

## Commentary on the Revelation

### *Thoughts on reading the Book of Revelation:*

- 1. The most important take-away from the book is that evil and brokenness will not always prevail; it will be judged. The latter chapters in the book (6-20) describe the crushing of all that is wrong and the triumph of all that is right and good; it will be the beginning of endless and unbroken delight and comfort.*
- 2. The one who will bring all this about for us is the one who was slain and rose triumphantly over sin, death, and all twistedness. The one who now is exalted in heaven and is now bringing His reign of righteousness on the earth as exhibited through His people. The one who will bring all the “shadows” of “not yet” to completion in the final judgment of sin, the gathering of all His people in the ultimate expression of their righteousness state to dwell amid splendor forever is Jesus, the LORD, who is the Christ.*
- 3. The final triumph has been secured, the victory won, yet it is still to be completed; evil remains co-existent with much good. The negative will end, but it now wraps its arms around us, our culture, and social relationships. This explains our contemporary struggles, disappointments, tears, and longings unfulfilled.*
- 4. How are we to live our lives in this world of “not yet,” but with certainty that it “will be?” The answer is found in the exhortations and commendations to the seven churches, churches real and yet reflective of the experience of churches through the centuries. We are to conduct ourselves in light of our bright and sure hope, enduring whatever crosses our paths, looking to the day when we shall be gathered home triumphantly. We are to “keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony about Jesus (12:17).”*
- 5. This book is “the Revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1),” telling us of His victory that He has shared with us and that we are to share with*

*anyone who will listen to our words that are complimentary to our deeds. This is the point of the book!!! It is not so much about how things will end, though there is much said about it, as it is about how we should live now in light of our redemption that will come with the judgment of all that is contrary to the character of God.*

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- I. Prologue, 1:1-20
  - A. The Introduction, vv. 1-3
  - B. The Salutation, vv. 4-8
  - C. The Vision, vv. 9-20
- II. “The Things Which Are”, 2:1-3:22
- III. “The Things That Shall be,” 4:1-22:5
  - A. The divine right to judge and reward, 4:1-5:14
  - B. The divine judgment of God’s enemies, 6:1-19:21
    - 1. The first cycle: the seal judgments, 6:1-8:5
    - 2. The second cycle: the trumpet judgments, 8:6-11:17
      - a. The judgments, 8:6-9:21
      - b. The second interlude, 10:1-11:13
      - c. The seventh judgment, 11:14-17
    - 3. A third interlude: Further Clarifications, 12:1-15:4

The concluding verse of chapter 11 is transitional in that it concludes the trumpet visions and introduces a new series of visions (the reference to “lightings, sounds, and thunder” also concludes the seal judgments [8:5] introducing the Trumpet series). The seven visions that follow in this section begin with “and I saw” or “behold.” Says Stott, “... just as the seven seals led into the seven trumpets so the trumpets lead into the next series of visions, the seven significant signs (152).”

While this chapter is an interlude to a new series of visions, the themes remain the same as in the two previous judgment series. However, the relation of the church and its struggles in the world are stated in greater detail. The seals

revealed the demonic activity thrust against believers and unbelievers until the end of times; the trumpets emphasize the reaction of unbelievers to the judgments while in both series the protection of believers is repeated.

a. The conflict of the ages, 12:1-17

What this chapter reveals are what believers do not see; an invisible war waged about them by spiritual forces. The instigator behind the persecution of Christians is the devil, “the red dragon.” The chapter functions also to encourage believers that one who is greater than the devil and his minions has won the victory. Though its fullest manifestation awaits heaven, the saints should be filled with hope and not give in to cultural and religious compromise. The victory has been won through the death and resurrection of Christ! This should have greatly comforted and motivated the seven churches (2-3) in their temporal struggles, as it should believers today.

At the end of chapter 11, we have the announcement that Jesus is king. John is commissioned in 10:1-11 as a true prophet and God’s people as His witnesses. In chapter 13 we have the reason that wisdom is important (vv. 11-17), deception abounds in the “beast” and the “false prophet, both minions of Satan.

1) A woman, a son, and a dragon, vv. 1-6

It is always difficult to decide in visionary literature how far to press the details; the point of this type of literature is the image, the big picture (it is designed with the purpose of conveying a vivid point; the point is not found in the details). The message of the chapter is that, though the people of God have their powerful adversaries, God’s mercies are greater.

a) The pained woman: “true” Israel, vv. 1-2

John sees in the sky, “the heavens,” a beautifully and triumphantly adorned woman who appears in stark contrast to the “woman”

of chapter 17, the scarlet whore. The vision is referred to as a “sign,” something that indicates a reality beyond itself. The “woman” represents, I surmise, the ancient people of God, the believing remnant in Israel.

The image of a pregnant afflicted woman, if it means that the believing community births a child, on the surface seems confusing. Birth pains can symbolize an unexpected, sudden event or problems associated with a sudden, expected event. The unexpected event is the fulfillment of messianic promises and the pain arises from attachment to Him and proclamation of Him. This is clear from fact that the offspring is Christ, but also the believing community (v. 6, 11-17). *The vision is confusing in that the community births Christ and, at the same time, is the family of Christ. However, remember, it is vision! Perhaps we should not labor to identify the woman in labor since the focal point is her offspring, Christ and the believing community (see Gen 3:15).*

Thus, it seems best to see the “woman” as believing Israel (perhaps to be identified with the 144,000 of chapter 7). This, in a way, would make more logical sense the “child,” Jesus, was Jewish, a child of Abraham. In a very real sense, Israel did give us Jesus. Says Mounce, “The woman is not Mary the mother of Jesus but the messianic community, the ideal Israel.... It is out of faithful Israel that the Messiah will come (236).”

b) The red dragon: Satan, vv. 3-4a

The text indicates that what we have here is a “another sign” (v. 1, “a great sign”). The imagery of a dragon, a sea monster (also

Rahab, Leviathan, the serpent), is that of opposition. The description of the dragon, in comparison to Christ, makes it evident that the dragon is a satanic counterfeit (“Crowns” and “horns” symbolize claims to sovereignty and power; seven suggests completeness. These are all false claims by the dragon). “Red” also signifies his murderous character. This personage is denominated as “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan” (v. 9).

The point of the dragon’s opposition is to destroy the community of faith. The mention of stars falling may indicate the broader cosmic conflict between God and the dragon, though we cannot be sure. The intent of the dragon is to destroy the child, but He will prove unsuccessful (though in his use of Herod the Great, many other children did die in Bethlehem).

c) The man-child: Christ, vv. 4b-6

The child is the Christ (Ps. 110:1 revealed in Mark 12:35-37). John does not deal with the earthly details of our Lord, which is found in his gospel account, but moves to His ascension and triumph (the point of the book is to give God’s suffering people hope in the truth of God’s triumph). He is now gathered (“caught up”) to heaven and enthroned though His rule is incomplete at this time (the “now”, but “not yet;” the partial, not the complete (v. 5b, “who is to rule”).

The followers of Christ flee to the wilderness where they are accorded protection (“nourished,” v. 6) from the ravages of the dragon (this will be enumerated in vv. 13-17). The OT background is most likely drawn from

the exodus account; Israel fled into the wilderness to escape destruction and was preserved from danger, though the ancient people of God also proved disobedient throughout it. This suggests further that Christ's life is a pattern of expectancies of our experience in the "not yet" of His rule, suffering before the crown!

The meaning of 1260 days, the equivalent of 3 1/2 years or 42 months) seems to speak of a defined, but limited, period of time. Ironically, it is half of seven years suggesting incompleteness or conflict. Christ's ministry was this length as was Elijah's (11:2-3). The point of this undefined period is that the believing community is protected, though they experience tribulation in various forms (chapters 2-3 [social ostracism, economic discrimination, physical harm, imprisonment, death]). Remember Antipas and the church in Pergamum (2:13).

2) The cause of the dragon's fury, vv. 7-12

a) The heavenly victory secured: the expulsion of the dragon, vv. 7-9

John describes a heavenly conflict between the angelic host aligned with Michael (v. 7), one of only two named (he is an archangel [Jude 9], the other is Gabriel), unfallen angels in the Bible, and the dragon (Satan) and his angelic, fallen host. We know little of the nature of the invisible-to-us spiritual war. However, as a result Satan and his minions were cast out (this explains the conflict the churches are enduring as well as offering hope since Satan has been defeated and is weaker than Michael's host). The earth has become the realm of Satan's activities!

*It seems that the casting out of Satan (the serpent, the devil, from heaven and his minions took place as a result of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. It seems, further, that in the visions of John the circumstance of victory, the point of Satan's defeat, is Calvary! Just as Christ won the victory but its fullest extent is yet to be realized, so Satan's defeat is yet to be realized (he was cast to earth, but he will be cast into hell forever). Jesus told us that, when He was lifted up (resurrection, ascension), Satan would be cast down (John 12:31).*

The activity of Satan, having been excluded from heaven, is deception (v. 9), the spreading of distortion and lies. On the earth, this began in the first garden (Gen. 3) and will continue until the garden is recreated (Rev. 21-22). Simply put, this explains the origin of the troubles that we experience!

b) The earthly victory secured, vv. 10-12

(1) The praise from heaven, v. 10

As a result of Satan's casting out (v. 9), resulting from Christ's victory, a chorus of jubilant praise echoes in heaven (likely from the same group described in 6:9-11. These are described as those who "overcame", brethren" [12:11]). Salvation, the kingdom of God, has been inaugurated (see 11:15-18); the end of history is now present in a "now, but not fully yet" a reality.

Satan is what he is, his name describing his character; he is the accuser. Though cast from heaven, he continues his activities on the earth, accusing the believers. Though his power is broken, he is still powerful in our realm.

(2) The consequences, vv. 11-12

The “they” in this verse is most likely the martyred (2:10) or, at least, deceased saints. They overcame (they gained the victory) because of the provision of Christ in His substitutionary death and their resultant perseverance in spite of trials.

(a) Assurance of final victory, v. 11

[1] The fact, v. 11

Praise resounds in heaven for God’s great victory over His adversary.

[2] The reasons, v. 12

Three facts account for the perseverance of the believers (“because”): first, the accomplishments of Christ’s faithful sacrificing for us, second, their faithful witness to Christ (“the word of their testimony”), and third, their priority of their love for Christ taking precedence over their own desire for safety

(b) The fact of struggle now, v. 12.

[1] The cause for rejoicing, v. 12a

The victory over the “accuser” has been won!

[2] The cause for suffering, v. 12b

The means of final victory is judgment on the world the “accuser” blighted. The “woe” is the third one stated in 11:14 that ends the trumpet-cycle of judgments on the earth.

[3] The reason for suffering, v. 12c

The shortness of time to accuse believers is likely the era between the victory procured at the cross and its final realization in Christ return in the Second Coming, when the devil will be silenced forever. Says Stott, “The



troubles of the persecuted righteous arise not because Satan is too strong, but because he is beaten. He is doing all the harm he can while he can. But he will not be able to do this much longer (163).”

3) The earthly conflict of the dragon, vv. 13-17

Here John returns to the story of the woman and the dragon (vv. 1-6), adding greater detail (“when the dragon saw”). The point of this paragraph is that though Satan rages against the community of believers, God will protect them. Often in Scripture “wings” are symbolic of God’s protective mercies and sustaining provision (Ex 19:4). The wilderness (perhaps a reflection of the exodus sojourn) is a dangerous place, but it would prove to be a place of protection for the people of God.

a) The need for divine protection, v. 13

It is clear that the cause of the persecution of the “woman” was her association with her “child.”

b) The fact of divine protection: stated, v. 14

What we have here is a reiteration of v. 6 with further delineation.

c) The action of the accuser, v. 15

Water is often symbolic of destructive forces in the Bible, the unruly. Buist Fanning writes, “Satan tried to stamp out the church in its early, formative days, and then in the latter first century-and continuing to the last days- he directs his attacks against Christians.”

d) The fact of divine provision: illustrated, v. 16

Just as the waters consumed the Egyptian army, securing the safety of the ancient people of God, so the earth is pictured as an agency of protection for believers. Also, as the earth swallowed up rebellious Korahites (Num.

16:31-32), the earth here devours the raging of floodwaters of evil intentions.

e) The continued wrath of the accuser, v. 17

It would seem that “the rest” secured by the woman’s offspring is distinguished from those in heaven (v. 1), those who have secured their final victory. Thus, the raging has to do with those within Satan’s grasp to influence, meaning the living. These are described as those who “keep,” or faithfully observe instruction, and who cling to the words “about” Jesus.

*Some translations have a verse 18; however, others, such as the NASB, combine the verse with 13:1. It is a minor textual variant among our ancient manuscripts.*

### Applications

1. The “wilderness” in the Bible is often portrayed as a dangerous place where predators abound and the harshness of the climate foreboding. However, it is also a place where God protects and provides for His own. This was certainly the case with the ancient people of God during the wilderness sojourn as He split rocks to quench thirst, send bread from heaven, and low-flying quail for meat. It is also the case in our passage in the protection of His church. When God is present, we do not have to fear the “wilderness” because He can turn it into a place of blessing. Is that not true in your experience? Have you not seen Jesus turn the “water of adversity” into the “wine of blessing?”
2. This chapter is a summary of all of history from a divine perspective; it is Gen 3:15 in a nutshell. Since the great dereliction of Adam, the garden has become a defaced battleground. The “seed of the serpent” is in a struggle for supremacy with the “seed of the woman.” Though Revelation tells us, as well as many other portions of Holy Scripture, how the conflict will end in the total victory of God, it can help you and I understand the conflicts and turmoil that you and I face. The devil is out to destroy God’s children and his ways are deceptive and devious. Do you think of the struggles you have as a part of a much

larger struggle? When struggles come, do you often side with your adversary in the battle? Do you understand that Satan is out to destroy your life and mock the God who loves you by doing so?

3. While Satan is a potent, powerful enemy of Christ and His church, he has been defeated; he has been cast out of heaven. Though it seemed that he gained the triumph at the cross in the death of Jesus. As is true in nature that a dying, wounded beast can still be vicious, the devil is on the ropes, so to speak, but his destructive powers remain a potent arsenal. With the limited time that he has to do so, with the limitations of God upon him to do so, he desires to do as much harm as he can. What are you doing in your life, in your family, in your business to come to terms with this fact? Are there ways in your life that he is gaining the victory? He was crushed at Calvary and he will be forever cast from us when Christ, who alone is sovereign, brings time to its conclusion. What has a beginning has an ending! Are you not glad?
4. In our struggles in our “wilderness sojourn,” a wilderness that God is turning into a garden, a place wherein many of the events in our lives are simply not understandable, it is comforting to know that the limit of our hope is not found in the limitations of our knowledge. While there is a “wilderness,” sad unexplainable happenings, our refuge is not so much in a rational explanation as it is in a person, that person being Jesus Christ. The battle has been won though it has not been concluded. Have you learned to rest happily and contentedly in the fact that we serve an infinitely wise, compassionate, all-loving, supremely powerful God in the “why’s” of life? Our passage tells us that even in a wilderness, He can bring a flood to defeat our enemies? Do you believe that today? Can you trust Him for your life today, your children, your mate, all your tomorrows?
5. Our text tells us that in the struggles that we have the wilderness is not a bad place to go, if God is there. In our passage the people of God are pictured as fleeing to the dessert to be “nourished (vv. 6, 14) and, thereby, be protected from the ravages of the archenemy of our souls. For all the portent of danger, the wilderness can be a quiet place of refuge. Regardless of circumstance, the presence of God can turn sadness into delight. Do you see that the “wildernesses” in your life can be refreshing opportunities? Do you see the importance of

taking time out to be refreshed and built up? Children are wearing; family can be difficult; life has its unexpected bumps. Are you allowing God to nourish you in a quiet, solitary place?

6. In a way our passage has a simple, yet wonderful message: God's people live under the protective mercies of the Lord. "Under His wings" is a wonderful metaphor of the capacity of God to protect, nourish, and comfort His children. There is need to live in fear unless you are of the opinion that God will keep you from pain and tragedy, even physical death (v. 11). Could it be true that you think God owes you health, wealth, and emotional stability that excludes difficulties in this life? Such is not the testimony of the Bible. There is something far more wonderful to anchor our lives and that is that whatever God brings our way it will not prevent us from an eternity with Him. He has not promised us the empty promises of our culture, health and wealth; He has promised us a productive life in glorifying Him and a safe passage into His presence. Are you expecting more than that?
7. Twice in our passage reference is made to "the testimony of Jesus (vv. 11, 17); the message about Jesus is what the devil finds detestable and he is willing to expend no limitation of effort in destroying it. However, the "testimony of Jesus" is the essence of the gospel that we have been entrusted with to proclaim in life and words. Are you forthright with your task or are you hiding your truest feeling about Jesus to avoid criticism and embarrassment, the ostracism of friends and colleagues? Remember, there is no greater "wilderness" than being in it without the blessing of Jesus. Can you trust Jesus to protect and provide for you? Is there not adequate evidence to suggest than you can?