

Revelation Outline

Introduction: Easily the most controversial book of the Bible, Revelation has fascinated and confused the church from the first century until today. Most of the difficulty is what I might call a “genre problem”. Like the book of Daniel, Revelation is a book length apocalypse. And while the apocalyptic genre flourished for 400 years from the 2nd century BCE through the 2nd century CE, the genre completely dies out after that. The upshot of this is that modern readers come to Revelation with very little preparation for how apocalyptic works use imagery and language and are intended to be read.

First off, apocalyptic literature is written by people living under threat. Whereas the community of Daniel suffered under Antiochus Epiphanes the IV, the community of Revelation suffers under the considerable threat of the Roman empire. Contrary to popular contemporary ways of interpretation Revelation, apocalyptic literature does not speak primarily about the future- but rather it addresses a hopeful futuristic message to an embattled historic community. By failing to honor the historic context of Revelation in favor of fanciful modern interpretations (like Russia or Iraq symbolizing “the beast”), we fail to understand the meaning of the book and fail to truly remember the suffering of these brothers and sisters in Christ.

Because of the life and death situations faced by the respective communities, the language of the apocalyptic is often encoded in symbols that may seem bizarre to those unfamiliar with scripture. But for those acquainted with scripture, especially the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, careful readers of Revelation encounter familiar symbols often used in creative and fresh ways. And while some of the original meaning is lost to contemporary readers, by comparing the images in Revelation with the source material, we can develop our appreciation for the meaning they might have held. At the very least we can acknowledge the images are not drug induced or from way out in left field- rather they are drawn from rich sources and reworked to offer struggling people hope.

Another aspect of living in such dire circumstances is a dualistic way of seeing the world with an emphasis on the hope of future peace. Unlike Paul and the author of First Peter, who both tend to emphasize getting along with the present political powers, the author of Revelation defines the Roman political powers as Satanic and the Roman empire as a new Babylon. So unlike Paul’s sober attempt to create communities who live and let live, the community of Revelation sees itself in a kind of spiritual war with a corrupt power structure that touches every aspect of their lives.

Unfortunately this bellicose attitude of Revelation with it’s visions of spiritual battles between cosmic forces of good and evil often gives the impression of Revelation as being a negative book, or a book about war and destruction. Ultimately, of course, Revelation is just the opposite. Just as Genesis begins with God creating the earth as good, Revelation ends with a majestic scene of heaven, the New Jerusalem, descending down to the earth with open doors and every tear being wiped away and creation being restored to God as being utterly and totally good, once and for all.

- Chapter 1: Introduction of John of Patmos and the seven churches; John’s vision of Christ
- Chapter 2: Ephesus; Smyrna; Thyatira- all mainly good reports
- Chapter 3: Sardis; Philadelphia; Laodicea- Philadelphia mainly positive but Sardis and Laodicea not
- Chapter 4: John sees vision of heavenly worship- throne, 24 elders, 4 living creatures
- Chapter 5: Scroll with seven seals; slaughtered lamb takes the scroll
- Chapter 6: First seal- white horse; second seal- red horse; third seal- black horse; fourth seal- pale rider
Fifth seal- white robes for the dead; sixth seal- earthquake and cosmic signs
- Chapter 7: Marking of the 144,000; countless multitude from every nation; angel describes them
- Chapter 8: Seventh seal- silence and fire; then seven trumpets; first trumpet- hail, fire, and blood;
Second trumpet- mountain into sea; third trumpet- star from heaven; fourth trumpet- Sun and moon struck
- Chapter 9: Fifth angel- bottomless shaft opened with locusts and scorpions; sixth angel- four angels of Death
- Chapter 10: Angel with a little scroll; John eats scroll- bitter in stomach; John to prophesy
- Chapter 11: John measures the temple; the two witnesses; the beast; the seventh trumpet- temple opens
- Chapter 12: Pregnant woman being chased by dragon; son rescued; angelic battle with dragon
- Chapter 13: First beast; second beast- give the “mark of the beast” and is called 666 (or 668)
- Chapter 14: Lamb on Mt. Zion; three angels; winepress of the wrath of God
- Chapter 15: Seven angels with plagues- given seven bowls of wrath
- Chapter 16: Seven bowls of wrath
- Chapter 17: Vision of Babylon as whore riding a scarlet beast; “explanation” of symbolism
- Chapter 18: Vision of the fall of Babylon; “Alas, Babylon”

Chapter 19: Rejoicing in heaven; angel rebukes John for trying to worship him; white horse and rider

Destroy the beast and the enemies

Chapter 20: Angel locks the dragon/Satan away for 1,000 years; final defeat; judgment of dead and

Death and itself

Chapter 21: The new heaven and earth; the new Jerusalem descending upon the earth

Chapter 22: John's final words; Jesus' last speech: 'Let everyone come'; warning about the book

Stories to know: John's vision of Christ (1:9-20); God's marking of God's own (7:4-17); New heaven and new earth with new Jerusalem descending (Chapter 21:1-27)