

Evil Undone Revelation 15-18; 19:11-21

There is a reason why “Episode III”, the last installment in the Star Wars franchise will gross more than \$400 million. It is not because everyone will believe that the movies characters are palpable. If the reviews I have read are true, most will find them wooden. Having seen the movie, I can agree that the dialogue is strained at moments. And nor will it because successful because of the dazzling effects that technology can produce. Even Lucas declared that part of his reason for delay was connected to his desire that technology catch up to his imagination. Nevertheless, as much as we love space battles and light saber duels, we will not shell out the cash for these alone. No; our fascination with the Star Wars story has more to do with us than with the movies. Lucas, like all good story tellers, has tapped into and explored what concerns us most deeply. Like Tolkien’s fantasy trilogy and the first installment of The Matrix, Star Wars seeks to explore the complexity of humanity and the nature of good and evil. Where does evil come from and in what do we trust? Our fascination is linked to the characters and the story only because they link us to a story that all of us already participate in—our lives which is the story of good and bad, sin and virtue, life and death, fall and redemption.

Of course Lucas’ answers to these questions are far from Biblical. That is not his goal, but his efforts are to be commended like those of all story tellers who seek to explore the grand and dark themes of life.

But what does the Bible have to say about evil? How does the story of Scripture address these same themes? Does it embrace the dualistic and symbiotic relationship between good and evil that both Star Wars and The Matrix portray? Or is evil to be seen through the lens that fantasy writer Tolkien provides, one wherein evil serves the purpose of an overarching Providential control? And what is to become of the evil of which the Bible speaks?

In a powerful and climatic way Revelation 15-19 explores how the Lamb will overthrow evil in this world. One might say that in these chapters we see how **evil is undone by the Lamb**. Contrary to Lucas’ world where a balance between the Force and the Dark Side is sought, the Bible presents us with a conflict where evil will be eradicated. It will be finally put out. The rebellion will be overthrown and its masters will be conquered.

Here in these chapters God’s purposeful approach to undoing evil is revealed. **Here we see evil exposed, we see evil degenerate and we see evil overthrown.**

Please refer to your outlines.

- The time between Christ’s ascent and his return, the age of the Church, is highlighted in various ways in the seven cycles of Revelation.
 - The seven seals of suffering (4-7)
 - The seven trumpets of judgment and warning (8-11)
 - The Cosmic conflict of evil with the woman (12-14)
 - The seven bowls of judgment which complete the God’s punishment and the overthrow of Babylon and the Harlot (15-18)
 - The victory over the Beast and False Prophet (19)
 - The Millennium and new heavens and earth (20)
- The symbols and images which John presents us with are not meant to be understood literally, they describe **true realities** but are intended to stretch our imagination as we try to understand both the **reach and horror of evil in this age**, but also the **strength and power of the Lamb which is ushering in a new age due to his victory on the Cross**.

- Preparing for a literal Armageddon by stocking up on weapons in the basement is a misunderstanding of the first order.
 - Trying to figure out the kingdoms of the world to which Daniel refers and Revelation expands upon, will yield fruitless results. All of the kingdoms of the earth are spoken of here.
 - Even the battles that I have numbered 1-4 are not four battles, but four ways of seeing the same battle.
- The point is to see through the symbols and images and to identify the **very real and literal** work of the Dragon, the Beast, the False Prophet and the antics of Babylon. Broadly speaking, what we have concluded thus far is this:
 - Dragon is portrayed as the Devil or Satan
 - The Beast is portrayed as the all-powerful state in every age which seeks to overthrow the kingdom of God
 - The False Prophet, the third member of the unholy triumvirate, is the religious institutions of the world which seek to deceive the nations
 - Babylon symbolizes the whole course of cultural and sociological systems throughout the world that ultimately incite the idolatry among humanity.
 - Revelation presents the conflict between the purposes of God and those of Satan as intensifying until the rebellion of evil is finally put down. One by one, each of the characters of evil is overthrown:
 - Those who have solidarity with the Dragon, unbelievers
 - The Harlot named Babylon
 - The Beast
 - The False Prophet
 - The Dragon

It is here in these chapters that the climatic end of evil is presented. It is here that evil is undone. **The reason for piling up the images is so that the character of evil is finally revealed. To undo evil, evil must be revealed for exactly what it is. In other words, it must be exposed, its degeneracy revealed and finally overthrown.**

1) Evil must be exposed for what it is: (17:1-6; 18:3)

The **seductive power** of evil is represented in chapters 17-18 through the image of Babylon who is portrayed as a seductive harlot of immorality. Of course she stands for the city of Rome in the ancient world, but in reality she stands for every pagan society which promises the blessings of comfort and pleasure when we give our allegiance to them.

Her seductive power lies in her outward appeal:

- **Her wealth and luxury: (17:4; 18:9-20)** Through allegiance to the Harlot and the Beast that she rides, a life of ease, wealth and luxury is held forth. Compromise has its benefits, so she promises.
- **Her mode of operation (17:5)** She is the mother of all prostitutes. The point of the imagery is not merely to condemn sexual immorality. Rather, the point is to highlight the twisting of relationship. Whereas, God has made us for himself so that all of who we are might know all of the life he brings us. As worshipers, we are known and come to know our God. The Harlot promises life not as we give ourselves in a mutual relationship of sacrifice, but by means of the almighty dollar. Commerce gives one the illusion of control and distance. As Eugene Peterson writes, "For the Whore, sex is in the service of commerce..." (p. 147)

Such is the seductive character of evil—outward wealth, peace, prosperity and life in service to the self. A Whore lets you live life the way you want to live it, as long as you pay up! In what ways are we giving ourselves the Harlot who is Babylon? As Vern Poythress writes, “Little babylons also operate in the recesses of our hearts...” (p. 161)

- Pride
- Wealth
- Fear of suffering or shame
- Fear of death
- Yearning for power

Yet what is the destiny of Babylon? Listen to the words of 18:6ff. Now, I want you to understand what is happening here. God is mocking evil. In other words, central to God’s undoing of evil is a holy mockery and ridicule of it.

Recent images of Saddam Hussein in his underwear may be a violation of the wartime treaties, but they are at the very least the shaming and mockery of an evil world dictator who was an accomplice with the whore of Babylon.

In Nahum 3:5 it is written, “I am against you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame.”

As Dan Allender writes, “God will not be mocked. We are called to repent—or face his cruelest mockery. He will relentlessly expose our secret idolatries and our brazen arrogance.” (*Cry of the Soul*, p. 181.) **Evil is seductive, but in the end it will be fiercely mocked! The cosmos shall laugh in derision even as you have mocked God and his people.**

2) Evil’s degeneracy must be revealed: (17:6c-18)

The second aspect of evil that must be revealed in order for it to be undone is its **internal degeneracy**. Notice that the whore, Babylon rides on top of the Beast symbolize her alliance with the Beast of the dragon. Yet when the purposes of the powerful Beast have been accomplished through the seductive power of the Harlot, the Beast turns upon his own servant. God has destined to make the Beast the servant of his punishment of the Harlot. Yet, this is the desire of the Beast.

Such division illustrates the divided house of Satan. Jesus himself set down this principle in his earthly ministry, “And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.” (Mk. 3:25-26) His point then was to prove that he was not a minister of the devil because he was battling against the devil. Such action would be tantamount to his own destruction.

Yet such is the foolish character of evil. It contains within itself its own **degenerative tendencies**. In other words, evil is parasitic and self-destructive. It relies on the good and creative work of God to find its energy and power. Yet in the end, it destroys all that it participates in. It is for this reason that things like:

- Addiction to substances
- Gambling
- Slavery and unjust wages (employers)
- Pornography among other things is so destructive.

It finds its life by stealing it from other life and so destroys everyone and everything. Evil is like a gigantic tick seeking to such goodness out of the universe.

3) Evil must finally be overthrown: (19:17-21)

Well in chapter 17 and 18, we see God's overthrow of the evil harlot, Babylon. At the end of chapter 19, we see God deal his death blow to the Beast and the False Prophet. What the end of chapter 19 reminds us is that there will be a time when evil will be no more. Evil is not a necessary component to the universe; it is a perversion. In the mystery of God's purpose, he made use of evil to manifest his greater glory. But that time is coming to an end. Evil and its servants will soon be punished.

Such actions remind us that all national governments that do not rule with a view to the true God of the universe and all religions, be they under the banner of Christendom or not that do not uphold the unique revelation of God's word revealed in the Scriptures and in Jesus, are promised certain death and defeat in the lake of fire—the place of eternal torment.

Such language serves to remind us that evil will come to an end. The Lord will answer the saints' prayers from under the altar. He does hear them and their blood shall be avenged.

The 1980's US hockey team which won the gold medal by defeating the former Soviet Union's national team will be forever remembered sporting triumph. As a child, though I remember it was more than a sporting triumph. It was something of a national triumph. Growing up I remembered that the US was becoming a kind of political chump in the world; the Soviet Union was more and more aggressive with its socialistic policies. That victory seemed to symbolize not only the legitimacy of American hockey, but the legitimacy of the US as the torchbearers of freedom. Tyranny would not last; it would be defeated. And in some small way it was.

This is the hope of Revelation 19. Evil is certain to be defeated. We can live in that hope.

In 15:2-4, we see the events that I have spoken of this morning as unfolding beside a sea of glass mingled with fire. Such a picture surely calls to mind the deliverance of the people of God from the mighty and evil Pharaoh. God's people stood on the other side of the terrible Red Sea which delivered the death blow to the armies of Egypt. Only God's people could speak of the Sea which brought death as smooth as glass, for their God had conquered the chaos of their sin and misery.

This is the final deliverance, the undoing of evil that is spoken of here in these chapters. Our Lord has undone evil!

But let us not forget that we are those who have been snatched from the clutches of evil by a gracious God who did not withhold his very own Son, but gave him up for us all that we might have eternal life. We are not those who have always sided with the Lamb. All of us have lived parts of our lives and even today are tempted to give our lives to aspects of the Kingdom of darkness.

Let us remember its seductive, yet degenerative character. Let us remember that an alliance with evil is an alliance with death. Let us run to the deliverer who has taken us through the Sea and into the realm of life everlasting.