

THE COMPLETION OF THE EXODUS

Revelation 14:1-15:4

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Introduction

It was August 23 1973 when four women were taken hostage at a bank in Stockholm, Sweden by 32-year-old career-criminal Jan-Erik Olsson. Six days later when the stand-off ended, it became evident that the victims had formed some kind of positive relationship with their captors. Stockholm Syndrome was born by way of explanation. During the remaining decade, psychiatrist Dr. Frank Ochberg was intrigued by the phenomenon and went on to define the syndrome for the FBI and Scotland Yard in the 1970s.

His criteria for the syndrome included the following:

"First people would experience something terrifying that just comes at them out of the blue. They are certain they are going to die.

"Then they experience a type of infantilisation - where, like a child, they are unable to eat, speak or go to the toilet without permission."

Small acts of kindness - such as being given food - prompts a "primitive gratitude for the gift of life," he explains.

"The hostages experience a powerful, primitive positive feeling towards their captor. They are in denial that this is the person who put them in that situation. In their mind, they think this is the person who is going to let them live."

Though police say that such situations are extremely rare in hostage situations, the phrase "Stockholm Syndrome" has become well-known in our vernacular. We use it to describe times when captives fall in love with their captors or seem to want to stay or return to their captivity, humorously just think "The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt", but perhaps a better illustration comes to us from the book of Exodus.

You recall that as the Israelites begin to be tested by God in the wilderness and begin facing various challenges or trials that they begin to long for Egypt. Some miss it; some want to return. And when we studied this passage a year ago we saw this incident as really a paradigm for all, the temptation to return to the land of bondage from which we've been redeemed; the struggle to enter into the Promised Land.

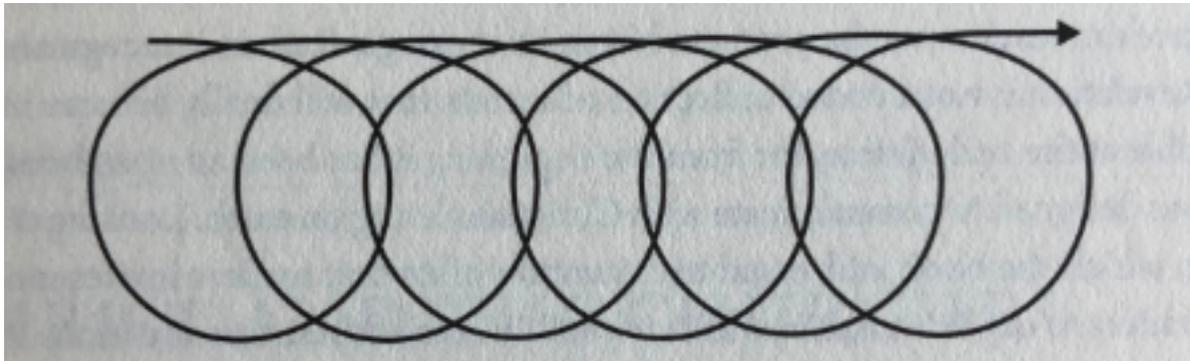
For the Israelites of Exodus this was a literal issue; as they finally did arrive in the land it became a spiritual issue. Created to be a redeemed people in the midst of a fallen world, to be a light and testimony of the holiness and justice of God, the Old Testament shows us how time and time again Israel joined in *with* the City of Man, as opposed to living as witnesses to the City of God. Whether it was the Egyptians, the Canaanites, or the Babylonians generations and generations found themselves not forced to adopt these pagan practices, but subtly seduced to willingly do so. And as we've seen in the book of Revelation, just because the people of God are now permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, doesn't mean they aren't pressured and tempted back into bondage either.

This is John's purpose, however; this is his reason for writing to the seven churches. He continues to show the reader how they are in the midst of a conflict between the powers of God and evil in which neutrality is not possible. And here in chapter 14 we see the outcomes of the conflict, revealed to us so as to give the reader incentive to persevere. Chapter 14 assures that God has not forgotten His people, that He will judge evil and restore His world. This passage teaches us that **Though God's people will suffer persecution and hardship because of their loyalty and witness to the Lamb, they may rest confidently in God's sovereign power to eternally bless them and judge evil.**

1. The faithful may be assured that God will vindicate them v. 1-5

Now, just a few comments to make sure we understand the context of the chapter and its place within the wider revelation we've seen and will receive in coming weeks. Hopefully you recall from week one of our series that the book is not meant to be read chronologically, meaning what happens in chapter 12 follows what happens in chapter 11, or what we read this week

precedes chapter 15 temporally. Rather, John writes this book as a series of vision cycles, as pictured like this:



1-3	4-7	8-11	12-15	15-19	19-22
7 churches	7 seals	7 trumpets	Visions	7 plagues	Visions

As you can see, then, here we are in the fourth of six cycles in Revelation, with this present cycle having begun in chapter 12 and concluding, as we see this morning, in verse 4 of chapter 15. This present cycle began with the incarnation and birth of Christ and ends here with the final judgment. In other words, you may say, these chapters cover the entire history of the church with chapters 12 and 13 focusing on the persecution of believers by the forces of unbelief led by Satan and his two beastly allies.

Chapter 14 shows, however, the final reward of the persecuted faithful and the final punishment of the beast and those who follow him. And then it all culminates at the beginning of chapter 15 with the glory of God. Gordon Fee, thus, comments,

Here at last are the *theological explanations* of God's coming judgments, in which the martyrs are accorded their special place in the divine design. In effect John is now offering his own 'tale of the martyrs,' The gruesome pictures of chapter 13 are followed by a picture of eschatological victory, as the contrasts between the two kinds of marks on the foreheads seem to make certain, (Gordon Fee).¹

¹ Fee, *Revelation*, 188.

We last saw week, in chapter 13, the beast and the false prophet dominate the sea and the land, but verse 1 of chapter 14 reminds us that the Lamb stands on Mount Zion. Verse 3 quickly reminds us of the heavenly throne room scene of chapters 4 and 5, that above all things Christ reigns in heaven. And not only is Christ there but so is the body of believers, the faithful departed. We addressed the significance of the number 144,000 back in chapter seven, seeing there that in John's symbolism the number represents the entire people of God.²

And contrast them with the depiction of the lost we saw last time in chapter 13. They are marked by the seal or the name of Christ, not the beast. They sing song the lost cannot know, meaning their praise is to the Lamb alone; they are uncompromised in the allegiance and worship. This is manifested, though, not just in their singing, but in their whole life; they demonstrate loyalty to Christ in their lifestyles. Right, remember from the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3, the majority of believers in the first century empire were facing temptations to compromise their faith in the interest of financial security or social acceptance.

Or, frankly, there was the temptation to join in with the culture around them because it's appealing. We talked about this last time, John pictures the beast in a way that's attractive, or charismatic. It's not always obvious to us; in fact, it would seem that it's rarely that way. If the mark of the beast or the false prophet were blatantly clear to us then we'd easily resist it; there wouldn't be such a worry toward compromise. In our context today if it was as overt as you going to temple to offer sacrifices to a stone idol, I'd like to think this church would be faithful to Christ.

² Beale writes, "The number – the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles, representing the church, multiplied by one thousand as symbolic of completeness – connotes the full number of God's true people throughout the ages who are viewed as true Israelites and is in antithesis to the beast's followers with 666 on their foreheads, which connotes their incompleteness in achieving the divine design for humanity," (Beale, *Revelation*, 293).

But that's not the way we're tempted. Rather, the signs of the evil one are deceptive, meaning you don't know these things are evil or outright violate one's allegiance to Christ, which is why John has continually sought to fix our eyes on the Lamb and on His heavenly worship. When we focus on what is of Him, then it becomes clearer to us what is not. I mean, don't get me wrong, there are always going to be particular situations or things where we're unsure of what God wants us to do, places where we have to seek the Lord's wisdom and discernment. But there are also a lot of things in life than when our eyes are fixed on Christ and we are humbly seeking His will and not our own that it's clear how we should live.

Consider verse 4, "These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women, since they remained virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were redeemed from humanity as the firstfruits for God and the Lamb," (Revelation 14:4). Now good news, married folks, this verse does not mean your heavenly fate requires lifelong virginity. Rather, John is drawing from a common military practice in his day to make a bigger point. Traditionally, soldiers in battle were expected to refrain from sex, thus in this picture of a cosmic battle John pictures believers who are pure and focused in the midst of temptation. They don't give their focus and their energies to lesser things but focus on the Lamb and follow Him wherever He goes. Verse 5 echoes Isaiah 53, where it is said of Christ,

He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
but he was with a rich man at his death,
because he had done no violence
and had not spoken deceitfully, (Isaiah 53:9).

That this verse is then applied to the saints means that though they are not blameless, their righteousness comes by virtue of their union with Christ. They find their entire identities and mission in Him and Him alone.

What these first five verses show is the assurance of promise that to abide in Christ ensures everlasting citizenship in the Kingdom of God. True saints are disciples of Jesus; it's not just something they say, but something they live out in every aspect of their lives.

2. The faithful must endure in following the Lamb and rejecting the beast v. 6-13

And so, if this is the identity of those who are redeemed, those who have been brought out of bondage, John shows next that the faithful must also endure in following the Lamb and rejecting the beast. In other words, to draw from our Israel-Egypt analogy, they must not look back and long to return, but must persevere and press on toward the Promised Land. Three angels come into view here, each with a distinct message, but ones that when taken altogether convey the message, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on," (Revelation 14:13).

The first angel comes, "with the eternal gospel to announce to the inhabitants of the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people," (Revelation 14:6). That this is an eternal gospel means it's for all generations and for every tribe of the earth to join in. This aligns with what we saw in Revelation 5 and 7; every time we've been at the throne room in heaven we've seen God and the Lamb joined with people from every tribe and every language. Hearing this revelation now for the third time ought to tell us something about God's intentions concern ethnicity. Right? Revelation itself actually stresses and makes clear the ethnic and social make-up of the Kingdom of God. This is why we stress ethnic justice so much as a church, because unity and peace and righteousness among all the nations is the destiny and *telos* of creation. There is no place for racism in the throne room of God.

I mean here me on this. I'm not talking politics; I'm not talking government programs. I'm not putting my faith or hope in Washington D.C. to bring peace and justice to people of

every socio-economic class and every ethnicity. I'm putting my hope in the King Jesus who died to redeem people of every nation; who came to heal the broken-hearted, who came to heal the lame and make the blind to see, to set the captive free. And because my hope is in Jesus, I, therefore, accept the command He has given to us, the church, that we are to pursue unity and peace and righteousness for people of every socio-economic class and ethnicity. I know the term "justice" can be a hot topic in our culture, and we may even hear that word and start thinking politics and the sorts, but justice is a biblical term. In the Bible, justice is the same thing as righteousness. These two English words come from the same word in Greek, **δικαιοσύνη** (*dikaïosuné*) – righteousness; justice. So listen, we're not talking about social justice the way a lost, secular culture talks about it; we're reclaiming that conversation in light of the Kingdom of God, in light of "the eternal gospel to announce to the inhabitants of the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people," (Revelation 14:6).

And so, having announced God's purposes to redeem the peoples of the earth the angel pronounces a warning to those who refuse. There are consequences for refusing to worship God. Judgment and destruction will come to those who do not heed this call. But, again, this isn't God's desire. Just as God didn't desire bringing plagues upon Egypt but rather that Pharaoh and all the land would know Him, so too, God does not desire destruction for His world. He will not surrender his world to the forces that terrorize it; He will not abandon His creation. He will overcome and defeat evil; thus He beckons all people to repent and flee to Him.

The second angel develops this theme of judgment by declaring, "It has fallen, Babylon the Great has fallen. She made all the nations drink the wine of her sexual immorality, which brings wrath," (Revelation 14:8). This is our first introduction to "Babylon", though, of course, her presence has been well-felt throughout the book. Her identity and character will be

developed in much greater depth in chapters 17 and 18, and so for now she is simply introduced to reinforce the general call for humanity, and believers specifically, to choose a side. We're shown here clearly that she, the quintessential City of Man, is destined to fall and so we must come out from her now.

Quickly to follow, then, is the third angel who details the eternal torment that awaits the citizens of the City of Man. The judgment of the wicked isn't excessive, however, but the epitome of justice. Though, as we just said, God doesn't desire any to perish that is precisely what will happen to those who choose the beast over the Lamb.³ Thus, be warned, Christian, and be warned, all those who dwell on the earth. Right, the purpose of these visions isn't to scare or to lead to hopelessness. Rather, "Warnings are not given in order to make people despair of grace, but to bring about change and to avert disaster," (Craig R. Koester).⁴

Think about the way we use warnings and discipline for the betterment and growth of our children. Sometimes in our household we'll have a kid who just wanders off. Right, they'll be playing outside and one of them will just go off somewhere in the neighborhood without telling us. Recently, this happened when all the neighborhood kids were playing together in the woods near a pond in our neighborhood and when it came time to come home one was missing. My poor wife immediately assumes the worst, that the child has been taken or is dead at the bottom of that pond, and, praise the Lord, the kid was just fine and already at home, but I recall Teresa getting pretty graphic with our kids concerning all the dangers of what could've happened and why they have to pay attention to these things and update us. I felt that maybe she had gone too

³ Note in verse 10 the angels and the Lamb are said to be watching the torment of the wicked, a picture that strongly challenges a belief in annihilationism. Though everlasting judgment may seem harsh and excessive to us, "Judgment is an integral part of the Christian message," (Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 139).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

far even, but it worked with the kids. Warnings about all the dangers that could befall them made them sit up straight and react accordingly.

The angels warn us of what is coming to the City of Man. But they also assure us. They assure us that whatever earthly pains we endure, the heavenly celebration (v. 1-5) far exceeds that! And so, we are called to endure, both persecution and temptation. Again, these warnings hint far more at the seductive methods of the dragon than his outright physical persecution of the church. You see, the second angel's words are not just a warning in general, but a warning against materialism. It is specifically the economic life of Rome and the debaucheries associated with it which is so damning.⁵ Chapters 17 and 18 will develop this in much greater depth, as we've found to happen in the cyclical reading of Revelation. But for now we are simply to hear this warning and see where joining in with the City of Man leads.

3. The faithful may rest in the justice of God v. 14-20

Of course, John realizes that while these future warnings and assurances may bring some comfort to the reader, that this world is still frustrating because though we see this heavenly reality in Revelation, our earthly circumstances often suggest the opposite. In other words, the wicked seem to triumph and do fine in this life. And so, what follows next in verses 14-20 is another vision of assurance, this one which points to the justice of God, that those who follow the Lamb will be delivered and those who follow the beast will be judged.

Right, we've already said that in this vision cycle John is showing us the end of this age, of what will come right before and at the return of Christ. Chapters 16ff will then come back to this whole picture but in greater depth and from a different angle. So here we see the judgment that unbelievers face at the end of time and the salvation the people of God receive. Right, first

⁵ As Greg Beale puts it, "The devil and his agents use the world economic system to ensnare people through their love of money and material pleasures," (Beale, *Revelation*, 308).

we see the Son of Man come and gather the firstfruit; He brings in the harvest, meaning the people of God.

But having gathered the wheat He then turns to the chaff. We read that the wicked who made the earth drink the wine of Babylon's wrath now themselves are trampled by God's wrath.

The picture drawn here is very much rooted in Old Testament prophecy, Joel 3,

Swing the sickle
because the harvest is ripe.
Come and trample the grapes
because the winepress is full;
the wine vats overflow
because the wickedness of the nations is extreme, (Joel 3:13).

And Isaiah 63,

I trampled the winepress alone,
and no one from the nations was with me.
I trampled them in my anger
and ground them underfoot in my fury;
their blood spattered my garments,
and all my clothes were stained, (Isaiah 63:3).

Moreover, this picture will be developed in greater depth when we get to chapter 19, "A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty," (Revelation 19:15). The point is that God's judgment surely, definitively, and completely will come for those that refuse the Lamb and are complicit with the beast.

And, listen, judgment is never anyone's favorite topic to discuss. It seems mean; it seems angry. It's certainly not P.C. in any way. But I think we feel that way in an effort to justify ourselves. Right, if it comes down to the fact that I don't measure up, well, then, I better find a way to reject the notion of God ever judging me. In other words, we reject the reality of judgment because we personally don't want to be judged. Whereas, that kind of thinking clearly

is inconsistent when it comes to life and the actions of others. We most assuredly want the murderer to be judged, the pedophile, the sexual assaulter, the co-worker who lies and cheats and steals. We want justice when we believe that there has been a wrong done.⁶ We just can't seem to look in the mirror and admit our wrongdoing against a holy and righteous God. But, you know, it really doesn't matter how we feel about it or what we think. Like it or not the judgment of God is a real thing.

And so, if it weren't clear enough to us at this point, here it is. There are two possibilities for every human being: the hope of salvation or the threat of judgment. Right? Here we stand, having been brought out of bondage, out of Egypt, journeying toward the Promised Land, having the promise that God will bring us there, but we keep looking back, wondering if maybe Egypt were better. We pause in that journey, maybe even having brought some Egyptian traditions with us along the way. We figure 'What's the harm,' or 'It'll all be ok and fine.' But as Craig Koester warns us, "Readers may be lulled into believing that evil is invincible or perhaps not evil at all, and that godliness brings only loss (13:4, 7); but John challenges this perception by pointing to the end of the story, in which earthly conditions are reversed, and the faithful are gathered together while the wicked are trodden down," (Craig R. Koester).

We cannot stop. We cannot slow. We certainly cannot turn back. We must press on and press forward. Three simple things this passage as a whole tells us that **The people of God must continue to: (1) Bear witness to the nations; (2) Be warned of the maddening adulteries of the enemy; (3) Be prepared to suffer and die as part of their witness.** The end is coming; God desires the lost to flee to Him, to leave the wicked city and be redeemed. It'll be a challenge, for the

⁶ Osborne points out, "For us the idea of judgment is at best a somber and sorrowful thought, but the perspective of Revelation is quite different. In the visionary world of this book, it signifies the justice of God and the vindication of the saints," (Osborne, *Revelation*, 572).

enemy is smart and conniving, the Spirit of truth is stronger and the Lamb is worthy all that we have to give, for as we see in the opening of chapter 15, God is going to complete the Exodus and bring us into the Promised Land.

4. The faithful look forward to the completion of the true and better Exodus 15:1-4

This picture of the end of this age ends, as it will in chapters 21 and 22, as it will in real history, with the vindication of the saints. You see, though we've never left the throne room of God, our attention is taken back to it to give us a sense of endurance and hope. As we're reminded of the great plagues and bowls of wrath that await this rebellious world and of the final judgment that is coming for enemies of the Lamb, we, the redeemed are called victorious in verse 2. You see, despite all the temptations and pressures and plots and devices of the dragon against the people of God, we're shown that those who overcome, those who conquer, do so solely because of the Lamb's victory in sacrificial death and how they have followed that example in the word of their testimony.

And what John sees is truly the completion of the Exodus. The saints sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Craig Koester captures this scene perfectly when he writes, "The vivid imagery transforms the story of Israel's liberation from slavery in the time of Moses into the story of liberation through the Lamb, which reaches its consummation in the heavenly throne room," (Craig R. Koester).⁷ Right, just look at the parallels here. Israel had been saved from the sea and from Pharaoh and been nourished in the wilderness, which is the story told in Revelation 12 & 13. And just as in chapter 15 Israel sang a new song of worship because of their deliverance, so too in Revelation 15 the people of God sing a new song. But, unlike that song in the wilderness here the redeemed do not sing about their own deliverance but celebrate God as

⁷ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 141.

king over the nations. They do not sing about God's destruction of the enemy but of the conversion of the nations!

Church, our God is to be praised not because He conquers "the enemy"; not because He conquers the people who aren't like me; not because He conquers those of a different political party; not because He conquers movements I don't like socially. God and His people don't stand on the banks of the sea anymore and gloat over the destruction of an army. God is to be praised because He has redeemed humanity. He hasn't won a victory to make other people like me. He has formed all the nations into a new family.

That's where your hope must go; and that's what you must be laboring toward today. The church is to hold fast our confession of Christ as King. But the church must pursue the welfare of every ethnicity. The things we see plague our cultures like racism, systemic injustice, economic disparity, substance abuse, abortion, all of it just reflect the character of Babylon. And listen, no politician, no political party is going to solve that. Getting your guy back in the White House, or making sure your party stays in power, neither of that is going to bring the nations to worship before God. Only the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.

What's the word of your testimony?