

The Divine Character of Scripture

Revelation 10:1-11, part 2

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2016-10-30

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Text

(10:1 I saw a mighty angel descending out of heaven, clothed with a cloud, and the rainbow on his head; his face was like the sun and his feet like pillars of fire; 2 and he had a little book open in his hand. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land, 3 and he cried out with a loud voice, just like a lion roars. And when he cried out the seven thunders uttered their voices. 4 Now when the seven thunders spoke I was about to write, but I heard a voice out of heaven saying, “Seal up the things that the seven thunders said,” and “You write after these things.” 5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to the heaven 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created the heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there would be no further delay, 7 but in the days of the blast of the seventh angel, when he is about to trumpet, the mystery of God that He declared to His slaves the prophets would be finished 8 Now the voice that I heard out of heaven was speaking to me again and saying, “Go, take the little book that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” 9 So I went to the angel and said to him, “Give me the little book,” And he says to me, “Take and eat it up; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” 10 So I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it up, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. 11 And he said to me, “You must prophesy again over many peoples, even over ethnic nations and languages and kings.”¹

Introduction

My friend, Vishal Mangalwadi, used to be a Hindu. He lived in India where he had been researching why the West seemed to produce the best technologies, music, liberties, women's rights, science, literature, and the list went on and on. He was very curious why Islamic culture could not do that - and actually, why Islamic culture barely produced anything useful, and why Hindu and Buddhist culture was even worse, and why atheistic communism had produced the most bloodshed and dehumanization of a population in the history of the world. His conclusion was that Christianity was unique and that it was on to something. But as he kept researching, he realized that Christianity alone could not answer that question because there were times when Christianity fluctuated in producing bad results - as you could clearly see in the century before the Reformation. But wherever and whenever Christianity was radically committed to the whole Bible and sought to apply it to all of life, civilization flourished. That much was crystal clear. He saw

¹ Translation based on the Greek text of Wilbur Pickering's [The The Greek New Testament According to Family 35](#).

that it was the Bible that produced all of these things.

His research led him to become a Christian. But he was saddened at how Christians in the West no longer had confidence in the Bible. He wrote a book called, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*. He is in the process of doing a TV series titled, "Must the Sun Set on the West?" that pleads with the West to go back to the Bible and that if they do not, they will lose the fruit that flowed from that wonderful root of Scripture. One book review said this:

...the examples of so many other areas turned upside down by the Bible and those who have been transformed by it would fill hundreds, nay thousands, of volumes. But Mangalwadi here does a superb job of demonstrating how in one area after another, the impact of Scripture has been overwhelming, and overwhelmingly a force for good.²

And Revelation 10 tells us why: God's Word has the divine characteristics of God Himself. It is powerful, wise, penetrating, sanctifying, purifying, judging, life-giving, and all of the other characteristics that we see symbolized in this chapter. And I hope that this sermon stirs you up to be so blown away by the character of Scripture that you become excited about memorizing it, reading it, and getting more blessings from it. If you do, I will have achieved my goal in preaching this sermon.

Now, I am assuming that you heard my last sermon. It would take way too long to repeat what I said last week. But I pointed out how Jesus (as the Word of God) communicates the Father's revelation to us. But He does so through His messenger angel, Gabriel, and through his prophet John. I think I demonstrated beyond any shadow of a doubt that this angel is not Jesus, but is Gabriel. But I think I demonstrated just as conclusively that the symbols are symbols of Jesus and His divinity. And the reason Christ's symbols surround this angel is because He is carrying the revelation of Christ. There is an unbroken chain from Father, to Son, to angel, to John, and to us through the written Scripture. And the remarkable symbols surrounding this angel showcase the remarkable nature of the revelation held in his hand - revelation that will be eaten by John and written down. Roy Gingrich says of this angel,

He as Christ's representative is clothed in Christ's official uniform, a cloud, a rainbow, a shining face, and shining feet.³

So these symbols are perfect descriptions of the revelation that becomes the Bible.

2 <https://billmuehlenberg.com/2011/09/28/5981/>

3 James I. Packer, "Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, Inerrancy," Jerusalem and Athens, ed. E.R. Geehan, p. 153.

I. It is prophecy ("I saw... little book... mystery... prophets... I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it... sweet as honey... bitter... prophesy again" with Ezek. 2-3)

First of all, the book of Revelation, and by implication all of Scripture, is a prophecy. And the reason this is important to understand is that Wayne Grudem's thesis falls to the ground if it is true. The first two words of this chapter ("I saw") are words typical of a vision given to prophets in the Old Testament, who were called seers because of these visions. They were enabled to see revelation through visions. The word "mystery" in verse 7 is a word frequently connected with prophecy. It is hidden apart from God's revelation. And of course the contents of that book are commanded to be prophesied in verse 11. Verse 7 explicitly speaks of this revelation of mystery as something given to prophets. Even the imagery of the little book being given by a mighty angel and eaten and being sweet and then bitter points us to the prophetic utterances of the book of Ezekiel. Every word that I have given in point I shows Scripture to be prophetic.

That all stands in contradiction to Wayne Grudem's thesis that New Testament prophecy is utterly different from Old Testament prophecy. He admits that the Old Testament Scriptures are called prophecy, but he claims that the New Testament Scriptures are not called prophecy. He says they are inspired and inerrant because they are apostolic, not because they are prophetic. But that is patently false. Luke was not an apostle. Nor was Mark, or James, or Jude. Their writings were inspired because they were prophets, not because an apostle supposedly read and approved of what they wrote. That's not how inspiration works. The Scriptures are called a prophecy over and over again in this book - not simply that it contained prophecy (as Grudem would have you believe), but that every word of it is prophecy. For example, Revelation 1:3 calls John's revelation "the words of this prophecy." Revelation 22:7 says, "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book," and he is referring to the whole canon of Scripture there - the βιβλίον. Revelation 22:10 says, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand." It's a prophetic book. Revelation 22:18 pronounces curses upon anyone who adds to the words of the prophecy of the βιβλίον. Wayne Grudem claims that John is using the word prophecy there in a non-standard way, but that the rest of the New Testament uses the term prophecy to refer to non-inspired, sometimes-mistaken, and "I think so" types of guidance from God. But that is to demean the nature of prophecy as a whole. We saw last week that Romans 16:25-26 applies the term

"prophetic Scriptures" to the brand new Scriptural revelations being given by the apostles. And the book of Acts uses the terms "prophecy," "prophet," and "prophesy" to refer to both Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets - many times in the same verse.

Why do I bring this up? Because we are going to be seeing that prophecy, whether oral or written, is inspired, inerrant, powerful, divine, God's very voice, and expresses other aspects of God's character. When the two prophets of chapter 11 command the rain to stop, the rain instantly stops. Why? Because the power of God is in their prophecy. It's not their words spoken, but God's words. Their prophecies are not different from the prophecies of Elijah, who also had the power to stop rain. But Grudem would have you believe that New Testament prophecy is quite different from Old Testament prophecy. When those two prophets in chapter 11 spoke a judgment of fire, the words that came out of their mouth bring fire down just as surely as Elijah's words did. And certainly the prophetic Scriptures can be trusted as much as God can be trusted because they come from God.

II. descending out of heaven - a letter from God (v. 1; 1 Thes. 2:13)

And that is the second characteristic: the Scriptures descend from heaven. "I saw a mighty angel descending out of heaven..." And of course, he has this spiritual book in his hand that will contain every word in the paper book that John will later write. He tells him not to write yet, but to write later. So it doesn't descend from heaven the way that Islam claims the Koran descended from heaven. But it is the very Word of God being communicated on this little scroll, being carried by the angel, being symbolically eaten by John, and then being written word-for-word by John. And we will get to man's portion of the inspiration process next week. But even though John later writes it down, it very literally is God's letter to the church. There is no difference between what John writes on the paper scroll and what was already written on the invisible scroll. Paul words his own prophetic revelations this way:

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

So even though we will be seeing that it is mediated through an angel and mediated through John, it remains the same Word of God. When you hear the words of Scripture being read, you are hearing God's very voice speaking to you. I have had the Scriptures lift me to heaven, and I have had

them humble me in the dust. As I have worshiped God on my knees while reading the book of Leviticus I have sensed God's holy presence so powerfully that I felt like I needed to back away from presence. Other times God's word has ministered wave after wave of His lovingkindness into my heart as if God was pulling me into the ocean of His heart. Overwhelming. It was not a dead letter. It was God Himself. If you have never experienced the reality of God gazing into your heart via the Scriptures, you have not approached them in faith. Hebrews 4 says that the Scriptures are powerful, living, penetrating, and leave us feeling like God is gazing right into our very soul. I'll read that Scripture at a later point. But let me quote from John Piper, because he has given a caution to those of us who have had visions, or dreams, or have experienced a word of knowledge, or other forms of guidance. I have. And Piper doesn't deny the reality of those things, but he cautions us that they are nothing in comparison to the divine character of God's Bible. And I will only read a portion from his letter. It's a long portion, but I think you will understand where I am coming from. Too many people approach Scripture without faith and they receive nothing. It is a dead letter to them. Piper says,

... Let me tell you about a most wonderful experience I had early Monday morning, March 19, 2007, a little after six o'clock. God actually spoke to me. There is no doubt that it was God. I heard the words in my head just as clearly as when a memory of a conversation passes across your consciousness. The words were in English, but they had about them an absolutely self-authenticating ring of truth. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God still speaks today...

As I prayed and mused, suddenly it happened. God said, "Come and see what I have done." There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that these were the very words of God. In this very moment. At this very place in the twenty-first century, 2007, God was speaking to me with absolute authority and self-evidencing reality. I paused to let this sink in. There was a sweetness about it. Time seemed to matter little. God was near. He had me in his sights. He had something to say to me. When God draws near, hurry ceases. Time slows down.

I wondered what he meant by "come and see." Would he take me somewhere, like he did Paul into heaven to see what can't be spoken? Did "see" mean that I would have a vision of some great deed of God that no one has seen? I am not sure how much time elapsed between God's initial word, "Come and see what I have done," and his next words. It doesn't matter. I was being enveloped in the love of his personal communication. The God of the universe was speaking to me.

Then he said, as clearly as any words have ever come into my mind, "I am awesome in my deeds toward the children of man." My heart leaped up, "Yes, Lord! You are awesome in your deeds. Yes, to all men whether they see it or not. Yes! Now what will you show me?"

The words came again. Just as clear as before, but increasingly specific: "I turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There they rejoiced in me — who rules by my might forever." Suddenly I realized God was taking me back several

thousand years to the time when he dried up the Red Sea and the Jordan River. I was being transported by his word back into history to those great deeds. This is what he meant by “come and see.” He was transporting me back by his words to those two glorious deeds before the children of men. These were the “awesome deeds” he referred to. God himself was narrating the mighty works of God. He was doing it for me. He was doing it with words that were resounding in my own mind.

There settled over me a wonderful reverence. A palpable peace came down. This was a holy moment and a holy corner of the world in northern Minnesota. God Almighty had come down and was giving me the stillness and the openness and the willingness to hear his very voice. As I marveled at his power to dry the sea and the river, he spoke again. “I keep watch over the nations — let not the rebellious exalt themselves.”

This was breathtaking. It was very serious. It was almost a rebuke. At least a warning. He may as well have taken me by the collar of my shirt, lifted me off the ground with one hand, and said, with an incomparable mixture of fierceness and love, “Never, never, never exalt yourself. Never rebel against me.”

I sat staring at nothing. My mind was full of the global glory of God. “I keep watch over the nations.” He had said this to me. It was not just that he had said it. Yes, that is glorious. But he had said this to me. The very words of God were in my head. They were there in my head just as much as the words that I am writing at this moment are in my head. They were heard as clearly as if at this moment I recalled that my wife said, “Come down for supper whenever you are ready.” I know those are the words of my wife. And I know these are the words of God.

Think of it. Marvel at this. Stand in awe of this. The God who keeps watch over the nations, like some people keep watch over cattle or stock markets or construction sites — this God still speaks in the twenty-first century. I heard his very words. He spoke personally to me.

What effect did this have on me? It filled me with a fresh sense of God’s reality. It assured me more deeply that he acts in history and in our time. It strengthened my faith that he is for me and cares about me and will use his global power to watch over me. Why else would he come and tell me these things?

It has increased my love for the Bible as God’s very word, because it was through the Bible that I heard these divine words, and through the Bible I have experiences like this almost every day. The very God of the universe speaks on every page into my mind — and your mind. We hear his very words. God himself has multiplied his wondrous deeds and thoughts toward us; none can compare with him! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told (Psalm 40:5).

And best of all, they are available to all. If you would like to hear the very same words I heard on the couch in northern Minnesota, read Psalm 66:5-7. That is where I heard them. O how precious is the Bible. It is the very word of God. In it God speaks in the twenty-first century. This is the very voice of God. By this voice, he speaks with absolute truth and personal force. By this voice, he reveals his all-surpassing beauty. By this voice, he reveals the deepest secrets of our hearts. No voice anywhere anytime can reach as deep or lift as high or carry as far as the voice of God that we hear in the Bible.

It is a great wonder that God still speaks today through the Bible with greater force and greater glory and greater assurance and greater sweetness and greater hope and greater guidance and greater transforming power and greater Christ-exalting truth than can be heard through any voice in any human soul on the planet from outside the Bible.

This is why I found the article in this month's Christianity Today, "My Conversation with God," so sad... [And he relates how excited this guy was about his word of knowledge - that God wanted the royalty from one of his books to be given to the poor. He went on to say] What makes me sad about the article is not that it isn't true or didn't happen. What's sad is that it really does give the impression that extra-biblical communication with God is surpassingly wonderful and faith-deepening. All the while, the supremely-glorious communication of the living God which personally and powerfully and transformingly explodes in the receptive heart through the Bible everyday is passed over in silence. I am sure this professor of theology did not mean it this way, but what he actually said was, "For years I've taught that God still speaks, but I couldn't testify to it personally... Surely he does not mean what he seems to imply — that only when one hears an extra-biblical voice like, "The money is not yours," can you testify personally that God still speaks. Surely he does not mean to belittle the voice of God in the Bible which speaks this very day with power and truth and wisdom and glory and joy and hope and wonder and helpfulness ten thousand times more decisively than anything we can hear outside the Bible.

I grieve at what is being communicated here. The great need of our time is for people to experience the living reality of God by hearing his word personally and transformingly in Scripture. Something is incredibly wrong when the words we hear outside Scripture [and he doesn't deny that that occurs] are more powerful and more affecting to us than the inspired word of God. Let us cry with the psalmist, "Incline my heart to your word" (Psalm 119:36). "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalm 119:18)...⁴

But if what Piper says is true, then the Scripture takes on all the attributes of God Himself. And of course, this is exactly what John Frame's Systematic Theology demonstrates so resoundingly. The Scriptures are divine. You cannot separate the Scriptures from God Himself. To ignore the Scriptures is to ignore God.

III. clothed with a cloud - a reflection of God's sovereignty (v. 1; Luke 4:32,36)

So let's look at some of these characteristics. If God is sovereign, then His word must be sovereign, so the symbol of sovereignty, the cloud, envelops the messenger of God's word. So John says, "I saw a mighty angel descending out of heaven, clothed with a cloud..." We saw last week that the Scriptures over and over again connect the cloud with the sovereignty of God. He is sovereign over everything, which means that when His Word speaks to every area of life (which it does), it is sovereign over every area of life. Yet how many people deny the sovereignty of Scripture over politics, economics, their sexual relationship with their wife, or their voting? Every election it grieves me to see countless Christians who insist that God's Word is not relevant to their voting. It is a denial of the sovereignty of God. Why?

⁴ John Piper. © 2009 Desiring God. Full text can be found at desiringGod.org

Because they are denying the sovereignty of His Word.

The dictionary defines sovereignty as supremacy, being independent of higher authorities, not subject to other authorities, and having authority over every jurisdiction. If you hide any area of life from the gaze of Scripture, you are fighting against God's sovereignty. Do not expect a snubbed Holy Spirit to minister anything to your heart if you pick and choose that which He can be sovereign over. We are the bond slaves and He is the sovereign.

Cornelius van Til said, "Whatever the Bible speaks to, it speaks with authority, and it speaks to everything."⁵ This is the crying need of our day - a church that accepts the authority of God's Word in politics, science, education, and all of life. J. I Packer said, "If biblical teaching and my own thoughts clash, it is my thoughts that are wrong every time!"⁶ And if the Holy Spirit right now is convicting you that you have insulated part of your life from the authority of God's Word, repent. It is only through repentance and faith that you will once again receive the overflow of His presence and His blessing. His blessing only falls upon those who have signed an unconditional surrender to Him as Sovereign King.

IV. the rainbow on his head - connected to God's covenants of promise (v. 1; Rom. 15:4; Rom. 9:4; Eph. 2:12)

He goes on to say, "and the rainbow on his head." We saw that this was the same rainbow that was around the throne of God in chapter 4. It speaks of the promises of God's covenant. He gave the rainbow to Noah to assure Noah that He was good for His promises. But those promises only punch through and give us hope and encouragement when we receive them by faith.

Let me illustrate with a story. Ruth Bell Graham vividly remembered September 2, 1933. She was thirteen years old and her parents, who were missionaries in China, were sending her off to boarding school in what is now North Korea. She was devastated at thought of leaving home and earnestly prayed that she might die before morning. But dawn came, and with a heavy heart she gripped her bags and trudged toward the riverfront where she boarded a boat that went down the Whangpoo River, into the Yangtze River and off to the East China Sea.

⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 8, emphasis added. Cf. *Christian Apologetics*, p. 2

⁶ James I. Packer, "Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, Inerrancy," *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. E.R. Geehan, p. 153.

In boarding school waves of homesickness continually flooded over her. She tried to deal with it by keeping busy, but the evenings were particularly depressing. Over and over she cried herself to sleep. I can relate. I think I cried my way through my whole first year of boarding school at age six. She fell ill, and in the infirmary she read through the Psalms, finding comfort especially in Psalm 27:10 - "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me."

But the hurt, fear, and doubt persisted. Finally in desperation, she went to her sister Rosa, who was also enrolled in Pyongyang boarding school. Her sister didn't know how to comfort her, but on a whim she encouraged her to take some verse and put her own name into the verse. So Ruth picked up her Bible, turned to her favorite chapter, Isaiah 53, and put her name in: "But He was wounded for Ruth's transgressions; by His stripes Ruth is healed." Her heart leaped up within her and she began experiencing the healing grace of God. What had happened? Well, finally, she was approaching the Scriptures with faith, and faith is always rewarded. The Scriptures came alive. God's promises were not simply academic - suddenly they became her promises. Do you approach the Bible with faith that it is God Himself making these promises to you personally? If you do, you are drawing near to God, and in James 4:8 He gives the ironclad promise: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

You may remember the story of Pilgrim and Faithful in Giant Despair's Castle. Both were suffering terribly in that castle, not because God was unfaithful, but because Faithful had not used his key - the key named promise. God's promises do not automatically bring comfort; they must be claimed by faith. One day Faithful said, "What a fool am I thus to lie in this stinking Dungeon, when I may as well be at liberty. I have a Key in my bosom called Promise that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle." And when he used it, it did. God's word always has these characteristics, but we must receive them by faith.

V. his face like the sun - penetrating gaze (v. 1; Heb. 4:12-13)

He goes on to say, "his face was like the sun..." The sun exposes all. Nothing can be hidden from its gaze. And the image shows that even with prophecy, it is God Himself who searches the heart. Hebrews 4:12-13 starts off talking about the Bible being living and powerful and without breaking a beat says that it is God doing these powerful things including God searching the heart.

And the point is that God uses the Bible as if it is His very eyes penetrating our hearts. It says,

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Have you ever had times when you were reading the Bible and began to be powerfully convicted? What was your reaction? Did you instantly ask forgiveness of the Lord and tell Him that you would put away the sin, or did you flip the page to some other topic so as to avoid conviction? To avoid the Bible's searching gaze is attempting to pull the shutters on God Himself. If you want the Bible to be powerful in your life, you must open your heart to all of its attributes.

By the way, that verse says that the bible doesn't just powerfully work on our spirit. That is the way most people read it. But that verse clearly talks about the Bible's powerful impacts on our bodies - joints and marrow. Have you thought about how the Bible can minister to joints and marrow?

Personalizing the Scriptures in our mouths by faith has brought healing to the bodies of countless people. Instead of just reading Psalm 103 as an academic exercise about something that happened to David, these people have said, "Thank you that you are the Lord who forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. I receive that healing today." Or personalizing 1 Peter 2:24 - "He Himself bore my sins in his body on the tree, so that I might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds I have been healed." We need to quit spiritualizing away the glorious promises of Scripture. We need to quit doubting the power of God's Word.

VI. his feet like pillars of fire - pure word judges & purifies (v. 1)

Anyway, the text goes on to say, "his feet like pillars of fire." Commentators say that this harks back to the theophany of God under Moses where God manifested Himself as a fiery pillar of cloud, sometimes called the Shekinah Glory. That fire showed the absolute purity of God. It also brought protection from Israel's enemies and yet fire flashed forth from it to judge and discipline His people. Well, if these very divine attributes accompany the Word as it is carried by the angel and as it is communicated to the church in the Bible, then the Bible too has this absolute purity. It is God Himself protecting us and judging us.

Moses told Israel, "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly, in

the mountain from the midst of the fire..." (Deut. 5:22). The fire symbolizes both the purity of the Word of God and the judgments and purification that it brings. Psalm 12:6 says that the word of God is like silver tried in a furnace of fire, purified seven times. We can trust every bit of it. And yet how often is the Old Testament slandered by Christians as if it was barbaric in its judgments? No, the Bible is pure, and those who criticize it are in danger of judgment. Jeremiah 23:29 says, "'Is not My word like a fire? says the LORD, 'and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?'" Those who approach the Bible with rebellious hearts find it judging them. In fact, 1 Corinthians 11 attributes the weakness, sickness, and deaths of many in the churches of Corinth as being due to coming to the Lord's Table despite being in rebellion against the Bible. It is powerful in bringing judgments, yet most Christians never consider this when examining their various sicknesses. Rather than going to the Lord and asking if He is disciplining them, they persist in trying one remedy after another as if wholeness in Christ can come without the Scriptures. It cannot.

On the other hand, when we cast off fear and approach the furnace of God's Word to be purified as silver, God protects us like He protected Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego in the furnace in Daniel. Nothing on them was burned except for the ropes that bound them. They walked freely. When we are willing to approach the fire in faith, God sanctifies us and adds riches upon riches of His presence into our lives. Do you want the Bible to be a living letter to you? Then don't hide any area of your life from that Word. "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word." (Ps. 119:9)

VII. the little book is open in his hand - perspicuity (v. 2; Luke 24:45)

Notice the first phrase in verse 2 - "and he had a little book open in his hand." We spent a long time on that little book last time. But I want you to notice something - it is an open book. The Bible was not intended to be a closed book, but an opened book and understandable to all. The Reformers spoke of this as the perspicuity of Scripture. Most of its message is easily understood if we approach it in faith and ask for the Holy Spirit's help. In Luke 24 Jesus met with the disciples and opened Scriptures to them that they had no understanding of previously. And because He Himself was present with the Scriptures, it was not a dead letter. Verse 45 says, "And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures." We need that when read the Bible. We need Jesus to open the Scriptures to us. Every

time we read the Bible, we should make David's prayer, our prayer - "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your Law" (Ps. 119:18)

VIII. straddles sea and land - for all nations (v. 2)

Notice the next symbol - "He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land." Straddling sea and land symbolized the fact that these Scriptures were not just for Israel - they were for all nations. God wants an ever-expanding audience to receive these Scriptures. This was why the passion of the church in the early centuries was to translate the Scriptures into many languages. And praise God, it is still being translated into all the languages of the world. It is a universal book intended for all nations. Yet how many people relegate vast portions of the Bible to the past, or to Israel? No, it is a book for all nations.

IX. placement of his right foot and left foot - the Jew first and then to the Gentile on gospel, judgment, and lordship. (v. 2,11; Rom. 1:16; 2:9)

You might wonder why the placement of his right and left feet is mentioned. Nothing in this book is throw-away language. There is a reason. In a right footed society, the right foot leads and the left foot follows. This means that the left foot was where this angel was ministering the word at first and the right foot is where he is headed. Since the word for "land" is γῆς, and since that is used throughout this book for the land of Israel, the position makes clear that the ministry of the word started in Israel and moved to the Gentile empire which was over the Mediterranean.

And of course, this is clearly what the Bible says about itself. Every author of the Bible was a Jew, and God's message was to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16; 2:9). But God's judgments begin with Israel as well and they extend to the Gentiles. And God's salvation message begins with Jews and extends to the Gentiles.

If the Bible is read this way, it is humbling to us Gentiles, but it is also encouraging. It helps us to understand both the unique place that Israel played in redemptive history and the universal lordship of the Word over all. This is why verse 11 says that the message will pertain to "many peoples, even over ethnic nations and languages and kings" (v. 11).

Now, Beale believes that one other possible thought in this symbol is that, This figure towers above all the church's enemies. This gives comfort to those who

thought that the beast was invincible.⁷

In other words, the Beast is no match for the Word of God. When the church embraces it and spreads it, it powerfully leavens the whole lump of society.

X. roaring like a lion - the very voice of God (v. 3; Deut. 13:18; 15:5; 30:10)

The next phrase says, "and he cried out with a loud voice, just like a lion roars." I pointed out last week that God Himself roars like a lion in Amos 3:8, Hosea 11:10, and Joel 3:16. But the first passage, Amos 3:8, indicates that when God roars, the prophet must prophecy what was roared, so the prophet is communicating that roar as well. Jesus roars like a lion because He is the very Word of God. And this angel roars like a lion to symbolize that He carries the very Word of God in his prophetic message to John.

And this reinforces what John Piper mentioned earlier - that the Scriptures are the very voice of God, and listening to Scripture is listening to God. So that Deuteronomy 13:18 says, "because you have listened to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all His commandments which I commanded you today..." etc. What Moses commanded was what God commanded. Listening to Moses' prophetic utterances was listening to God's utterances. And I've given some other sample verses from Deuteronomy. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 about the whole Bible, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of that mouth of God." The verses in this book proceed out of the mouth of God, and we must approach the Bible that way.

XI. response of the seven thunders - power (v. 3; Ps. 29)

Verse 3 continues: "And when he cried out the seven thunders uttered their voices." There is an antiphonal response of one portion of Scripture with another portion of Scripture, with one interpreting the other. We will look at the content of what the seven thunders say in the second half of the book.

But why does he liken some Scripture to thunder? In fact, why does it say "seven thunders?" We will look later at seven judgments that God will bring through His prophetic word. But I believe that Chilton may indeed be correct when he appeals to Psalm 29 - the only Old Testament passage that has seven thunders in it, and in that passage, the seven thunders showcase the

⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 523.

incredible power of God's Word. It always accomplishes what God sends it for.

When we use the Scriptures against Satan, Satan and his kingdom must flee. Why? Because those Scriptures carry the power of God behind them. When we appeal to the Word of God in God's heavenly court, God answers with His justice. When we claim the word of God for healing, God grants amazing healing. His Word is powerful. We must believe that, if we are to use it effectively. Wielded in the hand of faith, the Scripture slices through arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. It is living and powerful.

XII. certain content to be written later - orderly and divinely arranged (v. 4 MT; Luke 1:3)

But the next phrase shows that it is orderly and divinely arranged. Verse 4 says,

Now when the seven thunders spoke I was about to write, but I heard a voice out of heaven saying, "Seal up the things that the seven thunders said," and "You write after these things."

John was about to write down what the thunders uttered, but God forbids him from doing it then. He is to write those things later. First, the whole revelation will be given, and then God will enable Him to write it down. And this highlights the fact that it is divinely given and is also perfectly arranged. Not one word is out of place. John can't reverse the order. Even the order is dictated by God. And I think the incredible order and arrangement of this book demonstrates its inspiration. I don't see how a mere man could have done it on his own.

XIII. swearing by the eternal creator of all - infallible, sure (vv. 5-6; Ps. 19:7; 93:5; 111:7; John 10:35)

I'm just going to deal with one more symbol. The next two verses show the infallibility and surety of Scripture.

5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to the heaven 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created the heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there would be no further delay,

This swearing by heaven shows that God Himself is vouching for the authenticity of the message. And notice how he connects the truthfulness of Scripture in all that it says to God being the one who created all things. That is significant. You can trust everything the Bible says about everything because God created everything and sustains everything, and therefore

knows everything. People doubt what Genesis 1 says because of science-falsely-so-called. And so they say that the Bible is only accurate on invisible things. But God was there when the world was made, and He ought to know how He made it. Scientists were not there, and therefore they cannot use the scientific process to study what happened in the past. And besides, science is always changing, but God changes not. We can trust everything God says about everything in life because God created and sustains everything in life and therefore knows everything in life. The Bible is the truthful foundation for everything. To quote J. I. Packer again, "If biblical teaching and my own thoughts clash, it is my thoughts that are wrong every time!"⁸ And I love van Til's quote. He said, "Whatever the Bible speaks to, it speaks with authority, and it speaks to everything."⁹

Conclusion

We will finish off the divine characteristics of God's Word next week, Lord willing. But let me end with an exhortation to all of you. Value the Bible. Spend time in it. Approach it as a living and powerful message from God Himself. Approach it with the reverence worthy of the King of the Universe. Approach it in faith. Don't try to hide from its gaze even when it is uncomfortable in its convictions. Know that God is good, and He will never ask you to give up anything that He won't restore many-fold like he did with Job. When God asks us to make sacrifices, many times it is a test of whether we have a steward's heart. So, let God's Word purify you. Pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to its contents, believing that He will indeed do so. See it as sovereign over all your thinking, your feeling, your house and property, and over all that have and are. Be willing to stretch your right foot out and to bring this Word to those who are outside of our church. Share the treasure that you have found. And when the Word roars at you like a lion, humbly cast yourself at Christ's feet and tell Him that He can have you. Repent when your mind doubts its contents. Repent when your soul hides things from God's spotlight. Treat the Word of God as God Himself speaking to your soul - because that is what He is really doing. Do not quench the Spirit by despising these prophecies. And may God richly bless you with His presence as you do so. Amen.

⁸ James I. Packer, "Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, Inerrancy," Jerusalem and Athens, ed. E.R. Geehan, p. 153.

⁹ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 8, emphasis added. Cf. *Christian Apologetics*, p. 2