

The Revelation

Discipleship Bible Study – Fall 2020

The Village Church of Rancho Santa Fe

Lesson Seven – Week of October 25

Revelation 12:1 – 16:21

THE COSMIC BATTLE

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Chapters 4 – 18
 - a. The main series of visions given to John that illustrate the terrible woes that will befall the world as a prelude to the final defeat of all evil
 - b. Theological message: Jesus Christ is victorious over all things and those who remain faithful to him will share in his victory
2. Chapters 12 - 16
 - a. Within major section on John's vision of cosmic & heavenly matters
 - b. The truly final cosmic battle between Good & Evil, God & Satan

DETAILED NOTES

1. Chapters 12 - 14
 - a. This section is the central core/axis of the entire book
 - b. John's intention is to provide cosmic perspective to persecuted and suffering Christians of 1st century
 - c. Cultural Context: Pagan mythology
 - i. Greek island of Delos, nearby Patmos
 - ii. Birthplace of Apollo to mother Leto and father Zeus
 - iii. Attempt by Dragon Python to kill Apollo
 - iv. Meaning: conflict between forces of darkness, disorder, sterility, death and light, order, fertility, life
 - v. Rome – emperors “appropriation” of myth
 - d. John/Revelation
 - i. “Recasting” the Greek/Roman myth in Christian terms
 - ii. The Central Characters of Good/God
 1. Woman – Mary, Israel, Church, Eve
 2. Child – Messiah
 3. Brethren – Christians, offspring of Woman
 4. Earth – Where drama/battle is actually played out
 5. Angels – agents of God, captain is Michael
 6. God – never directly involved, name never used, evil is “allowed” to exercise power, therefore God is not directly responsible for evil
 - iii. The Central Characters of Evil/Satan
 1. An evil “Trinity” – Dragon, Sea Beast, Land Beast

2. Dragon

- a. Has place in heaven, throne
- b. Ancient mythology (Names: Leviathan, Lotan, Tiamat)
- c. Parody of God, “trans-individual & supra-personal” power of evil, represents all anti-God forces (from serpent on!)

3. Sea Beast

- a. Compilation of Daniel’s vision, taken from Jewish tradition, represents evil empire, Nero
- b. 7 Heads/Hills of Rome, Blasphemous names/emperor worship, Head wound healed/Nero’s suicide (stabbed throat)
- c. Note Image: Sacrificial Lamb is cut in throat, Beast is “cut in throat” – parody of The Lamb/Christ
- d. Represents all that is anti-human, arrogance of human pride over against true God

4. Land Beast

- a. False Prophet from “out of the earth”
- b. Like Elijah (fire from heaven in I Kings 18)
- c. Parody of Holy Spirit, promotes worship of Sea Beast & Dragon, “marks” people for inclusion in society of world against God
- d. 1st Century counterpart: Roman governors, Roman councils, Roman priesthood, false Christian prophets who encouraged accommodation with Rome – maybe none or all of these – major point of John is against anything that promotes “human empire” against empire of true God

iv. The Drama

1. 12:1-6

- a. Dragon attempts to kill Child (Satan/Christ)
- b. Note: Jesus’ death defeats Satan
- c. Note: Woman goes to the wilderness, like in Exodus!

2. 12:7-12

- a. Dragon is defeated
- b. Note: Satan expelled from heaven because of victory of Christ on earth (v11) and Christians with him
- c. Note: Message to Christians – hang in, victory is won, only way to lose is to quit or switch sides

3. 12:13-16

- a. Dragon persecutes Woman on earth
- b. This is time in which 1st century Christians live
- c. Note: even creation itself makes war against Evil

4. 12:17-13:10

- a. Dragon summons Ally from Sea – Beast
- b. This is about Imperial Rome against Christians
- c. Note: Beast is “allowed” to fight Christians and temporarily win

5. 13:11-18

- a. Another Beast summoned, from Land
- b. This is about more local manifestations of Rome – emperor cult of worship
- c. Mark of Beast – 666
 - i. Contrast – Seal of Lamb with the Mark of Beast
 - ii. About who gets to participate in (economic) society and who does not (guilds/pagan worship/patriotism of Rome)
 - iii. Name – gematria (letters have numeric value)
 - 1. Could mean Nero
 - 2. Generally means Roman Empire
 - iv. 666 – 6 one less than 7 three times over! – evil, incomplete, not perfect therefore not fulfilled

6. 14:1-20

- a. 1-5 - A picture of the redeemed church (144,000, Father's name, followers of Lamb, no lies)
 - i. (Defiled – not about “badness” of female/sexuality, but about true power of sexuality, from which those in service to God must be “insulated” in order to fulfill their religious functions)
- b. 6-20 – The real judgment of God versus the “false” judgment of Rome against Christians – a judgment that redeems all creation
 - i. More about victory of God than about vindictive punishment of God's adversaries (and The Adversary!)
 - ii. About Gospel (evangelion) of God: Evil itself is judged, and defeated, which is good news for those who are captured by it and serve it

2. Chapters 15 - 16

a. 15:1-8

- i. Image of sea of glass mixed with fire – evokes Red Sea & Exodus
- ii. Image of worship – as happened after deliverance at Red Sea
- iii. Therefore: all vision of final plagues & victory of God is within context of focus on God (the one who saves)
 - 1. Earthly worship anticipates heavenly (and final) worship
 - 2. Bowls (phale = vial) – used to carry ashes from altar

b. 16:1-21

- i. “Final” woes – actually only a different perspective on “previous” woes
- ii. Note: not 1/4 or 1/3 destroyed, but all!
- iii. Note: all judgment by God is just, justified, deserved
- iv. Battle of Armageddon

1. At Megiddo, in northern Israel? (important battles fought there, but no “mountain” there!) (har = mountain)
 2. No, not about literal places, but about meaning of final battle
 3. All forces of evil gathered, but cannot defeat God
- v. Note: Voice of Christ to Church – Stay awake/clothed, not naked!

THEOLOGICAL/BIBLICAL NOTES on SATAN

- A. In OT – accuser or hostile witness against the righteous, not a proper name!
- B. Intertestamental period – Satan emerges as personification of evil and “transcendent opponent of God” (Boring)
- C. In NT – Satan meant to denote that evil has power beyond just “accumulation” of humanity’s sins
- D. Satan – “real” or not?
 - a. Not Helpful
 - i. Problem of too much focus on Satan and too little on God!
 - ii. Problem of blaming Satan for our own bad actions & decisions
 - b. Helpful
 - i. Identifies very real sense of cosmic reality of evil
 - ii. Identifies sense in which all creation is “victim” of evil – including even those real people who are opposed to God

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Revelation takes ancient mythology (telling deep truth with stories) and uses it in service of Christian theology. What stories of your life speak of deeper truth that is common in all human experience?
2. Revelation gives us a picture of the battle between Good and Evil (God and Devil). Where is that battle being fought in your life and in the world today?
3. Revelation also gives us a picture of the reality of God’s final victory and the call for Christians to remain faithful to this God in this life. How does this picture encourage you? What is difficult about remaining faithful in this life?

+ + + + +

Leader: The Rev. Dr. Jack W. Baca

Sources:

- A. The Bible, New Revised Standard Translation
- B. M. Eugene Boring, Revelation: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1989
- C. Earl F. Palmer, Revelation: The Communicator’s Commentary, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1982