

BOOK OF REVELATION OVERVIEW

The book of Revelation (sometimes called Apocalypse) is the message from Jesus Christ to His Church in which He outlines the climax of human history. The book begins with the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ to His aged servant John, in which Christ commissions John to write down what he has seen and the things that were about to be revealed to him. The visions in the book were revealed to John while he was imprisoned “for the testimony of Jesus” (1:9; 19:10) on the island of Patmos during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Perhaps the most venerated church leader of his day, John was the only one of the twelve apostles still alive at the time he wrote this book. The book of Revelation was immediately and universally accepted as the last of the inspired writings. Neither its authorship by John nor the late date of its writing (A.D. 95) has ever been seriously questioned by those who interpret the Bible literally. Not until the third century was the suggestion launched that “another John” may have written it, and such a notion has no credibility in history.

Christ gave this vision to John and to all believers to comfort them in their trials. He assures them that there will be a day of rest for those who love God, that He will meet them in the air, and that while the Church is with Him in heaven the terrible Tribulation of which He spoke will occur on earth (*Mark 13:19*). The importance of the Tribulation

period is confirmed in the fact that twelve chapters of the book are devoted to describing over fifty details about it. When combined with the many Old Testament passages that mention the Tribulation, more prophecy is devoted to that brief period of time than any other comparable period in history.

However, a grim portrayal of the future days of the Tribulation is not all that Revelation contains. For instance, the glorious rapture of the Church is detailed in 4:1-2. The Church is mentioned nineteen times in chapters 1–3, but in the twelve chapters that describe the Tribulation period, it is not mentioned once. That omission can easily be explained when you understand that the Church is taken to heaven prior to the beginning of the Tribulation (4:1-2; 5:9).

A study of other passages on the Rapture (e.g., *1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58*) clearly demonstrates that the Church escapes that time of tribulation predicted exclusively for Israel and the unbelieving world by the Hebrew prophets. Following the Tribulation, Christ and His saints will return to earth to rule for a thousand years, followed by a day when evil will be vanquished forever and Satan and his minions and all who have spurned the Lord Jesus will be cast into eternal hell.

Revelation 1:19 provides a three-fold outline of the entire book. The book flows chronologically along these lines, with the exception of chapter 12, which is a

parenthetical flashback that culminates in the middle of the Tribulation.

AN OUTLINE OF REVELATION

I. The Things Which You Have Seen ...

The introduction and description of the resurrected Christ (Chapter 1)

II. The Things Which Are ...

The outline of church history (chaps. 2-3).

III. The Things Which Will Take Place after This.

- The rapture of the Church and a scene in heaven (chaps. 4-5).
- The seven-year Tribulation; seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments; the short reign of Antichrist; and the destruction of Babylon (chaps. 6-18).
- The glorious appearing of Christ (chap. 19).
- The binding of Satan, the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, and the final judgment (chap. 20).
- The eternal order called heaven (chaps. 21-22).

The book of Revelation relates the events of John’s visions through the use of symbols, many of which are unique to the book and some of which are not explained.

The key to understanding the book and the visions is to understand what is literal and what is symbolic, and to realize that even the symbols (trumpets, bowls, the Beast, etc.) represent real events and real people.

Those who do not interpret the book literally will fail to understand its real meaning, and

the blessing of the realities it portrays will be diminished.

Revelation also unveils the return of Christ in power to this earth to set up His kingdom on earth for one thousand years, followed by the final judgment of all lost souls just before He takes believers into God’s eternal heaven. A more beautiful description of life after death for eternity cannot be found in all of literature. The book of Revelation **concludes** all the prophecies of the Hebrew prophets, the writings of the apostles, and the teachings of Jesus. As Genesis revealed the beginning of the battle of the ages between God and Satan for the souls of men, Revelation concludes it with the return of Jesus Christ to this earth in power and glory.

A special blessing is promised to the reader of Revelation: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (*Rev. 1:3*).

Revelation contains more unfulfilled prophecy than any other book in the Bible. Something prophetic can be found in every one of its 22 chapters. Of 404 verses, 383 are prophetic, amounting to 95% of the book.

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signal to earth's inhabitants that the seal judgments have initiated the predicted wrath of God against rebellious humanity.

The breaking of the 7th seal (8:1) **resulted in** the sounding of 7 trumpets (8:7–11:15), in themselves 7 physical judgments additional to and more severe than those of the first 6 seals. The 1st 6 trumpets were prophetic.

The blowing of the 7th trumpet (11:15) ushered in **another** series of judgments predicting God's future visitations against rebellious mankind, the 7 bowls of God's wrath (15:7). The seven bowls represented to John what will be the 7 last plagues that will complete God's wrath (15:1) against creatures who have rebelled against Him. The first 6 plagues will produce affliction of false-Christ worshipers with incurable sores, (16:2), death to all sea life (16:3), transformation of all fresh water into blood (16:4-7), scorching of all rebels with super heat from the sun (16:8-9), darkening of the false-Christ's kingdom (16:10-11), and battle preparation for destruction of earth's kings (16:12-16).

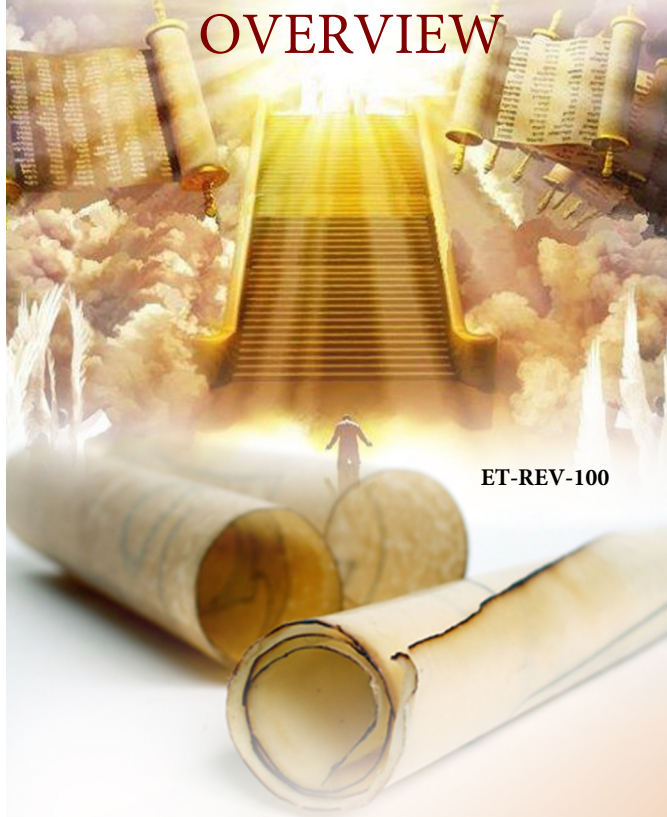
The prophetic message of the 7th bowl of God's wrath carries forward into the eternal state (16:17-22—22:5). It will include 8 main events: the 2nd coming of Christ to conquer His enemies, a summons of birds to feast on conquered humans, the slaughter of Christ's human opponents, Satan's imprisonment, Satan's release and final defeat, the setting of the Great White Throne Judgment, sentencing of lost people to the Lake of Fire and a sketch of the New Jerusalem and those excluded from it (19:11—21:8).

Along with his description of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, John's vision ALSO INCLUDES **supplemental data** (7:1-17; 10:1-14:20; 17:1-18:24; 21:9 -22:5) to give readers details of the future judgments that will occupy 7 years Tribulation, 1,000 year Millennium, and eternity future as this present creation of God runs its course and steps aside to be replaced by His new creation. Food for thought, believers & unbelievers alike.

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MORE REVELATION

BY ROBERT THOMAS

How do you strengthen people who are persecuted for being Christians? How do you motivate God-rejecting people to repent and turn to Him? God's answer to both questions is the same: by telling them what is to happen in the future, the very thing He does in the final book of the Bible.

That book, Revelation (also called Apocalypse), centers around prophetic predictions of the future (Rev. 1:3; 10:11; 18:20; 19:10; 22:6-7, 9-10, 18-19). Revelation plays a significant role in biblical prophecy as a whole. John, one of Jesus' 12 apostles, wrote the book in about A.D. 95 while in exile on a small Mediterranean island off the coast of Asia Minor (1:9). The resurrected Jesus appeared to him there and gave him information about the future for him to deliver to messengers from seven churches of the nearby Roman province located in the western portion of what is today the country of Turkey.

The announced subject of the book is "things which must shortly take place" (Rev. 1:1), the highlight of which is stated in the book's theme verse, "Behold, He (Jesus) is coming with clouds" (1:7). Revelation deals with the return of Jesus Christ and all the events accompanying His return. In instructing John to write the book, Jesus appeared to the Apostle in a glorified state (1:12-16) and gave him an advance outline of the prophecy (1:19). It included the vision of Jesus he had just seen (1:16), a message to each of the seven churches (Rev. 2-3), and events that were to transpire on earth after the faithful in the churches are taken away to heaven at Jesus' promised coming (Rev. 4-22).

Two themes recur in Jesus' messages to the churches, one of threat and one of encouragement. He issued threats to those in

the churches whose relationship to Himself was only superficial. He promised to come and judge these people because of their empty profession (2:5; 3:11, 16). For them an unparalleled hour of trial is imminent (3:10). His words of encouragement went to the faithful who had stood firm in the face of persecution caused by their faith in Him. For these He promised His imminent return to deliver them from adversity (2:25; 3:11, 20). Chapters 2 and 3 advise the churches about needed adjustments in their lives in view of the outpouring of God's wrath that is described in chapters 4 and following.

Jesus devoted the bulk of His revelation to John to describing judgments about to fall on an unrepentant world because of its rebellion against God. Through prophetic vision, He first allowed John to visit the heavenly throne-room from which the judgments will proceed (Rev. 4—5). There the prophet encountered the Father, seated on His throne and the slain Lamb, Jesus, who was the only one worthy to open a seven-sealed scroll given Him by the Father.

As it turns out, that seven-sealed scroll contained the remainder of Revelation except for some concluding remarks in chapter 22. *John saw the breaking of the first six seals* (Rev. 6) portrayed as a drama before his eyes. First came four different colored horses with riders depicting peaceful conquest of the world (white horse), warfare and bloodshed (red horse), widespread famine (black horse), and death to 1/4 of earth's population (pale horse). Then he witnessed martyred saints in heaven praying for God to avenge their blood by punishing people responsible for their deaths. Next, the 6th seal divulged various cosmic and terrestrial disturbances that unmistakably