

THE FINAL VISION OF REVELATION

Seven times in the book of Revelation God's judgment is symbolically shown falling on those who oppress and afflict those who are God's people.

1. You have the judgment symbolized in the opening of the seven seals, in chapter 6
2. The next symbolic judgment is pictured in chapter 11 with the sounding of the seven trumpets.
3. The next is found in the symbol of the great harvest in chapter 14.
4. The fourth symbolic judgment is seen in the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath in chapter 16
5. The fifth judgment is pictured in the fall of Babylon, chapter 18
6. The sixth judgment is symbolized by the war led by him who sits on a white horse and whose name is The Word of God, which then led to the great supper of the Lord, chapter 19

And that brings us to the 20th chapter where we see the dragon cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years.

Also seven times in the book of Revelation, God symbolizes that He has His eye on His Son's servants.

1. There is Christ standing in the midst of the seven churches, chapter 1, saying to each one of them, chapters 2 & 3, "I know what you are doing and what you are going through."
2. There is the symbol of the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7.
3. There is the symbol of the temple of God being measured in chapter 11
4. You see the lamb and the 144,000 on Mt. Zion in chapter 14
5. You see those who had conquered the beast singing the song of Moses and the Lamb in chapter 15
6. You have the celebration of the saints in chapter 19

And again, that brings us to the 20th chapter, where we see the souls of martyrs and those who did not worship the beast reigning with Christ for a thousand years.

It is obvious then, that the 20th chapter of Revelation offers readers a critical part of the message John was given to pass on to the saints. This morning, what I hope to do is to give you a helpful exposition of Revelation's seventh and final vision. Let me begin by giving you a quick overview of the vision portion of these three chapters.

In **Chapter 20** you have an angel coming down from heaven, seizing the dragon, which we were first introduced to in chapter 12 and casting him into the bottomless pit. He is also identified as Satan. The pit is closed and then sealed and there he remains chained up and locked away for a thousand years. After this the saints are seen reigning with Christ, also for a thousand years. After the thousand years are over, Satan is released—think "permitted"—and he is free once

more to deceive the nations. He gathers a large force, referred to as “God and Magog” and they surround the camp and the city of the saints, but about the time they are ready to attack, fire falls from heaven, consuming them. The devil is then cast into the lake of fire, into which the two beasts mentioned in chapter 13 had already been cast. Chapter 20, then ends with a picture of a judgment scene with the great white throne in the midst. Books were opened, and another book called the book of life was opened. The judgment proceeded, and people were judged on the basis of what was written in the books. Those whose names were not found in the book of life were then cast into lake of fire.

Chapter 21 continues the vision, only now the attention shifts to the saints and away from their enemies and the wicked who have been afflicting them. Where are they? Well, instead of a bottomless pit, and chains, and a consuming fire, John describes what he sees as “*a new heaven and a new earth.*” He says the old heaven and earth are passed away. In fact, back in chapter 20, verse 11, John tells us, in the presence of God’s throne, there is no place for those things. John also sees what he describes as the holy city, a “new Jerusalem.” She is coming down out of heaven, like a bride adorned and ready to meet her husband. Does the word glorious, or beautiful come to mind?

And suddenly an announcement is made that God’s dwelling place is with man. He dwells among them and they are His people. He wipes away every tear from their eyes, death is no more, and there is no more mourning or crying or pain. All of that is gone. This is now the place where the springs of the water of life now flow can be had without cost.

Then John is given, if you will, a personal tour of the holy city, and here is what he sees. John is carried away to a great high mountain, where he sees the holy city coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God, radiant and clear as crystal. It is surrounded by a high wall, and it has twelve gates, three gates on each side. At each gate stands an angel and on each gate is the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The city is built upon twelve foundations and on each foundation is written the name of one of the twelve apostles. The city is measured, and found to be almost 1400 miles long, wide and high. The walls are over two hundred feet thick, made of pure jasper—which a number of scholars believe to be what we now call diamond. John says the city itself was made of pure gold, including the streets, and the gold was so pure it was transparent as glass. Each of the twelve foundations was adorned with every kind of jewel, such as jasper, sapphire, emerald, topaz and others. Each of the gates was made of a single pearl.

And as John continues his tour, he sees that there is no temple in the city, the reason being because God and Christ themselves are the temple. John observes there is no sun, and no moon, that the city is illuminated by the glory of God. The gates are never shut which surely signified no fear of any enemy. Nothing and no one except that which is good and honors God is allowed to enter into the city; those who are false and do that which is detestable are excluded from it.

As **chapter 22** continues the scene which is mesmerizing to John. He sees a river flowing freely with the water of life from the throne of God and the Lamb. On both sides of the river grows the tree of life, yielding twelve kinds of fruit, a different kind each month. The leaves, John tells us, are for the healing of the nations. And in this city, nothing accursed is allowed, because there the throne of God and the Lamb is to be found, and they are worshipped by the saints. They will look upon the face of God, and his name will be on their foreheads.

Okay, that is a brief recapitulation of what is described for us in chapters 20, 21 and the first 5 verses of chapter 22. So what were Christians of John's day and Christians of today supposed to take away from all of that? And of course we know by now that this is a message from God given through the use of symbols. So that tells us that we are not supposed to interpreting these things literally; that there is a spiritual message to be found in the symbols. So what is that message?

In chapter 20, the message is surely this: The saints have no need to fear the devil. In chapter 12 we learned that he and a number of angels were cast out of heaven and since the very beginning of creation they have sought to destroy the work of God. They have devoted themselves to a war on God, which means that he has declared war on every saint, past or present. Peter was reporting the facts when he said, "*your adversary, the devil, roams about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour,*" **1 Peter 5:8**. But Peter went on to say, "*resist him, firm in your faith.*" **James 4:7** tells us that if we resist him, he will flee from us. And of course, that assumes we resist him, not in our own strength, but in the strength of God's might (Ephesians 6:10) and protected by the whole armor of God.

Now the saints of the first century and for several centuries after that really needed to know this because they were being intensely persecuted. Due to that persecution and pressure, it was a temptation to them to think that it was better that they give up their faith and commitment to God and to Christ. I thought it was interesting back in chapter 13, when the first beast that rose up out of the sea was introduced that it was said the people "*worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?'*" You see, those people were tempted to abandon their faith and commitment in an effort just to survive. It was easy to forget the words of Jesus when he said: "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11) 'Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'*"

And so the message in this 7th and final vision of Revelation is that the devil is no match for God and as **1 Corinthians 10:13** reminds us, "*No temptation (or trial) has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*"

All of the language in the 20th chapter implies that God is the One who is in control, not the devil. That is symbolized by just one angel being able to seize the dragon and cast him into the

bottomless pit. God is the one with the key and the chain, and the devil comes out when God says, and not before. And even after, as that symbolism continues, the devil is released, notice what is pictured—verses 7-10 of chapter 20. Symbolically he is pictured as gathering an army so massive that it surrounds the camp and city where the saints dwell, but fire falls from heaven and the devil and all who follow him are consumed. He is then cast again, this time not into the bottomless pit, but into a lake of fire where he is to be *“tormented day and night forever and ever.”*

That’s the message of the first 10 verses of chapter 20. People make a serious mistake in interpreting the things said in these verses literally. They make the mistake of interpreting the thousand years as a literal period of time.

(Incidentally, this evening at 5 p.m. I am going to be addressing what is sometimes called millennialism, the so-called thousand year reign of Christ on earth. That is a popular teaching in the world today, but it is based on a poor exegesis of this chapter.)

The rest of chapter 20, verses 11-15 provide us with a symbol of God’s judgment upon the ungodly and those who are not God’s people. That is not to say that the idea of a judgment day is not true. It is and is clearly taught in many other passages of the New Testament. However, in these verses, God’s power and right to judge all men is what is being shown to us.

Well, does John suddenly go literal on us in chapter 21? Is what we read and saw a few minutes ago meant to be a picture of heaven, even symbolically? Well, it certainly does that for us, regardless of whether or not that was the purpose it was shown. Personally, I believe what is found in these verses describes the church, but we have to keep in mind, the church is the kingdom of heaven on earth. What did Jesus say he was going to build? His church, and to what were the keys that he said he was giving to Peter? The kingdom of heaven.

The church is God’s dwelling place. Look at the words of **2 Corinthians 6:16**—*“For we are the temple of the Living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”* In the kingdom of God on earth is the place where saints can find solace for their tears, and where death no longer comes. Didn’t Jesus himself say, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die,”* (John 11:25,26). The kingdom of God on earth is where you find all things being made new. Paul wrote, *“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The kingdom of God on earth, which is the church, is the bride of Christ, Ephesians 5:22-33. The kingdom of God on earth is that city into which people come from every direction, east and west, north and south. The kingdom of God on earth is that which is built upon the promises made and carried out to Abraham and his descendants, the twelve tribes of Israel. The kingdom of God on earth, which is the church is that which is built upon the foundation of

Christ and the apostles, Ephesians 2:20. The kingdom of God, which is the church, is the temple of the living God and in which God himself through His word gives light to every soul.

The kingdom of God on earth, which is the church, is that place, and it is the only place, where the unpolluted water of life can be found. The kingdom of God on earth, which is the church, is the only place where real help for healing the nations can be found. That's the message of Revelation—"Get out of Babylon and get into Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, the city and people of God." It is telling us, "Don't worry about Satan or about anything he or those who follow him can do to you. While it may not seem like it at the moment when you are being hounded and stoned to death, the saints actually live in a city that symbolically has walls almost 1400 miles high and 200 feet thick!"

Now you might be thinking, "I thought Revelation 21 and 22 was talking about heaven." Well, in a sense it is, but understand heaven is simply going to be an extension of what you have already come to. You know that you have already begun eternal life. In **John 17:3**, Jesus said, *"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* That is why the apostle John could say as he did beginning in **1 John 5:11**: *"And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know you have eternal life."*

I think about these words taken from the **12th chapter of Hebrews, beginning in verse 18**. The writer here is contrasting the experience of people who come to Christ with that of the Israelites when they came to Mt. Sinai. He writes:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19) and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20) For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." 21) Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." 22) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23) and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24) and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25) See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. 26) At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27) This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken--that is, things that have been made--in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28) Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29) for our God is a consuming fire.

That's the message to be taken from the final vision of Revelation. The saints are given an everlasting, unshakeable kingdom. And at long last, when the last ember of a dying universe is gone, those who were wise and made Christ their Lord and Savior will have entered into that rest in a city that is foursquare, and in which there is no night, where the gates swing outward never, and where there will be eternal fellowship with God and His angels and the saints of all the ages.

Let me close this lesson with some of the closing words of this book.

22:7 *"And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*

Verses 12-21: *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." 14) Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. 15) Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16) "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." 17) The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. 18) I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19) and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. 20) He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*