**Revelation 12-16**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nvVVcYD-0w&ab_channel=BibleProject>

The book of Revelation is a 1sr Century revelation of Jesus, against the Roman Empire; to the Church(es); for the purpose of worship, encouragement and hope.

So a reminder then that the book is based around a series of sevens. The number 7 in the Hebrew imagination is the complete number; of all things, all time, number. So, whenever we see 7 in Revelation we should be thinking about the it being about all things or all time. So, the 7 churches; 7 seals; 7 trumpets; 7 bowels 7 years are in fact just ways of telling and retelling the entire history of the world.

War, power struggles, violence, inequality, natural disaster, famine, pollution, supernatural evil oh and did I mention war: but also cries for justice from martyrs. The people in their sinful state can only hear judgment from heaven but heaven’s real response to all this evil is an act of sacrificial love in the form of the slaughtered lamb. That’s how the victory is won.

But John is given a small scroll: a condensed history of the church. 3.5 years not 7. That the church will be a witness to the world performing miracles and healing but the world will hate it and the church will be persecuted and martyred but God has the power to resurrect the faithful and this not judgment will be the witness that will bring many to repentance.

**Chapter 12.**

Last week Phil asked the question: Who’s side are these angels dealing out judgments and killing so many people?

We start to see the root cause being revealed. We can’t just deal with symptoms. The systematic and spiritual evil behind war, violence, power, injustice, inequality, death and disease is being revealed.

Who’s side is the angel on Phil? Well, these things exist because of spiritual evil and human sin. The first answer is that there is a real spiritual being behind so much evil, suffering and sin in the world.

This prophesy is about the birth of Jesus – Psalm 2:9. Will rule the world with a rod of iron.

It draws on various Greek myths to make the point that the true messiah; true hero of the story of the world is Jesus.

The woman giving birth is probably Israel or the daughter of Israel Mary. Israel flees into the wilderness from Egypt. Mary and the Holy family flee into the wilderness to Egypt.

But weather this is supposed to be Israel or the fulfillment of Israel’s purpose in Mary. She represents the entire story of God’s people, chosen to carry forward his plans for the nations and indeed for the whole creation. That is why the sun, moon and stars form her robe, her footstool and her crown.[[1]](#footnote-1)

That is why, too, the forces that range themselves against the creator God are determined to strike at her, and at her child.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The woman and her child are carrying the purposes of God for the world. The dragon is doing his best to snuff out those purposes before they can get under way[[3]](#footnote-3)

On the earth Herod tries to kill Jesus. Joseph is warned in a dream that Herod is trying to kill the child and the Holy Family flee to Egypt.

But this is that same story told from the heavenly perspective.

Then John does a switcheroo and changes who the Woman is from Mary/Israel to the church. Remember last chapter the church pictured there as the 2 witnesses suffered persecution for 3.5 years as they do here. Half the history of the world. Or the short history of the Church.

John believes that since Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, Israel is redefined around him, so that the woman who flees to the desert to be looked after by God for a temporary period (three and a half years: 1,260 days) must be the church itself[[4]](#footnote-4)

The church needs to know that its present struggles and sufferings are not a sign that God has gone to sleep on the job. They are the sign that a great, cosmic drama is being staged, in which they are being given a vital though terrible role to play[[5]](#footnote-5)

A war has broken out in heaven.

Satan and his demons have been thrown down from heaven.

The church plays its role.

And their role is the thematic centre of the book. It is verse 11

They triumphed over him  
    by the blood of the Lamb  
    and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
    as to shrink from death.

Ultimately that is the theme of the book of revelation: You, the church, the faithful followers of Jesus can overcome the devil and his earthly representatives by trusting in the victory of Jesus won at the cross and speaking and living out truth, righteousness, justice and wholeness. We play our part in this cosmic battle by being faithful to the words, works and ways of Jesus.

**Chapter 13**

We begin to get a better description of the dragon – the image of the spiritual evil behind it all. The imagery is so close to that found in Daniel. This time the 4 monsters have been condensed into 1. John is not expecting alien monsters to come crawling out of the Mediterranean. The monsters represent earthly empires. Babylon, Persia, Greece, - This one represents Rome.

This is a 1st Century Revelation of Jesus against the Roman Empire.

The monster is the dark power of pagan empire, straddling the earth, crushing everything in its path, blaspheming other gods who get in the way so that it alone (and the dragon who has given it its power) may be properly worshipped[[6]](#footnote-6)

In Chapter 2 Pergamum was described as “being where Satan has his throne.” That is because it was the centre of worship of Caesar.

The cult of Caesar was the fastest growing religion of the first century. Most importantly it came with a sword that could enforce it. Julius Caesar had ended the civil wars; was proclaimed prince of peace; placed on a throne; proclaimed king of kings and lord of lords; was said to be the son of god; and when he died someone released a dove from behind the funeral pior and it was said that onlookers saw his spirit ascending to heaven; after which he was proclaimed a god, pagans greeted each other by saying, “Caesar is Lord”.

These were direct counter claims to the claims of Jesus. When Christians proclaimed “Jesus is Lord” they were clearly saying Caesar is not.

John is pointing out that behind the cruel unjust rule of the Roman Empire is a spiritual evil entity.

And there are some really interesting features here. One reason that it is believed that this book may have been written after Nero is that after his death there appears to be a kind of death blow to Rome that many thought it may not recover from.

The Jewish rebellion gets real momentum as the Roman Empire has 4 emperors in a year. But eventually is healed with Vespasien taking the throne.

Many believed that either Nero had not been killed and would come again or that Vespasien was indeed Nero revived. Emperors can possibly do this sort of thing, they are gods.

Of course, once the emperor becomes a god, there is no room for other gods. It’s all right if local and tribal deities are still worshipped, so long as one worships the new god, Rome and the emperor. But if one refuses—as the Christians knew they were bound to refuse—then a collision course is set. Like Daniel and his friends in the early chapters of the book from which John drew so richly, all the world seemed to be worshipping the monster. Only the faithful few, here described in terms of their names being in the lamb’s book of life, refuse to do so.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Even though you may be captured or killed, hold firm to patience and faith.

So, the first beast was the Roman empire, gaining its ultimate authority from the satanic dragon, was putting itself about as the world ruler[[8]](#footnote-8)

The second beast then are the local ruling elites in city after city and province after province, who do their best not only to copy the monster at a local level but insist, in order to keep the monster’s favour, that everybody in their domain should worship the monster[[9]](#footnote-9)

Coming up from the earth. That is local bullies who curry favour to Rome by promoting and enforcing the worship of Roman Emperors and their families.

Many have seen that, They complete the Unholy Trinity: the dragon, the first monster, and the second monster, the ghastly combined parody of God, Jesus and the spirit.[[10]](#footnote-10)

But they have horns like those of a lamb: trying to pretend to be what they are not.

What’s more, worshipping or not worshipping was quickly becoming the dividing line between people who were acceptable in the community and people who weren’t. Not long after this time, some local officials introduced a formal requirement that unless you had offered the required **sacrifice**s you weren’t allowed in the market. There were various kinds of marks and visible signs which were used to set people apart either as ‘able to trade’ or as ‘not able to trade’. From quite early on the Christians were faced with a stark alternative: stay true to the lamb and risk losing your livelihood, the ability to sell or buy; or capitulate to the monster, sacrifice to Caesar at the behest of the local officials, and then everything will be all right—except your integrity as one of the lamb’s followers.[[11]](#footnote-11)

But the lessons are clear. Although Rome is the subject of John’s critique it becomes true of every Empire; every power hungry government throughout history; every earthly system that is influenced and controlled by the gods of this world, money, sex and power.

It is easy perhaps for us to say, “I would remain true.” There is no way I would participate in the abusive slavery of the 1st Century Roman Empire.

OK well when you are purchasing clothes do you consult something like the Baptist World Aid Fashion Guide? Did you know that Billabong have a very poor record regarding caring for and paying their workers. Bonds and Bras and Things have a very good record. What shapes your ethical decisions regarding purchasing?

If your only consideration is price, then how is that not a way of participating in the unjust abusive economic system of this world – the god of mammon.

Finally, 666. Many people have said look, this is the antichrist. That’s fine except that title is not used here. The only place in the Bible it is found is 1 John 2:

**18**Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. **19**They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

**20**But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%202&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30571e)] **21**I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. **22**Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. **23**No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

So the antichrist or antichrists are those who deny Jesus is Lord, gather a following, and possibly promote themselves as Lord of the world.

In Revelation John makes it super clear who he means. Many languages do not have Arabic numbers like we use. In Hebrew for instance letters = numbers. A=1 B=2 etc.

So the John writes it out 666

Nero Caesar Beast

There is no doubt who John is talking about. He is talking about Caesar who was proclaiming himself as Lord of the World.

The Roman Empire was the one world government of the time with Caesar at its head. It was a direct counter claim to the claim of Christ that Jesus was Lord of all.

But 666 was also a parody of the 3x perfect number 777. Actually, a little less than Jesus in every way.

Nero and the Roman Empire he represented are a dangerous blasphemous imitation of the real deal in Jesus.

But there is also on step more. If you take the name Jesus and apply the same formula you get 888. A kind of super perfect number.

Antichrists then will come and go. They will proclaim themselves as saviours, hope, redemption, your justice your retribution. If they are proclaiming that they the answer; only they can save you…..you are probably looking at an antichrist.

**Chapter 14**

We again meet Jesus elite warriors – the 144000. They follow the lamb wherever he goes. Plenty of echoes from the gospels particularly the book of John where that picture of sheep following the shepherd and follow me is the best picture of being a Jesus person.

These 144000 we remember are the faithful from Israel and the great multitude of faithful followers from every tribe and nation.

John the seer here is again drawing on Psalm 2. The nations rage: the dragon and the beasts. But God’s answer is to place his king upon the throne. And the king is surrounded by this great multitude of faithful.

These 144000 are doing war then with the dragon and the beasts. In ancient Israel if the soldier was to go to war they had to obey special sexual laws including abstinence.[[12]](#footnote-12) So John in his stylised writing calls them virgins and pure. They sing a new song. They are the ideal representatives of the people of God. And they are ever ready for the real battle which may mean that they suffer and die for being faithful to Christ.

I can only imagine that the little groups of Christians spread around the Roman Empire might feel helpless in the face of such pressure, fear and abuse.

But John reminds us: the lamb has been enthroned, just as God promised, and his elite stand around him, ready for the battle in which, following the lamb himself, they are going to win the victory. They will be the conquerors.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The call then is for everyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus to faithful holiness as the way to both follow and do battle.

Brian Zahnd writes, “Christians are to persuade by love, witness, Spirit, reason, rhetoric, and, if need be, by martyrdom; but never by force.

The church does not need, should not have, and must not covet the sword of Caesar.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

So don’t give into the values of this world; the unjust systems with evil entities behind them. Don’t take the mark, that is, give into pressure to worship the antichrist the Caesar. Buying cheap clothes; cheap food; keep for ourselves….store up in our own barn rather than be generous. For us that is a mark of righteousness – just dealings.

Verse 13 is the 2nd of the beatitudes:

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.”

What? Really? OK….

Babylon here is another name here for Rome and all the evil empires of the world that have come since and may yet come. It will fall because the faithful do battle with patient endurance. Even unto death.

Babylon had taken Judah off into captivity. In Jewish thought it encapsulated wickedness; idolatry and immorality and sheer cruelty.

But Babylon will fall ultimately; they will drink the “grapes of wrath” that is fall victim of their own cruel unjust systems.

When the gospel is presented in the Bible it is often much larger in scale than the personal salvations we present. Much more about ultimate evil and its’s earthly representatives being defeated and God’s victory through sacrificial love.

But here we need to again pause and ask whose side are these angels on. We have seen where ultimate evil comes from – Satan. Not on God’s side.

But these angels coming from heaven are ones on God’s side. But they are doing things that may not always sound nice. That is because it is God’s judgement of that same evil and the people who follow that evil. It is actually good news that ultimate evil is being judged.

Here we see a harvest. And a harvest is a great occasion. All that tending and weeding and watering has come to fruition. Food is going to be on the table. Money in the pocket. A whole community might pitch in to help bring in the harvest on time. Yippee!

If it is “one like the son of man” a reference to Jesus inspired by Daniel and the sickle a picture from Joel 3, then Jesus is harvesting the faithful. Of course this may be salvation through suffering.

Grapes are often a picture in scripture of God’s people. But the harvest winepress “is outside the city.” What happened “outside the city”? Nothing other than the death of Jesus. The harvest comes through the lamb’s sacrificial death.

The rivers of blood match the description of the river of life in the last chapter of the book of Ezekiel.

All this is good news….at least if you are of Jesus.

**Chapter 15 and 16**

We now launch into the final 7. 7 bowls. The final telling of the short history of the world. The 7 complete, for all time.

But first another reminder about ultimate victory won by the martyrs over the the monster and over its image, and over the number of its name.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Think for a moment about a courtroom. We often fear that picture because we think we may be the one on trial.

But what if we are trying to get justice because we have been defrauded or had property stolen. Then the court can restore order.

This is also true on the global and historical scale.

So the nations will come and worship because of your judgements…..vs4b.

Most of us would prefer to live without the wrath of God. The wrath of God is not an easy thought. But wrath directed against true evil that has held humanity in chains for so long, that’s justice served.

We are reminded by the psalmist ‘There really is a God in Israel; there really is a God who puts things right, who judges the earth’[[16]](#footnote-16)

But evil and sin have been judged, at the cross. There is further judgement against evil when they kill the martyrs. That’s why they win the victory. It is upside down to the way we often perceive victory.

The tabernacle, the place of God’s dwelling, is opened to let the angels out.

The ‘wrath’ of the creator God consists of two things, principally. First, he allows human wickedness to work itself out, to reap its own destruction. Second, he steps in more directly to stop it, to call ‘time’ on it, when it’s got out of hand[[17]](#footnote-17)

Although it can appear harsh, we should remember that God’s judgements are just and true. We should thank Him both for his patience and his intervention.

With the seals and trumpets only part of the world was killed or harmed. This time the whole world is being judged.

The bowls of wrath are the just the next of numerous steps of cleansing of this world of evil that will continue over the next few chapters.

Did you notice the numerous passages of worship in chapters 15 and 16?

In verse 15 we get the 3rd beatitude: **15**“Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

And while the great battle gathers at Armageddon, we see the close of this section with crashes and thunder and lighting and earthquake. A great overturning of the order of things.

Be encouraged a victory is coming.

Refect

1. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re12.1-6&off=3900&ctx=on%E2%80%99+of+Exodus+19%3a6.+~She+represents+the+e), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re12.1-6&off=4114&ctx=tool+and+her+crown.%0a~That+is+why%2c+too%2c+th), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re12.1-6&off=4609&ctx=+in+the+whole+book.+~The+woman+and+her+ch), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re12.1-6&off=6813&ctx=l+through+the+book%2c+~John+believes+that+s), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re12.1-6&off=8043&ctx=must+be+overthrown.+~The+church+needs+to+), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster Jon Knox, 2011), 109–110. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re13.1-10&off=5479&ctx=r%2c+as+we+shall+see%2c+~the+monster+is+the+d), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re13.1-10&off=8326&ctx=pagan+divinity.%0aAnd+~of+course%2c+once+the+), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 117–118. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re13.11-18&off=3235&ctx=ntury%2c+was+that+the+~Roman+empire%2c+gainin), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re13.11-18&off=3449&ctx=e+the+local+elites%2c+~in+city+after+city+a), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re13.11-18&off=4056&ctx=ing+across+the+sea.+~They+complete+the+Un), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re13.11-18&off=5141&ctx=+the+dragon+itself.%0a~What%E2%80%99s+more%2c+worship), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Deuteronomy 23:9–10; 1 Samuel 21:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re14.1-5&off=5938&ctx=t+of+it%2c+says+John%3a+~the+lamb+has+been+en), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. https://www.facebook.com/share/19asPmjHCH/ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re15.1-8&off=330&ctx=on+the+victory+over+~the+monster+and+over), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Psalm 58:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re16.1-9&off=3475&ctx=d+to+be+wide+awake.%0a~The+%E2%80%98wrath%E2%80%99+of+the+c), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)