another**” means *there are other strong angels like him or there are more of the same kind of strong angels*. For example, back in **Revelation 5:2**, John tells us,

*And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “**Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?**”*

In that passage, the strong angel was not Jesus but rather he was speaking about Jesus – the Lamb of God, the only One worthy to take the scroll from the Father and break its seals – and I say all of that to say this: Jesus would not be described as just **another strong angel** – suggesting He is one of many other mighty angels, for we know that Jesus is One of a kind – He is the Son of God.

So, I believe John is saying just what he means to say. He is seeing another mighty angel – possibly an archangel like Gabriel who regularly stands in the presence of God, and we are told he has a **little book** in his hand, or more accurately, a little scroll – and it was **open**. **Is this the same scroll that Jesus had – the title deed to the earth, that had the seven seals on it that He broke one at a time?** It could very well be the same scroll, or it could be something else, and I say that because John describes it as being a **little** scroll. Again, it's another uncertainty that we are presented with.

Now continuing with **verse 2**, John tells us what this angel does. John says,

**He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; <sup>3</sup> and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. <sup>4</sup> 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.”**

If you remember from last week, at the sounding of the fifth and the sixth trumpets, John witnessed several powerful wicked fallen angels, such as the “Destroyer”, the “angel of the abyss” who led his demons to inflict torment upon people for five months, and then there were the four fallen angels bound at the Euphrates River who led their armies of demons to kill a third of mankind. They were powerful demonic beings, but they become puny in comparison when this mighty angel makes his presence known. John tells us he stands with his feet over both the **sea** and the **land**, implying he is both impressive and massive, and the placement of his feet serve as a symbolic reminder that God is sovereign over all.

The earth, and all that is in it, belongs to the Lord and He has the authority to bring final judgment upon it with the seventh trumpet and the seven bowls still to come. In spite of these *hell on earth* conditions, everything is under God's feet and He is still in control.

We are told that when this strong angel cried out like a roaring **lion**, **seven peals of thunder** spoke. I have no idea what that means for nowhere else in the Bible, nor in Jewish tradition, do “seven thunders” appear, but here they seem to speak for God. John hears them, they apparently give a clear message, and as a habit, John is going to write it all down, but he is interrupted and a voice from heaven says,

**“Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them.”**

Well, whatever these seven thunders said, was apparently for John's benefit only – not for ours, and so it was not written down for us.

This is similar to **2 Corinthians 12:4** where the Apostle Paul shared that he *was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.*

We want to know. We want to figure it out. We want answers to our questions, but the truth is – like it or not, God does not reveal everything to us, and sometimes the wisest thing we can do is to leave them just as they are – as uncertainties and mysteries. **Is it frustrating?** You bet is it. Trying to unravel this difficult chapter has been frustrating for me all week – but it is what it is.

Okay, let's continue with **verse 5**.

**<sup>5</sup> Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, <sup>6</sup> and swore 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, that there will be delay no longer, <sup>7</sup> 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.**

Similar to our own custom of swearing an oath in court by placing our right hand on the Bible and raising our left, this strong angel lifted up his right hand and **swore by Him who lives forever and ever**. The angel swore an oath to God, and **what is the oath? There will be delay no longer**. The waiting is over. The **mystery of God is finished – and what is this mystery?** He doesn't tell us here, but we are given a clue. We are told it's connected with the seventh trumpet, and we will get to that next week in **Chapter 11** – but suffice to say, that things are drawing to an end very quickly, Christ will return just as He promised to set up His earthly kingdom, He will be victorious, and good will ultimately triumph over evil.

Then this mighty angel becomes silent and another voice is heard. John tells us beginning with **verse 8**,

**<sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> 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.** <sup>11</sup> And they said to me, **“You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”**

We are told a voice from heaven commands John to go take the scroll from the mighty angel, and so John approached the angel and requested it. The angel told John, **“Take it and eat it”** but the angel cautioned John that even though it will be sweet in his mouth like honey, it would be bitter in his stomach – it would make his stomach churn.

Now, this wasn't the first time someone was told to eat a scroll. Back in **Ezekiel 2:8–3:3**, we read this exchange between God and the prophet Ezekiel,

*<sup>8</sup>“Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.”*

*<sup>9</sup>Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. <sup>10</sup>When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe. <sup>1</sup>Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.”*

*<sup>2</sup>So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. <sup>3</sup>He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.*

So, this begs the question, **why eat it?** Eating is a symbol for receiving God's message – it's a symbol of receiving knowledge. John is commanded to consume, to digest God's Word into his life so that it would change him personally and challenge him to continue with the important mission of sharing the gospel to all people.

We've all heard the old adage, *“you are what you eat.”* This is true for us when it comes to food, and it's just as true when it comes to the Word of God. It is not enough to just read the Bible, we must study it, we need to digest it, and we need to actually apply what we learn to our lives.

And speaking about its content for a moment, there are truths in the Bible that are **sweet** – they bring comfort and encouragement and joy, but there are also some truths in the Bible that are very **bitter** – they are hard and painful and difficult to swallow, but maybe – just maybe we don't fully appreciate the sweetness without the bitterness. **Is this not the reason why some people “sweeten” watermelon with salt?** It is the bitterness of the salt which causes us to sense the sweetness of the melon, and maybe this applies to God's Word too.

Well, we are told that John does exactly what he was commanded to do. He took the little scroll and ate it, and sure enough – it tasted as sweet as honey, but it turned sour in his stomach, and after John had digested it, he was recommissioned to prophesy again. Even though he is an old man imprisoned in a Roman penal colony on Patmos, his mission was not finished. He still had work to do.

I thought long and hard on what I wanted to leave you with this morning, and oddly enough where I landed had very little to do with the end times content of our passage, and more to do with the mysteries and the uncertainties we found in our passage – in other words, just like in our study this morning, **how are we to deal with the mysteries and the uncertainties that we face in life – and more specifically, as they relate to God’s hand in our life?**

I mean, we know that God loves us, we know that God is with us, we know He is always at work in our lives, but if you are like me, I wish I had more answers to my questions, and at times, I wish I had a better idea of what God was really doing in my life. I think that goes for all of us, but the truth is – for all of us – there are things about God, and there are ways in which He works that we will never fully understand because, just like those seven thunders, God has not revealed it to us.

Instead, God gives us the truth we *need to know* about Him and His ways, and in those instances where we are presented with mysteries and uncertainties, in those times where an answer to our question is not to be found – at least not yet, **what are we left with?** We are left with trusting God. We may not understand our circumstances and we may not understand God’s actions in those circumstances, but we can trust in His unchanging character and be assured that God is *always* loving, He is compassionate and gracious, faithful and merciful, God is in control even when we don’t understand, and He is *always* working out His plan for our greater good. Life is filled with mysteries and uncertainties, but God’s character is unchanging and constant.

*In his book “They Call Me Pastor,” H. B. London tells the following story:*

*Four doctors in surgical greens stood before Dave and Jana at the Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena. I stood by helplessly as one doctor spoke. “Your baby has died of sudden infant death syndrome. We want to give you a chance to hold your child before we take her.”*

*I watched this young couple; their shoulders shook with emotion as they held their firstborn for the last time. My mind raced to find something to say to the shocked young couple. I wanted to tell them that everything would be okay, but that wasn’t*

*true. Their baby was dead. All my pastoral training and experience seemed to fail me then.*

*“Dave and Jana,” I began, with words that were broken and slow, “I don’t know why this awful loss has to come to you. But I know God loves you as if you were the only ones in the whole world to love. If you accept His love...if you believe He does love you, you’ll make it. If you don’t, you won’t.”*

*Those were the only words I had for them. They seemed awfully empty at the time. I choked back my own emotions while they tried valiantly to cling to their newfound faith.*

*But something happened in that hospital room. Neither the couple nor I had words to erase the pain, but a Holy Presence invaded that place. God joined the three of us. Just as in the Old Testament story of the fiery furnace, when God Himself came to comfort Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we felt in the fiery trial of suffering an assurance that God was caring for us.*

*In all the pain, I remembered what a precious time we had a few weeks earlier when we dedicated their baby in the worship service. Now this. I confess that a few times in my ministry, the whys from my heart have almost made me quit. I am sure you have experienced similar anguish.*

*One day, after coming to Focus on the Family, I received a letter with a picture of Dave and Jana holding a beautiful baby.*

*They wrote: H. B., you probably don’t think we heard you when you encouraged us to cling to the love of God when our baby died. But we heard you clearly. So, we have believed over and over that God loves us as if we were the only ones to love. We have learned to live in the love of God. We quote your words to each other often. The Lord is gracious.*

*Notice in the picture we are holding a beautiful new baby—God’s special gift to us. We don’t understand why we lost our first child. We still hurt when we think about it, but we don’t question God anymore...*

*I have thought a lot about their faith and mine since receiving that letter. Some tough situations are mysteries beyond our comprehension. Mysteries greater than our answers. Mysteries that stretch our faith. Mysteries that force us to turn to God because we can’t find answers anywhere else.*

Whether we are faced with mysteries and uncertainties in the Bible or in life – no matter the circumstances, we can be completely certain in the constant and unchanging character of God.

Source Material:

Holman New Testament Commentary, Revelation – Kendell H. Easley, Max Anders

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament – Walvoord & Zuck

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Pugh, G. (2010). Commentary on the Book of Revelation. In R. E. Picirilli (Ed.), 1, 2, 3 John & Revelation (First Edition). Nashville, TN: Randall House.

Beyond Death's Door – Maurice Rawlings, M.D.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Constable Notes – Thomas Constable

Through the Word – Revelation 10 – Kris Langham

H. B. London on Mysteries That Stretch Our Faith, Citation: H. B. London, from They Call Me Pastor (Regal, 2000), pp. 23-30]

Swindoll, C. R. (2011). Insights on Revelation. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Enduring Word – David Guzik