

THE LAMB IS THE LORD

A journey through the Book of Revelation

6 ► Destruction and Death to the Devil's Domain



[Image](#) from at Wikipedia

The Course of Empire: Destruction painted by Thomas Cole and held by the New-York Historical Society. This, the fourth of a series of five paintings illustrating the rise and fall of a great city, depicts its fall. The city is being sacked and destroyed. A storm rages in the distance, and it seems that a fleet of enemy warriors has overthrown the city's defences, sailed up the river, and is torching the city and attacking its inhabitants. The bridge across the river is broken; a makeshift crossing strains under the weight of soldiers and refugees. In his newspaper advertisements for the series, the artist quoted these lines from Lord Byron's poem 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage': "There is the moral of all human tales; / 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past, / First Freedom and then Glory—when that fails, / Wealth, vice, corruption,—barbarism at last. / And History, with all her volumes vast, / Hath but *one* page, . . ."

Babylon, the Great Prostitute (17:1-19:5)

Babylon the great (17:1-6a)

The final bowl judgment

In session 4, we saw three sets of seven judgments unleashed upon this sin-soaked world. They were heralded, in turn, by the opening of the scroll's seven seals, by the blowing of seven trumpets and by the emptying of seven bowls.

Among these judgments, we saw God's people giving powerful testimony to Jesus, and passing triumphant

through tribulation.

As we saw in session 4, the seventh angel emptied his bowl "into the air" and God declared "It is done!" (16:17). God's presence was attended by storm and earthquake. The islands fled; the mountains vanished. The "great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath" (16:19). But to the end people defy God—they continue to curse Him (16:21).

A tale of two cities

Now, from 17:1 to the end of Revelation, two cities dominate our vision. One is the city just mentioned—Satan's city, "**Babylon the great**". The other is God's city, "**New Jerusalem**". These two cities are symbols: they symbolise *civilisation*. Cities are centres of government, of commerce, science, culture and the arts.

- Babylon symbolises "**this present world**" (a phrase used in 2 Timothy 4:10); "**the kingdom of the world**" (11:15), mankind's godless civilisation under Satan's domination.
- New Jerusalem symbolises God's perfect world where He reigns, His paradise where His people live in His presence. It symbolises the Kingdom of God.

Mankind, the city builder

The story of these two cities began in the Garden of Eden. Eden was God's *paradise*. He used to walk there "**in the cool of the day**" (Genesis 3:8) and it seems that He met with Adam and Eve there and enjoyed fellowship with them.

God commissioned mankind to fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). As the human family grew ever larger, God intended them to extend the garden out to the entire Earth. God wanted the garden to become a *garden-city*—a civilisation built in dependence on God, where He was worshipped and served.

God made us to be '*city-dwellers*'—that is, to live in *community* together. For many of us today, the word 'city' may trigger the idea of a 'concrete jungle', blighted by traffic congestion, noise, pollution, crowds—a place we really *don't* want to live! But most citizens in the great cities of Asia in the first century would have thought differently. They'd have thought of cities as the only places where they could flourish and achieve their potential.

Babylon

Adam and Eve's walk with God in paradise didn't last. They fell to Satan's temptation to rebel against God. So Satan gained power over our human race. He became "**the ruler of this world**" (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

Satan wants to be like God. So he began to inspire mankind to build a civilisation where he, Satan, would be worshipped and served. *That civilisation is symbolised by Babylon.*

The tower of Babel was an early venture (Genesis 11:1-9). We read that people said, "**let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.**" (Genesis 11:4). Babel was

"a symbol of human attempts to create a perfect world by our own efforts."^[1] But God confused the people's language and dispersed them. They "**left off building the city**".

But godless city-building continued. In Biblical times, ancient kings strove for glory through magnificent cities and vast empires. In Daniel, we read Nebuchadnezzar's proud boast: "**Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power . . . for the glory of my majesty?**" (Daniel 4:30). God humbled this arrogant ruler (Daniel 4:19-37).

In New Testament times, Rome and its empire was the Babylon of its day. The apostle Peter wrote, "**She who is at Babylon . . . sends you greetings, . . .**" (1 Peter 5:13). Babylon here almost certainly means the city of Rome.

For centuries, philosophers, revolutionaries and rulers of all kinds have pursued the dream of Utopia. But the idea that, century by century, civilisation has been progressing along an upward path, is a myth.^[2] The kingdoms of this world do indeed have a kind of glory (Matthew 4:8). But beneath the surface lie corruption, discord, and misery. And every so often they erupt and blow apart mankind's dreams of glory.

Mankind's final attempt to build a world-dominating, godless civilisation on Earth will be led, it seems certain, by an individual man known as the 'Antichrist'.

New Jerusalem

But there's another city. It's God's city. The story of this city also begins in Genesis. After God halted Babel's construction, He called Abram, later named Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham looked forward to "**the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God**" (Hebrews 11:10). And so the story of the Bible's two cities begins. That story comes to its climax here in Revelation. Babylon falls—mankind's city collapses into ruins (18:1-19:5). New Jerusalem comes down "**out of heaven from God**" (21:2): God's city fills the Earth, and endures for all eternity.

"Do not love the world"

By showing us these two cities and their fates, God is giving us a life-defining choice. On this choice hangs our eternal destiny. Will we be seduced to become citizens of Babylon, and enjoy this world's fleeting pleasures for a few brief years? Or are we set on being citizens of New Jerusalem? Are we laying up "**treasures on earth**" or "**treasures in heaven**" (Matthew 6:19-20)?

Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes

One of "**the seven angels who had the seven bowls**" says to John, "**Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute . . .**" (17:1).

John is carried by the Spirit "into a wilderness" (17:3). There he sees "a woman". We've seen a woman in a wilderness before (12:6,13-17). That woman symbolised God's people. Later, we'll discover that "New Jerusalem" is also pictured as a woman—the Bride of Christ. But this woman in the wilderness is a prostitute, the complete opposite of God's people. She's sitting "on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns" (17:3). This beast is, without doubt, the beast from the sea (13:1-2)—Satan's counterfeit 'christ'. The woman sits on the beast; she's in league with it.



Artwork by Pat Marvenko Smith © 1982, 1992 www.revelationillustrated.com

John writes, "I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns" (17:3)

This woman is clothed in gaudy, sumptuous clothes, and decked out with gold and jewels. She clutches "a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality" (17:4). To ensure we're in no doubt about her identity, her name is emblazoned on her forehead: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations" (17:5). Her name is a 'mystery'—something that now, in New Testament times, God has fully revealed to His people. And only those given true spiritual insight can understand it.

As we saw in the previous session, the sea beast seems to picture every anti-Christian power that has ever asserted itself against God and His people. In John's day that power was the Roman Empire. The woman sits on the beast—they're in league with each other. But they're not identical. It seems clear that the sea beast represents the godless state, that is *political and military*

power, and the woman represents *godless civilisation*. What's the connection between the state and civilisation? The connection is this: *civilisations are nurtured and protected by political and military power*.

This prostitute is drunk—not with wine, but with blood, "the blood of the saints, . . . of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:6). The woman and the beast collaborate to persecute the saints. The beast is "allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them" (13:7). In John's day, the Roman empire did indeed shed "the blood of the saints"—the death of Antipas (2:13) was one example. But these saints and martyrs are not just those who were killed for their faith. *All* God's people suffer because of their faithfulness to Jesus.

Like all prostitutes, this city Babylon is seductive. The "kings of the earth" have "committed sexual immorality" with her, and "the dwellers on earth have become drunk" with "the wine" of her "sexual immorality" (17:2, compare 14:8).

This "sexual immorality" is primarily a symbol of spiritual immorality, in other words, idolatry. At its heart, it's the immorality of worshipping the dragon and its beast, instead of God. People's sinful desires, aided and abetted by evil powers, draw them to succumb to the gaudy glamour, wealth and illicit pleasures, to the power and prestige that this fallen world offers. This "sexual immorality" doubtless includes sexual immorality as well.

The Roman world that John's readers inhabited was indeed a very alluring place. For many people, it offered power, glory, wealth, pleasure and self-indulgence beyond anything the ancient world had seen before. Just look at the list of riches in 18:11-13!

The Roman empire offered what appeared to be perfect fulfilment—it seemed like an earthly paradise. But this was a human 'paradise' without God, a 'paradise' under satanic domination. It was, in fact, no paradise at all.

Some believers, too, had fallen prey to the temptations of the Roman world around them—some in Pergamum and Thyatira, most of those in Sardis, and the entire Laodicean church. They had been lured by prosperity and social status into turning a blind eye to, or even participating in, the idolatry and immorality of that godless society. By describing Babylon as a drunken, filthy prostitute, Jesus is showing them *who it really is* they're consorting with. Jesus wanted them to wake up before it was too late!

And our modern world is simply an updated and amplified version of that ancient Roman world. It offers the same temptations. And so God wants *us*, too, to be awake.

The mystery explained (17:6b-15,18)

The beast's rising from the Abyss

When John sees this prostitute, he marvels "greatly" (17:6). The angel now explains the mystery of this woman and the beast.

We read that the beast "once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss" (17:8 NIV). Then we read that the beast "was and is not and is to come" (17:8). Where have we heard a phrase like that before? In Revelation 1:8 God says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty". God "is to come". He will come in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ. Revelation ends with Jesus declaring, "Surely I am coming soon" (22:20). So this reappearance of the beast seems to mimic Christ's Second Coming. In the previous session, we saw that the beast counterfeited Christ's resurrection (13:3). Now it's mimicking His Second Coming.

But its counterfeit 'second coming' is a complete contrast to Christ's Second Coming!

- At the end of this age, God will come in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He "will descend from heaven" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). This beast appears—not from above, but from below, "out of the Abyss" (17:8 NIV). The Abyss symbolises the source of evil.
- Our Lord will come to reign with the Father for ever and ever (11:15). But the beast will rise from the Abyss and "go to destruction" (17:8). When He comes again, our Lord will throw the beast, along with the false prophet, "alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur" (19:20).

What does the beast's 'coming' correspond to in history? It seems to depict the appearance of a final regime at the end of our age. That regime will be headed up, it seems certain, by the Antichrist.

But the beast's 'coming', inglorious and doomed as it is, has the same effect on the world as its resurrection did. The earth-dwellers are completely taken in. Satan is desperate to deceive people into treating him as God. And he seems here to be succeeding. In the last session, we saw that the whole earth " marvelled as they followed the beast" (13:3). Now, here, the earth-dwellers "will marvel to see the beast" (17:8). These earth-dwellers value only earthly things. Their names aren't written in "the book of life" (17:8).

At this point, the angel tells John, "This calls for a mind with wisdom" (17:9). We need wisdom to understand what the angel is telling us. God isn't looking for code-breakers. He wants us to have *spiritual insight and discernment*. Only the Holy Spirit can give us that

wisdom. And He gives it only to those who walk closely with God.

The seven kings

The angel continues to unfold the mystery. The beast's "seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings" (17:9-10). To John's readers, these seven mountains would have brought to mind the city of Rome. The ancient heart of Rome was built on seven hills. So perhaps that's part of its meaning.

But there's more to it than that. What do these "heads" and "mountains" and "kings" symbolise? Notice that the "heads" are *both "mountains" and "kings"*. Heads here represent *authority*. Mountains can symbolise *seats of power*—ancient fortress sites were often built on mountains. Kings symbolise *rulers* and *regimes*. So they all mean the same kind of thing. They all seem to symbolise a dominating regime. And there are seven of them. As we saw in session 4, 'seven' symbolises completeness, especially in relation to creation. They symbolise *complete* power. It's as if Jesus is heaping up images here to picture *all the godless regimes and powers throughout history*. All these regimes are Satan's tools. Through them, he tries to seize complete control on Earth, and so take God's rightful place.

Then we read something rather puzzling. Of these seven kings, "five . . . have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while" (17:10). If seven is symbolic, so is 'five' and 'one' and 'one'. Perhaps this series is showing us that most regimes and empires—powerful and strong though they may have appeared—had passed away by John's day. In other words, most of this age had passed into history. The end of this age—though still many centuries distant at that time—was on its way. We're really beginning to sense that now. Jesus is coming soon!

The eighth and final king

Then the angel tells John, "The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven . . ." (17:11 NIV). This king isn't, like the seven that preceded it, symbolised by just *one* of the beast's heads. No: the beast *is* "an eighth king" (17:11). This king embodies the beast in a greater way than any of the others. It's the final and greatest manifestation of the beast. This eighth king is the end-time regime headed up, it seems certain, by the Antichrist.

Earlier, we saw that the beast "will come up out of the Abyss" (17:8 NIV). Now, this eighth king—who is the final manifestation of the beast—enters the scene. These two pictures seem to *depict one and the same event*.

As we said earlier, this reappearance seems to mimic Christ's Second Coming. But his attempt fails completely. In 17:8, we're told the beast will "go to destruction". We're told the same thing here in 17:11. This eighth king—this end-time embodiment of the beast—"goes to destruction".

The ten horns

The angel reveals more about the beast's final appearance. Remember that it had "ten horns" as well as seven heads (17:3). The angel explains that these horns are "ten kings who have not yet received royal power" (17:12). They'll "receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast" (17:12). They're "of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast" (17:13, see 17:17). The number ten symbolises an unspecified 'round number'—in other words, the regimes and rulers in existence at that time (it isn't important to know how many). They collaborate with the beast, and support it. But they rule only "for one hour"—for only a short time.

How do these "ten kings" relate to the "eighth" king? Perhaps we can understand it this way. The eighth king is the final, climactic, embodiment of the beast. It's the final regime that will, it seems, be under Antichrist's control. We're now told that this final regime is supported by "ten kings". In other words, it seems to be a *global alliance of powers* that supports Antichrist's regime.



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The Antichrist's regime is supported by "ten kings", who seem to symbolise a global alliance of powers.

This is Satan's final throw of the dice. He'll gather all the resources at his disposal and make one last desperate attempt to defeat Christ and rule Earth in His place. And so we read that the beast and these ten kings "will make war on the Lamb" (17:14).

But "the Lamb will conquer them for He is Lord of lords and King of kings" (17:14). The Lamb is accompanied by those who "are called and chosen and faithful" (17:14). They share His victory. We'll see this same great battle again—in graphic detail—in 19:11-20, and in 20:7-10. *It is, in fact, the last battle.* We'll learn more about this battle later in this session.

Civil war in Satan's realm (17:16-17)

But before they attack the Lamb and His people, these kings and the beast destroy the prostitute Babylon.

We saw in 17:1 that she was "seated on many waters". We now learn that these waters are "peoples and multitudes and nations and languages" (17:15). These are the peoples under Babylon's spell. They were caught like a fly in a spider's web, captivated by this world's seductive charms. The prostitute herself is "the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth" (17:18)—kings "who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her" (18:9, see 17:2). These kings are regimes, rulers and ruling classes who were bewitched by all this world offered them.

Evil always bears the seeds of its own destruction. And so it is here. Satan's kingdom is convulsed by civil war. The ten horns and the beast "will hate the prostitute" and utterly destroy her. They'll "make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire" (17:16). No greater destruction can be imagined. As we've seen, it seems clear that this beast represents the godless state, that is *political and military power*, and the woman represents *godless civilisation*. It seems that the political and military power destroys the very civilisation that it once nurtured and protected. Sadly, we're so familiar with this. Throughout history, cities and lands have been—and will continue to be—laid waste by war and conflict.

But, once again, behind these scenes is the hand of Almighty God. "God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled" (17:17). This evil 'woman'—that is, the godless civilisation she represents—is ripe for God's judgment. But, astonishingly, it's *Satan's* forces which execute God's justice upon her. Evil is serving the purposes of God. *In the final analysis, it always does.*

Fallen is Babylon the great! (18:1-24)

The indictment (18:1-3)

John sees another angel "coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory" (18:1). A shaft of light illuminates the earth, dispelling the darkness.

The angel cries, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" (18:1). This once splendid city is now a wasteland. Her sins "are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities" (18:5). The angel reads out the charge sheet: "all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality" (see also 14:8, 17:2); "the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her" (see also 17:2); and "the



[Image](#) from Wikipedia.org

'The Course of Empire: Consummation' painted by Thomas Cole (The New-York Historical Society.) A vivid depiction of mankind's godless civilisation at its zenith, in all its decadent opulence. This painting is the third of a series of five paintings illustrating the rise and fall of a civilisation. A great crowd throngs the balconies and terraces of a magnificent city as a scarlet-robed king or victorious general crosses a bridge connecting the two sides of the river in a triumphal procession. The scene suggests the height of ancient Rome's power. Compare this image with that on page 1, in which the artist depicts this city's destruction.

merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living" (18:3).

And it wasn't only this world that had done business with Babylon. Some believers had, too—as we've seen. God doesn't want His people to share her doom. He pleads: "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues" (18:4).

But *how* do we leave Babylon? The way out is not a physical road, but a *spiritual* road. Jesus prayed to His Father, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:15–16). We're to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. We're to be a spiritual resistance movement, a heavenly counterculture in the midst of a godless world.

The just judgment (18:5-8)

The angel has read out the charge sheet. Now the Judge sentences her. God declares, "Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; . . ." (18:6). The word "double" may simply mean 'twice as much'. Or it may mean 'the equivalent'; thus "repay her an equivalent for her deeds; . . ."

Either way, Babylon is receiving the rightful recompense for what she's inflicted on others. Her lust for luxury, and her self-indulgence, exacted a terrible cost on countless slaves and workers who served her demands—a cost measured in toil, poverty, misery, and untimely death. Now it's her turn to suffer.

And her judgment will be swift and total. Her plagues "will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire" (18:8).

Lament over Babylon (18:9-19)

Mourners lament her passing. Gathered round her funeral pyre are "the kings of the earth" (18:9), "the merchants of the earth" (18:11) and "all shipmasters and seafaring men, . . . and all whose trade is on the sea" (18:17). The focus is the merchants' lament. Twenty-eight types of merchandise are listed; most are luxury goods. Last on this list are "slaves"—literally, in the Greek, "*bodies*". Slaves were considered mere goods to be bought and sold, useful only for what they could do. But they were actually, of course, precious "human souls" (18:13), made in God's image.

Babylon not only consumes merchandise. It also consumes people. The wealthy are consumed by the

pursuit of wealth, by luxury and self-indulgence (compare 1 Timothy 6:9-10.) The poor are consumed by toil and poverty and despair. Godless human civilisations promise paradise. They deliver corruption, misery, ruin and death.

Through this vision of Babylon's fall, God was warning Revelation's first readers—not least the believers in wealthy Laodicea. And He warns us today. It's God's wake-up call to those tempted to pursue this world's wealth.

The things of this world

But what about the place of the things of this world—its goods and its pleasures? Bernard Bell writes, "It is only when we are deeply satisfied in God, . . . that we can enjoy the material things in this world without setting our longings on them. We can take them as from the hand of God rather than as the reason for living."^[3] Being wealthy is not, in itself, wrong. It's our attitude to wealth, and what we do with our money and goods, that matters.

Heaven's celebration (18:20)

A voice (probably John's) cries, "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for

God has given judgment for you against her!" (18:20). In Babylon "was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth" (18:24, and see 17:6). Does this include only the martyrs? No, it seems to include every believer who has suffered at the hands of godless civilisation. And "all who have been slain on earth" may well include unbelievers, too. Recall that, when Jesus opened the fifth seal, John saw "under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne." (6:9). They were praying: "O Sovereign Lord, . . . how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (6:10).

Babylon is now a smoking ruin. Perfect justice has been done. As we read in 19:2, He "has avenged on her the blood of his servants". God has answered the prayers of His people.

Thrown down with violence (18:21-24)

A mighty angel picks up "a stone like a great millstone" and flings it "into the sea", saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence and will be found no more". She will sink without trace. Babylon's merchants "were the great ones of the earth"; all nations were bewitched and deceived by her. But now nothing—nothing at all—remains.

The Hallelujah Chorus (19:1-10)

"He has judged the great prostitute"

A jubilant roar rends the air. A great multitude in heaven—presumably God's redeemed people, perhaps accompanied by the angels—cry, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; . . ." (19:1-2).

Then the "the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures" add their "Amen. Hallelujah!" They fall down and worship "God who was seated on the throne" (19:4). The name of God most often used in Revelation is the One "seated on the throne". All through history, while godless civilisation has seemed to thrive on Earth, God has been on the throne. He will always be on the throne. He alone is all-powerful. He alone is worthy of worship.

From the throne itself, a voice is heard—most probably, the voice of the elders or living creatures. The voice calls on God's "servants" and all "who fear him" to praise God (19:5).

The Bride of the Lamb

Then John hears "what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude", like a thunderous roar, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" (19:6-7). This word "Hallelujah", heard four times here in chapter 19 (and nowhere else in the New Testament), is the English version of the Hebrew phrase meaning 'Praise the Lord'.

In 12:1-5 we met "a woman" who seems to represent the nation of Israel. She gave birth to "a male child" who defeated the dragon (12:5,7-10). The woman fled "into the wilderness", to "a place prepared by God"—a place where God takes care of her "for 1,260 days". (12:6). The woman here represents God's New Testament Church, seen corporately.

The dragon tries "to sweep her away with a flood" (12:15). God protects her. But the dragon doesn't give up. He goes off "to make war on the rest of her offspring . . ." (12:17).

What became of this woman in the wilderness? Now we know! Our faithful, Almighty God has taken care of His Church throughout that period of "1,260 days", throughout all the long centuries during which she's suffered attack from Satan and his forces. And now we see her as the Bride! God grants her "to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure" (19:8). Radiant in shining white, she's ready to be married to the Lamb.

This is the moment that Christ, and all the angels in heaven, and all God's people on Earth, have been longing for.

Her "fine linen" is "the righteous deeds of the saints". First and foremost, this linen represents *believers' righteous deeds*—keeping God's commandments and bearing faithful testimony to Jesus. White symbolises *purity* and *victory* and *honour*. They're honoured because they're victorious. And they're victorious because they kept themselves pure. God's Bride patiently endured and kept herself untainted by this world. And so she's *victorious over Satan*. As we've seen, Revelation "can be seen as one great call to faithfulness even to the point of death".¹⁴ The Bride has answered that call.

Notice that God *grants* her to clothe *herself* "with fine linen". These robes represent God's people's "righteous deeds". They did the deeds. Yet, the robes are God's gift. How can we explain this? Paul helps us here. He urges the believers in Philippi: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12–13). God, through His Spirit, empowers us to *want*, and to *actually* live, a life that pleases Him. We believers remain faithful to Jesus *only by God's grace, only by complete dependence on Him*.

Notice the total contrast between this woman, and the other woman we met earlier:

- Babylon is a false 'bride', the consort of a false 'christ', the beast. The other is the true Bride, the wife of the Lamb.
- The prostitute flaunts herself in garish, expensive attire. The Bride is clothed in purest, shining, white—clothes gifted her by Almighty God.
- The prostitute's sins "are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities" (18:5). But the Bride has done "righteous deeds" (19:8).
- The prostitute seduces "the kings of the earth" and "the dwellers on earth" (17:2) to indulge in her worldly riches and pleasures. The Bride calls the nations to follow the Lamb.

A marriage made in Heaven

We believers here on Earth are *betrothed* to Jesus. He is our Bridegroom; we are His Bride. Paul writes to the Corinthian church, "I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Among Jews, in New Testament times, marriage was preceded by a period of betrothal, typically lasting a year. A betrothed couple were already considered to be

husband and wife, except they didn't live together. During the betrothal period, each was to remain faithful to the other. To break the betrothal, divorce was necessary (see Matthew 1:18-19).

After the betrothal period the bridegroom and his companions would typically go to the bride's home. She would have made herself ready, dressed in fine clothing and adorned with jewels. The groom and his companions would then escort her to his home, where the couple would spend time alone together. Then the marriage feast would get under way, and might last several days.

During this time of betrothal to Jesus, we're to remain faithful to Him. One day, He'll come to take us to His home. But we don't know "the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:13). So we're to watch for His coming.

The marriage supper of the Lamb



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Then "the angel" (presumably one of the angels introduced in 17:1, 18:1 or 18:21) tells John to write: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:9). God's people—from both the Old and New Testament periods—are collectively the Bride. The guests are, without doubt, individual believers. Invitations to this end-time wedding feast are still being sent out!

Weddings in the time of Jesus—as they are today—were celebrated by a feast (see John 2:1-11). This great and final wedding will be celebrated by the marriage supper of the Lamb. It will be a time of rejoicing beyond anything we could ever imagine now. And it will never end. It will continue for all eternity.

God's faithful people were looking forward to this feast long before John wrote Revelation. The prophet Isaiah wrote: "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, . . . He will swallow up death forever; and . . . will wipe away tears from all faces, . . ." (Isaiah 25:6,8). Isaiah was pointing forward to this wonderful wedding feast in the new creation, when God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more . . ." (21:4).

What's the significance of this feast? Meals symbolise fellowship. In the ancient Middle East (and in many places today) people would eat together only with those they considered allies, friends or family.^[5] The marriage supper of the Lamb symbolises *the perfect, eternal fellowship of Christ with His people—and through Him, with the Triune God*. It symbolises that *"the dwelling place of God is with man"* (21:3).

We foreshadow the marriage supper of the Lamb every time we eat the Lord's Supper together. We can, in a way, think of the Lord's supper as a wedding anniversary celebration—a celebration held *in anticipation of our marriage to Jesus*.

"Worship God!"

Then the angel affirms, *"These are the true words of*

God" (19:9). So overwhelmed is John by all he's heard that he falls down to worship the angel. But the angel rebukes him, and tells him to *"Worship God"* (19:10). Once more, we're brought back to a key theme of the book: *worship*.

Finally, we're told that *"the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"* (Revelation 19:10). The *"testimony of Jesus"* may be both testimony *from* Jesus and testimony *about* Jesus. In 1:5, Jesus is called *"the faithful witness"*. He speaks the truth about Himself and God, and about salvation and judgment. Now He's entrusted *us* to speak the truth about Him. The *"spirit of prophecy"* probably means *Spirit-inspired prophecy*. The testimony of Jesus—both from Him and about Him—is inspired by the Holy Spirit. This testimony calls people to worship God and to follow Jesus. *That, in a nutshell, is the message of Revelation*.

The Defeat of the Beast and the False Prophet (19:11-21)

The Horseman and His armies (19:11-16)

The Warrior on a white horse

The marriage of the Lamb has come; His Bride is ready. But before the Lamb and His Bride can celebrate their marriage, the final battle must be fought.

John sees heaven open. There before him is a white warhorse. On it sits a mighty Warrior. We've seen Him before—He is, of course, Jesus Christ. His eyes *"are like a flame of fire"* (19:12). He's armed with *"a sharp sword"* that comes from His mouth (19:15). His eyes and sword recall the glorious vision of Christ at the beginning of the book (1:12-16).

He's *"clothed in a robe dipped in blood"* (19:13). That's probably His enemies' blood. If so, this recalls what we read in 14:19-20. The *"great winepress of the wrath of God"* was trodden *"outside the city"*, releasing *"blood"*. That winepress appears here, too: our Conqueror *"will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty"* (19:15).

But perhaps the blood is Jesus's *own*. It was, of course, through His *blood*—His sacrificial death—that Jesus conquered Satan and all the forces of evil (compare 12:11).

On His head *"are many crowns"* (19:12 NIV). In Revelation we read of two kinds of crown—the victor's wreath (for example 3:11) and the royal crown (which can also be translated 'diadem', as in the ESV). The crowns here are royal crowns. Jesus is a King. *"On his robe and on his thigh"* is written: *"King of kings and Lord of lords"* (echoing 17:14). He is King over all the kings of the earth (see 1:5). Their authority is merely

human; His is divine. God is *"the King of kings and Lord of lords"* (1 Timothy 6:15), and so is Christ. The dragon and the beast wore royal crowns (12:3,13:1). But they were pretenders to the throne; their crowns were fake. Jesus alone is King of kings.

So glorious and magnificent is this conquering King, it's obvious how his enemies will fare. They haven't a chance.

The cosmic law trial

But how is this great final battle fought? Not as we might expect. It seems to be waged, not on a battlefield, but in a *lawcourt*, and not with weapons of steel, but with *truth* and *error*.

Satan is *"a liar and the father of lies"* (John 8:44), *"the deceiver of the whole world"* (12:9). The beast from the sea (13:1-10) is a false 'christ'. The beast from the land (13:11-18) is a false prophet (16:13, 19:20, 20:10), which *"deceives those who dwell on earth"*. Satan's kingdom is founded on falsehood and deceit. So he and his forces are defeated, not by military might but *by the truth*—by the One who is *"the Truth"* (John 14:6), the One who is *"Faithful and True"* (19:11), the One who is *"The Word of God"* (19:13).

So, it seems we're in a great cosmic lawcourt. Satan and the forces of evil are in the dock. Witnesses have been called and questioned. Jesus Christ Himself is *"the faithful and true witness"* (3:14, see also 1:5). John *"bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw"* (1:2). The martyr Antipas was Jesus's *"faithful witness"* (2:13). The souls whom John saw *"under the altar"* had been slain *"for the word of God and for the witness they had borne"* (6:9). You and I are witnesses. *All* God's faithful people

are witnesses in this great courtroom drama.

The evidence has been heard. Jesus, the "Faithful and True" (19:11), the One who, in righteousness, "judges and makes war" (19:11), pronounces His verdict. Satan and the forces of evil are all liars. They are guilty.

The sword and rod of judgment

The sentence is carried out. From Jesus's mouth comes "a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations" (19:15). That sword is His *word*. With His word, He slays "the kings of the earth with their armies" (19:19-21). And Jesus will rule the nations "with a rod of iron" (19:15). Here, the rod continues the imagery of the sword. We've seen this rod before:

- ▶ Jesus will give each faithful believer "authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron" (2:26-27).
- ▶ And the "male child" of the woman is destined "to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (12:5, echoing Psalm 2:7-9).

Jesus will break the nations' rebellion. In 2:26-27 and 12:5 that breaking, for some, might have been through repentance—*turning from rebellion* and receiving Jesus as Lord. But the opportunity for repentance has now passed. That "rod of iron" is now only the rod of final judgment.

The armies of heaven

Following Him on white horses are "the armies of heaven", clad, not (as we'd expect) in armour, but "in fine linen, white and pure" (19:14). These armies seem certain to be God's people. They kept themselves pure, "unstained from the world" (James 1:27). And so they're victorious over all the forces of evil.

But what do these armies do in this battle? Seemingly nothing at all! The battle is the Lord's. In righteousness He judges and makes war (19:11). From His mouth comes a sword to strike down the nations (19:15,21). He will rule them with a rod of iron, and tread the winepress of God's wrath (19:15).

But God's people *have* done something. They have witnessed to the truth. And they have patiently endured; they have remained faithful to Jesus.

Jesus's hidden name

We're also told that Jesus bears a name "that no one knows but himself" (19:12). This may be His "own new name" (3:12), which we looked at in session 2. Jesus's names tell us about His Person and His character. But why is this name secret? Perhaps it won't be revealed till the new creation, when we'll see Him "as he is" (1 John 3:2). Then we'll know His Person and His character in a whole new way.

The great supper of God (19:17-21)

The last battle

Before the final battle even begins, an angel "standing in the sun" prepares for the gruesome aftermath. He summons the birds to feast on the flesh of the dead (19:17). We can imagine a pack of vultures circling overhead, ravenous for this "great supper of God". The angel reads out the grisly menu: the flesh of "kings" and "captains" and "mighty men" and "horses and their riders" and "all men" (19:18).

Gathering for Armageddon

John sees "the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies" gather to do battle against the Lord and His army (19:19). That battle is depicted in 19:20-21.

But, in fact, we're already familiar with this battle. It's the battle of Armageddon. In 16:12-16 we saw "three unclean spirits like frogs" spew from the mouths of "the dragon", "the beast", and "the false prophet". These three "demonic spirits" went out "to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty".

The demonic spirits assemble the kings at a place called "Armageddon"—the place where God's people are assembled in God's presence. Here, the forces of evil converge for their final doomed assault on God's people. In 16:12-16, we don't see the battle itself. But we do see the *preparations* for the battle.

Armageddon: a preview

Then, in 17:12-14, we're given a preview of this battle. Ten kings "are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast" (17:12). They're "of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast" (17:13, see 17:17). These kings "will make war on the Lamb". With the Lamb are those who "are called and chosen and faithful" (17:14). But "the Lamb will conquer" these kings, "for He is Lord of lords and King of kings" (17:14).

Armageddon: the report in full

Now, here in 19:11-21, we see the battle of Armageddon in graphic detail. The "kings of the earth with their armies" assemble (19:15,18-19). With them are the "the beast" and "the false prophet" (19:19-20); these two together symbolise these same armies, but viewed in a different way. The beast symbolises worldly regimes under Satanic domination. The false prophet symbolises the beast's 'minister of propaganda'—propaganda designed to draw and bind people to these worldly regimes.

Notice the correspondence between how the battle is

described here and back in 17:12-14. There, “the Lamb” is accompanied by those who “are called and chosen and faithful”. Here, He is followed by “the armies of heaven” (19:14). And both there and here, our Saviour is acclaimed as “Lord of lords” and “King of kings” (17:14,19:16).



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The battle of Armageddon is essentially a spiritual battle. It's symbolised by the preview in 17:12-14, and the battles in 19:11-21 and 20:7-10. It takes place “on the great day of God the Almighty” (16:14), the day when Jesus returns.

But the battle of Armageddon is hardly a battle. The Lord's enemies fall back in disarray, crushed. The beast and the false prophet are captured and “thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur” (19:20). The worldly regimes and the false ideologies that supported them are destroyed.

The rest—those who bear the mark of the beast—are slain “by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse” (19:21). The ground is littered with corpses, and “all the birds were gorged with their flesh” (19:21).

The battle of Armageddon is the final assault of the forces of evil on God's people. It must inevitably involve violence in its outworking—God's people will doubtless suffer physical persecution, and even death. But essentially the battle of Armageddon is a *spiritual*

battle. We'll see this battle one more time, in 20:7-10.

Imagery to awaken us

Are you shocked and disturbed by the gory detail of this scene in 19:17-21? It is repulsive, and intentionally so. Recall that some of Revelation's first readers had compromised with the Roman world around them. Jesus wanted His people to wake up and see exactly where this world was going to end up.

We, too, may drift sleepily into complacency. We may even actively compromise with this world. But this world is headed for destruction. Babylon will be destroyed. The beast and the false prophet will end up in the lake of fire—the place of eternal torment. And the kings and their armies will lie unburied, a feast for birds of prey. But they're simply receiving what they'd meted out to God's people: recall that “some from the . . . nations” gazed at the bodies of God's witnesses and refused to let them be buried (11:9). God will execute perfect justice on all who have opposed His people. And in so doing, He will answer His people's prayers (see 6:10).

But even this isn't quite the end for these kings and their armies. In 20:15, we learn that all those whose names aren't written in the book of life will also be thrown into the fiery lake.

The two suppers

Earlier, we read about “those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb”. Now we see another supper—“the great supper of God” (19:17). The contrast could not be greater. People will either feast at the Lord's supper, or they'll be feasted upon at God's “great supper”. Again, we're presented with the kind of black and white contrast so basic to the book. God is showing us things as they really are. He's teaching, encouraging, and warning us. He wants us to remain faithful to Him, and take our place among His victorious people in the new creation.

The Thousand Years (20:1-10)

The thousand-year question

John sees an angel “coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain” (20:1 NIV). He seizes Satan “and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him” (20:2-3 NIV). Thus begins one of the most debated passages in the whole Bible.

A central issue is this: *how are we to understand this period of a thousand years (also called the Millennium)?* There are various views. They can be divided into two broad groups—one in which Jesus returns *before* the

Millennium, the other in which He returns *after* it. We'll explain these views in more detail later.

For now, we'll take the view that Jesus will return *after* the Millennium. If so, it seems that the last battle (20:7-10) is *one of the events that accompany His return*. Let's start at this point in the story.

The last battle

After the thousand years—whenever that occurs—“Satan will be released from his prison” (20:7). He springs into action “to deceive the nations that are

at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle" (20:8). This vast and menacing horde marches across the earth and besieges "the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (20:8-9).

The word "camp" recalls the time when Israel were in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. God's besieged people must simply encamp in His presence, and trust *Him* to deliver them from their enemies.

And God's people are "the beloved city". In 11:2 we read that the nations "will trample the holy city for forty-two months"—symbolising the period from the Day of Pentecost to Jesus's Second Coming. During this period, God's people suffer tribulation and oppression. We're now at the end of that "forty-two months". Things have come to a head. The final attack has come.

In 16:12-16, we see the *preparations* for that final conflict. In 17:12-14 we see a preview of the battle. In 19:11-21 we see the battle itself. Now we see this battle again, but from a different 'camera angle'. But notice the progression from scene to scene:

- 1 After the preview in 17:12-14 (but before the actual battle takes place), the adulterous city *Babylon* is destroyed.
- 2 After the account of the battle in 19:11-21, *the beast and the false prophet* are thrown alive into the lake of fire, and the kings of the Earth and their armies are eaten.
- 3 Now, after this account of the battle in 20:7-10, *the nations* are consumed by fire from heaven (compare 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10), and *Satan himself* is thrown into the "lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were". There they'll be "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (20:10).

These successive accounts depict *the same battle*. But each account is giving us a different 'camera angle' on that battle.

When will this battle take place? As we've explained above, we're taking the view that *it's one of the events that accompany Jesus's Second Coming at the end of this age*. In 19:11-16 we see Jesus riding to victory against the forces of evil. Now God sends fire from heaven to consume the nations ranged against His people. These two accounts, together with the preview in 17:12-14, all seem to describe a climactic end-time battle against the forces of evil—the battle that occurs when Jesus returns to earth.

So here is our fixed point in the timeline. The thousand years ends with this end-time battle, which occurs at Jesus's Second Coming. That's the view we'll take in this course.



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Notice how all the forces of evil are burned by fire. Babylon is burned "with fire" (17:16, 18:8). The beast and the false prophet are "thrown alive into the lake of fire" (19:20). Fire "consumed" the nations (20:9). And "the devil . . . was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur" (20:10). Later, we'll see that, on the Day of Judgment "if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (20:15, see 21:8).

The Antichrist

Paul, too, tells us about this battle in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11. Shortly before Jesus's Second Coming, "the lawless one will be revealed". This lawless one is undoubtedly the final Antichrist—a man who's under Satan's control, and who'll head up a powerful regime. Antichrist and his power base will be the final expression of the beast of 13:1-10. But the Lord Jesus will kill him "with the breath of his mouth and bring [him] to nothing by the appearance of his coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Gog and Magog

The nations are described as "Gog and Magog" (20:8). To see who these are, we need to go back to Ezekiel 38:1-39:29. Ezekiel prophesied against "Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" (Ezekiel 38:2). He predicted that "on that day", Gog would lead an alliance of nations to launch a brutal and unprovoked attack on Israel. But God Himself would defeat this "mighty army" (see 38:21-22). The birds and wild beasts would feast on the corpses of the slain (just as the birds do in Revelation 19:17-21). Ezekiel is prophesying the end-time battle that we see here in Revelation.

The binding of Satan

We've established when the Millennium ends. But when does it begin?

In 20:1-3, we read that Satan is chained and locked away in "the Abyss". The Abyss is a spiritual dimension; it's the source and home of evil. Satan is imprisoned there so that "he might not deceive the nations any longer" (20:3). His imprisonment recalls what we read in 12:7-10 (which we looked at in session 4):

- 1 Satan "was thrown down to the earth", along with his angels (12:9). God has justified us; Satan has no

more grounds to accuse us before God. Now, Satan is thrown into **"the Abyss"**.

- 2 Secondly, Satan is called by the same four names that he's called in 12:9: **"the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan"** (20:1).

Revelation 12:7-10 records what happened at the Cross. The links between 12:7-10 and 20:1-3 suggest that they refer to the same event. If so, 20:1-3 simply gives us *another angle* on what happened at the Cross. *Jesus bound Satan at the Cross.*

To support this, consider how comprehensive Satan's defeat was at the Cross. Shortly before His death, Jesus declared **"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."** (John 12:31-32). Through the Cross, Satan was defeated. And Jesus rose again and ascended to His Father. **"All authority in heaven and on earth"** has been given to Jesus (Matthew 28:18). He's now drawing **"all people"** to Himself. God's people are making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). From all this, it seems clear that Satan is decisively bound.

But, if so, why is Satan still so very active on Earth? The whole world **"lies in the power of the evil one"** (1 John 5:19). The devil still **"prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"** (1 Peter 5:8). And Paul tells us that the gospel **"is veiled to those who are perishing. . . . the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers"** (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). So how exactly *is* Satan bound?

- 1 Firstly, *despite all his efforts to hinder it, Satan is ultimately powerless to thwart the gospel outreach to the nations.*
- 2 Secondly, *Satan can't yet gather the nations for the final attack on God's people—in other words, for the battle of Armageddon.* He can come out **"to deceive the nations . . . to gather them for battle"** only after the Millennium (20:8).

The first resurrection

We've seen what happens to Satan during the 'thousand years'. Now we see what happens to God's people.

John sees **"thrones"**; sitting on them are **"those to whom the authority to judge was committed"** (20:4). John also sees **"the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark . . ."** (20:4). It seems most likely that all these descriptions refer to *all* faithful believers. Only some of them suffer martyrdom, and of those, only some are beheaded. But *all* of them **"loved not their lives even unto death"**

(12:11). *All* God's faithful people must be prepared to die for their Lord. And so these people sitting on thrones include you and me!

These **"souls"**, in other words, the believers, **"came to life and reigned with Christ"** for the 'thousand years'. Their coming to life is **"the first resurrection"**. Over them **"the second death has no power"**—we'll explain the second death later. They are **"blessed and holy"**. And no wonder: what a blessed and holy calling they have! They're **"priests of God and of Christ"**, and they reign with Christ for a 'thousand years'.

What is **"the first resurrection"**? That's debated. Here are three options:

- *Believers' entrance into the presence of Jesus in what's known as 'the intermediate state'.* This is a state of conscious blessedness into which God's people pass, if they die *before* Jesus comes again, and thus *before* they receive their resurrection bodies. In this intermediate state, believers may be disembodied, or have temporary bodies. However, I don't think it's certain there'll *be* an intermediate state. Perhaps, at death, believers will step out of 'earthly' time and immediately enter 'eternal' time at the moment of Jesus's Second Coming and their bodily resurrection.
- *The resurrection of the body at Jesus's Second Coming.* If so, what we're seeing here in 20:4-6 is a glimpse of God's people in the new creation. We've already had previews in 7:9-17 and 15:2-4; perhaps this is another.
- *Spiritual resurrection—in other words, new birth.* Jesus said, **"whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."** (John 5:24, and compare 1 John 3:14, Ephesians 2:5-6 and Colossians 2:12). We're told that **"they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him . . ."**. We are already His priests here on Earth (Revelation 1:6; compare 1 Peter 2:9). And we already share Christ's dominion: we sit with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

Overall, options 2 or 3 seem more likely.

Where are the believers during the 'thousand years'? Are they in Heaven or on Earth? We're not told. In fact, in one sense, we believers—who live here on Earth—are already seated with Christ **"in the heavenly places"** (Ephesians 2:6). What we *are* told is this: they're **"with Christ"** (20:4, see 20:6). *And, in the end, that's what really matters.*

Why does Jesus give us this vision of His people in the Millennium? He's showing us *His great reversal*. They were once despised and persecuted. Some suffered

death for their loyalty to Jesus. *Now the situation is completely reversed:*

- The believers are given “the authority to judge” (20:4). This could also be translated, “judgment was given in their favour”^[6]—that is, they’re *vindicated*. God has vindicated them from the accusations and condemnation of this world.
- Satan is imprisoned and bound. Believers, in contrast, are enthroned (20:4). They’ll be “priests of God and of Christ” and will “reign with him for a thousand years” (20:6)! In session 1, we pointed out that martyrdom is no defeat for God’s people. Their faithfulness to Jesus, and the suffering that results, is the doorway to a glorious calling in the presence of Christ. As Paul wrote to Timothy: “if we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12).

This great reversal in 20:4-6 recalls visions we’ve already seen. In 7:9-17 we saw “a great multitude” who had come out of “the great tribulation”, now “standing before the throne and before the Lamb”. In 11:3-13 we saw God’s “two witnesses” slain by “the beast”, but raised from death and ascending into Heaven.

But the rest of the dead “did not come to life” until the thousand years were over. If the previous descriptions include all the believers, then ‘the rest of the dead’ must include all unbelievers.

The symbolism of the thousand years

Our Western society likes to pin events down to dates and times. But references to periods of time in Revelation are *symbols*. The important thing is not so much the *length* of those periods, as *what’s going on* in them. For example, in session 4, we saw that “42 months” symbolises a limited period during which God’s people suffer, but are protected from ultimate harm.

So what does ‘a thousand years’ symbolise?

- 1 Firstly, in session 4, we saw that ten suggests an unspecified but complete number. A thousand (ten multiplied by ten multiplied again by ten) thus suggests *an absolutely complete number*. The Millennium doesn’t necessarily mean a thousand years chronologically. It’s *an unspecified but complete period of time*. Only God knows how long it lasts. The saints endured suffering for a symbolic period of ‘42 months’. Compare that with the ‘1,000 years’ when they’re reigning with Christ, and serving God and Christ as priests! Our suffering for Christ may be hard, we may even lose our lives for Him. But the Millennium brings us *God’s* perspective on our suffering. In the end, it’s a “light momentary affliction” (2 Corinthians 4:17) compared with the magnitude and glory of our

reign with Christ—in this life now, as well as in the new creation.

- 2 Secondly, a thousand is ten cubed. The cube is a perfect space, and has special significance in the Bible. The Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:1-37) and in the Temple (1 Kings 6:20) was a cube. This cubic space was God’s home on Earth (see Exodus 25:22, Numbers 7:89). New Jerusalem is a cube, too, as we’ll see in the next session. So the ‘thousand years’ *may possibly* also symbolise believers *in God’s presence*.

Four Millennial Views

Introduction

In very simple terms, views about the Millennium fall into two broad groups:

- Many believe that Jesus will return *before* the Millennium, and so this view is called *premillennialism*. It has two main versions. *Historic premillennialism* is so called because it’s a view that’s been around since the early days of the Church. *Dispensational premillennialism* is relatively recent, and is a good deal more complicated.
- Many others believe that Jesus will return *after* the Millennium. Again, this view has two main versions—*postmillennialism* and *amillennialism*.

There isn’t space here to go into any detail about these views. What follows is a very brief thumbnail sketch of the four major views.

The historic premillennial view

Historic premillennialists believe that Jesus will be bodily present and reign on this present Earth for a thousand years, or at least a long period of time, *after* His Second Coming. The Millennium will be a period of global peace and prosperity. Sin and death will still exist, but Satan will be bound and evil firmly restrained.

The dispensational premillennial view

This form of premillennialism first took shape during the 19th century. The traditional version of this view has been very popular and influential, especially in North America; among its characteristic features are:

- Most think the ‘rapture’ of living believers and resurrection of dead believers (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) won’t occur at Jesus’s Second Coming, but *seven years before it*. Images of millions of Christians suddenly vanishing without trace have been spectacularly dramatised by writers and film producers—for example, in the *Left Behind* series of books.
- Jesus’s Millennial reign will fulfil Old Testament prophecies and promises concerning the nation of Israel in an earthly, political way.

Postmillennialism

Traditional postmillennialism typically holds that before Jesus's Second Coming, the gospel will result in a 'golden age' of peace and righteousness on Earth, though sin will still be present.

Amillennialism

Amillennialism literally means 'no millennial-ism'. Strictly speaking, amillennialists *do* believe in the Millennium—it's just that they think it covers the whole Church age from Jesus's first coming to His coming again. Amillennialism is very widely held. It seems to fit best with the rest of the Scriptures, and that's always a key consideration when assessing views of the end times. The view suggested in this course is essentially

amillennial.

Unlike the other views, amillennialism doesn't see the Millennium as a period of peace and prosperity, but as a time of conflict of varying intensity between the forces of Satan, and of Christ and His people. But nonetheless, the gospel will be preached and a great multitude of people will be saved.

Amillennialism and the idealist view

In session 4, we looked at the four views about the timing of the three series of seven judgments (6:1-17, 8:1-9:21, 15:1, 15:5-16:21). The approach we took was based on the idealist view. Most people who take this idealist view also take the amillennial view of the Millennium.

The Last Judgment (20:11-15)

The Judge upon the throne

A "great white throne" appears, "and him who was seated on it" (20:11). John sees no elders or angels or living beings. Earth and sky flee (echoing 6:14 and 16:20). The throne of God—the controlling image in Revelation—now stands alone. The great and final judgment of the world has come.

John does not tell us who is seated on this "great white throne". In the throne vision of 4:1-11, it is God who is "seated" there, as He is in 7:10 and 19:4. But in 22:3 we're told that "the throne of God and of the Lamb" will be in New Jerusalem (see also 22:1). Jesus conquered and sat down with His Father "on his throne" (3:21); in 7:17 the Lamb is "in the midst of the throne". The Father has handed over all judgment to the Son (John 5:22,27, Acts 10:42, 17:31, Romans 2:16). So it seems certain that it is God in Christ who is seated here. God in Christ judges the world.

The books opened

John sees "the dead, great and small, standing before the throne" (20:12). People from every age and nation and rank are assembled there. The sea releases its dead; "Death and Hades" (20:13) surrender their dead.

No-one escapes this final day of reckoning before Almighty God. There is nowhere to hide. Jesus said, "an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement" (John 5:28-29). That day has now dawned.

Books are "opened" (20:12). Then "another book" is opened—"the book of life" (20:12). Each person is



Acts of Parliament housed in the Victoria Tower, Palace of Westminster © Jeroen at Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 2.0)

John writes, "I saw the dead, . . . standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done." The books that John saw were scrolls. The scrolls in this image are records of Acts of Parliament of the government of the United Kingdom.

judged "by what was written in the books, according to what they had done" (20:12).

Everyone is accountable to God for what they have thought and said and done. What we think and say and do reveals our true character, what we *really* believe, and where our true allegiance lies. Each person is responsible for how they've lived their lives. In the end, no-one can blame heredity or circumstances, or what others have done to them, for the kind of person they are, or for what they have done.

The lake of fire

Then "Death and Hades" are "thrown into the lake of fire" (20:14). "Death and Hades" seems to refer to death and the realm of the dead. Jesus has authority over these; He has "the keys of Death and Hades" (1:18). Now He hurls "Death and Hades" into the fiery lake.

This seems to mean that they cease to exist: in other words, death and the realm of the dead are no more. What continues to exist, and will continue to exist forever, is the "lake of fire". This fiery lake is "the second death" (20:14). It is spiritual death—the burning torment of being cut off from fellowship with God and exposed to His righteous wrath. Everyone whose name isn't in the book of life is thrown into that fiery lake (20:15).

The judgment of believers

But the names of all God's faithful people are written in "the book of life". They're the people who conquer (for example, 3:5, 21:7). They've been written in this book from before the foundation of the world, before they were ever born (see 17:8). Their names are inscribed there by God's grace alone. And they'll never be blotted out (see 3:5).

This book is "the book of life of the Lamb who was slain" (13:8, see also 21:27). We are redeemed *through the death of the Lamb*. Through His death on the Cross, Jesus suffered the penalty for our sin. And so, when we stand before the "great white throne" (20:11) on that day, we won't be condemned. The penalty for our sin has been paid. Our destiny is to dwell in God's presence in His holy city, New Jerusalem, for ever—as we'll see in the next chapter. So, in the opening of these books—the books that record people's deeds, and the book of life—we see grace alongside justice, the free offer of eternal life alongside judgment.

Nonetheless, we believers *will* be judged. We must all appear "before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10, see also Romans 14:10-12). We'll receive "what is due" to us for what we've done. Have we yielded our lives fully to God, regardless of the apparent personal cost? Have we walked in the Spirit, and not in our own strength? Have we resolutely trusted God, come what may? Have we obeyed Him? Have we overcome temptation, compromise and persecution for Jesus's sake? Have we loved? Have we forgiven?

Each believer will receive a reward. We mustn't think of these rewards as 'prizes'—the sort we might have received as a child for good behaviour, or for good

work at school. No, our rewards will flow *naturally* from the way we've lived our lives on Earth.

Imagine you're learning to play the piano and you've just passed the highest grade. You might be awarded a prize for your achievement—perhaps a certificate and some prize money. These are good rewards, of course. But your *really* significant reward is the ability to play the piano beautifully and so give pleasure both to yourself and to many other people.^{[7][8]} That's the *real* reward. It's a reward that flows naturally from what you've done to get it. And it's *that* kind of reward that seems to be in store for us believers.

So, specifically, what might our rewards be? They seem to relate to *responsibility*. Jesus's parables of the minas (or pounds) and the talents show us that God will give people differing degrees of responsibility (Luke 19:11-27, Matthew 25:14-30). And with that responsibility comes *capacity*—a special aptitude and ability to fulfil that responsibility. But we believers will *all* have equal delight and joy in fulfilling whatever kind of responsibility God gives us. We'll all enter "into the joy of" our Lord (Matthew 25:21,23)—and there's no greater joy than that! And the crowning joy of the new Heaven and Earth is this: we'll see God's "face" (Revelation 22:4). We'll see the face of Christ, His Son. And we'll know God intimately, in a way we can't imagine in this life. We'll explore this more in the next part.

Footnotes

- [1] Quoted from *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Story-Line of the Bible* by Vaughan Roberts, page 147. Published by Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, in 2003.
- [2] See *Putin, the West, and the Myth of Progress* by Trevin Wax. Published online by The Gospel Coalition at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/putin-the-west-and-the-false-eschatology-of-progress/>, accessed 8 October 2022.
- [3] Quoted from *The Book of Revelation: the Seen and the Unseen: Sermons by Bernard Bell 2001-2007*, page 124. Published by Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino, Cupertino, California. Published online at <https://pbcc.org/learning/archived-teachings/series/>. Accessed 12 April 2013.
- [4] Quoted from *The Returning King: a Guide to the Book of Revelation*, by Vern Sheridan Poythress, page 44. Published by P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, in 2000. Published online at <https://frame-poythress.org/ebooks/the-returning-king/>, accessed on 14 July 2021
- [5] See *Exodus (The New American Commentary, volume 2)* by Douglas K. Stuart, page 555. Published by B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee, in 2006.
- [6] This is Craig R. Koester's translation (but with Anglicised spelling). See *Revelation: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Yale Bible)*, by Craig R. Koester, page 768. Published by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, in 2014.
- [7] This is taken from an example given by Tony Lane in *Exploring Christian Doctrine*, page 220, quoted and referenced by Robert Letham in *Systematic Theology*, page 901. Published by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, in 2019.
- [8] See *The Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis, in *Transpositions and Other Addresses* by C.S. Lewis, pages 21-22. First published by Geoffrey Bles, London, U.K., in 1949.