

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

By

H. A. Ironside, Litt.D.

*Author of Notes On Jeremiah and Lamentations; Notes On Ezekiel the Prophet;
Lectures On Daniel the Prophet; Notes On the Minor Prophets. etc., etc.*

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

EATING THE LITTLE OPENED BOOK

(Lecture 10)

WE will look this evening at the first part of the parenthetical portion that comes in between the sixth and seventh trumpets. We have already noticed that there are similar parentheses between the sixth and seventh seals and the sixth and seventh vials. It is an evidence of divine order not to be overlooked. The seventh trumpet ushers in the millennial kingdom, and goes right on to the close of the course of time and the establishment of the Great White Throne for the judgment of the wicked dead. But ere this consummation is brought to our attention, we are given fuller instruction regarding the place that Israel has in the mind of God in connection with these future events.

This tenth chapter contains truth largely of a moral character, and because of that, one is likely, in studying the book, to pass it over without very careful attention. It does not seem, at first sight, to have to do with any of the great movements we have been considering in connection with either Israel or the Gentiles. But just as in the first chapter of the Book of Daniel we have set before us, in the history of the three Hebrew youths who refused to be defiled with the king's meat, the moral condition suited to instruction in the things of God, so in this tenth chapter we find the Lord dealing in a very special way with His beloved apostle John, in order that he may be the better prepared to unfold the great mysteries lying just beyond us in the rest of this solemn Book. And in the Lord's preparation of His servant John, we get great moral principles that should speak to our own hearts, and, if laid hold of aright, fit us the better to serve the living and true God while we wait for His Son from heaven. In verses 1-3 we read:

“And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.”

This mighty angel can surely be no other than that same glorious Angel of the covenant whom we have already beheld standing at the golden altar officiating as the Angel-priest of the heavenly sanctuary. Of no created angel could such glorious things be said as those John here mentions in connection with this wondrous being.

The reason our Lord is brought before us in this angelic character, is, that in this portion of the Book of Revelation we are dealing largely with Israel, the earthly people, and that before their Messiah has been revealed to them. Therefore it is but natural that He should take the same position that He occupied toward them in Old Testament times.

A fuller revelation they will receive when He descends in glory, and they behold the marks of His passion and cry out in amazement, **“What are those wounds in thy hands?”** Then He will answer, **“Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.”** At last the full truth will burst upon them that the crucified Nazarene and the Angel of the covenant are identical, and **“they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and as one who is in bitterness for his firstborn.”**

This will be, for Judah and Jerusalem, the true day of atonement, when they will afflict their souls as they realize the enormity of their sin in rejecting their divine Saviour, and the merits of His atoning work shall be applied to their hearts and consciences; then will they be able to cry out in the full assurance of faith, **“He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”**

But until that moment of His full manifestation, He is to them the Angel of the covenant - an uncreated angel, therefore - The Lord's fellow; for, as we have intimated above, to no created angel could this description be rightly applied. He comes down out of heaven, clothed not merely with a cloud, but the cloud, as it should read, and the cloud is the symbol of the divine glory.

The cloud is the chariot in which He led His people of old through the wilderness all the way from Egypt to the Land of Promise. We are expressly told that in that cloud was the Angel of the covenant. It is the uncreated cloud of glory that dwelt between the cherubim, in the tabernacle, above the mercy-seat.

When Solomon built the temple and dedicated it to The Lord, He came in the cloud, dwelling in it as His house.

When nearly five centuries afterward Ezekiel was called upon to declare the desolation of that once holy house, he beheld the cloud lifted up from the most holy place, tarrying a moment over the door of the sanctuary, then departing and hanging above the city wall as though loath to give up the place where His glory had so long been manifested. Slowly the cloud moved over to the adjoining mountain on the east, that is the Mount of Olives, and then up into the heavens.

Thus the visible manifestation of The Lord's presence had disappeared from Israel because of their sins.

That cloud never returned to the land of Palestine, until our Lord Jesus Christ went up into the holy mount, which we commonly call the Mount of Transfiguration, where Peter, James and John had a vision of the coming kingdom - **“the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

There they saw Him transfigured, and talking with Moses and Elijah:

- Moses representing the saints who have died and will be raised again at our Lord's return, and
- Elijah picturing those who shall be caught up at Christ's coming, without dying.

Peter, overwhelmed by such an abundant revelation, knowing not what to say, cried, **“Lord, it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”** And while he thus spake, **“there came a cloud and overshadowed them.”**

This was the Father's way of showing them that He would have no mortal man, however holy and devoted, put on a level with His beloved Son. After Christ had died on the cross, and was raised from the dead by omnipotent power, He led His disciples out to the Mount of Olives nigh unto Bethany, and with hands lifted up in blessing was parted from them, and they beheld Him going up, until the cloud received Him out of their sight.

When He returns again we shall behold Him on the cloud and every eye shall see Him. So here, when John says, **“I saw a mighty angel clothed with the cloud,”** we may understand at once that this angel can be no creature, but is Himself the Creator of all things, our Lord Jesus Christ, clothed with the sign of the divine majesty.

Observe, in the next place, that the rainbow which we saw in chapter four round about the throne of God, is now seen wrapped, as it were, about the head of this mighty angel.

It seems to speak of His coming to confirm the covenant made of old with Noah after the world had been destroyed by a flood. Another evidence that it is a divine person who is here brought before us, is found in the next clause: **“His face was as it were the sun.”**

It is the same face that Saul of Tarsus saw when he was marching along the Damascus turnpike, his heart filled with hatred against the Lord Jesus and burning with rage against His followers. Stricken to the earth, he saw a light above the brightness of the sun, and in that glorious light beheld the once-crucified Christ of God, and heard Him ask in tenderest accents, **“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?”** When He comes again it will be as the Sun of Righteousness.

“His feet,” we are told, **“were as pillars of fire,”** thus linking Him with the same wondrous Being described in chapter one, of whom we read that **“His feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace”** - the same, too, that Daniel saw and describes in similar terms in his seventh chapter.

We are next told that He had in His hand **“a little book open.”**

There have been various speculations as to what this book might be, but it seems to me it could be no other than the very book we have had before us heretofore.

It is the title-deed to the earth, the seals of which have been broken, one after the other, until the entire scroll is seen unrolled. The Lord descends with all the evidences of divine majesty, and with this title-deed in His hand, He sets His right foot upon the sea and His left foot upon the earth, as indicative of taking possession of His own inheritance - that inheritance which, as Man on earth, He had redeemed with His own precious blood.

His voice is the voice of the conqueror: **“He cried as a lion roareth”**; for the Angel and the Lion of Judah’s tribe are one and the same. When He had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

The thunder, we have noticed before, speaks of judgment, and John says, **“When the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.”**

As Mediator of the New Covenant He seals up the utterance of the seven thunders. It is not necessary for us to know what they uttered. They speak of judgment due to wayward man, but He Himself has borne the judgment, and those who trust in Him need never know its dreadful secrets.

“Let us love, and sing, and wonder,
Let us praise the Saviour’s name;
He has hushed the law’s loud thunder,
He has quenched Mount Sinai’s flame.
He has bought us with His blood;
He has brought us home to God.”

Have you ever noticed how inquisitive people often are in regard to those things which the wisdom of God has purposely kept from them?

In the Old Testament dispensation the law was hidden in the ark, covered with the mercy-seat; yet the men of Bethshemesh foolishly looked into the ark, and were smitten in judgment. So there are things hidden from the people of God in all dispensations, which He would have them leave with Himself.

“The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed are for us and our children.”

Alas, it is only too natural for man to pass over the precious revealed truth which would be for his sanctification and blessing, and occupy himself with hidden things, which are not given him now to know and which, if it had been for his blessing to know, God would have revealed them.

I am often asked, “What do you suppose was written in the flying roll of Zechariah’s vision?” I only know what the Word has said. “What were the unspeakable things Paul heard when caught up into the third heaven?” If Paul could not utter them, how could we? And so many a one has puzzled over the things which the seven thunders uttered, but faith rests in the fact that John was commanded to write them not.

“And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets” (vers. 5-7).

It is important here to notice the difference between the last clause of verse six, as found in the Authorized Version and in any critical commentary. In reading, **“That there should be time no longer,”** we should understand, *“That there should be no longer delay.”* The vision is distinctly a pre-millennial one. The point is that the hour of accomplishment has almost struck, and God will not delay the completion of His plans and the fulfillment of His promises. **“A short work will the Lord make upon the earth.”**

The Angel swears by Him that liveth forever and ever (that is, by The Lord Himself, the Creator of all things), that nothing shall cause any more delay; but in the days when the seventh angel sounds, the mystery of God, that is, the mystery of God’s long tolerance of evil, will be finished.

Everything will then be made plain.

- The mystery of retribution
- The mystery of predestination
- The mystery of the great struggle between light and darkness and good and evil
- All will be explained then.

There will be no more secrets in God’s ways and dealings, and man need no longer question the dispensations of faith will have come to an end, and the dispensation of sight will have dawned.

Are you often troubled by questions as to God’s purpose, His counsels, His judgments, His apparently strange dealings with you and with the world? To the man who has not the secret of the Lord, His ways may seem contradictory. Learn from this Scripture to wait in patience. until God Himself makes all clear in the days of the voice of the seventh angel.

In the second part of the chapter we are occupied with a very different line of things. We are now to read of an experience the apostle John had, which God would have every student of His Word enter into. He tells us:

“And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter” (vers. 8-10).

Now what are we to understand by this? You will, at once, recall that a similar experience was given to the prophet Ezekiel (chap. 3).

He, too, was called upon to **“eat the book.”** And the lesson in both instances is the same. It is only as we feed upon and digest the Word of God, that we ourselves are nourished and built up in the truth of our most holy faith, and in a right condition of soul to use that Word for the help and instruction of others.

David said, **“Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee.”** And again, **“Thou desirest truth in the inmost parts, and in the hidden parts Thou wouldst make him to know wisdom.”**

This, I take it, is what John’s experience illustrates. He was commanded to eat the little book that was in the angel’s hand, that is, to meditate upon it, to make it thoroughly his own.

Someone has said that meditation, in these busy days of ours, is a lost art. Would to God it were restored, and that His people, generally, were more given literally to feed upon His truth. For it is not only that God would have John and Ezekiel eat the book, He wants you to eat it likewise.

He has given it to you who believe on His Son, to be the food of your own souls, to make you fit to serve Him in this scene. And remember this is just as true of the prophetic books as of every portion of the Word of God. In both the instances cited it is particularly the prophetic word that is in view. Lay hold of dispensational truth, of prophetic teaching, in this very practical way, and it must have a most beneficial effect upon your inner man.

John tells us that when the book was in his mouth it was very sweet, but when he had eaten it his inward parts were made bitter.

This is most instructive.

There is no sweeter portion in all Scripture than that which God has revealed concerning the manifestation of His blessed Son.

Prophetic truth is generally sweet and attractive to those whose interest is just being awakened in it. But, if followed up, if the book is really eaten, it leads to self-judgment, and to separation from evil, and this will always be bitter; for there is not one of us who readily takes the place that God’s Word would put him in during this period of Christ’s rejection. And so the point here is that God’s truth makes demands upon people.

And you, who are following these studies with me, will soon find this out, if you have not already done so. If you conscientiously undertake to walk in the truth revealed, you too will know something of its bitterness.

You cannot enjoy things that you used to enjoy, if you receive the prophetic testimony, and walk in the power of what is there revealed.

As the great divine program unfolds before your mind, it may be very interesting, and, in this sense, the book is sweet; but, as great divine principles enter your hearts, and you realize more and more the call to strangership in this Satan-controlled scene, the truth becomes bitter indeed, and it makes demands upon you.

How many a soul has greatly enjoyed his first taste of instruction as to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ! It was all so new, so wonderful, so different to the platitudes perchance that he had been hearing as he sat under the ministry of some cold semi-worldling, posing as a minister of Christ.

But as this truth got a grip upon him, as it entered into his inmost being, he found it made demands from which he shrank, and required of him what at first he felt he could not give. It was bitter, truly; yet it is not always the sweet things that are best for us. We need the bitter as well as the sweet; and every soul who has walked in the truth, as God has revealed it to him, has found, at last, the blessedness of obedience.

“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

It is a very sad thing indeed, when truth is simply held in the intellect, with no particular bearing upon the life.

The apostle John tells us, speaking of the second coming of the Lord, **“Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”**

It is a truth that should affect the believer at every angle of his life. Anyone, who really believes it, cannot afterwards live for self or for the world. If one professes to hold the second coming of Christ, and yet lives like the world, it but evidences the fact that, whatever he may hold mentally, the truth of the Lord’s coming does not hold him.

That truth believed:

- makes carnal Christians spiritual;
- it makes worldly people heavenly;
- It makes covetous people generous;
- It makes careless people earnest.

And so I want to be very frank with you. If you do not desire to let this truth have its sway over your lives, it might be better to cease studying this Book of the Revelation right here, for all God’s truth has been made known for the obedience of faith. And I am certain of this, that these truths are going to change the lives of some people completely, or they will harden them in their waywardness, and be the means of searing their consciences as with a hot iron.

After the apostle had eaten the book, the angel said unto him, **“Thou must prophesy again, before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings”** (ver. 11).

This is of importance in connection with the further opening up of the book.

The Lord says to John, “**Thou must prophesy again.**” It is not that he is to go to other peoples and nations. &c., to prophesy. Rather he is to prophesy in regard to these nations, to the same servants of God to whom he has already been giving the word.

The point is that, when the seventh trumpet sounds (of which we shall read in the next chapter), the present outline of prophecy comes to a close; for, as previously mentioned, the seventh trumpet carries us right on to the great day of judgment at the end of time.

But in the last verse of the 11th chapter, John begins once more to prophesy concerning nations, and kings, and tongues, and people, and this second great outline culminates in the new heaven and new earth.

You will remember that the roll which was seen in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the seals of which were broken by the Lamb, was written on two sides. As the book was unrolled, John would see clearly what was written on the inside, and this, I take it, is the outline we have already had before us.

But, beginning with chapter 12, the roll is, so to speak, reversed, and we see what was written on the other side. That is, God confirms the former outline, and fills in details there omitted, so that we have a clearer and fuller understanding of the great events yet to take place in the world where our Lord was crucified.

If this is clearly seen, the book becomes plain. Otherwise there is confusion.

There are those who endeavor to make everything chronological with their scheme of interpretation. The trumpets only follow the seals, which is quite correct, but these interpreters go on to make the vials, or bowls of wrath, follow the trumpets, and this necessarily puts the 12th chapter and the rapture of the man-child far over into the 70th week, whereas, as we shall see when we reach that point, the 12th chapter and chapter 4 fit together chronologically.

As of old God gave Pharaoh two dreams (the one confirming the other) so here the message is duplicated, if I may so say, that we may know the certainty of the words of truth wherein we are being instructed.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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