

## Gods Big Picture 8 The Perfected Kingdom Revelation

### Introduction

On Thursday evening 6 May 2010 at 10pm the polls officially closed in the United Kingdom general election. How would the results turn out? Who would be the winners and who the losers? It was far too close to call. Even with the most sophisticated analysis by the different polling organisations, allowing for their margins for error, the results were too close to call. As the night unfolded there were some big surprises. The victor for Labour in Edinburgh South, Ian Murray, confessed that he had not bothered to write a victory speech because he fully expected to lose and was (nearly) lost for words at the podium when the result had been declared. One person who had probably written his speech would have been the member for Belfast East, Northern Ireland's First Minister Peter Robinson, yet a swing to the Alliance Party of over 40% gave that party its first seat after 40 years of trying. Similarly the Green Party was equally triumphant after its Party leader Caroline Lucas took Brighton Pavilion from the Labour Party, its own first ever seat in the House of Commons. Overall, though, the country will experience a hung parliament for the first time in a generation with no one party in overall control of the government. The final outcome is far from certain on the morning after the day of the election. Christians can often feel that way too about how things are going in the world. Although those that are well informed about the overall picture worldwide know that Evangelical Christianity has never had so many million people claiming to hold to its tenets, it does not feel like that too often in our own country. In the public square Christianity is often marginalised and total numbers attending churches has been on a downward trend over the last century. We can begin to ask questions about what is going on and what does the future hold for Christian witness in the United Kingdom? Yet we are invited here in Revelation to take a step back and reflect on how God views world history from the coming of Christ to the consummation of history at his return. God's Big Picture is on display and provides much encouragement to us to keep focussed on the calling He has entrusted to us of sharing the good news with all people in a meaningful and holistic way. What are the key themes we pick up in Revelation?

### **1. The Centrality of God in the Kingdom (Revelation 4-5) *Triumph***

(a) **God the Father with the Spirit on the throne** (Rev.4) (i) **The Summons from God** (Rev.4:1) In a court of law there is one moment above all others that is the highpoint of the drama. The trial or case may have lasted a few days or a few months, but when the foreman informs the judge that the jury have reached their verdict the tension begins to mount and silence descends upon the courtroom. The jury members file back into their seats. The defendant, together with the assembled members of the public, anxiously views their faces for any sign of the verdict they have reached. The voice of the judge breaks that silence: 'How do you find the defendant as charged –guilty or not guilty?' The foreman will utter only one word, but its power will affect the destiny of many people in that room for the rest of their lives. Will justice be served or will a guilty person walk free? Might an innocent man on trial be convicted for a crime he didn't commit? These and many other questions flood through the minds of the people present and many others outside. The book of Revelation is

building to a climax not in a court case, but at the end of time when God brings history as we know it to the conclusion of the final chapter. Revelation 4:1 contains these dramatic words: *After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."* In its context these words were spoken to John, but its equivalent summons will one day be issued to you and to me –will you be ready? Have you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ or are you taking the biggest risk possible to humankind by failing to honour the call to follow the Son of God? Our life here on earth is but a moment of time, compared to the eternity that awaits us on the other side of the grave. How are you living your life? What place does the Lord Jesus have in it? Paul, the great Christian leader wrote these powerful words: *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup>I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup>but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body* (Philippians 1:21-24). This confidence can be yours –if you Jesus has first place in your life? The Christian confession of faith is not ‘Jesus is my Saviour’, although that is true. It is *Jesus is Lord* (Romans 10:9-10: *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*) Jesus in the Lord’s Prayer (John 17:24) prayed these inspirational words: *Father, I want those You have given me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world.* If you were to receive this summons tonight where would you be spending eternity? (ii) **The Sight of God** (Rev.4:2-6a) *At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup>And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. <sup>4</sup>Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God (NIV mg). <sup>6</sup>Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.* John is struggling to describe the brilliant multi-coloured sight of the glory of God. His words are totally inadequate to express the fullness of the glory of God. He Himself is invisible. I Timothy 6:16 states concerning Him: *who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To Him be honour and might forever. Amen.* In heaven we will see something of His glory and in response with all of His creatures that are present will bow down in worship and adoration (Rev.4: 6b-11). Yet our focus will be on the Lamb, the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. (b) **The Victorious Lamb who had been slain** (i) **The sight John saw** (Rev.5:6) *Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which is the sevenfold spirit of God sent out into all the earth.* We are familiar with Jesus being described as *the lamb*. John the Baptist declared to his followers this extraordinary statement about Jesus: *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29). However, the Greek word used there for lamb (αμνος) is different to the one used in Revelation (αρνιον), for example in Rev.5:6). Outside of Revelation this word is used to describe lambs as we visualise them in the countryside; however, in Revelation it is a different word that is used for the dominant ram in the flock that leads the flock; one that

serves as their head and is in charge. John's visual pictures do keep changing. Only a verse earlier Jesus is called: *the Lion of the tribe of Judah* yet in view of the word used for lamb in Revelation there is a consistent image here of a strong figure who has accomplished His goals. (ii) The Songs John heard (Rev.5:9-14) praises from both the angelic hosts and from humankind. At its heart was the same theme repeated over and over again: *You are worthy... because **You were slain** and with Your blood You purchased men for God* (Rev.5:9); *Worthy is the Lamb **who was slain**...* (Rev.5:12); Evangelical Christians have long been criticised for their emphasis on the cross and the sacrificial death of Jesus. Revelation reminds us that the glory of the crucified, risen and exalted Saviour of sinners will be equally central in the praises of the redeemed in heaven! If we needed it this is a reminder that without the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus on the cross there is no salvation. In our pluralist society with its many ways to God Revelation serves as a reminder that God has provided the way to heaven through the death and atoning sacrifice of His beloved Son. The outstanding issue here is simply this: what is my response to the Lamb who was slain? Polite words about a great moral figure or a wonderful teacher appear patronising in the light of the glimpses of heaven revealed in Revelation 5.

## **2. The Cost of Enduring in the Kingdom (Rev.6:10) Tribulation**

(a) Suffering as part of obtaining salvation As early as Revelation 1:9 John wrote: *I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.* In Western Christianity there have been two extraordinary phenomena –Christian Reconstructionists who work towards the ‘restoration’ of Old Testament civil laws which would make unbelief virtually illegal (mainly in the USA) and the Prosperity Gospel, teaching that God guarantees wealth and perfect health to the believers who have sufficient faith to claim it! In both cases these movements are based on misinterpretations of the Old Testament law and in any case we are living post Pentecost in the Church Age! The Gospel of Jesus stands in bold contradiction to these misleading emphases. Jesus said in John 16:33: *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble (tribulation NKJV). But take heart! I have overcome the world.* In Mark 8:34-35 Jesus explained the meaning of Christian discipleship: *Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.* <sup>35</sup> *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it.* More Christians have been martyred for their faith in the last one hundred years than in any previous century, both in absolute numbers and compared to the size of the total world population. There will be a cost to remaining faithful to Christ. Some people will lose their careers; others be denied deserved promotions; Christian political candidates may be vilified in the press for their ‘extreme’ views; Philippa Stroud, for example, Conservative candidate in Sutton and Cheam was the victim of an attack by *The Observer* newspaper on 2 May 2010, because amongst other dreadful things she was the wife of a New Frontiers’ Church pastor. It is very possible that she failed to take the seat for her party as a result of such attacks. We were fortunate in our own constituency that all the candidates appeared to behave so honourably, but this was not the case in other parts of the country. Yet our difficulties are very minor inconveniences compared to the torture and imprisonment, even the murder of our brothers and sisters in Christ, in other countries. Like the Psalmist in Psalm 79:5, the suffering Church is pictured crying out to God in the face of such injustice. John reported in Revelation 6:9-11: *I saw under the altar the souls of those who*

had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. <sup>10</sup> They called out in a loud voice, How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? <sup>11</sup> Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow- servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed. The growth of the Church and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world will throughout the centuries be accompanied by these trials and tribulations until the end of the age (see, for example, Revelation 12:17; 13:10) Yet those responsible will face God's judgement. Rev.16:5-6: *Then I heard the angel in charge...say: You are just in these judgments, You who are and who were, the Holy One, because You have so judged;*<sup>6</sup> *for they have shed the blood of **Your** saints and prophets.* To attack God's people for their faith in God is an attack on the Lord Himself. Remember Jesus' words to Saul on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:4-5: This young man who was obsessed with persecuting followers of Jesus *heard a voice say to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute **Me**?* <sup>5</sup> *Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied.* Most Christians who suffer for their faith will not see justice or vindication in this life, but God will make sure that the unrepentant are called to account for their actions in the world to come. (b) **Rewards for faithful endurance** the principle is referred to throughout the New Testament. Here in Revelation 2:10 Jesus said these words to the suffering congregation in Smyrna: *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.* Our focus individually must primarily be not on how well other people are living for the Lord, but how committed am I to following Jesus? Am I living as I should? Do I encourage or discourage other Christians in the way I behave? I trust at the end of our lives each of us can say with the apostle Paul: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*<sup>8</sup> *Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day— and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing* (II Timothy 4:7-8).

### 3. **The War that had to be waged** (Rev.12:7-9) war in heaven

Revelation 12:7-9 states: *And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.* <sup>8</sup> *But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.* <sup>9</sup> *The great dragon was hurled down— that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.* This is in line with the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10-12: *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.* <sup>11</sup> *Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* <sup>12</sup> *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* The drama of human righteousness and sinfulness played out on earth mirrors a similar conflict taking place between God and His heavenly host with Satan and the angels that fell with him when he was expelled out of heaven [Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:14-17; Rev. 12]. Jesus at various times drew attention to this spiritual conflict with the evil one (for example, Luke 11:14-28). In John 8:44 He uttered some very strong words to some people who opposed His ministry: *You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* Even Simon Peter, one of His disciples, was rebuked with these words in Matthew 16:23 when he criticised Jesus for speaking about His forthcoming death. *Jesus turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, **Satan!** You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.* Jesus defeated the temptations of Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13), but Luke 4:13 contains some ominous words: *When the devil had finished all this tempting, **he left***

**him until an opportune time.** The battle was far from over. Satan was determined to pressure Jesus into avoiding going to the cross. He knew that if Jesus gave His life for us and paid in full the cost of our redemption that he was defeated. Hence Jesus' cry from the cross 'finished' (John 19:30). This was more than the end of His pain and agonies on Calvary, it brought to an end the hopes of Satan. Satan had lost the battle, he was a defeated foe. In Colossians 2:15 Paul wrote: *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* Even before the cross Jesus prophetically declared the defeat of Satan as His followers, post Pentecost, would take the Gospel to the world. In Luke 10:16-20, in a context in which His followers were reporting back after a mission trip, Jesus said the following: *He who listens to you listens to Me; he who rejects you rejects Me; but he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.* <sup>17</sup> *The seventy-two returned with joy and said, Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name.* <sup>18</sup> *He replied, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.* <sup>19</sup> *I have given you authority...to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.* <sup>20</sup> *However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.* The book of Revelation is more explicit about this spiritual battle, but its teaching is only following on from earlier books in this theme. Satanic opposition is hinted at by Jesus in His comments to the Churches in Revelation two to three (Rev.2:13; 2:24-25; 3:9), but the final triumph of God's people, in Christ, is assured: *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.* <sup>11</sup> ***They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*** Over time there will be many battles and conflicts on earth, some will apparently be won and others lost by believers. A lot has been made in some circles about the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16), a final battle between major powers near the end of the world taking place in Israel. Undoubtedly this extraordinary conflict will be significant when the time comes. However, as Christians we should spend more time rejoicing over Satan's Armageddon at Calvary when Jesus triumphed over him, ensuring that our salvation was eternally secure. We will never work out conclusively the details of the end times, but we can rest assured that we are on the winning side, because Jesus has triumphed! Hallelujah!

#### **4. The Final Triumph of the Lamb (Rev.21:1) a new heaven and a new earth**

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.* <sup>2</sup> *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.* <sup>3</sup> *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, **for the old order of things has passed away** (Rev.20:1-4 –mentioned earlier in Isaiah 65:17). Sin disrupted and then led to the degeneration of the created order. In Christ not only humanity, but the created order itself will be regenerated and restored (Romans 8:18-23). God's intentions for His world will be fulfilled. The 'new heavens and the new earth' will be a physical world, in which we will have the ability to touch taste hear, handle and see the wonders of God's creation. Notions of floating on clouds with harps all day fall well short of the mark and have no basis in Scripture! When we die we leave our bodies behind in the grave. At that point believers will go directly to heaven (II Corinthians 5:6-8: *Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.* <sup>7</sup> *We live by faith, not by sight.* <sup>8</sup> *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*) to give*

an account for the way we have lived our lives (II Corinthians 5:9-10: *So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.* <sup>10</sup> *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*). This judgement will be not about our place in heaven which is not in doubt, but to determine if we are to be honoured for service for the Lord, and if so what honours. [I Corinthians 3:11-15 explains: *For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* <sup>12</sup> *If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,* <sup>13</sup> *his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.* <sup>14</sup> *If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.* <sup>15</sup> *If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.* Our works will be tested metaphorically by fire not us –there is no reference to purgatory in the Bible. This notion was found in some Jewish writings outside the Bible and taken up by the Roman Catholic Church in the early Medieval period but it has no biblical basis]. When Jesus returns He will bring with Him all believers who have died at an earlier time in history and we who remain on earth on that day will meet them in the air and all simultaneously will gain our new resurrection bodies. Paul told the Thessalonians in I Thessalonians 4:13-18: *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.* <sup>14</sup> *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*<sup>15</sup> *According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.*<sup>16</sup> *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.*<sup>17</sup>*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. And so we will be with the Lord for ever.* <sup>18</sup> *Therefore encourage each other with these words.* Revelation 20:11-15 speaks about the separate judgement at the great white throne of those who have rejected Jesus who in turn are rejected by Him and face their eternal punishment. No-one will be forced to be in heaven who has not desired to be there. God does not want anyone to spoil His celebrations! The details given in Revelation 21-22 are impressions of the splendour of the glorious inheritance God has prepared for those who love Him. It will be more beautiful than we can ever imagine and more fulfilling than anything we have experienced so far on earth and in a context where sin and evil cannot be found. No wonder Paul told the Corinthians: *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him* (I Corinthians 2:9).

## **5. Genesis to Revelation –Comparison and Contrast**

### **Genesis 1-3**

### **Revelation 20-22**

<i>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth</i> (Gen 1:1)	<i>I saw a new heaven and a new earth</i> (Rev.21:1)
<i>The darkness He called 'night'</i> (Gen.1:5)	<i>There shall be no night there</i> (Rev.21:25)
<i>God made two great lights</i> (sun and moon) (Gen1:16)	<i>The city does not need the sun or the moon</i> (Rev.21:23)
<i>when you eat of it you will surely die</i> (Gen.2:17)	<i>There shall be no more death nor sorrow</i> (Rev.21:4)
Satan appears as the deceiver of humankind (Gen.3:1)	Satan is banished forever (Rev.20:10)
A world where impurity entered (Gen.3:6-7)	A world where <i>nothing impure will ever enter</i> (Rev.21:27)
Fellowship with God impaired (Gen. 3:8-9)	Fellowship with God restored (Rev.21:3)
The initial triumph of the Evil One (Gen.3:13)	The ultimate triumph of King Jesus (Rev.20:10; 22:3)

Pain and suffering increased (Gen.3:16)	<i>There will be no more death...or crying or pain</i> (Rev.21:4)
<i>Cursed is the ground because of you</i> (Genesis 3:17)	<i>No longer will there be any curse</i> (Rev.22:3)
The rule of humanity impaired (Gen.3:19)	<i>And they will reign for ever and ever</i> (Rev.22:5)
The first paradise closed (Gen.3:23-24)	The second paradise opened forever (Rev.21:25)
Access denied to <i>the tree of life</i> (Gen.3:24)	Access to <i>the tree of life</i> restored (Rev. 22:14)
Humanity banished from God's presence (Gen.3:23-24)	<i>They shall see His face</i> (Rev.22:4)

[based on 'Applying the Alpha-Omega Principle', *Walk Thru the Old Testament*, p.44]

**6. Come Lord Jesus** (Rev.22:20) *I am coming soon*

In the light of such blessings and glory. Jesus declares in Revelation 22:12-13: *Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.* <sup>13</sup> *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.* What is our response? John pictures the response to Jesus' words from the Holy Spirit and from His bride, the Christian Church: *The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life* (Rev.22:17). This verse ends with a challenge. Have you received this gift of salvation? Has there been a time when you prayed a prayer of commitment to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour? I trust that each one of us either has already done so or will do so today, for Jesus' sake, Amen.