



Book of Revelation

VISION TO STRENGTHEN THE SAINTS

Oakland International Fellowship

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The Drama Behind History

Revelation 19:11-21:8

- A Judgment of the harlot (17:1-19:6)
- B The divine judge (19:11-16)
- C Judgment of the beast (19:17-21 ; cf. Ezek.39)
- D Satan imprisoned for 1000 years (20:1-3)
- D' The saints reign/judge for 1000 years (20:4-6)
- C' The judgment of Gog and Magog (20:7-10 ; cf. Ezek.38-39)
- B' The divine judge (20:11-15)
- A' Vindication of the bride (21:1-22:5 ; cf. 19:7-9)

Dr. Greg Beale (NIGTC - p.983).

Heaven stands open, not just heaven's door (4:1) or heaven's temple (11:19 ; 15:5), but the whole of heaven (19:11).

A. The Rider on the white horse (19:11-16) clearly depicts the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. This rider wears “many crowns” – This reveals his universal authority over the nations (19:12).
2. The rider’s robe is “dipped with blood” (19:13) – Robes of the saints made white in the Lamb’s blood (7:14).
3. The rider battles with a “sharp sword” – This sword coming out of his mouth indicates that it is Jesus Christ (1:16 ; 19:15,21 ; Isa.49:2)
4. There are several explanations of the rider’s name recorded: a **“name written that no one knows but himself”**, one who is **“Faithful and True”**, the **“Word of God”** & the **“King of kings and Lord of lords”**.

B. The end of the Beast and False Prophet, and the death of those who followed them to war (19:17-21)

1. This fulfills the “3rd woe” that was never actually said to have been completed (8:13 ; 9:12 ; 11:14 ; 3rd woe?).
Announcement of the battle is made to birds in midair by an angel standing in the sun (also see Mat.24:28) & harkens back to the destruction of Gog & Magog as God saved his people (Ezek.38:17-23 ; 39:4-8,11,17-28).
2. Beast and false prophet are first captured and then “thrown alive into” the lake of fire (19:20 ; 20:10).
In Daniel too, the 4th and most powerful beast was destroyed and then thrown into the fire (Dan.7:7,11).
“The rest killed by the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider” (19:15,21 ; Isa.11:4 ; 49:2). The beast and false prophet are to be **“tormented day and night”** in the **“2nd death”** (20:6,10,14-15 ; 21:8)
3. God remains sovereign as the prime mover of peoples, nations and history (17:16-17 ; 19:20-21)
Previously, evil was permitted to conquer (13:7,15) but it is a battle that they cannot possibly win (17:14), as all are slain by the **“sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse”**. There is an ironic twist comparing the **“great supper of God”** (19:17) to the **“wedding supper of the Lamb”** (19:8-9).

John has described the end of men bearing the mark in chapters 15 & 16, a detailed description and the end of Babylon in chapters 17 & 18, and Christ's victory over the beast, false prophet and their followers in chapter 19. But there is one foe, the leader of them all, who remains to be dealt with in chapter 20. His doom, which has been mentioned previously, is inevitably related to theirs and is described in this last section of final judgment and vindication. Then the remainder in chapters 21 & 22 will deal with the glorious manifestation of the bride, the marvelous promises of God fulfilled and the final words of Christ through his messenger to the church that guarantee his return.

Though their defeat is recorded over several visions, all five foes stand and fall together. The 5 foes were first introduced in chapters 12-14 (Dragon, 1st beast, 2nd beast, Babylon, those with the mark of the beast). Then the fall of each of the 5 foes is recorded in the reverse order of their introduction. In chapter 20 the defeat of the last foe, Satan (the dragon), is recorded. As has been John's custom, this chapter recapitulates what has gone on before. In it the millennium, uniquely mentioned here, begins and concludes the church age. During this period, God sets limits on the devil and the powers of darkness, while caring for the Christians who serve as priests and reign with Christ. When this period draws to a close, Satan is released from the Abyss to lead his hordes into one last battle against Christ and those belonging to him. This then ushers all into eternal judgment before the throne.

C. Victory over evil through Christ: the 1st Resurrection during the Church Age and beyond (20:1-6).

1. When John says, "Then I saw" (20:1,6,11), this communicates the truth of God on 3 levels:
 - (1). VISIONARY – what John sees and hears
John sees an angel, with a key, holding a great chain, and a dragon cast into an Abyss for 1000 years.
 - (2). REFERENTIAL – what realities these things identify with in history
This is a period when Satan is bound and limited in influence as Christ reigns together with the saints.

And (3). SYMBOLIC – what meaning or interpretation they have
These images signify the limiting control and confinement of evil during the period that Christ asserts his authority in creation.
2. Behind the scenes we view both present realities and the real triumph of those who have died in Christ.
 - a. Christ's first coming resulted in Satan being bound (20:1-2 ; Mat.12:29 ; Mk.3:27). Satan was cast out of heaven (12:9,13 ; 20:1-2) and thus the symbolic 1000 year period, already begun, covers an uncertain span of time where Satan will be prevented from deceiving the nations (20:3).
 - b. More significant than Satan's final demise, God's judgment is portrayed as the climax of history. At the end of the 1000 years, Satan will once more be allowed to work a great deception, gathering the nations for battle, the battle is simply defined by the comment that **"fire came down from heaven and consumed them"** (20:9).
 - c. Thrones are referred to without specifying exactly where (20:4-6) (compare Dan.7:9-14,22,27). The period of 1000 years is left uncertain as to when it will be finished. And strangely, there is no mention of the return of Christ here. These can only be understood in the greater context of John's 'Revelation'.
 - d. This is a curbing of Satan's power and not a complete cessation of it.
During this 1000 year period, Christ commands sovereign authority over life and death, for He controls the **"key to the bottomless pit"** (9:1-2 ; 20:1), **"keys of death and Hades"** (1:18) and **"key of David"** (3:7)
3. Both the "1st resurrection" & the "2nd death" refer primarily to the spiritual realm (20:5-6 ; 21:8).
 - a. This passage presents the 5th of 7 blessings (20:6) that centers upon the **"1st resurrection"**, and focuses on the salvation of the saints who reign with Christ and serve as priests to God (1:6 ; 5:10 ; 20:6 ; 22:5 ; Isa. 61:6 ; 2 Tim.2:11-12 ; 1 Pet.2:5,9). According to the N.T, the saints will assist Christ in judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Mat.19:28 ; Lk.22:29-30) and even participate in the judgment of the world (2:26-27 ; 19:14 ; 1 Cor.6:2).
 - b. The concept of a "1st resurrection" is unique to Scripture here. The N.T. clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is **"Lord of both the dead and the living"** (Rom.14:9), and that there will certainly be a bodily resurrection to life after death (1 Cor.15:12-58). But here the concept of a **"1st resurrection"** actually is intended to parallel the concepts of **"1st born from the dead"** (1:5 ; Col.1:15,18 ; 3:1-4) and Christ as the **"1st fruits of those who have fallen asleep"** (1 Cor.15:20). The N.T. claims the church of God to be the **"assembly of the 1st born"** (Heb. 12:23), and John specifically identifies the church as the **"1st fruits of God and the Lamb"** (14:4). James does the same calling the church a **"kind of 1st fruits of his (the Father's) creatures"** (Ja.1:18).

As these concepts transcend the normal boundaries of physical life and deal with the spiritual realm, so do the concepts of **"1st resurrection"** and **"2nd death"**.
 - c. The main difficulty raised is how to understand the phrase "they came to life" as the meaning presents some ambiguity: **"They came to life and reigned with Christ 1000 years"** (20:4) and the **"rest of the dead" who "did not come to life until the 1000 years had ended"** (20:5)

N.T. teaches that believers ‘come to life’ when they come to faith in Christ and share in his resurrection life (Rom.6:4-13 ; 8:10-11). However, the phrase that **“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1000 years were ended”** implies a different kind of ‘resurrection’ for the wicked.

For those destined for the **“2nd death”** who are blindly unaware, spiritually dead, and objects of God’s wrath; **“coming to life”** will be a fearful resurrection before the judgment throne of God. It is a reality that will bring great **“weeping and gnashing of teeth”** (Mat.13:40-42 ; 22:13 ; 24:48-51 ; 25:28-30).

- d. Critique: Interpretation must be consistent in a specific uniform context – this is a reasonable expectation.

In answer to this critique: John’s use of the word **“life”** in John 5:24-29, gives it a dual meaning in a uniform context, communicating both spiritual and physical realities: true of the **“1st resurrection”** and **“2nd death”** too.

D. Victory over evil through Christ: The final battle and Satan’s doom (20:7-10)

1. At the very end of human history, Satan is to be released for a “little while” (20:3).
 - a. The **“little while”** of 20:3 intersects with the **“little time”** of 6:11 and the **“time is short”** of 12:12. It appears to form the very final stage of the entire church age. This **“little while”** (20:3) relates directly to the angel’s oath that there would be **“no more delay”** (10:6). It links with the **“one hour”** ruin of Babylon (3:10 ; 17:12 ; 18:10,17,19) and with both the **“time is near”** and Christ’s promise to be **“coming soon”** (1:1,3 ; 22:6,7,10,20).
The N.T. teaches of the restraint and then final revelation of the **“coming of the lawless one”** (2 Thess.2:6-12). Satan and his horde are currently restrained, bound in the Abyss (20:1-3 ; 2 Pet.2:4 ; Jude 6).
 - b. During this “little while”, Satan will seek to crush the people of God once and for all (20:7-8).
It parallels Ezekiel 38 & 39, especially Ezek.38:7-16 where Israel’s security is threatened. There Gog and Magog, representing the forces of evil, establish a united national alliance in preparation to attack Israel. It comes after Israel has been restored to the land (Ezek.36-37), but before the temple is rebuilt in the ‘new’ Jerusalem, a city that will belong to the whole of Israel (Ezek.40-48).
In Revelation, John’s prophecy reflects a similar spiritual pattern facing a unified threat of the nations at the end of its history. In the end, the **“camp of God’s people”**, the holy **“city he loves”** ultimately becomes the **“New Jerusalem”** (21:1ff), where the **“Lord God Almighty and the Lamb”** become its temple (21:22).
2. Deceiving the nations (20:7-10)
In Rev.20, the enemy stirring up the nations to destroy refers to a great battle of **“Armageddon”** (16:16). Chapter 20:7-10 is a recap of Rev.16:14-16 and Rev.19:17-21, as these bring final fulfillment to the prophecy of Ezek.38 & 39. (1) Gathering for war (2) using deception and (3) seeking to bring about world devastation: such were the evil designs of Gog and Magog. This unreasonable contest merits unremitting torment forever and ever, as symbolized by the **“lake of fire and sulfur”** (19:20 ; 20:10). It is referred to as the **“2nd death”** (20:14-15 ; 21:8 ; 2 Pet.2:4 ; Jude 6) and O.T. history and prophecy are certainly in view here (20:9 ; Ezek.38:22 ; 39:6 ; 2 Kings 1:7-17).
But who can oppose the awesome power of the Lord God Almighty? Scripture’s answer is obvious, **No one!**

E. Victory over evil through Christ: The throne of God and final judgment (20:11-15)

1. **Before the throne of God in judgment at the end of global history**
 - a. The great white throne harkens back to Dan.7:10-11 and Ezek.1:26-28.
Daniel’s **“Ancient of Days”** (Dan.7:9) is in view, as universal impact is signified by **“earth and sky fled away”** from His presence (Ps.102:25-27 ; Isa.51:6 ; Mat.24:35 ; 2 Pet.3:7,10-13). A **“white”** throne reveals holiness.
 - b. The books are opened and another book, the book of life, is opened (20:12).
Sea, death and Hades all give up their dead, signifying general resurrection. The dead are judged according to what they have done (Jer.17:10 ; Ps.62:12 ; Rom.2:6-10 ; 1 Pet.1:17). The ‘double reference’ to **“death and Hades”** provides strong emphasis. These are thrown into the lake of fire, called the **“2nd death”**, along with all those whose names are not written in the book of life (18:5).

Judgment and dissolution of the old order is now followed by the new creation in 21:1-8. These 8 verses are then expanded and recapitulated in the final major section 21:9-22:5. Thus, this next portion of Revelation deals with the glorious manifestation of the bride and the marvelous promises of God fulfilled, and progresses up until Jesus’ final words of promise to return in the epilogue. The beginning of Revelation focused upon the faulty and incomplete condition of the church (2 & 3), but this final section focuses upon the church in its perfected state. In strong contrast to

Babylon and the woman sitting on the scarlet beast (17 & 18), the New Jerusalem and the bride of the Lamb are vividly described in all their glory (21- 22:5).

F. The new order of things (21:1-22:5)

1. Vision of a new world order in a new heaven and a new earth (21:1 ; Isa.65:17-19 ; 66:22-24)

This depicts a movement in history from the transitory to the permanent, from a temporary '1st' that is now old, to the everlasting new. As the 1st earth and the 1st heaven pass away, the **"new heaven and new earth"** probably imply something rejuvenated and transformed, rather than a totally other creation (Rom.8:18-23).

a. The new order brings radical changes: '7' eliminations that represent the old order of mankind passed away.

- (1) There will be no sea (21:1), -- symbolized the abode of evil forces (13:1,6-8) and turbulent nations (17:1,2,15 ; Isa.57:20,21).
- (2) There will be no mourning (7:16-17 ; 21:4).
- (3) There will be no crying, (" " ")
- (4) There will be no pain (" " ")
- (5) There will be no death (20:13-14 ; 1 Cor.15:54-55).
- (6) There will be no more curse (22:3), and
- (7) There will no longer be any night (21:25 ; 22:5 ; compare Gen.8:22).

b. The new order manifests the intimacy, perfection and permanence of relationship between God and His people. John claims that he saw **"a new heaven and a new earth"** (21:1) and **"a holy city, the New Jerusalem"** (21:2) coming down from heaven (Isa.65:17-19 ; 66:22-23). These convey the meaning of a perfect creation made by God and set apart for God.

The Holy City and New Jerusalem are also understood to be **"the Bride, the wife of the Lamb"** (21:2,9 ; Isa. 52:1-10 ; 61:10), and John hears the voice from the throne declaring that **"the dwelling of God is with man"** (21:3). These confirm and assure God's people that this is an intimate and lasting relationship.

All this is established upon the very nature and character of God as **"the Alpha and the Omega"** (1:8 ; 21:6 ; 22:13.), **"the beginning and the end."** (21:6 ; 22:13). Later these two expressions become interwoven with a third in full affirmation of the person of Jesus Christ as God (22:13). He who is **"coming soon"** will complete God's covenant promise, in full judgment of the wicked and complete vindication of his people (22:7,12,20).

c. The new order affirms that judgment will be fully satisfied.

John hears the voice command him to write **"words that are trustworthy and true"** asserting that **"It is done!"** (21:6). This alludes to the completion of the covenant promise in **"all things new"** (21:1,5). Like the words of Jesus Christ on the cross, **"It is finished!"** (Jn.19:30), the victory of redemption is complete: **"It is done!"** God's final purpose and eternal judgment have been satisfied to the full.

Judgment in the **"lake that burns with fire and sulfur"** is for all those who continue their evil ways (19:20 ; 20:10,15 ; 21:8 ; 22:11a,15). There is an unusual use of the word **"cowardly"** in this list of manifest wickedness (21:8). It highlights those unwilling to face persecution and maintain a faithful witness. This lake of fire is for all those who will remain outside the holy city (21:26-27 ; 22:15). It is a hopeless condition of eternal punishment, void of any fellowship with God. To these, the **"2nd death"** (2:11 ; 20:6,14-15 ; 21:8), brings an ultimate divine justice that eternally vindicates the persecuted / martyred saints (6:10,11 ; 18:6-8,20 ; 19:2).

Discussion Questions:

1. When you read the description of the one seated on a white horse, what kind of comfort does it bring to you?
2. How should John's vision of **"all things new"** impact us when at times it feels like the "same old, same old"?
3. What is your response to the depiction **"tormented day and night forever and ever"**? (Rev.20:10)