

John

We conclude our study on mankind as God's sons and kings with the apostle John. John is of utmost importance to our study because he gives us the most detail about the end of the story of mankind in the book of Revelation.

My purpose today is not to do an in depth survey of Revelation, but to look in this book at the final and eternal fulfillment of God's plan for mankind as His sons and kings on earth.

The Disciple whom Jesus Loved

John and his brother James were the sons of Zebedee, and fishermen by trade. Salome, John's mother, may have been the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25). John and Jesus may very well have been cousins.

John and James were disciples of John the Baptist who, upon hearing John the Baptist declare, "Behold! The Lamb of God!", followed Jesus and became His disciples (John 1:35-39). The apostle John never forgot John the Baptist's declaration of Jesus as the Lamb of God, frequently referring to Jesus as the Lamb in Revelation.

John, along with Peter and James, were part of Jesus' innermost circle of disciples. Jesus called James and John the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), likely a reference to their fiery zeal for God. For instance, John and James wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village that rejected Jesus, eliciting a stern rebuke from Jesus (Luke 9:51-56). But in spite of John's many failings, Jesus loved John. In fact, John primarily referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). The love of Christ tempered and refined John's zeal, but he remained a son of thunder until the very end.

Around 95 A.D., John received the vision that led him to write Revelation.¹ John was exiled by Rome to "on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 1:9). Prior to his exile, John lived in Ephesus, shepherding the churches around that region.² The Roman persecution of Christians under the emperor Domitian was widespread, extending even to the area of Asia where John lived.

¹ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 22.

² John MacArthur, *1-3 John* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 6.

The Promise to the Persecuted

John wrote Revelation to encourage persecuted Christians. He wrote, “I John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (Rev 1:9). Christians were experiencing affliction, but this was not their end. The kingdom awaited them. They must patiently endure in Jesus to receive the promised Kingdom.

John emphasized Jesus’ kingly authority over the earth in 1:4-6. “Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Even though the earthly kings were hostile to the church, Jesus is the “ruler of kings on earth”. These kings did nothing apart from Jesus’ sovereign rule. Jesus will have dominion forever and ever in His kingdom in which persecuted Christians will one day rule.

While Jesus is the true ruler of the earth, Satan is its current illegitimate ruler. Jesus referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31). Satan’s rule on earth is mediated through hostile human rulers who persecute the church.

The church in Pergamum was especially affected by the rule and hostility of Satan. Jesus said to His followers there, “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is... Antipas my faithful witness... was killed among you, where Satan dwells” (Rev 2:13).

To the persecuted Christians who persevere in obedience, Jesus promised future dominion. To the church in Thyatira, Jesus said, “Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father” (Rev 2:25-27).

To the church in Laodicea, Jesus promised, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne” (Rev 3:21).

Michael Vlach noted, “In an ironic reversal of circumstances, those who were persecuted will rule.”³

Jesus’ promises indicate that the rule of the persevering Christians will take place in the future. Notice the future tense in His promises: “I will give authority”, “he will rule them”,

³ Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2017), 476.

and “I will grant him to sit with me on my throne”. Christ does not say that His rule from His throne and the rule of Christians presently takes place.⁴

The Two Thrones

There are some who say that Jesus is currently reigning on His Messianic, Davidic throne. Revelation 3:21 provides great clarity to this debate.

Jesus promised that the conquering Christian will sit on Jesus’ throne. The delegated authority that Jesus gives to His followers is patterned after the Son’s relationship with the Father, for Jesus “also conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne”.

Notice that Jesus distinguishes between the Father’s throne, “His throne”, and Jesus’ throne, “My throne”. The throne of the Father is the heavenly throne of deity and its authority is over the entire universe. Psalm 103:19 says, “The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.”

Jesus is currently reigning, but He is reigning from the Father’s throne. The Father, upon Jesus’ ascension, granted that Jesus share the throne of deity with Him.

Jesus’ throne is the Davidic throne in Jerusalem from which He will rule over all the earth. This throne is the throne of mankind. As God delegated rule over all the earth to the first man Adam, so will He give the rule over all the earth to His Son Jesus, the second Adam.

Jesus presently reigns from the throne of deity over the entire universe. However, His rule from the Davidic throne over all the earth is yet to come.⁵

“Who Is Worthy?”

Following Jesus’ message to the churches, John sees a vision of the heavenly throne. In the hand of God the Father is a scroll sealed with seven seals. This scroll is the title deed to the earth filled with divine judgments that must take place for Christ to take back the world from Satan and begin His kingdom.⁶

A mighty angel inquired, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” (Rev 5:2), to which John said, “No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it” (Rev 5:3). John saw no one who could take back the world from Satan and restore God’s kingdom on earth.

⁴ Ibid., 478.

⁵ Ibid., 477.

⁶ Ibid., 479.

Then one of the elders before the throne told John, “Weep no more; behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev 5:5).

John then saw “a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain... and He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne” (Rev 6:6-7).

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before Christ and sang, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9-10).

In cascading exuberance, the myriads of myriads of angels then join in song, saying, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain” (Rev 5:12).

And then John heard, ‘every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev 5:13).

Beginning with those immediately around the throne, then the angels, and then all creatures in creation will praise the Lamb. The Lamb deserves all praise and dominion because He died and rose again, redeeming people from every tribe and language and people and nation, making them a kingdom (vv. 9-10). Jesus is worthy to take the scroll because of He is the Lamb who conquered at the cross.

The Lamb then opened the seven seals (Rev 6-8), unleashing divine judgment on earth. The church will be spared from the judgment of the seven seals, as Jesus told the church in Philadelphia, “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (Rev 3:10).

Having poured out divine judgment, the Lamb has begun to take back the world from Satan.

The Battle of Offspring

With the church spared from God’s judgment on the earth (the rapture), God turns His attention to His ancient people, Israel.

Between the sixth and seventh seals, God sent an angel to seal 144,000 of Israel so that they would not be harmed by the angels who would send a destructive wind upon the earth. The angel said, “Do not harm the earth of the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants

of our God on their foreheads” (Rev 7:3). These 144,000 came from “every tribe of the sons of Israel” (Rev 7:4).

The 144,000 from Israel cannot be a symbol of the church. Immediately after John wrote of the sealed Israelites, he saw a great multitude “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9). John makes a clear distinction between believing Gentiles and believing Jews.

At the head of the 144,000 is Jesus, the Lamb. John wrote, “On Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000... It is these who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev 14:1, 4).

While God will send Christ to rule over Israel and the nations, Satan will send the antichrist, his representative and image, to rule over the nations and conquer Israel.

Notice how the antichrist attempts to usurp the place of Christ.

Delegated rule and authority: “To [the beast] the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority” (Rev 13:2).

A false resurrection: “One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast” (Rev 13:3).

Worship: “They worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” (Rev 13:4).

Authority over the nations: “And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation” (Rev 13:7).

The antichrist, called the beast, will be “allowed to make war on the saints and conquer them” (Rev 13:7). The antichrist will wage war on all of God’s people, and in particular Israel (Rev 12:17).

The offspring of the serpent led by the beast will strike at the offspring of the woman led by the Lamb.

A Tale of Two Cities

We’ve previously noted that God’s response to Babel, the symbol of man’s defiance, is Jerusalem, a city set on a hill from which His glory would shine to all the earth. The fate of these two opposing cities will be settled in the Great Tribulation.

The capital city of the beast's empire is Babylon. Babylon is portrayed as a "great prostitute" (Rev 17:2), who is "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations" (Rev 17:5). Babylon gives birth to the evil of the world, particularly sexual immorality (Rev 17:2).

John saw Babylon "sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns" (Rev 17:3). The city is supported by, and in some measure wields influence over the beast.⁷ The beast also "carries her" (Rev 17:7), indicating that he gives the city purpose and direction.⁸

An angel had earlier announced Babylon's impending destruction, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality" (Rev 14:8). In an ironic turn of events, however, the beast comes to hate Babylon and leads others to destroy Babylon (Rev 17:16).

Robert Thomas comments, "In the end, Satan's kingdom will divide against itself, signaling that its demise is near (cf. Mark 3:23-26)".⁹

Jesus had earlier said, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand... if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end" (Mark 3:24, 26).

The beast assembled "the kings of the whole world" (Rev 16:14) "at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon" (Rev 16:16) to march upon Jerusalem, the city of the Lamb.

God said in Zechariah 14:2-4, "I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east".

It will seem as if the beast and Satan are victorious, but in the midst of devastation, Christ will come to conquer the beast (Rev 19:11-21).

The beast tries to gather his armies to attack the Lamb, but is captured and thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20). The armies of the beast are slain by the sword that comes from the Lamb's mouth (Rev 19:21). This not a battle between the beast and the Lamb, but an execution. Satan is also bound and cast into a pit, where he is imprisoned for one thousand years (Rev 20:1-3).

⁷ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8-22* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 285.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 304.

The Davidic Kingdom

Jesus had earlier told His disciples, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne” (Matthew 25:31).

Having come in His glory and conquered the armies of the beast, the Lamb will sit on His glorious throne, the throne of David. All previously deceased believers will have resurrected bodies, partaking of the “first resurrection” (Rev 20:5). They will then “reign with [Christ] for a thousand years” (Rev 20:6). Living believers who survive the tribulation will also enter the millenium in unresurrected bodies. They will experience the joys of marriage (Jer 33:11) and childbirth, fulfilling God’s mandate to mankind to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Christ will reign in Jerusalem from the throne of mankind, succeeding where Adam had failed as the king of the earth.

Remember, one of the purposes of the millennium is the subjugation of all Christ’s enemies. Paul said, “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Cor 15:25).

Satan is released after the thousand years and deceives the nations. He leads the nations yet again on another march upon Jerusalem, but “fire came down from heaven and consumed them” (Rev 20:9). He is then “thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur” along with the beast, “and they will be tormented day and night forever” (Rev 20:10). The devil will never again emerge from the lake of fire to lead us astray. Our ancient enemy will be forever banished.

Mankind’s rebellion against the risen Christ in Jerusalem settles the question of mankind’s deep wickedness. Even in paradise, mankind will try to overthrow God and Christ.

Following the final rebellion, God will judge all unbelievers before His Great White Throne, resurrecting them in a body fit for eternal judgment (the second resurrection), and will throw them into the lake of fire (Rev 20:11-15).

The New Heaven and New Earth

With all rebellion vanquished and all Christ’s enemies destroyed, Christ will hand the kingdom back to His Father (1 Cor 15:24). God will re-create the cosmos, in an act of creation similar to Genesis 1-2. He said, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5), namely a “new heaven and new earth” (Rev 21:1).

The new heaven and new earth will far exceed the first in glory. The New Jerusalem, not Eden, awaits us. Let's look at some of its features.

The New Jerusalem

The center and capital city of the new earth will be the New Jerusalem, as Eden was the capital of the first earth. But the New Jerusalem is called "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev 21:9), a designation never given to Eden. The Lamb has purchased the citizens of this city with His own blood and is forever in covenant relationship with them. The Lamb's deep and eternal commitment to the citizens of the city means that they can ever be exiled from the New Jerusalem as Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden.

The New Jerusalem will be adorned with precious jewels and made with pure gold (Rev 21:11, 15-21), as there was gold in the first earth (Gen 2:12). The city also has the spring of the water of life from which the thirsty may drink and be satisfied (Rev 21:6).

The beauty and drink of this city stands in stark contrast to Babylon, which was also "adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality" (Rev 17:4). On the other hand, the New Jerusalem is called the "holy city" (Rev 21:2). Her delights and beauty are holy, while Babylon's delights and beauty are thoroughly defiled. As lady folly and lady wisdom both called out to mankind, so Babylon and the New Jerusalem call out with contrary beauty and delights. We may resist the seductive call of Babylon by heeding the sweeter call of Jerusalem.

Dwelling with God

The greatest joy of the new earth will be that God will dwell with us. As He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, He will live with us.

Of the New Jerusalem, God said, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God will be with them as their God" (Rev 21:3).

We will "see his face" (Rev 22:4). While Moses, and all mankind, had been prohibited from seeing the very face of God, we will one day look upon His face.

The temple, which once symbolized God's presence on earth, will be no more. John said, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev 21:22). God Himself and the Lamb will fulfill what the temple represented.

The Removal of the Curse

The curse that God placed on the earth in Genesis 3 will also be removed. “No longer will there be anything accursed” (Rev 22:3). Sin and the pain of sin will be removed, for God Himself will do away with them. John said, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4).

The Tree of Life and the River of Life

As Adam and Eve had access to the tree of life in Eden, so will the tree of life will be in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:2). As a river flowed from Eden (Gen 2:10), so will the “river of the water of life, bright as crystal” flow from the throne of God (Rev 22:1). The tree of life and the river of life symbolize the fullness of life that will characterize the new earth.

Israel, Church, and the Nations

In the eternal state, a distinction will be made between Israel, the church, and the nations. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel will be inscribed on the gates of the wall of the New Jerusalem, forever memorializing Israel (Rev 21:12). The names of the twelve apostles of the church will be inscribed on the foundations of the wall, forever memorializing the church (Rev 21:14). The church and Israel will be distinguished.

The nations will also dwell outside the New Jerusalem, for their kings “will bring their glory into it” (Rev 21:24). I think that these nations are Gentile believers who were never part of Israel or the church. These are Gentile believers in the Old Testament who never incorporated into Israel like Ruth, and Gentile believers during the tribulation and the millennium.

The nations that were in rebellion against God following Babel (Gen 10) will live under God’s authority and at peace with one another.

Vlach writes, “Thus, we have one of the greatest miracles of all time, and something almost impossible to think of now - true peace among all ethnicities and nations. Racism and ethnic hatred will not exist.”¹⁰

Marriage

Marriage between husband and wife will be no more (Luke 20:34-36). There will be no marriage because there must be no more children born to humanity requiring redemption. But as the people of God, we will be the bride of the Lamb.

Fellowship with the Trinity

¹⁰ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 522.

We will experience the fullness of fellowship with the Trinity.

The Father said of the one who conquers, "I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rev 21:7). Adam was God's son in Eden, but we will possess a far greater sonship as sons of God through the Son of God.

We will be the bride of the Lamb, covenanted to Him for all eternity. The exclusive title for Jesus in John's description of the new heaven and earth in Revelation 21:1-22:5 is "the Lamb" (Rev 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 22:3). We will forever praise our King who gave His life for us as a Lamb.

The Spirit will forever give life to us. The river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev 22:1). This is an actual river that points to the role of the Spirit in the new earth. Jesus said earlier, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" The apostle John then added the editorial, "Now this he said about the Spirit whom those who believed in him were to receive" (John 7:37-39). The Spirit will proceed from the Father and the Son, like a river of living water, to give life to all the world. I believe that the Spirit will also eternally indwell believers.

The Throne of God

God Himself will rule the earth from His throne. John wrote, "the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it" (Rev 22:3). Jesus had previously mentioned two thrones, the throne of His Father, the throne of deity, and Jesus' throne, the Davidic throne. Having turned the kingdom back to His Father, the Father will invite the Son to sit on the throne with Him. The throne of God will no longer be in heaven, but on earth. There will no longer be two thrones, but one. The will of God will be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven.

Because God will rule on earth, we as "his servants will worship him" (Rev 22:3).

Kings

Believers will be both God's sons (Rev 21:7) and kings on earth. John wrote, "They will reign forever and ever" (Rev 22:5). Mankind, now redeemed and resurrected, will rule over a renewed earth for all eternity. As God had given Adam work, we will work to display the glory of God in creation.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Jesus promised John, "Surely I am coming soon." With John, we respond, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).