

## The Kingdom of God: *Behind the Scenes, part 2*

July 30, 2017

Richard Reaves

### Key Thought:

Revelation 12-14 provides both the behind the scenes vision of the Kingdom of God and God's provisions for living faithfully inside it.

### Goals:

To understand what is going on spiritually in our parallel existence

To feel sobered and encouraged by the existence of these spiritual realities and forces

To follow God's prescriptions for living faithfully as his kingdom citizens

### Message:

Begin with my wife's suggestion for *spicing up* my Revelation study from The Babylon Bee.com:

*Hidden Casserole Recipe Revealed*

*GALVESTON, TX—After studying the Scriptures through the lens of numerology for over three decades, Bible teacher and self-proclaimed prophet Jebidiah Benson has announced a stunning find. An ancient Bible code hidden in the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic texts appears to record a rudimentary recipe for making chicken pasta casseroles.*

*"It looks pretty appetizing, from what I can tell. The trick is to use extra dry mustard for that little bit of zest most casseroles are missing." Jebidiah Benson*

Not sure if I can trust this article however. Other sidebar articles on the website proclaimed:

*Entire city engulfed in artificial fog after megachurch leaves door open*

*Chick-Fil-A food found to contain addictive crack cocaine*

*The Lord Jesus detained at border while attempting Second Coming*

### Recap of last week:

We are in the book of John's Revelation to the churches in Asia Minor in the first century and by extension to Christ followers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well.

Last week we looked at Revelation 12-13 and got a peak behind the scenes of our world. For you see, we live in parallel kingdoms. There is the kingdom of the physical world which we can perceive through our five senses and then there is the Kingdom of God which can only be spiritually apprised through the discernment of the Spirit and the teachings of our Lord.

In chapters 12-13, we saw the ancient conflict between Satan, Jesus Christ and his church. Satan assaulted Jesus from the beginning of his earthly sojourn, through Herod's attempt to kill him after his birth, through tempting him in the wilderness before his public ministry, through those who continually challenged his three-year work and finally, in the Garden of Gethsemane. His goal was to destroy the rescue of humanity by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, but Jesus persevered through his own death and accomplished his earthly task and has now been taken back into heaven.

Now Satan has directed his wrath at the followers of Jesus (on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus). Depicted as a great dragon, Satan has summoned two beasts to do his nasty work: a political, intellectual, cultural force which

attempts to coerce our loyalty to himself and a deceptive religious influence which seeks to corrupt our Christian belief and practice. Both the disciples of the first century churches and we here today must deal with these powerful influences that surround us. Sometimes we feel and/or even express the words of Revelation 13:4b (ESV):

*“Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”*

To give his followers the perspectives and strength they need, Jesus gave St. John the pastor three visions in Revelation 14. Each vision provides important and powerful ways to combat these present evils.

The first vision: Worship the Lord  
Revelation 14:1-3 (ESV)

*Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders.*

What is this new song? It's found in the next chapter: Revelation 15:3-4 (ESV)

*And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

Worship is our first and best line of defense against the wiles of our behind-the-scenes enemy.

- Worship focuses our attention and hope on God, the true and victorious spiritual power. He defeated the forces of the mighty Pharaoh in Moses' day. He still reigns supreme over all earthly forces. His deeds are great and mighty!
- Worship reminds us who is true and just. God reveals the true nature of reality. The devil and his minions only feed us lies.
- Worship also prompts us to declare that the dragon and his beasts are simply poor losers, not worthy of our attention and certainly not our allegiance. God alone is holy and worthy of our worship and obedience?

Thus through worship we are alerted to evil's temptations and diversions, reminded that what they offer are dead ends. Only God can offer us what is truly satisfying. As Isaiah the prophet said in Isaiah 55:2 (NIV):

*Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare*

(E.g. Beer Commercials are trying to sell you something besides beer!)

I'll speak more on worship in a minute.

The second vision: Hear the Word  
Revelation 14:6-9 (ESV)

The second equipping vision involves three angelic pronouncements.

*Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water." Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath."*

These angels proclaim the word of God in spoken form. God's word is the message which helps us discern truth from error.

- The eternal gospel speaks of God's plan for the salvation of the world through the sacrifice of his son, the Messiah. Christ alone provides the true way back to God the Father.
- The judgment of Babylon was the judgment of the Roman Empire in John's day and is the judgment of all political, intellectual and economic systems which stand opposed to God today. One day this invincible evil will come crashing down to destruction.
- The third angel proclaims God's judgment on all evil which resides in the human heart. We have to make our choice whether we elect to follow God or the evil one.

These three pronouncements serve as warnings to those who waver in their commitment to the Lord and his ways. They encourage righteous, informed decision-making and reject the false narratives and enticements of the dragon and his beasts.

One of the dragon's current claims is to declare all truth relative. Today we hear people saying, "What works for you may not work for me. I'll do what works for me." "Truth for you may be different than it is for me. I'll believe what seems like the truth to me." This kind of relativistic thinking makes absolutely no sense to one who worships the God of all truth.

Comedian Stephen Colbert spoke to this craziness when he coined a new word on his show, truthiness. As he described it on his show:

*And that brings us to tonight's word: truthiness. Now, I'm sure some of the Word Police, the wordanistas over at Webster's are going to say, "Hey, that's not a word." Well, anybody who knows me knows that I'm no fan of dictionaries or reference books. They are elitist. Constantly telling us what is or isn't true, or what did or didn't happen. Who's Britannica to tell me the Panama Canal was finished in 1914? If I wanna say it happened in 1941, that's my right. I don't trust books. They're all fact, not heart.*

*(pg. 57-58 Rise of the Nones)*

In a relativistic world, the disciples of Jesus believe in absolute truths which guide our thinking and acting. These truths point out the realities which we must deal with appropriately. The old joke about the guy who jumped off the Empire State Building. Round about the 30 floor someone leaned out the window and asked how it was going. "So far, so good," was his reply.

The third equipping vision: Live the Life  
Revelation 14:14-19 (ESV)

We end our behind the scenes tour of the Kingdom of God with the third vision:

*Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of*

*the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.*

Two harvests are depicted in this vision; the first is by the Lord Jesus who is here identified as the son of man and the other by one of his serving angels. One harvest is of the saints the other is of the stored-up judgment of all evil.

These visions are cautionary tales to remind us of the coming final judgment of all humanity. The kind of life we are now living has eternal consequences. Every step we take is either towards God in obedience or away from God in disobedience. And each leads us closer to one of these two final destinations. For the first century church, this was both an encouraging and sobering word. Encouraging for those who were staking their lives on Jesus and planting the seeds of righteousness. Sobering for those who weren't who were sowing the seeds of destruction.

So it is with us. Every step counts. Every decision leads us somewhere. These harvest visions need to be kept on the back burners of our minds as we make our daily decisions. As Eugene Peterson speaks of this message:

*Holy living is posited on the conviction that everything we do, no matter what we do, however common and little noticed our lives, is connected with the action of God and is seed that becomes either a harvest of holiness or a vintage of wrath.*

The world is full of these *cautionary* tales:

Story of Tyler Hamilton teammate of Lance Armstrong who lost everything due to doping

- He began in a family that held integrity as a very high value
- He worked hard to become an outstanding cyclist, gaining a spot on Lance Armstrong's team: United Postal Service
- But over time his endurance began to diminish. Didn't recover as quickly as others.
- Noticed that some of them received a white bag after each stage. Doping compound.
- He finally gave in so he could be great again.
- When he was caught, he lost everything: wife, Olympic gold, Tour de France medals

Two kingdoms, two parallel realities that you and I live in every day. John's visions give us a look behind the scenes and thereby a proper perspective to rightly interpret our times and our lives. Permit God's spirit to imprint into your mind and heart the stratagems of Worship the Lord, Hear the Word and Live the Life.

Now I want us to fully employ the first of these three prompts. We've turned our usual worship order on its head today.

Having seen the critical importance of worship for us and those around us, let's "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!" Psalm 100:4 (ESV)