



The Spiritual Battle
Revelation 12-14 – Leaders version

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including the leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

Summarise the previous study:

The seven seals on the scroll that makes sense of history were opened and we saw God's judgement on a rebellious world and all hell let loose. John was given a prophecy to tell the people which would be bittersweet and we were told about two witnesses, the OT prophets and the church, who would share their testimony and then be killed but resurrected. After all this, Jesus' kingdom comes and heaven is opened for John to see in his vision.

It's important that we remember that Revelation is not a chronological sequence, rather a series of visions repeating the same event from different points of view. Explain that, 'In Revelation 12 a new vision sequence will take us back to history's dawn and lead us to this same end by a different route.' (Johnson 2001, p163).

This is another series of seven: 'There are thus seven symbolic histories in all: the history of the Dragon (12:7-12), the history of the woman (12:13-17), the history of the Beast (13:1-10), the history of the False Prophet (13:11-18), the history of the 144,000 (14:1-5), the history of the angelic proclaimers (14:6-11), and the history of the coming of the Son of Man (14:14-20).' (Polythress 2000)

This study has a lot of comprehension questions and a few application questions (in boxes). Try to spend as much time as you can on the application questions, once you've worked out what the imagery means.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

Revelation 12

1. Read Revelation 12 v 1-6. How are the events in verses 1 and 3 described and what do you think we are meant to understand from this?

They are described as signs. Signs point to something – we are meant to understand that these are not actual events, but pictures to help us to understand the unseen spiritual conflicts to which they point.

2. What event are verses 1-6 describing?

Let the group try to figure it out and then help them. It might help to write this on the flip-chart, as a table of signs and meanings.

The sun, moon and stars (referring back to Genesis 37 v 9, where Joseph's dream of the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him) = all of Israel

The woman = the Church

The dragon = Satan (see v9)

The child = Jesus (ruling all the nations with an iron sceptre refers to Psalm 2 v 9, a Messianic prophecy)

The child snatched up = a sign of Jesus' ascension (after his resurrection)

The desert = a safe place to hide

1260 days = the whole of church history, the time between Jesus' first and second coming (it refers back to Elijah's ministry, but you don't need to go into this)

In summary – we're looking at history playing out again, this time from the angle of the unseen spiritual battle. Satan tries to destroy the offspring/ruler of God's people, but Jesus is taken to heaven. 'The important facts ...are the nativity and the ascension: the point at which the Son himself first came within the dragon's grasp, and the point at which he finally escaped it for ever.' (Wilcock 1996, p118)

3. Read Revelation 12 v 7-9. Who wins this battle and what does this tell us?

(The timing of this battle is Jesus' death and resurrection – this is a picture of Satan's final exclusion, not his original fall from heaven. Again, this is not chronological, rather it is the order that John saw the vision.)

The angels win the battle and Satan is overcome.

4. Read Revelation 12 v 10. Once he has seen the signs that Satan is overcome, what does John hear?

A voice telling him that the kingdom of God has come.

5. Who are 'they' in v11 and what have they done?

'They' are Christian believers, the church. By the blood of Jesus, the believers have won and Satan has been thrown down!

6. Read Revelation 12 v 13-17. What does the dragon (Satan) do to try to destroy the woman (the church)?

He spews water from his mouth. It's from his mouth, so it symbolises words i.e. false teaching.

?

We have seen a spiritual battle in picture form. Satan tries to destroy Jesus but fails, then Satan is thrown out of heaven and he tries to destroy the church by false teaching. Despite all of this, the believers triumph over Satan by the blood of Jesus and the word of their testimony. If you are a believer, this includes you. How does that make you feel?

Spend some time thinking about how the believers overcame – by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony i.e. not in their own strength but Christ's.

Consider how this can give us increased assurance of our salvation and our power to resist temptation (if we want to resist it...)

Revelation 13

7. Read Revelation 13 v 1-4. The dragon failed in its attack on the woman and now goes to war against her offspring. How does the dragon do this?

(The woman and her offspring both represent the church).

The dragon gives his power, throne and authority to a beast from the sea and 'the whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast', worshipping the dragon and the beast and saying that the beast cannot be defeated. (We see in v8 however, that believers will not worship the beast).

NB the beast is not identified as a political figure or oppressive power of the time and we have no reason to associate it with any particular political figure or organisation today. Elsewhere in the Bible we read of the anti-Christ and the man of lawlessness, which are probably ways of describing the same creature.

8. Read Revelation 13 v 5-8. What does the beast do and who will worship it?

It utters proud words and blasphemies against God and his people and exercises its authority by waging war against God's people. All who are not written in 'the Lamb's book of life' will worship it i.e. all who are not believers in Christ will follow the beast. There is no third option.

9. Read v9-10. What warning is given and to whom? How do you think hearing this warning helped people who were suffering for their faith?

The warning is that there will be suffering for God's people, some of whom will be taken captive and other will be killed. They are called to patient endurance and faithfulness.

Hearing this warning would have helped them in that 1. They were not taken by surprise when they suffered, 2. They would have known that God was with them in it and so recognised his sovereignty in it, i.e. that He was in control even though things seemed way out of control, 3. God has told them what to do in the face of suffering for their faith – have patient endurance and faithfulness to Christ.

10. Another beast arises exercising the authority of the first beast, performing signs and having an image made of the first beast which it breathes into life. All who refused to worship the image of the first beast were killed. What happens in Revelation 13 v 16-17 and what does this mean?

In v16 all people are marked with the name or number of the beast, without which they could not buy or sell. Anyone who was not marked, i.e. the Christians, could not trade and would quickly fall into poverty.

NB

1. *This is recorded in the past tense – not because it has already happened but because John saw it in the past and now he's recording it. Don't get too hung up on past and present tenses, although future tenses are always future to the original reader.*
2. *Re 666 - there was a code system called gematria for calculating the number of a word as each letter in the alphabet had a numerical value. The word was translated it into a second language and then the number calculated. One calculation has this result – the Greek word for beast, translated into Hebrew and then into gematria is 666. This is also the number of a man – the Emperor Nero's number in gematria is also 666 (see Johnson 2001, p192-193). The Emperor Nero had famously persecuted Christians by lighting them and using them as candles in Rome. However, this may be over-interpreting the issue, it may be that the number simply represents the beast with no maths involved – nothing more complicated than that.*
3. *The beast's mark... is no outward tattoo or insignia on the body but rather a symbol of the beasts' ownership and control of his follower's thoughts (forehead) and deeds (right hands).'* (Johnson 2001, p196)

?

The main message of Chapter 13 is that there is a spiritual battle over us as believers. Satan is trying to win us back to himself through our feeling defeated in the face of attack (v4), lies and blasphemies (v5), deception (v14) and persecution (v16-17).

In what ways are you aware of this in your own life or culture and how can v9-10 help you to face this?

Revelation 14

11. In chapters 12&13 John saw images showing him the reality of spiritual warfare. Suddenly he sees a new scene. Read Revelation 14 v 1-5. Who does he see, what does he hear and what are we to understand from this?

He sees the Lamb, Jesus, on Mount Zion (a reference to the place where the Jewish Temple was built, here referring to heaven) and the 144,000 (remember this is a symbolic number, not a literal one) who are sealed with the Father's name on their forehead (similar to chapter 7), v1. He hears rushing water, thunder and harpists; the sound of a song sung before the throne of God which only the 144,000 could learn, v3.

We are to understand that, despite what we've seen happening in chapters 12 and 13, God is still on the throne!! The 144,000 are the first-fruits (v4) of those who will be saved i.e. there are more to come. The spiritual battle that we have seen playing out in the previous chapters has not de-railed God's plan of salvation!

NB v4 re the 144,000 being virgins; remember that this is imagery, not a proscription for entry to heaven. It's an image of single-minded loyalty to Christ.

12. John then sees three angels, each with a message – what are the messages? See verses 6-10.

V6-7 – this angel has the gospel to proclaim to every nation, tribe, language and people and announces that the time of God's judgment has come. In this context, every nation, tribe, language and people harks back to 13 v 7 where the beast was given authority over every nation, tribe, language and people. This is a final reaching out with the gospel and warning of judgement to those under the authority of the beast.

V8 – this angel declares the fall of Babylon – a real city, but here symbolising Rome / all the evil in the world.

V9-10 – this angel says that those who follow the beast of ch13 and receive its mark will receive God's fury/wrath.

13. Read v12. How should those who are faithful to Jesus respond to the warnings given by the three angels?

With patient endurance, as 13 v 10.

?

What does patient endurance look like?

- *clinging to Christ in the face of mockery/rejection/persecution*
- *standing against your culture when your culture is going against God's way*
- *not being deceived by the lies of the devil (which will never present themselves quite so obviously as a multi-headed beast performing great signs in front of you!). Consider how we recognise these lies and how we counter them; ultimately by comparing what we hear to what God has told us in His Word and standing on the truth of the Bible, not on anything or anyone else*
- *Consider Jesus' teaching in Mark 8 v 34-35 – the cost of discipleship*
- *Etc.*

14. John looks again and sees something new in v14. Chapters 12, 13 and 14 have all been leading up to this vision. Read Revelation 14 v 14-16. Who are we seeing, what happens and what are we to understand?

Jesus is the one on the cloud – 'one like a son of man', 'seated on the cloud' (Dan 7 v13-14), 'a crown of gold'.

He is told to reap the harvest of the earth – an image of reaping (the grain into the storehouse) probably meaning the harvest of the righteous (this is the most persuasive of several interpretations (Johnson 2001, p211)). We are to understand that this is the second coming of Jesus; judgement has come and those who have followed him are taken to be with him. From here to the end of Ch20, we will see imagery of judgement.

15. Another angel comes with another sickle. What are we to understand from v19? (See Psalm 75 v 8, Isaiah 63 v 3 and Joel 3 v 13 to help you understand the imagery)

Psalm 75 v 8 / Isaiah 63 v 3 / Joel 3 v 13 – wine and treading the grapes are OT symbolism for God's wrath. V19 is showing us the harvest of the wicked who are to face God's wrath (again, this is the most persuasive of several interpretations (Johnson 2001, p211)).

Make sure that the group understand that 1. 'the wicked' does not refer to what we have done in life, but to whether we have responded to Jesus' offer of forgiveness through his death in our place on the cross. The only distinction at judgement will be whether our sins have been paid for by Jesus, not the weight of our sins. 2. Again, reinforce that this is imagery, like a dream sequence, from which are to understand what is to come. It's not a history of what has already happened and it's not the literal events portrayed i.e. there won't be actual sickles or grapes involved etc.

?

What is the main learning point for you from Revelation 14?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

The Spiritual Battle

Revelation 12-14

What does the passage say and mean?

Revelation 12

1. Read Revelation 12 v 1-6. How are the events in verses 1 and 3 described and what do you think we are meant to understand from this?

2. What event are verses 1-6 describing?

3. Read Revelation 12 v 7-9. Who wins this battle and what does this tell us?

4. Read Revelation 12 v 10. Once he has seen the signs that Satan is overcome, what does John hear?

5. Who are 'they' in v11 and what have they done?

6. Read Revelation 12 v 13-17. What does the dragon (Satan) do to try to destroy the woman (the church)?

?

We have seen a spiritual battle in picture form. Satan tries to destroy Jesus but fails, then Satan is thrown out of heaven and he tries to destroy the church by false teaching. Despite all of this, the believers triumph over Satan by the blood of Jesus and the word of their testimony. If you are a believer, this includes you. How does that make you feel?

Revelation 13

7. Read Revelation 13 v 1-4. The dragon failed in its attack on the woman and now goes to war against her offspring. How does the dragon do this?

(The woman and her offspring both represent the church).

8. Read Revelation 13 v 5-8. What does the beast do and who will worship it?

9. Read v9-10. What warning is given and to whom? How do you think hearing this warning helped people who were suffering for their faith?

10. Another beast arises exercising the authority of the first beast, performing signs and having an image made of the first beast which it breathes into life. All who refused to worship the image of the first beast were killed. What happens in Revelation 13 v 16-17 and what does this mean?

?

The main message of Chapter 13 is that there is a spiritual battle over us as believers. Satan is trying to win us back to himself through our feeling defeated in the face of attack (v4), lies and blasphemies (v5), deception (v14) and persecution (v16-17).

In what ways are you aware of this in your own life or culture and how can v9-10 help you to face this?

Revelation 14

11. In chapters 12&13 John saw images showing him the reality of spiritual warfare. Suddenly he sees a new scene. Read Revelation 14 v 1-5. Who does he see, what does he hear and what are we to understand from this?

12. John then sees three angels, each with a message – what are the messages? See verses 6-10.

13. Read v12. How should those who are faithful to Jesus respond to the warnings given by the three angels?

?

What does patient endurance look like?

14. John looks again and sees something new in v14. Chapters 12, 13 and 14 have all been leading up to this vision. Read Revelation 14 v 14-16. Who are we seeing, what happens and what are we to understand?

15. Another angel comes with another sickle. What are we to understand from v19? (See Psalm 75 v 8, Isaiah 63 v 3 and Joel 3 v 13 to help you understand the imagery)

?

What is the main learning point for you from Revelation 14?