

## **The Story – Chapter 31: *The End of Time***

### **Introduction**

Last week, we looked at Paul’s missionary journeys, and how Paul was all in. This coming Sunday, look at the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, and we hear how the vision John sees of the victorious Jesus, and the messages to seven local churches, have much to say to us today in the 21st century United States.

If you want to read this material in the Bible, you can find it in Revelation 1-5 and 19-22. These are the most important chapters in the book and it would be well worth your time to look them over.

### **Summary of Chapter 31 – The End of Time**

A prophet named John was exiled on the island of Patmos for his faith in Jesus. It was here that the glorified Christ appeared to John with a revelation of His second coming. John saw someone “like a son of man” dressed in a priestly robe and ready to judge. Jesus presented Himself as the resurrected One who has authority over life and death. And he had some messages for the seven churches located in the province of Asia Minor.

All of these seven churches are trying to figure out how to live in the midst of a culture that’s very foreign to their faith. Some were facing external persecution, others internal conflict, and a couple were feeling pretty satisfied with themselves. The messages offer hope to some and a warning to others – things are not what they may appear. Rome is not in control. By getting a glimpse of the throne room of heaven where God sits upon His throne in unimaginable splendor and beauty, John sees that God is in control. And God will soon return to establish his reign.

Revelation is filled with often-bizarre pictures and metaphors, many based on Old Testament stories that the original hearers would understand. Revelation is a specific type of writing called apocalyptic literature, which was not uncommon in the first century. We have nothing today to compare it to – a combination of super hero and science fiction stories is as close as we’ll get. But as you read, it is important to know that the purpose of Revelation is not to predict the end of the world based on current twenty-first century events; it is to provide hope (and warning) to Christians living in a Roman world at the end of the first century.

At the end of Revelation, John describes seeing a New Heaven and New Earth and the New Jerusalem. In this future re-creation, God dwells among His people where He wipes away every tear. Many themes from God’s redemptive Story find their culmination in this place where all things are made new. The water of life flows from the throne of God, the tree of life bears much fruit, and all are invited to partake. This place is the hope of all Christians, for it is where God’s Upper Story and Lower Story finally merge into one. It is here that we will enjoy the presence of God and of the Lamb forever. When we understand the genre and a bit behind the book of Revelation, it can provide the same hope to us today as it did in the first century, as we also try to live as followers of Jesus in the midst of a very different culture.

## Discussion Questions

As you read, remember there are discussion questions for Chapter 31 on page 487 of the book and also questions that can be found on *The Story* bookmark (which is also on our website). Also, feel free to consider some of the questions below:

1. Jesus had a message for each of the churches in Asia (p. 459).  
As you read the letters to the various churches, what themes seem especially relevant to the church in US? What type of message do you think Jesus would give to your own congregation?
2. How did Jesus' assessment of the affluent church at Laodicea differ from the church's assessment of itself (Revelation 3:15–17)? What was this lukewarm, self-satisfied church missing? How can earthly riches blind us to spiritual poverty? How does Jesus' message to Laodicea still apply today?
3. Review Revelation 4-5 (p. 463-465). What strikes you about this scene of heavenly worship? What do you think it would be like to be there? What glimpses of that worship do you experience here on earth?
4. How does Revelation describe the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem? Compare that description with God's first creation in Genesis 1-2. How are the two similar? How are they different? What emotions does John's description of the Holy City evoke (Revelation 21:9–27)? What strikes you most about this description? Why?
5. What did this chapter of *The Story* contribute to your understanding of God's Upper Story of redemption? How might you respond to a Christian friend who sees no value in or is confused by studying Revelation?
6. What stands out to you the most from your study of *The Story*? What is the next step after *The Story* for you?