

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 49

December 1, 2014 – December 7, 2014

Revelation 15-19

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, reading it like an ordinary book is quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to what we are calling “The Context Bible.” We have arranged Scripture to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John’s gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

These written lessons have historically corresponded to each week’s reading to explain the material. As the series winds down, however, the lessons do not fit fully with the scheduled readings for each week. Instead, the lessons are accelerated from the reading calendar. This is because no Life Groups meet the last two Sundays of the year in the home church for these lessons, so without this modification, the classes would fail to cover the end of Revelation that bring human history to a VICTORIOUS conclusion. The lessons will still include the regular reading schedule to complete the one-year Bible plan (week 49 here with week 50 attached).

Week Forty-Nine Readings

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| <p>12/1 The Seven Trumpets Rev 8</p> <p>Num 10 Zeph 1:7-1:18 Luk 21:25-21:28 Lam 3:19 Amos 5:18-5:20 Ex 30:1-30:10</p> | <p>12/3 The Seven Trumpets Cont'd Rev 9</p> <p>Job 3 Pslm 115 Isa 24 Amos 7</p> <p>12/4 The Little Scroll Rev 10</p> <p>Pslm 29 Isa 57:14-57:17 Pslm 146 Ezek 3:1-3:3</p> <p>Pslm 119:97-119:104 Col 2:1-2:5 Prov 5:1-5:14</p> | <p>12/5 The Two Witnesses Rev 11:1-11:3</p> <p>Ezek 40-41:14</p> <p>12/6 The Two Witnesses Cont'd Rev 11:1-11:3</p> <p>Ezek 41:15-42:20 Ezek 43:13-43:27</p> <p>12/7 Off</p> |
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BACKGROUND

As we continue working through the Revelation of John, we re-emphasize the need to understand it in light of the era of its composition. The book was written to seven specific churches in Asia Minor that would have read it in light of their own experiences and, hopefully, have understood much of it. After all, the name “Revelation” speaks to a “revealing.” Having said that, in earlier lessons, we illustrated that the number seven was significant for symbolizing a totality. From this we can fairly deduce that the Revelation was not only for the seven specified churches, but was also for the church in its fullest sense, including the church throughout history.

Revelation is a kind of writing well-known in its day. Scholars today call this genre “apocalyptic” from the Greek word *apokalypsis* (ἀποκάλυψις) which actually means “revelation.” When scholars use the word, they are generally referring to writings that use symbolism and speak of the present and future, frequently stemming from a narrative of visions. There are many apocalyptic works from the centuries before and after the biblical book Revelation. As these writings are well known for using symbolic numbers and language to impart their messages, Revelation is a marvelous example.

As we study the book, therefore, it is critical to our understanding that we discern as best we are able, what the symbolism means. Fortunately the Bible itself informs much of our understanding. A great deal of the symbolism comes directly from the Old Testament.

The book relies upon the Old Testament not only for many of its symbols, but also its ideas, and even structure. As far back as Eusebius (c.260-c.339 A.D.), the Greek text of Revelation was considered very stilted that was much more Hebraic in its reading style than true Greek.

There are many modern ideas on how to understand and study the book. We do not recite all of those in these lessons, but we do try to illustrate some of the differences where it matters on the issues as discussed. While there are legitimate and fair disagreements among well-schooled scholars on the approaches and layout of the revelation, there is really no disputing the overall theme. The book emphatically proclaims that God sits enthroned over all of history. He has ensured the destiny of his children through the Lamb who conquered death and redeemed his people by his shed blood.

STRUCTURE

Recognizing that differences in views about the structure of the book, and the corresponding differences in interpretation, exist among scholars, we nonetheless must use a structure for this set of lessons. Some scholars believe that Revelation reads in a

normal time sequence like a book we might read today. In other words, it starts with material relevant to the contemporaneous church in the first century, but then as it progresses, it moves through history until at the end, it recounts the ends of days with a window into eternity. This necessarily dictates different conclusions about what the text is referring to in a number of places.

In these lessons, we are using a different approach. Much like the book of Daniel, we are using an approach that explains Revelation as a series of cycles that repeat themselves. In a parallelism reminiscent of Hebrew poetry, the book proclaims material past, present and future, speaking to the time between the first and second coming of Christ.¹ It then proclaims material again – past, present and future. It then takes another perspective as it explains the material again, past, present and future. This happens for seven (the “complete” number) cycles throughout the whole book.²

As an illustration of this, think of an onion. You peel a layer of an onion, and then you get another layer that is much the same, just slightly smaller. The illustration breaks down a bit because in Revelation, as the same cycles get repeated throughout the book, the later time periods get fuller and fuller treatment. It is the onion peeled from the inside out! Each successive layer is larger and has more depth.

We have seen the first “layer” in chapters 1-3. Jesus walks among the lampstands, (symbolic for walking “among the churches”). He is present with John and displayed as one in power and victory, one who has conquered the grave (Rev. 1:13-1:18). He proceeds to speak of things that are to come (Rev. 1:19). From there, we read letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. These letters speak to those churches and to all

¹ Parallelism was an artistic construction in ancient Hebrew writing and thought as well as other Semitic cultures. We see in many poetic and prophetic writings the ideas of parallelism where the second phrase repeats the ideas of a previous phrase, giving a slightly different or fuller meaning to the concept expressed. This is also found in a fuller sense in books like Daniel where the future events were set forth multiple times in five different visions. Daniel chapter 2, 7, 8, 9, and 11 all cover the same general time period, but as different visions with differing emphases. For example, in Daniel chapter 7 we read of four beasts that represent coming kings, likely with the leopard representing the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great. Then in Daniel 8 we read again of the same future, but this time in a vision of a battling ram and goat. The ram has two horns, representing the Medes and Persians, while the goat is Alexander’s Greek conquest. Then again in Daniel 11, we read of the coming successive kingdoms from another approach and in different detail.

² A classic explanation of this approach, although modified a bit in these lessons, is that of New Testament scholar William Hendriksen (1900-1982) in his book *More Than Conquerors* (Baker 1967). This book was initially published in 1939 and is still in print today. Hendriksen was the principal translator of the book of Revelation for the New International Version. Hendriksen’s ideas are used in multiple places in this lesson. Another scholar who sets out this approach is Leon Morris in his commentary, *The Revelation of St. John* (Eerdmans 1980). See also the discussion of this versus other approaches in G. K. Beale, “The Influence of Daniel Upon the Structure and Theology of John’s Apocalypse,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, (Dec. 1984) 413-423.

churches. The messages contain not only concerns of what was happening in the churches, but also promises of what *was going to happen* should the churches not pay attention and make changes.

The next layer of the onion was found in Revelation chapters 4 through 7. These passages started with John's vision of the throne, showing the holiness and authority of God, the Lamb, and the Spirit. This scene includes a scroll that has seven seals, containing the future of God's people and the earth. With Revelation 6, the opening of the seven seals began. Like many of the "sevens" in Revelation, these seals are divided into a group of four and a group of three. The first four were horsemen followed by three other seals. This was covered in the last lesson.

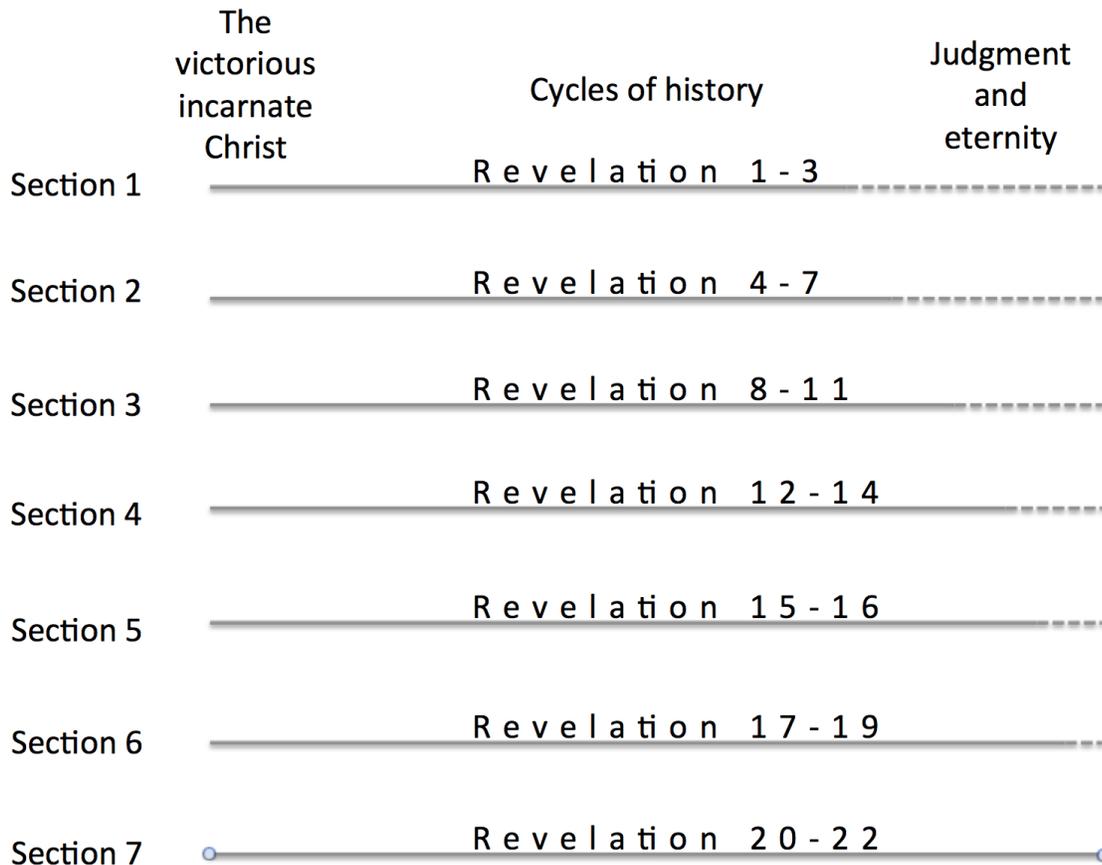
The third cycle or layer of the onion was found in Revelation 8-11, centered around the seven trumpets. While the first cycle focused on the churches and their holiness, the second cycle emphasized the effects of outside persecution on the saints. The third cycle was more focused on the effects of the coming history on the people outside the church. The trumpets were warnings of things to come that should drive people into the safety of God's arms and belief in his Son. Unfortunately, the same vision indicates that many will not be moved to faith but will rather deepen their disbelief, much like Pharaoh did in the midst of the plagues sent as warning to him. (Key language in the trumpet warnings echoes the plagues used in Egypt over a millennia earlier.)

The fourth cycle is found in Revelation 12-14. As with each other cycle, the vision begins with the conquering Christ and proceeded with the history that will culminate in the victory of Christ at the end of time.

The fifth and sixth cycles are set out in this lesson. The fifth cycle is found in Revelation 15-16 while the sixth is in Revelation 17-19. These cycles speak to the churches in John's time, explaining the events of the world, but they also speak to the churches in our day and throughout history. Just as the letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 reach out and speak to all churches, so these cyclical visions give a measure of understanding and encouragement in their insight for the churches of every age.

We have used the following diagram/time line to illustrate this approach to Revelation's structure and meaning:

Revelation's Progressive Parallelism



IMPORTANTLY: There is much in Scripture about the end of days. Revelation is not the full answer or explanation of what is to happen in the end times. There is a wealth of things contained in Revelation on that subject, but the book was written to real churches over 1900 years ago. It had a message to those churches and we do it a disservice if we lose track of that. **HOWEVER**, we do a disservice to other Scriptures if we fail to see that they have much to say, sometimes more to say, about the end times than passages in Revelation. For example, in Romans 11, we have a good discussion from Paul about the restoration of many Jews before the Lord returns. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Paul speaks of the end times giving important insights. The goal in these lessons is simply to focus on Revelation and the contextual Scriptures chosen for their relevance in understanding the book.

Revelation 15-16: The Bowls of Wrath (Revelation 15; Exodus 15:1-21; Psalm 111; Amos 4:13; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 86; Numbers 17; 1 Kings 8:31-66; Revelation 16; Isaiah 66:1-6, 15-24; Psalm 19; 76; 83; 88; 106; 119:137-144; 2 Peter 3; Matthew 24:42-44; Proverbs 12:3)

In the earlier cycles, we have read of the church and its internal struggles for holiness during the time beginning with the first and ending with the second coming of Christ (the “Gospel Age”) (Revelation 1-3); of the martyrdom and persecution of the saints in the Gospel Age in Revelation 4-7; and the same cycle of history focused on warning the unbelieving world in Revelation 8-11, the warning sounded as seven trumpets. Then in Revelation 12-14 we read the same cycle, but this time the warning is over: God’s judgment is poured out in seven bowls. Judgment is not poured out in warning like the trumpets, but in a final sense as the warnings had gone unheeded. This section indicates a time comes where unbelievers who have refused to repent can reach a point of no real return. They receive God’s unbridled judgment that is completed in the last bowl on the Day of Judgment.

The judgments echo the judgments brought on Egypt as Pharaoh refused to honor God by treating his people right. Pharaoh’s obstinate refusal to honor or heed Moses’ pleas led to curse after curse until finally he let God’s people go from slavery. Even after that, however, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the Israelites to the Re(e)d Sea seeking to destroy them and bring them back under his control. But despite having the best army of the age, Pharaoh was not successful because he was fighting against Almighty God. Using the Re(e)d Sea, God engulfed Pharaoh’s army and brought deliverance to his people.

Chapter 15 explains John’s vision of seven angels with seven plagues representing the final wrath of God. This gives the preview that these plagues are no longer warnings; they are judgments.³ The scene shows John a collection of saints who “conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name,” meaning those who did not succumb to Satan and his efforts to secure allegiance and obedience among humanity. These are free from Satan’s grasp and they sing the “song of Moses” *and* the “song of the Lamb.”

Exodus 15:1-21 has the song of Moses. While it recounts God’s victory over Pharaoh and his army, it begins with language especially poignant as language also of the “Lamb.”

The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.
The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name (Ex. 15:2-3).

³ John says this vision of the plagues is the “last.” The futurist or linear reading of Revelation typically sees this as coming at the end of history. Instead, we consider it a reference to John’s sequential seeing of the visions. We see in 15:5 that John again speaks of this vision using instead of “last” the phrase, “after these things.” This is John’s way of presenting an order of what he saw, not the chronology of events described (see Rev. 4:1; 7:1, 9; 18:1; 19:1). These seven plagues might also be considered “last” in the sense that they are the final echo of the plagues started in Egypt (the “first”). The Gospel Age is the “Last Days” of Scripture, so these plagues taking place in the Gospel Age are truly last plagues.

This is the two-fold thrust of the Revelation vision and is befittingly called the “song of the Lamb.” God, through the Lamb, has become the salvation of his people. It is a theme oft repeated in the Old Testament. Psalm 111, for instance, speaks of God keeping his covenant and sending redemption to his people (Ps. 111:5, 9). He is full of majesty and splendor, and also is gracious and merciful (Ps. 111:3, 4). But God is no soft, cuddly, teddy bear. To know him is also to respect and hold him in awe, to “fear the Lord” in the language of the Old Testament (Ps. 111:10). As Amos said,

For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name! (Amos 4:13).

A second thrust is not to be missed, however, especially in light of the coming bowls of wrath/plagues. Namely, God is also a God of judgment. He is a man of war. In 21st century America, we tend to think of God simply as the embodiment of love, but we forget that pure love has an intense aversion of evil. Evil destroys that which is good, and God goes to war against evil. Pharaoh was at a point of no return once his chariots chased the Israelites into the sea. God judged him and his army, and the result is now history.

Here we are going to see that God executes similar judgments in the pages of history on the godless who are so bent on evil they have passed any point of return. This lesson is set out further prior to the actual pouring out of the bowls of judgment in the last verses of chapter 15 where John sees the “sanctuary of the tent of witness” in heaven. The “tent of witness” is the tent (“tabernacle”) that Israel built under Moses’ oversight as instructed by God. In the area called the “Holy of Holies,” the Ark of the Covenant was placed along with the witnesses of God’s love and judgment (the tablets with the commandments, the budding rod,⁴ and the jar of manna). The Holy of Holies was entered only on the Day of Atonement and only by the High Priest who took a sacrifice in mediation for the sins of the people.

In John’s vision, seven angels come out from the Holy of Holies each receiving a bowl of God’s wrath to pour out. As they do so, John wrote that,

no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished (Rev. 15:8).

Here we have another indication this is a point of no return. There is a judgment that comes from God on those who do not heed his warnings, who are so bent on evil and

⁴ In Numbers 17 we read of the rod in the tent of witness (or testimony) as a sign to prevent the people from grumbling.

rebellion that there is no more mediation. Their actions are going to receive judgment. Period.

Now some very sensitive people may read this and worry, “What about me? Have I reached that point?” Of course, the answer to that is “No!” No one who wants God has ever reached that point. God is a God of justice, but also a God of mercy and compassion. That is the picture of the Lamb. It is both God’s justice (death for sin) *and* God’s mercy (*his death* – our sin!). Rightly we see there the description of God from Deuteronomy 32:4,

The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

The sensitive can take refuge in psalms like Psalm 86. God *is* “good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon” him (Ps. 86:5). Solomon in his prayer consecrating the temple emphasized the same thing, that when the reprobates “repent” and “turn their hearts,” then God forgives them (1 Kgs. 8:46-50).

The people who are receiving the bowls of wrath are people who will NEVER turn to God, regardless of what is said or done to or for them. They are resolute enemies of God. Even Paul found full redemption from God as he turned to God. These are those who would see Jesus on the road to Damascus and spit on his face, knowing fully who he was and is. These are those that Jesus refers to as blaspheming the Holy Spirit. These incur the bowls of wrath poured out in Revelation 16.

As the bowls are turned out and the judgment of God is poured upon the unrepentant evil, we observe plagues that are among the plagues of Moses and Egypt. There is the plague of sores (bowl 1 – Rev. 16:2). It is an interesting contrast of Scripture in the diseases as they work upon believers versus unbelievers. The believers have the assurance that all things work together for their good, including disease and illness (Rom. 8:28). Yet for the unbeliever, the disease comes not for good, but in judgment. A good example is King Herod and his onslaught of worms and intestinal disorder resulting in his death (Acts 12:20-24).

The second bowl was poured into the sea turning it into blood and killing all within it. In the Egyptian plagues, the Nile was turned into blood, but the sea swallowed up Pharaoh and his army. Here we have the two combined, and the sea turns into blood and kills all within it. This would, of course, affect commerce (fishing and trade) and be devastating to humanity. While our scientific knowledge understands more fully that the world could not exist without life in the sea (plankton alone is integral to climate issues and without ocean life, life on land would be near impossible for most species today), even in John’s day, the picture of the sea being dead would convey tragic consequences on business and trade. Just as with disease, however, business and economic upheaval does not bring destruction on the believer, but actually works out

for the best. It is the unrepentant before God who can be destroyed through these events.

This second bowl also emphasizes the “finality” of this judgment as compared to the “warning” given in the previous cycle of trumpets. With the second trumpet, a third of the ocean was turned to blood and a third of the creatures within it were killed. This was a warning. In this cycle, we read about those who do not heed the warnings of God, but turn further away from him. These people will receive full judgment. No longer is one-third affected as a warning, but the entirety is brought down. The effect is full and final.

The third bowl has the rivers and inland water springs turned into blood. This is the source of fresh water for people and animals alike. No one is drinking from the sea, but water wells and inland water sources are important for human and beast alike. Even beyond drinking, they are used to irrigate and water crops. The pollution of this water supply would speak of famine and disruption of basic day-to-day life. Consider the picture we get from this passage and the rest of Scripture. While the believer experiences financial and daily hardships from life in the broken world, there is protection and promise that God will work it all out for the believers’ good (Rom. 8:28) and none of it will ever separate the believer from Christ’s life (Rom. 8:35-39). For the unbeliever, these events should warn them of their sin and turn them to Jesus (the third trumpet of warning affected only one-third of the rivers and springs). While the hard-hearted, never-to-repent blasphemer of the Holy Spirit will find in this full judgment of an earthly variety (the final judgment coming with the last bowl).

The fourth bowl of wrath was a scorching of fierce heat and wrath for those who would not “repent and give him [God] glory” (Rev. 16:8). As with the other bowls, we are to understand the symbols used, rather than to see this as literal. This is not a time where God will turn humans into torches (the Greek literally says during this plague the sun will “burn men with fire.” Echoing the plague on Egypt of hail and fire coming from heaven, this plague hearkens to the oppression frequently identified with heat. Oppression so intense that it can be considered “scorching,” will be a purifying fire for the believer (Zech. 13:9). For the unrepentant, however, the oppression is one of judgment and appropriate misery.

The fifth bowl plunged the kingdom of the beast and his people into darkness. This is a blinding darkness that renders day-to-day life incredibly difficult. We lose track of this in the 21st century when light is a switch away, ending any darkness. But in John’s time, darkness was incredibly restrictive. There was much that just could not be done in the dark, without the necessary light. The effect of this judgment was to bring out curses upon God instead of repentance (Rev. 16:11). We can readily see in the world of darkness those who quickly say, “I don’t believe in God. Why else would all these bad things happen? And if there is a God, he is not a good one, so I wouldn’t follow him.

A good God would never allow this!” These people sit harshly in judgment upon God rather than accepting that darkness comes from the sin of this world, and God is the remedy, not the problem!

The sixth bowl dries up the Euphrates so that armies can easily pass, and the historic enemies of Israel and Judah (Assyria and Babylon) then have easy access to bring their armies straight into battle against God’s people. The vision as John sees it moves us to the end of the Gospel Age as John sees the forces against God and his people drawn up on the historic battlefield of Armageddon (pronounced in the Greek as “Harmageddon”).

This is an interesting reference. It is the only time in the Bible the word is used. However, there is a place in Israel called “Megiddo,” and while John’s spelling differs a good deal from the Hebrew, if one adds the Hebrew word for mountain (“*Har*”) one gets the area likely referred by John.⁵ This area is well-known for a most significant Old Testament battle, that gives great significance to its usage here in John’s vision.

At the ancient battleground of Megiddo, there were two battles of good versus evil fought in Israel’s history. First, when the armies of the Canaanite Sisera and King Jabin were deemed unbeatable by Israel who cowered in fear, not even bringing in crops lest they should be killed or captured, Deborah stepped forth and called for Barak to lead God’s armies in victory (Jdg. 4-5). Second, Judah’s good king Josiah went to battle there against Pharaoh Neco in another good versus evil showdown.

John uses this historic battleground to describe the evil assault of the forces of Satan against the church. This battle is not the saints’ to win, however. It is a battle fought by the Lord. For while Satan will array his forces against that which is holy and right, the battle ground will change completely by the coming of the Lord Jesus! As John put it,

For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) (Rev. 16:14-15).

The enemy can war against the saints, but there will be a day, an unexpected day, when the Lord returns, and with it, John sees the seventh and final bowl poured out – Judgment Day.

⁵ The Greek version of the Old Testament (the “Septuagint”) uses “Magiddon” to refer to Megiddo in verses like Josh. 12:21.

These bowls are “harsh treatments” as people’s worst “fears” are realized. They come upon those who refuse to heed God’s warnings and repent, choosing instead to simply do more and more evil (Is. 66:1-6). Even as God sets up a new heaven and a new earth, the evil-doers who refuse his call for repentance will suffer the justice due their actions (Is. 66:15-24).

We have set out in the context readings a number of psalms well understood in this context. The psalms speak of the way God’s light and sun should illuminate the heart and bring people into relationship with him, as opposed to burning people up in judgment (Ps. 11). For God is glorious, even in his judgments, and no one can rightly stand before him. We should never choose to be in his anger when we can walk in his peace (Ps. 76). For God will rightly and justly execute punishment on those who destroy his saints (Ps. 83; 88). Yet even his judgments sound first as warnings, seeking those who would repent so he can display his mercy (Ps. 106). For in a repentant life, seeking God’s truth and trying to follow him, is found peace and joy (Ps. 119:137-144).

So the believers are assured that a day of judgment is coming, and that we see God’s judgments in the world today, trying to move people to repentance, and executing real judgment on those who refuse to repent. And in patience, God awaits until the fullness of time, not wanting any to perish, before he returns like a thief in the night (2 Pt. 3; Mt. 24:42-44). The believer can be confident that,

No one is established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous will never be moved (Prov. 12:3).

God’s wrath will be fully poured out and the cup will be “drained” (Rev. 16:19). John saw Babylon (representing God’s adversaries and the empire of Satan) destroyed.

The Prostitute and the Beast (Revelation 17; Nahum 3; Daniel 2:46-49; Ezekiel 21 and 23) The Fall of Babylon (Revelation 18; Jeremiah 50; Isaiah 47; Ezekiel 26-27; Psalm 114; Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 14:1-11; Amos 4:1-12) The Marriage Supper (Revelation 19; Rom 8:18-25; Hebrews 8; Philippians 3:12-4:1; Proverbs 29:16; Zechariah 8; Isaiah 35; Psalm 87)

With Revelation 17-19, we read the sixth cycle of the Gospel Age given to John in the Revelation. In this cycle, we read of the nature of Satan’s “run” during the Gospel Age and the certainty of his fall, glimpsing even deeper into the victorious future of the age to come.

The cycle begins in Revelation 17 with one of the seven angels taking John to see the whore of Babylon, better appreciating her nature and the judgment coming upon her. The image is a seductress sitting upon a scarlet beast, the enemy of the saints. The scarlet beast is not the only one reflecting the blood of the saints, but the prostitute herself is drunk on martyrs’ blood.

The scene is quite descriptive in ways that make it fairly self-explanatory, quite revealing, and serious as a great warning for the saints. The seductress allures people with her “golden cup of abominations,” the great temptations and pleasures of the world. That the woman was the harlot of “Babylon” also keys us into the seductive nature of this vignette as Babylon was the ancient enemy of Judah that brought destruction, and yet was famous as a seat of culture, industry and commerce, and power (Ezek. 21).

This vision portrays the seduction of knowledge, power, culture, industry and productivity, worldly success and fame, all of which are used by the enemy to draw people away from faith. It is a simple seduction that people fall for time and time again.

The prophets readily used the image of a seductress for the passions of the present age with their attractions and distractions. In Nahum 3, we read of the seductress as just such a symbol.

And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms (Nah. 3:4).

In Ezekiel 23, we read of the seductions of other nations on the people of God with a special emphasis on how those seductions inevitably lead to misery and pain. The life of the seductress is not good, but neither is the fate of the seduced!

The seductress rides on a beast who “was and is not, and is about to rise” (Rev. 17:8). For John’s day, the beast might have found its manifestation in Rome, but the harlot’s song is one sung over and over from one time to the next. One day it was Babylon, one day Macedonia, one day Persia, another Rome. Since the prostitute has taken many forms, wherever the culture and powers of the day use the allures of wealth, success, power, pleasure, or anything else to distract from faith and lead people blissfully away from faith and into the estate of the beast.

This is actually a war upon the saints, but it is one that the Lamb wins! In Revelation 18 we read of the victory accomplished by the Lamb.

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living” (Rev. 18:2-3).

On the cross, Jesus did win the victory, empowering the believers to come forth from the seductress, avoiding the plagues and judgments appropriately due her.

Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues (Rev. 18:4).

The destruction of Babylon will be complete and irrevocable, as we have seen in the prior bowls of wrath. It will come upon the rulers and power brokers, the rich and prosperous, the success stories of this age (Rev. 18).

Babylon is an appropriate symbol for the nation of the enemy also because of its role in the Old Testament history and Scripture. Babylon was victorious over many nations, not just Judah (Ezek. 26-27). Babylon was a “lover of pleasure,” who “felt secure in its wickedness” seeming on top of the world in its “knowledge” and “wisdom” (Is. 47:8, 10-11).

Yet Babylon itself received prophecies of destruction in the Old Testament. The nation that was victorious over Judah and so many others, had its own fate sealed by its own sin. Jeremiah 50 is a strong example of the full and complete destruction forecasted for Babylon.

Behold, I am against you, O proud one, declares the Lord GOD of hosts, for your day has come, the time when I will punish you. The proud one shall stumble and fall, with none to raise him up (Jer. 50:31-32).

Babylon was due judgment (Is. 14:1-11) for it never accomplished anything out of some greater power than God’s. In fact, Babylon (and other nations in like position) served as God’s tool in bringing judgment to others! (Prov. 16:4; Amos 4:1-12).

Babylon, in any incarnation or age, is nothing compared to the Lord God. All earth appropriately trembles before God; only a fool would not (Ps. 114).

In contrast to those beguiled by the temporary and passing pleasures of this age, there is coming something altogether different for the saints. As Revelation 19 so elegantly portrays, there is a coming harmony of uniting between saints and their Lord that can best be described as the wedding feast to end all wedding feasts. This feast shows all of heaven rejoicing, giving glory to God since

the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure (Rev. 19:7-8).

The angel instructs John to write that those invited to the marriage supper are specially blessed. This scene is so touching and beautiful that the whorings of the harlot of Babylon are more clearly seen for the shallowness they are.

Revelation 19 shows in a vivid picture the bridegroom, the one who brought about the victory, securing his bride from the beast and executing judgment on his enemies. He is the one on the white horse (which we read of as the first of the horsemen of the apocalypse in Revelation 6:2). He is Jesus! He is called “Faithful and True” (Rev. 19:11). He is called “The Word of God” (Rev. 19:13). He judges in righteousness, warring on the enemies of God (Rev. 19:11). He is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16).⁶

He conquers all who oppose him and the saints, and ensures the blessed eternity for his people! (Prov. 29:16). Zechariah 8 spoke prophetically of God returning his people to a city where he would again dwell with them. While a level of this prophetic word can be seen in the return of God’s people from Babylonian captivity, it has its truest promise in the final reckoning where God brings his people into his eternal city. This is similarly true with the promises in Isaiah 35, that

a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way (Isa. 35:8).

There,

the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isa. 35:10).

With this in mind, we can better understand Paul’s words,

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us....we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:18, 23).

We saints are the receivers of a new and better covenant than ever before. We worship a merciful God who has made a way through Christ for our eternal security (Heb. 8). Paul reminded the Philippians that this had not yet been realized, even though it has been secured! We eagerly await it in hope and confidence, realizing in Calvary and the

⁶ This comment adds an extra focus in light of Daniel 2:46-49, where Nebuchadnezzar, the *king of Babylon* finally falls and realizes that the God of Daniel is the true “God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries.”

empty tomb that we already see the victory. This changes not only who we are, but how we live.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved (Phil. 4:1).

This concludes the fifth and sixth cycles in our Revelation study in context, leaving the final cycle in next week’s lesson!

QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about God judging the wicked? Does that seem “fair” to you?
2. Have you been warned by God in your life to change your ways and honor him in repentance? How have you responded?
3. Are you able to trace God’s victories in your life already, where the curses of the world worked together as blessings in your life? Explain.

Week Fifty Readings

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| <p style="text-align: center;">12/8 The Two Witnesses and Seventh Trumpet Rev 11:4-19</p> <p>Ps 52 Ezek 38 Num 8:1-4</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">12/10 The Woman and Dragon Cont’d Rev 12</p> <p>Ps 74 Hos 2 Isa 14:12-23 Ps 96</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">12/12 The Lamb and the 144,000 Rev 14:1-5</p> <p>Heb 12:18-29 Isa 33 Gen 4</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">12/9 The Woman and Dragon Rev 12</p> <p>Isa 26:16-21 Isa 66:7-14 Mic 4:6-13 Isa 27 Ezek 28:11- 29:21</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">12/11 The Beasts Rev 13</p> <p>Dan 7:1-8 Dan 7:15-28 Rom 13:1-7 Mk 12:13-17 Prv 24:19-22 Mic 7 Dan 11:36-39 Col 3:1-4</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">12/13 The Lamb and the 144,000 Cont’d Rev 14:1-5</p> <p>Amos 5:1-17 Prv 22:22-23 Ezek 24 (with vs 9-11) Jer 3 Mk 8:31-9:1 Hb 9:11-14</p> <p style="text-align: center;">12/14 Off</p> |