

Revelation: The Church Triumphant Through Christ the Lamb of God

Based upon Jim McGuigan's work on the book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation: Armageddon, New Jerusalem, Etc., Etc.

Lesson Seven

In this lesson, we will learn that ...

- Revelation is not to be read in the same way 1 Samuel or Mark is to be read.
 - The destruction of the world dominated by an evil empire is common in Old Testament imagery.
 - The city foursquare is not heaven. It's the triumphant people of God.
 - In Revelation, Armageddon pictures the war between the devil and Rome on one side, and Christ and the Church on the other.
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It's an overstatement but when you read books like 1 Samuel or Mark you read the words and know what the writer has in mind by the very words he uses. That's because, whatever the writer means to do with what he writes he tells of actual events and people doing this or saying that or going here or there. But that's not how it works in the book of Revelation. Revelation uses words to paint images and the reader has to ask, "What does the picture mean?" Anyone can tell you what the picture *is* (you only have to read it), but the issue is what does the picture *mean*?

For example, John sees a seven-headed beast come up out of the sea in chapter 13:1. We aren't supposed to think that some time, somewhere (past or future) an animal like that came or will come up out of the sea. No! We're supposed to look at the picture and ask, "What does the seven-headed sea-beast stand for?" The same is true of the Prostitute that rides the beast or the awful locusts or the terrifying plagues on the oceans, lakes and rivers of the world. In trying to understand Revelation (and, apart from some specific texts, it's not *that* difficult) the thing to say to ourselves is, "That's what he *sees*, now what does it mean?"

Let's take a look at three additional important images used in Revelation.

A new heaven and a new earth (21:1)

John sees a new heaven and a new earth come into existence. He sees a red Dragon with seven heads, he sees a glorious Woman with the moon at her feet and a world entirely without drinking water and we asked, "What do these things mean?" Now he sees a new heaven and earth and what are we to do? We're to ask, "What does this mean?"

The vision of a new heaven and earth *speaks of a new environment, a new state of affairs for the people of God*. The old world in Revelation's context has been dominated by the cruel and evil Roman Empire—it was, so to speak, their world! But they offended God and He attacked it. In Revelation its stars are torn down, its seas are turned to blood, earthquakes tear it in shreds and its vegetation is completely destroyed—the Roman world is dismantled. *None of that literally happened!* John now sees a new heaven and earth. But as surely as we're not to believe in the literal dismantling of the Roman world (remember 22:6,10) we're not to believe in a literal creating of a new heaven and earth. *This is a book of pictures! It tells its message in images. It isn't like other books and mustn't be interpreted like other books.* When Matthew says they met a man carrying a water pitcher on his head we tend to believe that that's what they actually saw. When John says he saw a door open in heaven or

that he saw a new city coming down out of the sky on to the earth we're not supposed to take it as literal.

The vision of the new heaven and earth is Revelation's way of saying that the people of God live to see the destruction of the world "owned" and shaped by the beast-empire of Rome. They are free from Rome. Rome can no longer murder them or make them cry or mourn (21:4). There is no more sea (21:1), therefore, the Roman beast can rise from it no more (13:1).

The dismantling of the world of the oppressor is a common vision in the Old Testament. Babylon's world is dismantled in Isaiah 13 and 14. Edom's world is devastated in Isaiah 34:4-15. Judah's world is "uncreated" in Jeremiah 4:22-26 and so on. In none of these cases are we to think of a literal destruction of the world. Can you imagine what would happen if a star the size of Mount Everest fell on an earth the size of a grain of sand just so Edom could be destroyed?

A new and glorious Jerusalem (21:2,9)

The city that dominated the world in John's day was Rome (see 17:18). Nations walked according to her laws and nations brought their wealth to her. She persecutes the Church in defiance of God and the world saw her as unbeatable. Yet, her wicked world crumbled around her and her city went up in flames (read the whole of chapter 18 and 21:1).

In her place John sees another city. He sees it coming down from Heaven on to the earth. This city is not of earthly origin. Men didn't build it, God did (compare Hebrews 11:10,16). It sits on the new earth (21:24) and it's called the New Jerusalem (21:2,9). *That's what John sees.* What does this city stand for?

Whatever it is *it isn't Heaven!* John tells us it is the bride of the Lamb, the wife of Christ (21:9-10). The bride, the wife of Christ, is the Church; the people of God (see Ephesians 5:29-32 and 2 Corinthians 11:2). We aren't supposed to think this is a literal city that sometime in the past or in the future comes down out of Heaven and settles on the earth (remember the dimensions of it?). That misses the point altogether. John is contrasting the wicked City that went down in flames to utter ruin and this one that is glorious and beautiful and invulnerable to attack. Notice how the images switch between a woman and a city; that's what they did in chapter 17 when discussing the Prostitute and the city that ruled the world. *This glorious city is no more literal than the new heaven and earth.*

The message in this section is this: when the smoke clears there is one glorious city and it came down out of heaven to take its place in a new environment. That environment is free from the Roman oppressor and the city (Rome) they claimed was "the eternal city" was now gone. The glorious city is a picture of the triumphant people of God and much of the imagery is taken from the Old Testament (see Isaiah 54:11-12 for example).

Her identity is spelled out (21:9). Her dimensions we've talked about earlier. She brings light and healing to the nations of the world (21:24 and 22:2). There are those who say that the city is literal, that it is sitting even now (yes!) ready to come down and sit on the earth. *John expressly tells us it is not a city! It is the wife of the Lamb!* It isn't Heaven, it isn't a literal city, and it isn't even a literal wife of anyone. It's God's people in, and through, Jesus Christ. They are pictured as gloriously triumphant over their enemy (Rome, inspired by Satan).

A home within the wilderness (12:6,14)

The glorious Woman of 12:1-2 is the people of God (see Revelation 3). In 12:6 and 14 she is forced to flee into the wilderness. But in the wilderness she is taken care of for a time, times and half a time. This phrase will be discussed in a future lesson on the use of numbers as symbols in Revelation.

Israel, the ancient people of God, experienced a wilderness period. John borrows some from their experience. Elijah, one of God's prophets and witnesses, had his own wilderness experience during a three and a half-year drought. In both cases the people of God endured a wilderness experience but in both cases God looked after his troubled people. See Deuteronomy 8:2-5 and 1 Kings 17:1-16.

We have the trouble and triumph, suffering but sustained theme again. The Woman flees to the wilderness, but while she is there God protects and provides for her. Via these images the church of God is told tough times are ahead so they shouldn't be surprised but they're assured that wherever they are God will be with them to protect and bring them through to victory. *That* is the message of the home in the wilderness for three and one-half years.

The battle of Armageddon (16:12-16 and 19:11-21)

The battle of Armageddon is introduced in 16:12-16 but it is fought in 19:11-21. In 16:12-16 we're told it is between "the kings from the East (sun-rising)" and the two beasts and their allies. In 19:11-21 we're told it is between the people of God led by Jesus Christ and the two beasts and their allies. What does that tell you?

It tells you that the kings from the sun-rising in 16:12 are the People of God. Jesus himself is said to be the Bright and Morning Star (22:16 and see Malachi 4:2) and his followers are the kings from the sun-rising. It's from the East that the sun rises into the sky and floods the earth with light.

In 16:12 we hear that these royal ones (compare 5:10 and 1 Peter 2:9) cross water on dry ground. In the Bible only the people of God do such a thing. They did it in the days of Moses, and under Joshua. Elijah did it and so did Elisha. And when God speaks of rescuing his people from their enemies he speaks about bringing them across water on dry ground (Isaiah 11:15). These kings advance from the sun-rising to dispel darkness from the earth. See Psalm 110:1-3 and read the description of the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19, noting especially 19:8.

And why *Armageddon*? It is a huge valley in Palestine where ancient armies fought. Israel gained famous victories there under Deborah and Gideon. A bible dictionary would tell you the derivation of Armageddon and say something about the strategic importance of the town of Megiddo and its association with the plain or valley. Those having some acquaintance with the OT would have known immediately what was meant when a battle of Armageddon was mentioned. *In Revelation the battle pictures Rome led by Satan losing a pitched battle against the Church led by Jesus Christ.*

Exercises for Lesson Seven

Underline the scripture that teaches ...

- The glorious City of Revelation is Christ's wife.
Matthew 5:14 Revelation 21:24 **Revelation 21:9-10**
- Israel experienced a trying time in a wilderness.
Revelation 12:6,14 **Deuteronomy 8:2-9** Isaiah 65:17-18
- Armageddon is fought between Christ and His people on one side and the Beasts and Satan on the other.
II Corinthians 11:2 Revelation 5:9 **Revelation 19:11-21**
- Christians are a ROYAL priesthood.
Revelation 19:8 **I Peter 2:9** Revelation 4:4
- The glorious City is a blessing to the nations on earth.
Revelation 21:1 Revelation 17:18 **Revelation 21:24; 22:2**

Simply Write Who ...

- in the Bible crosses water on dry ground? **God's people** _____
- is the bride or wife of Christ? **the Church** _____
- rides white horses in Revelation? **Christ** _____
- dominated the world in John's day? **Rome and the Roman Empire** _____
- spent forty days in a wilderness being tempted? **Jesus** _____
- won a great victory for God at Megiddo (Armageddon) in the OT? **Deborah and Gideon** _____
- besides Israel, Moses, and Joshua, crossed water on dry ground in the OT? **Elijah and Elisha** _____
- fights along side the Dragon in the battle of Armageddon? **two beasts and their allies** _____
- in the OT spoke of a new heaven and a new earth? _____
- in the OT spoke of God dismantling the world of the evil nations? **Isaiah and Jeremiah** _____

Check off each of the following references after you have read it.

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| _____ Revelation 21:1
<i>New Heaven/New Earth</i> | _____ Isaiah 34:1-5 & 65:16-18
<i>Judgement of Nations & New Heaven/New Earth</i> | _____ Revelation 21:2,9
<i>Glorious City & the Lamb's wife</i> |
| _____ Ephesians 5:29-32 with II Corinthians 11:2
<i>Church as Christ's bride</i> | _____ Deuteronomy 8:2-9 with 1 Kings 17:1-16
<i>Israel's & Elijah's Wilderness Experiences</i> | _____ Revelation 12:6,14
<i>Glorious Woman's Wilderness Experience</i> |
| _____ Exodus 14:21-31 with Joshua 4:1-24
<i>Israel crosses over water on dry ground</i> | _____ Matthew 5:14 with Isaiah 54:11-12
<i>The Church or individual christians are a light to the world</i> | _____ Revelation 16:12
<i>Kings of the East walk on dry land amidst Euphrates</i> |
| | | _____ Revelation 21:9,10,24
<i>World benefits from New Jerusalem</i> |

True or False?

- In the Bible, only God's people cross water on dry ground. **T**
- The walls of the glorious city are 1,500 miles high. **T**
- The symbol of the glorious City speaks of the Church. **T**
- A wilderness experience for God's people is common in the Scriptures. **T**
- Armageddon is a real war that will be fought in our near future. **F**
- The pictures in Revelation are to be fulfilled literally. **F**
- The city foursquare of Revelation 21 is Heaven. **F**