

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

REVELATION LESSON 2 (Keys 4-7)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written in it, for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3). Welcome to our study of the Book of Revelation. This second lesson is going to discuss the remainder of the seven keys that will help us “unlock” the Book of Revelation. Previously we discussed the first three keys. First, Revelation is a symbolic book. Second, it was written about things that were “shortly to take place.” And third, Revelation was written to encourage or comfort Christians in the first century.

In this lesson we will be identifying some of the main characters in the book, the time frame, and where those events would be occurring. Key number four is that Revelation identifies the dragon and the two beasts. Like in any vision, in order to fully understand it we must understand who the main characters are. Some of the characters in this book are the dragon and the two beasts. Who are these characters, and who or what do they represent? Let us remember again that this is a figurative or symbolic book. God showed (or signified) to John and the saints many things that were figurative, and that were not meant to be taken literally because they were symbols. So who or what is the dragon, and what does the dragon represent? I want to direct your attention to Revelation 12 so that you can notice verse 9 where the dragon is clearly identified as none other than Satan—the devil himself. “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” The dragon is here identified very clearly. He is the devil—Satan—who “deceived the whole world.” In John 8:44 Jesus identified the devil as a liar and a murderer from the beginning. Revelation 12:9 clearly identifies the dragon as Satan, which is a big help to our understanding the Book of Revelation. Toward the end of the book, the dragon also is identified. Look at Revelation 20:2 where we read, “He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.” Here we see God binding Satan (the dragon) for a thousand years. When we come to the Book of Revelation, let’s understand that the dragon—a mythical creature that throughout human history in literature has wreaked havoc—represents the devil, which is the most fearful adversary mankind has. I am reminded of 1 Peter 5:8 where we are told that the devil is “like a roaring lion, seeking those whom he may devour.”

In key number four we learn not only who the dragon is, but also who the sea beast and the land beast are. These powerful figures represent someone or something during the time of the first century. Let’s take a moment to identify from the Scriptures some characteristics that accompany the sea beast so that we can understand who or what this is. In Revelation 13:1-10 we see some of the characteristics of the sea beast. Verses 2 and 4 say that the sea beast has been given its power by the dragon. So, the sea beast is a tool (or pawn) in the hand of Satan. It is under Satan’s control, and as such is a wicked and ungodly figure. Whoever or whatever this beast is, it is being ruled by the “god of this world”

—Satan himself. Verse 4 tells us that people worship the beast. Whatever this beast was, during the first century people were worshipping it. History tells us that the rulers (or Caesars) of Rome often were viewed as gods. That is how they viewed themselves. And the annals of history clearly show that the people worshipped Roman emperors as gods. Thus, we see that the sea beast receives its power from Satan, and that people worshiped the beast. Verse 8 tells us something interesting about those who do not worship the beast. Only those whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life did not worship the beast. So who is it who is **not** worshipping the beast? It is the Christians—because those whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life were the ones who were not worshipping the beast. In Revelation 17:9-12 we see the seven heads of the beast as representative of seven hills and seven kings. What would people in the first century naturally have thought when they read something like that? Rome always has been known as “the city set on seven hills.” It also had seven major kings (or Caesars). What is the sea beast? It is none other than Rome and her rulers. The sea beast was not a figure that would show up 2,000 years down the road. It was not something about which God was prophesying that had to do with us today. Christians would have understood this. The sea beast was under the control of Satan, and was none other than Rome and her rulers. In Revelation 13:7 we see another characteristic of the sea beast. It is identified as a persecutor of the saints and as a dominate world power. Who persecuted Christians? Rome did. Who was the dominant world power during the first century? Rome and her rulers (the Caesars) were. Revelation 13 gives us adequate information to know that the sea beast is representative of Rome. When we see the sea beast under the control of the dragon, we can know that it is speaking of Rome and her rulers—all of which would have been easily recognized by first-century Christians.

But what about the second beast—the land beast? Revelation 13:11-18 identifies the land beast. Verse 12 says that the land beast exercises the authority of the first beast. It is as if the land beast works under the sea beast, which has given the land beast its authority. In verse 12 we also see that the land beast causes the people to make an image of, and to worship, the sea beast. The land beast has authority, and goes around enforcing worship of the sea beast. In verses 13 and 14 we see that the land beast, through trickery and other things that were not real, makes people think that the sea beast is a god. Remember that people viewed Roman emperors as gods. It was the land beast's job to make sure that people looked up to the emperors as gods. In Revelation 13:14 we learn that the land beast causes people to make images of the sea beast. Archaeology has shown us that the Romans made busts or images of their gods—which then were placed on pedestals so that people could worship them on a regular basis. It was the land beast's job to see to it that people made such images and worshiped the sea beast. Revelation 13:15 tells us that the land beast would even put people to death if they did not worship the sea beast. Thus, the land beast is representative of some type of militia—a group of people who went around forcing people to worship the sea beast, and punishing them if they refused to do so. Revelation 13:16-17 identifies some people who worshiped the sea beast, and who were known by marks on their hands and foreheads. This mark signified that a person's allegiance was to the sea beast. It was the land beast's job to be sure that the mark was clearly seen and known. The land beast is identified as a false prophet. Who is this land beast? The sea beast is Rome and her rulers, and if it is the job of the second beast to go around and force people to worship the sea beast and to set up images of the sea beast, then the second beast is representative of a type of militia, government officials, or army that went around and caused people to worship the sea beast. The dragon is Satan. In the hand of the dragon is the sea beast (Rome and her rulers) that is causing Christians to suffer. The land beast represents people under the power of the Roman gov-

ernment who were going around and trying to force Christians to give their allegiance to Satan by worshiping the sea beast. Understanding this helps us understand much of what the Book of Revelation is about.

Key number five identifies the harlot in Babylon. If we are going to understand who the dragon is, we also must understand who the harlot and Babylon are. These two figures are mentioned in Revelation 17 and 18. The harlot is none other than the city of Rome itself. Let me list some facts for you that will help you see that the harlot is Rome. Revelation 17:18 says that the harlot is a great city. During the time of the Book of Revelation, there was no city greater than the city of Rome. Millions of people lived there. It was a powerful world force. Revelation 17:2 says that the harlot had committed fornication with the kings of the Earth. Who was making foreign alliances and bringing foreign nations under her power? It was Rome. We also are told that the harlot rode on the back of the beast. Because Rome and her rulers were the beast, she is the one who is riding on the back of the beast. Revelation 17:4 says that she lives a luxurious life. Rome, its senate, and its elite inhabitants lived one of the most-luxurious lives you could ever imagine. Revelation 17:6 says that the harlot was drunk with the blood of Christians. During the time of the first century, Rome was the chief persecutor of Christians. The Romans were putting Christians to death. Some were being thrown to the lions. Anyone caught worshiping as a child of God was put to death. Who is this harlot? Revelation 17 identifies as a city that fits the description of none other than Rome itself.

But what about Babylon? Who or what is Babylon? Revelation 18 tells us about Babylon, taking our minds back to the image of Babylon in the Old Testament, which depicted Babylon as a great world power that conquered God's people. Although Babylon of the Old Testament was not a righteous force, God used it for His purposes. But who is the Babylon mentioned in Revelation 18? In verses 16 and 21 we see Babylon mentioned as a great city. Verses 3 and 9 say that Babylon commits fornication with those of the world. This is much like the harlot who was committing fornication and living in ungodliness. Verse 16 says that Babylon dresses and lives luxuriously, which is quite similar to what is said of the harlot. Babylon also is seen as having killed Christians (vs. 24). Babylon is a synonym for Rome. Revelation 17:5 refers to "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots." If the harlot is Rome, and if Babylon the Great is the mother of harlots, then that is a picture of Rome and her government." The harlot is Rome. Babylon the Great is Rome, which is the evil world force that is causing so much harm to Christians.

The sixth key identifies the period of 1,260 days (42 months, or "time, times, and half a time"—three-and-a-half years). This is important because this is the period of time for which the Book of Revelation was written. In Revelation 11:2 we are told, "But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." Forty-two months is 1,260 days (or three-and-a-half years). Revelation 11-13 is a climatic scene of persecution and the beginning of victory. The two witnesses (or prophets) are killed. In Revelation 12 we see a great battle where we see Christ and Christians as victorious. But what is the time period of that? It is 1,260 days (or 42 months). Revelation 11:3 says, "I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." Verse 7 says that when they finish their testimony, "the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them." In Revelation 12:6 we are told that "the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days." Verse 14 says that she was "given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and

half a time, from the presence of the serpent.” We have three-and-a-half years, 42 months, or 1,260 days. Notice Revelation 13:5-7, and how all of this ties together.

“He [the sea beast] was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. [Remember that we have identified the sea beast as Rome and her rulers, and that time frame is 42 months.] Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.”

The beast is Rome and her rulers, and the time period is 42 months. This is essential to an understanding of the Book of Revelation because the writing of the book was taking place in an intense period of persecution of Christians by the Roman government and her militia. This persecution was relatively short-lived in duration. And it was for this exact period of intense persecution that the Book of Revelation was written. If we can understand when this was occurring (and we can!), and if we can understand that it was a time of persecution by Rome and her government, then we can have a better understanding of when the Book of Revelation was written and for whom it was written.

The seventh key is that the Book of Revelation discusses a spiritual, not a physical, kingdom. In Revelation 1:6 we are told that God “and has made us kings of priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.” The kingdom is present. We are a kingdom of priests. It is not a future event. In Mark 9:1 we see where Jesus told His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.” In Revelation 1:9 we learn that John and other Christians were currently in the kingdom. To understand the Book of Revelation and how God’s kingdom will reign and rule over all other kingdoms, we must understand that this is not a physical kingdom being discussed. We are not talking about people in a militia conquering other nations. That is not how God’s kingdom is going to reign. Jesus said to Pilate in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight.” The Book of Revelation is about God, Christ, and His kingdom being victorious over all other kingdoms—and especially (so far as first-century Christians were concerned) the Roman Empire.

Now, let’s tie these things together to see all of this fits. We have identified the main adversaries in the Book of Revelation. The dragon is Satan. The sea beast is Rome and her rulers. The land beast is those in Rome who enforce worship of the sea beast. Those are the main adversaries in this book. We also understand where these activities are taking place. They are occurring where Babylon the Great and the harlot are located. We know that these two represent Rome. We also understand the time frame, which is three-and-a-half years. Since three is the perfect number, and since there is a half after it, then we know that this is not something that will last forever. These events were happening during the reign of the beast (Rome). Look at what we have learned as we have examined these keys. We have learned who was doing the persecution. We have learned where the persecution was taking place. And we have learned the time period. All of this will help us in our attempts to understand the Book of Revelation.

Do not forget that the Book of Revelation is a very practical book. I have not presented these keys just so we can gain more knowledge about the Book of Revelation in general. Rather, I want to show that this book is a very practical book. Look at some of the lessons we have seen as we have examined the keys.

First, we can know that God knows, and cares deeply about, our suffering. In Revelation 6:10 we see Christians crying out to God, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Those Christians were told

to wait a while because God **would** punish those who were harming them. So, from this book we learn that God knows, and cares about, our suffering. How that can help us on a daily level to know that we are not alone, that God loves us, and that He cares deeply for us! Jesus was tempted “in all points as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). We are told, “Cast all your cares on the Lord, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). God even cares for us enough that He provides us with the things of this life (Mt. 6:33). We are told that if we seek first the kingdom of God and its righteous, things such as food, shelter, and clothing will be provided for us. David said in Psalm 37:25, “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.” God will take care of righteous people. We need to understand that the Book of Revelation contains some very practical lessons. When we struggle, have trials, face tribulation, or have things come into our lives that bring us great trouble, there is a God in Heaven Who knows about our suffering, cares for us, and wants to help.

Second, we also learn that Satan, our adversary, is to be feared. He is not someone with whom we should flirt or play. Satan is a fearful adversary. But we can win over Satan. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that Jesus, through death, overcame him who had the power of death—the devil. Yes, Satan is to be feared. He is “the serpent of old” (Gen. 3) and the “roaring lion” (1 Pet. 5:8). He even can present himself as an angel of light. He definitely is to be feared. And yes, Satan can work in human history through human governments to cause Christians to undergo persecution in order to try to cause them to be lost. But if Christians remain faithful, they will always be victorious over the devil. Revelation 12:11 says, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

Another wonderful lesson that we can learn from the Book of Revelation is that persecution can have great spiritual value. Jesus said of certain Christians in Revelation 2:10 that they would have to endure persecution for a period of time, but if they would be faithful “even unto death,” then He would give them “the crown of life.” Through their persecution, these people learned great spiritual lessons and were forced to think about what was really important. That same lesson is true for us today as well. When we face trials or tribulations, or when things happen to us that are difficult, we can gain spiritual wisdom and insight as we allow such things to be of benefit to us. True, we do not often think about it like that. But that is what Scripture teaches. James 1:2-4 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” Our trials can help us, and can have real spiritual value. It is as though we are being tested in the fire. Impurities that we do not need in our lives will be seen, and we can be refined by those tests. Paul said in Acts 14:28 that we must “through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Trials and tribulations help us see what really matters. In 2 Timothy 3:12 we are told that “and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will** suffer persecution.”

I hope that these keys will give you a better insight to the Book of Revelation by helping us understand to whom it was written, why it was written, and that its main application is that we must never give up regardless of what happens to us in this life. We must be faithful to God, and in the end we will have the hope of eternal life.

Are you a child of God? Have you obeyed the Gospel? If not, you can do so by hearing the Word of God, by believing that Jesus is God’s Son, by being willing to repent of things in your life that are wrong, by confessing Christ as your Savior, and by doing as the people did on the Day of Pentecost when they were told to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38). May we have the strength and fortitude of faith to be faithful unto death and never give up—according to God’s plan in the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR REVELATION LESSON 2 (KEYS 4-7)

1. According to Revelation 1:3, when would the things discussed in the Book of Revelation be taking place?
2. This lesson explains that there are three creatures discussed in the Book of Revelation whose identity it is important to understand. What are those three creatures?
3. Revelation 12:9 names one of the creatures mentioned in question #2 above, and tells who the creature represents. What is the creature, and who does it represent.
4. Revelation 13:11-18 discusses another one of the creatures mentioned in question #2 above. What is the creature, and who does it represent?
5. Revelation 13:1-10 discusses another one of the creatures mentioned in question #2 above. What is the creature, and who does it represent?
6. In Revelation 17:9-12 we see the seven heads of a creature as representative of seven hills and seven kings. To what did the seven hills and seven kings refer?
7. Revelation 13:7 depicts one of the creatures as doing two things to Christians. What are those two things?
8. According to Revelation 13:15, what happened to people who refused to bow down and worship the creature discussed in Revelation 13:11-18?
9. According to Revelation 13:12, what was one of the assignments of the creature mentioned in this passage?
10. According to Revelation 13:16-17, how were the people identified who worshiped the creature discussed in Revelation 13:11-18?
11. Revelation 17:1 mentions a "great harlot." Who, according to Revelation 17:18, was that harlot?
12. How does Revelation 17:6 describe the harlot who is first mentioned in Revelation 17:1?
13. Who or what is depicted by the phrase in Revelation 17:5, "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots"?
14. Revelation 11:3 depicts a battle occurring that will last for 1,260 days (or 42 months). What is this rather unusual time period intended to represent?
15. What important statement did Christ make in John 18:36 that relates to the information being related in the Book of Revelation?
16. In Revelation 1:9, John said that when he wrote the Book of Revelation he was in tribulation. But he also said he was in something else. What was that "something else"?