

REVELATION

Living in Light of Christ's Second Coming
(Part 2)

Review

- We explored in part one how John composed this apocalyptic prophecy
- We encountered John's main symbol for Jesus—the slain Lamb—who conquered his enemies by dying for them
- He's the one who opens up the scroll containing God's purpose to bring his kingdom on earth as in heaven
- The scroll's opening brought warning judgments like the plagues of Egypt and, like Pharaoh, the nations do not repent
- John then introduced the multi-ethnic army of the Lamb, bearing witness to God's justice and mercy before the nations, even if it kills them
- They will conquer the beast by laying down their lives, just like the Lamb, which will move the nations to repentance
- In the remainder of the book, John fills out his portrayal of this beast and his war on God's people, bringing the story to an end

Series of Visions—Signs (12-14)

- After the 7 trumpets, John deepens the symbol of 7s with a series of visions, which he calls signs
- These visions explore the message of the opened scroll in depth
- The **first vision** reveals the cosmic spiritual battle that lay behind the suffering of the seven churches under Roman persecution (12)
- It's a metaphor of the conflict that began in Gen 3:15: "I will put enmity between you [serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"
- The serpent who represent the source of evil is depicted as a dragon
- It attacks a woman and her seed, representing Messiah and his people
- The Messiah defeats the dragon through his death and resurrection and it's cast to earth (12:10-12)

Series of Visions—Signs (12-14)

- There the dragon incites hatred and persecution of Messiah's people
- They will conquer the dragon by the blood of the Lamb, resisting his influence, even if it kills them (12:11)
- John shows that our battle is not against Rome or the nations
- The **second vision** (13) retells the story of the same conflict, but in terms of the earthly symbol of Daniel's animal vision (Dan 7-12)
- John sees two beasts empowered by the dragon. One, represents the national military power that conquers through violence. The other represents the economic power of nations that is exalted as divine
- These beasts demand full allegiance from the nations and that

Series of Visions—Signs (12-14)

- John is making an OT allusion to the anti-*shema*, a prayer or symbol of devotion to God (Deut 6:4-5): “Tie them [commandments] as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads...”
- The number “666” refers to the number of Hebrew letters in the words Nero, Caesar, beast
- John is not saying that Nero was the only fulfilment of this symbol
- It’s an example of nations becoming evil beasts when they exalt their military and economic powers as false gods demanding allegiance
- Babylon was the beast in Daniel✉ Persia✉ Greece✉ Rome in John’s day
- Standing opposed to the beastly nations and the dragon is another king—the slain Lamb
- In ch 14a, he is with his army, those who have given their lives to follow him

Series of Visions—Signs (12-14)

- From Jerusalem, their song of victory goes out to the nations and what John calls the “eternal gospel” (14:6), calling everyone to repent and to worship God
- John sees a vision of final judgment (ch 14b), symbolized by 2 harvests
- One is a good harvest of grain as Jesus comes to gather his faithful people to himself
- The other is a harvest of wine grapes and it represents humanity’s intoxication with evil—taken to the wine press and trampled
- Will the 7 churches resist Babylon and follow the Lamb? Or will they follow the beast and suffer?

Final Cycle of Judgment—Bowls (15-16)

- John tells about a final cycle of 7 divine judgments, symbolized as pouring out of 7 bowls (15-16)
- We know from the Lamb's scroll and sign vision that many do not repent
- As the Exodus plagues are repeated and poured out through the bowls, many people do not repent just like Pharaoh
- All this leads up to the 6th bowl as the dragon and the beast gather the nations together to make war against God's people in a place called Armageddon, a place in N. Israel, where they fought invading enemies (Judg 5:19; 2 Kgs 23:29)
- Many people think this 6th bowl refers to an actual future battle
- Others think it's a metaphor for God's final justice on evil

Final Cycle of Judgment—Bowls (15-16)

- Either way, John clearly took images from Eze 38-39 about God's battle with Gog
- Gog was Ezekiel's symbol of the rebellious nations gathered before God to face judgment
- That's what comes in the 7th bowl—the 4th and final depiction of the Day of the Lord (16:17-21), when evil is defeated among the nations once and for all
- Thus far, John has unpacked the message of the Lamb's unsealed scroll
- Now he goes back to expand on three key themes introduced earlier: (1) the fall of Babylon (17-19a), the final battle to defeat evil (19b-20), and the arrival of the New Jerusalem (21-22)

Fall of Babylon 17-19a

- Each of the three final themes explore the final coming of God's kingdom from a different angle
- **One**, an angel shows John a stunning woman who's dressed like a queen but drunk with the blood of the martyrs (18:24)
- She is riding the dragon from the sign visions, a symbol of the rebellious nations. She is called Babylon, the prostitute
- John blended together words and images from every OT passages about the downfall of Babylon, Tyre, and Edom (Isa 13, 23, 34, 47; Jer 50-51; Eze 26-27)
- Rome is the newest version of the OT archetype of humanity's rebellion against God, shaping military and economic security into a false god
- This trend will continue to happen until the arrival of Jesus' kingdom

Final Battle to Defeat Evil 19b-20

- **Two**, the Day of the Lord is depicted as a day of fire or earthquake or harvest
- Now it's depicted as a final battle and told twice (19:11-21; 20:8-15) and results in the vindication of martyrs (20:1-7)
- John takes us back to the 6th bowl when the nations gathered to oppose God
- Suddenly Jesus appears (19:11-21). He is the Word of God riding on a white horse
- He's covered with blood before the battle even begins, because it's his own. His weapon is the sword of his mouth from Isa 11:4; 49:2
- John is telling us that Armageddon will not be a blood bath

Final Battle to Defeat Evil 19b-20

- Rather, Jesus comes to proclaim justice. He will hold accountable those who refuse to repent
- After this, John sees a vision of Jesus' followers who have been murdered by Babylon (20:1-7), and they are brought back to life and they reign with the Messiah for 1000 years
- Then the dragon rallies the nations to rebel against God's kingdom (20:8-15; cf. Dan 7)
- But before God's throne of justice, they all face the consequences of eternal defeat
- The forces of evil and everyone who does not repent are destroyed

Final Battle to Defeat Evil 19b-20

- The dragon and Babylon and all who choose them are eternally quarantined
- What is the relationship of the 1000 years to these two battles?
- One school of thought argues for a chronological sequence: Jesus returns ➡ 1000 year kingdom ➡ final judgment
- The other argues that it is a symbol of Jesus' and martyr's present victory over spiritual evil
- The two battles depict Jesus' future return from two angles
- Whichever, the main point is clear—when Jesus returns as King he will deal with evil forever. His faithful will be vindicated

Arrival of the New Jerusalem (21-22)

- The book concludes with a final vision of the marriage of heaven and earth
- A bride is depicted, symbolizing the new creation that comes to join God and his covenant people
- God will come to live with his people forever and that he is making all things new (21:5). It's a new vision of the garden of Eden
- It's not a return to the garden but a step forward into a new Jerusalem, a place where all human cultures and their diversity work together in peace and harmony before God
- There is no temple building in the new creation, because of the presence of God and the Lamb that were once limited to the temple now permeate the new creation
- They will rule as God's image (Gen 1:27-28), to partner with God in taking this creation into new and uncharted territory

Conclusions

- The book of Revelation is not a secret predictive code about the timetable of Jesus' return
- It is a symbolic prophetic vision that brought hope and challenge to the seven churches and every generation of believers
- It reveals history's patterns that all human kingdoms eventually become a form of Babylon that must be resisted
- It is a promise that Jesus who died will not let Babylon go unchecked. He will return to remove evil from this world and make all things new
- This message should motivate faithfulness of God's people in every generation

Discipleship Pointers

- Christians in every generation must resist the evil beasts of military and economic powers among the nations. They are false gods
- The mission of the church is to conquer our enemies by following and witnessing to the slain Lamb by loving them, even if it kills us
- The nations will only come to repentance when they see God's love and mercy shown through Jesus' followers
- God's kingdom will be revealed when the nations see the church becomes more Christlike, imitating the sacrificial love of the slain Lamb
- In the meantime, we are to live in light of Christ's second coming, waiting for the final consummation of heaven and earth