

Revelation Week 1: Overview

Getting Acquainted

The book of Revelation is extraordinary in every way—not least in its hard-to-classify genre. It is prophecy (**1:3; 22:19**) while also belonging to the genre of apocalyptic writing (**1:1**), and it begins and ends with features that characterize the epistles of the New Testament (**1:4-5; 22:21**). Like other Jewish apocalypses, Revelation is filled with symbolic images from beginning to end. This allows for numerous possible interpretations of the book, and much diversity of opinion on matters such as the tribulation, the rapture, and the millennium.

No two authors completely agree on everything. But this is not important. What is important is that we not miss the major message of Revelation: the glorious victory of Jesus Christ over all His enemies.

Revelation begins with a vision of the resurrected and ascended Christ and his words to seven-first century churches in Asia Minor that were facing a range of challenges: persecution from without, false teaching from within, temptation to compromise with the surrounding pagan culture, and spiritual lethargy. The book then covers a vast sweep of time, from the first century all the way to the return of Christ.

Central to Revelation is its assertion that Christ has already won the victory over Satan through his death, and has, therefore, freed Christians from their sins by his blood (**1:5**). Christ's past, inaugurated (i.e., already begun) victory guarantees his future, consummated (i.e., fully completed) victory (**2:26-27**). Because Christ has already conquered Satan through his uniquely redemptive suffering, Christians can also "conquer" in the present by holding fast their witness in the face of enticing temptation or violent persecution, even if their faithful witness results in death.

Placing It in the Larger Story

Through its pervasive allusions to the Old Testament, Revelation demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment and climax of history. Believers live after Jesus' first coming, suffering as he suffered, but full of hope because of his atoning death and their assurance of his future, victorious return. The entire book strains forward to the new heaven and new earth described in **Chapters 21-22**.

Knowing the Bible Series, Stephen Witmer, Crossway; Life Application Study Bible, Tyndale; ESV Study Bible, Crossway; King James Open Study Bible, Nelson

Key Verse

“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (**Rev. 1:5b-6**)

Key Chapters Revelation 19—22

When the end of history is fully understood, its impact radically affects the present. In **Revelation 19—22** the plans of God for the last days and for all of eternity are recorded in explicit terms. Careful study of and obedience to them will bring the blessings that are promised (**1:3**). Uppermost in the mind and deep in the heart should be guarded the words of Jesus, “Behold, I come quickly.”

Date and Historical Background

Revelation was written by a man named John (**1:1**), most likely John the son of Zebedee, as suggested by early church tradition and indicated by links between Revelation and the Gospel of John (e.g., Jesus is the “Lamb” of God and the “Word” in both books). This is the John who was one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples, and probably the one identified in John’s Gospel as the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (**John 13:23; 21:20**). John likely wrote Revelation in the mid-90s AD, near the end of the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, while in exile on the Island of Patmos.

Outline

- I. Prologue (1:1-8)
- II. Substance (1:9-22:5)
 - A. God’s people imperfect in the world (1:9-3:22)
 1. The son of man among lampstands (1:9-20)
 2. Seven letters to seven churches (2:1-3:22)
 - B. The Lamb and the seven seals (4:1-8:1)
 1. The Lamb receives the scroll (4:1-5:14)
 2. The Lamb opens the seven seals (6:1-8:1)

C. The seven angels and seven trumpets (8:2-11:19)

1. Prayers go up; fire comes down (8:2-5)
2. The seven trumpets are blown (8:6-11:19)

D. The cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan (12:1-14:20)

E. The seven angels and seven bowls (15:1-16:21)

1. Heaven's sanctuary is filled with glory (15:1-8)
2. The seven bowls are poured out (16:1-21)

F. The judgment of God's enemies (17:1-20:15)

1. Babylon, the beast, the false prophet (17:1-19:21)
2. Satan (20:1-10)
3. Unbelievers (20:11-15)

G. God's people perfect in glory (21:1-22:5)

III. Epilogue (22:6-21)

The three major movements in this profound unveiling are captured in 1:19: "the things which thou hast seen" (1); "the things which are" (2 and 3); and "the things which shall be hereafter" (4-22).

As You Get Started...

1. When you think of the book of Revelation, what comes to mind?
 - a) Do you think it refers mainly to events in the first century, events in our day, or events in the distant future?
2. Are you more intimidated or more intrigued by the colorful and often bizarre images throughout Revelation?

- a) Are there areas of confusion you hope will be cleared up through this study of Revelation?
3. Do you think Revelation as a book mainly to be understood or to be obeyed or both?
- a) Is it intended mainly to give us information, or to change our behavior, or both?

As You Finish this unit...

As we'll see, God gives a blessing to every person who reads, hears, and obeys the words of **Revelation (1:3)**. Take a moment to ask God for this special blessing, and for help in understanding this dazzling and mysterious book.

Definitions:

Genre—A type of literary work, characterized by a particular style, form, and content.

Apocalyptic—The distinctive literary form of the book of Revelation and of **Chapters 7-12 of Daniel**. These parts of scripture include revelation about the future, highly symbolic imagery, and the underlying belief that God himself will one day end the world in its present form and establish his kingdom on a re-created earth.

Homework: Week 2, **Read Revelation 1:1-20.**