

Revelation concerns the here-and-now of human history:

- *The seven churches*
- *The seals*
- *The trumpet warnings*
- *Gospel-age battle*
 - *Bowls of wrath*
- *Who will win the battle?*
- *Jesus will overcome Satan by the preaching of the gospel in this age of history*
- *A time of great opposition*
- *Spiritual victory comes as we prepare ourselves to meet Jesus, the heavenly husband*

We need to overcome Satan

- *Jesus – will continue to reign until all enemies are defeated*
- *Trumpets of warning – will people take note?*

We must remember that much of Revelation is concerned with things that God does in the gospel-age, in the here-and-now of human history. The seven churches of the first section were actual churches in the first century. They represent churches throughout the gospel-age. The seals of chapters 4:1 to 8:1 represent what Jesus is doing as the Lord of history. The trumpet-warnings of chapters 8:2 to 11:18 speak of events that take place in our present experience, events that warn us to expect no spiritual success in this world without our Lord Jesus Christ. The battle between Christ and the dragon in chapters 11:19 to 15:4 is a battle that takes place in this epoch of time that we are currently living in – the gospel-age. The bowls of wrath in chapters 15:5 to 16:21 are diseases and ecological calamities in this age that tell the world that it is experiencing the anger of God against sin.

Revelation 17 brought us a step nearer to seeing the defeat of various enemies in this gospel-age. We were asking the question: who is going to win this mighty spiritual battle, the dragon or the child, the devil or the Lord Jesus Christ? Who is going to win in this age, in the time of the preaching of the gospel? As we looked at Revelation 17:1–19:10 it seemed clear that the answer is: Jesus has overcome his enemies and he is planning to overcome them yet more. Everything in 17:1–19:10 leads us to expect that in this gospel-age Jesus will be the conqueror of Satan. The great harlot is defeated. The evil of Babylon will be exterminated¹. Fleishy indulgence and pagan government will go into destruction. The beast ‘will go away into destruction’². Everything that represents paganism is destined to end. Jesus will overcome it – by the preaching of the gospel in this age of history. Mighty forces will oppose Jesus ‘but the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings’³. Those who are with him will overcome them also⁴. There will come a time of great opposition against God’s people. I believe it will **follow** a time of success in the church and this period of great rebellion will not itself succeed. The Lamb – the Lord Jesus Christ – will triumph, and the followers of the Lamb will triumph also! The many judgements that have been mentioned in Revelation 1–19 take place in the history of the world. **Spiritual victory comes as we prepare ourselves to meet Jesus, the heavenly husband.** As the bride of Christ, the church, prepares herself for the coming of Jesus, Babylon is defeated.

I believe we should use Revelation 1–19 to interpret Revelation 20. Revelation has been constantly telling us to ‘overcome’ the opposition of the dragon. Again and again – seven times – in Revelation 1–3 we were told to overcome Satan, to hold on to what we have, to go through the ‘open door’ of the opportunities that are put before us. What can it mean to ‘overcome’ except that eventually we shall triumph? Does it only mean that we triumph **after** Jesus comes? If that were all there is to it, we would hardly need to be told to overcome now. We would need to do nothing except wait for the day when victory will come as Jesus comes. Our overcoming in the here-and-now is hardly necessary if there is no promise that we shall indeed overcome in this gospel-age.

In chapters 4–7 Jesus is the Lord of history. But are we expecting him to fail? Is the Lord of history not going to succeed in spreading his gospel to the nations? Jesus is worthy to rule in the history of the world. He keeps this world going for century after century. He must go on reigning until he has put all enemies beneath his feet. Surely everything in the book of Revelation and elsewhere in the Bible leads us to expect some kind of victory for our Lord Jesus Christ in his spreading the gospel **in this age**.

In chapters 8–11 the trumpets of warning are being blasted. But what is the point of the warning? Is there no expectation that any large numbers of people will ever take note of the warning?

¹ 18:2-24

² 17:11

³ 17:14a

⁴ see 17:14

• Will there be victory before the second coming?

• Surely Satan will lose again when the gospel goes out to conquer the nations

• His destruction in the lake of fire is his final failure

Further success of the gospel

• Satan is bound – the success of the gospel – the great un-deceiving of the nations

• Satan briefly allowed to attack the church

In chapters 12–14 there is a battle going on between Christ and Satan. But does this gospel-battle have no hope of success? Do we have to wait until the second coming before Jesus is victorious? Is Christ victorious **only** by naked power revealed and displayed when Jesus comes in glory? Or is there hope that the gospel **itself** will reach some kind of victory **before** the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? We know the second coming of Jesus will be 'successful'! But how 'successful' will the preaching of the gospel be before Jesus comes? Surely the battle between the dragon and the child in chapters 12–14 is not destined to be won by the dragon! Satan lost the battle when he tried to stop the child from being born. He lost the battle when the child actually had been born. He lost the battle when the child was taken up to the throne of God. Now the question is: will Satan not **also** lose the battle when the gospel goes out to conquer the nations? Yes, he will be defeated! There is defeat for him at **every** stage of human history. Revelation 20 surely speaks of a time in the gospel-age when Satan will be more fully defeated than ever before and will be thrown not from heaven to earth (as at the time of the cross), but from the earth to the abyss (at a time of worldwide gospel success, when the gospel is powerfully preached). At a later stage he will be released briefly but still will not succeed in his intentions. Then his destruction in the lake of fire is his final failure.

When we realize that the victory of Revelation 20:1–3 is greater than the victory of Revelation 12, it surely demands that we see some further success of the gospel in the story of the church.

Let us have the passage before us again. ¹And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the keys of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and he bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the abyss, and shut [it] and sealed [it] over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed. My conclusion then (concerning 20:1–3) is as follows. The angel brings in a new part of John's vision. John is shown a scene in which Satan is bound. I believe it refers not to anything that happens at the second coming, not to the resurrection-and-ascension of Jesus, but to the eventual success of the gospel within the gospel-preaching-age that we are now in. It is an intense **enforcement** of the power of Jesus given in his resurrection-and-ascension, an enforcement that comes about by the preaching of the gospel. This is what everything in Revelation 1–19 has been leading up to. It is the great un-deceiving of the nations!

After this he must be released for a short time. The age of gospel success is not unbroken success. God will allow it to be challenged. Satan is allowed an opportunity to attack the church just as Satan was allowed to attack Job. But just as Satan was allowed to attack Job because of his great godliness, so Satan is allowed to attack the church because of the church's great maturity and success.



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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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