

# Book of Revelation

## Week 6 — The restoration of all things (Revelation 19–22)



## Celebrating God's victory; the end of evil (Rev 19–20)

### *The bride appears (19:1-10)*

Ever been to a football match? When the final siren blows and it's clear who has won, the spectators erupt in celebration. That's nothing compared to what happened at the end of World War II when news reached the cities of Australia. People flocked out of their homes and offices waving flags. Cars honked their horns, as uncontrolled joy broke out in the streets. That's nothing compared to what happens when the reign of evil falls (as described in the previous chapter) and people celebrate God's reign.

Hear the **victory celebration** (Revelation 19 paraphrased):

**19**<sup>1</sup> Give honour to YHWH (Hallelujah)!

He has rescued his realm (salvation).

He is recognized as majestic sovereign (glory).

All power resides with our ruler (God).

<sup>2</sup> His decisions (judgements) are true and just;

His judgement against the mega-prostitute means she can no longer corrupt the earth with her immoral power-plays.

She has received justice for killing God's servants.

<sup>3</sup> Give honour to YHWH!

See the smoke? It's the victory signal:

the city been ransacked for good.

Her rebellion is over! Permanently!

<sup>6</sup> Give honour to YHWH.

Our sovereign has begun to reign,<sup>1</sup>

our God—ruler of everything!

<sup>7</sup> C'mon! Rejoice! Go overboard!

Give him his honour!

The Lamb's wedding day has arrived.

His bride has been getting ready for this moment!

The evil rulers who tried to grasp the sovereignty of God for themselves were the prostitute. Now that the rebellion has been put down, John sees the people who recognize God's authority. They are his partner, his bride:

<sup>8</sup> She's dazzling: draped in fine bright linen,

as pure as a priest, given to her for this occasion.

(Her priestly robes suit her: she's already been doing the good things her groom expected of his holy people.)

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<sup>1</sup> G. K. Beale translates, "'because the Lord God Almighty has *begun to reign*' (ἐβασίλευσεν, ingressive aorist)." *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 931

Now the rebellion is over, God and humanity can finally get back together. The wedding is on! Heaven and earth can be joined together, just as intended in the beginning.

### ***The groom appears (19:11-21)***

The groom, of course, rocks up on a white horse! The rebellion against his authority never compromised him: he is (and always has been) “faithful and true” to his people.

Remember the judges of the OT? Rebellious nations who did not recognize God’s authority oppressed his people, but God would raise up a *judge*. He was called a judge because he resolved the injustice, by driving the invaders out. That’s what Jesus has done (19:11).

His laser eyes cut right through the false claims of the rebels. He has many crowns because people from all over recognize him as their sovereign (19:12).

His robe is dipped in blood (19:13), but it’s his own blood: it was he himself who was killed. He himself trod the winepress of God’s wrath against the rebels (19:15).

His names represent this authority. They include:

- *a name known only to him* (19:12). His is the highest authority. He is not at anyone else’s bidding.
- *the word of God* (19:13). He spoke creation into existence in the beginning, and he is the one who brings it to completion.
- *King of kings / Lord of lords* (19:16). Earthly rulers cannot remain in rebellion. Every knee bows, including Caesar’s.

Humans were created to image God, as agents of his reign. Those who refuse to submit to him have destroyed their own humanity. Once life goes out of them, they’re nothing but meat (19:17-18).

Therefore Rome (the beast) and those who claim to be Christians but actually promote the beast (the false prophet) die as rebels who failed to oust the true king (Jesus). Their dead bodies are thrown into the fire to be burnt (19:19-20). The truth that comes out of Jesus’ mouth cuts right through their deceptions. This is the great reversal: Jesus is alive while they are dead (19:21).

### ***The millennium and final court scene (Revelation 20)***

In his vision, John has seen three evil forces at work:

- *beast*: the empires (like Rome) that claim to rule God’s world.
- *false prophet*: the people who ascribe power to the beast, some of them even within the church.
- *dragon*: Satan, the spiritual power behind the other two.

The main thing Satan does is to *deceive* the nations into thinking they (not God) rule the world (12:5, 9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3, 8, 10).

Towards the end of the Old Testament, the Jewish people began to understand that their real enemy was not the Philistines, or the Assyrians or the Babylonians, but Satan—the power behind the powers. He had a role in the divine court where he could prosecute a case against God’s people (as in Job 1). He would *accuse* them of being so disobedient against their divine ruler that the sovereign should no longer permit them to be his representatives (e.g. Zechariah 3:1). His role was like that of the director of public prosecutions—bring accusations against God’s people. That’s why he is known as “the accuser of our brothers” (Revelation 12:10).

But the accuser’s case has failed! Satan deceived the beast (Roman Empire) and false prophet (those who were supposed to be God’s people but actually supported the beast) into killing God’s anointed ruler. His case against Jesus was overturned: the heavenly Judge overruled the injustice by raising Jesus from the dead! Satan’s case has failed. Instead, Jesus’ blood cries out not in accusation against humanity, but for the rescue of humanity from evil! In that sense, Satan (the accuser) has been bound by Jesus (the Saviour).

In one sense, Jesus has already received all authority to rule, both in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), so those who acknowledge him as Lord are reigning with him (Ephesians 1:20-21). In another sense, there are enemies of God’s anointed ruler (the Messiah) who still resist him, so he must reign until all his enemies are subject to him (1 Corinthians 15:25-28).

We need to live with this unresolved state of affairs (Jesus is Lord, but Satan is not completely removed for a long period of time. In the symbolism of John’s dream, that’s represented as 1,000 years (20:1-6).

But it doesn’t stay that way forever. There will come a moment at the end of this era, when the old accuser must be released to see if he can make any further accusation against God’s people. But (as always) Satan will abuse that opportunity to try to deceive the nations again. He will fail. There will be no valid accusation to make against Jesus our ruler. Consequently, the whole evil collusion—the beast, the false prophet, and Satan—will be permanently trashed, so the deception is finally over (20:7-10).

That’s when everything that has ever been wrong with the world will finally be put right. The heavenly judge, the one who holds the throne, will recognize who are really his people, and those who are not his people will be permanently trashed (20:11-15).

Well, that's one way to understand the millennium (1000 years).

There are four major views:

- **Amillennialism:** the 1000 years is a symbolic number standing for the current church age (as above).
- **Premillennialism (historical):** the 1000 years is a future time when Jesus will literally return to earth and reign for 1000 literal years before finally sorting things out and establishing his eternal reign.
- **Premillennialism (dispensational):** similar to the historical view, but with the return of Christ split into two separate events (rapture and return).
- **Postmillennialism:** the nations will accept the gospel, so Jesus will be invited to reign in peace and triumph before the final consummation.

However you understand the 1000 years, it's actually quite a minor topic in the Bible. In fact, this is the only passage where it's mentioned. (For more detail, see Week 3 notes, pages 11-12.)

## God's government sets everything right (Rev 21–22)

### *Restored creation (Revelation 21:1 – 22:5)*

John's vision in the previous chapters has been all about cleansing the earth. Now that it is holy space, God can live among men. Now the rebellion has been overcome, God's reign can be fully restored. Now creation is now longer bound by evil, it can be all it was created to be.

Those are the key themes:

- **New creation:** released from its enslavement to evil, creation is finally becomes what God intended in the beginning. Nothing unruly or unruléd (like the sea) remains (21:1).
- **New Jerusalem:** released from those who claimed God's power to rule, God's government finally comes to earth. Finally, we are his partners (bride), caring for his world (21:2).
- **God's dwelling:** released from every defilement, the whole earth becomes the Most Holy Place, the temple/palace where our sovereign lives among his people (21:3).

We saw a vision of God's throne back in Chapter 4. Now, at last, we hear the voice of our heavenly ruler. What he says is the most important statement in the entire book:

**21:5 (NIV)** He who was seated on the throne said,  
"I am making everything new!"

There's a real sovereign! Through the whole twisted mess, he never gave up on his rebellious people. Trustworthy and true were his edicts; his heart for his people was trustworthy and true (21:5).

He provides exactly what we need to live—the water of life—free (21:6). In Jesus, we're brought home as sons (21:7). But those who persisted in resisting his reign will not enjoy his reign (21:8).

### ***The bride is his city (21:9-27)***

Just as Ezekiel was carried by the Spirit to see Jerusalem while he was in exile (Ezekiel 11:24; 37:1), John is carried by the Spirit to see the new Jerusalem. For Ezekiel, Jerusalem was the city where God's administration was to be carried out through a king descended from David, but that government had failed: Babylon destroyed the city.

- **king:** David, and his descendants, as representatives of Israel's true heavenly king.
- **capital:** Jerusalem, where the earthly king and the heavenly king lived among the people (palace and temple).

This all that fell apart when Babylon invaded Jerusalem:

- **king:** No son of David ever reigned again. They were ruled by Babylon, and then other empires. They were under the rule of these beasts instead of the rule of God.
- **capital:** Babylon destroyed Jerusalem's protective walls, ransacked the temple and palace, and took the people into captivity.

John sees the reversal of this injustice:

- **king:** the reign of the ultimate king—the one who sits on the throne—has been restored. The Lamb (son of David) has overcome death. He reigns on earth with and for the heavenly king.
- **capital:** Jesus has re-established the capital, the seat of his government. It's a renewed city—the new Jerusalem—where the king lives among his people.

Like Ezekiel, John is in exile (on Patmos). The Spirit carries him to see a vision not of God's government being destroyed but God's government being restored:

**21:2** (NIV) I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

The problem with the old world was the people resisting God's reign, rebelling against our sovereign. The polar opposite would be people cooperating with God's reign, willingly doing life with our sovereign, actively caring for his people? What's the closest image we could have of this kind of partnership with God? We would be his ... bride.

The *city* that lives with God and partners with God is his *bride*. What an honour: life-partners with our sovereign, living as his government, giving his care for his realm!

The bride (the city, the people of God who represent his rule) glows with the reflection of our glorious ruler (21:10). We're dressed in the best jewellery (21:11)! We're a safe city, protected by living walls and gates—people like the apostles who followed the Lamb by laying down their lives to found God's government (21:12-14).

Ezekiel envisioned a restored Jerusalem where the temple was so large that it would not fit on Mount Zion. John also sees the new Jerusalem being measured, and it's absurdly large. Can you imagine a city 2,200 km wide (21:16)? This "city" is the about size of Europe! It's as if the whole world known to John submits to God as sovereign.

So what about the temple? Does that get rebuilt too?

**21:22** (NIV) I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

In old Jerusalem, the temple was the holy space where the king dwelled among his people in the defiled world. But he has cleansed the world. Nothing is unclean. New Jerusalem doesn't have a temple, because the whole city is his holy space! The whole holy city is his temple/palace.

Can you imagine a totally clean city, where the streets are as clean as polished gold (21:21)? Can you imagine a city where nothing ever happens in the dark, because the presence of the sovereign is so bright (21:23)? Can you imagine a city where it's so safe that they never shut the gates (21:25)? Can you imagine a city with no enemies, because everyone honours its king (21:26)? Can you imagine a city where nothing goes wrong because everyone honours the Lamb (21:27)?

### ***The realization of God's dream (22:1-5)***

When God first created the world, he arranged it perfectly. The sun and moon reminded us day and night that earth was under heaven's rule (Genesis 1:14-16). God ruled over humans, and humans served as his agents ruling over the animals, not over each other (Gen. 1:26-28).

Eden was the centre of God's government, his palace if you like. God planted a garden for his creatures around his palace (Genesis 2:8).

In other words, Eden wasn't the garden. Eden had a garden. The Garden of Eden was the garden associated with God's providence, God's government, God's palace. The water needed for life flowed from the sovereign himself to his realm:

**Genesis 2:10 (ESV)** A river flowed *out of Eden* to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

The Tree of Life was another symbol of the divine presence that sustained them and kept them alive (Genesis 2:9).

The sovereign who provided the tree of life and the water of life involved humans in managing his realm. He entrusted two tasks to them: *tending* and *guarding* the palace garden (Genesis 2:15). He gave them everything in garden, except for the power to make their own laws (to decide good and evil). This tree was reserved for the king only (Genesis 2:17).

They rebelled against the king's regulation—a coup against his right to govern them. The sovereign investigated their crime, explaining what conflict and struggle they had unleashed. They die because they disconnected from God, their life-source (the tree of life) (Genesis 3).

But in John's vision, the entire history of human resistance against God's reign has been resolved. Once again, the water that gives life to his realm is flowing from Eden, from God's throne to his people:

**22:1–2 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Amazing! When leaves drop from a tree, they decay. These leaves do the opposite: they heal! The life-giving presence of God sets everything on earth right, for all nations! There's no strife.

Everything that God imagined when he began this project is fully realized.

### ***Back to the present (22:6-11)***

*Trustworthy and true*: that's the character of the sovereign who never gave up on his creation. We can trust him when he proclaims that this is how it will end up (22:6).

The Lamb already shares the throne with earth's true sovereign. His reign is present and growing. It's coming! His authority matters (22:7).

John adds his own voice (as a prophet) to the voice of the sovereign and the Lamb. Unfortunately, John is only a created creature, so he responds to the message wrongly. He is so overwhelmed by what the angel has shown him that he makes the mistake of worshipping the angel. Oops: the main thrust of the book is that we mustn't give honour to any created being, only to God (22:8-9).

Jewish apocalyptic literature was written as if an ancient sage had described the reader's time long ago and "sealed up" the revelation. (In reality, it had only just been written, or course.) John's apocalypse isn't like that: it's not written under a false name, so it's not to be "sealed up" for some future time. It was immediately relevant for the churches of Asia Minor. It continues to be relevant for the whole church era, as the people of the Lamb respond to their sovereign and invite his kingship (22:10).

22:11 is a challenge. Given all that John has seen, how will we respond to the one who has the throne? Will you persist in your rebellion against his authority anyway? Or will you recognize him and obey him? Does hearing this message make any difference to you?

The story of Jesus is to be proclaimed and celebrated. Some will hear and rejoice, some will remain indifferent, some will become hostile. The story of Jesus will not always be accepted, but it must be told.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The last word (22:12-21)***

It's not John we have to answer to, but Jesus—the king whose kingship needs to be acknowledged now. Earth's true king will recognize those who have acknowledged his authority (22:12), giving them amnesty, access to the tree of life, citizenship under his government (22:14). Outside his government will be those who persist in rejecting his authority (22:15). You can be certain it will end like this, because this is how he has always planned it; the one who began it all will bring it to conclusion (22:13).

This is the message we need to hear, the whole point of Revelation:

**22:16 (NIV)** I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.

Jesus is not only the *descendant* of David who rightfully restores God's kingship; he is also the *root* of David—the one who gave the kingship to David in the beginning.

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<sup>2</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen

In the darkest night, as dawn approaches, the brightest star is Venus. It's always found in the direction of the sunrise. The heavenly lights were there in the beginning to remind us that earth belongs under heaven's rule (Genesis 1:14-16). Jesus is the dawn star—the promise of the dawn of God's restored eternal reign (22:16).

So the bride, the partner of the Lamb, joins her voice with his—inviting people to acknowledge his kingship, his life-giving reign. She doesn't do this in her own energy: the anointed ruler is the anointer, i.e. he inspires and empowers his partner with his energy:

**22:17 (NIV)** The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"  
And let the one who hears say, "Come!"  
Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

John wraps up his scroll with a curse on anyone who modifies (adds to or detracts from) its contents (22:18-19).

For John, prophecy isn't predicting the future: it's hearing what the sovereign is saying to his people. It's a word from God, a statement from King Jesus. What Jesus testifies is true, important prophecy (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4).

King Jesus announces, "Yes! I am coming soon!" He's looking for the response that John gives: an invitation to come and reign. That's the expression that the rebellion is truly over (22:20).

Jesus reign has begun. His reign is characterized by **grace**—the overflowing generosity of the king who provides the water of life for his people, so we live, one again, as the garden of his palace (22:21).

## Conclusion

What would you still like to ask?

## Memory verse

### Revelation 21:3 (NIV)

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
 “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.  
 They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

## Take home exercise

Some bonus quotes to meditate on.

**Ben Witherington III**, *Imminent Domain: The Story of the Kingdom of God and Its Celebration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009):

**Page 51:** When the New Testament speaks of the new creation it means exactly that—a renewal or transformation or re-creation of the creation that already exists. The end times are envisioned as being like and yet superior to the beginning times for the human race. It is thus a mistake to assume that the New Testament writers envisioned dying and going to heaven as the final condition of human beings.

**Page 52:** The goal of God is not merely to reign in or from heaven, but to reign upon the earth forever. In God’s plan, creation, like human creatures, has a future, not least because God cares about all that he has made.

**Pages 74-75:** So often at funerals we have heard the stirring words of Revelation 21 about the descent of the new Jerusalem and then the voice from the throne saying “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (vv. 3–4). If this promise were to come true, it would necessitate not just new persons but a new environment, one free from disease and decay, one free from struggle and strife. Of course, God’s permanent residence with his people would also necessitate such changes, for God is holy and purely good.

If we ask why and how this transformation will transpire, the short answer is because of and by means of God’s very presence. For example, in Revelation 22:1–5 the water of life flows directly from the presence of God, alluded to by reference to the throne, and this river enlivens and heals all that it touches. It is like the opposite effect to that of a polluted and disease-filled river that defiles all that it touches and all that touch it.

The upshot of all this is that God is the ultimate conservationist or ecologist. This should not surprise us since the God of the Bible is a God who made all of creation and then, when that work was finished, revealed in what he had made, pronouncing it very good. It is also worth reminding ourselves that when the Bible refers to redemption it is creation that is being redeemed, and this entails not just human beings but all of creation. The visions of Revelation 21 and 22 are not just about a new humanity, but about a new creation, a new world.

**Eugene Peterson**, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988), 174:

Many people want to go to heaven the way they want to go to Florida—they think the weather will be an improvement and the people decent. But the biblical final destination is not merely heaven, it is new heaven and new earth. It is not a nice environment far removed from the stress of the hard city life. It is the invasion of the earthly city by the heavenly one. We enter this final destination not by escaping what we do not like but by the sanctification of the place in which God has placed us.

**Tom Wright**, *Revelation for Everyone*, (London: SPCK, 2011), 178–181 (on the millennium):

We must not forget that ‘the satan’ was initially a member of the heavenly council. Though he has fallen from his position, he may still, by God’s permission, play a role. (I am reminded of the role Tolkien gave to Gollum, right up to the climax of *The Lord of the Rings*, and on reflection I guess that Tolkien was aware of exactly this kind of parallel.) The satan’s job was always to ‘accuse’ where accusation was due, to make sure (as a good Director of Public Prosecutions) that nothing reprehensible went unreprehended. Now, one last time, he must play that role, even though as before he will pervert it and try to deceive and accuse in all directions, warranted or not (verse 8). He must ultimately do the worst he can, so that when he is defeated there will be no last tiny remnant of suspicion that anything worthy of ‘accusation’ has been left unaccounted for. He must be allowed a final moment to flail around with his lies and accusations, so that in his overthrow it will be clear beyond the slightest doubt that ‘there is therefore now no condemnation for those in the Messiah Jesus’. Like a boxer staggering to his feet to face the last punch, he must come up one more time, even if only to be knocked out flat on the canvas for ever.

But, before that can happen, the reign of Jesus, with and through his millennial people, must be established by the first resurrection. John itemizes these people not just as martyrs (as opposed to other Christians) but specifically as those who had been beheaded for their witness. We should, I presume, take that symbolically. It may hint at something to do with their true citizenship in Jesus’ **kingdom**; it was Roman citizens who were beheaded, a greatly preferable death to many others the Romans devised, not least crucifixion itself. It seems, in any case, contrary to John’s normal line to suggest a radical difference between one set of martyrs and another.

But should we take the thousand years symbolically as well? Again, I believe we should. John has used all kinds of symbolic numbers throughout his book. It would be very odd if he were suddenly to throw in a rather obvious round and symbolic number, but expect us to take it literally. There were some, around the year AD 1000, who supposed they were about to see the end of this ‘millennium’, but as with other such speculations the date passed without significant eschatological events taking place. But what is the actual reality to which the symbol points?

It appears at first sight very difficult to see this millennium as ‘the age of the church’. Nobody aware of church history would suppose that there has been no satanic attack, no deceiving of the nations (or of the church itself) during that time.

It could be a time still in the future, either the final prelude to the **second coming** of the Messiah or a period immediately after that coming—the classic ‘post-millennial’ and ‘pre-millennial’ interpretations. Both of these seem to me to miss the point, for reasons too numerous to go into here (I have discussed them elsewhere).

The clue to the passage is, I believe, in the opening line: ‘I saw thrones, with people sitting on them, who were given authority to judge.’ This is straight out of Daniel 7, where the ‘thrones’ were for ‘the Ancient of Days’ and ‘One like a **son of man**’. But Daniel 7 itself interprets the latter phrase corporately, so that ‘the saints of the most high’ receive the kingdom and the authority to judge. It looks, then, as though John is referring not to a thousand-year period *on earth*, but to the heavenly reality which obtains during a particular period. Jesus, according to the whole New Testament, is *already* reigning (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:25–28; etc.); and what John is saying is that the martyrs *are already reigning with him*. This, indeed, is more or less what is said, as well, in Ephesians 2:6, where the church is ‘seated in heavenly places in the Messiah Jesus’. Presumably they aren’t just sitting there doing nothing. Perhaps, after all, John’s ‘millennium’ does correspond to a more widely known early Christian view—though in Ephesians there is no sense that this only applies to martyrs.

As to the ‘binding’ of the satan (verse 2), Jesus declared that he had already accomplished this, which was why he was able to perform exorcisms (Matthew 12:29). The satan was, after all, still able thereafter to work through Judas and others, to accuse Jesus and bring about his death. Perhaps what we are seeing in Revelation 20 is the cosmic version of that story.

Perhaps. At this point above all—above all the rest of the New Testament, in my experience—it doesn’t do to be too dogmatic. We must hold on to the central things which John has made crystal clear: the victory of the lamb, and the call to share his victory through **faith** and patience. God will then do what God will then do. Whether we describe the final events as Revelation 20 has done, or as Paul does in Romans 8:18–26 or 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, it is clear that the one who wins the victory is the creator God, who does so to defeat and abolish death itself and so to open the way to the glories of the renewed creation. That is what matters.