

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

The Revelation to John

Readings: *Revelation 14:1-19:5*

Reflections:

- Hope of the faithful – Lamb with redeemed: The second beast looked like a lamb but now we see the revelation of the true lamb, Jesus. John has a vision of the Jewish Christians remaining completely true to Christ, responding to his leadership, singing his new song, and remaining purely devoted to him as the first fruits of the kingdom. Their identity is in Christ and they are set apart for him as symbolized by the mark on their forehead. This points back to the practice of tying the Torah to your forehead (see Deuteronomy 6:8, 11:18) as well as the prophecy of Ezekiel that refers to a righteous remnant being sealed with a number on their forehead (Ezekiel 9:4). This passage closely parallels Hebrews 12:22-23. Some scholars believe this is further evidence for dating Revelations pre-70 CE and that this passage in Revelations influenced the writer of Hebrews.
- First angel: The first messenger of God is announcing the proclamation of the Great News of Jesus to the whole world. This was being accomplished by the church.
- Second angel: The second messenger announces judgment against Babylon. Although some commentators suggest Babylon here is Rome, there is good evidence as we will see to view Babylon as apostate Israel, particularly Jerusalem. Israel has become Egypt, Babylon, and a beast like the great Beast of Rome. It has become the thing it claimed it hated. The reference to her adulteries aligns with the later comparison of Israel to the great prostitute.
- Third angel: The third messenger announces the time for judgment has come and encourages those faithful to Jesus to be patient and to trust in their eternal reward. The image of smoke and torment comes from the utter destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 19:28, Jude 7) and the fall of Edom (see Isaiah 34:9-10). This everlasting fire does not mean unending torture but rather complete destruction.
- Judgment against unrighteous – earth being harvested: Here we see the coming of the Son of Man (see Daniel 7:13), Jesus to judge Jerusalem. The image of sickle is first used to harvest the righteous to safety. The fullness of time has come and before the wicked are judged, Jesus comes to harvest and rescue the righteous. This follows the Old Testament pattern of the righteous being rescued out from the city that was being judged.

- Wrath imposed upon harvest: A second angel comes with a sharp sickle and fire to judge the wicked. The image of harvesting grapes and treading on them is one taken from the first fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE (see Lamentations 1:15). This image is stark: blood everywhere. The notion of blood four feet deep and almost 200 miles long is unfathomable. It is the ultimate destruction.
- Seven plagues of wrath: We see the final outpouring of God's wrath has come upon Jerusalem and the seven plagues of judgment have reached their fulfillment. This is most likely 70 CE and the final destruction.
- God's holiness in wrath: Those faithful to Christ who have been rescued now sing Moses' song of deliverance (see Exodus 15) as well as the Lamb's song of deliverance. They have triumphed with Christ over all the powers of the enemy. Those rescued by Christ worship him with complete passion and awe.
- Bowls of wrath: We see that the wrath of God comes through one of the four living creatures. We must remember the four living creatures are symbolic of the gods of the nations, particularly Rome now, in submission to God. It will be through Rome that Jerusalem is judged. The number of seven again represents completeness. From the temple in heaven, the true temple, the wrath of God is poured out against the apostate temple and its city. As we will see, the plagues or the bowls of wrath find parallel to the plagues against Egypt while at the same time weaving in images from the destruction of Jerusalem.
- First bowl: Disease became epidemic in the final phase of the destruction of Jerusalem as dead bodies were everywhere.
- Second bowl: There is a final account in the Jewish wars where the Romans pursued Jews into the sea of Galilee and slaughtered them in the water turning the water red with their blood.
- Third bowl: The blood of the dead corpses polluted the water ways in Jerusalem causing further disease.
- Praise for God's justice: Water is consistently viewed as a source of life. Here the angel that symbolically oversees the waters and sees the death in the waters is declaring God's righteousness in bringing judgment because of the righteous saints and prophets who have been martyred.
- Fourth bowl: With the lack of water in the city, the sun is seen as increasingly scorching. Again the people do not repent under their final terrible suffering but remain rebellious to the end. We know that although the Jews in the city were given the opportunity to surrender they refused and preferred to choose death.
- Fifth bowl: This fifth bowl may point to the suicide of Nero in 68 CE and the turmoil within the Roman capital during the time of the Jewish Wars. Or it may be symbolic of wrath being poured out on the second beast, those that had aligned with the Romans to persecute the

church. The throne of the beast would suggest that this judgment is against those who rule, either Nero in his suicide or the ruling class in Jerusalem.

- Sixth bowl: This sixth bowl has many images interwoven. The drying of Euphrates is similar to the parting of the Red Sea or the Jordan to miraculously allow an army to pass through. The Romans under Titus brought a final great army, many from the Euphrates area, to destroy Jerusalem. The reference to frogs again ties the imagery back to the plagues against Egypt but here they are apparently demons that work both through the Romans as well as through the Jews within Jerusalem to gather both for battle. Jesus interrupts the passage to warn that he is coming like a thief. This is not likely referring to his second coming but rather to how his judgment against Jerusalem will come as a surprise attack. Only those who are spiritually awake and ready will escape. This was true for the Jewish Christians who fled and were saved from the final destruction of the city. The place of destruction is called Armageddon. This is actually a reference to the historic site where Elijah slaughtered the priests of Baal, the plains of Megiddo. Rather than a plain, Armageddon means “mount of Megiddo” or maybe better translated, “mount of slaughter”. This plain of Megiddo was a place of many historic battles (see Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 9:27; 2 Chronicles 35:20-25). It would be like saying the Confederacy met their Armageddon at Gettysburg.
- Seventh bowl: The imagery again here speaks to God’s judgment seen throughout the Old Testament (particularly the earthquake). The division into three parts aligns with Ezekiel 5:1-12 where Ezekiel gives a prophetic sign against Jerusalem warning it against judgment. It also fits well with history as the city was ruled by three warring factions at the time Titus descended to destroy the city. The huge white stones that fall from the sky most likely were the rocks fired from the Roman catapults. One legion in particular fired stones of one hundred pounds into the city. Josephus records actually that when these huge white rocks fell from the sky that some Jews proclaimed, “The son comes.” Some see this as a reference to the Jews actually knowing the prophecy about Jesus returning to destroy the city.
- Special judgment upon Babylon – drunken prostitute: Israel was referred to in the Old Testament as a prostitute (see Isaiah 1:2; 57:8; Jeremiah 2:2,20; Hosea). Here apostate Israel is envisioned as actually riding on the great red beast (red is the imperial color for Rome) and she is dressed as a prostitute. She has rejected her love relationship with God and is fully adulterated herself with the gods and powers of Rome. She is called mystery Babylon because who would have thought that Israel would basically become a spiritual Babylon. She has killed the saints of the Old Testament as well as those who are faithful to Jesus. She is now falling under judgment and John is astonished at the sight.
- Beast explained: The beast again is the Roman rulers, particularly as expressed in Nero. The seven heads suggest seven rulers in succession. Again we see the use of code to help protect those carrying this document.
- Seven heads explained: It will take wisdom to break this code. The woman rides the beast which is on seven hills. Rome is consistently described as the city on seven hills. The

description of the seven rulers, five who have fallen, one who is, and one who is to come, may represent the Caesars either starting with Julius or the Roman rulers of Judea starting with Herod. There is an eighth king announced that will also be destroyed. It seems most likely that these kings refer to the Caesars rather than the rulers just of Judea.

- Ten horns explained: This probably refers to the provincial rulers of the Roman Empire who continued the persecution against Christians across the Empire.
- Waters explained: Many Jews were spread across the Roman Empire (the image of being seated on many waters) and yet Rome (the beast) will come to hate Jerusalem and will bring destruction on the city. God again takes credit for destroying apostate Jerusalem through the Romans.
- Woman explained: This verse has led some to interpret the woman as Rome rather than Jerusalem. Yet, the phrase “the great city” is used in Revelations to describe Jerusalem. Jerusalem as the center of God’s covenant was to be a light to the Gentiles and the center of God’s kingdom rule over the earth (see 1 Kings 10:24; Ezra 1:4-7 and Romans 2:17-24).
- Rejoicing over Babylon’s fall: Here is the rejoicing over the fall of Jerusalem which became a hangout for every unclean spirit and every evil bird (a symbol of evil Gentiles).
- Warning about Babylon: The call to God’s covenant people was to flee out of apostate Jerusalem to safety. Although the Jews of Jerusalem felt safe and secure, judgment is about to fall from God. She boasts that she is a queen, not a widow but she has abandoned her first love with God to adulterate herself with Rome and pagan gods.
- Lament by kings: The story of Jerusalem’s destruction travelled far and wide and became a well known story of terrible, horrifying death.
- Lament by merchants: Israel was a center for trade and wealth as Jews have a history of excellent business success.
- Lament by Sailors: Again those who had profited from Israel now mourn her destruction. They acknowledge the justice as she is destroyed for killing the innocent leaders God had sent to her in the apostles and prophets of Jesus.
- Extent of destruction: The final destruction is like a huge millstone being thrown into the sea never to rise again. The temple and the entire religious establishment is now being thrown into the sea even as Jesus has indicated to his disciples in Matthew 21:21.
- Multitude celebrates: All heaven and all past martyrs celebrate and worship God as this final judgment is enacted. We must ask the question, how can the righteous celebrate such judgment? Although we can’t judge others nor can we execute judgment, we can and should praise God when he chooses to judge because he does so in complete righteousness and truth. Only in the next life will we be able to truly discern what represents God’s true judgment and then worship God accordingly. These closing verses close the second vision

just as Revelations 11:15-19 close the first vision. The parallels between Revelations 11:15-19 and 19:1-5 are distinct.