

## SURVEY OF REVELATION

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### Keys to interpreting the book of Revelation:

1) OT background. 278 of 404 verses in Revelation draw on the OT either by way of direct quote (relatively rare) or by allusion—i.e., the use of similar wording as an OT passage.

Rev 1:6-7	Ex 19:6; Dan 7:14; Zech 12:10
Rev 13:1	clearly drawing from Daniel 7:2-3, 8

2) There is no reason to abandon the normal rules of Bible interpretation when you come to the book of Revelation.

Revelation is a prophetic book which makes extensive use of figurative language, but that doesn't mean the book is incomprehensible or that the figures of speech don't point to literal meanings. The book of Revelation is by title a *revelation*, not an obscuration. We should interpret it with that in mind.

Three wise guidelines:

1. The use of figurative language does not mean that everything (numbers, kingdoms, events, etc.) in the book is figurative. Always start by considering a statement to be literal until it is clear the writer intended it to be figurative.
2. One should avoid assigning figurative meanings in everything in the book—i.e., every colour, event, group of people, etc.
3. One should avoid reading Revelation through the lens of this morning's newspaper. Christ's return could be in our lifetime; it could also be another thousand years until Jesus comes.

### Four different approaches to interpreting the book of Revelation:

1. Preterist approach: The book refers to conditions in the Roman empire in the first century, and all of the events referred to in the book of Revelation took place by the time of the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

Evaluation: This view cannot explain the second coming of Christ as described in Rev 19. Christ did not return when the temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

2. Continuous-historical approach: Revelation is predictive, but refers to events that have taken place already in church history. In other words, it is a panoramic view of church history, largely in allegorical form.

Evaluation: The historical events said to match the bowl, seal, and trumpet judgements bear no actual resemblance to those judgements as Revelation describes them.

3. Timeless-symbolic approach: Revelation depicts, not specific events in church history, but rather the eternal conflict of good and evil in every age, especially the age in which the interpreter lives. Therefore, the reader is free to make connections between events in Revelation and whatever is happening in his own world in his day.

Evaluation:

- In this view, the reader determines the meaning of the text.
- While there is allegory in Revelation, this approach to the book makes the whole book an allegory, and therefore, virtually uninterpretable.
- Revelation has a specific chronological flow that ends with Christ's return and kingdom. It is not merely a general panorama of the age-long battle between good and evil.

4. Futurist approach: Revelation focuses on the final years before Jesus Christ's return, His actual return, and the establishment of the millennial and eternal kingdom. This view sees Revelation as prophetic, foretelling specific events in the future. This is the view taken in these notes.

### **Introductory Details:**

The author: John the apostle (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). This was the earliest tradition in the church: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian and others all credit Revelation to the apostle John.

The date: The date of writing was traditionally held to be during the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 96).

The source: 1:1 God

The recipients: 1:4 seven prominent churches in the Roman province of Asia (western, modern-day Turkey).

The content of Revelation: 1:1

1. An unveiling of the glory, majesty, and sovereignty of Jesus Christ
2. A revealing of things to take place in the future

### **Survey of Revelation:**

#### **Rev 1**

John's opening vision.            1:9-16

The glorious Person: Christ

- one like a son of man (1:13), Messianic terminology from Dan 7:13
- the descriptions of v. 17-18 best apply to Christ, especially since 1:1 says that the book is an unveiling of Jesus Christ.

The lampstand/stars imagery: The churches and their messengers, angels, or pastors (1:20). Christ is pictured as moving among seven *menorah*, trimming the wicks and checking the oil supplies of each church.

### Rev 2-3

Christ gives a specifically tailored message to each of the seven churches. Each message follows this general pattern.

- Christ characterised—Christ describes Himself in some way fitting to that church.
- church commended—all except Laodicea, which receives no positive commendation
- church condemned—except Smyrna and Philadelphia
- church cautioned—warning regarding what Christ will do if they don't change
- church commanded—the repentance and change Christ demands from them
- church congratulated—the promise of good and blessing if they overcome

The chronological flow of the rest of Revelation:

Seven seal judgements → seven trumpet judgements → seven bowl judgments  
→ the return of Christ → the millennial kingdom → the eternal kingdom

### Rev 4:1-8:1 The seal judgements

Primary events:

- The opening of the scroll of seven seals (Rev 4-5). The imagery is probably that of a title deed—Christ is the heir of all the earth, thus He is worthy to open the title deed.
- the seven seal judgements (6-8:1)

The scene: The heavenly throne room. A vision of God and His court.

The participants in the scene:

- God the Father 4:2-3
- God the Spirit 4:5
- God the Son 5:5
- Divine body guards 4:6-9 (cp. Is 6:1-4)
- Angelic nobles, elders (24 elders) 4:4.

The celebration:

The worthiness of the Lamb to open the scroll and to take possession of His inheritance, i.e., the earth. (5:2-14)

## The seven seal judgements

Seal 1	Peaceful conquest. 6:1-2
Seal 2	War. 6:3-4
Seal 3	Famine. 6:5-6
Seal 4	Death of ¼ of the earth's population. 6:7-8
Seal 5	Prayer by the martyrs for believers still on the earth. 6:9-11
Seal 6	Cosmic and terrestrial disturbances. 6:12-17
Seal 7	Seven trumpet judgements. 8:1-2

## Rev 7 Interlude.

Two sets of God's servants:

1. God's special earthly servants: the 144,000 marked with a seal of protection (7:1-4). There is no indication in the text that this is anything except a literal 144,000 Jews. The character of the 144,000. Rev 14:1-5
2. God's heavenly servants: Rev 7:9-17. Although the text doesn't say precisely, this seems to refer to those who have died or been martyred for the cause of Christ during the great tribulation.

The interlude of Revelation 7 highlights the power of God to protect and care for His persecuted people, either on earth or by taking them to heaven (cp. Daniel chaps. 1, 3, 6, 7):

## Rev 8-11 The trumpet judgements

Primary events:

- the trumpet judgements
- an interlude between trumpet 6 and 7, which includes John's consuming of the book of prophecy, measuring of the temple, and details regarding the two witnesses.

8:1-2, 6. The trumpet judgements unfold out of the seventh seal judgement. There seems to be an intensification in the severity and specificity of the judgements in the trumpet judgements. Meanwhile, the saints in heaven and on earth are praying that God will judge the wicked men of the earth and stop the persecutions. Rev 8:3-5

Trumpet 1	1/3 of plant life burnt up by fiery hail. 8:7. This might be a reference to divinely timed meteor activity.
Trumpet 2	1/3 of sea life and ships destroyed. 8:8-9
Trumpet 3	1/3 of fresh water poisoned. 8:10-11
Trumpet 4	1/3 darkening of the heavenly bodies. 8:12

Side note: Angelic warning about the severity of the three remaining blasts (8:13). The final three trumpet blasts are called the *three woes*. 8:13; 9:12; 11:14-15.

Trumpet 5 Demon plague—locust-like in its intensity: five months of pain as from scorpion stings (9:10). Reasons to take this as a demonic plague:

- The bottomless pit is the abode of demons, not locust. 9:1-2
- Their king is *Abaddon* or *Apollyon (Destruction)*, presumably a reference to Satan or some other high-ranking demon. 9:11

Point of the imagery: This plague is as intense and dominating as a locust plague in which the sky is blotted out and everything is covered and consumed by locust.

Trumpet 6 1/3 of the earth's population killed by 4 demons and their army of 200 million (9:13-19). It is probably best to view this as a further demonically instigated and proliferated plague, not the marshalling of a human army (see 9:20a).

Side note: Rev 9:20-21 Men are so hardened in their rebellion against God, they refuse to repent. They will rather have Satan's reign of ruin, destruction, and demonic torment than submit to Christ and have peace, contentment, and joy.

## Rev 10:1-11:14 Interlude

Interlude part 1: Three announcements (Rev 10)

1. Seven peals of thunder (probably God's voice): John was not allowed to record this message. 10:1-4
2. Angelic oath: God's long-promised Messianic work as promised in the OT prophets is now at hand (both judgement and salvation). 10:5-7
3. Angelic commission of John: John eats the little book (cp. Ezekiel 2:8-3:3). John is commissioned to complete what the OT prophets started—delivering God's message of judgment and salvation. Rev 10:7, 10-11

Interlude part 2: Duration of Gentile domination and persecution (11:1-2)

This is the first connection with the 3.5 time periods of persecution in Daniel 7 and the second half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. (42 months = 3.5 years = 1260 days; see also Revelation 12:6, 12:14, and 13:5)

Interlude part 3: The career of the two witnesses (11:3-13)

Trumpet 7 Two aspects: Angelic celebration that God will now take possession of the earth through Christ, and a massive earthquake and gigantic hailstorm.

## Rev 12-14 Panoramic view of the Messianic history, especially the tribulation period

Rev 12-14 interrupts the chronological flow of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgements, giving you the background you need to understand the tribulation period as a whole.

12:1-6 How shall we interpret the imagery of this God-intended allegory?

*The male child:* 12:5 alludes to Psalm 2. Clearly the male child is the Messiah who rules the nations.

*The dragon:* 12:9 states that the dragon is Satan. The heads and horns imagery clearly reflect Daniel 7. Satan is the power behind the little horn and his violent, destructive kingdom.

*The woman:* The sun, moon, and stars imagery is borrowed from the dreams of Joseph regarding his family (Gen 37:9-10). This suggests that the woman might refer to the family of Jacob, i.e., the nation of Israel. The woman gives birth to the Messiah. This could be Israel or Mary. Israel seems more likely. In 12:17, Satan goes off to "make war with the rest of her children." This is surely a reference to the Jewish people and the great persecutions predicted in Daniel 7 and 12, and in Matthew 24. Conclusion: the woman pictures the nation of Israel.

*1/3 of the stars:* 12:9 refers to Satan's angels who are cast out of heaven. This seems, then, to be a reference to the angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God.

The story told by Rev 12:

The woman (Israel) gives birth to the male child (the Messiah). Satan who has brought down 1/3 of the angels in rebellion tries to destroy the child, but God protects the child and raises Him up to the position of heir and vice regent. At some point the woman will flee into the wilderness for protection from Satanic persecution.

How did this situation come about? Satan was violently removed from heaven (12:7-10), probably sometime during the first half of the great tribulation. Heaven rejoices, but the earth will—for a short period—experience the full evil of Satan's murderous, lying schemes (12:12). Having been cast down, Satan tried to destroy the woman (Israel) as already described in 12:6. In other words, 12:13 picks up the story where 12:6 left it.

In 12:13-17, God protects Israel in some unique way in the wilderness (see Jesus' counsel to flee "to the mountains" in Matthew 24). This protection lasts for 1,260 days or 3.5 times (v. 6, 14; see also Malachi 3:16-17). Unable to destroy those Jews

living in the land of Israel, Satan widens his attack to Jews (and probably both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ) who live outside Palestine.

### Rev 13

Revelation 13 fills in more details of the tribulation period and the little horn or Anti-Christ's satanically empowered rule.

Key figures (the satanic version of the Trinity):

1. *The dragon*: Already introduced as Satan in Rev 12. Note the connection between 13:1 and Daniel 7 (standing on the seashore watching a world empire emerge).
2. *The beast*: Combines all the features of the four beasts or kingdoms in Daniel 7: leopard, bear, lion, and the indescribably fearsome beast. This beast refers both to the king and the kingdom that Satan is substituting for Christ and Christ's rule. There is a clear connection between this beastly king and the little horn ruler of Daniel 7. Rev 13:5-6 "arrogant words and blasphemies ... he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God". Daniel 7:8 and 11 say that the little horn speaks great boasts against God.

Characteristics of the beast:

- satanically empowered 13:2
- worshipped by his followers, citizens, and the world 13:4, 8
- violent 13:4
- rules for 42 months 13:5
- blasphemes God 13:5-6
- overcomes the saints 13:7
- world-wide rule 13:7
- appears to defeat death 13:3, 14

This is Satan's *anti- or replacement-Christ*: a death-defeating, worshipped, world ruler.

3. *The lamb that speaks like a dragon* (called the the *false prophet* in Rev 19:20):

Characteristics:

- Satan's mouthpiece 13:11
- lamb—this suggests a religious role 13:11
- directs the world's worship to the beast (i.e., to the Anti-Christ and his kingdom 13:12
- miraculous powers—calls down fire 13:13
- spiritual deception 13:14
- appears to have the power to give life 13:15
- kills those who won't worship the beast 13:15
- causes all beast worshipers to receive a distinguishing mark or number so that those who refuse to worship the beast can be persecuted more effectively

Summary: Revelation 13 describes a satanically conceived and empowered world empire in which Satan and the human ruler he establishes are worshipped for their supposed power over life and death. This satanic empire persecutes and murders true believers for 3.5 years.

#### Rev 14

1. Christ's kingdom (jumps ahead to the millennial or eternal state) 14:1-5
2. Christ's plan for dealing with unbelievers in the beast's kingdom:
  - the gospel preached audibly to all men 14:6-7
  - temporal judgement announced 14:8
  - eternal judgment announced 14:9-12
    - Side note: a promise to believers in the tribulation: blessing even if they are killed 14:13
  - temporal judgment enacted: wheat harvest image (14:14-16) and grape harvest image (14:17-20, see Joel 3:13 for both)

#### Rev 15-16 The bowl judgements

15:1 The bowl judgments exhaust the temporal wrath of God on the beast and his worshippers. The praise and preparation of the bowl judgements (15:2-16:1)

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| Bowl 1 | Incurable sores on the citizens of the beast's kingdom 16:1-2   |
| Bowl 2 | Death of all sea life 16:3  |
| Bowl 3 | All fresh water turned to blood 16:4-7  |
| Bowl 4 | Sun's heat becomes scorching in intensity 16:8-9  |
| Bowl 5 | Sun darkened 16:10-11   |
| Bowl 6 | Preparation for the battle of Armageddon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Euphrates dried up to allow easy passage of armies</li> <li>• three demonic messengers use supernatural signs to gather the nations of the world to fight against God.</li> </ul>   |
| Bowl 7 | Huge storms, 45 kilogram hailstones; greatest earthquake in the history of creation—mountain ranges fall flat, islands disappear, all cities destroyed; Babylon destroyed. Based on Daniel's visions, this probably refers to the world empire of the Anti-Christ, but it may well include a city rebuilt on the site of Israel's ancient nemesis, Babylon. |

#### Rev 17-18 Destruction of the world system of the Anti-Christ

The **religious system** described (17:1-7):

- harlot—typified by spiritual adultery, i.e., the worship of false gods 17:1-2
- dominates all world religions 17:1 ("many waters" thus explained in 17:15)
- seven heads/ten horns—connection with Daniel 7 and the beast's kingdom 17:3-5
- kills believers 17:6

The **political system**: its history (17:8-13):

Five world empires fallen: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece

One world empire that is (as John writes): Rome.

The seven mountains on which the harlot sits (17:9-10) do not refer to the city of Rome or the Roman Catholic Church. The angel plainly says in v. 10 that they refer to seven historical and future kingdoms.

One kingdom yet to come:

The world coalition which the Anti-Christ takes over and dominates when he "rises" from the dead. (17:12-13). In that sense, according to 17:11, the Anti-Christ's kingdom is the seventh *and* the eighth—i.e., the eighth kingdom is the 42 month reign of terror of the Anti-Christ.

**Religious and political systems**: their culmination

Rev 17:15-18. The ten-king coalition (of whom the Anti-Christ is one) will destroy all false religions and the Anti-Christ will step into the void, claim to be god and to have power over death. All who do not accept his claim will be persecuted.

The **commercial system**:

- Its judgement announced by angels 18:1-8, 21-24.
- Its judgement lamented by the world's kings and merchants 18:9-19.

**Rev 19-20 The conquest and millennial reign of Christ**

Jesus Christ now takes centre stage in the book written to reveal His glory.

Conquest: its anticipation.

Heavenly rejoicing over the fact that God has judged and is now implementing His direct rule through Christ (19:1-10).

Conquest: its actualisation.

The return of Christ and His defeat of Satan and the armies of the Anti-Christ (19:11-20:3). 3 Results: 1) The beast and the false prophet are cast directly into the lake of fire, 2) all the followers of the beast are killed by a word from Christ, 3) Satan is bound in the abyss for 1,000 years (20:1-3)

Millennial reign:

20:4-6          The resurrection and reign of the saints

20:7-10      The rebellion and final defeat of Satan

The Great White Throne Judgement:

All unbelievers are judged and join Satan, the Anti-Christ, and the false prophet in the lake of fire, the eternal abode of those who reject God and Christ.

### **Rev 21-22 The eternal reign of God and Christ**

The new heavens and earth, key characteristics:

- God and Christ's personal presence 21:3, 22-23; 22:3-5
- removal of the curse/reversal of the Fall 21:4; 22:3
- all things made new 21:5
- for believers, the completion of their salvation and adoption into God's family 21:6-7
- complete exclusion of the wicked 21:8, 27; 22:15
- a capital city of stunning beauty 21:2, 10-11
- complete safety from fear and enemies 21:25
- perpetual reign with Christ 22:5

### **22:6-21 Closing testimonies** as to the truthfulness of the book of Revelation

- angelic testimony 22:6-7, 8-11
- John's testimony 22:8
- Jesus' testimony 22:12-20

Benediction 22:21