

Introduction to The Book of Revelation

Hermeneutical guides:

1. Revelation ~ translated from Greek "apocalypsis" = hidden things revealed.
This book is showing what is really real... the true story that we are to live within.
It is not primarily foretelling the future. It is presenting how things really are, what is real.
2. It is a letter... the whole book!
Chapters 2-3 are not a parenthesis or diversion but an essential part of the whole message.
This book is written to the church, first century and now. Revelation 1:4-5, 22:16
3. It is about what must "soon take place." (Revelation 1:1) For "the time is near." (Revelation 1:3, 22:10)
This is the same root as "at hand." (Mark 1:15, Matthew 4:17)
This is about the same theme as these gospel references, "the Kingdom of God/Heaven." (Rev. 1:8,19)
4. To understand Revelation you must have the entire Old Testament.
This book pulls in all the principal themes of the Bible, allusions to nearly every book.
All of the visions and images in the book are connected to the Old Testament.
5. Revelation will not fit into your system.
It resists efforts to make it into a book to use to defend or promote a particular eschatological view.
Beware the temptation to identify historical moments and symbolic referents.
You will not master it. It will shape you and transform how you see and think.

There is an introduction and a conclusion... related in themes and language that help reveal the melodic line of the book. Then the book is organized around the three visions of Christ. Each section begins with a command to the author, John "in the Spirit," and a location: Patmos, Heaven, and the final vision takes us to "a wilderness" (17:3), back to the throne in heaven (19:1-6), and then to "a great high mountain" (21:10).

Rev. 1-3

The first, a vision of sovereignty and intimacy sets off the seven letters. The seven letters are seven messages to seven actual churches, the original audience would have known. The message in these letters is grounded in the vision and preparation for the rest of the book. It is the same message.

Rev. 4-16

The second vision is the Lion-Lamb who opens the book sets off the unfolding of the future and fulfillment of God's promises. The Lion-Lamb is worthy to do so because of the Cross, and so what we read in this section is a depiction of hidden things revealed that are now and not yet (church age). The opening was initiated because of the Cross. What the Lion-Lamb sets in motion is depicted in four successive movements: the seals, trumpets, a cosmic battle, the bowls. Each movement presents the unfolding of prophesy-promise in a slightly different way and arrives at the end, four times. We see our times as guided by the Lion-Lamb.

Rev. 17-22

The third vision(s) presents a contrast between two cities with the vision of Christ as the pivot. Here He is a conquering, vindicating warrior-king. The world's kingdom comes crashing down and the Lord's Kingdom comes to its fruition. It is future, but even this is happening now. It shows us hidden things revealed which were and are and will come.

Of all the books of the Bible that have suffered the most abuse, Revelation ranks first.
We will not be asking, "How can I fit Revelation into my system?"

Which means that sometimes it will not fit.

Why? Is it because there is something wrong with Revelation?

One of the essential habits of doing Biblical theology is resisting the urge to fit the book into your thinking.
Study the book, leaving theological systematic conclusions aside for a while.

Study the book in its Biblical context, and then struggle with the systematic fitting together later.

We want to understand the book according to the purpose for which it was written.

What is this book?

What is it for?

Who is it for?

What does it mean?

How does it fit into the whole Bible? Does it?

We need to understand it as inspired, infallible, inerrant, literature given to us by God.

Revelation is about God. It features Christ, God the Lamb. We will find that the book of Revelation is the most comprehensive answer to the Problem of Evil in the whole Bible... but it gets to it only after the preparation of Chapters 1-5 (about Christ's sovereignty, His churches in the world, and worship at the Throne of God.)

So, what is Revelation?

A letter. **Revelation 1:1-6**

From? John (Rev. 1:2, John 1:1-3, 1 John 1:1-4), Jesus (Rev. 1:5)

To? 7 churches in Asia... all churches? (Rev. 1:11, 22:16) (**Structure: diagram and map**)

About?

"things which must soon take place" = When was that written?

"prophecy" = What is the Biblical definition?

"made us a Kingdom" (consider Rev. 1:9 and the present nature of the Kingdom and tribulation)

These are Gospel themes... 2 Samuel 7, the prophets, "Kingdom of Heaven"

"glory and dominion" (vs. 6) This is going to be worship.

notice the promise of blessing (vs. 3)

What is it saying about what it is about? Theme.

Revelation 1:4 "The One who is and who was and who is to come"

Revelation 1:8 "The One who is and who was and who is to come"

Revelation 4:8 "The One who was and who is and who is to come"

Revelation 11:17 "The One who is and who was"

Revelation 16:5 "The One who is and who was"

Why? By the events of chapter 11, the eschatological coming of God is no longer future.

Revelation 11:17

"We give you thanks... because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign."

"seven spirits" = Holy Spirit or seven angels before the throne (spiritual messengers, servants)

Rev. 1:20, Rev. 8:2, 16:1

"and from Jesus Christ" = no longer the Christ of humiliation and suffering, but the glorified victor!

"firstborn of the dead" = leader of those He saves

"ruler of the kings of the earth" = Sovereign Lord

Praise: (commonplace in Revelation) "to Him who loves us..."

(our Savior, the one who has called us out of darkness)

Revelation 1:7-8 focus on Christ and God at the beginning and the end of the book

1:7 Daniel 7:13, Acts 1:9-11, 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Revelation 1:8 - Three of the four designations of God used in Revelation are used.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega." (1:8, 21:6 also "the beginning and the end")

"The One who is and who was and who is to come"

"Lord God Almighty" - occurs 7 times (1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 15:3, 16:7, 19:6, 21:22)

1:8 God, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." (connection with parousia)

1:17 Christ, "I am the First and the Last." (connection with new life) Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12

21:6 God, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

(connection with new life)

22:13 Christ, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Read **Revelation 22:6-21** similarities? thematic elements between the beginning and the end?

Prophetic = hearing something from God, "Thus says the Lord," addressing God's people in their current situation and revealing how they ought to live. Prophecy is not primarily predictive.

Rev. 3:22 (seven times), 13:18, 17:9-10

Rome was, without a doubt, the cultural and historical context of the book of Revelation.

In the Roman world... like most military-political powers, supported itself in religious terms.

state sovereignty + religious worship/support of the state (propaganda) = conformity

seduction (Nazi, Communist, Capitalist) This is Satan's chief method of assault.

persecution (receiving the full blast of hatred from those who oppose Jesus Christ)

This is not cryptographic esoterica, alarmist entertainment, or fictional mythology.

We are not figuring out the future. We are understanding the present in light of the past and the future.

"was, is, and is to come"

Apocalyptic = revelation or uncovering, seeing something that had been hidden. revealing God's ultimate and eternal purposes in this world, living in light of final things. Daniel 2:28-30

Shares the question of all apocalyptic writing in the Bible: Who is Lord over the world?

This is the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1)

About and by means of His Word. Revelation shows us who He is and what He does.

Prolific visual imagery... Rev. 1:1, "to show His bond-servants" = He is giving us the vision.

Why? So we can figure out the future?

No. So we can see something. What?

If you read through Revelation, what stands out? What do you find?

Visions (typical of apocalyptic writing, this is the genre) Rev. 1:12 "I turned to see the voice."

How are we to understand them?

Prophetic visions, unveilings, in a narrative framework

Well, if you have read your Bibles through you will recognize these visions... virtually all of them...

as a reflection of other parts of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament.

It is the last book of the Bible.

Would you read the last chapter of a novel, disregarding everything else before it?

Blessing = There are 7 beatitudes throughout the book

This is the only book in the Bible that explicitly promises a blessing to its reader.

1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14

Notice the increasing concentration as we progress through the apocalypse. Why?

Warning = there are many implicit warnings in the book... "overcomer" vs. "earth-dweller"

Revelation 22:18-19 reminiscent of Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32

In every part of Scripture (Revelation is no exception)...

you understand the text in its context, according to genre, and by looking at other parts of Scripture.

As this is a challenging genre, need to focus on the un-obscure, less obscure, before tackling the very obscure.

Biblical Context: There are 5+ books in the Old Testament that control structure, method, rhythms, images, and theology in Revelation:

Genesis

How does it inform the theological outlook of Revelation?

It is primarily about what God is doing.

Creation - God is praised as creator... Rev. 4:11, 14:6-7, 22:1-3a

De-creation - judgment - the curse (on the serpent --- dragon)

The serpent of Genesis 3 becomes a great red dragon, hungry, old, and brutal.

Counter (counterfeit)-creation - man's project... Babel --- Babylon

fake enterprises and selling stolen goods (counterfeit, fencing operation)

God's good gifts repurposed... in bad ways

re-creation... including the tree of life (Genesis 2 -- Revelation 22) with leaves to heal the nations garden (gold, precious stones) --- Temple --- New Jerusalem (Rev. 21)

breath of life & 4 rivers --- John 4 (water of life) --- River of Life

Exodus

It is the controlling motif for the book, the main paradigm.

God is bringing His people out from their oppressive rulers into His glorious kingdom.

Revelation depicts the end times exodus of the people of God.

God uses devastating judgment to work His vengeance and deliverance.

Exodus 7-11 - the plagues -- seals, trumpets, bowls (especially the latter)

Exodus 15 - the song of Moses -- Rev. 15:1-8

Daniel

Provides imagery for Revelation 13

Other imagery and the movement of empires toward a final power... Rome.

Daniel and friends are a chief model of the faithful witness... standing before the idol...

Need for the ethic of resistance against persecution and seduction.

Together with the visions following the narrative in Daniel... thematic thrust of Daniel.

Daniel 1:1-2 Kingdoms of this world battling together... but God's Kingdom wins every time.

God brings His Kingdom to bear on the world over the Kingdoms of this world through the faithful witness of His people in suffering.

Vision of Christ given authority by God -- Daniel 7

Structure of Daniel 2-7 (chiasm)

A	ch. 2	Rock crushes the idol = God is the sovereign King.
B	ch. 3	Fiery furnace = faithful witness in trials
C	ch. 4	Vision of the tree = Pagan king humbled
C	ch. 5	Handwriting on the wall = Pagan king humbled
B	ch. 6	Lion's den = faithful witness in trials
A	ch. 7	Beasts from the ocean and judgment, Son of Man = God is the sovereign King.

Ezekiel

Theophany of chapter 1 -- Rev. 4

chapters 38-39... the two battles, Gog and Magog

Zechariah

The great question of the prophet: when is Jerusalem to be destroyed?

Framework for what Revelation is all about... lamp-stand, two witnesses, horsemen

chapter 14 - all the nations are gathered against Jerusalem and God delivers the city.

This is just the starting line-up... there is a deep bench... Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Joel, Joshua, Job...

Judgment on Babylon, mountain thrown into the sea, Rev. 8:8 - Jer. 51

Joshua - 7 trumpets blowing, the city falls (like Babylon)

And, the New Testament, particularly the Gospels, are influential as well.

Take, for example, Matthew 24:

Revelation 16:15 - Matthew 24:42-44 - Zechariah 3:1-10 (Be ready)
Revelation 6:12-14 - Matthew 24:29 - Isaiah 13:6-11 (Judgment upon Babylon)
Revelation 1:7 - Acts 1:11 - Matthew 24:30 - Daniel 7:13 (Son of Man)

Major Themes of Revelation: (Melodic Line - Revelation as a symphony, Recapitulation)

In contrast to all that is in the world (ads, money, movies, pride, catastrophes, sadness, sickness, sports, business, families, war, government, i-pads, snap-chat, cartoons, music, reality shows, and cookbooks) this book pulls back the curtain and reveals what is really going on in the world and what is real.

Don't make Revelation a book to use. Listen to God and let it shape you.

God

The overarching theme of Revelation is a presentation of God and His sovereign covenant-keeping.

Trinity

A standard form of Biblical letter-opening: Rev. 1:4-5 (even more clear than 1 Peter 1:1-2)

"Grace to you and peace

"from Him who is and who was and who is to come, (God)

"and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

"and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth."

References to Christ and the Spirit(s) make Revelation the most clearly Trinitarian book in the Bible.

How Christ is presented: Lamb, Lion, worship, victorious, warrior, bridegroom, authority...

Revelation 1:4 "the seven Spirits who are before God's throne"
that stood in the holy place in the Temple.

Revelation 1:12,20 The seven-branched lamp-stand (fragile but radiant) They are the churches.

Exodus 25:31-40, 40:1,24-25

Shown to the prophet in Zechariah 4:1-7 The lampstand is connected to the Spirit of God.

Zechariah 4:10 They show the sovereign seeing of God, omniscience.

(spirit and eyes, Ezek. 1:15-21)

2 Chron. 16:9 "The eyes of the Lord range to and fro throughout the earth..."

Revelation 4:5 These lamps are called "the seven Spirits of God."

Four references to the sevenfold Spirit of God: Rev. 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6

Seven times the Spirit speaks to the churches: Rev. 2:7,11,17,29, 3:6,13,22

Seven other times the Spirit is mentioned: Rev. 1:10, 4:2, 14:13, 17:3, 19:10, 21:10, 22:17

The Spirit of God is accomplishing the work of God in the world, seeing, speaking, working.

Transcendent

Revelation 1:8 - Three of the four designations of God used in Revelation are used.

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"The One who is and who was and who is to come"

"Lord God Almighty" - occurs 7 times (1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 15:3, 16:7, 19:6, 21:22)

Revelation 1:4 "The One who is and who was and who is to come"

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Revelation 11:17

"We give you thanks... because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign."

Sovereign

"The One who sits on the throne" - precise form occurs 7 times (4:9, 5:1,7,13, 6:16, 7:15, 21:5)

Throne imagery in Isaiah 7, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7

Isaiah 46:9-11 There is no one like God.

Creator

Revelation 4:11 "You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

Revelation 14:7 "Worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the springs of waters."

Worship that ought to be His is given to the beast. Rev. 13:8

Revelation 21:5 "Behold, I make all things new." (echo of Isaiah 65:17-19)

God the creator rescues Israel in Isaiah 43.

Evil is not the beginning of the story. It does not determine how things are. It is not permanent.

The Lamb

"Jesus" occurs 7 times and "witness(es) of Jesus" occurs another 7 times.

"Christ" (Messiah) occurs 7 times

"Lamb" occurs 28 (7 x 4) times = the Lamb is perfect and completely victorious over all the world.

He is God

Appearing as a glorious theophany: Rev. 1:12-16 and Rev. 4-5 (recalling Daniel 7:13-14), 19:11-16

Rev. 1:17-18, "I am the first and the last, and the living one, and I was dead

and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

1:8 God, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." (connection with parousia)

1:17 Christ, "I am the First and the Last." (connection with new life) Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12

21:6 God, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." (connection with new life)

22:13 Christ, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

(connection with parousia)

He is the Messianic King who is a Lamb Slain

Revelation 5:1-14 The epic moment in the book... Davidic Messiah comes together

with the Mosaic sacrificial Lamb and the one who leads His people out of bondage.

The Lion is a Lamb = Jesus conquers by suffering and dying for those He loves.

This is a new drawing together of Biblical imagery... a new picture.

He is worshipped

In Revelation 5:8-14, 11:15-16, 22:3-4

In contrast to the angel of Rev. 19:10, 22:8-9

He Judges

His judgment is God's judgment. Rev. 22:12-13

Isaiah 40:10, 62:11

Evil has an opponent.

Opposition to the Lamb: the dragon, beasts, kings of the earth, nations, earth-dwellers

This shows up in Revelation 2-3, then becomes apparent in 6:9-11.

We discover the culprits (some of them) in Rev. 6:15-17

This builds toward the persecution of the witnesses in Revelation 11.

Rev. 11:7 The beast from the abyss (9:1) makes war with the witnesses.

Rev. 12 The dragon goes off to make war on "her children."

We get the full view with vision of the dragon and His beasts in Revelation 12-13 and following.

"Blasphemies"... the unholy trinity pretends to be like God... Counterfeit/pretension

The seven heads of the dragon and the beast set against the seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb.

Revelation 5:6, 12:3, 13:1,11

Selling stolen goods... God's good gifts repurposed (a fencing operation)

The dragon, beast(s), Babylon... look beautiful, powerful, like they're winning,

but they are worthless, wicked, corrupting...

Seduction... the beast from the earth makes people worship the beast.

The emperor cult of Rome. "Just a pinch of incense" ~ "the mark of the beast?"

Revelation 13:16-17, 14:9-11, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4

In order to participate in economic prosperity you must be a part of the beast's unholy enterprise.

In opposition to the "sealed."

Revelation 7:1-8, 14:1, 22:4

Ezekiel 9:4, 2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13, 4:30

There is no hard distinction made between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Romans 10-11

Hebrews: The Temple sacrifice is over... no mention of it in Revelation.

Persecution (like Hitler in the final days of WW2)

Evil has an explanation, but it is not minimized or ignored. It is named.

Victory of the Lamb: two aspects

Salvation: deliverance for the followers of the Lamb (overcomers)

The Messianic Davidic Warrior King - Rev. 11:15, 22:16

Isaiah 11:10-16 The root of Jesse becomes the one who gathers His remnant

Psalm 2:1-12 His victory over the nations

Consider His description, allusions to His victory over the nations.

Rev. 2:12,18,26-28, 11:18, 12:5,10, 14:1, 15:2, 16:14,16, 19:15

Once, at the end the "kings of the earth" come and worship Him. Rev. 21:24

The people of the Lamb are called to conquer with Him.

Rev. 2:7,11,17,28, 3:5,12,21

Cosmic war of Rev. 12 and following... but no battle is ever engaged but by the Messianic King.

Revelation 12:10-11 We conquer with Jesus by our suffering and witness.

Exodus motif - Jesus is the ultimate Passover Lamb.

Rev. 5:6, 9-10

Like Exodus 19:5-6, Isaiah 35:10, 51:11, 53:7

Isaiah 43:1-21 God saved from Egypt, He will save from Babylon.

Revelation 15:2-4 echoes Exodus 15 (the song of Moses by the sea)

Jesus "the faithful witness" - "martyr" = not death, but witness... in Revelation, willing to suffer death.

Revelation 3:21 Like He conquers, we conquer. (Rev. 12:11) ...though conquered (Rev. 13:7)

As the two witnesses of Rev. 11, a parable of resistance... by witness and martyrdom not violence.

The Spirit(s) of God, the people of God, and their witness... Zechariah 4:1-14

Revelation 1:12-20, 11:3-6

Evil has a response: The blood of the Lamb, faith, prayer, witness, worship

Judgment: wrath upon those who oppose the Lamb and His servants

7 times in revelation "kings of the earth" refer to the opponents of Christ.

Revelation 1:5, 6:15, 17:2,18, 18:3,9, 19:19

The fate of the nations - Revelation 15, 21, 22:2) They suffer terrible defeat and mourning in the end.

The great question of the book: "Who can stand?" Rev. 6:17

Rev. 1:1, 9 The angels stand. God's people stand and sing... worship amidst suffering.

Lamb is worthy to open the seals in Rev. 5. He does so and the opened scroll appears in Rev. 10:2, 8-10.

Following Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 (meaning: unalterable prophetic utterance - Rev. 1:1)

God will "destroy those who destroy the earth." Rev. 11:18

Rev. 11:19 The Temple opened and the ark of God revealed...

For the "trampling" (Rev. 11:2,7-10, Luke 21:24) they will be "trampled" (Rev. 14:17-20).

For the overcoming of the saints (Rev. 13:7-8) they will be overcome (Rev. 12:11-12).

For the deceit (Rev. 12:9, 13:13-14, 18:23) they will be defeated by the army of truth (Rev. 14:5).

Clear pictures of judgment:

Censer filled with fire, incense, and prayers for vengeance... lead to the trumpets. (Rev. 8:1ff)

3 angels of Rev. 14:6-12

7 bowls of wrath on the whole earth

The plagues are God's judgment modeled on the plagues on Egypt. Rev. 15:1-16:12 like Ex. 7-12

Downfall of arrogant, ungodly Babylon Rev. 17-18

Doom of the dragon and his beasts - Rev. 19:20-21, 20:7-15 like Isaiah 27:1, Daniel 7:2-8,15-27
Evil has an ending.

Contrast between the New Jerusalem (the city of God) and Babylon (the city of this world)

The strategy of Revelation is to create a symbolic world for readers/hearers to enter.
It is a real world that captures the imagination and reflects the truth better than the visible world.
Babylon represents all the great and ungodly accomplishments of man... Rome.
The New Jerusalem is presented as both a place and a people and symbolizes God's presence.
New Jerusalem as God's alternative to Babylon:

New Jerusalem

The chaste bride, the wife
of the Lamb (21:2-9)

Her splendor is the
glory of God (21:11-21)

The nations walk by her light,
which is the glory of God (21:24)

The kings of the earth bring their glory,
worship, submission into her (21:24-26)

Uncleanness, abomination, and falsehood
are excluded from her (21:27)

The water of life and the tree of life are for
the healing of the nations (21:6, 22:1-2)

God's people are called to enter
the New Jerusalem (22:14)

Babylon

The harlot with whom the kings
of the earth fornicate (17:2)

Her splendor comes from exploiting
her empire (17:4, 18:12-13,16)

She corrupts and deceives
the nations (17:2, 18:3,23, 19:2)

She rules over the kings
of the earth and extorts them (17:12-18)

She is filled with abominations,
impurities, and deceptions (17:4-5, 18:23)

Her wine makes the nations drunk with immorality,
blood and slaughter (14:8, 17:2,6, 18:3,24)

God's people are called to come out of
Babylon (18:4)

Fulfillment of prophesy (All God's promises)

Seven references to the fourfold peoples of the earth, "every tribe and tongue and people and nation"
Rev. 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15

Perfect completion of God's promise to Abraham

The word "prophesy" used seven times: Rev. 1:3, 11:6, 19:10, 22:7,10,18,19

Revelation 1:3 "the time is near."

Revelation 22:10,18-19 (a threat protecting God's message)

The scroll of Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 - Revelation 5:1-10 - Revelation 10:2,8-11 (scroll now opened)

Acts 3:19-21 and Luke 24:25-27,44-48

Challenge/choice for those who read: Be faithful to the Lamb or serve the beast(s)

Will you be an overcomer or earth-dweller?

Will you be marked by the Lamb or by the beast?

Will you worship the Lamb or the beast/Babylon?

Will you participate in the victory of the Lamb or the judgment of the dragon?