



In the previous articles, I've tried to make the case for understanding the book of Revelation as revolving around chapter 12 and the "war in heaven" motif. This world is a mess! The book of Revelation explains how the sin problem began in the first place, it clarifies for the reader what the real issues are in the great controversy, and finally it outlines God's plan for winning the war and healing his children in the process.

Last time we discussed God's invitation to the seven churches (which includes us!) to come through the open door with John (4:1) and to get the inside scoop. Remarkably, what we discovered is that God won the great controversy in the hearts and minds of his children by becoming a slaughtered Lamb. As we described last time, the evidence about a God of humility and kindness who would lay down his life for others triggered a chain reaction of amplified praise. Prior to the slaughtered Lamb in chapter four, we witnessed the praise only of four living creatures and twenty four elders. After the evidence revealed about God by the slaughtered Lamb in chapter five, however, this praise crescendos to now countless "millions and millions." In this article I'd like to reinforce this idea by including some quotes of others on this subject. I will also expand a bit more on the importance of the throne scene imagery.

When the book of Revelation is read as a whole and with the "war in heaven" theme as the common thread that is woven through the entire book we see that God is faced with the challenge of defeating a devious enemy. The descriptive terms used in the bible for Satan's method of operation are "deceiver", "subtle", "crafty", "cunning", "father of lies" and so on. How do you defeat an opponent who lies and conceals his objectives? This point is so critical to our understanding of the seven seals, trumpets, and plagues:

"...the repeated identification of Satan as 'the deceiver' solicits an understanding of the means by

which the uprising must be overcome. As a deceiver, Satan wins support for his cause and programme by something other than what he truly represents. If this is the case, simple demolition of the deceiver will not suffice unless or until his true character has become manifest. Such a perception of the cosmic conflict depends on [the] presentation of evidence for its resolution. To the extent that the deceiver wins support by purporting to be what he is not, he must be unmasked by evidence to the contrary, that is, by the evidence of his own actual deeds. To the extent that the deceiver gains influence by slandering his opponent...his cause will unravel if the actual deeds of his opponent turn out to be different from what the slanderer has made them out to be. The crucial point relates to the fact that a conflict of this nature cannot be resolved by force. Inevitably, this requirement exposes at least one troubling risk that is intrinsic to the non-use of force: If the deceiver is partly to be unmasked by the evidence of his own actions, it means that he will be granted the opportunity to bring his design to fruition. Satan must be allowed to commit evil for his evil character to be manifest. The political risk to the diving government of this projected policy, not to mention the theological risk, hardly needs to be elaborated." (1)

The words of Tonstad are worth another read since this is the basis for understanding the seals, trumpets and plagues. That is, what we see in these three cycles of seven is the revelation and exposure of Satan, his methods, and the destructive nature of his kingdom.

In this context, the purpose of the meeting in the heavenly throne room in chapter four and five is not to reveal a tranquil scene of music and praise for God. Rather, this meeting is to deal with the problem of Satan's rebellion:

"In the context of the Apocalypse as a whole it is clear that the problem facing the heavenly council is the rebellion of Satan which is paralleled by rebellion on earth. Chapter five presupposes the old story of Satan's rebellion against God which leads to the fall of creation." (2)

God's right to rule as God was challenged by Satan. "According to the war-in-heaven theme the throne of God is contested territory." (3) Satan once dwelled in the very presence of God, "I expelled you, O Mighty Guardian, from your place among the stones of fire" (Ezekiel 28:16) and he now seeks to occupy God's place on the throne:

"You thought, 'I'll go up to heaven and set up my throne above God's stars. I'll sit on the mountain far away in the north where the gods assemble. I'll go above the top of the clouds. I'll be like the Most High.'" (Isaiah 14:13-14)

Satan ultimately wants to be worshiped as God and to be enthroned in our hearts and minds. To accomplish this, he slanders the character of God and deceptively leads people away from God and to his side. If there is any doubt that worship is what Satan craves remember that in the wilderness of temptation he even asked God in human form to get down on his knees and worship him.

If most of us were in God's shoes we would have a strong tendency to eliminate Satan by violent means. Revelation five, however, reveals that God won the war over the throne by becoming a slaughtered Lamb. Last time we considered that God handing the scroll to the slaughtered lamb in

chapter five does not represent the Father handing the scroll to his Son, but rather a change in our picture of who God is. When our picture of God becomes Jesus Christ, Satan is dethroned in our minds:

[The act of the scroll being handed to the slaughtered Lamb] "...does not mean that the throne of the universe is occupied by two persons, but that God, the ruler of the universe, has functionally defined his rule with his act in Jesus. Revelation's Christology, like New Testament Christology generally, is not a response to the question, 'Who is Jesus?' but 'Who is God?' Jesus does not replace God, here or anywhere else in Revelation. God rules, but God has definitively manifested his rule in Jesus, who turned out not to be the Lion who devoured our enemies but the Lamb who was slain." (4)

Others have described the meaning of God as a slaughtered Lamb to reveal "the way God rules the world" (5) and that "Christ and the saints conquer by dying; Satan and the powers of evil by physical force." (6) God as a slaughtered Lamb means that "...omnipotence is not to be understood as the power of unlimited coercion, but as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible power of self-negating, self-sacrificial love." (7)

There are two thrones to choose from. The book of Revelation reveals that the throne of the true God is occupied by One who is limitless in power (chapter four), but yet this power is equally matched by self-sacrificial other-centered love, humility and kindness (chapter five).

We need to recognize that there is another throne occupied by a pretender and the rest of the book of Revelation reveals the dramatic distinction between these two thrones. Unless our picture of God is Jesus Christ (the slaughtered Lamb), our worship naturally turns toward Satan:

"It was allowed to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. It was also given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. Everyone living on earth will worship it, everyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life. That book belongs to the lamb who was slaughtered before the creation of the world." (Revelation 13:7-8)

Most people imagine "Satan worship" as merely involving ritualistic chanting, Ouija boards, child sacrifice, and so on. It is rather sobering to realize that one of the most devoted religious people of all time were confronted by these words of Jesus:

"You belong to your father, Satan, and you want to carry out your father's desires. From the start he was a murderer, and he has never stood by the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he is speaking in character; because he is a liar — indeed, the inventor of the lie!" (John 8:44)

On the surface, it would seem that these people had a lot going for them. They had a very high regard for God's law. In fact, Jesus even noted that they tithed their tiny seeds. They were careful not to intermarry with non-believers. They faithfully kept the Sabbath and would never miss church. Jesus also commented on the fact that they diligently read their bibles and sent missionaries around the world to win one convert. With such a good list as this, how could these people possibly

be worshipping Satan?

Re-read the translation above of John 8:44 from the Christian Jewish Bible in which Satan is described as “the inventor of THE lie” – singular! THE lie that Satan has promoted from the very beginning is about the character of God. The problem on planet earth began when Adam and Eve believed Satan’s lies about God’s character at the tree and we still haven’t recovered:

“From the beginning it has been Satan’s studied plan to cause men to forget God that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself,—as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving,—that He might be feared, shunned, and even hated by men. Satan hoped to so confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge.” (8)

The minute our picture of God becomes anything other than a slaughtered Lamb (i.e. – a God of infinite self-sacrificial love) we begin to turn our worship to the Adversary. Is God “arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving?” Not if we believe that Jesus was God in human form.

Next time the 7 seals. Who is the rider on the white horse? Friend or foe?

- Written by Dr. Brad Cole

---

Footnotes:

1. Tonstad, “Saving God’s Reputation” pg. 129
2. Yarbo Collings, “Acocalypse”, pg 39
3. Tonstad, “Saving God’s Reputation” pg 118
4. Eugene Boring, “The Theology of Revelation”, pg 266
5. Richard Bauckham, “Revelation”, pg 64
6. Anthony Hanson, “The Wrath of the Lamb”, pg 165
7. Caird, “Revelation”, pg 75
8. EGW, Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 738