

Revelation as Trilogy
The Two Powers
Chapter 10: The Calm Before the Storm

Introduction: In this chapter we come to another reprieve from destruction. This is the continuing pattern of Revelation. Just as things are heating up, the reader is given a moment to reflect on God's continuing presence, power and mystery. However, the reprieve is only for a moment and John once again has to speak of the future. In the end, however, the promise is made that God will fulfill God's promises and all will be made clear. We also have an interesting move by the writer, that as John is about to write down more information about another series of sevens, he is told not to do so.

The Story: the trumpets go silent for a few moments, signaling not an end to the chaos, but the calm before the storm, or perhaps the silence before the battle. During this moment of silence, a mighty angel from heaven, perhaps God's best and brightest (notice the colors involved), arrives in order to deliver a message of extreme importance. In his hand is a little scroll, which seems insignificant, yet is of great importance. The image of the angel astride the waters would have reminded first century readers of the Colossus of Rhodes, which was a statue of the sun god Helios. The statue was 105 ft. tall and made of bronze so it would shine in the sun. The angel appearing to John dwarfs the Colossus, which reaffirms God's supremacy over the gods of Greece and Rome.

What happens next is rather unexpected. The angel shouts like a roaring lion and in response, John hears the "seven thunders"; or if you will, an additional schema of sevens, that tells the readers about additional chaos that is about to break loose. Instead, John is commanded to seal up these seven thunders and to not write down what they have told him. This essentially ends the chain of sevens, while at the same time, creates a greater sense of unease in the readers because there is now a greater mystery about what is ahead.

The scene returns to the angel who once again speaks. This time the angel swears an oath to the God of all creation, which again is a reminder that the Greek and Roman gods are all pretenders because they are neither creators nor rulers of the universe. The God of the Jews and Jesus is the only one who has the power to shape the future. The announcement once again sets the readers on edge because there will be no more delay in the crisis that is coming. For Christians who were facing persecution this was both good and bad news; bad news because the chaos would reach a critical level, but good news because it meant that God was finally going to fulfill the words of the prophets who spoke about God's judgment of the world and the vindication of God's people.

John is commanded to take and eat the scroll. This is a prophetic act, meaning that the prophets often acted out their pronouncements (building model siege towers, walking around naked) as a way of demonstrating their message. In this case John eats the scroll and it is sweet, because it is God's word, but it is sour, because it lays out the vast level of death and destruction that is ahead. Even so, John must continue to tell the story.

Reflection: People often use the Book of Revelation to predict the future. Some of the best-selling Christian books have based a timeline on the second coming of Jesus to the events John describes. This chapter should put an end to this kind of speculation. By commanding John to seal the seven thunders, God has essentially said, human beings can never know the future well enough to predict the timing of God's final actions in the restoration of creation.

Questions:

1. What do you make of this calm before the storm? Can you relate to it?
2. How does scripture seem to be both sweet and sour?
3. Where do you see the gods of this world in competition with the God of creation?