

The Book of Revelation

Session 8 - The Battle for Worship (Chapters 13:11-14:20)

Book Overview

The Book of Revelation can be divided into five sections:

1. Introduction: Establishing Context and Conflict (Chapter 1-5)
2. Action: The Main Story (Chapter 6-11)
3. Action: The Main Story Retold - Focus on Satan's Schemes (Chapters 12-14)
4. Action: The Main Story Retold - Focus on Mankind's Sinfulness (Chapters 15-19)
5. Ending: Resolution (Chapter 20-22)

Chapters 13:11-14:20 finish the first retelling of the action, zooming in on Satan's activity throughout this period of time, but emphasising God's sovereignty and His response. This retelling ends once again with the return of Jesus, the judge of all the earth.

Chapter Overview

These two chapters can be divided into four sections:

1. A False Worship Movement (Revelation 13:11-18)
2. True Worship Arising (Revelation 14:1-5)
3. God's Sovereign Message (Revelation 14:6-13)
4. The Wrath of God (Revelation 14:14-20)

These chapters are the second half of John's long vision (ch. 12-14). These two chapters particularly focus on the way Satan, through the antichrist and the false prophet, will deceive and lead the whole earth astray. Yet the victory belongs to God - He will strengthen and equip His people to stand firm, and He alone will have the final word.

A False Worship Movement (Revelation 13:11-18)

Verse 11:

"Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon" - This beast appears out of the earth. He will appear ordinary and like us. He will appear to be innocent and pure but he will in fact be fierce and deceptive.

Verse 12-13:

"It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed" - The dragon (Satan), the beast (antichrist) and the second beast (false prophet) form an unholy trinity. Just as Jesus received authority and power from God (Matthew 28:18), the antichrist will receive authority from

the dragon (Revelation 13:2), and just as Jesus is glorified through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-14), so will the antichrist be glorified through this false prophet.

“And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of the people” - Similar to Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40). The deception will be more than just convincing the earth of the beast’s power - the second beast’s deception will be convincing the earth that the beast is on God’s side and that Satan is the one true God (1 Kings 18:21). Satan’s goal is still the same - to be worshipped as God (Isaiah 14:12-14), and this battle for worship will reach a crescendo at the end of the age.

Verse 14:

“Because of the signs... it deceived the inhabitants of the earth” - Through its signs and wonders, the false prophet will deceive the nations into worshipping the antichrist and Satan. In a time of such intense shakings and disasters, it will be natural to rally around someone who claims to have the answers.

“It ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived” - This worship will become ‘institutionalised’, just as in Daniel’s time (Daniel 3:1-7). The earth will obey because it does not understand what is truly going on. Only those who are rooted in scripture will be able to make sense of these times of chaos.

Verse 15:

“The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed” - We will relive what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego went through but on a global scale. With modern technology - AI, holograms etc - we have a grid for how this could play out, but there is still much mystery. This is Satan waging war against God’s people (Revelation 12:17) - seeking to deceive and manipulate as many as possible into turning away from God and worshipping him. It will be a time of trial and temptation similar to that which Jesus faced in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13) - Satan is after our worship.

Verse 16-17:

“It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name” - This false worship movement will become more and more aggressive and oppressive. In his desperation for the allegiance of the whole earth, Satan will do all he can to manipulate and trick mankind into worshipping him. God commanded the Israelites to fix His words on their hands and foreheads (Deuteronomy 10:1-6). The mark of the beast is a counterfeit allegiance, a seal of ownership. The sin of taking the mark is more than just about the mark itself, it is about the name we are receiving. For in order to receive the mark, we first have to reject and forsake God and the seal He has placed upon us (2 Corinthians 1:22, Matthew 12:31-32). In baptism, we openly declare our allegiance to God and reject Satan, and so we are baptised into God’s name and receive His seal of ownership (the Holy Spirit). Satan will use this mark as a means to coerce us into declaring our allegiance to him, and so we will become ‘baptised’ into his name.

Verse 18:

"This calls for wisdom" - Also see Revelation 17:9. God wants to give us wisdom so we are not caught out and so we can see clearly in these times.

"Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666" - The unholy trinity. The epitome of the sinfulness of man. The greatest single expression of the wickedness of man will be the Beast.

True Worship Arising (Revelation 14:1-5)

Verse 1:

"Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" - Now John sees God's response to all of this. God always preserves a remnant for Himself (Romans 11:2-5). Satan's schemes will not prevail. John sees the Lamb - the true King of the world, who did not seek power but gave up His own life - standing on Mount Zion. This could be a picture of Jesus in the midst of His people during this time of trial, or a future vision of His reign on Mount Zion with those who have overcome. They have the name of God and Jesus written on their foreheads - further emphasising the counterfeit nature of the mark of the beast.

Verse 2:

"And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder... like that of harpists playing their harps" - John hears songs of worship from heaven (Revelation 19:6). True worship is still continuing in heaven and will soon fill the earth.

Verse 3:

"And they sang a new song before the throne and before the living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth" - It is the turn of this 144,000 to sing a new song, just like the great multitude in Revelation 7:10. In this time of trial God will release new songs to strengthen and encourage His people, and out of this time we will sing new songs to God rejoicing in His goodness and faithfulness.

Verse 4:

"These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes" - Contrary to the sinfulness and depravity of the world, these ones have lived lives of such holiness and purity. God will use the increased wickedness to bring forth increased righteousness.

"They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless" - They have been offered as firstfruits, the first of a great harvest! There will be millions more like them.

God's Sovereign Message (Revelation 14:6-13)

Verse 6:

"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people" - This section continues to show us God's response to what Satan is doing on the earth. God's gospel will go forth in power and be preached to the ends of the earth (Matthew 24:14). Though there will be great deception, there will be great openness to truth. Light shines brightest in the dark.

Verse 7:

"He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water'" - Underlying everything in this time is the battle for worship. We are called to love and fear God alone. He will not stay silent when His name is being mocked. The gospel is good news to those who love God but bad news to those who hate him.

Verse 8:

"A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries'" - God will finally remove everything that leads the world astray. He will dethrone sin and darkness. His will be the final victory.

Verse 9-11:

"A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: 'If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name'" - Receiving the mark of the beast is synonymous with worshipping the beast. This is more than about a physical mark or tattoo - this is about the state of a person's heart. This angel warns us of the everlasting consequences of hardening our hearts towards God and turning from Him. There can be no forgiveness for someone who is beyond repentance. God's anger has been fermenting like wine. It is not reactive but it is ready to be poured out.

Verse 12:

"This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus" - We are called to faithful endurance in light of this (Revelation 13:10).

Verse 13:

"Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on'" - God will completely flip the narrative of 'survive at all costs'. We will be blessed if we die because we will receive eternal salvation!

"'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them'" - Our faithfulness and perseverance will not be forgotten. God will reward us for how we have lived in this life.

The Great Wrath of God (Revelation 14:14-20)

Verse 14:

"I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand" - The final stage of God's response will be Jesus Himself returning (Daniel 7:7-9, 23-27). He is the true King of the earth. He has a sharp sickle - not a single grain will be missed. He will harvest the earth, gathering the good fruit and destroying the bad (Matthew 13:24-30).

Verse 15:

"Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice... 'Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe'" - The temple was opened in Revelation 11:19 at God's final judgement. John is seeing this again from a different perspective, focussing on Jesus who will harvest the earth. The earth is ripe - righteousness and wickedness have reached their fullness.

Verse 16:

"So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested" - Jesus will gather His elect at the end of the age (Matthew 24:31). He will remember us and come for us!

Verse 17-18:

"Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe'" - Now is the time for judgement (Joel 3:13), the day of the Lord's sacrifice (Isaiah 34:6, Zephaniah 1:7), where God will repay the nations for their wickedness.

Verse 19-20:

"The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia [180 miles]" - This is exactly what Jesus said would happen (Matthew 13:41), when all that do evil will be uprooted from His kingdom. In the days of Noah, God brought destruction upon the earth so He could 'start again' with Noah. Jesus is removing all that is sinful from the earth so He can 'start again' as He establishes His kingdom on the earth. He is doing what the Israelites did not do - purging the whole land of sin for the good of the earth and its inhabitants (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). This time will be bloody! Jerusalem will be the epicentre of this drama. God will gather the nations to Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:1-5, 14:2, Ezekiel 38:14-16, Luke 21:20) and there He will fight against them when He returns.

Summary

These chapters highlight four ways the second beast (false prophet) will lead the earth astray:

1. Through having the appearance of being someone who cares for the people (Revelation 13:11)
2. Through signs and wonders that demonstrate his power (Revelation 13:12)
3. Through instigating a worldwide worship movement celebrating the beast as the answer to all the world's problems (Revelation 13:14)
4. Through manipulating people to worship the beast in exchange for the means to live (Revelation 13:16-17)

These chapters highlight five ways God will respond to this:

1. He will preserve for Himself a faithful remnant who will be given completely to Him (Revelation 14:1,4)
2. He will raise up messengers to preach the eternal gospel to the whole world (Revelation 14:6)
3. He will finally uproot Babylon the Great, an ancient system of sin and adultery (Revelation 14:8)
4. He will repay the earth for all they have done (Revelation 14:9-11)
5. He will emphasise to His people the great rewards of heaven (Revelation 14:13)

These chapters highlight two aspects of Jesus' return:

1. He will gather His elect to Him (Revelation 14:16)
2. He will confront and kill those who oppose Him (Revelation 14:17-20)