

Revelation 1:4-20

The ESV bible provides a summary of the Book of Revelation, namely that there is a spiritual warfare behind the struggles of the church (e.g., the war between God and Satan). There are certain powers at play behind the sufferings and temptations faced by the church, such as immorality and false teachings. In this cosmic battle, Christ has already won through His death and resurrection, and this is a great comfort for the church. The war has already been won by Christ, but the battle is not yet over. The Book of Revelation warns and pushes the church to be faithful and to resist temptations and false teachings, for the time is not long.

Revelation was written to reveal things to us, not to confuse us. John did not receive inspiration from God through words; rather, God showed him images he had never seen before, and he wrote down what he saw (v2). On the one hand, this makes Revelation unique because when people witness the same event and write about it, they will all tell the story in different ways (e.g., the synoptic Gospel). John wrote Revelation so that we would understand what happened to the churches at that time. This brings up a problem because what John witnessed was actually symbolic in nature, making things ambiguous for us in the 21st century. Hence, we have to understand what these images mean. For example, we know that the double-edged sword symbolizes God's Words, and the seventh horns on the lamb and the number 7 point to the completion of the power of the lamb.

We must understand the images used in the Book of Revelation in light of the Old Testament, because many of them have already been used before. For example, a beast that comes from the ocean (Revelation 13) is the amalgamation of four animals written in Daniel 7. Another example: the two witnesses in Revelation 11 are two olive trees in Zacharia 4. The Book of Revelation is also the climax and fulfilment of the prophecies in the Old Testament. For instance, number 7 represents completeness or perfection. This is seen in the lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, and the seven churches which Revelation was written for. Number 12 represents God's people – for instance, there were 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles of Jesus Christ, and 144,000 Israelites who were saved. In our current chapter (Chapter 1), number 7 is used in verses 4-5. Here, the meaning of 'seven spirits' can be confusing. We find our answer in Zacharia 4 where it says there are seven eyes over the whole earth, and God works in this world by his Spirit. Hence, the 'seven spirits' in Revelation 1:4 is talking about the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, not about seven holy spirits. This drives us to continue to depend on the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our lives because He has blessed us, has worked through us, and has given us victory, all glory to Him.

The Book of Revelation is talking about the sure victory of Jesus Christ. It talks about God sitting in the highest throne, just as He did in Isaiah 6. Although Revelation does mention the punishment and destruction of God's enemies, the climax of the book is when God's people bow down to worship Him who sits on the throne and the Lamb who was slain for our sins. This depicts the chief end of man, which is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. May this image continue to push us to be obedient to God. And may we realize that though the war is won, the battle is not yet over.