

and the certain outcome of victory encourages the people of God to persevere to the end.

Chapter 13 introduces Satan's two agents for waging war against God's people—the beast out of the sea (13:1–10) and the beast out of the earth (13:11–18). Pagan political power joins forces with false religion. The dragon and the two beasts or unholy trinity resolute on seducing and destroying God's

the reader is once again given a glimpse of the blessings of the d has in store for his people. In spite of the persecution they d, the followers of the Lamb will one day stand with him on g a new song of redemption. Following this heavenly scene ngelic proclamations about God's judgment, followed by two using the images of a grain harvest and a winepress. This final minds us that God's judgment of evil is certain and encourages faithful to Jesus.

Seven Bowls (15:1–16:21)

es seven angels with seven golden bowls filled with the wrath follow the seals and trumpets as the final series of seven. s the pouring out of these seven bowls on the unrepentant world. The plagues are devastating, uninterrupted, uni- versal manifestations of God's anger toward sin and evil. God will make Babylon the Great (the Roman Empire in the first century) drink the "wine of the fury of his wrath" (16:19). In response the earth-dwellers not only refuse to repent, they go so far as to curse God (16:9, 11, 21).

on (17:1–19:5)

on in the book of Revelation John sets before us a "tale of y of humanity (earthly Babylon destined for destruction) and a- venly Jerusalem, where God will dwell among his people 17–18 depict the death of Babylon, the great mother of pros- oubtedly represents Rome, a pagan power said to be "drunk od's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to neral laments of chapter 18 give way to the explosive celebra- d's people rejoice over Babylon's downfall (19:1–5).

tory (19:6–22:5)

Revelation portrays God's ultimate victory over the forces of ward for his people. The scene opens with the announcement he Lamb (19:6–10) and the return of Christ for his bride rrior-Christ returns, captures the two beasts and their allies,

and throws them into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (19:17–21). The dragon, or Satan, is bound (20:1–3), during which time Jesus' faithful followers reign with him (20:4–6). Satan is then released from his temporary prison only to join the two beasts in eternal torment (20:7–10). The dead are judged by him who sits on the great white throne. Anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life is also thrown into the lake of fire (20:11–15). At this point death itself is judged.

Having judged sin, Satan, and death, God ushers in the eternal state of glory. There is a general description of "a new heaven and a new earth" in 21:1–8, fol- lowed by a more detailed presentation in 21:9–22:5. There will be no more crying or pain or death—God is making everything new (21:4). The Old Testament promise that God would live among his people finds its ultimate fulfillment here (21:3). There is no temple in this city of God because God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (21:22).

God's victory is complete, and the fellowship he desired with Adam and Eve is now recovered in a restored garden of Eden complete with "the tree of life" (22:1–2). The curse of sin is removed, and redeemed humanity is once again able to walk with God and see his face (22:4).

9 Conclusion (22:6–21)

Revelation closes with a final blessing on those who keep "the words of the prophecy written in this scroll" (22:7) and a warning for those who practice sexual immorality, idolatry, and the like (22:15). This book is an authentic revelation from God and should be read faithfully to the churches (22:6, 16). Jesus assures his people that his return is imminent (22:7, 12, 20). And John responds with a prayer statement that Christians of all times can make their own—"Come, Lord Jesus." In the meantime, John writes, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen" (22:21).

Revelation 12:1–17 and the Interpretive Journey

Before we close this chapter, we want to show you how to take a passage in Revela- tion through the steps of the Interpretive Journey. Revelation 12:1–17 provides a useful example. We realize that not everyone will agree with our interpretations of this passage, but we will go through the process anyway so that you can see what is involved.

Step 1: Grasp the text in their town. What did the text mean to the biblical audience?

This step consists of understanding the context of chapter 12 so that we may be able to interpret the symbols ("signs" in 12:1, 3) in light of that context. The chapter opens with a woman who is about to give birth to a male child. An enor- mous red dragon is waiting to devour the child. But as soon as the child is born, he is snatched up to God, who also provides a safe place on earth for the mother. The scene then shifts to heaven, where the archangel Michael and his angels fight against the dragon and his angels. The dragon (now explicitly called "the devil, or

Satan,” 12:9) is defeated and thrown down to earth. As a defeated foe who has had to forfeit his place in heaven, the devil pursues the woman with a vengeance and makes war against the rest of her offspring.

How would the first-century audience have understood these characters? Most likely they would not have identified the woman with Mary, the mother of Jesus (a much later interpretation). Instead, they likely would have thought of the woman as the true Israel, the faithful community who gives birth to both the Messiah and the church. Both the male child and the offspring (12:17) serve as keys for identifying the woman. Note that the prophets often portray righteous Israel as a mother and the symbols used in 12:1 confirm this interpretation (cf. Gen. 37:9).²⁴ After giving birth to the Messiah, the woman flees to a place of spiritual refuge for a period of 1,260 days, the time of persecution between the ascension and exaltation of Christ and his future return (cf. Rev. 11:2; 12:14; 13:5).

The dragon is explicitly identified in the passage as the devil, or Satan (12:9). This enemy of God attempts to devour the male child and lead the whole world astray. The detailed description of the dragon as red with seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns only adds to the awesomeness of the image.

We are told that the male child “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter” (12:5), an allusion to Psalm 2 that is applied even more clearly to Jesus in Revelation 19:5. The male child most certainly represents Jesus Christ. After the child is born he is taken up to God. By moving straight from Jesus’ birth to his ascension and enthronement, John stresses that Satan’s evil plot has been foiled by Jesus’ incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation.

The original audience would have understood the war in heaven (12:7–12) and the subsequent rage of the devil (12:13–17) as an explanation of two significant realities. (1) God has defeated Satan and the victory is certain. (2) God’s people on earth will continue to suffer as victims of the devil’s rage. The heavenly perspective would help the original audience to understand their hostile environment and encourage them to persevere. They too can appropriate the victory and overcome the devil “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony,” that is, by bearing faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ even if it costs them their lives (12:11).

Step 2: Measure the width of the river to cross. What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?

Like the original audience, we look back on the first coming of Christ and forward to his second coming. Both the biblical audience and the contemporary audience live between the already and the not yet. Because we share this situation with the original audience, we too can expect to suffer. As offspring of the woman (12:17), we will also encounter the anger of a defeated devil. Nevertheless, because we live in a different place and time (i.e., we are not part of Domitian’s Roman

How would the first-century audience have understood these characters in Revelation 12?

Empire), our suffering may take different forms and may vary. In general, churches in North America are not being persecuted to the extent that churches in Asia Minor were being persecuted, though that could change.

We do, however, struggle with many of the same temptations: immorality, idolatry, false teaching, materialism, and other such sins are still alive and well in our day. Like our ancestors, we also feel the attack of the devil in our attempt to live consistently and faithfully in the midst of a world system opposed to God. We know what it means to be at war with the evil one. The comment in 12:11 that first-century believers “triumphed over him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” and “did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” will pose a strong challenge to North American Christians not considering radical sacrifice for the cause of Christ, much less martyrdom.

Step 3: Cross the principlizing bridge. What are the theological principles in this text?

The theological principles are built on similarities between the original audience and ours. There are several principles or truths that emerge from this text:

- There is a real devil that is opposed to God and is bent on destroying God’s people. Spiritual warfare is real.
- Satan has been defeated by the life and redemptive work of Jesus Christ.
- Christians can overcome the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully.
- Christians can expect to suffer for being faithful in their witness.

Step 4: Consult the biblical map. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?

The rest of the Bible clearly affirms all four principles identified above: the existence of Satan, his purposes of opposing God and his people, the triumph of Christians over him through faithfulness to Christ even to the point of martyrdom (willing to suffer).

Step 5: Grasp the text in our town. How should individual Christians live out this theological principle?

In chapter 13 of *Grasping God’s Word* we explained what is involved in the application of a biblical text. We need to see first how the principles in the text apply to the original situation. Let’s use the third theological principle identified above as an example: “Christians can overcome the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully.” There are several common elements in the original situation: (1) the original audience (2) by living and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully (3) by living and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully (4) even under threat of death.

ated and thrown down to earth. As a defeated foe who has had
in heaven, the devil pursues the woman with a vengeance and
the rest of her offspring.

First-century audience have understood these characters? Most
not have identified the woman with Mary, the mother of Jesus
(much later interpretation). Instead, they likely would have
thought of the woman as the true Israel, the faithful community
who gives birth to both the Messiah and the church. Both the
male child and the offspring (12:17) serve as keys for identifying
the woman. Note that the prophets often portray righteous Israel
as a mother and the symbols used in 12:1 confirm this interpre-
tion (cf. Gen. 37:9).²⁴ After giving birth to the Messiah, the
woman provides a place of spiritual refuge for a period of 1,260 days, the time of
the ascension and exaltation of Christ and his future return
(13:5).

Explicitly identified in the passage as the devil, or Satan (12:9).
Satan attempts to devour the male child and lead the whole world
into his power. The description of the dragon as red with seven heads, ten horns,
and seven crowns only adds to the awesomeness of the image.

The male child "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter."
Psalm 2 that is applied even more clearly to Jesus in Revela-
tion. The male child most certainly represents Jesus Christ. After the child is
taken up to God. By moving straight from Jesus' birth to his ascension
John stresses that Satan's evil plot has been foiled by Jesus'
death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation.

The first-century audience would have understood the war in heaven (12:7–12) and
the attack of the devil (12:13–17) as an explanation of two significant
events: (1) Satan has been defeated and the victory is certain. (2) God's people on
earth will not suffer as victims of the devil's rage. The heavenly perspec-
tive provides the original audience to understand their hostile environment and
how to persevere. They too can appropriate the victory and overcome
the devil by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony," that is,
by living and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ even if it costs them their

width of the river to cross. What are the differences
between the original audience and us?

For the original audience, we look back on the first coming of Christ and
his second coming. Both the biblical audience and the contemporary
audience are in the already and the not yet. Because we share this situation
with the original audience, we too can expect to suffer. As offspring of the woman
we will encounter the anger of a defeated devil. Nevertheless, because
of the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, we can
persevere in our place and time (i.e., we are not part of Domitian's Roman

Empire), our suffering may take different forms and may vary in intensity. In gen-
eral, churches in North America are not being persecuted to the same degree that
churches in Asia Minor were being persecuted, though that could change.

We do, however, struggle with many of the same temptations toward compla-
cency and compromise that the churches of Asia Minor faced. Immorality, idolatry, false teaching, materialism, and other such
sins are still alive and well in our day. Like our ancestors, we also
feel the attack of the devil in our attempt to live consistently and
faithfully in the midst of a world system opposed to God. We
know what it means to be at war with the evil one. The comment
in 12:11 that first-century believers "triumphed over him [Satan]
by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony"
and "did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death"
will pose a strong challenge to North American Christians not accustomed to con-
sidering radical sacrifice for the cause of Christ, much less martyrdom.

Like the first-century Christians,
we also feel the attack of the devil
in our attempt to live consistently
and faithfully in the midst of a
world system opposed to God.

**Step 3: Cross the principalizing bridge. What are the theological principles in
this text?**

The theological principles are built on similarities between their situation and
ours. There are several principles or truths that emerge from this passage:

- There is a real devil that is opposed to God and is bent on deceiving and
destroying God's people. Spiritual warfare is real.
- Satan has been defeated by the life and redemptive work of Christ.
- Christians can overcome the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel of
Jesus Christ faithfully.
- Christians can expect to suffer for being faithful in their witness to Christ.

**Step 4: Consult the biblical map. How does our theological principle fit with
the rest of the Bible?**

The rest of the Bible clearly affirms all four principles identified above (i.e., the
existence of Satan, his purposes of opposing God and his people, and how Chris-
tians triumph over him through faithfulness to Christ even to the point of being
willing to suffer).

**Step 5: Grasp the text in our town. How should individual Christians today
live out this theological principle?**

In chapter 13 of *Grasping God's Word* we explained what is involved in the appli-
cation of a biblical text. We need to see first how the principles in the text address
the original situation. Let's use the third theological principle listed above as an
example: "Christians can overcome the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel
of Jesus Christ faithfully." There are several common elements in the intersection
between this theological principle and the original situation: (1) Christians (2)
experience victory over the devil (3) by living and proclaiming the gospel of Christ
(4) even under threat of death.

Next, we must discover a parallel situation in a contemporary context. In the original context the satanic attack takes the form of persecution. Consequently, we can say that any time Christians suffer persecution for their faithfulness to the gospel of Christ, we have a parallel situation.

Finally, we need to make our application specific so that people will know how to live out this part of the biblical story. In our example, persecuted Christians overcome the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel of Christ. As we mentioned in chapter 13, perhaps the best way to make an application specific is to create a real-world scenario to serve as an illustration or example of how a person might live out the biblical principles. Real-world scenarios or stories should be both faithful to the meaning of the text and relevant to the contemporary audience. You might create a scenario illustrating inappropriate versus appropriate strategies for overcoming the devil (e.g., displaying the bumper sticker “The devil is a nerd” versus authentic, verbal witness to Christ). Or you could come up with a scenario of how to engage the culture with the gospel of Christ rather than withdrawing to avoid persecution. Sometimes a real-life story serves as the best illustration of all.

Consider the gripping account of faithful Christians living on the Indonesian island of Buru:

On the morning of December 23, 1999, a group of Muslims murdered scores of Christians, including women and children at a plywood factory on the Indonesian island of Buru, according to several Christian employees who survived the attack. Christians and Muslims have been fighting for more than a year and hundreds have been killed. Yoke Pauno, a factory worker who has taken refuge in Ambon, the capital, says she saw armed Muslims ask a woman holding a baby if she was “obed” or “achan,” the local slang for Christian and Muslim, respectively. When the woman answered “obed,” both she and her child were brutally killed.²⁵

Real-life scenarios and stories help us to grasp the text in our town.

Conclusion

In the book of Revelation, God pulls back the curtain to give his people a glimpse of his plans for human history. Center stage in this cosmic drama is Jesus Christ, the Lion and the Lamb, who secures victory through sacrifice. Revelation is strange because of its blended literary genre (prophetic-apocalyptic letter), but it is not a closed book. We can grasp the meaning of Revelation and apply it to our lives, but we need to “play by its rules,” not our own.

25. Dr. Randy Richards, our former colleague at Ouachita who served as a missionary to Indonesia, has confirmed the report through his former mission chairman, who personally interviewed one of the eyewitnesses. The story was also reported in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

As we study the historical context of Revelation, we see a situation where Christians were increasingly being persecuted for their faith because they refused to join the pagan parade. The pressure to bow the knee to Caesar was increasing as Jesus was spreading, and hope was beginning to fade. In addition, Christians were growing comfortable with their pagan surroundings and their faithfulness to Christ. Revelation encourages the persecuted Christians to stand firm and not be selling out.

We might say that the purpose of Revelation is to answer the question, “Who is the Lord?” Historian Will Durant, in *The Story of Civilization*, comments:

There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a man scorned and oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all with tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies were fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at the end the strongest state that history has known. Caesar and Christ had fought, and Christ had won.²⁶

Revelation answers this question by creating a symbolic world in which readers may find the heavenly perspective they need to endure trying times. When we read about God on his throne or about the Lamb conquering the beast or about the garden where we will live in the presence of God, we are encouraged to hang in there, to remain faithful. The purpose of the book is to show us in picture language that Jesus rather than Caesar (any Caesar) wins. When we read, we are reminded that God wins and we can continue on in faith.

Revelation is indeed an amazing book. As God paints a picture for history, he uses a rainbow of colors. He overwhelms our imagination with his awesome strength.

As we bow down to worship the Lord God Almighty for his love and to rescue us, the powers of this world lose their grip on our souls. In prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

26. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Part III: Caesar and Christ* (New York: Schuster, 1944), 652, as quoted in Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 210.

cover a parallel situation in a contemporary context. In the satanic attack takes the form of persecution. Consequently, some Christians suffer persecution for their faithfulness to the same parallel situation.

make our application specific so that people will know how of the biblical story. In our example, persecuted Christians come the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel of Christ. mentioned in chapter 13, perhaps the best way to make an application specific is to create a real-world scenario to serve as an illustration or example of how a person might live out the biblical principles. Real-world scenarios or stories should be both faithful meaning of the text and relevant to the contemporary audience. You might create a scenario illustrating inappropriate versus appropriate strategies for overcoming the devil (e.g., displaying the devil is a nerd" versus authentic, verbal witness to Christ). Or with a scenario of how to engage the culture with the gospel of withdrawing to avoid persecution. Sometimes a real-life story illustration of all.

ing account of faithful Christians living on the Indonesian

of December 23, 1999, a group of Muslims murdered scores of women and children at a plywood factory on the Indoruru, according to several Christian employees who survived. Christians and Muslims have been fighting for more than a year and many killed. Yoke Pauno, a factory worker who has taken refuge in a hospital, says she saw armed Muslims ask a woman holding a child "obed" or "achan," the local slang for Christian and Muslim, and the woman answered "obed," both she and her child were

and stories help us to grasp the text in our town.

tion, God pulls back the curtain to give his people a glimpse into history. Center stage in this cosmic drama is Jesus Christ, the Lamb, who secures victory through sacrifice. Revelation is a blended literary genre (prophetic-apocalyptic letter), but it is not. We can grasp the meaning of Revelation and apply it to our lives, "play by its rules," not our own.

ards, our former colleague at Ouachita who served as a missionary to the report through his former mission chairman, who personally interviewed witnesses. The story was also reported in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

As we study the historical context of Revelation, we see a situation where Christians were increasingly being persecuted for their faith because they refused to join the pagan parade. The pressure to bow the knee to Caesar rather than to Jesus was spreading, and hope was beginning to fade. In addition, some Christians were growing comfortable with their pagan surroundings and compromising their faithfulness to Christ. Revelation encourages the persecuted and warns those who were selling out.

We might say that the purpose of Revelation is to answer the question, "Who is Lord?" Historian Will Durant, in *The Story of Civilization*, concludes:

There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned and oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all trials with a fierce tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the strongest state that history has known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and Christ had won.²⁶

Revelation answers this question by creating a symbolic world in which readers may find the heavenly perspective they need to endure trying times. When we read about God on his throne or about the Lamb conquering the beast or about the garden where we will live in the presence of God, we are encouraged to hang in there, to remain faithful. The purpose of the book is to show us in picture language that Jesus rather than Caesar (any Caesar!) is Lord. As we read, we are reminded that God wins and we can continue on in hope.

Revelation is indeed an amazing book. As God paints a picture of his plans for history, he uses a rainbow of colors. He overwhelms our imaginations with his awesome strength.

As we bow down to worship the Lord God Almighty for all he has done to rescue us, the powers of this world lose their grip on our souls. We too pray the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

The purpose of Revelation is to show us in picture language that Jesus rather than Caesar is Lord.

26. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization. Part III: Caesar and Christ* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944), 652, as quoted in Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 248.