

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

REVELATION LESSON 4 (Chapters 12-22)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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

“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” (Rev. 12:11). Welcome to our study of the Book of Revelation. In this lesson we will be examining chapters 12 through 22 of the book, and will be looking at the main idea or theme of each chapter so that we see how these items tie into the overall message of God offering Christians help and encouragement during times of persecution by the Roman government. In chapter 12 we are presented with images of the dragon, the woman, and the child. Revelation 12:9 tells us that the dragon is none other than the devil himself. But who is the woman? And who is the child that the dragon is trying to consume? We learn in Revelation 12 that the child is one who will rule all nations with a rod of iron. This harks back to Psalm 2:9 where we find a prophecy about Jesus reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords. But who is the woman? It is the woman who gives birth to the child. Most Bible scholars believe that this woman is representative of Old Testament Israel (that is, the faithful remnant of Israel from which the seed—Christ—came). In Genesis 3:15 it was promised that the seed of woman would deal a death blow to Satan. In Revelation it is the seed of woman who defeats the dragon. It was Israel’s faithful remnant that prepared the way for Jesus (the child), the Son of God, to come. It was prophesied in 2 Samuel 7:12-14 that someone from the seed of David would rule and reign forever over God’s kingdom. We learn from Luke 1:32-33 that this was Jesus (“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”). Thus, it would be out of the faithful remnant of Old Testament Israel (those through whom God was working His purpose) that Jesus would come. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-20 that He did not come to destroy the Law, but instead to fulfill it. He said that not a single jot or tittle would pass away until everything had been fulfilled. So Jesus, having been viewed through prophecy in the Old Testament, had finally arrived. And it was through Him that the devil would be defeated.

The lesson for us is that if we are children of God, we **can** defeat the devil and be a part of God’s eternal scheme to save humankind. We **can** have access to the blood of Christ, which is able to cleanse us of our sins. But how do we, through Jesus, overcome the devil? How can we defeat the devil in our lives today? One of the most practical verses in the Book of Revelation is found in Revelation 12:11, which presents a three-fold way for us to overcome Satan. “And they [first-century Christians] overcame him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” These Christians overcame the devil through Jesus’ sacrifice, Scripture, and their own self-sacrifice. They overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb. What was it that defeated the devil—the one who seemed to have the power of death? Hebrews 2:14 says that Jesus, through death, conquered him who had the power of death, who is the devil. Jesus’ sacrifice (“the blood of the Lamb”) was the sacrifice which provided the death blow that had been promised in Genesis 3:15. But these first-century Christians also overcame

by the word of their testimony, which is what we have today recorded in Scripture. It is God's inspired Word. And it is in the Word of God today that we find the power of salvation. In Romans 1:16 Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation." The Word of God is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12). James said in James 1:21 that we should "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Peter said in 1 Peter 1:23-25 that we are born again by the Word of God. Thus, first-century Christians overcame the devil through the sacrifice of Jesus when He died on the cross in obedience to His Father's will. They overcame the devil through Scripture. And they overcame the devil through self-sacrifice. Even if we recognize the importance of the sacrifice of Jesus, obey the Gospel, and become Christians, if we fail to make self-sacrifice a part of our lives, we will not be saved. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 we read, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Our lives as children of God must belong to Christ, and we must be willing to sacrifice ourselves for God. In Romans 12:1 Christians are commanded to offer our lives as "a living sacrifice." Jesus said that if we desire to come after Him, then we must deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him. We overcome the devil through the sacrifice of Jesus, by obedience to the Scriptures, and by living a life of self-sacrifice.

In Revelation 13 John introduces us to the sea beast, which we identified earlier as Rome and her rulers. He also introduces us to the land beast, which represents the militia who set up images of Rome's emperors and who enforced emperor worship. We now come to a number that has become so popular in our day and age that it deserves to be discussed here: 666. In Revelation 13:18 we read, "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666." If the number seven represents that which is complete, perfect, and whole, the number six falls one short of seven. Does 666 represent some type of "hidden meaning" that requires us to use algebra and trigonometry to uncover some kind of "magical calculation?" No. That is not what God is saying. The number six is one less than seven. If seven is perfection, then since six is one less than seven it represents imperfection. And look at how it is multiplied in 666—imperfection, imperfection, imperfection! That's the idea. The Roman Empire was the embodiment of human imperfection and human sinfulness. The number 666 is not some literal number on some literal human's head. Nor is it a Social Security number, as some have suggested in the past. It simply represents the imperfection and sinfulness of man, and especially those who were enforcing emperor worship. Without God in our lives, we cannot have salvation. If we look to men for our salvation, our salvation will be imperfect. Thus, 666 is a sign of utter and complete imperfection of man and his sinfulness outside of Jesus—especially in light of the identify of the sea beast and the land beast, which was enforcing emperor worship.

In Revelation 14 we find 144,000. While the number 666 probably is the most-popular number today in the Book of Revelation, then the number 144,000 probably is the second most-popular number. Have you ever had someone come to your door and ask you, "Are you sure you're part of the 144,000?"—as if the 144,000 is a literal number of which we must be a part because this is the number of people whom God will literally save. That is not what is being stated here. Notice something interesting about the 144,000. If this is a literal number, then let's take other such things in Revelation literally, too. Revelation 7:4 says that these were Jews only. Revelation 14:4 says that they "had not been defiled by women" (thus, they were male virgins). Therefore, those who are part of the 144,000 are: (a) Jews; (b) males; and (c) virgins. How many people are going to buy into such a concept today? We must recognize that such passages are not speaking literally, The 144,000

is not literal. And when Revelation speaks of Jews who had not been defiled by women, it is speaking of purity. The number 144,000 is not to be taken literally. The number 12 represents humanity. If you take 12 and multiply it by 12, you get 144,000—meaning simply a large number of those members of humanity who had been redeemed. This number simply represents those members of humanity who had decided to obey God's will and become Christians. It is not saying that if you are not a part of a literal 144,000 people, then you will miss out on Heaven. It is simply speaking of the redeemed of all the ages who have obeyed God and who are living faithful to Him.

Now I would like you to notice a very encouraging verse, which is found in Revelation 14:13. To Christians who were suffering, and to those who had seen family members die for the cause of Christ, the book says, "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."' "Yes," says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" The redeemed needed to know that if they died for the cause of Christ, they still would be blessed. Death was not the worst thing that could happen. In fact, did you know that you cannot get to Heaven without dying first? Death is a marvelous thing for the child of God. If we are living faithfully as a Christian, death is not a bad thing. Death is a wonderful thing. The Scriptures do not promote a black, cold, dreary view of death like some in this world do. Death is viewed as wonderful. In Psalm 116:15 we read, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." That is how God views death. When one of His children dies, and that person has lived faithfully, even though that person may have died at the hands of an evil Roman government, it is a blessing for that person. Revelation 14:13 says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." In Philippians 1:21 Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Death is a wonderful thing for the child of God who has lived faithfully because that person has had his sins washed away, and therefore has the promise that if he walked in the light he will remain in fellowship with God. He also has the promise of eternal life (Mt. 25:46; 1 Jn. 2:25). Revelation 14:13 is encouraging and practical for us today, too. We must be faithful unto death, and then God will give us the crown of life.

In Revelation 15:3-4 we are introduced to the song of Moses and the Lamb.

"They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.'"

Here we see a prelude to bowls of judgment which show that the wrath of God is being poured out on the ungodly. Prior to that, the saints are rejoicing. The song of Moses brings to our minds Exodus 15. The people had escaped from Egyptian bondage. They were under horribly tyranny under pharaoh, who was a hard taskmaster. God delivered them through ten plagues, and they walked across the Red Sea on dry land. The Egyptian army was crushed by the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites cried out victoriously because they had been delivered from great tribulation and trouble. God's people had been able to overcome and end up triumphant. So they sang the song of Moses. But in Revelation, the people are not merely singing the song of Moses. Instead they are singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Just like Moses led God's people out of Egyptian bondage to the Promised Land, the Lamb is able to lead Christians out of trials and tribulations resulting from the Roman government so that those Christians could be victorious and be able to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. This, then, was another sign of how, if Christians would trust in God, He would lead them to victory. Here we find great comfort given to these first-century Christians.

Chapter 16 presents the seven bowls of judgment where God is seen as pouring out His judgment upon the Roman Empire as punishment for its sin against Christians. I will not examine each bowl in detail here, but simply will point out that God, through natural means, punished Rome for its sins. In Revelation 16 we see a great battle occurring—the battle of Armageddon. Today we hear so much about Armageddon—and how it is some type of future battle in which God and His saints will war against the ungodly, eventually be victorious, and then reign for a thousand years in a utopian state here on Earth. But at this point, let us remember some of the keys we discussed in previous lessons. Revelation is a symbolic book. A **real** battle is not being depicted in this **symbolic** book. Remember, too, that the book speaks of things that will “shortly take place” (Rev. 1:1). These were things that were “at hand” (Rev. 1:3). Whatever battle is going to occur would take place during the time period of the people who were reading the Book of Revelation. In fact, look at what Revelation 16:16 says: “And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.” That is what is said in Revelation about the battle of Armageddon. What does the word “Armageddon” mean? It literally means “hill of Megeddo.” Since Revelation was written to Christians, many of whom had come out of Old Testament Israel, this reference would take their minds back to a famous battle in the Old Testament. Notice Judges 5:19, where God’s people were going to battle against the kings of Canaan at the hill of Megeddo. God’s people were victorious. Why? It was because God was on their side. He had told them that they would win the battle. They trusted God and followed Him—and all went well. The battle was pretty much over before it even started. That is the case here in Revelation 16:16 as well. Evil nations are depicted as rising up against God and His people. They were gathered together—just as they had been at the hill of Megeddo. But the Christians and God would win and be victorious. This was not a physical battle, but was a spiritual battle that God’s people would win because God was in control. Unfortunately, today people use the battle of Armageddon in a fairy-tale manner as a launching pad for things that God never intended.

In Revelation 17 we turn our attention to the King of kings and Lord of lords—Who will overcome. Revelation 17:14 says, “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called chosen and faithful.” The battle was over before it even started. God and His people would be victorious. Christ is the One Who is leading the army. He is the Captain of the Lord’s army (Heb. 10:9-10). We have the perfect spiritual armor (Eph. 6:10-12). We have been promised that we will be victorious (Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:51). Christ always leads us in triumph, the Bible tells us. Thus, here it is no surprise that the Lamb (Jesus) and those who follow Him will overcome Rome and her government, and will arise out of persecution victorious. What is the message for us today? When we face tribulation, and when evil opposes Christianity (whether it is an evil government, atheism, humanism, or post-modernism), Christ and the faithful will always win the battle. The battle has already been won. If we make sure that we are on God’s side, we will overcome. Why? It is because Jesus is Lord of all lords and King of all kings. There is no one greater than the Lord Himself. No one can match His majesty, His power, or His ability to lead us to Heaven. No one can even compare to Jesus, the Captain of the Lord’s army. Yes, we will be victorious. But we must be sure that we are among the faithful who are God’s chosen.

In Revelation 18 we are introduced to the fall of Babylon. In our second lesson in this series we identified some characteristics of Babylon and the great harlot. Both—because of their characteristics—represented Rome. Christians no doubt were wondering, “What is God going to do to Rome?” God had already told them to wait a while because He would reap vengeance upon Rome. That vengeance was seen in the seven bowls discussed in the book. God had promised that His vengeance **would** come. Now, God explains that

Rome **will** fall. Christianity will live and rule forever, but Rome and its government will not. In Revelation 18:10 we read of people “standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’” This represents the power of God and the completion of His promises. People did not even want to get close to what they were seeing because things were so bad. They were saying that at last the great city had fallen. Look at the swiftness involved in God’s power as it destroyed Rome. History records that Rome was destroyed, and that its evil ways came to an end. God’s kingdom, the church, however, is still reigning today. This is a powerful tribute to the Word of God, to the Book of Revelation, and to Jesus Christ. Just as God promised, Rome **was** destroyed. But look at the Lord’s church today. It flourishes and grows. The Word of God, we learn from Acts 12:25, grew and multiplied. But Rome has long been forgotten. Meanwhile, the Lord’s church is still ruling and reigning in the hearts and lives of men and women today. The lesson, then, is that we must make sure that we are a part of the most-important kingdom of all—the kingdom of Christ. It is not a kingdom that has a physical location or that is composed of physical things. Rather, it is a spiritual rule and reign in the hearts and lives of men and women.

In chapters 19-22, the battle is over and God explains what will happen to the enemies of Christianity and to the redeemed. In chapter 19 we learn that Satan will be defeated. We learn that Jesus is identified as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is victorious, and the dragon is defeated. Rome is thrown down. Christ is exalted. And Christians, we see, will live and reign forever. Look at Revelation 19:16, which is a great tribute to the power of the Lord. He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” Jesus is the One Who is the Conqueror. He is victorious. In chapter 20 we see the scene of Satan’s binding and eventual release—which shows us that God has control over Satan. Today, Satan still tempts people. But God has control over Satan. Who bound Satan and released him? God did that—because He has power over Satan. Jesus said in Mark 3 that a powerful man had control over His own house. On that occasion Jesus was able to cast demons out of a man, which showed that because he could cast out demons that were under Satan’s control, He was greater than Satan.

In Revelation 20:12-15 we see a great judgment scene. God’s judgment has been released upon Rome.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

The message is that God was going to bring judgment upon Rome. Thus, Christians had to make sure that their lives were right with God. There was going to come a time when everyone—great or small—would be judged by God, and would have to give an account before God for how they had lived their lives. The practical application from this for us today is that during times of tribulation and trial, even if we lose our lives, we must be ready to stand before the judgment seat of God. We must be sure that our names are written in the Book of Life because we have lived as we ought to have lived and because our deeds in this life allow us to stand justified before God.

In Revelation 21 we find a glorious picture of the church and of Heaven. In verses 3 and 4 we read,

“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’”

To suffering Christians John said, “Hang in there, because Heaven will be worth it all!” That is a message we need to hear today as well. No matter what it costs, and no matter what we may have to give up (even if we have to die for the cause of Christ), Heaven (where there will be no more sorrow, death, crying, tears, or pain) will truly be worth it all.

Jesus closes the Book of Revelation by instructing us not to add to or take away from its message. In Revelation 22:18-19 we read,

“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

God said, “Do not add to or take away from anything you read it because it is correct just the way it is.” That is the overriding message about **all** of Scripture. “Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar” (Prov. 30:6). The message of the Book of Revelation is this: Be true to God and His kingdom, which will rule and reign over all kingdoms. If we remain faithful unto death, the Lord will give us a crown of life. May God bless us as we strive amidst trouble and tribulation to be faithful to Jesus.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR REVELATION LESSON 4 (CHAPTERS 12-22)

1. In Revelation 12 we are presented with images of a dragon, a woman, and a child. Who or what do each of these images represent?
2. What important prophetic message is found in 2 Samuel 7:12-14?
3. When 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," who is the "him" mentioned in that verse?
4. Explain the connection between the last part of Revelation 12:11 ("...and they did not love their lives to the death") and the last part of Revelation 2:10.
5. According to this lesson, what does the number 666 mentioned in Revelation 13 represent?
6. According to this lesson, what does the number 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 14 represent?
7. What important message is found in Revelation 14:13?
8. What important message is found in Psalm 116:15?
9. What is the main thought behind Revelation 15:3-4, which mentions "the song of Moses and the Lamb"?
10. Revelation 16:16 says, "And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." According to the material contained in this lesson, what was John's purpose in referring to Armageddon ("the hill of Megiddo")?
11. Revelation 17:14 contains two descriptions of Christ. One is "the Lamb." What is the other?
12. According to Revelation 17:14, what two designations are given to those who accompany the Lamb?
13. In Revelation 18:2 when the text says that "Babylon the great has fallen," to who or what does the phrase, "Babylon the great," refer?
14. What was John's point in writing in Revelation 18:10 of people "standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come' "?
15. From Revelation 19 we learn that Satan will be defeated. Who, according to Revelation 19:16, will defeat him?
16. What important future scene was John depicting in Revelation 20:12-15, and what message is contained in that passage for Christians, even today?