

Holy War 2  
Revelation 14:1 – 15:4

Turn to Revelation 12:17. Rev 12 – 14 describe the Holy War in which we find ourselves. And we indeed are in this war. The Bible is written to answer the important questions, and one of them is “what’s really going on?” We are in a Holy War.

Revelation 12 is scene 1, and from 13:1 to 15:2 we find six more times, “And I saw.” Those six “and I saw” introduction mark out scenes 2 to 7. These 7 scenes take us from just before the birth of Christ in scene 1 to praising God in scene 7, after all the rescue and judgment have happened.

Scenes 1-3, which we covered last week, and which I will review in a minute, describe the battle. Who is fighting against who, why are they fighting, what are they fighting about, what are their weapons? Scenes 1-3 describe the battle. Scenes 4-7 describe the consequences of the battle, rewards and punishments.

Rev 12:17 says this: *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.* We are those who keep God’s commands and hold onto our confession of Christ. That means that the dragon is at war with us.

How did this come to be? Who’s the dragon, who’s the woman, why is he so angry, and why’s he coming after us? Scene 1 (Rev 12) answer these questions.

The woman is God’s people, faithful Israel and faithful church. The woman is God’s woman. The OT prophets often described Israel as God’s wife. In the NT the church is Christ’s bride. But in Revelation these are not two different women. All God’s people together are the woman.

And the dragon is the ancient serpent, called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. In scene 1, the dragon loses three times, and all are good news for us.

One, he tries to destroy Christ, but fails. Christ is safe with God on his Throne. Two, the dragon fought to keep his place in heaven, but he lost the fight, and he and his angels were thrown down. Three, the dragon tried to destroy the woman, the people of God, but God protects the woman, and he cannot destroy the woman. The dragon cannot destroy the people of God. Three losses.

All he can do is go after individual believers. That he can do, which produces holy war ...  
*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.*

Scene 1 tells us how holy war began. Scenes 2 and 3 show us the shape of the war. Scene 2 (13:1-10) shows the dragon arranging a beast who will rule all the nations. Rev 13:4 says that people worshipped the dragon, and they worshipped the beast. That's a key line.

When they worshipped the beast, they said to each other, “who can wage war against the beast? Who can fight such authority and power? He's too big and strong.” So they worship the beast.

Think about our King, the real King: he arranged to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling Zechariah's old prophecy about how Israel's king would arrive. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, not explaining or saying a word, waiting to see who would figure out what he was telling the world. We could not find a bigger contrast with the dragon and his beast.

Scene 3 (13:11-18) tells us about a second beast, who is the first beast's enforcer. The second beast uses great authority to make everyone worship the first beast. Later in Revelation, the second beast is called the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). God has prophets, who called people to honour God; the first beast has his prophet, too.

In the first century, emperor worship was common. It was enforced more strictly at some times than others, depending on how paranoid that particular Caesar was. But John's churches will have known all about bowing down to worship the image of a world ruler. The first beast was Caesar, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> beast, the false prophet, was whatever local authority forced them to bow.

The end of scene 3, end of Rev 13, gives us important new information: the beast is *human*. Nothing in the rest of Rev 13 prepared us for that. He's a monster out of the sea, he looks like a bizarre mix of land predators. Yes, he is all of that, and he is also human.

The name on the forehead describes who we worship. God's people have God's name and the Lamb's name on our foreheads, because that's who we worship. The beast himself has blasphemous names on his forehead. Revelation will not even tell us who he worships.

But his followers have 666 on their foreheads. “6” is the human number, because God created people on the 6<sup>th</sup> day. 6 is a good number. Humans were made in the image and likeness of God. But for one image of God to worship another is foolish, and blasphemous. And not only that, people are forced to worship an image of a human, an image of the image of God.

What they have on their foreheads is “human, human, human.” We who are God's people have God's name and the Lamb's name on our foreheads, but they have “human, human, human,” because they worship a human. No one can see God's name on our foreheads, it is real but not part of the material world; I expect the 666 on their foreheads is to be understood the same way.

That's the battle. The battle is about worship. 13:4 - *People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast.* 13:8 - *All inhabitants of the*

*earth will worship the beast.* 13:12 – [The second beast] made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast. 13:15 – All who refuse to worship the image of the beast will be killed.

That's scenes 1-3, how we got into holy war, and the shape of the battle: who will worship the beast, and who will worship God. Scenes 4-7 are consequences, how this ends up for those who worship the beast and those who worship God.

#### Scene 4: the Song of the Redeemed, Preview of Scene 7 (14:1-5)

Scene 4 is the middle scene of the 7, but it is pretty much the same as scene 7. It's as if John could not wait to the end of the vision to tell us the happy ending, so he brought half of the happy ending into the middle (scene 4). In scene 7, we get the other half of the happy ending.

In scene 4, we find out that God's people are playing music and singing in front of God. In scene 7, the same people are in the same place also playing music and singing, and in scene 7 we read the words of the song.

Back in Rev 7, we were first introduced to the 144,000. In Rev 7, John *heard* the number, 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel, and then he *saw* a huge crowd that no one could number, from every tribe and people and language and nation. What he *heard* and what he *saw* two different descriptions of the same people. 144,000 symbolizes God's people lined up for battle.

"*Heard*" and "*saw*" are reversed, here he *saw* first then *heard*. In 14:1, John *saw* the 144,000 with the Lamb's name and his Father's name on their foreheads. And then he *heard* a sound from heaven, the singing of the huge crowd from every nation, pictured symbolically as the 144,000. But what John *hears* is the singing of those he *saw*, the 144,000.

There's emphasis here on volume. The roar of rushing waters and great thunder. Imagine yourself beside a huge waterfall, where the only way to speak to someone is to shout right into their ear. Then imagine a severe thunderstorm going on at the same time. That's how loud this is.

But what is he actually hearing? Harpists playing their harps, and God's people singing to God. You and I will be there. We're in this great choir. Do you wish you were a better musician, and could sing wonderfully? I do. On that day, we'll be great musicians, and have voices we enjoy, and we'll play and sing for God.

There has been a lot of worshipping God so far in Revelation, but not much on music. But music is at the core of scene 4, musicians playing and singers singing a new song. Why now? Contrast.

Contrast. No one sings to the dragon, no one sings to the beast and his image. They will bow and worship, they will bring offerings and sell their very souls to the dragon and beast. But no one plays harps and no one writes a new song and no one sings. That only happens before the one who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, to humbly let the world know he was the Promised King.

*They did not defile themselves with women, for they are virgins.* We get a male image of spiritual faithfulness, then a female image. The 144,000 are men who did not defile themselves with women, and in the same breath they are virgins who did not defile themselves with men.

“*Virgin*” is much debated here. In the Bible, “virgin” always refers to women, except for this place. I suspect it means women here as well. Paul says to the Corinthian church, *I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.* 2 Cor 11.

If the 144,000 represent believers as God’s army, it would make sense to picture them all as men. In any case, this is about spiritual faithfulness to God, and married and celibate are equally holy lifestyles before God, and men and women are equally members of God’s army.

To summarize, scene 4 is a preview of the End in scene 7, it puts us all before God and the Lamb, after all this is over, all of us singing and making music to God with all our might.

#### Scene 5: God Warns All People: Two Worship Messages from God (14:6-13)

Three angels make announcements to the world in scene 5, but only the first and third use a loud voice. The middle one is about Babylon, it is a teaser for Rev 17-18, and we’ll ignore it here. The first angel with a loud voice preaches the eternal gospel to every nation, tribe, people, and nation. And this gospel is, “*Fear God, give him glory, worship the Creator.*”

A small detour here. Christians differ on how we understand the creation stories of Genesis. That’s fine. Let us NOT quarrel with, or get upset with, Christians who take the creation story differently than we do. The differences are okay. On this we all agree: Creation made it all, the God of the Bible made the heavens, the earth and sea, and everything in them. Amen!

The first loud angel: *worship the Creator.* The other angel with a loud voice warns about ignoring the first loud angel: *Whoever worships the beasts and its image and takes its mark on their foreheads, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength in the cup of his wrath.*

Let’s go back to the first angel. This means that God has been telling people about himself and calling people to worship him, all along. Paul in Romans 1: *For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*

Jesus said that the Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement. The Holy Spirit is out there all the time, urging people to stop living as rebels against God, and starting giving God his due.

God is speaking to the whole world, through Creation and the Spirit. He is not limited to human voices. None of the messages to the seven church have any interest in evangelism or outreach. In Revelation, the gospel is always going on, and for the most part without people.

I will read the 3<sup>rd</sup> angel's warning in full, because the church has largely stopped preaching warnings like this. 14:9 *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,* <sup>10</sup> *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 sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.* <sup>11</sup> *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."* <sup>12</sup> *This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.* <sup>13</sup> *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."* "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Some won't rest. Some will rest.

The punishment is symbolic, most of what's in Revelation is symbolic. The next scene describes the great winepress of God's wrath, which is quite a different picture, but that is also symbolic. This second angel tells us that although there will be troubles for those who don't worship the beast, there will be far greater troubles for those who don't worship God. Worship God.

The point of these two loud angels in scene 5 is that God's message is going out to every human, God urges every human to honour and worship him, and warns every human ignoring this.

#### Scene 6: The Lord Harvests the Righteous and the Rebels (14:14-20)

Scene 6 has the two final harvests, the next step after the two warning messages in scene 5. The second harvest of scene 6 is clear. It is God's wrathful punishment on those who refuse to worship him, who worship someone else instead. That's the second harvest in scene 6.

The first harvest becomes clearer then. It is Christ gathering his own people to himself. *There before me was a white cloud, and on the cloud was one like a son of man.* The cloud here is the cloud of God's presence, and John is quoting from Daniel 7, his favorite OT chapter: *I saw one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.*

Here's how Jesus puts it in Mark 13: *At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.* That's the 1<sup>st</sup> harvest of scene 6, gathering the elect. (We get another picture of this when the two witnesses are raised to life and taken up, Rev 11:11-12.)

See also 1 Th 4: *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*

The second final harvest is the rest of humanity, those destined for God’s wrath, and it is pictured as a grape harvest in a winepress. But it is the great winepress of God’s wrath. Instead of grapes being trampled and juice flowing out, people are trampled and blood flows out. After the two witnesses were taken up, in Rev 11, there was great judgment, so also here.

Scene 7: The Song of the Redeemed, Now in Proper Sequence (15:2-4)

15:1 is an advertisement for the 7 bowls, soon to follow, and we will ignore it.

In last scene, John sees a sea of glass and standing beside the sea, those who were victorious over the beast and its image and name. And they sang the song of Moses. So, they are standing beside the sea and they are singing the son of Moses. Does that remind you of anything?

In Exodus, after they had crossed the Red Sea, and escaped their enemies, Miriam and the other women sang to the Lord, and Moses sang to the Lord. So our future praise is pictured like that. In Revelation, the only time God’s people use harps is in scene 4 and scene 7 of this holy war vision, and the only time God’s people sing songs to God are in these two scenes.

That’s one reason I’m pretty sure we’ve got two different pictures of the same event. Another reason is that in scene 4 we learn much about music and singing, but we don’t find out what they sing to God. In Revelation that’s unusual. But in scene 7 we get the words to the song, which we take to be the words of the singing in scene 4.

Here is the song: *“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.*

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

*<sup>4</sup> 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.”*

Worshipping God in Revelation means give God clear and direct credit for what he has done. We tell God that he is great, and why he is great. That’s worship consistent in Revelation. Here is what we will sing to God with our instruments and our voices: *Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. You alone are holy. Your righteous acts have been revealed.*

Our God is just and true and righteous. That makes him great and marvelous, and we will sing that to him with all our hearts. That’s the song, that’s where this Ends. Holy war started before the birth of Christ, and this is where it ends. We worship the one who told the world he was the promised King simply by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. It ends in singing before God.

*Prayer:* Our God, we read in this Scripture, “this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.” “This calls for patient endurance by the saints, those who keep the commands of God and remain faithful to Jesus.” We ask that the God who gives eternal encouragement and good hope would faithfully strengthen us for this. We want to stand by the sea and sing the song of Moses to you on that day. Amen.