

Do You See Your Bible as Bitter or Sweet?

Revelation 10:8-11

Which is your Bible: bitter or sweet? Hostile rebellion? Satan's defeat?

Promised salvation? Heavenly grace? Bitter and sweet for the whole human race

And the voice which I heard from heaven spoke unto me again, and said, Go *and* take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which stands 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. And he said unto me, You must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. (Revelation 10:8-11)

Overview

In Revelation chapter 10, the Apostle John was not only a recipient of the revelation, he was also a participant in the revelation. "Revelation" is the communication of a body of truth that was not formerly known. But in this case, there is an interactive quality about the revelation. In the Book of the Revelation, Jesus Christ revealed the truth and the Apostle John recorded the truth. But in Revelation 10:8-11, John also record his responses to the truth of God's revelation. And what he recorded about himself is still true of God's people today. To the believer, the Bible is bitter with the penalties of man's rebellion, yet sweet with the promises of our Savior's redemption.

John had been exiled to the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:9). This is God's Word about patient endurance (3:10), for martyrs have been and will be slain for the Word of God (6:9). Yet the true words of God (19:9) will be fulfilled (17:17). Revelation chapter 22, for instance, is replete with warnings and strong encouragement for each of us to respond rightly to God's revelation and obey it. The Bible is the Word of God's grace just as surely as it is the Word of God's judgment on the human race.

Revelation Chapter 10

So these few verses remind us of an intermission of sorts. It's a good time to take stock of what we have seen so far, and prepare ourselves for the rough ride ahead. [In the last message in this series, Pastor Rodney King described Revelation 10:1-7 as "the calm before the storm," and so it is.](#) It is the calm before the storm, an intermission, and time to prepare ourselves. We will find that the Bible is bitter with the penalties of man's rebellion, yet sweet with the promises of our Savior's redemption.

God's sovereign authority pictured by an angel, v. 8

And the voice which I heard from heaven spoke unto me again, and said, Go *and* take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which stands upon the sea and upon the earth.

The voice from heaven in Revelation 4:1 is apparently the same voice from heaven, described in Revelation 10:4. The voice commanded John to take the little book from the hand of the angel. The little book refers to a small "*biblos*" in the original language. As you can see, this word is the basis for our word, "Bible." This has led most scholars to conclude that "the little book" is a reference to the

Bible. The angel's stance upon the sea and the earth portray God's authority – His dominion – over the entire world.

According to the Creation account, this dominion was originally given to mankind. **“And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’”** (Genesis 1:26). Mankind's dominion over the earth would have been as sweet to us as the trees of the Garden of Eden (of which men could freely eat). But when mankind rebelled against God, God's creation rebelled against mankind. Yet God still reigns in sovereignty over the whole world – the earth and the sea.

The voice commanded John to take up the little book. What does that mean to you and me today? We are also commanded to take up God's Book – the Bible. Have you taken it up and read it through? Consider taking on the challenge to read your Bible every day for the next 30 days. Be like John and take up the little Book.

God's sovereign authority expressed in God's Word, v. 9-10

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. (Revelation 10:9-10)

God's authority is most clearly expressed in His Word. In this passage, God's angel, acting in God's authority, gave the apostle God's authoritative Book. John gave us a pattern to follow. You and I could and should pray with the psalmist, **“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law”** (Psalm 119:18). The angel told John, “Take it and eat it.” You and I could take on the challenge to read God's Word and digest it. Sometime soon, take the time to read Proverbs chapter 2 slowly and carefully. Note the importance of receiving God's Words and, using them, to cry out for wisdom.

Bitterness and sweetness

The angel told John that the little book would be sweet to his taste but be bitter in his belly. Why would he say such a thing? It is because of the impact of the Bible on believers.

The Scriptures grant sweet freedom to the believer. Perhaps you find the world has a tremendous – even magnetic – hold on you, and you are stuck. A few years ago, a little girl's hamster escaped from its cage. The family searched high and low, and ultimately found the hamster under the refrigerator. They placed it back in its cage, and it immediately became listless, learning against the side of the cage. When they took it to the veterinarian, the doctor listened to their story with interest. When she took the hamster out of the cage, it walked around normally. But when they placed it back into the cage, it went back to the wall and stayed there. That's when the doctor examined the hamster's mouth and found that it had stuffed a refrigerator magnet in the little pouch on the side of its mouth! The hamster was stuck on the metal bars of his cage. Maybe you are listening to this, and you feel as if you are stuck in the magnetic hold of the world. Take up the little book and you will find that it grants you sweet freedom.

But why did the Scriptures have both effects on the apostle? Why sweetness and bitterness? With some things, it's all in the form that things appear, the way you use them, the way you look at them. Is air a good thing? A gentle breeze is sweet, but a tornado can be devastating. A famous prank highlights the dangers of "dihydrogen monoxide" which kills people every year. But the chemical formula, expressed another way, is H₂O. You need water; it is sweet, but if you ignore its dangers, you will drown. But the point of this passage is that if you use the Scripture exactly the right way – in a God-honoring manner – you will find that it is sweet to the taste and bitter to the belly.

When the book was spread before the prophet, Ezekiel, he found it full of **"lamentations, and mourning, and woe"** (Ezekiel 2:9-10), yet it was sweet to the taste (Ezekiel 3:1-4). The psalmist said of God's Word, **"More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb"** (Psalm 19:10). The prophet, Jeremiah, wrote, **"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart"** (Jeremiah 15:16). Yet knowing the Scripture and its message as he did, the Apostle Paul wrote, **"I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren..."** (Romans 9:2-3). The rebellion of sinners causes the Scriptures to seem bitter. Yet as Solomon wrote, **"Sorrow *is* better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better"** (Ecclesiastes 7:3). To the believer, the Bible is bitter with the penalties concerning man's rebellion, yet sweet with the promises of our Savior's redemption.

Welcome and Warning

[In the recent message, we studied Hebrews chapter 6ⁱ](#) which is full of warnings, along with welcome assurance. John's response to God's Word reminds us about the nature of God's Word. He welcomed it because it was sweet to the taste. But the warnings in the Word turned his stomach sour. With the psalmist, the believer can say, **"My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD"** (Psalm 104:34). But the prophet Daniel said that the visions of the Lord troubled him with alarm (Daniel 7:15). Young believers are hungry for the sweet milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2). As they grow, they sometimes find that parts of the world are like eating dry cereal. Other parts taste bitter like medicine. But as believers continue to grow, they cultivate an appetite for the sweetness of the Word. How do you see the Bible? How does it taste? Have you cultivated an appetite for its sweetness? The saints of all the ages testify to us that the Scriptures are sweet. Have you personally experienced this sweetness?

One author wrote, "Though John as a child of God will never know the bitterness of being lost or the afflictions of eternal punishment, he knows what it is to be like his Master, despised and rejected of men... Like John, every saint should take and eat with the assurance that the Word will be sweet, whatever suffering and trials he may be called upon to bear."ⁱⁱ

How does the sweet message of the Bible affect people? According to Paul, the Scriptures affect lost people and saved people very differently. To the lost, the Biblical message is like the stench of death; but to the saved, it is the sweet aroma of life (2 Corinthians 2:15-17).

Jesus suffered knew the bitterness of having his sweet message rejected by his own family members. Think about this account in Matthew chapter 13. **“And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this *man* this wisdom, and *these* mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this *man* all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief”** (Matthew 13:53-57).

Though the message of Jesus was sweet, yet it cost Him bitterly. The central message of the Scriptures is that He drank the bitter dregs, the penalty for our sin. He shed His blood in the bitter death that each one of us deserved. He arose victoriously in sweet triumph. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized the sweetness and the bitterness. **“Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”** (Matthew 5:11-12). Be prepared for the bitter responses from others; be prepared for the sweet eternal blessing.

God’s sovereign authority expressed to the nations of the world, v. 11

And he said unto me, You must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

After John digested the little book, he was called to declare its message. Though he was a lonely, old exile on the island of Patmos, John was told that he would preach once again to the nations. The peoples of the world, the nations, the languages and the kings needed God’s message. And this is still true today. And one of these days, we will join in the chorus described in Revelation 5:9, “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

We are all called to proclaim the sweet Gospel of God’s grace to the nation. But bear in mind that the message is both sweet and bitter. The Bible is bitter with the penalties of man’s rebellion, yet sweet with the promises of our Savior’s redemption.

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ⁱ The Lord Remembers Your Labors of Love, accessed at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=8122167392348>

ⁱⁱ John Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Chicago: Moody Press, 1989, p. 174