

The Book of Revelation
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Part 2
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Review of Part 1.

- Introduction on the background of the book.
- Rev 1-3: Christ's message to "the seven churches that are in Asia."
- Rev 4, 5, and 7: Three of John's visions of heaven.

Rev 5-6 and 8-11: God' s Judgment upon a Sinful World

The Bible speaks frequently of "the Day of the Lord" and the Last Judgment. On that Day, before "the dread judgment seat of Christ" (2 Co 5:10), the forces of evil will be finally and decisively blasted by God and banished from the heavens and the earth.

However, between the fall of humanity and the last judgment, the wrath of God is continuously directed toward the sins of the world. God's continuing and historical judgment of the fallen world is depicted vividly in Revelation.

Revelation presents two visions of God's condemnation of sin: (1) the vision of the seven seals (chapters 5-6) and (2) the vision of the seven trumpets (chapters 8, 9, and 11).

Rev 5-6: the seven seals.

God the Father gives a scroll of judgment – "a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals" – to the lamb of God ("the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" – i.e., the Christ) (Rev 5:1-7).

As the lamb breaks the seals on the scroll, great calamities are visited upon the earth.

With the breaking of the first four seals, the "four horsemen of the Apocalypse" go forth to bring war, famine, and pestilence to the world of men (Rev 6:1-8).

As the fifth and sixth seals are broken, God's holy martyrs – "those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" – cry out for the final destruction of the powers of darkness which will take place on the day of the Lord (Rev 6:9-17).

The opening of the seventh seal brings "silence in heaven," for the scroll of judgment is now completely open, signifying the fullness (the number "seven" again) of the judgment which is yet to come (see Rev 8:1).

Rev 8:2-9:21 and 11:1-19: the seven trumpets.

The "seven angels who stand before God" announce, with trumpet blast, the incredible catastrophes that are to occur just prior to the end of days.

The imagery of this vision is very difficult to decipher in detail. As the seven trumpets are sounded by the angels, the earth is devastated by a series of afflictions: hailstorms of fire and blood; vast and extremely destructive fires; the pollution of the rivers and the seas; worldwide warfare; the contamination of the atmosphere by great clouds of smoke and sulphur; the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars; the death of millions of human beings; and so on (Rev 8:7-9:21).

Even the Church of Christ (represented by "two witnesses" – Elijah and Enoch?) will suffer tremendously during the last days; but because of her faithfulness, she will be finally delivered and exalted into the kingdom of God (Rev 11:1-19).

Comment.

The breaking of the seven seals and the blasting of the seven trumpets signify the utter ungodliness of sin and the disasters which sin has brought upon the world.

John's visions of God's judgment upon the sinful world constitute, on the one hand, a kind of explanation of the great suffering that takes place in the present world order, and, on the other hand, a call to repentance.

The most devastating judgment of all still lies before us – beyond the world, beyond death, beyond time. To enter into the ultimate glory of the Kingdom of Heaven, we must make ourselves ready for the Last Judgment. By living faithfully and obediently in Christ and in his Church, we will one day hear the Lord say to us, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34).

Rev 12-22: Visions of the Coming of the Kingdom of God: (1) the original satanic rebellion against God; (2) the spiritual warfare between Christ and the devil which forms the supernatural background of world history; (3) the ultimate victory of Christ over the powers of darkness; and (4) the final establishment of the kingdom of God.

(1) Rev 12:3-4, 7-12: The Satanic Rebellion against God.

According to ancient Jewish and Christian traditions, the devil was originally one of the angels of God. Seeking to exalt himself to the heavenly throne, this celestial creature led an angelic rebellion against God. Revelation tells us that one-third of the angelic host was implicated in Satan's revolt (see 12:3-4). Depicting the devil as "a great red dragon," John writes:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael, [the archangel] and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent [see Gn 3], who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (12:7-9)¹

According to tradition, the devil was thrown down to earth because he was originally ordained to be the guardian spirit of that planet, and during the epoch of world history he has been permitted to continue his association with our world (see Ezk 28:11-19). It was through his position as "the god of this world" (2 Co 4:4) that Satan was able to entice Adam and Eve into the realm of evil.

(2) Rev 12, 13, and 17: The Spiritual Warfare between the Lamb and the Dragon.

Revelation takes the fall of man for granted and concentrates upon the devil's attempts to subvert God's plan for the salvation of the fallen world.

Rev 12: The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon.

John portrays ancient Israel as "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." The woman was "with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery" (12: 1-2).

The "child" is the Messiah promised by God to the people of the Old Covenant, he "who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (12: 5).

The devil – the "great red dragon" – sought to destroy the Messiah of Israel, but the Holy One "was caught up to God and to his throne" (12:3-5). As we know, Satan did see the Messiah suffer and die on the cross but, through the Lord's resurrection, ascension, and exaltation, Satan was himself defeated, as will be made finally clear at the Second Coming.

¹Extended quotations from scripture are in boldface.

Realizing his defeat and final destiny, the devil, out of sheer malice, has devoted his remaining time to the devastation of the earth and to the oppression of the human race. The Bible tells us that he is especially concerned with the persecution of the Church and of individual Christians. Seeing that he could no longer hope to defeat God, Satan

pursued the woman who had borne the male child [the woman now represents the people of the New Covenant, the Church]. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half the time.... Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. (Rev 12:13-17)

The Church, as the body of Christ, will never be destroyed. Individual Christians, John tells us, are very much at the mercy of demonic temptation and oppression, but they can conquer the devil and his agents by believing in the saving power of "the blood of the Lamb" and by maintaining their faith ("the word of their testimony") during times of tribulation (Rev 12:11)

Rev 13: Satan's Two Beasts: worldly power and worldly ideology.

Worldly power is represented as "a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads" (13:1).

This beast from the sea is given authority by Satan to rule "every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it [i.e., worldly power], every one...[except those who belong to] the Lamb that was slain" (13:10).

Christians must not allow themselves to be swept away in admiration for the power of state and empire, or for the glory of race and nation. They must keep their hearts and minds free from "the political illusion," the illusion that the salvation of the human race can be effected through social, economic, political, or military means.

Worldly ideology – "another beast which rose out of the earth" (13:11).

It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.... It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven [the sky] to earth in the sight of men; and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the [first] beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them...[to worship the first beast], and...[causing] those who would not worship the image of the [first] beast to be slain. (Rev 13:12-15)

For John, this imagery was no doubt symbolic of the Roman empire (the first beast) and its cult of emperor worship (the second beast). The famous "number of the beast" – 666² – is a Hebraic cryptogram symbolizing the Roman emperor, Domitian (see Rev 13:18). However, the beast from the earth stands for any ideology or belief system that would lead us to devote our ultimate concern to worldly power. Christians of all ages can find meaning in the vision of the two beasts.

²hexakosioi hexēkonta hex, ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ

Rev 17: Babylon, the Great Harlot.

In John's day, as has been indicated, the center of worldly power and worldly ideology was Rome. In Revelation, Rome is presented in symbolic guise as "Babylon, the great harlot." John is shown

the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk.... [He saw] a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; and on her head was written the name of a mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations." And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. (Rev 17:1-6)

The "mystery" of the great harlot's identity is cleared up in Revelation 17:7-18, where she is designated as "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth." But, again, the symbolism Revelation has universal significance. The image of the great harlot, based upon the OT symbol of Babylon, represents "every society which fights against God, every body of persons united in wickedness and fleshliness." The great harlot of Revelation is the biblical type of "all who are corrupted by their passions and lusts, unfaithful to God Who has made them and loves them."

Summary comment on Rev 12, 13, and 17.

These, then, are the forces against which the Church of Christ must contend throughout the duration of world history: demonic oppression and temptation, the enticements and threats of worldly power, the delusions of false religion and philosophy, a worldly morality based upon the renunciation of God, and so on.

During the Christian era, the Lamb of God does battle with the devil in and through the Church. For those of us who follow Christ, the spiritual warfare of our Savior has become our warfare. We must always remember, with St. Paul, that "we are not contending [merely] against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness [which are in league with the devil]" (Eph 6:11-12).

(3) Rev 15-20: The Victory of Christ and his Church over the Powers of Darkness.

According to the "inaugurated eschatology" of the NT, salvation through Christ is simultaneously past, present, and future: we have been saved, we are being saved, we will be saved; the kingdom of God has come, it is coming, and it will come. This "collapsed time" of the redemptive process is evident in John's vision of the victory of Christ and his Church over the powers of darkness. The work of Christ at his first advent, his ongoing work through the Holy Spirit and in his Church, and the work he will perform at his Second Coming are depicted in Revelation 15-20 as phases of a single process.

Rev 15-16: the seven bowls of the wrath of God.

In the last days, John tells us once again, the earth will be afflicted by the wrath of God. In chapters 15-16, we are presented with a vision of "the seven bowls of the wrath of God" which are poured out by angels upon the world. All those who had followed the satanic beasts of worldly power and worldly ideology are covered with "foul and evil sores"; the sea becomes like blood, and all sea-life dies; all the rivers and fountains of the earth, too, become like blood; the land is covered with complete darkness; the earth is wracked by a devastating earthquake, and so on (see Rev 16).

While the seven bowls of wrath are being poured out, the legions of God are secretly gathered and made ready for the final battle with evil, which will take place at the second advent of Christ (see Rev 14 and 19:1-10).

Rev 18:1-19:10: Christ's final victory over the great harlot and the two beasts – the powers of worldliness through which the devil had ruled the world since the fall of man.

Rev 18:1-8: The fall of Babylon the Great.

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird; for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness."

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and played the wanton, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning. Since in her heart she says, 'A queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning I shall never see,' so shall her plagues come in a single day, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she shall be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."

Rev 18:9-19: The world mourns the fall of Babylon the Great.

And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and were wanton with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour has thy judgment come."

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more.... The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud....

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?" And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! In one hour she has been laid waste....

Rev 18:21-24: The final destruction of Babylon the Great.

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more; and the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more; and a craftsman of any craft shall be found in thee no more; and the sound of the millstone shall be heard in thee no more; and the light of a lamp shall shine in thee no more; and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall be heard in thee no more; for thy merchants were the great men of the earth, and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

Rev 19:1-6: Exultation in Heaven.

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her

the blood of his servants." Once more they cried, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice crying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns."

Rev 19:7-10: The joining of Christ and his Church.

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; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

Rev 19:11-20:15: The final defeat of the devil and his demonic legions.

Rev 19:11-16: The Coming of Christ.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Rev 19:17-21: Defeat of the Beast and his armies.

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

Rev 20:1-3: Satan Bound.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.

Rev 20:4-6: The Millennium.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they

shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

Rev 20:7-10: Satan's last stand.

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Comment on Rev 20:1-10.

John tells us that, through the power of Christ, the devil will be bound up in chains by an angel and cast into "the bottomless pit." The devil is to remain in the bottomless pit for "a thousand years," and, after that, "he must be loosed for a little while" (20: 1-3).

During that thousand-year period, Christ and his saints will reign over the world (20:4-6). "And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison" and will come forth to do battle for the last time against God.

At the battle of Armageddon (see Rev 16:13-16), the devil and his legions will be utterly routed. They will be "thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the...[two beasts] were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (20:7-10).

The "millennium."

The thousand-year period mentioned in Revelation 20 is often referred to as "the millennium" (the Latin term for "thousand-year period"). Christians have held several different views of the millennial reign of Christ.

Premillennialism. All of the events described in Revelation 20 will follow the second coming of Christ, and the Lord will literally rule the earth for a thousand years prior to the final institution of the kingdom of God.

Postmillennialism: Through the missionary work of the Church, the world will experience a long golden age (the millennium) which will be followed by the second coming.

Amillennialism: There will never be "a literal earth-rule of a thousand years, either before or after Christ's return."

The Orthodox Church subscribes to the amillennialist point of view.

As used in Revelation, the number "ten" and multiples thereof signify an indefinite magnitude. The Orthodox Church regards the thousand-year period of Revelation 20 as symbolic of Christ's reign in and with his Church during the indefinitely long period between his first and second advents.

At the Lord's first coming, the power of the devil was placed in chains (although not utterly and finally obliterated); and when Christ returns, at the end of "the millennium," the devil will be "loosed" and finally reduced to a hellish impotence.

Rev 20:11-15: The Last Judgment.

Following the second coming and the battle of Armageddon, the general resurrection of the dead will take place. At the last judgment, the saved will be separated from the damned, and the latter will be eternally separated from the presence of God (see also Mt 25:31-46).

Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life.

And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done.

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

With the "great divorce" of God's people from those who belong to darkness, the victory of Christ and his Church over the forces of evil will be complete.

(4) Rev 21-22: The Final Establishment of the Kingdom of God.

After the Last Judgment, the Kingdom of God will be fully and finally established. The final vision recorded in Revelation portrays that ultimate eschatological event.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new.... It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son." (Rev 21:1-7)

John goes on to describe the glory of the new Jerusalem, the fully deified bride of Christ, the Church (21:9-27). The union of God and his Church is presented as complete: the glorified Church lives in God, and God lives in his Church. In the glorified union of God and the Church, "there shall no more be anything accursed...[and the saints] shall see...[the] face [of God], and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light or lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign [with him] for ever and ever" (Rev 22:3-5).

John brings Revelation to a close with a series of exhortations and warnings (22:6-21). All are called into the kingdom of God; but to enter that kingdom, one must first respond to the invitation of Christ and his Church with diligence, constancy, and obedience. Revelation reminds us, again and again, to make ourselves ready for the sudden and unpredictable Second Coming of Christ.