

Revelation

*Part Twenty-Seven
A Bitter-Sweet Message
(Revelation 10:8-11)*

With Study Questions

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Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, “Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.”⁹ So I went to the angel and said to him, “Give me the little book.” And he said to me, “Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.”¹⁰ Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter.¹¹ And he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (Revelation 10:8-11).

Introduction

There is both value and heartache having lived in one area, and ministering in one community, my entire life. We recently ordained an elder who I shared the gospel with when we were both in high school, some fifty years ago. It gained little traction in his life at that point. But according to God’s own timing this man came to faith many years later and is now a co-laborer for Christ.

That is a sweet gift. God has been very gracious to me, allowing me to participate in these types of things, and observing these types of things for many years. Weddings, baptisms, conversions, healing and reconciling of difficulties are all such a joy to be part of.

But there is the other side. I do many more funerals, of members and non-members, than I ever anticipated. I have also watched the faith of many people dashed against the rocks. Some have quietly disappeared while others viciously attack. It is heartbreaking to see and hear very vocal and unvarnished denunciations of the faith. Sometimes this is accompanied by virulent assaults upon our church and/or those who minister within it.

It can be heartbreaking. One can also be tempted to be retaliatory; to think, or even behave in such a way as to be governed by someone else’s poor behavior. This can surface when one engages in ministry with some notion that there will be reciprocation. I was recently asked by someone who was charged to speak to a group of ministers, what I might contribute.

Among my answers was a warning to beware of ministering for reciprocation (what they used to call 'psychic income'). To be sure, the congregation should seek to make the elder's ministry a joy (Hebrews 13:17). But even if they're poor at this, it shouldn't govern you. The two most notable ministers in the Old and New Covenants (Moses and Paul), had pretty tough congregations. But they were serving God's people because of what Christ had done for them and because God's people are God's people, and He wants them ministered to.

Consider the words of Peter, calling us to imitate Jesus:

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).

This was one of many takeaways for me in this passage. I pray there will be others we examine it more thoroughly.

Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth."

John had seen a **"mighty angel coming down from heaven."** This angel, who may very well be Christ Himself, is a colossal figure. He has one foot on the sea and the other on the land. This angel makes an **"oath"** that **"there should be delay no longer."** The prayers of the saints for God's justice would soon reach its climax.

There is an anticipation, that during the **"days of the sounding of the seventh angel"** the **"mystery of God would be finished."** This **"mystery"** marks the complete obsolete and vanished nature of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:13) and the full inclusion of the gentiles into the gospel. A gospel for the whole world.

Now John is no longer merely reporting the news; he is part of the news. He is called to **"take the little book"** from this colossal angel. We are told that the book is **"open."** Unlike what we read in Daniel, this vision is not **"seal[ed] up"**. The reason for the sealing in Daniel is because the prophecy points to the far future, **"many days from now...until the time of the end"** (Daniel 8:26; 12:4, 9). The little book is open and the transmission of the knowledge within it must be soon. When something is

not sealed up, we are told, it's because **"the time is near"** (Revelation 22:10).

So I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book." And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." ¹⁰ Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter (Revelation 10:9, 10)

John, as we should all, obeys the voice from heaven and receives the **"little book"** from the angel who instructs him to **"eat it."** John is also told what it will taste like and how his stomach will react. This elicits many questions. What is in this little book? What does it mean that it is both bitter and sweet? Why is John called to eat it? We'll seek to answer these questions in reverse order.

That in some sense, the word of God is contained in the little book is without dispute. In a moment we will address more specifically what it contains. But what does it mean to **"eat it?"** Such symbolism is not unique to Revelation. We read in Jeremiah,

Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts (Jeremiah 15:16).

The Psalmist also writes,

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth (Psalm 119:103)!

Ingestion is a common biblical metaphor.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 2:2, 3).

Yet, according to Hebrews, we are to move beyond milk, to solid food.

...for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:13, 14).

Though John is given a unique, prophetic assignment with this little book, let us not lose the impact of what it means that he would eat it. We can smell something, and we can even taste something (Hebrews 6:4, 5), but that it quite different than eating something. To taste a victory is different than having the victory.

When you eat something, it becomes part of you. It's been said, 'you are what you eat'. It filters into your cells, as it were. Let us not be among those who merely have the word of God on our tongues, but not in our hearts. Let us be careful to avoid being numbered among the religious charlatans, of whom Jesus spoke,

You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:7-9).

We are to see His word, smell it, taste it and eat it. His word is to be a joy and delight of our hearts. His **"word is truth" (John 17:17).**

But John is warned that the little book would be both **"sweet"** and **"bitter."** Having eaten it, he found those words to be true. This was not a mere hypothetical reality; it became an existential reality. We can speak of trials, tribulations, pains, sorrows, courage, and all sorts of difficulties. So many heroes today behind a keyboard and a screen! But there is something to be said for boots on the ground.

Again, this type of metaphor is not new or unique to Revelation. Ezekiel received a similar message. Regarding the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. (In the third chapter of Ezekiel) he is told **"eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel"** Ezekiel eats the scroll which, in his mouth, is **"like honey in sweetness."** Ezekiel is also told that the **"house of Israel will not listen"** because they are **"impudent and hard-hearted."** God is preparing Ezekiel for a less than favorable response to His word.

...do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they *are* a rebellious house ¹⁰ Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse" (Ezekiel 3:9-11).

There was a response Ezekiel had when the word of God, which was so sweet to him, was rejected by the people.

So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me (Ezekiel 3:14).

Later in Ezekiel, in the context of blowing the trumpet of warning, we read the disposition of God, which should be ours as well.

Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel' (Ezekiel 33:11)?

All this to say that the beauty and sweetness of the word of God can carry a bitterness in the environment of its rejection. The Apostle Paul expressed it this way:

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life (2 Corinthians 2:15, 16).

In the context of our current passage, the sweetness is the sweetness of answered prayer. It is the sweetness of God protecting, preserving and promoting the His covenant people and the gospel they are called to proclaim. The bitterness is the heartache that should attend us when people refuse to embrace the truth. We should not read this in such a way as to condone a bitter attitude. We should think more along the lines of having

eaten something poisonous that upsets our stomachs. Of this very event, we read of Jesus' response:

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

The "**visitation**" would certainly, and primarily, include the incarnation, the Truth among men. But their rejection of this would lead to a different type of visitation—a visitation of judgment. It was this which brought tears to the Savior's eyes.

The seven churches (and others as well), under the heavy hand of Israel's oppression and Rome's persecution would rejoice in God's sweet hand of deliverance and deposing of these dark enemies. At the same time, it would (or at least should) break their hearts to see them under judgment. Remember the words of Paul, writing about the very people who wished him dead (Acts 23:12).

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved (Romans 10:1).

The initial application of this was to the first century church. But, similar to all the books in Scripture, there is a continuing application throughout the course of history to all who find themselves in similar circumstances. We are to ever proclaim the word of God. We are to rejoice when it is received and to have a godly sorrow and compassion when it is rejected. Either way, we are called to ever proclaim it, regardless of the season (2 Timothy 4:2).

Finally, what is in this "**little book?**" We don't want to be precise where the Scriptures are imprecise. There is great speculation regarding the contents of the book. But the last verse in the chapter tells us something.

And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings" (Revelation 10:11).

It would appear that this is in reference to the little book. It does not appear to be the repetition of a previous prophecy, but another prophecy. And this other prophecy focuses on **"many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."** This would lead us to conclude that the prophecy extends beyond Israel.

I would not say here that I am in stark disagreement with those who believe the prophecy against Israel continues throughout Revelation to chapter 19. But I would say that the reference to the **"seven mountains"** (Revelation 17:9) and, as we shall see, the altercation moving to the Caesars in chapter 13-18, draw us to a more international focus.

The great similarities between Revelation and Daniel often cause the books to be studied together. We see here the fulfillment of a prophecy found in the second chapter of Daniel. The **"stone,"** which is Christ strikes the **"image"** of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The image is a statue representing four kingdoms. Those kingdoms are Babylon, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks and finally Rome. Rome is the kingdom in existence when that **"stone"** enters humanity (Luke 2:1).

The **"stone"** strikes the image, on the portion of the image which represented Rome.

You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces (Daniel 2:34).

And then, in anticipation of the fulfillment of the Great Commission, we read:

And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:35).

For many Christ is/was a **"stone of stumbling"** (1 Peter 2:8). May He for us, be the **"rock"** of our salvation (Psalm 62:6).

Questions for Study

1. How can seeking to minister be both joyful and painful (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the “mystery of God” and how was it “finished” (page 3)?
3. Discuss what it means for a message to be “sealed” or “open” (pages 3, 4).
4. In what ways do we “taste” or “eat” things in a spiritual sense (pages 4, 5)?
5. The “little book” is both sweet and bitter. How are we to understand this (pages 5-7)?
6. What is contained in the “little book” and how is this good news (pages 7, 8)?