

Revelation 20-22

The two things the suffering churches most want to know:

1. When will their suffering end (in victory over enemies)?
2. Will it (i.e. their faithful endurance of suffering, even death) have been worth it?

Answers:

1. “Soon” – but not until all God’s purposes served and all enemies destroyed
2. They will get their reward (NB. don’t think in human terms of money or hedonistic pleasures! – as in false religions like Islam and Mormonism)
 - a. This is an oft-neglected theme as sounds like salvation by works (it’s not), and may be misunderstood as the primary motivation for faithfulness, which it should not be: love for God and gratitude for what he has already done, esp. in Christ, should be.
 - b. But it is something Jesus spoke of on a number of occasions:
 - i. Matthew 10:41-42
“He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”
Matthew 25:28-29
Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’ “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.
Mark 9:41
For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.
Matthew 19:29
And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s

sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

See too Matthew 16:24-26; Matthew 6:19-21

Matthew 19:21

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Luke 18:28-30

Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You." And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

Matthew 16:27

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.

Luke 14:12-14

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

c. And Paul:

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

Colossians 3:23-24

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

- d. It is a key element in the letters to the 7 churches
- Ephesus: “To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God”
- Smyrna: “The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death”
- Pergamum: “To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”
- Thyatira: “To the one who conquers... I will give him authority over the nations... and I will give him the morning star.”
- Sardis: “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.”
- Philadephia: “The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem... and my own new name.”
- Laodicea: “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne...”

In many ways these It is these two questions have been in view throughout the book, which is why Christ has been giving constant assurances to the seven churches that:

1. God is in control – he’s on the throne, even as Satan rages. Ch 4
2. Victory is already assured: Christ’s resurrection and ascension show who has the real power. Chs 1, 5 and 7
3. God has allowed evil and trials to
 - a. test the faithful and
 - b. allow them to bear witness to Christ, and
 - c. give all the opportunity to repent and worship him
 Chs 6, 8-13, 16
4. The fate of Satan and his demonic forces is already determined. They are destined for complete destruction Chs 12, 17-19
5. The faithful will reign with Christ forever in a new, glorious and perfect (sinless and unspoiled) creation Chs 7, 14-15, AND NOW 19-22

Very clearly in view in these closing chapters: the visions are of end of evil and the ‘new creation’ which the faithful can look forward to.

But first, a reminder that patience is required. As with certain Beethoven symphonies, just when you think the final climax has arrived and the symphony is ending, orchestra takes flight. So here: Satan's final destruction is delayed until the very end.

The end of the parodies:

- Demonic trinity (2nd and 3rd members already destroyed: 19.20 – beast and false prophet)
- Harlot – killed by the kings and beast in ch.17
- Babylon

NB. Babylon = harlot = those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life

But dragon/Devil yet to be destroyed

In 20.1-3 the dragon is bound and thrown into the (bottomless) pit from whence the beast arose in 11.7.

After 1,000 years he is released for a short time to deceive the nations (20.7f.) and gather them for battle, only to watch these massed armies consumed by fire from heaven, and to be thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur himself - 20.10.

20.1-10 The 1,000 years & destruction of the devil

Pre-millennial – millenium begins when Christ returns

Amillennial – the millennial reign began with Christ's ascension

Post-millennial – Christ returns after/to end millennial period

Pan-millennial – will all pan out in the end

Pro-millennial – no idea, but all for it

Non-specific about where the saints shall reign with Christ for 1,000 years : on earth in heaven (vv.4-6)?

Elsewhere (4.2, 4; 11.16) thrones are located in heaven. Most likely here too.

Makes more sense that first resurrection is to a heavenly life, whereas the second resurrection is a general resurrection at the Parousia.

What's the point of this passage:

1. With the beast and false prophet already destroyed Satan is now bound and imprisoned, but his final destruction is delayed.
Meanwhile:
2. Those who have been martyred and have conquered~(i.e. all the faithful) will be raised and rewarded as they reign with Christ in heaven NB. The contrast between the 1000 year fate of the devil and the righteous
3. Meanwhile, the nations and peoples of the earth (those who don't yet believe) will have opportunity to serve God untroubled by persecution and deception. An opportunity to repent and worship. This is the precursor to the final judgement when Satan is unleashed for a short time. Will the wicked nations (symbolised by Gog and Magog) be deceived again? Alas, and incredibly, yes. They will be destroyed, along with Satan. But clearly not all on earth deceived – there are the saints encamped outside/in the beloved city

20.11-15 Judgment before the great white throne

Two sets of books:

1. Books recording the deeds of each
2. The Book of Life, containing the names of those saved

Divine grace and human accountability.

- It is on the basis of the former that we are saved.
- God will hold people accountable for what they have done, does not judge them on the basis of their works.

With the demonic trinity finally destroyed, and all those whose names not written in the Lambs Book of Life:

Left with the victorious and splendid:

- Holy Trinity
- Bride
- Jerusalem

NB. The bride = the holy city/Jerusalem = the 'temple' = the Church/community of believers/those whose names are written in the lamb's Book of Life.

Moreover the new heaven and new earth = the new Jerusalem = the 'temple'

21.1-8 The new Heaven and New Earth

Barnett: “The woman desperately menaced and pursued on earth by the dragon (12.4,6,13-17) is now the pristine bride of the Lamb, coming in serene beauty from heaven.”

21.3-4 draw on Lev 26.12-13 and Ezek 37.27-28

With the demonic trinity destroyed, and the absence of evil, the results of the curses in Gen 3 are reversed/cancelled (see too 22.3).

Koester:

In the end, those who gather around the throne see the face of God and reign with him forever, in the glory of God’s everlasting life (22.4-5). This marks the final reversal of the story that began when Adam and Eve sinned, and hid themselves from the face of God in shame, seeking refuge in the shadows (Gen 3.8).

The faithful righteous will receive the rewards promised (as in letters to seven churches).

This is the final act. Judgment is the penultimate one. The rewarding of the saints is the final one.

21.9-27 The New Jerusalem

One of the 7 angels who had poured out the bowls of God’s wrath says. “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

Cf. 17.1 where one of the same angels (perhaps the exact same one) said, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters...”

But what John sees is not a woman but the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, i.e. bride – church – Jerusalem = all symbols of God’s redeemed.

It is vast, a cube 2250km x 2250km x 2250km = London to Athens, i.e. encompassing much of the known world in John’s day.

The inner chambers of the temple were likewise cubic in shape, though a mere 20 cubits (l x b x h) in Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 6.20)

In Rev, the entire city and the entire community is God's sanctuary, but here people are not frightened off by its glory but are drawn to it.

21.22 "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb

In 3.12, Christ promised the Philadelphians that overcomers would be made a pillar in the temple

In 7.15, those who came out of the great tribulation "serve day and night in his temple".

In 11.19, when God finally takes his great power and begins to reign, "God's temple in heaven is opened,"

But now find no temple! Because God and Jesus are the temple, and the redeemed have free access, without mediation.

NB. The whole of creation is redeemed, not just individual souls. NB. Rev 5.13 "And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying..."

Cf. Rom 8

22.1-5 The River of Life

22.2 the tree of life – another sign of the Gen 3 curses reversed.

The word for tree is not the normal word for tree but that used for a dried piece of timber, as of the cross in Acts 5.30; 10.39; 13.29; Gal 3.13; 1 Peter 2.24.

Another parody is replaced: the cross with the Tree of Life.

22.6-21 Jesus is Coming

Last verses are dominated by words from Jesus himself.

Says 4 things:

v.7 Behold I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book, i.e. remain faithful.

v.12 Behold I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, i.e. it'll all be worth it, of that you can be sure, for I am the Lord

v.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, i.e. you can trust everything that has been revealed to you, that it is the truth, because it has been revealed to the angel (and by him to you) by Jesus himself.

v.20 **Surely** I am coming soon, i.e. I know it seems like forever, but I *am* coming soon. Hang in there!

Telos: "Worship God!" 19.10; cf. 13.4 – NOT the beast, the dragon or even heavenly angels (22.9).

Victory = not by might or power but by righteousness and faithfulness. The only weapon (sword) = the Word in Christ's mouth. There is no battle! (a huge anticlimax for those who want a great final showdown). In 12.11 we learnt that the saints overcame the dragon "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony because they loved not their lives unto death."

Matthew Henry attributed these words to his father, Philip Henry (1631-1696)

"He is no fool who parts with that which he cannot keep, when he is sure to be recompensed with that which he cannot lose."

Cf. Jim Elliott

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. How has reading Revelation made you more aware of the issues faced by suffering/persecuted Christians?
2. How has it challenged your own prayer life and lifestyle?

3. Do you ever cry out to God “How long?” Over what issues? In what ways does Revelation encourage and strengthen you to keep patiently trusting?
4. Does millenium theology excite or worry you at all? How significant do you think these 6 verses are in God’s overall purposes? Do they affect how we live as disciples today?
5. What do you make of the rewards promised to those who are faithful? What is the nature of them?