

THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

Chapter 31: The End of Time

Key Question: How do we conquer Satan through faith?

Jesus Among the Churches

Pages 459–461

Late in the first century AD, Rome banished John to the tiny island of Patmos.¹ There, John saw a series of visions meant to encourage persecuted churches to overcome hardships through faith. He wrote these visions in the book of Revelation.

1. (a) In Revelation’s prologue, John described Jesus’ second coming to earth. What will it be like (Revelation 1:7)? (b) John quoted two passages that Jesus quoted when he spoke about his second coming at the end of the age.² What does this tell us about one of the themes of the book? (c) What do you most look forward to when Jesus returns?

In John’s first vision, someone like a son of man held seven stars in his right hand while standing among seven golden lampstands. The man he saw wasn’t an ordinary man, however, for John’s visions were of symbols.

Many of the symbols were common in Jewish life and literature.³ The man wore a long robe and a golden sash, such as a king or priest would wear.⁴ His hair was described in the same way as the hair of the

¹ Revelation 1:9. Some banishments were to hard labor in penal colonies; others were simply banishments to a particular place, limiting movement. John probably wrote Revelation in AD 95; his exile likely ended in AD 96. Note that Rome destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and exiled the Jews in AD 70 after the Jews in Judea and Galilee revolted in the hope of establishing an earthly nation under an earthly Messiah.

² Matthew 24:30. “Look, he is coming with the clouds” quotes Daniel 7:13, which depicts “one like a son of man” being worshiped and given everlasting dominion over his kingdom. The phrases, “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him” and “will mourn because of him,” come from Zechariah 12:10, which is part of an oracle describing the Lord rescuing Jerusalem from a multinational assault, people looking at the one who was pierced and mourning (either in repentance or realization of impending judgment), and a fountain of living water that cleanses from sin.

³ Bible interpreters agree on the symbolism for many passages, but offer multiple suggestions for others. It’s important not to look down upon those with interpretations that might differ from ours or let such differences cause disunity. As is often said, “The main things are the plain things.”

⁴ Exodus 28:4.

Ancient of Days: white like wool and snow, depicting dignity, wisdom, and long life.⁵ His eyes were like “blazing fire,” burning away all that is false and seeing into hearts and minds.⁶ His feet were like fired bronze, refined and stronger than the clay and iron feet of Rome.⁷ His voice was “like the sound of rushing waters”—the divine voice.⁸ A sharp double-edged sword came from his mouth, for he was able to divide soul and spirit, and to judge the heart’s thoughts and attitudes.⁹ His face shone like the sun.

The one like a son of man identified himself and explained some of the symbols.

2. (a) What did the one speaking call himself in Revelation 1:17? (b) This was one of God’s titles.¹⁰ Who was the speaker, and how do you know (1:18)? (c) What keys did he hold (1:18)? (d) What do those keys tell us about Jesus and of his power over eternal things? (e) The seven lampstands symbolize the seven churches to whom the message would go (1:20). Seven symbolizes completeness, and the seven churches represent all churches in all ages. How does knowing Jesus stands among them help persecuted churches?¹¹

Letters to Churches

Pages 461–462

Jesus’ messages for the churches depended on their need.

⁵ Daniel 7:9.

⁶ Jeremiah 17:10.

⁷ The Israelites made fortified walls from bronze (Jeremiah 15:20). Daniel 2:41–43 describes Rome as a kingdom with feet of baked clay and iron—a divided kingdom that has strong and brittle parts.

⁸ Ezekiel 43:2.

⁹ Isaiah 49:2; Hebrews 4:12.

¹⁰ Isaiah 44:6; 48:12.

¹¹ Churches provide the light of truth, like lampstands. Just as the priest tended the seven lamps on the temple’s lampstand so that their light did not go out in darkness (Exodus 27:20; Leviticus 24:1–4), so Jesus now tended these lampstands so that their light would not go out in spiritual darkness.

3. (a) For what does Jesus commend the wealthy church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:2–3, 6)? (b) They had rejected the Nicolaitans’ teaching that spiritual freedom allowed them to participate in the idolatry and immorality of the culture around them.¹² What does Jesus say the church needs to correct (2:4–5)? (c) How can we hold on to right doctrine without losing love? (d) If a church loses its zeal for Christ and stops sharing the gospel, it will no longer give light to the world (2:5). Jesus makes a promise to those who overcome. The word translated *overcome* is *nikaô*, which means to overcome, prevail, conquer, triumph.¹³ What will Jesus give those who overcome (2:7)?
4. (a) How did Jesus’ assessment of the affluent church at Laodicea differ from the church’s assessment of itself (Revelation 3:15–17)? (b) How can earthly riches blind us to spiritual poverty? (c) Laodicea was famous for its textiles, medical center, and eye salve, yet what did Jesus tell them to do (3:18)? (d) Why did he rebuke them (3:19)? (e) Where is Jesus in relation to the church, and what does he want to do (3:20)? (f) Eating with someone is having relationship. What was this lukewarm, self-satisfied church missing? (g) How can we avoid being lukewarm? (h) What would happen if they overcame (3:21)?

¹² Acts 20:29–30.

¹³ The maker of athletic shoes, Nike, gets its name from this word.

The Throne & the Lamb

Pages 462–465

After John received the messages for the churches, he found himself in heaven.

5. (a) Poets describe lovers in symbols meant to evoke emotion: “her lips are like rubies” describes color, rarity, and preciousness. Read Revelation 4 as you might poetry. What emotions does the heavenly scene¹⁴ evoke? (b) What strikes you most about this scene? Why?

John saw a sealed scroll in God’s hand. The only one worthy to open the scroll was the triumphant Lion of Judah. A lion usually conquers with muscles, claws, and fangs. Not so Jesus the Lion of Judah and the Root of David.

6. (a) How did the Lion of Judah triumph (*nikaô*), according to Revelation 5:5–6, 9? (b) By allowing his physical body to be conquered on earth, Jesus conquered spiritually. When we persevere in faith through hardship, how are we likewise triumphing over Satan?

Just as John portrayed Jesus as the Lamb who conquered, so Paul said that Christians are often considered as sheep to be slaughtered who nonetheless overwhelmingly conquer (*hupernikaô*):

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are **more than conquerors** through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. ~Romans 8:35–39

¹⁴ Don’t worry about the symbolism too much since interpretations vary. For instance, the 24 elders might represent humans (either believers in heaven or the twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles), celestial rulers, etc. Enjoy the descriptions and look for the main idea of the symbols without worrying about getting just the “right” answer!

7. (a) Does the Christian conquer by going *around* or *through* trouble, hardship, and suffering? (b) What assurance does the Romans passage above give you? (c) Why shouldn't we fear that something might conquer us and separate us from God? (d) Briefly describe a time when you conquered *through* difficulty.

The Judgment

Pages 465–467

As the Lamb opened the seals, John saw a series of visions of those who warred against the saints: the dragon, Satan, who had failed to devour the child born from heaven; a great prostitute who made many rich with her adulteries and excessive luxuries; and blasphemous beasts who influenced rulers. Although satanic forces outwardly defeated the saints on earth by slaying them, like the Lamb they conquered by staying faithful unto death, thereby humiliating Satan.¹⁵

Plagues came against people who followed the dragon, prostitute, and beasts, but they refused to repent.¹⁶ One of the beasts devoured the prostitute,¹⁷ and heavenly multitudes rejoiced over her fall.¹⁸ Heaven opened, and John saw a rider on a white horse.

8. (a) List the names given to the rider in Revelation 19:11–16. Who is he, and how do you know? (b) What strikes you most about the rider on the white horse? Why?

¹⁵ G. K. Beale: “‘Overcomers’ [*nikaō*] are those whose lives are characterized by refusal to compromise their faith despite the threat of persecution. They ironically conquer when they maintain their faith even though they may appear defeated in the world’s eyes because of persecution.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGCT* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 1057. See also 1 John 5:4.

¹⁶ Revelation 16:9, 11, 20.

¹⁷ Revelation 17:16–17.

¹⁸ Revelation 18:15, 20; 19:1.

John described how the rider and his army captured the beast and threw it into a fiery lake; how the ancient serpent, Satan, was also thrown into the lake of fire; and how the dead then stood before the great white throne.

9. (a) How were the dead judged¹⁹ (Revelation 20:12–13)? (b) What is the lake of fire (20:14)?
(c) What happened to those whose names were not found in the book of life (20:15)?

Those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life have their sins paid for by the Lamb’s shed blood, for Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

The New Heaven & New Earth

Pages 467–470

John saw a new heaven and new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away.²⁰ A Holy City, the New Jerusalem, composed of those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, came down out of heaven from God.²¹ It shone with the glory of God, and was bejeweled with precious stones, gold, and pearls.²² It was the bride of the Lamb.

10. (a) What will be different in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:3–5)? (b) Who will inherit this, and what relationships will they have (21:7)?

¹⁹ See also Romans 2:6–8.

²⁰ Revelation 21:1.

²¹ “The people themselves will be both the city and the temple in which God’s presence resides.” Beale, *Revelation*, 1066.

²² “It is best to see this list [of jewels] as a general depiction of the glory of the people of God.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 756.

“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’”²³ And he made a new heaven and a new earth for the people whom he had made new.²⁴

11. (a) What emotions does John’s description of the Holy City evoke (Revelation 21:9–27)?
- (b) What strikes you most about this description? Why?

The revelation ends with what was lost in the garden being restored.

12. (a) When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God banished them from the garden so they could not eat from the tree of life and live forever.²⁵ What grows in the heavenly city (Revelation 22:2)? (b) God cursed the ground of the first earth, making it produce thorns and thistles, and subjecting it to decay.²⁶ What is different in this city (22:3a)? (c) God promised an offspring of Eve’s would crush the head of the serpent that deceived her.²⁷ Where is the serpent crusher in this city, and what is he called (22:3b)? (d) After the fall, people no longer saw God’s face on the first earth.²⁸ What will change (22:4)? (e) The first heaven and earth were given the sun, moon, and stars for light. What provides light in this city (22:5)? (f) God had made Adam and Eve to reign over the earth, but they followed the serpent instead of God, and gave the earth’s reign to Satan.²⁹ What will be restored (22:5)?

²³ Revelation 21:5a.

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17–19.

²⁵ Genesis 3:22–24.

²⁶ Genesis 3:17–18; Romans 8:19–21.

²⁷ Genesis 3:15.

²⁸ Exodus 33:20.

²⁹ Genesis 1:26–28; John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2.

And so Eve's seed crushed the serpent that deceived humankind into sinning and separating themselves from God. The Great Passover Lamb gave his righteousness to his beloved and reconciled them to God. The King of kings gave them a new heaven and new earth, and placed his throne among them. The Bridegroom made them his own. And they will reign for ever and ever.

13. What stands out to you the most from your study of *The Story*?

Recommended Reading

Barker, Kenneth, gen. ed. *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1985). Many experts contribute archaeological, historical, and explanatory notes to this outstanding study Bible.

Merrill, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, second edition (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2008). This excellent overview of the Old Testament is filled with archaeological and historical insights.

Metzger, Bruce M. *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1993). Renowned New Testament scholar Metzger explains much of Revelation's symbolism while avoiding hard stances in areas open to multiple interpretations.