

Things are not what they seem; glimpses from Revelation

A Wedding Without Rivals

Chapters 19:11—21:8

In this penultimate scene, we again slip seamlessly between this age and the age to come. We are not reading a history but an unveiling of how things really are—the present age in the light of a future that is not far removed.

Scene seven comes between the announcement of the Lamb's marriage (19:6-9) and the arrival of the Bride (21:9). It describes the defeat of the beast and false prophet (19:19-20) and then the defeat of the dragon (20:2, 10)—those who have opposed Christ since chapter twelve. Clearly, the Lamb's marriage does not take place until all rivals are shown for what they are, and are removed! Such is Christ's zeal.

Babylon's fall has been described. Kings of the earth have watched its demise (18:9-10) but, in this section, they are still in league with the evil trinity (19:19; 20:8). This suggests that, even when the pretense of building a community is gone, the kings of the earth are still eager to maintain their place in the worldly scheme of things, and, in so doing, are caught up in Satan's rage against God.

Christ presents on a white horse (19:11).

- He is the true Prince going out to conquer (cf. 6:2). Former scenes have described a complex picture but now the unveiling shows what has been happening all along—Christ has been going out to conquer. That is what our history is all about.
 - These verses 'describe not what Christ is *going to do* but what he *is*: conquering King, righteous Judge, Captain of the armies of heaven. It will only be at his parousia that "every eye will *see* him" like that (1:7); but at no time, not even on the cross, has he ever *been* anything other than that' (Wilcock).
 - Whether at his coming again or at any time, Christ conquers by being the Word (as in John 1), by not being squeamish about blood—whether his own on the cross or that of his enemies, and by being jealous for his Father's honour.
- The way he is described shows he is the same Christ who is present among the churches (2:16, 18, 27; 3:7, 14), indicating that we, the churches, are to read and understand what is in all the visions. They tell us how to remain true and firm in the midst of the battle.
- He comes with heaven's armies dressed in white—God's glorified saints (3:4f; 6:11; 7:9, 13f) the Lamb's Bride (19:7-8).
 - If this relates to the present, the word of Christ is the only weapon we have.
 - Beale suggests that saints 'take part in the final judgment only in that their testimony is the legal evidence condemning their oppressors'.
- He comes to execute the wrath of God.
 - As in Isaiah 63:1-6
 - This is a wrath he himself came to spare us by bearing it on his cross.
- None will now be able to ignore him as they have done in the past.
- An angel sees what is coming...
 - ...a rebellion of the world against the King of kings
 - ...a feast of human flesh for birds.
- In this way, the beast and false prophet are conquered and cast into the abyss, and those who had followed them are killed.
- Babylon, the beast and the second beast/false prophet have been judged. What of the dragon?

The fate of the dragon is described as a 1000-year saga.

- His fate begins with being confined.
 - Jesus observed his falling (Luke 8:31).
 - He announced his being cast down through his death (John 12:31).
 - God knows how to confine fallen spirits until the time of their final judgement (2 Pet. 2:4, 9).
 - Satan must be given permission to leave his own domain to cause trouble on earth (Rev. 9:1-11).
 - He is restrained now, until the time for revealing all that is in his mind to do (2 Thes. 2:3-12).
 - His limitation is that he cannot deceive the nations—in the sense that he will do at the end of time.
- For a brief period at the end of the present age, he will be released.
 - Then, he *will* be able to deceive the nations into fighting yet again against the Lord and his Anointed.
 - This reveals that he has learned nothing.
 - The unrepentant nations are called Gog and Magog (mentioned in Ezekiel as a king and place name—38:2), had become symbols of evil in Judaism.
 - Their target is God's beloved City—also, as we shall see—his Bride.
 - The Satan inspired beast could not sustain 'Babylon'. Now, Satan demonstrates his total anti-sociality by attacking God's eternal city. He is rightly called Abaddon or Apollyon, meaning destroyer (9:11).
- The ensuing battle is no contest.
 - As at Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24).
 - As with Elijah (2 Kin. 1:12).
 - Beware of imagining this in our hands (Luke 9:54)!
- Satan joins his stooges in the abyss.

God has spoken, and everything now is as it is—no deception, no hiding, no way to justify oneself.

- Now comes the general resurrection, as taught by Jesus (John 5:29).
- God's books will tell exactly what everyone has done—not what they say they have done.
- Everyone will receive exactly what he or she deserves.
- Death and the place of the dead (Hades) are for those who have not been given eternal life and they are thrown into an lake of fire.
- There is only one way to stand in this judgement—by confessing Christ and his death for one's sins and holding to this confession to the end (13:8; 21:7).

New for old (21:1-8).

- The old heaven and earth was 'all that chafed and fretted under the dominion of God' (Wilcock). It simply passes away.
- The new heaven and earth is new in quality (*kainos* rather than *neos* = new in time).
- God *will* wipe away all tears, but *is* now making all thing new—starting with us: '...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation ... behold, the new has come' (2 Cor. 5:17).
- God's relationship with his creation, a covenant, is expressed as a marriage to his Son. History ends, not with a bang or a whimper (cf. T. S Eliot) but with a wedding. This is the way he is God to us and the way we are his people.
- Jonathan Edwards reasoned that God created the world and its people so as to provide a Bride for his Son.
- Water, meaning life itself, will not be the cause of war but be supplied without payment. Finally, we will understand the nature of God as a one who gives.
- Again, the book's purpose is clear—be strong, and be pure until what is promised comes.