

## **New Testament Survey: Revelation**

**Theme:** Christian Hope, also More than Conquerors

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### **I. Name of Book**

Revelation receives its name from the first word of the book. Revelation is a translation of the Greek word Apokalypsis meaning *discover* or *unveiling*.

### **II. Purpose**

Revelation has a two-fold purpose, with a possible third

1. “To show [Christ’s] servants what must soon take place.
2. To bring comfort and encouragement to the faith in turbulent times of persecution. It seeks to enable persecuted Christians to control their fear, renew their commitment and give them hope (a sustaining vision) by showing them the ongoing warfare between Satan and the Lamb prior to the Lamb’s arrival, God’s victorious power of his enemies, God’s judgment on the earth before all give account on the final day, and the final triumph of the God’s people. The book intends to give hope, not details. Revelation is not a fortune-telling guide.
3. A possible third purpose of the book is to show how God’s people worship in times of persecution. The word worship appears in this book far more than any other NT book - 24 times. It also contains more images of worship and more doxologies (songs of praise) than any other NT book. Perhaps the overarching theme of Revelation is not prophecy, although we have that here, but it is worship.

### **III. Authorship, Date and Audience**

#### **A. Authorship**

1. When looking at both internal and external evidence, it is difficult to know for sure who exactly wrote Revelation. There are many divergent opinions. The author offers his name (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). However, which John is not clear. Some have said John the Elder, but evidence for existence is vague, and the consensus of the early church is against him. Some have argued perhaps a disciple of John the Apostle or at least a member of the Johannine group. Since the second century, external evidence from the early church fathers (Justin the martyr, Irenaeus) have attributed Revelation to John the Apostle, a position that is

contended by many scholars today, although many prefer to leave the authorship open.<sup>1</sup>

2. Regarding internal evidence for the Apostle John as author of Revelation, there are some linguistic similarities (at the same time some stylistic differences) between Revelation and the fourth Gospel.
  - a. both refer to Jesus as logos (Rev. 19:13 & John 1:1; 14 and 1 John 1:1).
  - b. Lamb is a title for Jesus in both (28 times in Revelation; John 1:29, 36 and 21:35).
  - c. Witness used as a verb and a noun is common in both.
  - d. The adjective, true (ἀόληqino/β ) occurs 15 times in John and 10 in Revelation and only 5 places elsewhere in the New Testament
  - e. The verb *overcome* appears 16 times in Revelation, only once in John (16:33), 6 times in 1 John, and 3 times in the rest of the New Testament.
  - f. The verb  *dwell*  appears 4 times in Revelation and its only other appearance in the New Testament is John 1:14.

As a whole, evidence shows the Apostle John as the strongest candidate for authorship.

## **B. Date and Location**

John mentions that he authored the work on the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). Early church fathers, especially Irenaeus, mention that John was in exile during the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Domitian (AD 89-96), but then returned to Ephesus on the ascension of Nerva (96 AD).<sup>2</sup> Many scholars prefer dating the book near the end of Domitian's reign (90-96 AD), with his rage and persecution of Christians.

## **C. Audience**

In chapters 2 and 3, John addresses the seven churches of Asia. He possibly intended the letter to be circulated and read by the church as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

## **IV. Literary Genre**

### **A. Literary form.**

It contains elements from three literary forms: Apocalyptic (1:1), Prophetic (1:3; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18f.) and Epistolary (1:4-6; 22:21). However, Revelation is seen

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Guthrie, Introduction to the New Testament, 947-948.

<sup>2</sup> I. A. Sparks in ISBE, Vol 3, 640.

<sup>3</sup> Guthrie, 965.

primarily as Apocalyptic. From 200 BC to 200 AD the tradition flourished. Jewish Apocalyptic material began with the book of Daniel.<sup>4</sup> There are many Jewish Apocalypses: *Enoch*, *The Sibylline Oracles*, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, *The Assumption of Moses*, *The Apocalypse of Baruch*, *Fourth Ezra*. There were also many Christian Apocalyptic writings; however, Revelation is the only admitted into our Canon.

## **B. 2 Major differences between prophecy and Revelation/Apocalyptic.**

1. Prophets saw the world redeemable and reformable. The Apocalypticist saw the world beyond mending--no reformation, only a dissolution of present age. Apocalypticists were more pessimistic.<sup>5</sup>
2. The prophets' message was spoken; the message of the apocalypticist was written.<sup>6</sup>

## **C. Characteristics of Apocalyptic literature.**

"Apocalyptic literature as a pattern, it seeks to describe the things which will happen at the last times and the blessedness which will follow; and the same pictures occur over and over again. It always, so to speak, worked with the same materials; and these materials find their place in our Book of Revelation."<sup>7</sup>

1. Apocalyptic literature is eschatological in nature; that is, it predicts the final outcome of human affairs.
2. Apocalyptic literature is characterized by dualism with two opposing personified forces of good and evil in the universe and two separate ages—the present age and the age to come.
3. William Barclay explains that Apocalyptic literature deals with three major themes: a) the sin of the present age, b) the terrors of the time between, c) the blessings of the age to come.<sup>8</sup> The present age is seen as all evil, and the Jews desired and waited for its end. The age to come was all good; it was the golden age of peace, prosperity and righteousness, and God's people would be vindicated.<sup>9</sup> This new day was to only come about with the intervention of God. This day that God would intervene in history became known as The Day of the Lord. This day "was to be a terrible day time of terror and destruction and judgment which would be the birth pangs of the new age."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol 1, 5.

<sup>6</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol 1, 5.

<sup>7</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol 1, 6.

<sup>8</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol 1, 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol 1, 3.

<sup>10</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol 1, 3.

4. "These writings flourished during the time of oppression and tyranny. It would have only worsened the situation of the oppressors had understood these dreams. These writings would have been seen as revolutionary; therefore, the writers "were frequently written in code, deliberately couched in language which was unintelligible to the outsider; and there are many cases in which they must remain unintelligible because the key to the code no longer exists."<sup>11</sup>

### C. Regarding the Present Age

1. The Messiah is a "divine, pre-existent, otherworldly figure" with supernatural power and glory waiting to come to earth and conquer the whole world.<sup>12</sup>
2. The Messiah's coming would be preceded by the return of Elijah who would prepare his way (Malachi 4:5-6).<sup>13</sup>
3. "The last terrible times were known 'as the travail of the Messiah.' The coming of the Messianic age would be like the agony of birth."<sup>14</sup> See Matthew 24:8; Mark 13:8).
4. The last days will be a time of terror. See Zephaniah 1:14; Joel 2:1.
5. "The last days will be a time when the world will be shattered, a time of cosmic upheaval when the universe, as men know it, will be disintegrated. The stars will be extinguished; the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood (Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:30, 31; 3:15)."<sup>15</sup>
6. All relationships will be destroyed in the last days. See Zechariah 14:13
7. The last days are a time of judgement from God. See Malachi 3:1-3; Isaiah 66:15-16.
8. Gentiles all have their place, but it is not the same place in every apocalypse.
  - a) Sometimes they are totally destroyed.
  - b) Sometimes there is one great battle with the Gentiles gathering to battle against Jerusalem--Gentiles are destroyed.
  - c) Sometimes Gentiles are converted through Israel.
9. In the Last days the Jews, who have been scattered, will gather at the Holy City in Jerusalem. See Isaiah 27:12, 13.

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<sup>11</sup>William Barclay, The Revelation of St. John, vol 1, 4.

<sup>12</sup>William Barclay, The Revelation of St. John, vol 1, 6.

<sup>13</sup>William Barclay, The Revelation of St. John, vol 1, 6

<sup>14</sup>William Barclay, The Revelation of St. John, vol 1, 6.

<sup>15</sup>William Barclay, The Revelation of St. John, vol 1, 7.

10. In the last days the New Jerusalem, which has been prepared in heaven by God will come down among men.
11. There is a resurrection of the dead. There are varying pictures: a) Sometimes only the righteous of Israel. b) Sometimes all of Israel. c) Sometimes all of humankind.
12. There are differences as to the length of the Messianic Kingdom. Most of the time it was to last forever (Daniel 7:27). Some believe it was to last four hundred years. In Revelation it was to last 1000 years, then the final battle of good and evil; then the golden age.<sup>16</sup>

#### **D. Regarding the Blessings of the Coming Age**

1. The divided Kingdom will be united again. See Jeremiah 3:18; Isaiah 11:13; Hosea 1:11.
2. There will be plenty of fertility--no more hunger. See Isaiah 32:15; 51:3; 35:1.
3. All wars would cease. See Isaiah 2:4.
4. No more enmity between beast and humans. See Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25.
5. The age to come is the end of sorrow and pain. See Jeremiah 31:12; Isaiah 35:10; 65:20-22; 33:24; 25:8
6. The age to come is an age of righteousness. See Psalms of Solomon 17:28-49; 18:9-10.

#### **V. Use of the Hebrew Scriptures**

John makes heavy use of the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly from the books of Daniel and Zechariah. Of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 make some kind of allusion to an Old Testament passage.

#### **VI. Imagery and Symbolic Language of Revelation**

**A. Symbols were a means of communication for apocalyptic writers.** In Revelation, sometimes these meaning of symbols is explained (5:6, 8; 13:18; 17:9-18). Symbolism also connected Revelation with the Semitic prophetic tradition (1 Kings 11:30-32; Isaiah 20:2-4; Jeremiah 13:1-11; 19:1ff; 10ff).

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<sup>16</sup>William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol 1, 9.

**B. Most of the symbols of Revelation are borrowed from the prophetic tradition, for example<sup>17</sup>:**

a woman represents a people (12:1ff) or a city (17:1ff); horns speak of power (5:6; 12:3), in particular dynastic power (13:1; 17:3ff); eyes, knowledge (1:14; 2:18; 4:6; 5:6); and wings, mobility (4:8; 12:14). In the trumpets is heard a superhuman divine voice (1:10; 8:2ff.); a sharp sword indicates the Word of God, which judges and punishes (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). White robes signify the world of glory (6:11; 7:9, 13f; 22:14); palms are the sign of triumph (7:9), crowns, of dominion and kingship (2:10; 3:11; 4:10; 6:2; 12:1; 14:14); the seas is an evil element; a source of insecurity and death (13:1; 21:1). [It can also be seen as a sign of separation or distance from the holiness of God- see 4:6] White indicates the joy of victory (1:14; 2:17; 3:4f., 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:11, 14); purple, luxury and kingship (17:4; 18:12, 16); black, death 6:5, 12).<sup>18</sup>

**C. Symbolic use of numbers is also important.** Seven appears to be the author's favorite number. For example: 7 lamp stands, 7 stars, 7 spirits of God, 7 churches, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 thunders, 7 bowls, 7 mountains, 7 kings, etc.

Seven (54 times) signifies fullness, perfection; twelve (23 times) recall the 12 tribes of Israel and indicates that the people of God has reached its eschatological perfection; four (16 times) symbolizes the universality of the visible world; also worth mentioned: three (11 times), ten (10 times) and a thousand (six times in chapter 20, often in multiples). Three cases are intriguing: The duration of the persecution is given as either 1260 days (11:3; 12:6), 42 months (11:2; 13:5), or three years and a half (12:14); 144000 "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (7:4-8; 14:1-5); finally, the Beast is referred to by the number 666 (13:8).<sup>19</sup>

**D. Other symbolic language, unique to Revelation**

- Beast = Roman Empire
- 10 Horns = power
- 7 heads = hills & kings of Rome
- 10 Diadems = political power
- blasphemous names = Roman emperors deified.
- Dragon = Satan or Devil
- **The mark of the beast** = emperor coins with divine titles, or certificate of allegiance

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<sup>17</sup> Jean-Louis D' Aragon, *The Apocalypse*, see *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 467.

<sup>18</sup> IBID.

<sup>19</sup> IBID.

The use of symbols and understanding is only made possible by intervention of the Spirit, who takes hold of John (1:10; 4:2), who communicates to John through visions (54 times). An Angel (67 times) must always intervene and supply explanations to John, who is carried to the desert (17:3) and a high mountain (21:10).<sup>20</sup>

## VII. Structure of Revelation

1. **Revelation appears not to be written in chronological sequential order.** In other words, the order that John received and wrote down his visions are not necessarily the order in which the content of those visions is to play out. For example, chapter one envisions the resurrection of Jesus while chapter 12 views his birth.
2. **Seven-fold Structure.** Scholars have not been able to reach complete agreement on Revelation's overall structure. At the same time, many scholars believe "the structure of the book involves a series of parallel and yet ever progressing sections; these bring before the reader, over and over again, but in climatic form, the struggle of the church, and its victory over the world in the providence of God Almighty. There are probably seven of these sections, though only five are clearly marked: Prologue (1:1-8); seven parallel sections divided at 3:22; 8:2; 11:19; 14:20; 16:21; and 19:21; Epilogue (22:6-21).<sup>21</sup>

In each of these parallel sections, you will find at least one of these repeated themes, often in combination. You will find a struggle between the forces of good and evil. You will find God's judgment. You will find the conquering Christ and the church triumphant, in other words God's people victorious. John repeats one or more of these themes over and over in each of these sections. Perhaps you have seen one of those Revelational charts that starts in first chapter, then goes to the end of the book, organizing the book in strict sequential order like an almanac or a time chart of how the end of time is to occur. If John wrote in a parallel style, then those charts do more harm than good in understanding this book. John knows like any good teacher, that repetition is a helpful learning device, so he repeats his message more than once from differing points of view.

The seven-fold pattern has merit in that it is compatible with the number of times he uses the number seven (54 times) to signify fullness and perfection. This symbolism is also seen in other biblical literature written by the Apostle John.<sup>22</sup> In his Gospel, he shapes the ministry of Jesus around seven signs or miracles.

William Hendriksen, in this model, sees the dividing point of Revelation between chapters 11 and 12. He sees the earthly perspective—struggle between

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<sup>20</sup> Jean-Louis D' Aragon, *The Apocalypse*, see *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 468.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 974.

the church and the world in chapters 1-11. The heavenly perspective is seen between Christ and Satan and their followers in chapter 12-22.

## Outline

The following outline is adapted from Bruce Metzger (Breaking the Code) and Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (How to Read the Bible Book by Book)

### I. Prologue (1:1-8)

### II. Seven Parallel sections

#### 1. Chapters 1:9-3:22: Historical Section

- a. Inaugural vision- Christ exalted (1:1-19)
- b. Letters to the seven churches (2:1-3:22)

#### 2. Chapters 4-8:2 Introductory scene in heaven and on earth.

- a. Vision of the Heavenly Throne (chapter 4), unopened Scroll with seven seals (5:1-4), the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5-14).
- b. Opening the Seven Seals of God's Scroll (6:1-8:2)

#### 1. Ch 6- The first six of the seven seals (6:1-17)

Although part of the preceding vision, the account of the seven seals also begins a series of three visions (seals, trumpet, bowls), all of which have the same structure—a series of four [give one unified impression of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse], a series of two, [give one impression] an interlude of two visions, and a seventh. “The seven seals and seven trumpets essentially tell the same thing, each time emphasizing on or another aspect of the whole.”<sup>23</sup>

- Seal 1 (v. 1-2): White horse symbolizing conquest
- Seal 2 (v. 3-4): Red horse symbolizing war and bloodshed
- Seal 3 (v. 5-6): Black horse symbolizing famine
- Seal 4 (v. 7-8): Gray or color of decay flesh symbolizing death.

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<sup>23</sup> Metzger, 56. Also How to Read the Bible Book by Book, 431.

- Seal 5 (v. 9-11): Opening of the fifth and sixth seals the scene shifts from earth to heaven. Opening of the fifth scene reveals the souls of the martyred saints crying out for divine vengeance for those who shed their blood.
- Seal 6 (v. 12-17): Breaking of the sixth seal where punishment of the wicked is resumed. The awesome extent of God's final and complete judgment is shown with images of cosmic convulsions.

## 2. Interlude of two consolatory visions (7:1-8:2)

- Sealed 144,000 (v. 1-8), that is 12,000 from each tribe of Israel. The two tribes represent the new Israel or the church. The seal of the king was used to authentic documents as official and to mark the personal property of the king. They are sealed in that they show that they belong to God. 144,000 symbolized completeness; that not one is missing.
- A Great Multitude (v. 9-17) who are victors robed in white with the Lamb. This stands in contrast to the first vision. The former can be counted, from twelve tribes of Israel, prepared for imminent peril. The second, incalculable, from every nation, victorious and secure. "The two visions are correlative and refer to the same people distinguished only by their location. The 144,000 on earth about to enter into a period of secular opposition. The purpose of the second vision is to bring encouragement to believers by revealing what awaits them in heaven."<sup>24</sup>

3. (8:1-2) opening the seventh seal expecting final cataclysm, instead there is silence for a half hour. Then seven angels with seven trumpets revealed.

3. Chapters 8:3-11:19: The Seven Trumpets (Preliminary judgments on the Empire while anticipating final judgement (chs. 16; 18). This is understood in that the first four judgements are adaptations of Egyptian plagues, which were temporal, not final judgments on Egypt, and the repeated motif of one-third. The same pattern as before, a series of four, a series of two, an interlude of two visions and seventh vision.

- a. 8:2-6—Seven angels with seven trumpets presented along with the prayers of the saints ascending to God. The silence in heaven (8:1) is more than interlude, but also a pause to heighten the horror of the next series of judgments.

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code, Understanding the Book of Revelation*, 61

- b. 8:7-12: First Four Trumpets—first four trumpets are elemental forces of nature directed at the cosmos and affect humanity indirectly. Adapted from Egyptian plagues. The last three call on demonic forces falling on humanity directly.
1. First Trumpet- hail and fire mixed with blood (Egyptian plague #7; Exodus 9:13-35)
  2. Second Trumpet- river into blood in the sea (Egyptian plague #1; Exodus 7:14-24)
  3. Third Trumpet- river into blood in fresh water.
  4. Fourth Trumpet- darkness (Egyptian plague #9; Exodus 10:21-29)
- c. 8:13 Eagle Warns of the last three trumpets.
- d. 9:1-21: Two more Trumpets
1. Fifth Trumpet (9:1-12): Abyss or bottomless pit presided over by Apollyon (the Destroyer) Judgement is in historical terms, feeding first on Roman fears of the barbarian hordes (9:1-12; men of long hair), but pictured by Joel's locust plague (Joel 1:6; 2:1-5).<sup>25</sup> First woe is passed.
  2. Sixth Trumpet (9:13-21): Four angels were released from the Euphrates River whose mission is destruction. The Euphrates is significant for it was the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire where the Parthian threat lay. The angels allowed 2 million horsemen to wreck death on humankind, and those not affected by the death, did not repent of their wickedness.
- e. Two Interlude Visions (10:1-11:13), another pause between sixth and seventh trumpets.
1. Angel with one foot on land and the other on sea with the little open scroll of which John is told to eat (10:1-11)
  2. John is told to measure the temple and two witnesses prophecy followed by the Beast rising from the Abyss to make war with them and killing them. The two prophets then are resurrected with more suffering. This is the second woe (11:1-13). Chapter 11 is one of the most perplexing sections of the book. Old Testament symbols and prophecy are interwoven together with "reference to the temple and the altar, to Moses and Elijah, to the wild olive trees and the lampstand seen by Zechariah, to the plagues sent upon Pharaoh, to the tyrant predicted by Daniel, and to Sodom and Egypt and Jerusalem. Perhaps the most that can be said with confidence is that the author views the people of God as bearing faithful testimony, but

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read The Bible Book By Book*, 432.

also as suffering pain and persecution and indignity. They are delivered not from martyrdom and death, but through martyrdom and death to a glorious resurrection.”<sup>26</sup>

- f. Seventh Trumpet (11:15-19)
1. The second woe has passed, and we are warned that the third is coming soon (v. 14).
  2. The seventh trumpet is blown and closes this section of the book. However, in this seventh trumpet, it is unlike that of the other trumpets with immediate destruction and death. Here we see an outburst of rejoicing in heaven (11:15-18). The book of Revelation could have ended here, and were it would, could be seen as the story of God completely told with Christ glorified and worshipped, but since there are eleven chapters yet to read, the author returns back to an earlier stage and repeats some of the teaching he previously covered with his readers. Thus, the sequences in which John’s visions occurred does not allow us to turn Revelation into an almanac or time chart of the last days.<sup>27</sup>
4. Chapters 12-14—Conflict between the Lamb with his Church, and the Satanic Trinity: The Dragon and two beasts. This is the center of the book.
- a. Chapter 12 can be characterized as a flashback, telling of the birth of the Messiah and the attempt of King Herod to kill Jesus.
    1. The Dragon seeks to destroy the celestial woman and her son (12:1-6). Verse 5 is a reference to the ascension. The child is saved by God’s intervention.
    2. Michael’s victory over the dragon/Satan and casting him out of heaven (12:7-12).
    3. The Dragon vainly pursues the woman on the earth, in his inability to catch her, he goes after her children (12:13-18).
  - b. Chapter 13 Two of Satan’s agents appear comprising a counterfeit trinity.
    1. The first beast from the sea, symbolizing the Roman Empire. He makes war on God’s people. This beast is an adaptation of Daniel’s beast rising from the sea, taken from Daniel 7:2, 7-8, 23-25. (13:1-10). Note the fatal wound in 12:3, 12 alludes to the year AD 60 when at the death of Nero, the world expected Rome to collapse as it went through three emperors in succession. The fact that it didn’t made Rome appear to be invincible.

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<sup>26</sup> Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, 71.

2. The second beast (false prophet) from the earth symbolizes the priesthood or local officials executing and enforcing the emperor cult. The mark of the beast is mentioned, 666. If one adds the numerical value of the Hebrew alphabet it comes to Nero Caesar. Older manuscripts read 616—Nero Caesar (13:11-18).
- c. Chapter 14 - Outcome of Holy War: Vindication and judgment Interlude of visions to reassure the church amid its trials and persecutions. This sets the stage for the final visions.
1. Tranquility and rejoicing—The Lamb standing with redeemed martyrs (144,000- representing those who remain faithful) standing on eschatological Mount Zion (14:1-5)
  2. Angel's announcement of judgment (14:6-11)
  3. The Martyrs commended (14:12-13).
  4. Two visions - one a harvest with the Son of man bringing in God's people; the second a harvest of wrath with punishment for the wicked - judgment of Rome (14:14-20).
5. Chapters 15-16: The Seven Bowls: God's judgment against Babylon. This is the third and final set of judgments against Babylon/Rome.
- a. Chapter 15- prelude with the martyrs who have conquered the beast, its image and number, singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.
1. Seven angels holding the last plagues (15:1)
  2. Martyrs singing God's praise (15:2-4)
  3. Angels come forth of the temple with seven bowls of wrath (15:5-8).
- b. Chapter 16- Babylon is judged with bowls of wrath being poured out. These plagues are different from the trumpets in that there is no "one-third qualifier." These are complete. As with the first four trumpets, the first four bowls are adaptations from Egyptian plagues. There is a kind of progression. The seventh in each of the first two series of woes (regarding the trumpets) produces another series, similar to but more terrible. The bowls picture complete uninterrupted punishment.
1. Bowl one: soars on humans (16:2)
  2. Bowl two: sea becomes red like blood (16:3)
  3. Bowl three: Rivers and springs become blood (16:4-7)

4. Bowl four: Fierce heat of the sun (16:8-9)
5. Bowl five: darkness (16:10-11).
6. Bowl six: sixth angel empties his bowl of doom. It dries up Euphrates River to get it ready for Armageddon<sup>28</sup>. Three foul spirits like frogs come out—one from dragon, one from the beast and one from the false prophet. Kings of earth as assembled for Armageddon (16:12-16). There seems to be a kind of interlude (as seen in previous sets of judgments (seals and trumpets) in verses 15-16. The final battle appears in chapter 19, and the final defeat of evil is not from armaments but from the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ (19:13).
7. Bowl seven: lightening, thunder, and an earthquake (16:17-21). Total destruction with the great city being split in three parts, the cities of the nations falling, and every mountain and island destroyed.

The remaining chapters of Revelations (17 through 22) are seen as a tale of two cities. They are compared as two contrasting women. Rome is an opulent harlot, referred to as Babylon and the mother of whores and of the earth's abominations (17:5); then the church as the Bride of Christ. Note how they are introduced. The fall of Rome is seen in the desert (17:3), the New Jerusalem on a mountain great and high (21:10).

## 6. Chapters 17-19

### a. Chapter 17: Babylon the Whore

1. The great whore, Babylon, is seated upon the beast (17:1-6).
2. The vision is interpreted. The mystery of the whore and beast explained. Verses 9 and 18 clarify who Babylon really is (17:7-18).

### b. Chapter 18: The Doom of Babylon

1. Angel sings a funeral dirge over Babylon (18:1-3).
2. A voice from heaven calls for the faithful to leave the city (18:4-8)
3. The lament of the kings of the earth over the fall of Babylon. Here is the third woe, which itself takes the form of three woes (18:10, 16, 19). Here

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<sup>28</sup> Not sure how to spell Armageddon. Some manuscripts spell it Harmagedon. Scribes in other manuscripts spell it with one *d* and two *g*'s; others with two *g*'s and one *d*. some with two *d*'s and two *g*'s. thus we are not exactly sure what it means. See Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, 84.

John abandons apocalyptic mode for prophetic one denouncing Rome's economic policies which grew on the backs of the poor.<sup>29</sup> (18:8-19)

4. Heaven rejoices over her doom (18:20).
  5. Babylon's doom symbolically portrayed as an angel drops a large millstone into the sea and proclaims Babylon's final doom (18:21-24).
- c. Chapter 19: Here three woes are responded to with a threefold, Hallelujah (19:1, 3, 6). And John returns to the scene in heaven (from ch. 4), where wedding supper of the Lamb and his bride, the church, is envisioned (19:1-10). Starting in 19:11 to 20:15 is the account of the last battle. The destiny of the two cities is the theme of the holy war. Christ, the Divine Warrior, takes on the beast, the false prophet and the Satan himself.
1. Hymn to God for avenging his martyred servants followed with a marriage supper hymn of the Lamb (19:1-10)
  2. Vision 1- The appearance of the King of Kings (19:11-16). Note from verse 11 to the first verse in chapter 21, there is a rapid succession of seven visions preparing for the end. Each begins with the words "I saw."<sup>30</sup>
  3. Vision 2 – The gathering of vultures for eating the fallen in battle and destruction of the beast, false prophet and their followers (19:17-21). The revolting scene is based on Ezekiel chapters 38 & 39, especially 39:17-20. John will adapt Ezekiel's account here also in 20:7-10. In 19:20 and 20:10, the unholy trinity is, one by one, thrown into the lake of fire.
7. Chapters 20-22:5—Final Destruction of Evil and the New Heaven's and New Earth. The restoration of Eden and a reversal of the effects of the fall.
- a. Chapter 20
1. Vision 3 - Satan is bound for a thousand years (20:1-3).
  2. Vision 4 - The thousand-year reign of Christ and the martyred saints (20:4-6).
  3. Vision 5 - (no "I saw" statement here) Satan is loosed after the 1000-year reign and then finally destroyed in the lake of fire (20:7-10). Adapted from Ezekiel 38 & 39.
  3. Vision 6 - The last judgment (also known as the great white throne of judgment) with Death and Hades thrown into the Lake of fire, (20:11-15).

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<sup>29</sup> How to the Bible Book by Book, 435.

<sup>30</sup> See Metzger Breaking the Code, Understanding the Book of Revelation, 90.

- b. Chapter 21:1-22:5: visions of a new order- New Heaven and Earth and New Jerusalem.
  - 1. Vision 7 - a new creation; new heavens and earth for the first heaven and earth have passed away. The Holy City, New Jerusalem, comes down from heaven, where there is a restoration of Eden and a reversal of the effects of the fall (Revelations (21:1-8). This restoration is seen through chapter 22:5.
  - 2. New Jerusalem is called the bride of the Lamb. Further splendors of the New Jerusalem are described - gateways, its measurements (also in multiples of 12), its jeweled foundation stones. (21:9-21).
  - 3. The No Temple, no sun, no night; the river of life, the throne of God, and the glory of God provides light (21:22-22:5)
- 8. Epilogue 22:6-21: It echoes many of the themes from the prologue.
  - a. Witness (encouraging words) of the Angel (22:6-9).
  - b. Time of retribution is at hand (22:10-15).
  - c. Witness of Jesus (22:16-21).
  - d. Salutations (22:21).

### **VIII. Five Schools of Interpretation.**

When interpreting Revelation, much of the debate has centered on how should chapters 4-20 be interpreted. There are five different schools of interpretation.

#### **1. Futurist Method:**

- Sees chapters 4-20 as describing the events as "end of time" which climaxes with the return of Christ. The book is exclusively concerned with the happenings at the end of the age.<sup>31</sup>
- Several forms of the futurist view:
  - a. Revelation 4:1, the words, "Come up hither" mean that the church is removed from the earth (rapture of the saints); thus the church escapes the great tribulations described in the book.

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<sup>31</sup>Leon Morris, Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 20.

- b. Other futurists understand 4:1 as merely addressed to John in so the "end time" beginning with the tribulations described in chapter 7 (chapters 4-5 are simply woes visited on the world during the history, not at the end of the world history).

Criticism (Leon Morris): "This view robs the book of all significance for the early Christians and, indeed, for all subsequent generations right up to the last. For all intermediate generations it is merely a forecast of what will happen in the last days. Until those days come, it means little, except that God has an ultimate purpose."<sup>32</sup>

- George Eldon Ladd blends Preterist and Futurist methods, see page 14 in his Commentary on Revelation.

## **2. Preterist Method—Past Tense**

- The bulk of Revelation starts and ends with first century in which the book was written. Roman empire dominates the scene. Author writes out of his century in his day and has nothing more in mind. The conflict is between Rome and the church

Criticism: Its strength is that it is very relevant to its original readers and for whom the book is written. Its weakness is that it has nothing to offer subsequent readers (except for information about the early church), and the question remains: what do you do with the predictive events that did not happen in the early church's lifetime?<sup>33</sup>

## **3. Historicist Method (The Continuous Historicist's view)**

- Seeks to interpret Revelation in terms of the whole of human history.
- It sees symbols within Revelation as items that outline the history of western Europe and as stretching right on until the second coming of Christ. Things like Mohammed, the Papacy and the Reformation are interpreted within Revelation. The various items in the visions are identified as major events and person in church history from the Apostolic age to the present.
- This school of thought really has it out for the Roman Catholic Church. It sees Revelation as describing in detail the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church.

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<sup>32</sup>Leon Morris, Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 20.

<sup>33</sup>See Leon Morris, Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 18 and Beuford Bryant, NT Introduction Notes, 281).

Criticism (Leon Morris): Revelation is meaningful for this generation, but the early church could have not gotten much from the book. For them it would have been a puzzle. It also ignores the world outside western Europe.<sup>34</sup> (Bryant): It is not likely that the original readers would have guessed the use of Mohammed, the Papacy, Reformation and various great persons of Church History by reading this book.

#### **4. The Idealist or Philosophy of History Method**

- This view sees few or no references to historical happenings either in the first century or subsequent centuries.
- It sets forth the ageless struggles between the Kingdom of God and the forces of evil which oppose it. It is a "philosophy of history" theory which stresses basic ideas or principles rather than historical events. Its purpose thus becomes to strengthen the church through its history with the promise of ultimate victory for the cause of righteousness.<sup>35</sup>
- It has no particular concern for the situation of the early church, later or the end time. It simply sets principles on which God acts in human history.

Criticism: Strength--it makes relevance for all periods of the church's history; weakness- it refuses to see a firm historical anchorage of the book.<sup>36</sup> (Bryant): It reduces the value of prophecy.

- Comment-- Leon Morris: "It seems that elements from more than one of these views are required for a satisfactory understanding of Revelation."<sup>37</sup> Morris puts in a footnote in his commentary: "G.T. Manley notes a variety of systems of understanding this book, but concludes by urging the reader to maintain an 'open mind to deal with each portion of the book as seen in relation to its context and to other parts of Scripture. This is still good advice. Each passage must be interpreted in its own context, and not forced into an overall scheme'"<sup>38</sup>

#### **5. Cycle or Parallelism view:**

- It sees Revelation as consisting of several parallel sections each one of which moves from the time of the writing to the end of human history; thus, the writer at the end of each section goes back to the beginning, starts over and moves to the end again.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Leon Morris, Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 19.

<sup>35</sup>Beuford Bryant, NT Introduction Notes, 281.

<sup>36</sup>Leon Morris, Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Morris is actually speaking of the first four schools of interpretation; he does not speak of the parallel view.

<sup>38</sup> Morris, footnotes on page 20-21.

<sup>39</sup>Beuford Bryant, NT Introduction Notes, 282.

- Some of the sections may view history and God's presence from a different perspective; that is, from the view of different actors in history including Christians, God, Christ, Satan, the world, empires and perhaps others. Certainly, the two great points of view the events of history are set forth, the earthly (1-11) and the heavenly (12-21).<sup>40</sup>
- Revelation sets forth the struggle between the church and the world (Christians and non-Christians) with history in chapters 1-11, and the deeper struggle that is also going on in the Spirit world outside our earthly history between Christ and Satan (and their super human followers in chapters 12-22).
- William Hendrickson sets forth this view in his book *More than Conquerors*. He sees Revelation as consisting of seven sections, three in chapters 1-11 (1-3, 4-7, 8-11) and four in chapters 12-22 (12-14, 15-16, 17-19, 20-22). Hendrickson calls this progressive revelation.<sup>41</sup> Metzger makes the same case. Over and over again the reader witnesses the struggle of the church over the world and its victory through God in climatic form. "There are probably seven of these sections, though only five are clearly marked. The plan of the whole, then can be divided as follows. Prologue (1:1-8); seven parallel sections divided at 3:22; 8:2; 11:19; 14:20; 16:21; and 19:21; Epilogue (22:6-21) . . . Like any good teacher, he knows that repetition is a good learning device and so he repeats his messages more than once from differing points of view."<sup>42</sup>

Criticism: Its strength is that this is an integrative model drawing on the strengths and elements of the other models. It basically interprets revelation against its historical background but does not limit it to the first century. Sees principles which apply to every age.<sup>43</sup> (Donald Guthrie) "The attempt to fit the whole into a sevenfold structure seems somewhat artificial if two unnumbered sequences have to be included, and one wonders why the structure of these did not conform more obviously to the sevenfold pattern."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Beuford Bryant, NT Introduction Notes, 282.

<sup>41</sup>Beuford Bryant, NT Introduction Notes, 282.

<sup>42</sup> Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 18-19.

<sup>43</sup>David Fulks notes on Revelation, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 974.