

### Jesus defeats the enemies of God

- A spiritual 'holy war' of Jesus and His people against the forces of darkness

- No escape for the sons of darkness

- Followed by 'the season of God'

### A period of history in which the gospel triumphs

- God's enemies defeated in turn

### 'Supper of God' – a day when sin is defeated

- Among the victims of the Saviour's sword are the beast and the many pagan kings that persecuted the people of God

- Victory of gospel AND final judgement day

- Victory comes by the preaching of the gospel

The major section of Revelation that runs from 19:11 to 21:8 is concerned with the way in which Jesus defeats the enemies of God. Although the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ comes into it, the description is not so much of the second coming. It is more about a spiritual 'holy war' of Jesus and his people against the forces of darkness. This kind of thinking was common in the ancient world. One thinks of 'The War Rule' among the famous Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1947, where there is talk of a Davidic Messiah who annihilates the forces of darkness. The sons of light fight against the forces of darkness. One part of 'The War Rule' says there will be 'a time of salvation for the people of God, an age of dominion for all the members of his people, a time of everlasting annihilation for all the people of Belial'.<sup>a</sup> The victory will be total. 'There will be no remnant', says the War Scroll.<sup>b</sup> There will be 'no escape for the sons of darkness'.<sup>c</sup> Righteousness will 'shine over the ends of the earth' and will go on shining until all the extermination of all the seasons of darkness'.<sup>d</sup> Then there will come 'the season of God' in which 'the height of his greatness will shine' and will bring 'peace, blessing, glory, joy and length of days for all the sons of light'.<sup>e</sup> This will be 'the day appointed from ancient times, for the battle of destruction of the sons of darkness'.<sup>f</sup>

This kind of thinking is the background to the book of Revelation. It refers not to a single day of judgement but to a period of history in which the gospel triumphs. In the early chapters of the book of Revelation the dragon was introduced first<sup>1</sup>. Then we were introduced to his allies, the beast from the sea and the false prophet<sup>2</sup>, and Babylon<sup>3</sup>. Now these great enemies of God are defeated. We have had a description of the great Warrior-King<sup>4</sup>. Now the angel calls out from a position high in the sky. A day of total victory is coming!

<sup>17</sup>And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven, 'Come and be gathered together to the great supper of God . . . ' If there is to be a 'marriage supper of the Lamb', there is also to be a 'supper of God' – a day when sin is defeated. And the defeat of evil comes first in the sequence of John's visions. Anyone living in a hot country has seen vultures flying round and round in the sky ready to swoop down on the dead bodies of animals in the countryside. Something similar is seen in John's vision. 'Come and be gathered together unto the great supper of God,' says the angel, <sup>18</sup>'so that you may feed on the bodies of kings, and the bodies of sea-captains, and the corpses of mighty people. Come, feed on the flesh of horses and of their riders, and the bodies of all people, free and slave, small and great.' Among the victims of the sword proceeding from the mouth of the Saviour are the beast and the many pagan kings that persecuted the people of God. Oppressive business-people are there (the 'sea-captains'). So are high and mighty oppressors of God's people, people who boast in their power and status symbols (horses and riders), and the vast numbers of those of every section of society who have rebelled against the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The vision John sees (which resembles Old Testament symbolism<sup>1</sup>) pictures a day when God's enemies have been so totally defeated that they are like corpses ready to be devoured by vultures. It is not a picture **exclusively** of the second coming of Jesus (although that is no doubt the **final** part of the story). On the whole it is a picture of total victory after a 'holy war' – the preaching of the gospel. The second coming comes into it, since prophecy often gives a symbolic vision of **all** that is to happen in the future, with the times and the seasons unfolding in stages. So the vision may include both the victory of the gospel **and** the final judgement day, but the emphasis is on the rider on the white horse who conquers by the sword of his mouth. With him are his people. The victory comes by the preaching of the gospel.

- 1 ch. 12
- 2 ch. 13
- 3 ch. 17
- 4 19:11-16

- 1 Isaiah 34:6; Jeremiah 46:10; Ezekiel 39:17-20

**A third vision – the enemies of God fighting back**

• Exceptionally powerful king – ‘antichrist’

• Victory for the people of God in the end

• Lake of fire – final stage of God’s punishment

• ‘End times’ – success of gospel and final destruction of God’s enemies

• The supper of God – the day of total victory over his enemies – goes on until the victory is complete

Next John has a third vision (within the major section). It is important to note that this is a **new** vision. It goes further than the previous two and fills in some details. The first unit has shown us Jesus as the mighty King<sup>□1</sup>. The second has shown us the expectation of total victory<sup>□2</sup>. Now the third vision gives us a sight of the enemies of God fighting back! There is a small jump backwards in the scenery since in 19:17–18 the enemies were corpses! Now the vision goes back to the point where the enemies of God were at their most furious. <sup>19</sup>*Then I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against the One who sat on the horse, and against his army.* It is likely that this part of the vision specially focuses on the point where the enmity to the gospel arises to a height. John has said there will come a specially powerful king in the future. The ‘seventh king’ was John’s way of speaking of ‘antichrist’ – or whatever name one wants to give to a powerful enemy of God. ‘When he comes he must continue for a little while’<sup>□3</sup>.

But however furious the fight may be, in the end the people of God come through to victory. Both the beast (pagan persecuting governments) and the false prophet (false religion) are defeated. <sup>20</sup>*But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs in the presence of the beast. With these signs he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and who had worshipped his image. They were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur.* In this ‘holy war’ (consisting of the preaching of the gospel), paganism and false religion are utterly put down. It is not the end of the world. Even after their destruction more battling goes on. If the remainder were killed with the sword of the gospel – verse 21 – then the end had not yet come!

The lake of fire is the very final stage of God’s punishment, and involves final extermination. The enemies of God will be ‘found no more at all’<sup>□1</sup>. As in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the fire of God is like a furnace<sup>□2</sup>, and after its work is fully done, ‘the smoke . . . goes up for ever and ever’<sup>□3</sup>. In Revelation 19:20 it speaks of victory over paganism. No doubt it takes in also what happens in the second coming of Jesus. The vision is all-embracing and speaks of a large section of the ‘end-times’ including **both** the success of the gospel **and** the final destruction of all God’s enemies.

It seems that the gospel-preaching goes on for some time after the defeat of the beast and the prophet. <sup>21</sup>*And the remainder were killed with the sword of the One who sat on the horse, the sword which came forth from his mouth. And all the birds ate their bodies until they were full.* The supper of God – the day of total victory over his enemies – goes on until the victory is complete.

**Notes**

- a. See 1 QM 1:5, in *Die Texte Aus Qumran* (Kösel, München, 1971). I translate the Hebrew.
- b. 1 QM 1:6. c. 1 QM 1:6–7. d. 1 QM 1:8. e. 1 QM 1:8–9.
- f. 1 QM 1:10.

□1 19:11-16  
 □2 19:17-18  
 □3 17:10  
 □1 18:21-22  
 □2 Genesis 19:28  
 □3 19:3



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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