

Sweet and Sour

By Mark Mayberry

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Introduction

Revelation chapter 10, verses 8-11, say, *“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.” 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.” 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. And they said to me, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.” (NASB95)*

Take and Eat It

John was told to take the little book and eat it. Various passages describe God’s Word as something that can be consumed (Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 2:8-3:3; Rev. 10:8-11).

Jeremiah 15:16 ... 16 Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts. (NASB95)

Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 ... 8 “Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.” 9 Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. 10 When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe. 1 Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” 2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. 3 He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. (NASB95)

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Eating the book signifies that John was to thoroughly master its message. The one who would effectively preach the gospel to others must first assimilate the truth, making it a part of himself (Acts 20:25-35; 1 Tim. 4:6-16).

Acts 20:25-35 ... 25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. 34 “You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ” (NASB95)

1 Timothy 4:6-16 ... 6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. 7 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; 8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 9 It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. 10 For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. 11 Prescribe and teach these things. 12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. 13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. 15 Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. 16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (NASB95)

The Word of God is Sweet

As John ate the book, it was sweet as honey in his mouth. There is joy in receiving God’s Word, delight in being entrusted with a heavenly message. It brings personal benefits and public blessings (Psa. 19:7-11; 119:103-104; Prov. 24:13-14).

Psalm 19:7-11 ... 7 The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the

heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. (NASB95)

Psalm 119:103-104 ... 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. (NASB95)

Proverbs 24:13-14 ... 13 My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste; 14 Know that wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find it, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off. (NASB95)

The Word of God is Bitter

After John ingested the book, it made his stomach bitter. In other words, the apostle experienced considerable sorrow in delivering his message. The duty of being God's watchman is sometimes bitter. John warned of impending persecution that would be poured out upon the righteous, and impending punishment that would be poured out upon the wicked. Both messages filled him with foreboding.

Consider the example of Jeremiah: though judgment must come, the prophet shares in the people's affliction (Jer. 15:1-21; Lam. 3:1-6, 15-18, 19-23).

Jeremiah 15:1-21 ... 1 Then the Lord said to me, "Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go! 2 "And it shall be that when they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you are to tell them, 'Thus says the Lord: "Those destined for death, to death; And those destined for the sword, to the sword; And those destined for famine, to famine; And those destined for captivity, to captivity." ' 3 "I will appoint over them four kinds of doom," declares the Lord: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. 4 "I will make them an object of horror among all the kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem. 5 "Indeed, who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem, Or who will mourn for you, Or who will turn aside to ask about your welfare? 6 "You who have forsaken Me," declares the Lord, "You keep going backward. So I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am tired of relenting! 7 "I will winnow them with a winnowing fork At the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy My people; They did not repent of their ways. 8 "Their widows will be more numerous before Me Than the sand of the seas; I will bring against them, against the mother of a young man, A destroyer at noonday; I will suddenly bring down on her Anguish and dismay. 9 "She who bore seven sons pines away; Her breathing is labored. Her sun has set while it was yet day; She has been shamed and humiliated. So I will give over their survivors to the sword Before their enemies," declares the Lord. 10 Woe to me, my mother, that you have borne me As a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land! I have not lent, nor have men lent money to me, Yet everyone

curses me. 11 The Lord said, “Surely I will set you free for purposes of good; Surely I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you In a time of disaster and a time of distress. 12 “Can anyone smash iron, Iron from the north, or bronze? 13 “Your wealth and your treasures I will give for booty without cost, Even for all your sins And within all your borders. 14 “Then I will cause your enemies to bring it Into a land you do not know; For a fire has been kindled in My anger, It will burn upon you.” 15 You who know, O Lord, Remember me, take notice of me, And take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do not, in view of Your patience, take me away; Know that for Your sake I endure reproach. 16 **Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.** 17 I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers, Nor did I exult. Because of Your hand upon me I sat alone, For You filled me with indignation. 18 Why has my pain been perpetual And my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will You indeed be to me like a deceptive stream With water that is unreliable? 19 Therefore, thus says the Lord, “If you return, then I will restore you— Before Me you will stand; And if you extract the precious from the worthless, You will become My spokesman. They for their part may turn to you, But as for you, you must not turn to them. 20 “Then I will make you to this people A fortified wall of bronze; And though they fight against you, They will not prevail over you; For I am with you to save you And deliver you,” declares the Lord. 21 “So I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, And I will redeem you from the grasp of the violent.” (NASB95)

Lamentations 3:1-6 ... 1 I am the man who has seen affliction Because of the rod of His wrath. 2 He has driven me and made me walk In darkness and not in light. 3 Surely against me He has turned His hand Repeatedly all the day. 4 He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away, He has broken my bones. 5 He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship. 6 In dark places He has made me dwell, Like those who have long been dead. (NASB95)

Lamentations 3:15-18 ... 15 He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood. 16 He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust. 17 My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. 18 So I say, “My strength has perished, And so has my hope from the Lord.” (NASB95)

Lamentations 3:19-23 ... 19 Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. 20 Surely my soul remembers And is bowed down within me. 21 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. 22 The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. (NASB95)

In like manner, note Ezekiel’s call and commission: though sent to a stubborn and rebellious house, the prophet must not be afraid or dismayed (Ezek. 2:8-3:21).

Ezekiel 2:8-10 ... 8 “Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.” 9 Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. 10

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Conclusion

God has made provision for your spiritual needs, but how will you respond (Eph. 4:11-16)? What is your attitude toward truth? Will you love it more than anything else? Will you obey it or reject it? Eternity itself hangs in the balance (2 Thess. 2:10-12; 1 Pet. 1:22-25).

Ephesians 4:11-16 ... 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (NASB95)

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 ... 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (NASB95)

1 Peter 1:22-25 ... 22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, 25 But the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you. (NASB95)