

Revelation Chapter 10

An Interpretation

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Introduction:

John T. Hinds: In the first four trumpet visions we saw the overthrow of pagan Rome - a work finished in A.D. 476; in the fifth and sixth the Mahometan (Islamic) scourge and the destruction of the Greek or Eastern Empire - completed in the taking of Constantinople in A.D. 1453; the seventh trumpet, which is the announcement of the end of the world, is recorded in 11:15-18.

The things pictured in this section, 10:1 to 11:14, come between the sixth and seventh trumpets. This must be the time that includes the restoration of genuine Christianity.

Departures from true teaching began early, grew rapidly after the Roman Emperor, Constantine, recognized Christianity as the true religion. The selection of a universal bishop (pope) in the sixth century made a complete apostasy.

Something more than eight centuries till the fall of Constantinople did not improve the church as 9:20 and 21 show. The visions of this section were intended to encourage Christians then that truth would be restored; and to assure us, through the facts of history, that it has been.

(1) 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; (2) and he had in his hand a little book which was open.

- **Another strong angel** means one of the same kind as the others. We met a **strong angel** back in 5:2 also.
- This angel is **clothed with a cloud**.
- The **rainbow** was on the **head** of the **angel** and John had seen a rainbow connected with the Throne of God in



4:3. The **rainbow** is a reminder of God's covenant with mankind.

- The **little book which was open** may represent the New Covenant Scriptures which had been marginalized by the decadent church of the time. With the Catholic Church, the Pope is first authority, the traditions of the church are second in authority and the Scriptures are third. The Word of God was going to return to first place for believers.
- God's Word is a written document and is not changeable.
- **B.W. Johnson:**

Beginning in the early part of the sixteenth century, within a short time of the date already reached, was a movement which corresponds fully to the symbols. Indeed the **Reformation** might be said to have begun earlier with Wycliffe and Huss, but was fully inaugurated in the sixteenth century. It was a movement.

The Reformation was the work of a **book**. Whatever the Romish clergy may pretend now, there is no doubt that before the Reformation they had taken the Bible from the people. The whole influence of the Catholic Church was opposed to its circulation, and in many instances persons have been burned for no other crime than having the Bible in their houses. The book was left sealed up in dead languages, and it was impossible for it to be read in the native tongue of any European people. This radiant **angel**, however, has in his hand a **book open**, significant of the fact that in God's providence the Reformation should present the New Testament, **open**, to the world.

Discuss: In what ways was the Bible kept from the ordinary people?

(2) He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; (3) 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.

- **Sea and land** could refer to the entire planet or maybe both the stable and unstable portions of humanity.
- There was a response to the angel's loud voice. **The seven**

peals of thunder uttered their voices.

- John thought heaven was speaking.

(4) 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.”

- The **seven thunders** have not been identified previously. These voices were convincing and John was about to record their utterances when **a voice from heaven** ordered him **not to write** what they said.
- **B. W. Johnson:**

His act shows that the **voices of the seven thunders** claimed a record as of divine authority. There was something uttered, and what was uttered was so presented that John was about to record it in the word of God. Then he heard a voice from heaven which bade him seal up what was uttered and **write** it not.

When **the seven thunders** had uttered their voices, etc. **The seven thunders** uttered their voices when the angel cried in a loud voice. John was forbidden to record what they uttered. Certain facts will help us to understand what is meant.

1. The apostate power which had taken away and closed the book of the New Testament was called the seven-hilled city, and is alluded to in Revelation as the woman that sat on seven mountains (Rev. 17:9).

2. The word **thunder** has been constantly used to describe the threatening, blasphemous, and authoritative fulminations issued by the seven-hilled power against its enemies.

To illustrate this, Le Bas says in his *Life of Wycliffe*, p. 198:

The thunders which shook the world when they issued from the seven hills, sent forth an uncertain sound, comparatively faint and powerless, when launched from a region of less devoted sanctity." See Le Bas, Chapter VI.

These ecclesiastical **thunders** derived their power from the fact that they were hurled from the seven-hilled city. Very appropriately the bulls and anathemas of Rome may

then be called the **seven thunders**.

3. It is a historic fact that the opening of the book by the Reformation, called forth the loudest voices of the **seven thunders**. The anathemas that had been wont to shake the nations were hurled at Luther and his supporters. When we remember that the **thunders** that issued from the Vatican were regarded by the nations as the voice of God, and that the Pope claimed to be the vicar of Christ, we can understand the meaning of John's symbolical purpose to record them as a part of the word of God, and also that of the heavenly voice which forbade them to be written. It simply represents what did take place among the reformers. There was an open book offered to the world. This resulted in the voices of **thunder** of the seven-hilled city.



From the Wikipedia article on the *Seven Hills of Rome*.

At first there was a disposition on the part even of Martin Luther, to listen to these **thunders** as divine, but finally he committed the Papal Bull issued against his teachings to the flames to be rejected, and it was rejected by the Reformers.

(5) Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, (6) 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, (7) 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.

- **Johnson:**

The whole passage means that the time remaining is short, and that in the time of the seventh trumpet angel the whole consummation shall be reached. In response to the anathemas, thunders, and persecutions, called forth by the Reformation, the great angel who stands on both sea and land lifted his hand and uttered his solemn oath that the period of probation, persecution and suffering on the part of the Church, soon shall end. In Revelation 6:10 the suffering martyrs of Pagan persecution cry, "O Lord, how long?" And here to the second great body of martyrs assurance is given that events are hastening to the end. The mystery shall be finished when the seventh angel shall sound.

- **Hinds:**

The oath by him that liveth forever refers to God. It indicates that the angel was assuring John he had God's endorsement and verification of the truth of what he was about to say. The certainty of this was in the fact that God was able to confirm it, for he was the Creator of heaven, earth, and sea and everything in them. This was to give assurance to the churches then, and to others since, that the work depicted in this vision would actually be accomplished in spite of all the anathemas, excommunications, and papal thunders that could roar from the head of an apostate church. We should not forget that all these visions were intended, directly or indirectly, to protect and sustain the true people of God in facing the sufferings, persecutions, and death that might be inflicted by their enemies.

(8) 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."

- John had been told what not to write down in verse 4. Now he is told to **take the book** from **the angel**.
- **Hinds:**

John himself now becomes a part of the scene - he is commanded to take the book out of the angel's hand. This, doubtless, indicated that he was to have some important part in the work of restoring the scriptural doctrine and practice. But as he had been dead about fourteen hundred years when the Reformation began, he did not do any of that work personally. Being one of the number through whom the true gospel was first promulgated, the restoration of that gospel gave him back his position of authority as one who ruled under Christ as King. (See Matthew 19: 28.)

(9) 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."
 (10) 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.

- John has been an observer and a writer only. Now he is told to devour the **little book**. So he asked the angel for it.
- He **ate** as he was told. It had two results: when it was first eaten it, it tasted **sweet**. But in his **stomach**, it was **bitter**.
- Learning the Scriptures is a joy, but they can also bring stress and upset to the disciple obeying them.
- **Hinds:**

The command to **eat** the book was strange instruction; its double effect was equally strange. Of course, all this was to be carried out in the symbolic scene, and must represent some remarkable events on earth. To **eat a book** cannot be understood literally. We often speak of devouring a book by which we mean to give deep and earnest meditation upon its contents. The thoughts would give him joy, but practicing the teaching would bring persecutions, sufferings, and possible death. This

figure is based upon the fact that some food that is pleasant to the taste may give pain to the **stomach**.

Discuss: Are there times when obeying the Scriptures brings pain to us?

(11) And they said to me, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”

- The Scriptures were going to be a significant force again. **Prophesying** here is in the sense of proclaiming, not foretelling the future. The Word of God will once again be available and have great force.
- **Johnson:**

I will give a synopsis of the events of the chapter.

1. The angel holds in his hand an open book.
2. He calls attention to it in a loud voice.
3. The seven thunders launch their thunderbolts against the reception of the open book by the world.
4. John is about to record their words, but is forbidden.
5. The angel affirms with an oath, that the duration of the power and terror of the seven thunders shall be short, and that soon the seventh angel shall sound universal redemption and triumph.
6. John is bidden to take the book.
7. He receives it and is told to eat it, or to receive and devour its contents.
8. Its words are sweet like honey. In Psalm 19:10 the word of the Lord is compared to the sweetness of honey.
9. There are bitter effects that follow.

The great object of this angel seems to be to present the open book to the world. The book is mentioned four times in the chapter; twice it is stated that the book was open [Revelation 10:2,8-10].

John, in behalf of humanity, receives the book; a symbol of the reception of the New Testament in their own tongues, received by the nations as a result of the Reformation. The word of the Lord was received by the people with great eagerness and joy. They found it

"sweeter also than honey and the honey comb" [Psalm 19:10].

But while they devoured the Word with great enjoyment, there were bitter effects that followed. Millions, perhaps, in all, were persecuted and put to death because they had accepted the book and suffered it to determine their lives and worship.

There is portrayed last another consequence of eating the book. "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings." To prophesy is not only to foretell future events, but to declare the message of God. This message had been declared once by the apostles, both in person, and by those who preached their words.

Apostolic preaching had almost ceased for many ages before the Reformation. John, the representative of the apostolic body, commanded to prophesy, implies a revival of apostolic preaching among all people and nations.

Selections from Martin Luther's 95 Theses in English.

1. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says "Repent ye," etc., he means that the entire life of the faithful should be a repentance.
2. This statement cannot be understood of the sacrament of penance, i.e., of confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priesthood.
3. (27) They preach human folly who pretend that as soon as money in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs.
(The money was to build the enormous St. Peter's Basilica in Rome: Height 450 feet)
4. (32) Those who suppose that on account of their letters of indulgence they are sure of salvation will be eternally damned along with their teachers.
5. (36) Every Christian who truly repents has plenary [full] forgiveness both of punishment and guilt bestowed on him, even without letters of indulgence.
6. (37) Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has a share in all the benefits of Christ and the Church, for God has granted him these, even without letters of indulgence.

7. (45) Christians should be taught that whoever sees a person in need and, instead of helping him, uses his money for an indulgence, obtains not an indulgence of the pope but the displeasure of God.
8. (51) Christians should be taught that the pope ought and would give his own substance to the poor, from whom certain preachers of indulgences extract money, even if he had to sell St. Peter's Cathedral to do it.
9. (81) This shameless preaching of pardons makes it hard even for learned men to defend the pope's honor against calumny or to answer the indubitably shrewd questions of the laity.
10. (82) For example: "Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love ... for after all, he does release countless souls for the sake of sordid money contributed for the building of a cathedral? ..."
11. (90) To suppress these very telling arguments of the laity by force instead of answering them with adequate reasons would be to expose the church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies and to render Christians unhappy.
12. (94) We should admonish Christians to follow Christ, their Head, through punishment, death, and hell.
13. (95) And so let them set their trust on entering heaven through many tribulations rather than some false security and peace.