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How the First-Century, Asia Minor, Jewish Christians Understood the Book of Revelation

3. Outline

Scene 3 – The Wilderness

Justice Comes (17-21:8)

Scene 1 – The Island called Patmos (1:9–3:20)
Scene 2 – An Open Door into Heaven (4–16:21)
Scene 3 – The Wilderness (17 – 21:8)
Scene 4 – A high mountain (21:9-10–22:21)

The 4 scenes (or sections) of Revelation are separated by the author's words **I was in the Spirit**.

Scene 3 begins: "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of sexual immorality... **And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness**; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast..." (See 17:1-4)

So far, John has communicated personally to each community in Asia Minor (Scene 1). In Scene 2, he has drawn them into the flourishing scene of Yahweh's Heavenly Court.

- As a **pastor**, he has cared for them by exposing all the nuances of evil they face.
- As a **prophet**, he has spoken words of warning, challenge, and comfort.
- As a **poet**, he has creatively used signs and symbols to illustrate and inspire them with truth they can experience and remember.

Now, in **Scene 3**, the Spirit leads John into the wilderness and gives visions of God's promise of vindication, final judgment, and the New Creation.

Five Windows of Judgment Closed

The descriptions of the nature of all who collude against Yahweh's Kingdom have been exposed. Now, John exposes their judgment and the full vindication of the Faithful Witnesses.

1. **17:1 – 19:10 – The destiny and judgment of Babylon (the Roman Empire)**

John presents the Roman imperial world in the starkest terms using Babylon to describe her. He uses the image of a harlot to contrast the bride of Messiah, drawing his language from the prophets who likened Israel's idolatry to sexual sin that represents unfaithfulness to covenant (Isaiah 23:15-18; Jeremiah 28:7, 51:7). John does not want his audience to be lured away from their covenant with Yeshua by the harlot's false offer of peace. The harlot sits on a beast about to be destroyed. She symbolizes all the abusive kingdoms of this world animated by the dragon.

17:1f – John's descriptions of the Roman Empire are found on first-century, Asia Minor (FCAM) Roman coins. One image, the goddess *Dea Roma*, represents tyrannical rule, sensuality, and evil.

A voice from heaven cries, "Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive her plagues." (18:4) This is a repeated warning not to assimilate into the Roman cult. (See also Isaiah 21:9; Jeremiah 50:1-16; 51:1-17; Isaiah 23; and Ezekiel 26-27.)

In Chapter 18, John continues to expose the underbelly of the Roman Empire by comparing it to Babylon using the language of the prophets' denouncement of Babylon in passages such as Isaiah 21:9; Jeremiah 50:1-16; 51:1-17; Isaiah 23; and Ezekiel 26 and 27.

John's language of momentary destruction (18:8,17) may have echoed their fear associated with the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii in 79CE. John wasn't trying to scare them but to warn them to be sure to check their loyalties.

The Faithful Witnesses rejoice in the judgment and the end of their suffering (18:20) and praise Yahweh Who reigns and has culminated His marriage covenant with His people! (19:1-10)

2. **19:11-21 – The destiny and judgment of earthly kings, the false prophet, and all who collude against Yahweh and His Kingdom with the return of the Divine Warrior**

“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.” (Revelation 1:7) ¹

19:11-16 – Yeshua comes on a white horse followed by His heavenly army to wage war against the kings of the world. John contrasts Him to violent, warrior depictions. His victory is not by might or conquest (*nike*). He wages war in righteousness by **the sword from His mouth, His sacrifice, and His people:**

- **The sharp sword from His mouth** is His word. *He* is the Word of God (19:13). He speaks and evil is unmasked, truth is proclaimed, and healing and shalom come. His word is so powerful it smites the nations (19:15).
- **His sacrifice** is evidenced by His robe dipped in His own blood (19:13). The word *dipped* is the Greek *baptō* meaning *immersed*; His robe is saturated with His sacrifice, and His victory is complete!² He has no need to wage war as the world wages war with a thrashing, violent sword. No, He already finished the war when He said “It is finished” on the cross! The tribes of the earth will mourn as they see the Truth of His Kingship in the light of His victorious, glorious presence! When He comes in the clouds, He shows Himself as King. The kings and kingdoms of this world will mourn because they missed the mark – their pride and hypocrisy blinded them from recognizing Him before. They fall like stars from the sky in the fierceness of His brilliance! (Zechariah 12:10 indicates the negative aspect of this mourning for what has been missed; the door has been closed shut to His Kingdom.)
- **His faithful witnesses** are in His right hand (the 7 stars of the 7 churches). We know this from Revelation 1:16,20. His people who mirror His ways are in His arsenal. (See Ephesians 6:11-13) [Stars are an apocalyptic symbol of either heavenly messengers (good) or ancient deities (evil).

In verses 19:17-21, we see the gathering of the evil systems spoken of in Revelation 16:13-16 assembled at Har-Magedon (Armageddon) to war against the Lamb. The demonic frogs (16:13-14) have gathered them there. They think they are staged for battle, but they are consumed by the birds in mid-heaven and thrown alive into the lake of fire. Some were killed by the sword of His mouth, His word!

3. **20:1-6 – The destiny and judgment of *ha satan* (the accuser/adversary)**

The dragon is bound and thrown into the abyss for 1,000 years. The word *millennium* is not found in Revelation. 1,000 is a numeric symbol for infinity or an all-encompassing period of time.

- **Judgment on *ha satan*** – The adversary has been captured and completely put away for all time (20:10).

In verses 20:7-10, John uses the Greco-Roman practice of military trials, i.e., the leading general or emperor would return to Rome after a triumph displaying the humiliated foe and spoils through the streets. In 71 CE, General Titus returned after the Jewish war with the holy sacred vessels. The relief on the Titus arch in Rome depicts these items. Dr. Ron Herms suggests the possibility that John is using creative language to take his audience to the theatre to teach that Yahweh's defeat of *ha satan* will be humiliating and obvious to everyone in the entire cosmos.

The Apostle Paul knew this language when he said, “When He [Jesus] disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them having triumphed over them through the cross.” (Colossians 2:15)³

- **Justice for martyrs** – Those who mirror the Lamb are vindicated and given thrones!

Visions and Images of the New Kingdom (20:11-15 – 21:1-8)

4. 20:7-15 – The judgment on earthly inhabitants who disregard Yahweh’s invitation

Still in the wilderness, John returns to the Heavenly Court. The Throne symbolizes authority. Just judgment goes forth. Everything that is not consistent with full, flourishing, redemptive life is eliminated.

Everyone is marked/sealed based on their allegiance. The books represent allegiance accounts. Some accounts contain the political and allegiance records of the earthly kingdoms. All previous chaos has been accounted for and eliminated.

Other accounts contain the records of all the faithful witness, generosity, love and kingdom work of Yeshua’s followers. He knows where each of His children are and calls them each by name. The number 144,000 symbolizes *a number too numerous to count and yet all are accounted for*. Everyone who is numbered and known by the Lamb is sealed, and their suffering is vindicated in the new creation!⁴

The judgment is fiery and eternal:

- **Fiery** – The fire purifies creation and eliminates evil. It is not a literal fire that burns things up but a symbol of the resulting purity when God acts.⁵ I personally think there could be actual fire, but not all-consuming – a fire that takes away the dross and allows for new growth.
- **Eternal** – Eternity is not unending time here. Eternal is not quantitative but *qualitative or complete*. The purification is complete!

5. 21:1-8 – The positive judgment of justice for the Faithful Witnesses of the Lamb!

Continuing in the wilderness scene, John is given a vision of the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, made ready for the people of God!⁶ (Revelation 21:1-2; Genesis 1-2; Ezekiel 40-47) The chaotic sea is no more. How exciting! All suffering will be over (21:4).

John uses two images to describe the New Creation – The first image is a flourishing City; the second is a Garden, the New Eden. All things are made new (not new things but things made new). The images of *City* and *Garden* resonated with his FCAM audience as an expression of divine love. Yahweh’s goal has always been loving relationship. **He is love, not power. His love is the power.** His love is defined in the life, death, and resurrection of Yeshua, the Messiah, the Lamb slain for the entire world. The New Creation has been built on this definition of love. (See Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

Endnotes

¹ For more verses on His coming, search for *Behold, He is Coming in the Clouds* at ShaleFragments.com

² Genesis 49:10-12 – A Prophecy of Yeshua

The scepter will not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh [Messiah, the Peaceful One] comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
He ties his foal to the vine, And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes.
His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth are white as milk.

³ Yeshua’s accusers thought they were making a spectacle of Him on the cross, when He was making a spectacle of the entire domain of darkness!

⁴ For more on His remembrance of our lives, please search for *HIS SIGWORK, Principle 10 of 10 - Knowledge of His Love, Study 2* at ShaleFragments.com

⁵ For more reflection, search for *Purifying Fire* at ShaleFragments.com

⁶ While on earth, Yeshua had said to His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:2-3).