

# Understanding the Book of Revelation

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The Book of Revelation contains a number of references or allusions to events found in the Book of Exodus, in particular the Israelites' deliverance from Egyptian bondage. We should be able then to use what happened to the Israelites as a basis for understanding the events described in the Book of Revelation. Let's look at four major points about the Israelites' deliverance, and then we'll look at how these correspond to the experience of the saints in the Book of Revelation.

- 1) The Israelites were sorely oppressed by Egypt, an oppression that began with hard labor, but soon included the murder of male children (Exodus 1).
- 2) Because they were so oppressed, the Israelites cried out to God for help (Exodus 2:23-25), and He heard their cry: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows" (Exodus 3:7).
- 3) God answered their cry by punishing Egypt and redeeming His people, using of course the ten plagues, and then miraculously delivering them through the Red Sea while He destroyed the Egyptian army (Exodus 7-14).
- 4) The Israelites rejoiced in their deliverance, and sang praises to God (Exodus 15).

In the Book of Revelation, the characters change, but the story line is essentially the same. Let's take a closer look.

- 1) The saints were sorely oppressed or persecuted by Rome, persecution that had been earlier prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 7:23-25). They were persecuted in a number of ways, including death by force (Revelation 13:15; 20:4), and a slower form of death, where they were prohibited from buying or selling (Revelation 13:16-17).
- 2) Because they were so oppressed, they too cried out to God for help: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:10). God certainly heard their cry, and in many ways, the rest of the book is an answer to their cry.
- 3) God's answer to their cry was that He would punish Rome, and redeem His people. It wouldn't happen right away (6:11), but their blood would be avenged (Revelation 18:20; 19:2). The details of this punishment and deliverance again sound very similar to the exodus from Egypt. For example, the language of the plagues is used throughout to describe this punishment (boils, hail, locusts, darkness, etc.). Also, like the Israelites, there was a sea between these saints and the Promised Land—"before the throne there was a sea of glass like crystal" (Revelation 4:6). Later, we see the victorious saints "standing on the sea of glass" (Revelation 15:3). They didn't just pass through it; they're standing on it!

4) The saints rejoiced in their deliverance (Revelation 18:20) and sang praises to God (see in particular 15:3, where they sing “the song of Moses,” an obvious allusion to the experience of the Israelites).

Let’s notice a few more comparisons, focusing now on the judgment of the two nations, Egypt and Rome.

The method of judgment was the same—it was accomplished in stages. God could have delivered Israel from Egypt with one mighty blow, but He chose instead to send a series of judgments, in the form of ten plagues. This is the same pattern found in the Book of Revelation, where a number of warning judgments (seven trumpets) are given before the decisive blow. Clearly, God wanted to turn the hearts of these people to Him; He was giving them ample time to come to know Him and repent of their sins (Exodus 7:5, 17; Revelation 9:20-21). Of course, these warning judgments would also serve as a wake up call to any of God’s people who needed to repent.

God’s purpose behind these judgments was the same. Yes, He intended to punish the oppressors, and yes, He intended to deliver His people, but there was still another purpose—to show that He reigns! Read the song Moses and the children of Israel sang after God delivered them, especially the conclusion: “The LORD shall reign forever and forever” (Exodus 15:18). Compare this to the proclamation of the angel at the sounding of the seventh trumpet: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15). These were two powerful demonstrations of the Lord’s power and authority over all nations. This was the message God wanted to send, not just to these respective generations, but to all succeeding generations.

God’s care for His people during these judgments was the same. The Israelites suffered along with the Egyptians during the first three plagues, but starting with the fourth plague, God made a difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians (Exodus 8:22-23). The land of Goshen, where the Israelites dwelt, was not hit with the remaining plagues. They were protected from the final plague, the death of the firstborn, in a very interesting way—by the blood of the Passover lamb, which they sprinkled on the top and sides of their doorposts. Similarly, in the Book of Revelation, it seems that the people of God suffered along with everyone else initially, but notice what is said before the opening of the seventh seal: “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of God on their foreheads” (7:3). The purpose of this was obviously protection, because later the command is given to harm “only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (9:4). The best form of protection they were given though was the blood of their Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. Those who were washed in His blood and followed Him faithfully had no reason to fear anything that might happen to them (7:14; 12:11).