

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

**TITLE:** The title comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis* (1:1) which means “revelation, disclosure, unveiling”<sup>1</sup>

† The visions contained in this book serve to remove the veil and disclose God’s promised plan to destroy evil through His Son.

**AUTHOR:** The Apostle John “the beloved disciple” who also authored the Gospel of John and 1, 2, 3 John

† Internal Evidence: Author identifies himself (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8); Familiar language “word, witness, life, judgment”

† External Evidence: Testimony of Early Church Fathers (Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus of Lyons)

**AUDIENCE:** Seven 1<sup>st</sup> Century Gentile Churches in the Roman province of Asia (1:4; ch.2-3)

† The seven local churches received the letter to encourage faithfulness, rebuke sin, and prepare them for Christ’s return.

† These churches should also be seen a representation of all types churches throughout history (2:23).

† Roman Empire was an oppressive system characterized by political idolatry and economic exploitation.

† Revelation’s message had direct meaning for the 1<sup>st</sup> century church; “soon...time is near” this is important to remember.

**PURPOSE:** Revelation *informs* the church of God’s plan to fully and finally overthrow the kingdom of Satan and *prepares* her to be devoted to Christ by rejecting false teaching, enduring persecution, and resisting compromise as she awaits the return of Christ.

**DATE:** A major discussion exists regarding whether Revelation was written before or after Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD.

† Before 70AD: This view proposes the letter was written during Nero’s reign (54-68AD)

† After 70AD: This view proposes the letter was written during Domitian’s reign (81-96AD)

† Conclusions: the issues facing the churches in Rev. 2-3 seem to indicate the later date is more likely.

**GENRE OF LITERATURE:** The book of Revelation consists of three types of literary genres.

1. Apocalyptic: contains visions and symbols that disclose and unveil God’s consummate judgment
2. Prophetic: foretells events that will take place in the future (1:3, 19; 22:7-19)
3. Epistle: the book instructions its readers about who God is and what He requires

**OT BACKGROUND:** Of 404 verses in the book, at least 278 allude to OT passages, despite no direct quotations.

† Key: Gen 1-3, 49; Ex 7-12, 15; Ps 2; Isa 6, 11, 44, 48, 65-66; Jer 51; Ezek 27, 40-48; Dan 7, 9; Zech 12

**KEY TERMS / IDEAS:** These terms are repeated in Revelation and are helpful to understanding the book.

- “see” (x52) cf. 1:2, 11 – the visions given to John are given to us to “see” with our ears; it is a “sound-film” (Hendrickson, 50)
- “throne” (x47) place of authority from which a sovereign reigns (x4 more refer to 24 elders)
- “Lamb” (x29) Jesus is the Lamb of God who was slain and has been raised to forever reign
- “Satan” (x8) Satan is the adversary of God and His people who rules the spiritual Babylon God opposes
- “like” (x63) John is shown images, symbols, pictures that have real referents in history [vs Hal Lindsay]
- “blessed” (x12) a state having happiness, joy, favor, and goodness from God (x3 more refer to God: worship)
- 7 Beaitudes: God promises blessing on those who 1) read, hear, keep what is written (1:3); 2) die in the Lord (14:13); 3) remain pure in expectation of Jesus’ return (16:15); 4) are invited to Lamb’s wedding feast (19:9), 5) have been killed for their faith (20:4-6); 6) share in the tree of life in the city of God (22:14); 7) keeps these words of the prophecy of this book (22:7)

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis E. Johnson’s *Triumph of the Lamb* and William Hendriksen’s *More Than Conquerors* are helpful resources for studying Revelation.

## **SIX COMMON INTERPRETATIONS OF REVELATION**

1. **Idealist**: symbols are not tied to specific events, but reflect the *spiritual* battle between Christ and Satan
2. **Preterist**: the visions, in large part, were fulfilled in the *past* during the fall of Jer. (70AD) or Rome (5<sup>th</sup> cen.)
3. **Historical**: the visions are *currently* being fulfilled in a chronologically throughout church history
4. **Futurist**: the visions in the apocolypse are future events that are yet to be fulfilled (dispensational)
5. **Progressive Dispensational**: the visions reflect both *past and future* fulfillment with idealist themes
6. **Seven Parallel Visions**: Seven repeating and intensifying visions of God's victory over evil

## **THREE VIEWS OF THE MILLENIUM**

- † In Revelation 20:4-5, a 1,000 year reign of Christ is described. The Latin word for 1,000 is *mille*.
1. **Pre-millennial**: Jesus will return *before* the millennium to establish a time of unprecedented peace
- † Some suggest this is essential for God to remain faithful to His OT promises. This view common among Futurists.
2. **Post-millennial**: Jesus will return *after* the millennium and usher in the eternal state.
- † Jesus will bring about world-wide repentance through the spread of the Gospel. This view is held by Preterists.
3. **A-millennial**: the current age is the millennium during which Jesus reigns as our King from heaven
- † Satan was bound at the cross, saints now reign with King Jesus Christ while enduring tribulation until He returns.

## **Principles for Interpretation**

1. **God finally defeats evil**. This is the main point. Keep the big picture in mind, it helps keep things clear in unclear portions.
2. **Revelation is to be seen**. apocolyptic literature communicates messages through vivid images which portray spiritual realities (Lampstand = Church; Dragon = Satan). Complicated at times because some referents are represented by multiple symbols (Jesus = Lion and Lamb; Church = 144K from 12 tribes of Israel and Innumerable host from every tribe).
  - Literal meaning of sybolic language is what the symbol represents (Ez. 40-48 vision of rebuilt temple = living stones 1 Pt 2:5).
3. **Revelation fulfills all prophecy**. There is an almost continual allusion to and interpretation of the OT through out the book.
  - The New Testament interprets the Old Testament. Symbols from OT prophets are modified at times in light of Christ's work.
4. **Numbers Count**. They are often used symbols in Revelation (7, 10, 12). "7" (x55) symbolizes perfection and completeness<sup>2</sup>, "10" often used to describe vastness<sup>3</sup>, "12" number of the people of God (12 tribes, 7:4-8, 12:12; apostles (21:14)
5. **Comfort and encrouage the persecuted church**. This book must beread with the mindset of those who are under various forms of attack. Satan and his helpers are always assaulting the church by bringing *persecution* leading to martyrdom and / or *seduction* leading to defilement. Revelation is meant to embolden the church to persevere in faith and faithfulness to Jesus.
6. **Worship**. The goal of this book is to inspire worship of the God who has faithfull kept His promises to His people. The pages of this revelation are filled with images of heaven's songs to the risen Lamb. Ask God to move you to worship as you study.

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<sup>2</sup> 7 churches (ch.1-3), 7 golden lamp-stands, 7 stars, 7 spirits, 7 torches of fire, 7 seals, 7 horns, 7 eyes, 7 angels, 7 trumpets, 7 thunders (10:3-4), 7,000 people killed, 7 heads, 7 diadems, 7 plagues, 7 bowls, 7 mountains, 7 kings, 7 plagues

<sup>3</sup> dragon and beast (12:3, 13:1, 17:12); 10 cubed = 1,000 to describe a vast number of years (20:2-7), 10 cubed and multiplied by 12 = 12,000 to portray vast dimensions in all directions (length, breadth, height) of New Jerusalem; cubed and multiplied by 12 squared to symbolize full registered number of God's people (7:4-8; 14:1-5); myriads of myriads (100 millions) symbolizes countless heavenly worshipers (5:11-12).

## **OUTLINE OF REVELATION: THE CONSUMATION OF GOD'S PLAN IN CHRIST JESUS**

- 3 Major Sections: Beginning (Prologue) **ch.1:1-8**; Middle (Body) **ch.1:9-22:5**; End (Epilogue) **ch.22:6-21**
- The Body: is arranged in 7 parallel descriptions of the “Gospel Age” that span from Jesus’ 1<sup>st</sup> coming to His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. These *intensifying visions* highlight different aspects of God’s redemptive work.
- **#1 – The Struggle on Earth (ch. 1-11)**
  - The church is persecuted by the world, but the church is avenged, protected and victorious.
- **#2 – The Struggle in the Spiritual Realm (ch. 12-22)**
  - Jesus and His church are persecuted by the Satan (the dragon) and his helpers, but they remain victorious.

**(1:1-8) The Introduction – Author, Audience, and the Almighty One**

**(1:9-3:22) Cycle #1 – The King and His Bride – Christ and The 7 Churches**

**(4:1-7:17) Cycle #2 – 7 Seals – Darkness Hates The Light And Persecutes The Church**

**(8:1-11:19) Cycle #3 – 7 Trumpets – Christ Avenges The Saints’ Blood**

**(12:1-14:20) Cycle #4 – The Cosmic Conflict Between Christ And Satan**

**(15:1-16:21) Cycle #5 – 7 Bowls Of Plagues – Wrath Is Fully Poured Out**

**(17:1-19:21) Cycle #6 – The Triumph Over Babylon**

**(20:1-22:5) Cycle #7 – The Eternal Reign Of The Glorious King**

**(22:6-21) The Conclusion – Behold! I Am Coming Soon**

**(1:1-8) The Introduction – Author, Audience, and the Almighty One**

**(1:9-3:22) CYCLE #1 – THE KING AND HIS BRIDE – CHRIST AND THE 7 CHURCHES**

1:9-20 – The Christ in Glory: Jesus Walks Among His Churches

2:1-7 – The Church of Ephesus: The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

2:8-11 – The Church of Smyrna: The Church in the Midst of the Fire

2:12-17 – The Church of Pergamum: The Assembly of Assimilation

2:18-29 – The Church of Thyatira: The Congregation of Compromise

3:1-6 – The Church of Sardis: The Church of the Living Dead

3:7-13 – The Church of Philadelphia: The Church of the Open Door

3:14-22 – The Church of Laodicea: The Church that Thought They Needed Nothing

**(4:1-7:17) CYCLE #2 – 7 SEALS – DARKNESS HATES THE LIGHT AND PERSECUTES THE CHURCH**

4:1-5:14 – From the Throne: The Lamb Receives the Scroll of Judgment

6:1-17 – The Opening of the Seals 1-6: God’s Wrath Opened Up

7:1-8 – The Sealing of the Saints: True Israel Gathered In

7:9-17 – A Heavenly Host of Worshipers

### **(8:1-11:19) CYCLE #3 – THE SEVEN TRUMPETS – CHRIST AVENGES THE SAINTS' BLOOD**

8:1-5 – The Opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Seal: The Loudest Silence in History

8:6-13 – The Blowing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Four Trumpets: 1/3 of All Creation Destroyed

9:1-12 – The Blowing of the Fifth Trumpet: The 1<sup>st</sup> Woe

9:13-21 – The Blowing of the Sixth Trumpet: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Woe

10:1-11 – Interlude 4 (Earthly): The Angel and Little Scroll

11:1-14 – Interlude 5 (Earthly): The Two Witnesses at the Temple

11:15-19 – The Blowing of the Seventh Trumpet (3<sup>rd</sup> Woe): The Ark of the Covenant Unveiled

### **(12:1-14:20) CYCLE #4 – THE COSMIC CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN**

12:1-6 – A Savior is Born: The Christ is Given and Pursued by Satan

12:7-17 – Satan's Throw Down: The Evil One is Cast from Heaven and Pursues the People of God

13:1-10 – The Beast from the Sea

13:11-18 – The Beast from the Earth

14:1-5 – The Lamb and His Sealed Servants: A Firstfruit of Redeemed Worshipers

14:6-13 – Angelic Announcements: An Eternal Gospel, The Fall of Babylon, and A Promise for the Faithful

14:14-20 – Time for the Harvest: The Angels Call for the Sickle of Judgment Upon the Earth

### **(15:1-16:21) CYCLE #5 – THE SEVEN BOWLS OF PLAGUES**

15:1-8 – The Entrance of the Seven Angels: Preparation for Pouring Out God's Final Wrath

16:1-21 – The Pouring Out of the Plagues: God's Wrath Results in Unrepentance Displayed

### **(17:1-19:21) CYCLE #6 – THE TRIUMPH OVER BABYLON**

17:1-18 – The Whore of Babylon: Immorality, Perversion, and Blasphemy Conquered by Christ

18:1-24 – Fallen, Fallen is Babylon: The Great Godless Power Has Been Destroyed in an Instant

19:1-10 – The Heavenly Response: Rejoicing in the Coming Marriage Supper of the Lamb

19:11-21 – The Return of Christ: The King Comes to Reclaim His Kingdom

### **(20:1-22:21) CYCLE #7 – THE ETERNAL REIGN OF THE GLORIOUS KING**

20:1-10 – The Reign of the King: Jesus Displays His Authority Upon the Earth

20:11-15 – The Great White Throne Judgment: Evil is Fully and Finally Executed

21:1-22:5 – Behold! I Make All Things New: The New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem

### **(22:6-21) THE CONCLUSION – BEHOLD! I AM COMING SOON**