



The Book of

# Revelation



Once-Over-Lightly

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# The Book of Revelation

## APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

### Introduction

[The purpose of this brief study of the book of Revelation is intended to acquaint the student with an over-all knowledge of the book: its structure, similarities to Old Testament writings, the use of symbolic numbers, and the various methods of interpretation.]

**The book of Revelation belongs to a class of literature termed apocalyptic. The Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel, along with parts of Zechariah, belong to the same class.**

The word “apocalyptic” comes from a compound Greek word which refers to the taking off of a veil so as to discover what was previously hidden. The purpose of such literature was not to hide the writer’s message but to make it vivid and impressive through the use of signs and symbols. This type of literature ordinarily appeared in difficult times and sought to convey a message of optimism and hope. That God is in control of history and fully capable of bringing human beings and human events to his desired divine goal is the confidence which underlies such literature. That the book of Revelation belongs to this category of literature is evident.

**Revelation was written at a crisis time in the history of the church.** The very existence of the body of Christ was being threatened. Christians were being persecuted almost everywhere and a number of them had already died as martyrs because of their steadfast allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. This book was therefore written in an optimistic spirit and was designed to assure its readers that their cause would ultimately triumph. The *theme* of the book can be expressed in these words: God’s way of truth and righteousness will triumph over all its foes!

Since the church was having to exist under a virtual police state when Revelation was written, the apocalyptic form was the ideal method for the Holy Spirit to use in revealing the message of encouragement which constitutes this book. **The symbols used to refer to the Roman government and its anti-Christian rulers served to protect both the writer and his readers.** Those who were not Christians would see the book as merely a fanciful tale involving monsters, angels and spirits. But the Christians would understand that these were symbolic representations of the contestants in the

ongoing struggle between truth and righteousness on the one hand and error and wickedness on the other. They would easily discern the message of the book that the former was guaranteed victory over the latter.

Understanding only this much about the nature of the literary form of Revelation aids one immensely in his effort to interpret the book. One must realize that the essential message of the book can be understood without understanding every detailed part of the symbolism used to convey the message.

One should study Revelation with the goal of understanding the significance of its symbolism to the first-century readers of the book. The bearing of the encouraging message of Revelation on the present-day problems of Christians can then be easily seen and appreciated.

Some of the problems of interpreting Revelation are enormously complex and difficult. But the gist of its message is clear enough to be grasped by every reader.

*“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.” (Rev.1:3).*

## The Author

This book purports to be “the Revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1:1). Therefore it is technically incorrect to label it “the Revelation of John.” However, the man who wrote down Christ’s revelation for its delivery to the saints was named John. (Cf. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). There is no valid reason for doubting that this was the apostle John who also wrote four other New Testament books.

## Date of Writing

Revelation was written in A.D. 95 or 96 while John was a prisoner in exile under the Roman emperor Domitian.

Some would date the book prior to A.D. 70 (i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem) based on the contention that chapter eleven indicates that the temple at Jerusalem was still standing. This would make Nero the emperor at the time of writing and mean that the persecutions reflected in the book were those occurring during his reign. In reply to this view, numerous weighty objections may be raised: (1) the symbolism of the book forces one to be cautious in dogmatically asserting that the Temple of chapter eleven is the literal Temple in Jerusalem, (2) the Neronian persecutions were confined to Rome and were not – as those assumed in Revelation – of a general nature throughout the empire, (3) emperor worship is clearly an issue in Revelation but was not an issue under Nero, (4) it is not reasonable to assume that the condition of the churches of Asia at the time of this book could be made to correspond with such an early date and (5) no early writers among the so-called church fathers assign such an early date to the book.

Thus it is that the idea of assigning an early date to Revelation and attempting to find its fulfillment in the events of the destruction of Jerusalem are on shaky ground, to say the least.

The evidence for the dating of Revelation near the close of the first century is quite strong. First, the matter of emperor worship points to Domitian. Although emperors before him had taken certain titles and prerogatives of deity unto themselves, it was under Domitian that an insistence on the universal worship of the emperor developed. He was proclaimed “dominus et deus” (i.e., Lord and God) and had images of himself erected throughout the empire. Since the Christians were committed to “one Lord” (i.e., Jesus Christ, cf. Eph. 4:4-6), they could not bow to the demand of emperor worship. A sharp confrontation was thus inevitable between the church and the empire. Some Christians had their property confiscated, some were tortured into a

confession of the emperor’s deity, some were exiled, some were murdered. This is the situation reflected in Revelation.

Second, the condition of the churches in Asia Minor reflect a situation quite late in the first century. The church at Ephesus, for example, reflects a condition that could hardly have come about as early as A.D. 70. The church had been founded by Paul on his return from the second missionary journey, had received correspondence from Paul around A.D. 60 and – by the time of the writing of Revelation – had gone into spiritual decline. This process would seem to require a period of time longer than that allowed by an early date. Furthermore, Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60, but was rebuilt and boasting of its riches by the time this book was written. (3:17).

Third, early external testimony to the book places it in the last period of Domitian’s rule. Irenaeus says the book was written “at the end of the reign of Domitian.” The testimony of other early writers such as Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria and Hegesippus supports this contention.

In view of the fact that Domitian reigned from 81 to 96 A.D., the book is to be dated near the end of this period.

## Destination

This book was obviously intended for the seven churches of Asia Minor which are specified in chapters two and three. But, whereas these seven churches constituted the immediate destination of the book, there can be no doubt that its message had a much wider relevance.

Everywhere the church existed at the time in history when this book was written, its membership was subject to persecution. The message of hope and encouragement was certainly for all these congregations. That such a wide distribution of the book occurred is evident from the attestations to it which are available to us.

Furthermore, since believers of every generation have to undergo trials of some sort for the sake of their faith (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12), this book remains relevant for every generation of saints until the final victory over Satan is won!

## Approaches to the Book

Many approaches are taken to the study of this book. Here are four schools of interpretation.

***The Poetic (or “Spiritual”) Method.*** Those who use this method of interpreting Revelation allegorize everything in the book and thus destroy any hope of arriving at a definite message from its pages. This view denies the clear contention of the book itself that it is a book of prophecy (1: 3, etc.) and allows each reader to make the book mean whatever he desires it to mean.

***The Preterist Method.*** This theory holds that Revelation was written prior to A.D. 70 and was fulfilled *in the series of events involved in the destruction of Jerusalem*. As has already been shown in discussing the date of the book, this requires an unjustified and arbitrary dating of the book and is inadequate for the explanation of the triumph of the persecuted saints.

***The Continuous-Historical Method.*** This view holds that the book is a blueprint for history from A.D. 96 to the end of time. Those who hold this view claim to find the popes, Mohammed, the Reformers, Hitler and others in the pages of Revelation. This approach makes the book practically meaningless to the people to whom it was originally written, attaches too much importance to the Roman Catholic apostasy and often becomes absurd in its fanciful and detailed interpretations.

***The Futuristic Method.*** This system of interpretation holds that the things referred to from the beginning of chapter four to the end of the book will take place in the time immediately prior to Christ’s return and the establishment of his kingdom on earth. It interprets everything in the book quite literally. It seeks to impose a very literal meaning on what is clearly symbolic (apocalyptic) literature. It turns the kingdom into a carnal rather than a spiritual thing and causes this book to contradict other parts of the Bible. This view adopts the unscriptural theory of premillennialism as its base for understanding the book.

*These four approaches are inadequate and false. They must be rejected by one who would have a tenable base from which to interpret the book. Such a base is suggested in the following approach.*

## Summation

**Revelation must be interpreted in the light of the circumstances in which it was written.** The church was existing in a period of severe persecution when saints were being hunted down, imprisoned and murdered. This book was written to bring comfort, exhortation and warning to men living under these conditions – comfort to Christians who were being persecuted for Christ’s sake, *exhortation* that the saints patiently endure their trials in hope and *warning* to their enemies of their eventual overthrow and damnation.

This view relates the symbolism of the book to the immediate situation of the first-century church and considers its message as one of optimistic encouragement. Yet it allows Christians of every age – particularly those who live in times of great stress and opposition – to read this book and be encouraged by its assurances of God’s concern for and control over the spiritual welfare of his people.

**Therefore one should study this book with two questions in mind:**

**(1) What did this mean to the saints to whom it was first written?**

**(2) What practical application of this truth can be made to our present-day situation?**

*—Adapted and compiled from various sources. Credits that should be mentioned have been forgotten.*

## References to the Prophets Of the Old Testament In the Book of Revelation

1	Description of the Son of man .	Daniel 7:9ff, 10:5-6; Ezekiel 1:26ff.
3	The book of life . . . . .	Exodus 32:33, Psalms 69:28
4	Throne in heaven . . . . .	Isaiah 6:1-3; Ezekiel 1:26-28
	Four living creatures . . . . .	Ezekiel 1:5-12, 10:14, Isaiah 6:1
5	The scroll . . . . .	Ezekiel 2:8-9, Zechariah 5:1-3
6	Horses and riders . . . . .	Zechariah 1:8, 6:1-3
7	The sealing . . . . .	Ezekiel 9:4
10	Angel swearing . . . . .	Daniel 12:7
	The little book . . . . .	Ezekiel 2:9-3:4
11	The measuring reed . . . . .	Ezekiel 40:3; Zechariah 2:lff
	Two witnesses . . . . .	Zechariah 4:2ff
13	Beasts from the sea . . . . .	Daniel 7:2ff
14	One like a son of man. . . . .	Daniel 7;13, 10:16
15	Song of Moses . . . . .	Exodus 15
17-19	Fall of Babylon . . . . .	Isaiah 13, 14, 21, 46, 47-48; Jeremiah 25, 50-51 Daniel 2, 7; (Cf: fall of Tyre, Ezekiel 39:17-20)
	Invitation to the birds. . . . .	Ezekiel 39:17-20
20	Gog and Magog . . . . .	Ezekiel 38, 39
	Books of judgment . . . . .	Daniel 7:10, 12:1
21	New heaven and new earth . . .	Isaiah 65:17ff, 6
22	River and tree of life . . . . .	Ezekiel 47:1-12

**Also observe the Old Testament words and phrases:**

<i>tree of life</i> . . . . .	2:7; 22:2, 14,19
<i>paradise of God</i> . . . . .	2:7
<i>Balaam and Balak.</i> . . . . .	2:14
<i>Jezebel</i> . . . . .	2:20
<i>Har-Magedon</i> . . . . .	16:16
<i>rod of iron</i> . . . . .	2:27, 12:5, 19:15

The references above are only a sampling of the nearly 400 Old Testament references found in the book of Revelation.

## REVELATION NOTES

### THE HEAVENLY VISIONS OF SEALS, TRUMPETS AND BOWLS COMPARED

SEVEN	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>SEALS</b>	MILITARY MIGHT AGAINST CHRISTIANS						
	<b>Conqueror</b> (white horse) crown	<b>sword</b> (red horse) war	<b>scales</b> (black horse) inflation	<b>death</b> ashen (pale) horse; followed by <b>hades</b>	<b>souls under the altar</b> they ask when vengeance will be taken; told to be patient	<b>earthquake, sun blackened, moon like blood</b> day of wrath	<b>silence in heaven</b> ½ hour
<b>TRUMPETS</b>	GOD'S VENGEANCE ON PERSECUTORS OF CHRISTIANS						
	<b>hail, fire, flood</b> ⅓ earth, trees, grass burned up	<b>burning mountain into the sea</b> ⅓ living creatures, ships destroyed	<b>star falls on rivers, springs</b> (Wormwood) ⅓ waters made bitter, many die	<b>sun, moon, stars darkened</b> ⅓ of them smitten	<b>star</b> (which had fallen) <b>opens the abyss</b> plague of locusts come out of pit	<b>release of angels at Euphrates river</b> ⅓ mankind killed	<b>kingdom of world has become the Lord's</b> judgment of nations; reward servants
<b>BOWLS</b>	GOD'S VENGEANCE UPON THOSE WHO WORSHIPED THE BEAST						
	<b>poured into the earth</b> sores upon those who worship the beast	<b>poured into the sea</b> sea becomes blood; living creatures die	<b>poured into rivers and springs</b> they become blood	<b>poured upon the sun</b> men scorched with fire	<b>poured upon the throne of the beast</b> darkness and pain	<b>poured upon Euphrates river</b> way prepared for kings of the East	<b>poured upon the air</b> Lightening, earthquake, hail. "It is done"

# REVELATION

**WRITER:** John  
**THEME:** Victory of Christ and His Church

DATE: 90-96

## PROLOGUE

Revelation of Jesus Christ . . . . .	1:1-3
Salutation . . . . .	1:4-7
John instructed to write by the Alpha and Omega . . . . .	1:8-20

## LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

<b>Ephesus.</b> Left it's first love . . . . .	2:1-7
<b>Smyrna.</b> Persecuted church . . . . .	2:8-11
<b>Pergamum.</b> Over tolerant church . . . . .	2:12-17
<b>Thyatira.</b> Compromising church . . . . .	2:18-29
<b>Sardis.</b> Sleeping church . . . . .	3:1-6
<b>Philadelphia.</b> Church with opportunity . . . . .	3:7-13
<b>Laodicea.</b> Complacent church . . . . .	3:14-22

## HEAVENLY VISIONS

<b>The throne of God.</b> . . . . .	4:1-11
Twenty-four elders on thrones around the throne of God	
Seven Lamps before the throne	
Four living creatures around the throne	
All worship Him who is on the throne	
<b>Book with seven seals.</b> . . . . .	5:1-1-14
Opened by the Lamb, who alone is worthy	
Lion of Judah, Root of David	
Heavenly Hosts, myriads of angels praise God and the Lamb	
The book opened . . . . .	
<b>First seal:</b> white horse—conquering . . . . .	6:1-2
Bow in hand, crown given to rider . . . . .	
<b>Second seal:</b> red horse—power given to take peace away . . . . .	6:3-4
Sword given to rider . . . . .	
<b>Third seal:</b> black horse—Scales in hand of rider . . . . .	6:5-6
<b>Fourth seal:</b> Ashen (pale) horse; followed by Hades . . . . .	6:7-8
Rider's name: Death . . . . .	
<b>Fifth seal:</b> souls of martyrs under the altar . . . . .	6:9-11
Ask when vengeance will be taken	
Told to wait until their number is complete	
<b>Sixth seal:</b> Earthquake, sun blackened, moon like blood, etc . . . . .	6:12-17
Great day of wrath has come	
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Harm withheld until the sealing of the bondservants . . . . .	7:1-17
144,000 from Israel	
Multitudes of other nations before the throne	
Those who came out of great tribulation	
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<b>Seventh seal:</b> silence in heaven . . . . .	8:1

## Seven angels with seven trumpets

Preparation for sounding the trumpets . . . . .	8:2-6
<b>First trumpet:</b> hail, fire mixed with blood thrown to earth . . . . .	8:7
1/3 earth, 1/3 trees, 1/3 grass burned up	
<b>Second trumpet:</b> [Like] burning mountain thrown into the sea . . . . .	8:8-9
1/3 sea became blood, 1/3 sea creatures died, 1/3 ships destroyed	
<b>Third trumpet:</b> great star (Wormwood) fell upon rivers, springs . . . . .	8:10-11
1/3 waters made bitter, many die	
<b>Fourth trumpet:</b> . . . . .	8:12
1/3 of sun, 1/3 moon and 1/3 stars smitten	
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Eagle with 3 woes because of remaining trumpets . . . . .	8:13
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<b>Fifth trumpet:</b> fallen star opens abyss . . . . .	9:1-12
Plague of locusts come out of bottomless pit	
<b>Sixth trumpet:</b> four angels at Euphrates loosed. . . . .	9:13-21
1/3 of mankind killed	
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Angel with little book . . . . .	10:1-11
Sealing of what seven thunders spoke	
John ordered to eat book; must prophecy again	
Two witnesses . . . . .	11:1-14
Two olive trees, two lampstands	
Finish testimony, killed by beast	
Come to life again, goes up to heaven	
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<b>Seventh trumpet:</b> loud voice in heaven . . . . .	11:15-19
Kingdom of world becomes kingdom of Lord and Christ	
Judgment of nations; reward of bond-servants	
Temple (sanctuary) of heaven opened	
<b>Woman with child opposed by dragon</b> . . . . .	12:1-17
Dragon thrown down to earth	
Son born; taken to God and His throne	
Woman flees into wilderness	
Beast comes out of the sea, receives power from dragon . . . . .	13:1-10
Beast comes out of the earth, has power with beast. . . . .	13:11-18
Lamb standing on Mount Zion . . . . .	14:1-11
Three angels: (1) With gospel message, (2) with message that Babylon has fallen, (3) with message of God's wrath upon all with mark of the beast	
The harvest of the earth . . . . .	14:12-20
One like the Son of Man reaps the earth	
Angels reap that which was ripe for wrath of God	
<b>Seven angels with seven plagues</b> . . . . .	15:1
Song of those who are victorious over the beast) . . . . .	15:2-8
Angels pour out bowls of plagues . . . . .	16:1-21



**First bowl** poured into earth  
 Malignant sores on those who had the mark of the beast  
**Second bowl** poured into sea  
 Sea becomes blood; all living in sea die  
**Third bowl** poured into rivers and springs  
 They are turned into blood  
**Fourth bowl** poured upon the sun  
 Men scorched with fire  
**Fifth bowl** poured upon the throne of the beast  
 Darkness and pain  
**Sixth bowl** poured upon river Euphrates  
 Way prepared for kings of east

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From the mouth of dragon, beast, and false prophet come three  
 unclean spirits (like frogs)

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Kings gathered to battle God at Har-Magedon  
**Seventh bowl** poured upon the air  
 Lightning, thunder, earthquake, hail  
 "It is done"  
 Great city split in three parts; cities of nations fall

**Judgment of the great harlot**

Judgment announced . . . . . 17:1-2  
 Description of the great harlot. . . . . 17:3-5  
 Explanation of woman and the beast that carries her . . . . . 17:6-18  
 Beast's seven heads are seven mountains on which woman sits;  
 Seven kings: five fallen, one is, one is to come  
 Beast's ten horns are ten kings yet to have kingdoms; they will  
 wage war against the Lamb; Lamb overcomes them  
 Waters are the people, nations, tongues  
 The ten horns will hate the harlot and make her desolate  
 The woman is the great city

**Fall of Babylon**

Extent of her judgment . . . . . 18:1-8  
 Kings of earth lament over her . . . . . 18:9-14  
 Merchants weep and mourn over her . . . . . 18:15-20  
 Babylon desolate . . . . . 18:21-24

**Rejoicing in heaven over judgment of harlot**

Fourfold hallelujahs . . . . . 19:1-6  
 Marriage feast of the Lamb . . . . . 19:7-10

**Word of God appears: King of kings, Lord of lords** . . . . . 19:11-16

Beast rallies kings against Word of God and saints . . . . . 19:17-19  
 Beast, false prophet cast into lake of fire . . . . . 19:20-21  
 The rest killed by sword from His mouth  
 Dragon (Satan) bound; unable to deceive nations . . . . . 20:1-3  
 Faithful souls who persevered live and reign with Christ . . . . . 20:4-6  
 Release of Satan for little while . . . . . 20:7-9

Devil thrown into the lake of fire . . . . .	20:10
Heaven and earth flee. . . . .	20:11
The dead are judged by books (and Book of Life) . . . . .	20:12-13
Death and hades thrown into the lake of fire . . . . .	20:14
Those not found in book of life thrown into lake of fire . . . . .	20:15
<b>New heaven and new earth</b>	
All things made new . . . . .	21:1-8
Vision of heavenly Jerusalem: bride (wife) of Christ . . . . .	21:9-14
Twelve gates with twelve angels with names of twelve tribes	
Twelve foundation stones with names of twelve apostles	
Measurement of the city . . . . .	21:15-17
Splendor of the city's walls . . . . .	21:18-21
Almighty God and Lamb are the temple in the city . . . . .	21:22-27
River of life with tree of life in the city . . . . .	22:1-3
Inhabitants live and reign forever and ever . . . . .	22:4-5
<b>EPILOGUE</b>	
Final testimony . . . . .	22:6-9
Admonition not to seal up the book . . . . .	22:10-15
Invitation of Jesus . . . . .	22:16-17
Warning against tampering with the contents of the book . . . . .	22:18-19
Closing . . . . .	22:20-21