

Introduction:

Preaching from **Revelation** is tough because so many of us have done our study on it and come up with our own little theories about what it must all mean. **Revelation** is a hotbed for each of us to proudly say, "I know what everyone else says, but I've really figured it out." Sadly, I am not really different on that front. I recognize that my theories may be faulty and yours or someone else's may be more valid. With that in mind, as we come to the conclusion of our "Give Attention to Reading" trek through the New Testament, I want to share some thoughts that I have from the **Revelation**. I am not trying to pass this off as if I have the absolute right theory on the book, but rather I hope it will be something that can be added to our consciousness regarding the book as we all grapple with it and strive to serve the Lord according to His **Revelation** so our names will be in the book of life and we will each have our share in the tree of life and the holy city of God (**Revelation 22:18-19**).

I believe it is a mistake for us to view the **Revelation** as one lengthy prophecy, spelling out step by step some future events that began in **Revelation 1** and progressed to **Revelation 22**. Rather, I believe **Revelation** is much more like a Russian nesting doll. I don't know if the illustration works better to picture the doll being built as we surround each level with a new and bigger level or if it works better to picture opening each level to reveal a new level, drilling down to the heart of the message. But, whichever picture works better, the concept I want to share is that is not one long vision of prophecy but rather a series of apocalyptic visions that repeatedly reveals the same message over and again—God wins. Though the cycles are not absolute, notice how the book presents seven churches, then seven seals, then seven trumpets, then seven bowls. Also notice how in some cases one cycle of seven opens the door for the next. For instance, when the seventh seal was opened in **Revelation 8:1-2**, the seven angels with seven trumpets are released. Then when the seventh trumpet is blown in **Revelation 11:15** a series of visions are initiated that culminates in the seven angels with seven bowls of plagues and God's wrath in **Revelation 16:1**. These visions are nested in each other. However, the visions are not providing us with information about new events, but rather repeating the same message of God's victory whatever we are facing.

With that in mind, I would like us to review one of these nested visions in **Revelation 6** as the Lamb opens the first six seals and provides a picture of the victory God has over His enemies. However, this victory will look different from what we might naturally expect.

Discussion:

- I. Jesus established a spiritual kingdom, not a physical one.
 - A. In **Revelation 6:2**, the first seal is broken and white horse comes forth conquering and to conquer. Sadly, our premillennial friends have stolen this imagery and perverted it to the point that even Christians sometimes mistake what this is about. Premillennialists tell us this is the antichrist. However, apart from their Premillennial theorizing, antichrist doesn't even come into the **Revelation**. Rather, that was a statement in John's letters about people who denied that Jesus came in the flesh (cf. **1 John 4:2-3**). The Bible never presents a new world order ruler that is the antichrist and this passage doesn't do so either.
 - B. Rather, it makes much more sense to recognize this image in its biblical context. Cross reference this image with **Revelation 19:11**. We once again see the same white horse and on it a rider going forth to make war and bring judgment. He goes about conquering. There, the image is clearly Jesus. For what reason would we take this first image that shows the exact same picture but make it have the exact opposite meaning? There is no reason to do so except because Premillennialists have a preconceived notion that has to be filled here.
 - C. Having laid this foundation, I think we learn an important lesson. The Jews had awaited the Messiah for generations. They believed He would come riding in as a leader on a stallion, conquering all their enemies. They believed He would throw off whoever was oppressing them. They believed He would physically conquer all other nations and bring His people to physical power and rule over the world in an era of peace, plenty and prosperity. If we simply stop reading at **Revelation 6:2**, we might think that is exactly what God was revealing to John. However, as we read further, we discover that is not the case. In **Revelation 6:3-4**, we see war continuing on throughout the world, even though Jesus is conquering. In **Revelation 6:5-6**, we

see political inequity is still in the world even though Jesus is conquering. In **Revelation 6:7-8**, we see death and destruction by pestilence and famine still going throughout the world even though Jesus is conquering. In **Revelation 6:9-11**, we see that war has even been made against those who have submitted to King Jesus even though Jesus is going forth conquering and to conquer.

- D. Why was Jesus revealing this to John? Because, as the Christians, especially Jewish Christians, saw all this happening in the world, they might think Jesus actually failed. Jesus wanted them to know that He was in fact conquering. He was winning. But that was because He never intended to establish a kingdom of this world (cf. **John 18:36**). Jesus' kingdom is not a physical kingdom with a physical throne, physical army and physical domain. Therefore, His victory is not measured by physical battles, political domain or material means. His victory is seen in souls who submit despite what is going on in the physical world.
- E. From the very beginning, Jesus is explaining that no matter what we face, we need to know that He really is conquering the enemy. Don't be deterred or distracted by what we see in the physical realm. Jesus really is winning.

II. Jesus did not come to provide physical and material ease.

- A. Look again at that survey in **Revelation 6:3-8**.
 - 1. Jesus did not come into the world to stop all the wars (**vss. 3-4**). Rather, war will continue on despite Jesus' continued and progressive victory in the world.
 - 2. Jesus did not come into the world to stop all the political inequity that goes on in our world (**vss. 5-6**). We are told the prices for the wheat and barley are exorbitant. However, it is clearly not because there is no food. The people are told to stay away from the oil and wine. This is not a picture of famine, but of someone controlling the food supply and keeping part of the populace in poverty. This inequity continued despite Jesus' continued and progressive victory in the world.
 - 3. Jesus did not come into the world to stop all the death and natural disasters (**vss. 7-8**). Rather, death, pestilence, famine and all the things that cause that would continue on despite Jesus' continued and progressive victory in the world.
- B. Sadly, one reason often given by atheists and skeptics for their lack of faith is all these awful things that continue on. Surely, if God is out there, He would do something about all of this. Since it all continues on, God must not be out there. God wants us to recognize that these things are going on. He is not blind to them. He will act in His good time for His good reasons. However, we must not lose faith in Him just because the world continues on the way it always has. Wars are going to take place; we and our loved ones will be impacted. Governments will continue to be oppressive; we and our loved ones will be impacted. Natural disasters will continue to come; we and our loved ones will be impacted. God is still out there. We can trust Him to deliver in His good time. Don't turn your back on Him.
- C. Additionally, look at **Revelation 6:9-11**. This is not just natural, as the world turns troubles that everyone faces. This represents specific attacks against us as Christians. Surely, if Jesus were conquering, that would be removed. I can understand why these brethren were impatient. But as Paul said in **Acts 14:22** we enter God's kingdom through many tribulations. War will even be made on God's people because they are God's people.
- D. We need to understand that Jesus didn't come into the world to ease the political oppressions and natural disasters. He did not come to bring physical and material ease. He came to bring salvation so that we might have hope even through all the tribulation we face. We must not hear the news of tsunamis impacting our brethren in the Philippines and China, tornadoes killing boy scouts (one of whom was the grandson of an elder in a congregation in Alabama), floods destroying the homes of Christians in the Midwest and think God is blind, helpless or non-existent. Jesus didn't come to stop those things. We must not hear about legislation that seems to undermine our work as Christians or even hear about persecution happening in the world against brethren (even when it starts happening here) and think God has abandoned us. Jesus is still King. He is still conquering and we want to be on His side.

- III. At times, it will seem Jesus is losing and doing nothing about it.
- A. Look again at **Revelation 6:10**. What is at the heart of this question? The martyred saints are really asking, “God, why aren’t you doing anything?” War was continuing, political inequity hadn’t stopped, natural disasters still prevailed and God’s people were being killed. What was God doing in all this—playing tiddlywinks?
 - B. Notice God’s response. He provided these martyrs with a white robe (He rewarded them). He told them to *rest* a little longer (He reminded them they weren’t going through the trouble anymore). Then He explained that He had His own reasons for waiting. He was waiting until the evil of the worldly was complete and they had martyred all the saints they were going to martyr. God would do something in the fullness of time, when it was right to do something about it.
 - C. This is hard for us to grasp, but as the war goes on between Jesus and His enemies, it will sometimes look like God is losing and doing nothing about it. It will sometimes look like Satan is winning. As this is happening, it will sometimes look like God’s people are the losers.
 - D. In these times, we have to learn to walk by faith and not by sight (**II Corinthians 5:7**). We must learn to trust God that no matter how it looks He is really working everything out for our good (**Romans 8:28**).

IV. In the end, Jesus wins.

- A. In the end of this nested vision, we see what happens to those who do not trust in the Lord. We see the end of those who wage war against God. Read **Revelation 6:12-17**. This is a picture of judgment coming upon the earth. The earth quakes, the sun darkens, the moon becomes as blood and the stars fall from the sky. The sky rolled up like a scroll and all the mountains and islands were shaken out of their place.
- B. But notice what this is all about in **vss. 15-16**. The kings and generals, the rich and powerful all ran into hiding. These are the source of the persecution (cf. **James 2:6-7**). The wrath of God is coming upon them and they are trying to hide from it, but there is no hiding place. The great day of wrath has come and who can stand?
- C. Actually, that question is answered in **Revelation 7**. God sends forth His messengers to seal the servants of God so that they might be protected from harm. Notice **Revelation 7:9** with the multitudes clothed in white robes. Where have we seen that before? These are those who earlier were asking God when He was going to do something. Their number was completed and God acted in His good time. He brought judgment on those who persecuted, oppressed and attacked His children, but His children were preserved from the judgment. Whether God’s children lived or died through the persecution and oppression, they came out on the other side the victors. They no longer questioned God. Instead, they worshiped Him (**Revelation 7:10-17**).

Conclusion:

We could study the entire book of **Revelation**. We could pull out all the commentaries and view all the possible theories. We could examine all the nested visions within this book and we will always come back to this exact same picture. GOD ALWAYS WINS!!! We need to be on His side. Whether you believe this book was originally for the destruction of Jerusalem or the fall of Rome is really immaterial. The message is still for us. Jesus is the king. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom that is going throughout the world conquering. Life, however, continues on filled with tragedy and travesty. At times, we may think God is doing nothing. At times we may even think He is losing. In those moments, we may think about defecting. We may think about quitting. We may think about abandoning the Lord because we think He has abandoned us. He hasn’t. He is waiting until the right moment, in His good time, in which He will provide judgment on our enemies and deliverance for us. God will win. The White Rider has gone forth conquering and to conquer. Satan and the world are fighting back. Whose side are you on today?