

Week 4: The one who saves from slavery (Revelation 12–15)

Congratulations! You've made it halfway through the Book of Revelation:

- A. Revelation 1–3: The Lord and his people
- B. Revelation 4–11: The drama in heaven
- C. Revelation 12–20: The drama on earth
- D. Revelation 20–21: The union of heaven and earth.

Jesus commissioned John (Rev 1). He delivered Jesus' guidance to the churches who represent heaven's government in their cities (Rev 2–3). John was shown heaven's throne (Rev 4). From heaven's perspective, the Lamb has the authority to save earth from evil (Rev 6), to rescue God's people (Rev 7). Heaven's messengers addressed the evils in creation (earth, sea, rivers), as God looks for people to repent (Rev 8-9).

Then John was recommissioned to address the salvation drama from earth's perspective, to speak *about many peoples, nations, languages and kings* (Rev 10:11). Bearing witness to Jesus' kingship on earth is dangerous, but the final trumpet guarantees the outcome: *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah"* (11:15). That's the outcome we see in Chapter 21 too: *all things made new*.

So, Revelation 12–20 is not a different set of events. It's the same events from a different camera angle. The salvation drama that took place in heaven (Rev 4–11) changes everything on earth (Rev 12–20), so that heaven and earth are reunited (Rev 20–21).



A reflection of what is above.

Revelation 12: The child who saves the world

God's throne is established in heaven, but earth has been dishonouring God's throne. Now we see that a dragon has been driving the rebellion:

Revelation 12:1-6 (NIV)

- ¹ A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.
- ² She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.
- ³ Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. ⁴ Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.
- ⁶ The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

No prizes for guessing who this **dragon** represents. (Hint: verse 9). *Satan* is the Hebrew word for “enemy.” It was only after the exile that the Jewish people began to understand their “enemy” as a spiritual power driving the nations to conquer them.

No prizes for guessing who the **male child** is, born to save the world from Satan's grip and restore God's reign over the nations (verse 5, quoting Psalm 2:9).

But who is the **woman** who gives birth to the Messiah? Catholics think it's Mary. Protestants recall that's Eve's offspring would crush the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Israel's family was *the sun the moon and the eleven stars* plus himself in Joseph's dream (Genesis 37:9). Jews and gentiles in Christ *will soon crush Satan under your feet* (Romans 16:20). The *woman* who gave birth to the Messiah is humanity—through Eve, through Israel, through Mary.

But heaven is not leaving humanity to our own devices to defeat the dragon. Heaven is actively involved in saving us:

Revelation 12:7-9 (NIV)

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Satan loses. It's like what Jesus told his disciples: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Even if it causes much suffering, the dragon is a defeated enemy.

Heaven describes Satan's defeat like this:

Revelation 12:10-12 (NIV)

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah.

For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

¹¹ They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

Notice the two perspectives in this declaration:

- From heaven's perspective, the battle is done and dusted: “*The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah have come*” (verse 10).
- From earth's perspective, the battle is still raging: “*Woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you!*” (verse 12).

Heaven says the Lamb's followers triumphed over the dragon by *the blood of the Lamb* (verse 11). Some Christians use this text to "plead the blood" as a spiritual covering to ward off attacks from evil. Many religions have incantations against evil, but that's not how *the blood of the Lamb* works in Revelation.

The blood of the Lamb refers to Jesus being *slain* by the evils that blocked God's playbook for the world (Revelation 5:6, 9, 12). Followers of the Lamb are called to take the same non-violent response to evil, taking up their cross too. Many have been *slain* too. Why? Because they maintained the *testimony* about the Lamb as God's Messiah, Lord of all (Revelation 6:9). *The blood of the Lamb* is not a charm to ward off evil; it's a people who are willing to be slain like our Lord rather than serve the dragon, a people who do not shrink from death (the parallel expression in verse 11).

The word of their testimony is that God has given all authority to King Jesus, so we will not capitulate to evil, even if we're killed for it. The people of God participate in heaven's defeat of the dragon by placing our lives on the line (participating in *the blood of the Lamb*) as living evidence (*testimony*) that *the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah have come* (verse 10).

The blood of the Lamb has established the community of the Lamb. That's what the only other use of the phrase *the blood of the Lamb* says (7:14). Unsurprisingly, the dragon gets even more furious that this apparently powerless group of followers of the Lamb don't believe its lies or submit to its power (verse 12).

A dragon may feel like an overwhelming enemy for humans to face, but God has not left us to our own devices to defeat it:

Revelation 12:13-17 (NIV)

¹³ When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴ The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. ¹⁵ Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. ¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. ¹⁷ Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

As far as heaven is concerned, the foe is fallen (verses 10-11). In the same way that God helped Israel escape from Pharaoh, leading and guarding them in the wilderness, God is leading and guarding humanity (the woman who gave birth to the Saviour) during the limited time when the devil seems to dominate them (verse 14). When Israel was caught between Pharaoh and the Red Sea, God made a way through the waters (verse 15). Creation itself is on the side of the people who hold the testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the heaven-anointed ruler of the earth (verses 16-17).

But creation is also suffering the fury of the defeated dragon. As we'll see in John's next vision, beastly powers are lurking in the sea and the earth.

Revelation 13: The beastly powers

The beast from the depths (12:1-10)

The dragon calls the beastly rulers and kingdoms of this world to represent its power:

Revelation 13:1-2 (NIV)

¹ The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had **ten horns** and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.

² The beast I saw resembled a **leopard**, but had feet like those of a **bear** and a mouth like that of a **lion**. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.

These images are familiar from Daniel. When Babylon trampled Jerusalem, Daniel tried to convince King Nebuchadnezzar to recognize the LORD as sovereign (Daniel 1–5). Then Persia conquered Babylon and threw Daniel to the lions (Daniel 6). Humans were meant to exercise God's dominion on earth (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6), but Daniel saw these rulers acting like wild animals (beasts) fighting each other for power (war):

Daniel 7:2-8 (NIV)

² Daniel said: "In my vision at night, ... ³ four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. ⁴ "The first was like a **lion** ...

⁵ And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a **bear**. ...

⁶ After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a **leopard**. ...

⁷ After that ... there before me was a fourth beast ... and it had **ten horns**."

The power these kingdoms wield comes not from heaven but from the depths (*the sea*) as they feed on each other. The kingdoms that conquered God's people in Old Testament times included Babylon, Persia, Greece (Alexander the Great), the Seleucids (Antiochus Epiphanes IV), and then Rome in Jesus' grandparents' time.

That's why heaven's words for the earth were *bound up* (5:1-4). Evil rulers take control through conquest, war, famine, and death (6:1-8). Heaven's solution was to give the throne to the slain Lamb, the only ruler worthy of the name (5:5-14).

But the rulers of this world do not recognize the Lamb. They've kept fighting each other for another last 2000 years, and still do. The root of the war and violence we see today is the refusal to recognize the reign of the Lamb, the King of kings. The rulers of this world get their power from the depths (*the sea* in 13:1). The dragon gives them his power: *his throne and great authority* (verse, compare 20:3, 8).

Now, it's a very dark view of politics to say (as verse 2 does) that **rulers get their power from the devil**. That's true, but it's not the whole truth. It's also true that **all authority originates with God**. That's why Daniel kept calling the kings of the earth to recognize God as the source of their authority (Daniel 2:37; 3:28; 4:34; 5:22; 6:26).

God gave the power of life and death to the community to limit violence (Genesis 9:5), so the authority of human governments ultimately comes from God (Romans 13:1-4). We're living on the conflict zone: authority ultimately comes from God, but the authorities choose to get their power from the devil (compare Matthew 4:8-9).

If that's not clear, consider the kings of Israel and Judah. Their power came from God: David's sons were God's anointed. Yet, many of them served evil. Eventually God cut off the kingship when King *Manasseh shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end* (2 Kings 21:16).

Pilate asked, "*Don't you realize I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?*" Jesus didn't argue: "*You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above*" (John 19:10-11). God authorized human government. But in executing God's Messiah, Rome's official in Jerusalem was serving the dragon.

The dragon cannot create; only destroy. It cannot give life; only death. But it deceives people into thinking it has power to overcome death, so they'll give it power:

Revelation 13:3-4 (NIV)

³ One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. ⁴ People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?"

The earthly rulers seem impossible to beat. That's why John was weeping in 5:4. The beastly rulers act as if they are gods:

Revelation 13:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. ⁶ It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.

That's why all the peoples of the earth are enslaved to the dragon-serving beasts:

Revelation 13:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸ All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

All the people on earth are born under the power of death, under the dragon who gives its authority to the nations. We need deliverance from this oppression like the Hebrews needed deliverance from Pharaoh so they could be the people of God.

That's what salvation is. Salvation in Exodus is not, "Every Hebrew was a sinner needing personal forgiveness." It's the LORD saving his people from the rule of evil (Exodus 15). Salvation calls the world to turn from the dominion of evil to our true sovereign (repentance), placing their allegiance (faith) in the Lamb.

Despite the universal oppression of the earth by evil, God always had a plan to save and restore us into his reign. It was always the Lamb—being crucified at the hands of evil. It's a slow process, but it's the one God set in motion at creation. It means God's people suffer too, like the Lamb. *This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness [trust] on the part of God's people* (verse 10).

The beast from the ground (13:11-18)

Some beasts (Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Nero, Hitler, ...) clearly draw their power from the depths. Others are more deceptive:

Revelation 13:11-15 (NIV)

¹¹ Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. ¹² It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. ¹³ And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. ¹⁴ Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵ The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

These rulers try to look like the Lamb (verse 11), with life-giving power (verse 12). They make it seem as if their power is coming from heaven (verse 13), but don't be fooled (verse 14). They serve the rebellion against God, the power of death (verse 15).

Remember the vision where God placed a protective seal on his servants (7:3)? The deceptive earth-beast pretends to do that too, but what it really wants is control:

Revelation 13:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, ¹⁷ so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.

¹⁸ This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.

There's much speculation about *the mark of the beast*. Some (Futurists) identify it with tattoos, chip implants, or cashless banking. Others (Preterists) wonder what it meant to the seven churches: perhaps a receipt from the Temple of Emperor Domitian that the merchants of Ephesus wanted to see before they'd sell you anything. But the speculation misses the point. The context is right here in Revelation:

The mark on their forehead, which is the name of the beast, or the number of his name, is the parody of and the opposite to the "seal" in 7:3–8, which is the divine name written on the foreheads of true believers (14:1; so likewise 22:4; cf. 3:12). Since the seal or name on the true believer is invisible, so is the mark on the unbeliever. That the two are of a parallel spiritual nature and intended to be compared is evident from the immediately following mention of the names of God and Christ written on the foreheads of the saints (14:1).³⁶

It's all about who you give your loyalty to. It's not a literal beast, but an "inhuman" ruler. It's not a literal mark, but a promise of protection under guise of control.

³⁶ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2015), 283.

God's mark (7:3) is protection for those who are his. When Ezekiel saw that Jerusalem would fall to Babylon, he also saw a vision of God protecting his people:

"Go through the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it" (Ezekiel 9:3).

The Torah called God's people to take God's commands to heart, to *tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads* (Deuteronomy 6:8). That's a voluntarily identifying as God's people, like putting the blood of the slain lamb on their doorframes (Exodus 12:21-23). God marks those who are his so he can care for them. The deceptive earth-beast marks those who are his to gain control over them.

Speculation about the beast's identity goes into overdrive with verse 18. What is 666?

Some (Preterists) treat it as a code for Nero, the Roman Emperor from AD 54–68. Ancient languages did not have digits (0–9), so letters of the alphabet also served as numbers. By combining Nero's name and some of his titles, it's possible to add up the numeric value of the letters to arrive at 666 (or 616, in some manuscripts).

Many names and titles can be manipulated that way. If you assign A=6, B=12, C=18, and so on, even *Santa Claus* adds up to 666. Here's a crazy example:

Since Trump's election in November of 2016, many have linked him to the beast of Revelation and the number 666, noting, among other portents, that his election year, 2016, is the sum of 666 + 666 + 666 + 6 + 6 + 6; that he frequently makes an "okay" sign that forms the number six; and that his son-in-law Jared Kushner's real estate company owns 666 Fifth Avenue in New York.³⁷

There's a better way to *figure out* (*psēphizō*) what John meant. Numbers are symbols in apocalyptic literature. A thousand is a lot. Three often relates to God, and four to the earth (four corners). Seven is the complete number. If God is a threefold seven, then humans would be a three-fold six. That's the explanation John gave: the triple six is *the number of humanity* (rather than of a particular human).

Revelation 14: The Lamb and his followers

Now John's vision shifts away from the deceptive rulers who serve the dragon, to focus on the Lamb leading the rescue of God's people:

Revelation 14:1-5 (NIV)

¹ Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. ³ And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴ These are those who did not defile themselves with women,

³⁷ Timothy Beal, *The Book of Revelation: A Biography*. (Princeton University Press, 2019), quoted in Scot McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us* (Zondervan, 2033), 7.

for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.⁵ No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

Unlike those marked as belonging to the beast, followers of the Lamb are identified with God's seal (7:1-8). Symbolically, the number 144,000 comes from Israel's tribes, so the people of God are all accounted for. But John saw an innumerable multitude singing the song of salvation (7:9-10). What God did for Israel in the exodus he is now doing for the earth in the Lamb. The salvation song (Exodus 15) belongs to the redeemed, as the Lamb now leads the exodus for the world (compare Rev 15:4).

When Moses rescued the people from the beast of his time (Pharaoh), the firstborn of each family was saved from the final plague. They were dedicated to the LORD as a kind of firstfruits offering for the nation. Their lives served as the mark of God's leadership: *a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand* (Exodus 13:16).

After they met the LORD at Sinai, Moses numbered God's people, organizing them for battle against the rulers in Canaan (Numbers 1–4). In time of battle, Israel's fighters were required to abstain from sexual relations (Deuteronomy 23:9-14). All these symbols are used in John's vision.³⁸

The Lamb's followers do not rely on deception the way the earth-beasts like Pharaoh do (Exodus 8:32; 9:34; 10:16; 14:5). They're living evidence that the Lamb is restoring heaven's throne to the earth, and heaven confirms it:

Revelation 14:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal **gospel** to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. ⁷ He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

Do you recognize that as the gospel? The gospel is the good news that God's reign is restored to the earth in the Lamb, so the gospel calls for everyone to give allegiance (faith, fealty) to heaven's throne, in the Lamb.

And since God *has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves* (Colossians 1:13), the earth-beasts that have caused so much suffering for God's people (symbolized by Babylon) can no longer cause pain by seducing the nations into the rebellion against God:

Revelation 14:8 (NIV)

A second angel followed and said, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

Heaven is therefore calling the people of the earth not to trust the beasts such as Babylon. Their intoxicating promises to anesthetize their pain yield not only a tormenting hangover but also the anger of the one who can save:

³⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (T&T Clark, 1993), 230-231.

Revelation 14:9-11 (NIV)

⁹ A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, ¹⁰ they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."

God is exposing the deception of the beasts, calling for *patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus* (verse 12).

This is how God restores what he planted in the beginning. God blessed the earth with fruitfulness (Genesis 1). It grew thorns and thistles, but the Sower came and replanted it as a kingdom of heaven to yield the harvest God intended (Matthew 13).

Revelation 14:14-16 (NIV)

¹⁴ I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud,

"Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

¹⁶ So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

The harvest comes, but the earth has yielded weeds as well as wheat (people of the beast as well as people of the Lamb). Jesus said to leave it for the angels to sort out (Matthew 13:39, 41, 49).

Crushing grapes to release the wine is another common harvest image in the prophets:

Revelation 14:14-20 (NIV)

¹⁷ Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸ Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle,

"Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe."

¹⁹ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. ²⁰ They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

Verse 20 might be the most bloodthirsty text in the Bible. Horses were common in warfare,³⁹ but horses almost drowning in blood is pure horror. And the blood flows for 300 kilometres (*1600 stadia*), effectively the whole of Palestine from north to south.

³⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (T&T Clark, 1993), 40-48.

Whose blood is this? Isaiah may be able to help us.

Long after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, Isaiah spoke of a leader coming back from battle. He'd won the *victory* and *saved* his people (Isaiah 63:1), but they were shocked to see his bloodied garments *like those of one treading the winepress* (63:2). He said:

"I have trodden the winepress alone ... I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm achieved salvation" as he brought the *nations* into line (63:3-5).

Jesus saw the cross as the battle when he would drive out the ruler of this world and draw everyone under his leadership: *"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself"* (John 12:31-32).

Jesus won this battle not as a beast but as the descendant of humanity (*son of man*) to whom God gave dominion in the beginning. God had made the earth fruitful, so when a wheat seed *falls into the earth and dies*, it produces life (John 12:23-26).

The blood that flowed in Jesus' battle against the prince of this world at the cross was not the blood of his enemies. It was his own.

The blood on his garments was his own. It's the blood of the Lamb that flows out to the whole Holy Land to rescue his people from the dragon. *"With your blood you redeemed for God people from every tribe"* (Rev 5:9). Like the great warrior of Isaiah 63, *he is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God* (19:13).

How is this sitting with you? Are you okay?

Now that we've understood the blood as Jesus' blood, let's extend that meaning. We think of the saving blood that Jesus shed on the cross as unique to him, something he alone did to save the world. In one sense that's so: the world can be saved only in him.

But to all who recognize him as Saviour, the Lamb says, "Take up your cross and follow me!" When Jesus spoke of the seed falling into the ground and dying, he was speaking of his followers too: *"Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life"* (John 12:26). The Lamb expects us to follow him in laying down our lives for the salvation of the world too.

That's why there are martyrs under the altar (5:9). Like the great warrior of Isaiah 63, his followers *wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb* (7:14).

"The blood of the Lamb" is not a magic charm for protecting believers; it is a willingness to lay down our lives too, for the salvation of the world. The parallel expression for triumphing over the devil by *the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony* is: *they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death* (12:11).

That's why Babylon took not only the blood of the Lamb, but *was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus* (17:6). That's what Jesus was bearing in his own body when he faced the judgement of God against Jerusalem (Matthew 23:35-39, compare Revelation 18:24).

If you include the blood of the prophets who spoke for God, the blood of the Lamb who defeated the dragon, and the blood of the Lamb's followers who loved not their lives even unto death (12:11), you might see a vision of the blood flowing out for hundreds of kilometres across the Promised Land (14:20).

Revelation 15: The new exodus

This chapter consolidates the visions of the Lamb who leads the world out of oppression by beastly rulers, just as Moses led Israel out of oppression by Pharaoh.

Revelation 15:1-4 (NIV)

¹ I saw in heaven another great and marvellous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed.

² And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God ³ and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

“Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways, King of the nations.

⁴ Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name?

For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

To worship is to bow to the authority of our leader. By recognizing the Lamb and not the deceptive beast's claims, this crowd has been rescued from the reign of evil (verse 2, compare Matthew 10:32-33).

The *song of Moses* is the first song in the Bible,⁴⁰ celebrating *salvation* from Pharaoh (Exodus 15:2-4), into YHWH's leadership:

You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance—the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established. The LORD reigns for ever and ever. (Exodus 15:17-18)

The Lamb has brought salvation from the beast into the reign of the *Pantokratōr* (All-ruler). The Lord God is king not only of the kingdom established at Sinai; he is *King of the nations* (verse 3). The nations are approaching him to bow to (*worship*) his authority, because he has *done right* by them (verse 4).

The first thing God asked for when Israel accepted his leadership was this:

“Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ... I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites”
(Exodus 25:8, 22).

The tabernacle stood as testimony to God's presence and leadership (Exodus 40:34-38). The temple later served as a house for God's presence too, though they knew it was just a representative copy of God's true throne in heaven (1 Kings 8:10-11, 27).

Where Moses had the Israelites build an earthly house for God, the Lamb has opened the heavenly temple, the heavenly throne for the whole earth (compare Luke 23:45; Hebrews 10:20; Revelation 4:1):

Revelation 15:5 (NIV)

After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the ~~covenant law~~ [testimony]—and it was opened.

⁴⁰ <https://allenbrowne.blog/2018/10/29/the-significant-song/>

The actual phrase is *the tabernacle of the testimony (martyrion)*. The NIV interprets (rather than translating) this phrase throughout the Old Testament (e.g. Exodus 38:21), so it continues the mistranslation in the New. In doing so, it undercuts the relationship between heaven and earth, where the open temple in heaven bears witness to the Lamb, as does the Lamb himself (the faithful witness) and his witnesses on earth who stand as living evidence to earth's relationship with him, even when they die.

But the task of convincing the rulers of this world to submit to the *Pantokratōr (King of nations)* is not complete. God used plagues to convince Pharaoh, “Let my people go!” and John sees God pouring out plagues on the nations to lead them to repent:

Revelation 15:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. ⁸ And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

We'll pick up the details of those plagues next week.

So what?

Tonight we've seen visions of the child who saves the world (Revelation 12), and the beasts that implement the devil's reign in the world (Revelation 13). We've seen how the Lamb leads his followers through the crushing winepress (Revelation 14), establishing the reign of God and the presence of God for all nations (Revelation 15). While the violent imagery of these chapters needs an “R” rating, the blood of the Lamb does rescue creation from evil, back into God's reign. Are you okay?

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In preparation for next week, read Revelation 16–19.