



# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## 4: HEROES and VILLAINS - JESUS

### RECAP

We have been reflecting on the Book of Revelation and using the motif of a play.

And so we have looked at the 'Script' (what sort of literature is the Book of Revelation?), at the 'Author' (John) and at the 'Audience' (the 7 churches). Now we turn to the 'Cast', to the Heroes and Villains who appear upon this vast cosmic stage that is the Book of Revelation. The Two Witnesses, the Beast, the Great Dragon, the Woman clothed with the sun and the Scarlet Woman and the New Jerusalem etc.

Remember that John is using pictorial apocalyptic language all the time. It is to be taken seriously but not literally.

But we begin, where Revelation begins and ends, with Jesus.

### 'THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST' (1v1)

- This is a revelation given *by* Jesus.
- This is a revelation given *of* Jesus.

It is easy to miss how soaked the Book of Revelation is with Jesus. In the first three chapters alone He is:-

- The One who is and was and who is to come (1v4,8).
- The faithful and true Witness (1v5; 3v14; 19v11).
- The Firstborn\* from the dead (1v5).
- The Ruler of the kings of the earth (1v5).
- The One who loves us and has freed us by His blood (1v5).
- The Coming One (1v7; 3v11; 22v12).
- The Alpha and the Omega (1v8; 21v6; 22v13).
- The Almighty (1v8).
- 'One like the Son of Man' (1v13).
- The First and the Last (1v17; 2v8; 22v13).
- I Am (1v17).
- The Living One (1v18).
- The One who was dead but is now alive forever (1v18; 2v8).
- The Holder of the keys of Death and of Hades (1v18).
- The One who holds the 7 spirits and the 7 stars and who walks among the 7 lampstands (2v1; 3v1).
- The One who has the sharp, double edged sword (2v12,16; 19v15).
- The Son of God (2v18).
- The Ruler of the nations with an iron sceptre (2v27; 12v5; 19v15)
- The One who is Holy and True (3v7).
- The One who holds the key of David (3v7).
- The Amen (3v14).
- The Ruler of God's creation (3v14).

\*'Firstborn' does not mean created first but is a title of honour and of standing in a special relationship to God (Gn.49v3; Heb.1v6). Israel, King David and the believer are all described as being God's 'firstborn' (Ex.4v22; Ps.89v27; Heb.12v23). The rabbis described the Law in a similar way, as did Jeremiah of the Temple (Jer.17v12).

And then Jesus is further revealed as:-

- The Lion of the tribe of Judah (5v5).
- The Root and Offspring of David (5v5; 22v16).
- The Lamb (5v6-8,12-13; 6v1,3,5,7,16; 7v9-10,14,17; 12v11;14v1,4; 15v3; 17v14; 19v7,9; 21v9,14,22-23,27); 22v1,3).
- The Shepherd (7v17).
- The Christ (11v15; 20v4,6).
- A Thief (16v15).
- King of kings and Lord of lords (17v14; 19v16).
- The Rider on the White Horse (19v11)
- The Word of God (19v13).
- The Bridegroom / Husband (19v7,9; 21v2,9).
- The Beginning and the End (21v6; 22v13).
- The Temple (21v22).
- The Lamp (21v23).
- The bright Morning Star (22v16).
- Lord Jesus (22v20).

In total that is some 36 revelations of the nature and character, power and purpose of Jesus!

## SOMEONE LIKE A 'SON OF MAN' 1v12-20.



John is clearly referencing Dan.7v13-14 and the revelation of the exalted and divine Son of Man. In the New Testament this is glimpsed on the Mount of Transfiguration and given a theological explanation by Paul in Col.1v15-20.

The Lord is seen standing amongst the lampstands, which are revealed as the 7 churches (1v13,20). Christ stands amidst and amongst His people in power and in majesty and the Church and the believer shines with the light of Christ (Mt.5v14-16; Jn. 8v12; 9v5). However as the Church in Ephesus is warned, if a church ceases to shine with this light it loses its reason for existence (2v5).

It has been pointed out that in this opening chapter Jesus is portrayed as Prophet (1v1) and as King (1v5) and in 1v12-20, as Priest. His clothes reflect to an extent the robes of the High Priest (Ex.28v4; 29v5; 39v29) and of course it is especially this image of Christ as the High Priest which is explored and developed by the writer to the Hebrews.

The entire description of this Heavenly Priest, His head and hair, His eyes and feet, His voice and hand, His mouth and face, all speak of power and of majesty and of glory and the effect upon John was overwhelming (1v17). However, there is one addition which would not be expected of a priest: out of His mouth comes a sharp, double edged sword (1v16). There comes a moment when those who reject the atoning sacrifice made by the Lamb and presented by the High-Priest before the throne of God, will have to experience the consequences of that rejection and of the hardness of their heart. But the priest also speaks the words of God, which people reject at their peril (Mal.2v5-7; Eph.6v17; Heb.4v12-13). The picture of the sword of judgement will be repeated throughout Book of Revelation (2v12; 19v15,21).

Within this description of the 'Son of Man' comes Jesus' own self-description of Who He is and what He has done (1v17-18).

- He is the 'I AM', the Divine Name, recorded most clearly in the 'I AM' sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel but also found elsewhere in the Synoptics and of course in the Old Testament, most famously at the Burning Bush in Ex.3v14. (*I am* the First and the Last, *I am* the Living One').
- He is the 'First and the Last' (22v13; Isa.44v6; 48v12).
- The Living One.
- The One who was dead but is now alive forever (2v8).
- The Holder of the keys of Death and of Hades .

In short there is nothing and no-one outside His authority and power, nothing and no-one beyond His grace and love. Even Death and Hades are under His ultimate control. This will be important because as the Book unfolds, the powers of Satan can appear to grow ever stronger and the power of the saints ever weaker (e.g.ch.13) and where is God in all of this? The answer is to go back to the first chapter and to get refocused.

## THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE (19v11-21)



Once again Heaven is opened (cf 4v1) and an unexpected vision is given to John. A logical follow on from the preceding verses of ch.19 might be to take us straight to the events described in chapters 21 and 22. Instead we are given a revelation of judgement and of war.

John gives us a description of what the Rider looks like and of his nature and character and of his purpose and action.

### The Description

His eyes are like blazing fire (19v12; cf1v14). He is filled with glory and with passion and zeal for the will of God (cf Jn.2v17). Nothing is hidden from His penetrating gaze (cf Isa.29v15). Upon His head are 'many crowns' (19v12), which is explained a few verses later in His Name – 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (19v16). All part of what it means for Him to be the 'Alpha and the Omega', the 'Beginning and the End', God's first and last word on everything.

In his train ride the armies of Heaven but notice that their role is not in fact to wage war - their clothing is 'fine linen, white and clean', for the battle has already been won and is won by this Rider alone. (19v14). His and their white horses (mirrored earlier in the angel on the white horse, who rode out as a 'conqueror bent on conquest' 6v2), is a picture not simply of majestic kingly power but of victory.

The Rider is also dressed in a 'robe dipped in blood' (19v13). There are four possible understandings of what this means and we may choose one explanation over another or be content to hold them all as all containing elements of divine wisdom and truth.

- This is meant to be understood as the actual blood of the unrighteous. Certainly there is a very vivid description of judgement, where blood rises up to the horses' bridles (14v20).
- This is meant to be symbolic of God's judgement upon the wicked. One of the common metaphors for God's judgement in the Bible is that of the grape and of the winepress. As the grapes are crushed underfoot and the red juice flows out (the 'blood' of the grape), so too God will crush those who have rebelliously risen up against Him. (Isa.63v1-3,6; Lam.1v15; Joel 3v12-13; Rev.14v18-20; 19v15). Or sometimes the wicked will drink the wine cup of God's wrath (Ps.75v8; Isa.51v17; Jer.25v15-18; Rev.14v10; hence Mt.20v22-23). And throughout Revelation blood is a symbol of divine and catastrophic judgement (6v12; 8v7-8; 11v6; 16v3-4,6). So the Rider's robes are symbolically stained with this 'bloody' judgement.

- The innocent blood of the saints (6v9-11; 16v6, 17v6; 18v24; 19v2; cf Acts 9v4). Christ cannot be unmoved by the suffering of His people but more than that He is intimately interconnected with their distress. If they are part of His 'body', how can He not be affected and so His clothes bear and share their spilled blood.
- If it is blood on the Rider's robes, then who is to say that it is not His own blood, shed on the Cross? In 7v14 the martyrs are described as having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The armies of Heaven do not need to fight because the battle has already been won. But the Rider conquers not by the death of others but by His own death (cf 1v5; 5v6,9; 12v11).

## His Nature and Character

Much of His Character and Actions are actually found in Isa.11v1-5, which of course we should expect from the One who is the 'Shoot of Jesse' (Isa.11v1), the 'Root and Offspring of David' (5v5; 22v16).

He is Faithful and True (3v14; 19v11), with a 'Name' known only to Himself but which is revealed to us as the 'Word of God' (19v12-13). In the pagan world, to know someone's name was to have power over them and there may be an element of this contained here. But more profoundly surely, this tells us that there are untold and unfathomed depths to Christ who within Himself contains both everything that God desires to say and everything that can be said about God (Rom. 11v33-36). This Name is written both on His robe and on His thigh. Visible when He is mounted, this is not some mere external title of honour that a king might be given or take to himself. This is who Jesus is.

## His Purpose and Actions

The Rider comes to bring in the Kingdom of God but unlike the ravenous Beast or the rapacious Roman empire, He not only judges with justice but also wages war with justice (19v11). This is no lust for power or for destruction, no desire to extend an empire or to subjugate nations. This is the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth as in Heaven. But because it is the establishment of God's Kingdom against all others, the rule that the Rider ushers in is absolute and is absolutely righteous. Reflecting Isa.11 but most especially Ps.2 and already appearing twice in Revelation (2v27; 12v5), the wicked, both mortal and spiritual, are totally defeated and placed under God's unbreakable authority and power to face utter and complete ruin (19v15-16).

This judgement is described as experiencing not just God's fury or God's wrath but as experiencing the 'fury of the wrath of God Almighty' (19v15)! This is no outburst of uncontrolled emotion, because the Lord judges with justice but it is a revelation of the heart of God. Injustice and oppression make His heart burn and they should make ours burn also! The wickedness and sorrow that Satan and his servants have delighted in and of which they have been the instruments, mean that they will now reap what they have sown. Their anger over those who opposed them and their power over those who resisted them and their punishment of those who held true to the Lord, will be as nothing compared to what they now face from God (cf 11v18; 18v20!

## The Revelation of Jesus Christ



These two great descriptions of the Lord Jesus come at the very start and then almost at the end of Revelation. But the most common description of the Lord Jesus and one that might surprise us in this apocalyptic book, first makes its appearance in chapter 5v5-6: '*See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed... Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain...*'

## THE LAMB...

But that is for another study