

Vaneetha Rendall was born in India and contracted polio at a young age. By the time she turned 13, she had undergone 21 surgeries. She spent years in the hospital. She endured verbal and physical bullying from schoolmates. Then she had multiple miscarriages as a young wife. The losses in her life continued to mount. Yet she lives with joy to this day. She has written about her life in her book “The Scars that have Shaped me.”

In an article entitled “Where is God when life gets worse” she write this. “Life can be achingly difficult. It has been for me. Many times, I’ve thought life was finally getting better, only to find out I was wrong. It was just the calm before the next devastating storm. Nothing was better. In fact, life became even harder.

I grew afraid to even hope again. Because hoping just brought more pain. I wondered where God was when things kept getting worse. I buried my precious son when he was two months old because the doctors made a mistake. Six years later, I was diagnosed with post-polio syndrome, a condition that will eventually require that I have full-time care, I will be unable to do the simplest things for myself. And then six years after my horrifying diagnosis, my husband left our family, moved away, and later filed for divorce.

Those years are still a blur to me. Just as I was coming to terms with one calamity, the next one came raging through. I wondered how I could handle yet another blow. That’s why I’m drawn to the story of Joseph. He knew what crushing disappointment felt like. He grew up as the favorite son of his father, but was later betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave in Egypt. Soon he was falsely accused and thrown into prison where he remained for years, waiting and wondering if he would ever be delivered.

Joseph must have felt afraid and alone, uncertain of the future. I definitely did. So, how did he make it through those years and emerge with a stronger faith? Why did he not give up, determined never to hope again? Joseph suffered well amidst staggering disappointment because he knew God was for him and with him in the darkest places.

Four times in Genesis 39 we read that the Lord was with Joseph. While God later delivered Joseph in an astonishing way, the beauty of Joseph’s story to me is not in the miraculous deliverance, but God’s constant and faithful care of Joseph when his life was bleak. God never left Joseph’s side. Joseph knew that God was with him, I remember years of crying out to God, thinking my faith would get back on track when life got back to normal. But as the pain grew more intense, I realized I needed to find God in the present, and not wait for my circumstances to improve. God wanted me to find him

sufficient in the midst of trouble rather than just demanding that he deliver me from it. And I found God more than sufficient as I met with him daily in Scripture and in prayer. Through his word, God gave me an undeniable sense of his presence, just as he did with Joseph.

But my story seems to diverge from Joseph's. Suddenly and miraculously, he was completely delivered; freed from prison; brothers humbled and repentant; awarded unprecedented power. He could say to his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). In the end Joseph's story is tied with a bow — a beautiful, inspiring, faith-building bow.

But will all our disappointments get tied up with a bow? Does God mean everything for *my* good? Some of my losses cannot or will not be reversed in this life, and I have seen faithful friends die without being rescued. How do I reconcile that? As I return to the Bible, I see that because of heaven, my future is indeed guaranteed. Just as with Joseph, nothing can keep me from God's best.

Where is God when things keep getting worse? He is *with us*. And he is always *for us*. And one day we will see how he has used our pain and losses to accomplish far more than we could ask or imagine."¹ You can learn more about Vaneetha's story and her blog at danceintherain.com.

Now some of you can relate to Vanessa's story. You may have gone through a time when things went from bad to worse for several months or years. Or you may be in a time like that now. Or there may be such a time coming in your life. When those times come, how can we keep hoping in God? Today's passage in Revelation gives us a foundation to do this. **Because God will completely overthrow evil in the future, we can live with great hope in the present.** To discover this, first, I want to show you how God will completely overthrow evil in the future. Then we will think about how this knowledge can help us live with hope in the present. Finally, we will think about where we might turn if we're still struggling with hope today.

Revelation 17 (ESV)

17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters,² with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk."³ And he carried

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/where-is-god-when-things-keep-getting-worse>

me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. ⁵And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations."⁶ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. ⁷But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. ⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit^[b] and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. ⁹This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; ¹⁰they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. ¹¹As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. ¹²And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. ¹³These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

¹⁵And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. ¹⁶And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, ¹⁷for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

Revelation 17 is a very unique vision because it's the only one in the book that gives us an interpretation. So we better pay attention when the Bible interprets itself before we throw our own interpretations in. The vision starts with one of the 7 angels from Revelation 16 approaching John. He poured out one of the 7 bowl judgments. He will also interpret the vision for John.

He tells John to come and see the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters. In verse 15, the angel reveals that these great waters symbolize peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. So this prostitute has great influence over a vast array of people. The angel also reveals in verse 2 that the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality with her. Whenever we see that phrase in this chapter, it translates some form of the Greek word "porne" from which we get our word pornography. Yet though some of the king's unfaithfulness may have been in a physical or sexual way, it is more likely that this refers to spiritual unfaithfulness towards God.

The angel also reveals in verse 2 that earth dwellers have become drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality. So she not only affects kings. Her immorality spreads to all the people of the earth. She has very powerful sway over kings and the people of the earth. So the angel provides all this description in his invitation for John to come and see her judgement.

Now if we were told that we were about to see the judgment of a prostitute, we might expect to see them in prison garb awaiting sentence. But the angel leads John to a very different picture. So in verse 3, the angel takes John into the wilderness. This is a little unusual because the wilderness has been a place of refuge throughout Revelation. But here it is a place of exposure. Away from all other distractions, the angel will reveal to John the reality concerning this woman.

John sees a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names and had seven heads and 10 horns. Scarlet – red – we’ve seen red before in the dragon back in chapter 12. That dragon had seven heads and 10 horns. But we’ve also met a beast rising out of the sea in chapter 13 with 7 horns and 10 heads. And there were blasphemous names on its heads. So the beast in 17 reminds us of the dragon and the beast, part of that unholy trinity that wages war against God’s people. The color scarlet could be the color of sin. You might have read Isaiah 1:18 where the Lord says to Israel “though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.”

Then John describes the woman he sees. She is not dressed in prison garb awaiting sentence. She wears purple and scarlet, expensive colors to have on any clothes. She is adorned with gold, jewels and pearls. She looks more like a high class prostitute enjoying the good life rather than some bedraggled woman on the verge of prison. She also has that sinister side for she holds a golden cup of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. It is this cup that she offers the kings and the people.

John sees a further clue to her identity in the name written on her forehead. Apparently, high class prostitutes in ancient Rome sometimes wore headbands with their name on her forehead. Here, she has a name of mystery; “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” So she spreads her unfaithfulness and influences others to follow. She shares abominations that go against God’s holiness and rightful worship. But she’s not playing a game. She’s playing for keeps. For she is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus.

Who is she? The angel tells John in verse 18 that she is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth. She is named Babylon and may symbolize human civilization opposed to and apart from God. We live in this civilization. We see it all around us. It's influence is everywhere. Bible scholar Bruce Metzger wrote "Babylon is allegorical of the idolatry that any nation commits when it elevates material abundance, military prowess, technological sophistication, imperial grandeur, racial pride, and any other glorification of the creature over the Creator . . . The message of Revelation concerns . . . God's judgments not only of persons, but also of nations and all principalities and powers – which is to say, all authorities, corporations, institutions, structures, bureaucracies, and the like."

John sees this woman on the beast and marvels at the end of verse 6. Some of your versions say "greatly perplexed" or "astonished." I think John sees this sight and doesn't understand it. I don't think he is getting seduced by the woman. But either way, the angel immediately snaps him out of his funk in verse 7. . "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and the beast. The angel focuses first on the beast. Verse 8 "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction." "Was, is not, and is about to" resembles a description of God earlier in Revelation. Back in 1:4 John writes "Grace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come." But the beast is not described in the same way. He was, He is not and He is about to rise." So somehow the beast was alive. Then he was not alive. Then is about to rise. Back in Revelation 13:3, one of the beast's heads seemed to have a mortal wound but the wound was healed."

Many commentators think John is playing on the Nero resurrection myth. Nero was a wicked Roman emperor in the 60's of the first century. We believe the apostle Paul was executed under Nero's reign. Rome burned under Nero. He blamed the fire on Christians. So he had many executed and even had some doused with oil and lit on fire to serve as torches in his garden. He eventually committed suicide amidst a great cloud of suspicion and rumblings. But there arose a myth that Nero would someday return perhaps from the east with an invading army. Maybe John was using this myth to portray the beast as this recurring form of evil. Evil happens, then it seems to die. But then it comes back. But notice this beast rising from the bottomless pit rises not for victory but to go to destruction.

Then John writes in verse 9 – This calls for a mind with wisdom. "The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated." Well there was an ancient city that was said to be built on 7 hills. No it's not St Albert's toboggan hill. Rome was said to be built on seven hills. You can find this throughout ancient literature. And you can see on a coin

that was minted in the first century. It contains the goddess roma sitting on the seven hills of Rome. John's readers would have likely used this coin in trade. Maybe John was thinking of it as he wrote down the angels words. So the woman is human civilization opposed to God. Beast – political rule.

Then in verse 10 we find out the 7 horns are not only mountains but kings. Five of them have fallen – been killed or assassinated or committed suicide. One currently reigns and one is to come. So this has led to all kinds of speculation about which kings or emperors John was talking about. But suffice it to say, the beast represents some sort of earthly political power that is in a sort of alliance with the world system of Babylon.

In verse 11, the beast is somehow related to these seven kings. It is an eighth but it belongs to the seven. So maybe the beast's character showed up in each of these seven kings. But again, the angel declares that this beast is going to destruction.

Then the angel interprets the 10 horns as 10 future kings. These will somehow join the beast. Rome often hired other kingdoms to maintain power over the empire. They were called client kingdoms. They would join with the Roman army to enforce Rome's rule and put down rebellion. In the future 10 kings or maybe a complete set of kings will join this beast. According to verse 12, they will get royal authority and they will receive power for 1 hour together with the beast. It sounds like someone is ruling over them. That someone is God.

The 10 and the beast join together in an alliance. In verse 14, they make war against the Lamb who is Jesus. But the Lamb will conquer them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. So it doesn't matter how many kings line up in rebellion against God. Jesus is King over them all. He has an authority that they cannot match. Those with the Lamb are called, chosen and faithful.

The vision concludes with an amazing development. We see the woman and the beast in a form of partnership. But at the beginning of the chapter in verse 16 the ten kings and the beast turn on the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked. They will devour her flesh and burn her with fire. It is the image of an invasion of a city that is then destroyed and burned to the ground. But what caused evil to turn on itself? Verse 17 "For God has put it into their hearts (the 10 kings and the beast) to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled."

So Babylon, the great prostitute will be judged by the beast on which she rides under the authority of God. **God will completely overthrow evil in the future. (Revelation 17:1-18)**

The woman will be judged. The beast that was, is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit will go to destruction. The ten kings and the beast receive authority for one hour. The Lamb will conquer the beast and the ten kings. My God will put in the hearts of the 10 kings and beast to wage war on the prostitute resulting in her destruction. God's word will be fulfilled.

So because God will completely overthrow evil in the future, **We can live with hope in the present.** If God is able to deal with all the forces of evil in the future we can put our hope in Him to look after us now. Now I'm not talking about hope like wishing upon a star. I mean God-centered hope. To hope in God means to look to Him, His power and His promises and trust that He will fulfill them. We can live with hope now because of God's present involvement in our lives. Psalm 33:18 states "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love." Or Psalm 42:4 which says "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation. Jeremiah 29:11 states "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

But we can also live with hope in the present because of what God promises to do in the future. Paul expressed this hope in 2 Corinthians 1:10 – "God delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again." Colossians 1:3-5 – We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." 1 Peter 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

As we think about this future hope, we need to recognize that the life waiting for us in God's presence will be infinitely greater than our life on earth. Tim Keller, his book "Walking with God through pain and suffering writes "The most rapturous delights you have ever had — in the beauty of a landscape, or in the pleasure of food, or in the fulfillment of a loving embrace — are like dewdrops compared to the bottomless ocean of joy that it will be to see God face-to-face. That is what we are in for, nothing less. And according to the Bible, that glorious beauty, and our enjoyment of it, has been immeasurably enhanced by Christ's redemption of us from evil and death."

But what if we lack hope? What if the promise that God will completely overthrow evil in the future does not fuel our hope in the present? Here are some possible actions.

1. We may need to adjust our view of the world and life to include suffering. As Vaneetha reminded us, “Life can be achingly difficult.” We sometimes put our hope in a good life rather than God. Or we put our hope in the improvement of circumstances. She wrote “As the pain grew more intense, I realized I needed to find God in the present, and not wait for my circumstances to improve.” Keller writes “No matter what precautions we take, no matter how well we have put together a good life, no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable with friends and family, and successful with our career — something will inevitably ruin it.”

2. We also need to remember God’s active care and concern for us in the present. Vaneetha wrote that “Joseph suffered well amidst staggering disappointment because he knew God was for him and with him in the darkest places.” We can discover God’s concern for us in His Word. We learn there that He loves us – 1st John 4:10 – “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” We learn He will give us what we need every day. Lamentations 3:22-23 – “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” We learn that God is always for us in Psalm 56:9-10 – “This I know, that God is for me. In God whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.” We learn God is always with us and nothing can separate us from His love. In his work Keller writes “Only when our greatest love is God, a love that we cannot lose even in death, can we face all things with peace. Grief is not eliminated but seasoned and buoyed up with love and hope.” (Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, 44).

3. We need to nurture a deeper understanding of our future life with God. Keller again – “But resurrection is not just consolation — it is restoration. We get it all back — the love, the loved ones, the goods, the beauties of this life — but in new, unimaginable degrees of glory and joy and strength.” (59) “The only love that won’t disappoint you is one that can’t change, that can’t be lost, that is not based on the ups and downs of life or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God’s love is the only thing like that.” (304) Vaneetha writes “As I return to the Bible, I see that because of heaven, my future is indeed guaranteed. Just as with Joseph, nothing can keep me from God’s best.”

When life gets worse, God walks with us with deep concern and compassion. Yet he will one day completely overthrow evil, and because of that we can live with great hope in the present. Where in your life have you lost hope? What in your life causes you much anxiety that you need to bring to God and His sovereign compassionate care? Will you bring these to the Lord now as we pray.