

Revelation: The Church Triumphant Through Christ the Lamb of God

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

The Book of Revelation: Chapters Eleven to Twenty-two

Lessons Eleven & Twelve

In this lesson, we will learn that ...

- Being bound 1,000 years doesn't tell us how long Satan was bound but how well he was bound.
 - Three and a half years doesn't tell us how long the beast's authority lasted but that his authority was limited and temporary.
 - Rome used all its powers and allies to destroy the Lord's Church, but failed.
 - John sees two resurrections. One results in life and reigning with Christ (the first resurrection). The other is unto judgment and dying a second time.
 - The glorious City is a visual parable of the Church triumphant, secure for the future.
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Assuring God's people

The terrible warning plagues of chapters 8 and 9 should have brought the followers of the Dragon to repentance but they didn't. We'd have thought the same about the earlier plagues on Egypt but for one reason or another, humans find grounds for not repenting. Impenitence and defiance at this level generates fear by its blind and savage "no surrender" character. Since the enemy is so bent on evil the righteous need to be assured and that's what chapters 11 and 12 do.

In chapter 11 God's people (the temple and city) are seen trodden under by the enemy but their center can't be taken—the inner sanctuary remains untaken. God's people (the two Witnesses) may wear sackcloth while they preach during the enemy's "time" of power (forty-two months, 1,260 days) but they can't be stopped in their proclamation. And when it seems being killed has stopped them they are dead for only three and a half days before being resurrected.

In chapter 12 the People of God (the glorious Woman and her seed) endure a wilderness experience but they are protected and nourished while they are there. In chapter 12 the Dragon loses against the Woman, loses against the single Child, and loses against God's servant, Michael the archangel. The Dragon is presented as a three-time loser. All this assurance is needed in light of chapters 8 and 9, and in light of the two beasts about to be described.

The Roman beasts

Chapter 13 tells how the dragon would make war with the offspring of the woman via the sea beast and the earth beast. John sees a beast rising out of the sea which resembles the dragon and receives authority from him. Given the characteristics of power, authority, a throne, the world's submission and the purpose of making war against the saints (13:6-7), it is both reasonable and biblically consistent to identify this manifestation of Satan as the empire of Rome. Permission is granted by God for the sea beast to wage war against His people for a limited period of time (42 months, see 11:2-3).

The earth beast is an accomplice of the beast from the sea; they are distinct forces though one in purpose. The religious overtones in the description of the earth beast (worship, signs, make an image, etc.) suggest false religion, specifically emperor worship. This earth beast will later be referred to as "*the false prophet*" (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). The earth beast derives its power from the sea beast (13:12). In return, the earth beast fosters worship of the sea beast. Ironically, Rome was able to stay relatively united by a common though forced allegiance to the emperor.

As we have studied previously, the harlot or prostitute of chapter 17 refers to the city of Rome. The scarlet beast upon which the harlot sits refers to the whole Empire, the presence and authority of Rome throughout civilization. Rome was the perfect fullness (the seven kings become eight – more than enough) of civil power. The beast has ten horns that represent the mutually beneficial relationship between Rome and the client kings who were allowed to rule in their respective territories under Rome's authority.

So, in chapter 17 the world empire of John's day, the city of Rome together with its network of vassal kings, was waging war against the people of God through active persecution, idolatry, immorality and materialism. God had allowed sufficient time and power to overturn His rule and destroy His kingdom, but it could not be done. Some of His people had been killed, but even this resulted in their ultimate triumph. God would cause the Empire to self-destruct.

More assurance for the people of God

Chapter 13 brings a fearful message indeed but chapters 14 and 15 lift the hearts of God's people. John sees the 144,000 (Lesson 2) marked with God's name rather than the name or number of the beast (see 13:16-18—there's nothing here about credit card account numbers or modern governments tattooing ID numbers on anyone). The 144,000, faithful and victorious, are *singing*.

Four angels (14:6,8,9,17) proclaim good news about the imminent fall of Babylon (Rome). The headlines they announce are fulfilled one by one in the rest of the book. The evil City is going to fall (14:8 and chapter 18). The beast's worshipers will be judged (14:9-12 and 20:11-15) and the righteous are to be gathered in like wheat to a barn (14:13-16, and compare chapters 21-22).

Chapter 15 announces the arrival of the seven angels who have the final plagues, the full outpouring of God's wrath (15:1,7-8). These you'll remember follow because the trumpets had failed to bring the beast and its allies to repentance.

The bowls of wrath are poured out

The bowls look like the trumpets only they are more severe. Remember, we're to think of the plagues on Egypt and that will tell us what is happening here and how the plagues function. All these are pictures! We aren't supposed to take them literally! Be sure to see the remarks on Armageddon in a previous lesson.

Bear in mind the Woman of chapter 17 is a great City. She is the City that rules the world *in John's day* (17:18) and she is built on seven hills (17:9). She's the world's leading commercial power (chapter 18) and not a Church! In chapter 18 she is burned with fire.

Celebration and then Armageddon

The celebration in 19:1-10 takes place even before the battle of Armageddon is fought. That speaks of assurance. The armies in the battle are named (in keeping with chapter 16) and an angel proclaims the result even before the war commences (19:17-18). The evil army is defeated, the two beasts are thrown into the lake of fire (19:19-20) and their followers are killed by Christ (19:21). Rome has perished! She is no more; she has been thrown into the lake of fire and can never again be a threat.

The vision of victory - the triumph described

In Revelation the Dragon *works through Rome!* At other times in the past he worked through others. In the future he will have to work through others because in Revelation he works through Rome and Rome perished. The defeat of the Dragon in Revelation is the defeat of the Dragon *in his use of Rome!* That defeat was not partial—it was absolute! Complete! Final! So it is described as a 1,000 years incarceration. The victory of God's people over *Rome* is not partial or temporary, but a total and unlimited triumph so it is described as a reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4-6 answers the question, "Yes, but what about those who were faithful unto death in the conflict with Rome?" John is given another vision (in addition to chapter 19 and 20:1-3). It's a picture that tells a truth! The picture is the apocalyptic way of saying that those who die in Christ and for righteousness are victorious. Those who die for Rome and unrighteousness are losers!

The resurrection image is not uncommon. See Ezekiel 37:1-14 for an extended illustration of this point. See, too, Colossians 2:12-3:3, Romans 6:1-7, and John 5:25-27 for the same thing.

In Revelation 20:4-6 see what John is seeing. First, with the war of chapter 19 as background, simply ask yourself what it is that John sees. There's a battlefield with thousands of dead scattered all over the place. As he watches, many of them come to life and join others sitting on thrones and they reign with Christ 1,000 years. The rest of the dead that are scattered about the battlefield remain dead all the while the saints are reigning in triumph. Then they rise from the dead only to be judged and to die again in the lake of fire (20:5,11-15). In the *picture* there are two resurrections. One is to life and triumph—that's the one he sees "first". The one he sees next is "after" the 1,000 years because the first resurrection *picture* only pictures the followers of the Christ. That 1,000-year reign tells *their* story in imagery. The second resurrection to a second endless death is the story of the followers of the beast told in imagery. These visions are not a description of literal and actual events. Chaining a Dragon, and throwing him into a hole, and putting a lid on him for 1,000 years does not make up a description of literal events!

20:7-10 must occur after the thousand years. Why is that? Because the image of a 1,000 year imprisonment must be allowed its message. You can't have him free and active during the 1,000 years because that would contradict the inner structure of the scenes. You can't have the evil dead living during the 1,000-year reign of the saints because that is the image reserved to tell the story of *the saints*. So, as the visions unfold, Satan is pictured as freed for a little while, getting an army from the four corners of the earth but it's all to no avail.

This vision functions in this way. It assures the people of God that it makes no difference how, when or where Satan might show himself, he loses and they win. This is not a prediction of a still future war it is God saying to his people, "It doesn't matter when or where or how Satan appears - your future is secure and his final end is destruction!"

The triumphant and glorious church

When the smoke clears we find the New Jerusalem (the Church, the wife of Christ) not in rags or blood-spattered but looking like a bride (21:2). That's *the city* that John sees in 21:9-10. It isn't a literal city! It's the wife of the Lamb. *Be sure to see Lesson 4 on this.*

While John is dealing with eternal realities he isn't dealing with a period of time in eternity. You'll notice that there are still nations to whom the City gives light (21:24). You'll notice that the nations still need to gain health and that the City provides it (22:2). You'll notice that nations still bring their riches to the City and you'll notice that someone could lose his or her share to the Tree of Life (22:19). *In eternity?*

No, John is certainly dealing with eternal truths and eternal realities but he is describing the triumphant state of the church that by God's redeeming and sustaining grace has come through its trial with the brutal beast-kingdom Rome. This demonstrates what was already true—that the dominion belongs to the Lord and Christ.

This is timeless truth! Every judgment rendered by God is a shadow and a "prophecy" of the final and complete judgment when evil will be totally obliterated. Rome, like Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and the rest is a perfect illustration in the history of the world of the coming obliteration of all evil. But it's more than an *illustration*, it is *meant* to proclaim the certainty of a future glorious finale. But Revelation, like Nahum and other OT books relates to a definitive judgment in time past. And the glory of the triumphant church in Revelation relates to its victory over Rome. It speaks as surely now as it did then.

Exercises for Lessons Eleven & Twelve

True or False?

1. Beast worshippers die for 1,000 years. F
2. The sea-beast's horns represent kingly allies. T
3. Isaiah 37 tells of the vision of dry bones. F
4. The City foursquare is the Church, the Lamb's wife. T
5. Daniel 2 prophesied that Rome and her allies wouldn't be able to stick together. T
6. Just as Christ told parables, John in Revelation paints us picture-parables. T
7. The key and the chain in Revelation 20:1-2 are literal. F
8. In Revelation only the good guys wear white clothes and ride white horses. T
9. Some were warned that they could lose their share in the tree of life in the glorious City. T
10. The nations of the earth were to walk in the light of the glorious City. T
11. The sea beast represents the false religion of Rome. F

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

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| <u> </u> Ezekiel 37:1-11 with Revelation 20:4-6
<small>Resurrection as a common theme</small> | <u> </u> Daniel 7:6-8,20 with Revelation 17:9-12
<small>Horns and heads as figures of kings/kingdoms</small> |
| <u> </u> Daniel 2:40-43 with Revelation 17:12-18
<small>The weakness of Rome found in its client kings</small> | <u> </u> Daniel 7:9-12 with Revelation 20:11-15
<small>God as the judge of nations and peoples</small> |

Complete the following statements.

1. Rome was the perfect **fullness (the seven kings become eight – more than enough)** of civil power. _____
2. The second resurrection **to a second endless death** is the story of the followers of the beast told in imagery. _____
3. She's the world's **leading commercial power (chapter 18) and not a Church!** _____
4. You'll notice that nations **still bring their riches to the City** and you'll notice that someone could lose his or her share to the Tree of Life (22:19). _____
5. The rest of the dead that are **scattered about the battlefield** remain dead all the while the saints are reigning in triumph. _____
6. The victory of God's people **over Rome** is not partial or temporary, but a total and unlimited triumph so it is described as a reign with Christ for a thousand years. _____
7. Remember, we're to think of the **plagues on Egypt** and that will tell us what is happening here and how the plagues function. _____
8. John sees a beast **rising out of the sea** which resembles the dragon and receives authority from him. _____
9. It assures the people of God **that it makes no difference how, when or where Satan might show himself, he loses and they win.** _____

List Five Big Truths You've Learned. (Five listed, there are certainly more possible)

1. **Dominion over the world and the Church belongs to God and Christ.** _____
2. **The glory of the triumphant Church in Revelation relates to victory over Rome, and ultimately, for all time.** _____
3. **God alone is to be worshiped and served, no matter what the circumstances or consequences.** _____
4. **The early church proves God's dominion is real by outliving, out-suffering, and outlasting Rome.** _____
5. **Revelation is a book of pictures and visions full of figures, symbols, and images, many from the OT.** _____