

THE BOOK OF REVELATION¹

TITLE: from Greek word *apokalypsis* (1:1) meaning *revelation, disclosure, unveiling*.

- The visions unveil God’s promised plan to destroy evil through His Son. 1st word “**the**” implies singularity (not Revelations)

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

- John authored Revelation while exiled on the island of Patmos
- **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 1st 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 of 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 1st century church; “soon...time is near”

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

- **Prior 70AD:** proposes writing during Nero’s reign (54-68AD); **After 70AD:** proposes writing during Domitian’s reign (81-96AD)
- **Conclusion:** issues facing the churches (Rev. 2-3) indicate the later date is more likely. This aligns with testimony of Irenaeus “*John received the Revelation almost in our own time, toward the end of the reign of Domitian*” (*Against Heresies* 5.30.3).

PURPOSE: Revelation *assures* the church that she will conquer with Christ who has conquered Satan’s kingdom and *prepares* her to be devoted to God by rejecting false teaching, enduring persecution, and persevering in faith until Christ returns.

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:** Genesis 1-3, 49; Exodus 7-12, 15; Psalm 2; Isaiah 6, 11, 44, 48, 65-66; Jeremiah 51; Ezekiel 27, 40-48; Daniel 7, 9; Zechariah 12
- The most helpful question when reading Revelation is, “Where is that in the Old Testament?”

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)
- “conquer” (x17) to prevail, triumph, overcome. Saints join in Jesus’s holy war and triumph with Him over sin, Satan, death (3:21)

¹ The following resources have proven invaluable in my study of this book and are reflected in this sheet. Dennis E. Johnson’s *Triumph of the Lamb*, William Hendriksen’s *More Than Conquerors*, Thomas R. Schreiner *Revelation in the ESV Bible Expository series*.

PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETATION

1. God conquers evil through Christ. This is the main point of the book. Keeping this in mind provides clarity in unclear portions.
2. Revelation is written to churches. It is written to aid believers to persevere in faith. It is a matter of necessity, not curiosity.
3. Revelation is to be seen. Apocalyptic literature communicates messages through vivid images which portray spiritual realities.
 - i.e., Lampstands are churches; The dragon is Satan. At times, John sees overlapping images that are represented by multiple symbols. i.e. Jesus is both Lion and Lamb; The Church is 144K from Israel's 12 tribes and an Innumerable host from every tribe.
 - Unwarranted interpretations flow from forcing symbols into literal interpretations (i.e. locusts hair in Rev. 9 are helicopters)
 - "Revelation is a picture book, not a puzzle book. Don't try to puzzle it out. Don't become preoccupied by isolated details. Rather, become engrossed in the story. Praise the Lord. Cheer for the saints. Detest the Beast. Long for the final victory." Vern Poythress
4. Revelation fulfills all prophecy. The most helpful question when reading Revelation is, "Where is that in the Old Testament?"
 - Though there are no direct quotations, there are 500+ allusions to OT texts (more all other NT books combined). Of the 404 verses, some 278 allude to OT passages. We gain clarity by looking at John's visions through what is written in the Law and prophets.
 - The New Testament interprets the Old Testament. Symbols from OT prophets are modified at times in light of Christ's work.
5. Numbers Count. Numbers are often used symbolically in Revelation. "7" (x55) symbolizes perfection and completeness², "10" often used to describe vastness³, "12" number of the people of God (i.e. The Twelve Tribes, 7:4-8, 12:12; The Apostles, 21:14)
6. Take comfort and courage. This book is written to persecuted believers who are under various forms of Satanic attack.
 - Satan's army relentlessly assaults the church through *persecution* leading to death and *seduction* leading to defilement. Revelation emboldens the church to persevere in faith and faithfulness to Jesus. We must not cower in fear or compromise with fleeting sin.
7. Worship. The book is to inspire the worship of God who has faithfully kept His promises to His people. The revelation is filled with images of heaven's songs to the risen Lamb and we are intended to be drawn heavenward through seeing what John saw.

APPROACHES TO INTERPRETATION

1. Idealist: symbols are not exclusively tied to specific events, but reflect the *on-going spiritual* battle between Christ and Satan
2. Preterist: (*ln, past*) the visions were largely fulfilled in the *past* during the fall of Jerusalem (70AD) or Rome (5th cen.)
3. Historical: the visions are *currently* being fulfilled chronologically throughout church history (Ch. 13 rise of Islam, Ch. 17 reformation)
4. Futurist: the visions in the apocalypse are almost entirely future events yet to be fulfilled (classic dispensational)
 - We will approach the book by attempting to draw from the strengths of each view. We will assume the visions reflect *past and future* fulfillments with idealist themes as presented in a repeating and intensifying presentation 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.

² 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

³ 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 worshippers (5:11-12).

AN OUTLINE OF THE REVELATION

The Consummation of God's Plan in Christ Jesus

- **Literary Sections:** Beginning (Prologue) **Ch. 1:1-20**; Middle (Body) **Ch. 2:1-22:5**; End (Epilogue) **Ch.22:6-21**
- “Write therefore the things that you have seen [1:1-20], those that are [2:1-3:20] and those that are to take place after this [4:1-22:5].” **1:19**
- **The Body** is arranged in 7 parallel descriptions of the “Gospel Age” that span from Jesus’ 1st coming to 2nd coming.⁴
- They are *intensifying visions* that highlight different aspects of God’s redemptive work. The body has two major sections:
 - (Ch. 1-11) **The Earthly Struggle (Ch. 1-11)** The church is persecuted by the world, but protected by Jesus.
 - (Ch. 12-22) **The Spiritual Struggle (Ch. 12-22)** Jesus and His bride are persecuted by Satan, but remain victorious.

(1:1-3) The Introduction – Author, Audience, and the Almighty One

(1:4-20) What You Have Seen – The King and His Glory (Jesus appears to the Apostle)

(2:1-3:22) What is Now – The King and His Bride (Christ ministers to the Churches)

(4:1-22:5) What is to Come - Seven Cyclical Visions (Christ conquers evil and rescues the righteous)

- (4:1-7:17) Cycle #1 – Seven Seals – Darkness Hates the Light and Persecutes The Church
- (8:1-11:19) Cycle #2 – Seven Trumpets – Christ Avenges the Saints’ Blood
- (12:1-14:20) Cycle #3 – The Cosmic Conflict Between Christ and Satan
- (15:1-16:21) Cycle #4 – Seven Bowls of Plagues – Wrath is Fully Poured Out
- (17:1-19:21) Cycle #5 – The Triumph Over Babylon and Marriage Supper of the Lamb
- (20:1-21:8) Cycle #6 – The White Throne Judgment – The Eternal Reign of the Glorious King
- (21:9-22:5) Cycle #7 – The New Jerusalem – Our Heavenly Home Before the Face of God

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

SEVEN BEATITUDES IN REVELATION

God promises a seven-fold blessing for believers who respond in faith to what has been revealed concerning Jesus

1. Blessed are those who read, hear, keep what is written. (1:3)
2. Blessed are those who die in the Lord. (14:13)
3. Blessed are those who remain pure in expectation of Jesus’ return. (16:15)
4. Blessed are those who are invited to Lamb’s wedding feast. (19:9)
5. Blessed are those who have been killed for their faith. (20:4-6)
6. Blessed are those who share in the tree of life in the city of God. (22:14)
7. Blessed are those who keep these words of the prophecy of this book. (22:7)

⁴ Concluding words of each cycle echo Christ’s 2nd coming: #1-7:17, #2-11:15, 19, #3-14:14-16, #4-16:17-21, #5-19:11, 20-21, #6-21:1-9

EXPANDED OUTLINE OF THE REVELATION

(1:1-3) The Introduction – *Author, Audience, and the Almighty One*

(1:4-20) What You Have Seen – *The King and His Glory* (Jesus appears to the Apostle)

1:4-8 – The Apostle with Greetings: Grace and Peace to the Seven Churches

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

(2:1-3:22) What Is Now – *The King and His Bride* (Christ ministers to the 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 #1 – Seven 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 #2 – Seven Trumpets – **Christ Avenges the Saints' Blood**

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

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

9:1-12 – The Blowing of the Fifth Trumpet: The 1st Woe

9:13-21 – The Blowing of the Sixth Trumpet: The 2nd 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 (3rd Woe): The Ark of the Covenant Unveiled

(12:1-14:20) Cycle #3 – 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

13:1-18 – The Beasts from Sea and Earth

14:1-5 – The Lamb’s Sealed Servants: A First Fruit 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 Son Swings the Sickle of Judgment

(15:1-16:21) Cycle #4 – Seven Bowls of Plagues – Wrath is Fully Poured Out

15:1-8 – Seven Angels and Singing Saints: The Songs of Moses and the Lamb

16:1-21 – Seven Bowls and God’s Wrath: The Pouring Out of the Plagues

(17:1-19:21) Cycle #5 – The Triumph Over Babylon and Marriage Supper of the Lamb

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

18:1-24 – Fallen is Babylon: The Sudden Collapse of Sin City

19:1-10 – Celestial Celebration: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

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

(20:1-21:8) Cycle #6 – The White Throne Judgment – The Eternal Reign of The Glorious King

20:1-10 – The Reign of the King: Jesus Displays His Authority Over Satan

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

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

(21:9-22:5) Cycle #7 – The New Jerusalem – Our Heavenly Home Before the Face of God

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