

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

### *The Revelation to John*

**Readings: Revelation 19:6-22:21**

#### ***Reflections:***

- Triumph of Christ and his church – wedding of Lamb and Bride: There are references in Paul's writings to Christ as the husband and the church as his Bride (see 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:25-27). As Israel was the wife that became a prostitute and was finally judged and chooses divorce, so now the church becomes the true faithful bride to Christ. The church's readiness to be the Bride of Christ is a combination of her preparing herself and the gift of white robes for her to wear. We partner with God in our own purification and growth into Christ-likeness as God changes us from the inside out and because of his love in us we begin to act in a way that reflects his heart and purposes in the world. This Bride who is faithful to her husband is contrasted to the great Prostitute, who became the adulterous woman to all the nations of the earth. This wedding provides another image for the major transition from the covenant with Israel to the new covenant in Christ. The old marriage is over with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and now the new marriage has begun with the church.
- Honor of being invited: Here is an interesting account of John being so excited he wants to worship the angelic messenger and the angel corrects him to just worship God. We also see the angel point out that the "testimony of Jesus" or Jesus speaking is the "spirit of prophecy" or the "Spirit of prophecy". In other words, God's Spirit in us enables us to understand and speak out the heart of Jesus. Prophecy when rightly understood and experienced is simply Jesus speaking through us.
- Word rules as Lord and King: Israel expected the Messiah to come with the armies of heaven to destroy their enemies. Here we see that Christ is portrayed as coming on a white horse with the armies of heaven to bring God's wrath against apostate Israel just as he predicted in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Although this section has often been thought to represent the second coming of Christ, it most likely is referring to him coming to judge Israel and further unleash the spread of his kingdom and the proclamation of his Great News. The message of Jesus is the Word of God, the sword of Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12. The picture is that now through the power of the Spirit and the proclamation of the Gospel, no force on earth can stop the advance of Christ's kingdom. Jesus, not the Caesar, is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

- Birds devour unrighteous: Just as there is a wedding feast for the Lamb and the Bride, now there is a feast for the vultures or birds of the air. It is the feast of eating the dead bodies of those who have fallen under God's judgment. The Gentiles are referred to throughout the Old and New Testament as birds and so it seems clear that this passage refers to the Roman armies coming to kill and devour those within Jerusalem.
- Beast and false prophet killed: The battle portrayed here is a spiritual battle. The beast, the demonically empowered Rome controlled leadership and the false prophet, were the demonically deceiving spiritual leadership within Israel that partnered together to kill Jesus, and were now again working together to persecute the church. Jesus was now coming with his spiritual forces to destroy the temple, Jerusalem and overthrow the power of Satan and the beast. In this final terrible battle, the Gentile armies would feast on the dead of the city like vultures feasting on dead carcasses. This final victory of Christ is the fulfillment of his words when he said, "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth; this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened (Matthew 24:27-34). The parallels to this text are striking. The gathering of the elect again refers most likely to the rescuing of his true covenant people, the Jewish Christians out from this judgment. We should note again the Jesus said that all of this would happen in the lifetime of the people he was speaking to.
- Satan bound for a time: Revelation 20 has caused more debate and discussion than any other passage in Revelation or maybe even in the entire Bible. Those within the various camps of interpretation (Preterist, Historicist, Futurist, and Spiritualist) cannot even agree with those within their own camps on how to interpret this chapter the meaning of the 1000 year rule of Christ. Therefore we should interpret humbly. Satan in this first passage is bound for 1000 years from being able to deceive the nations. 1000 years within Scripture simply means a very long time. Like the other numbers in Revelation, it should be understood as a symbolic number. The notion of Satan being bound is not a new concept. Jesus taught this idea in Matthew 12:29 and Luke 11:22 in reference to binding the "strong man" to rob his house or to strip him of his weapons and armor. In light of the previous passage of Satan's defeat in Revelation 12, we should probably not view this as a final act that makes Satan completely powerless but rather that he has limited authority now and is unable to have control over the nations. The church is now free to proclaim the message of

Jesus to the nations. At the end of this we see that Satan will again one day be released from this chain and will create one last terrible stand against Christ.

- **Martyrs reign with Christ:** We are brought back to the throne room to those who have been martyred. These martyred saints have been a part of the story thus far. They reign with Christ for this extended time. There is a question though. It says, "They came to life and reigned with Christ." The Greek can also be interpreted "They lived and reigned with Christ." This is described as the first resurrection. The question is "are these people physically resurrected and return to earth in human bodies to reign with Christ" or is this simply saying they are alive with Christ in heaven and are reigning with him through the age of the church while the Great News is being proclaimed to the nations? This isn't the final resurrection where all are raised and receive final judgment but rather a limited resurrection just for the saints who have died. Although resurrection in Scripture seems to always entail a new body, in this case I think it is worth considering an exception as it seems that their rule with Christ is viewed as a spiritual rule as priests within heaven. Now this resurrection may actually also parallel Ezekiel's dry bones in Ezekiel 37 that pictures a broken and powerless people being resurrected through the power of the Spirit to carry out the will of God on earth, a foreshadowing of the coming of the church. This first resurrection of those who have been martyred (beheaded) may be a kind of spiritual fulfillment in parallel with the spiritual raising of the new army on earth. If this is the case, then both in heaven and on earth are their now spiritual priests reigning with Christ.
- **Satan destroyed:** After the long period of time Satan is released and there is one last massive spiritual battle. John refers to Gog and Magog take from Ezekiel 38 (see notes from Day 245 - September 2). Similar to Ezekiel 38 this appears to be one last great final battle. Satan gathers spiritual forces to descend not on the Great City, the city that has been judged by Christ, but on the city Christ loves, the community of Christ-followers. Yet Christ-followers do not need to fight this final spiritual battle as Christ comes in power and destroys Satan and his forces. These evil rebellious forces now face their doom and enter into eternal destruction and torment. Some have wondered if this passage means that there is a spiritual hell where all people who don't follow Jesus are tortured with ultimate pain for eternity. We need to remember that this is symbolic language of a terrible end. Final judgment is also described as the second death and destruction. Although it refers here to Satan and spiritual forces suffering eternally we don't necessarily have to conclude that all people who are judged by God will suffer eternally but may simply die a final spiritual death and no longer exist (similar to what atheists believe, a death with no further existence).
- **Great judgment of the dead:** After this final spiritual battle, all people from all time stand before God and are judged. All the books are opened suggesting that all the information about all people is in full view. The book of life is also opened. This is the record of those who live in true relationship with God. Everyone is judged righteously by God. Death itself and Hades (where the dead reside after they die) are all now destroyed as well as those who have no relationship with God. This is a fearful thing to consider. Although it seems

politically incorrect today to talk about all people being judged and some not living for eternity with God but their lives ending, this in fact the simple teaching of Scripture. This should motivate all people to respond now to the invitation of Jesus to embrace him as Lord of your life and to humbly live in a love relationship with God as you seek to express his love and truth to a needy world.

- Vision of new heaven and earth: The new heaven and new earth may also mean a new sky and new earth. God hits the ultimate reset button. The new Jerusalem is a picture of God's new community, his true bride, being established on earth to live in peace and without any effects of the curse. "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." The triumph of Christ is now fully realized as God makes everything new and the life of the garden is restored.
- Reward and destruction: Jesus makes a final invitation to everyone hearing this prophecy. He wants all those who hear to embrace him and receive eternal life. Jesus through John uses the same image as he spoke to the woman at the well in John 4. The Jews based on Ezekiel 47 believed this living water would flow from the temple to restore the land. Jesus is now declaring as he did in John 4 that the living water, the work of the Spirit, flows from him, not from the religious institution of the temple. Again Jesus warns his listeners of the second death in his plea for them to turn to him and be saved.
- Glory and grandeur of heaven – view of the holy city: This new community of Christ is now described in the most beautiful terms. Every possible beautiful and wonderful term imaginable to John is used to describe those who are faithful to Christ. The twelve gates reflect the fact that this community is completely open to all the nations of the world and reflects the full expression of being the covenanted people of God both of those who are faithful in the story of Israel and the twelve tribes (twelve gates – Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles) as well as those who are faithful in the era of the church and the apostles (twelve foundations – this new city was founded on the work of Christ).
- Description of the city: We see the image of this city being measured. Just as Jerusalem was measured (evaluated) before it was destroyed (Revelation 11:1 follows the imagery of Ezekiel 40 and 42) so now the city is measured to reveal how righteous, holy and perfect it is. Every possible precious stone is used to describe this city. Gold is so common it is used for pavement.
- Purity and light of city: This now announces a great final statement in Revelation. "I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." All religion is now gone forever. Pure light with no darkness. All of the glory of the nations now found within. No sin, only what is true and right and good. Again, all of the effects of the fall are completely eradicated and only what God originally intended is restored.
- Blessings in river and tree: We now move from city imagery to garden imagery. The garden is restored to this city. The vision of a great river of life as pictured in Genesis 1-2 and again in Ezekiel 47 is described by John, this time flowing from Jesus throne without any temple or

religion. There is no more tree of “deciding for myself what is right and wrong” but only trees of life to provide healing for the nations. God will be our ultimate source of purpose (to serve God), intimacy (we will see his face), identity (his name will be on our foreheads), truth (God will be our source of light), and authority and eternal life (we will reign with him forever). The life we have always wanted will be ours!

- Epilogue – Angel verifies revelation: The angel confirms that these words are true and that all that is revealed in this book must happen soon. This again confirms that the bulk of the book of revelation was to be fulfilled in John’s day, most likely in 70 CE with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
- John verifies revelation: John restates his interaction with the angel when he was so excited he fell down before the angel to worship the angel. Then he states that the time for judgment has now come. Where Daniel was told to seal up his vision for the time was for the distant future (see Daniel 8:26; 9:24) now John is told to keep it open to people because it is about to happen. John now states that those who are sinning and rebellion should continue to do so and those that are living rightly should continue to do so. This seems contrary to the idea of calling people to repentance. The best way to understand this is to read John as saying, “Judgment is now falling. Go ahead and keep sinning because judgment is NOW! Righteous people, carry on because your deliverance is NOW!” There is no more time to repent for those that are now falling under the judgments outlined in this revelation. Obviously there was still time for people to repent as we saw at the beginning of Revelation where various churches were called to repent and as in a few verses the Spirit and the church will call people to repent and receive the hope of eternal life. This is simply dramatic language used to underscore that the time for judgment is now!
- Jesus verifies revelation: Jesus is the final one to confirm the words of this revelation. His identity as God with us and the Messiah is underscored repeatedly through this section. His promise of life and warning of judgment against the rebellious is underscored again.
- Invitation to enjoy blessings: The message is now to go out through the Spirit working and speaking through the Church. All the nations are to come and experience the power of God to change them from the inside out. This water of life is the Spirit’s power to transform our lives and enable us to experience the love of God and to live the new life he wants for us. What a message of hope for the world!
- Caution against misuse: John gives a final strict warning for no one to edit this book but to keep every word he has written. This may explain why the Greek is so poor in that later editors may not have felt free to improve the Greek but felt compelled to keep it as it was first written by John.
- Promise of Jesus: Jesus is coming soon. We are struck again that in John’s day that coming would be realized when Jesus with the clouds to destroy Jerusalem and fulfill his prophecy in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. John’s simple closing prayer: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

- Benediction: John adds a final prayer for all those who would follow Christ: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” With this simple prayer, the library of the Jesus movement comes to a close and those who embrace the message and mission of Jesus are left with the challenge to both embrace this amazing grace of Jesus and to take it to a hurting, needy world.
- Final conclusions about Revelation: 1) It makes sense that the spiritual principles found in Revelation are played out again over and over again in history. It also makes sense that because of this, we are able to see parallels to the prophecies of Revelation played out in history. Lastly, it is quite possible that there will be a future fulfillment of this prophecy when Satan is released again and there is a final great spiritual battle. Yet, with this said, it still seems to make the most sense to start with view to see how the prophecies of Revelation may have been fulfilled in John’s time in 70 CE and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. As we have witnessed in this study, there is good evidence that at least at this basic level much of Revelation found fulfillment when Jerusalem was destroyed. Other interpretations or applications of Revelation may be true but at least we can see evidence for this first approach to be true. 2) One of the main themes of Revelation is Israel became the thing she hated. Her desire to be her own savior, to live according to religion rather than relationship with God. This resulted in her becoming the very thing she despised. She became Egypt, Babylon, and the Great Prostitute (or we could also say the Great Hypocrite). This is a great warning to all those who seek God. We must be careful to truly embrace a relationship with him and not fall into a religious mindset for fear that we become the very things we say we hate. 3) As we see in the terrible disaster of the fall of Jerusalem we should be reminded that God’s judgment is real and to be feared. We must be careful not to treat the warnings of God something to be treated lightly. 4) The call of the church to be the hope of the world could not be portrayed any more strongly. In Christ we have the greatest mission. In Christ we become the most beautiful display of his glory and grace. In Christ we have a calling that gives our lives ultimate purpose and meaning. In Christ we have the sure hope of life eternal. Revelation reminds us that there is nothing better, higher, or more amazing and wonderful than living in relationship with God, allowing him to change us from the inside out and partnering with God to bring his love and hope to the world!