

Revelation Bible Study

The End of the Story - Chapter 19-22

Synopsis - Chapters 19 – 22 - God is having the final say on the history of His Creation. We also get a glimpse into eternity/heaven. We witness God's final judgement of evil and God bringing creation to a newness and goodness that will last for eternity. In addition, the book ends with an urgency and an encouragement to decide for ourselves whether we will align ourselves with the Lamb or evil.

That's Revelation's story:

- Story of urgency and decision - as the heat of reality comes pressing on people
- Jesus knows His people - but He is the risen Lord - chapters 4 and 5 tell us he is worthy to be praised and to reveal his ultimate will within the world/cosmos
- John sees eternal/infinite realities and he attempts to capture them in finite language - His words are prophetic but they are also apocalyptic - because as evil intensifies and becomes increasingly destructive, God makes a move on it
- God isn't passive about what is happening in the lives of the people he loves
- God will have the final say about everything in the human story

The Audience of Revelation

- Why it is important to reconsider the audience of this letter - it's important because this audience is not just Jesus followers from first century - it is us.
- Every person we know who has any sense of self-awareness, has concerns that are deep and alarming when they enter into a time/season of pain or problems
- If you are suffering or needing hope or confused or struggling, there's one truth that always cuts to the heart of all of our issues - if we try to handle the struggles alone, those struggles will get the best of us.
- John's vision, his book written to a specific audience in the first century, would have been something that these early Jesus followers would have understood immediately. Their relationship with John AND with Jesus was meant to bring them hope in the midst of their struggles.

Revelation's contextual audience: The Persecuted, The Assimilated and the Complacent

1. The Persecuted: These early Jesus followers were experiencing massive persecution and open hostility from Rome because of their faith. In extreme cases, their allegiance with God in Christ meant torture and death. To say that Jesus was/is Lord and not Caesar was a statement of treason and that often-meant elimination and death. The language of Revelation is non-conformist and defiant, the audience of this book knew that and it brought them hope
2. The Assimilated: While some Christians were facing open hostility, others were experiencing the pressure to conform. There were all sorts of sticky dilemmas in the first century pluralistic world. Should they eat food sacrificed to idols? Should they go to festivals dedicated to local gods like Dionysus or Artemis to preserve in some cases their families, their friendships or business relationships? There must have been huge pressure for them to blend into their surroundings and lose their identity in Christ. These words and visions of Revelation challenged the myth of Rome, actually gave people a word that they COULD resist that the seductive culture was throwing at them.
3. The Complacent: Some Jesus followers in 1st century was so wealthy and comfortable they saw no problem at all with the dominant culture of Rome, so they bought into self-sufficiency. Like self-sufficiency does, it pulled them away from dependency on Jesus. The book of Revelation confronted them.

That was the audience then - but perhaps you can see yourself in one of these 3 situations.

- For those who feel threatened, Revelation is a book of encouragement to keep the faith amid open hostility. It encourages us to know that truth will prevail.
 - For those under the gun of stress, struggle, fear and all-out assault on your life (physically, emotionally, relationally, whatever) - Revelation speaks the words, "hold on - Lamb power is on your side."
 - For those who are just trying to assimilate and blend into culture, the vision of Revelation may act as a challenge as John makes a sharp and emphatic contrast between God and those things that take God's place. Has there been any cultural pressure on you to Assimilate - you know what that means don't you? For us, just like dominant culture of the first century, OUR century has seductive power and it too lulls people to sleep until they lose track when something is wrong. Seductive cultural power offers security, but when things go south in people's lives, it won't or can't come through, when threads start to unravel in our culture's supposed security blanket, John's words come alive. For the comfortable, the message may be disturbing and challenging. Revelation calls them to open their eyes. It is easy to get seduced into thinking that all is right with the world as long as all is right in our world, but John tells his audience and us there's a deeper truth if only we open our eyes. There is a battle going on in the world and in our souls, and that creates a desperation, more than we realize.
- The struggling are called to persevere and have the same patient endurance that Jesus had.
 - The assimilated are called to a renewed sense of integrity in a complicated world.
 - The complacent are to become recommitted.

A snapshot of the end of the story - here's what we have in this last section:

Commentary: The fall of Babylon, a massive collapse of everything that is aligned with evil. That which has perpetrated evil and those who just went along to get along, like the king's men in humpty dumpty, they all fall down. The picture that John paints in chapter 18 is not that flattering. For you would think that there would be those who would be ecstatic with the crushing of evil. But actually, the powers that may be mourn and cry. Those who took part in evil's immorality and bathed their senses, they weep. In addition, immorality is judged. Those who took advantage of evil's system of economics and reaped the rewards, they weep for their materialism is meaningless. Those who thought that participating in this world's power and benefits, they weep because it is OVER. In fact, in the coming Kingdom John talks about, all that the world values becomes commonplace.

Then we see the white horse and its rider, Jesus! Jesus is wearing crown. Jesus is faithful and true and coming to end injustice once and for all. And in an epic battle, the forces of evil and darkness get defeated once and for all time. In these final chapters, we finally we get to see what had been chained and restricted at the cross of Jesus. For when Jesus died, there was a promise made – that evil and death were on the clock. Now, it's over! The Jesus who brought love and grace to the world, the Jesus of John 3:16 is now the judge and those who aligned themselves with LIFE in Him, are ushered into a richer, more fulfilling, eternal existence with Christ and those who didn't, they get more of what they aligned themselves with...that being death and destruction.

Remember this - all these images, all these symbols, all the numbers, beasts, dragons, etc., they are word pictures and, in many respects, they work much the same way as political cartoons do in our day. John not only uses them to expose the shortcomings of first century society to the scrutiny of his readers, but these images still speak as art always does.

Babylon (chapter 18) is a particularly vivid word picture:

- John receives a vision in the wilderness of a woman riding on a beast from the sea.

- The reader would have known that the 7-headed beast represented Rome.
- The 7 heads would have reminded everyone of Rome's 7 Caesars whose power and prominence in that culture still dominated people's lives. There were also 7 mountains in Rome too. John calls this woman a harlot. She's wearing a sumptuous gown and the finest jewelry, displaying the ultimate in materialism. Everyone reading/hearing that read that first time would have known that. Just like a lot of ostentatious wealth does when people flash it around us, it's eye-catching but often gaudy, and over-the-top, even vulgar, and offensive. This woman is Babylon the Great and if you read carefully, you will see that John gives her a nickname, "the Whore of Babylon."
- She's in a drunken stupor and there's a cup filled with sewage in her hand.
- She's drunk with the blood of the people who paid the ultimate price with their lives of coming against her because they aligned themselves with Jesus and actually bore witness to the freedom and hope and love that Jesus gives over against her empty promises and allurements.
- John's painting this picture that couldn't be more graphic and incisive.
- Nobody would mistake this image for any other place but Rome.
- On the outside, "she" looks powerful, but Rome was obsessed by its craving for power, luxury, and driven by the kind of violence exemplified by the Caesar's slaughtering of many people who called Jesus Lord.
- Rome had the goddess, "Roma," a mythical being that enshrined and elevated the most base elements and evil tendencies of humanity.
- John wanted to startle and shock his readers into showing seductive Rome's power as well as all cultural power (what Paul would call, the "power of the air" in Ephesians 5) for what it was, an evil temptress.
- Though alluring at first glance, it was actually repulsive and debased.
- Babylon represents not a city, but all the addictive attitudes and actions that can claim so many and that which is powerfully alluring in every one of our lives.
- Just like the harlot, the truth is - we all have often chosen to ride the beast, to give in to evil.
- Problem is - giving in, may have some temporary benefits but eventually, it will victimize us.
- Evil isn't passive, evil isn't illusive, evil takes prisoners and those who mess with it, get burned because it ends up putting us into chains.

Commentary: As we get to the end of this book, friends, the purpose of the Revelation journey is to give us a wakeup call...to bring us to a point of decision. We must decide, whose power is going to control our lives? What power has sway over our day-to-day relationships, decisions, values? When you look at what John writes, when you see these images of corruption, you got to wonder, if we are all past hope?

But remember, and this is awesomely good news, evil doesn't have the final say! Because as John is saying that, Jesus is calling his people out of this evil. He's calling his followers to leave Babylon. Through Jesus, there must be an alternative to its materialism and violence. Like the ancient Israelites leaving Egypt, there is a possibility of another exodus away from that which enslaves us. Led by the Lamb, we can undertake a spiritual exodus out of the empire. And we are given and can embrace a new vision of how things truly be as we are being called to be faithful. You see, there is an Alternative to Babylon: there is a Second City mentioned in these final chapters. At the end of Revelation, John shows us a breathtaking vision of another city, an alternative to Babylon - God's wonderful paradise-like world called the New Jerusalem, descending from heaven like a bride, inviting us in. As it says in Philippians 3:20, we are citizens of this holy city. It's the one we are called to hope for. The early Christians heard in John's vision that there is NOT ONLY A KINGDOM in the future to give us ULTIMATE hope but there is also one here on earth a community that is an alternative to that which seeks to enslave us. And it is THIS VISION that brings John's audience together but can also bring us together to worship around a radical and transforming vision of the joyful reign of God.

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). Friends, this is where whole book has been leading us! Evil has been released, evil and evil powers have been judged, the culture that harms, imprisons and exploits tender, human hearts has been

destroyed and now, a new heaven and a new earth are revealed. But the Greek word John uses here, for "new" is not like that, nor are John's visions to be taken literally. It's more like a "renewal" or restoration. This promise is the ultimate reversal for everything that was lost in Genesis 3 gets restored to where it was in Genesis 1 and 2. NO wonder John broken out in worship! This was hope for John! John would have welcomed this vision, since his home city of Jerusalem had been devastated and completely destroyed by war after the Jewish revolt against Rome. There is not a corner of this earth, or our hearts, that doesn't need transformation. Imagine all of us broken people suddenly seeing an amazing vision, not of a heaven we need to ascend to, but of a holy city that descends, renewing all it touches. Previous to this, the throne room of God had been in heaven, but there is no more mention of heaven in Revelation after this point because it's moved to earth. You see what John is doing? This is not a static idea of heaven...it isn't "pie in the sky when we die." Instead, it's a compelling vision of how God comes to dwell with us on this earth. The culminating vision of the book - the picture of our life together in a renewed world, a vision which we live in our lives right now in the power, freedom and hope of Jesus. We are welcomed into this city. It has 12 gates that never close. It's a city of welcome for all who have been in exile, suffering under who knows what. It's a vision of a rightly ordered creation, the way things were intended to be. Every corner is filled with God's presence in this new city. It is a place where Jesus reigns and heals every heart, every broken soul or body. As a living symbol of this healing, in the very center of the city is the river of the water of life which flows out from the throne of God. The trees on either side of the river bear leaves that are for the healing of the nations.

Don't miss how huge this is friends! This is our invitation to walk into this new city and receive as a gift of love and grace a presence that transcends all pain, all suffering, everything that confounds and enslaves, and have HOPE in the victory of the King! The author doesn't separate the future of the individual from the future of the world, everything falls at the feet of the Lamb who we will enjoy his bounty and love and worship him forever. Revelation is about two cities. One of them, Babylon, is already here. We see its destruction in the news every day - exploitation, injustice, fear, destruction, war, death, and exclusion impinge themselves on people every day. But there's another city, the New Jerusalem and it is a place to hope. We can anticipate and long for but it is not yet here, and too often seems a long way off. We live in a time in between Babylon and the New Jerusalem. We live in a world of sin/brokenness and evil and yet yearn for a world of perfection at the same time. What the first readers needed was something in between, an alternate city to give them hope. We all need the same thing!

Chapter 19

- 19:1 - "After this..." after the fall of evil powers and institutions that align themselves with the dragon:
- 19:1-4 – Worship of God for His coming judgment upon all evil – a shift occurs from mourning on earth to rejoicing in heaven
- 19:5-10 – Glimpse of the wedding feast of the Lamb. Jesus followers, those who have trusted God for salvation and are saved for eternity gather for a wedding feast that is the culmination of the relationship that has been so extensively described in the NT (Ephesians 5, Matthew 22 and Matthew 25). Christians wait for the Lord as the bride to be! This is the celebration that kicks off eternity.
- 19:10 – John falls down to worship as the messenger of the Lord – the angel says, “don’t do it, worship only the Lord” – what message might that have for us?
- 19:11-21 – The White Horse and its Rider – JESUS! He is faithful, true, speaking the Word of God, fighting for justice, eyes aflame (1:14), wears a crown, has a robe clothed in blood
- 19:12 – “A name known only to Himself (Moses at Mt. Sinai, “I am who I am” YHWH), Philippians 2:9-11 a name “limits” Jesus – name above all names
- The great battle – Jesus vs. the forces of darkness – guess who wins?

Chapter 20

- 20:1-6 – Satan is bound for a 1000 years and then let loose for a period of time. Jesus defeated Satan on the cross and through the empty tomb but Satan is also “alive and well” and allowing evil to run its final course on earth.

- 1000 could be another number of completion (2 Peter 3:8 – a 1000 years is like a day; a day is like 1000 years to the Lord).
- Many Jewish texts lay out an intermediate kingdom between the present age and the future eternal reign of God. This has been debated for centuries. Some Christians, like Luther, Calvin, and Augustine, believed that this 1000-year reign was symbolic of the present age. Others like Irenaeus and Justin Martyr saw this as something that happens after Jesus returns. Others still see it as an in-between period. Might there be a period of Messianic peace on earth prior to the final return of Christ?
- It seems to me that that view doesn't fit the rest of the book. Revelation builds as a narrative to the coming of Jesus. Either this 1000-year reign is a symbol of the reign of Jesus for eternity OR humanity has already experienced some peace and protection of God (in other words this reign is currently happening) and when Satan is loosed it is a reference to the tribulation that we have already studied.

20:7-10 – Satan loosed and finally judged for eternity

Gog (prince) and Magog (land) refer to the final enemies of Israel in Ezekiel 38-39

20:6 – mentions the “second death” – what is that referring to?

There are TWO books mentioned in this chapter – book of deeds and the book of life. What role do they play in judgement? How important are our deeds in these final times? What saves us?

Book of deeds shows that what we do is NOT insignificant – faith/works argument may be a red herring...real issue is faith AND works. What is significant is the ORDER – faith proceeds works; being (identity) in Christ proceeds doing for Christ!

20:11-15 – Final judgment – either judged by book of deeds or life/grace? Which would you choose?

Great white throne – power, authority, holiness

Chapters 21-22 – New Heaven and New Earth

* Remember – difference between “Kainos and Neos” – “new” in Revelation is restoration, redemption, fulfilled vision language – everything is restored to the way God intended it to be

Think Jesus and the Law – remember how Jesus said that he did not come to “replace” the Law (cancel it, abolish it) but to FULFILL it!

21:1 – Restored vision of God's original plan – takes what is there and restores it

- “Heaven” is not a geographical place but the bride of Christ
- New city – a dwelling for those who trust in the Lamb 21:1
- Perfect cube 1500 miles in each direction (distance between NYC and London – 2 million square miles)
- All fulfilled the way it was intended to be
- All relational language – we are not “possession” of God we are the bride of Christ – relational difference

21:4 - No more grief, pain or tears

21:3 (21:23) - Jesus is present and lives with us (21:23 and 22:3)

- Everything in this section is relational language – eternity with God isn't just a place, it is a relationship
- Issue is not gold or magnificence of the place – common place gold is street material
- Real glory is relationship with Lamb
- In our world, materialism is value – in eternity, relationship is value
- We are God's children...no barriers between God and His people in eternity

21:24 – people of earth walk by light, kings shall bring their glory, honor into it

- NO distinction or barriers between people – uniqueness honored
- Book ends with an urgency and encouragement to decide for ourselves whether we are going to align ourselves with the Lamb or evil. How might this be relevant to what we are facing today?

Revelation 21-22: A New Heaven & A New Earth

Metaphors and Symbols of our HOPE in Jesus:

A New Garden of Eden - Revelation 22: 1-2 – this is an image of the Old Testament prophetic echoing all the way back to the first pages of Genesis. John saw the tree of life there, accessible to all and eternally yielding fruit. It could do this because its roots had access to the eternal river of life, which can dispense nourishment to all the new creation because it flows from the presence of God himself. However, in John's account of a garden, humanity wasn't represented by a couple. John describes seeing all the nations there, working to cultivate the garden as Adam and Eve did in Genesis. For John, the fulfillment of God's purpose through Jesus would result in the restoration of humans to their place as co-rulers of God's world, ready to work with God to take creation into uncharted territory.

A New Jerusalem - a great city where human cultures and all their diversity work together in peace and harmony before God. John first described the new creation as a marriage of heaven and earth. Heaven is represented as both a city and a bride, coming down out of God's heavenly domain and landing on earth. John called the city-bride a "new Jerusalem." It was so marvelous that he could only describe it regarding brilliant stones. Jerusalem represents the ultimate Promised Land: all of restored creation. John depicts the reunion of heaven and earth as the descent of a new Jerusalem. Unlike the old Jerusalem that was corrupted and dishonored by most of Israel's kings, the new Jerusalem would be ruled by a divine king. This new city would be built by God, not by human hands.

But NOT A New Temple - John says the heavenly city has four sides, each with three gates, corresponding to the 12 tribes of Israel. Then he mentions 12 huge foundation stones, which correspond to the 12 apostles. After this, John says the heavenly city is a perfect cube, each side are 1,400 miles long. Then we're told that the walls are 200 feet high. And in the most surprising twist of all, there's no temple building in the new creation! The presence of God and the Lamb that was once limited to the temple now permeate every square inch of the new world. There's a new humanity there, fulfilling the calling placed on them all the way back on page 1 of the Bible. Humanity will rule in God's image, partnering with God in taking this creation into new and uncharted territory. And so ends John's apocalypse and the epic storyline of the whole Bible.

A Whole New, Vague Creation - John's visions leave most of our questions about the new creation unanswered—and that's not a bad thing. John's goal wasn't to satisfy our curiosity about the new world, but to instill confidence that the creation would be reborn just as Jesus was resurrected from the dead. This is the hope of the story of the Bible: God's domain and our domain will one day completely unite. All things will be made new. Death will be replaced with life. The whole earth will be a recreation of the garden, and the glory of the temple will cover it. Every nation will be blessed through the power of the resurrected Jesus, and God's own personal presence will permeate every square inch of the new creation.

On Earth as it is in Heaven - There is not even one passage in the Bible that talks about "going to heaven" after you die. The phrase "go to heaven" doesn't appear anywhere in the Old or New Testaments about death. Not once.

This doesn't mean the Bible has nothing to say about what happens to God's people after they die. It just means that "going to heaven" isn't the way biblical authors thought about it. The issue AGAIN is Jesus! Jesus is the focal point of eternity! Eternity is JESUS for those who trust and follow Him! HE, and not a what, is our inheritance and reward!

Let's look at the New Testament passages that speak to what Jesus' followers will experience after they die.

- Jesus spoke to the repentant criminal being crucified next to him, saying, "Today you'll be WITH ME in paradise." - Luke 23:42-43
- Paul discussed his possible execution in a Roman prison, and he said death wouldn't be so bad. It would make the Philippians sad, but he would get to be "WITH CHRIST." - Philippians 1:21-24
- Paul talked about the true hope that drives Christian faithfulness, even in the face of death. The result of death, he said, was being "WITH THE LORD." - 2 Corinthians 5:6-9
- Notice the consistent factor is not that people will "go to heaven," it's that they all use the same phrase: Our hope is about being "WITH JESUS." Both Jesus and Paul believed that not even death could separate people from God's love, and that Jesus' followers would be with him after death.
- However, Paul does not envision this disembodied mode of existence as permanent, or even desirable.
- Paul wrote that in this world "we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling." He's referring here to a resurrected body believers will inherit when they are finally made like Jesus. For Paul, the end goal is not disembodied bliss in heaven, but rather a restored physical existence, which is a gift from heaven.
- But what about the interim period, when our mortal bodies rot in the ground?
- Paul describes this interim experience like "falling asleep." He wasn't alone in using sleep as a metaphor for death. It was common in Jewish culture to use the phrase "lay down with my ancestors" to talk about death. The prophets described death as a form of sleep and the hope of future resurrection as "waking up." Remember that these are poetic metaphors, so we shouldn't analyze them for precise information about what we will experience after we die.
- In the Revelation, it would seem John's hope somehow resides in the specific manner in which Jesus was resurrected. Just as he went through death and came out the other side in a transformed physical existence, so also his people can hope for the same. The risen Jesus was physical, not a ghost. He ate food and drank wine and talked with his followers about the Kingdom of God over the course of a few weeks. He had scars on his hands and feet. There was no mistake. They were touching and talking with the same Jesus they followed up in the hills of Galilee.
- But the resurrected Jesus was also different. Really different. Some of the disciples didn't even recognize him at first glance. And while Jesus' body was physical, it was physical in a way that was different from ours. He inexplicably appeared and disappeared from rooms, baffling the disciples. There were no categories that prepared them for this moment, so all they could do is tell the odd stories we find in the New Testament.
- This paradox of "the same Jesus and also a different Jesus" is precisely what John was trying to communicate about the "new heavens and earth" in the book of Revelation. He was convinced that the future of the universe walked out of the tomb on Easter morning, simultaneously the same and different. What was true of the risen Jesus is what will be true for all creation when heaven and earth completely reunite.
- So, while we can't say you'll "go to heaven" when you die, we can say that one day you will be resurrected and reborn LIKE Jesus in the resurrection. Even better, that means you'll be WITH Jesus. Now THAT is worth writing home about, and in this case, was worth John writing the churches in Asia minor to remind them about.
- John did not write this book as a secret code for you to decipher the timetable of Jesus's return, or figure out exactly what happens to you after you die. It's a symbolic vision that brought hope and challenge to the seven 1st Century churches, and every generation of Christians. It reveals history's pattern and God's promise that every human kingdom eventually becomes Babylon and must be resisted in the power of the slain Lamb. But there's a promise that Jesus who loved and died for this world, will not let Babylon and all the evil of this world go unchecked. One day, Jesus will return to remove evil from His good world and

make all things new, including his people! And that is a promise that should motivate faithfulness in every generation of God's people until the King returns.