

REVELATION 14-19

Notes

These chapters and the remainder of the book are intended to encourage and strengthen the faithful to persevere in their fidelity to the ways of God in spite of persecution from without and the lure of compromise from within. How is this encouragement and strengthening to come? Their persecutors and those who promote the way of compromise will be destroyed. God will vindicate the faithful and invite them to rule in the new heavens and new earth that will come to be once this world order is overcome.

Chapter 14

144,000 is a number intended to denote a large multitude. It is of great comfort for those who feel isolated and alone to know that there are many out there who are secretly Christians suffering the same fate. 144 being a multitude of 12 also denotes the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles which will now constitute the new spiritual Israel, stretching well beyond the Jewish nation.

The 3 angels each have three key events to introduce.

- 1) Everyone throughout the world is confronted by a call to fear God and give God the glory, for a day of judgement is coming on all wickedness and injustice.
- 2) Babylon (Rome) has fallen and it is just a matter of time before this will actually happen in human history. It has corrupted other nations with its immorality and idolatry, and it has slaughtered the innocent and vulnerable for far too long.
- 3) Those who have aligned themselves with wickedness will be judged, while those who endure in resistance and remain faithful will be comforted and vindicated.

The Son of Man (Jesus Christ) will come on the clouds (Mark 13:26) with a golden crown (symbol of rule) and a sickle (to weed out the bad from the good). Even though God's forbearance has sustained human beings since the beginning of creation, when the judgement comes it will be fierce and massive (blood flowing for 200 miles). But remember, Christ does not shed the blood of others but rather suffers the shedding of his own blood. The conquest is in the victory of love not violent bloodshed. Yet the violent bloodshed of the empire turns in on itself and produces endless suffering for countless many. They are reaping what they have sown. There has been a consistent and perverse refusal to turn to the way of love and repent of all the killing, torture, and injustice the empire and its leaders have committed. The blood reflects the wickedness. There is no more time left. People are either on God's side or the side of evil. Those who have suffered will be vindicated and comforted eternally. But freedom to love is also freedom to refuse love which is what hell is about. Revelation envisions those who have refused love to share the same fate as the dragon and the beasts (more on this below).

Chapters 15 – 16

The comparisons between the heavenly temple and the temple (in a large tent) at the time of Moses are unmistakable. Also unmistakable are other comparisons with Moses (e.g., sea of glass and red sea; tent of testimony and the temple which was in a tent before it was built in stone much later under king Solomon). The key purpose of this comparison seems to be as a lead in to the 7 bowls of the wrath of God which ignite 7 plagues paralleled with the 10 plagues at the time of Moses, aimed against the Egyptians. A number of the plagues are actually similar, even though the overall number differ (the vision of Revelation maintains a consistency with the number 7 throughout). Rome, like Egypt of long ago, has enslaved people for far too long and will fall.

In terms of the events in the late first century when Revelation was written, here is what is going on. There was widespread popular belief that Nero, isolated by those around him and having killed himself, would return from the dead with an army of the Parthians from the East, and wreak vengeance on Rome and its leadership (he felt betrayed). Thus, there is the beast (resurrected Nero) and the whore (Babylon-Rome), and it is the beast who will be the means of the destruction of Babylon. This will also be part of the larger plan of God, which will eventually include the destruction of the beast and the dragon who gave his authority to the beast in the first place. The 'false prophet' who supports the beast is equivalent to the second beast of chapter 13. The role of the prophet like the second beast is to support the empire by an enforced religious adherence, devotion, and loyalty. Resistance meant suffering and death.

Chapter 17

There are many clues given throughout the vision to identify Nero with the beast and Rome with Babylon the 'whore'. The seven heads as seven mountains in chapter 17 clearly refer to Rome which was built on 7 hills. The seven kings, five of which came before and one currently reigning, all point to the reign of Diocletian (mid-90s of the 1st century) leaving the way for the last and final king - (Nero - the Antichrist) - to rule. He was, is and is not, and will be again. All of this is a reference to Nero, believed to come back from the dead at some future point in time.

The final battle is two-pronged. First Rome is destroyed, but then the beast (a revived Nero) will do battle with the Lamb and his heavenly armies at Armageddon (historic Megiddo, a great biblical valley where battles were fought).

Chapter 18-19

The fall of Babylon is described with great relish. All those who were 'in bed' (fornicating) with Rome in terms of business and pleasure, will also suffer because Rome will be no more. Rome was also responsible for the slaughter of many of the faithful (chapter 20 refers to those who were beheaded), and Rome's prosperity was tied to her brutal domination of other peoples, enslaving them all.

The fall of Babylon in chapter 18 is contrasted with the great celebration in heaven in

chapter 19. The destruction of Babylon is seen as a just recompense and vindication of the faithful persecuted and slaughtered. The celebration is also preparation for a much more prolonged and widespread celebration to take place when the Lamb and his bride will host their wedding feast.

But before the wedding there is a last battle to be fought. The rider on the white horse whose tongue is the sharp and two-edged word of God will strike with the edge that is judgement all those who have refused to submit to God's rule and God's demand for obedience to the Word that is eternal love.

The two beasts (the Resurrected Nero and his false priests/prophets (introduced in chapter 13 as the second beast)) are captured and instead of being killed, something far worse is done to them. They are thrown alive into the lake of fire (into an active volcanic like pit) to burn without dying - an endless torment (hell). Even though it is assumed that those who hatefully refused to repent of their wickedness are part of this group thrown into hellfire, the focus is on rooting out the source of evil in human hearts and destruction of the earth – the source that is the dragon and his earthly servants the beasts. Unless they are destroyed, heaven cannot come down the earth and the earth and its peoples cannot be liberated from their enslavement under brutal regime after regime. God's rule is the only rule that brings true freedom and peace. More to come in the remaining chapters.

For most of us living in this part of the world, life may be far from perfect but it's much better than many alternatives people are having to live in other parts of the world or if they are part of some marginalized race or group. But imagine living in a world ruled by perfect justice and love, where all life is treated with ultimate care and dignity, where people are free to love but are also full of love in their hearts. How safe and fulfilled we would all feel in such a world. How cared for and safe we would feel. This is God's dream and the book of Revelation wants to tell a fantastic story around such a dream to encourage those who want to remain true in difficult times when it's tempting to give up and give in. Where are we tempted to give up and give in?