

Through the Bible Book by Book

New Testament

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THE REVELATION

Theme: The book of Revelation is the climax of God's revelation of truth to man, the capstone of the edifice of the Scriptures, of which Genesis is the foundation stone. The Bible would not be complete without either book. If the omission of Genesis would have left us in ignorance as to the beginnings of things, the omission of Revelation would have deprived us of much light concerning the consummation of all things. Between Genesis and Revelation a striking balance may be seen, as follows:

GENESIS	REVELATION
Paradise lost	Paradise regained
The first city, a failure	City of the redeemed, a success
The beginning of the curse	No more curse
Marriage of first Adam	Marriage of second Adam
First tears	Every tear wiped away
Satan's entrance	Satan's doom
Old creation	New creation
Communion broken	Communion restored

The book of Revelation is the consummation of Old Testament prophecy. It is full of symbols and language borrowed from the writings of those prophets who were favored with glorious revelations concerning the end-time-Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. It is the grand "Amen" of, and the glad "Hallelujah" for, the fulfillment of the predictions of the prophets - the glad answer to their yearning and prayer that the kingdom of God might come and that His will might be done on earth as it is in heaven. "As the completion of the whole prophetic Scriptures it gathers up the threads of all the former books and weaves them into one chain of many links which binds all history to the throne of God."

Above all, this book is a revelation-an unveiling-of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his Gospel, John describes His earthly life and ministry. Before writing the book of Revelation, the apostle is caught up to the throne of God where he sees the Lord Jesus clothed with the glory which He has with the Father before the foundation of the world; where he sees Him who was judged by the world, returning as its Judge; where he sees Him who was rejected by men, taking possession of all the kingdoms of the world, as King of kings, and Lord of lords.

The Revelation is the book of Christ's coming in glory, therefore we shall sum up the theme as follows: The coming of Christ in glory, as the supreme climax of the age.

Why Written: It was written by John the apostle at the direct command of Jesus, in order that there might be a book of prophecy for this dispensation.

Where Written: On Patmos, an isle off the coast of Asia Minor, about A. D. 90.

Contents: The analysis of 1:19 will give us the three main heads of our outline:

I. Concerning Christ: “The things which thou hast seen.” Ch. 1.

II. Concerning the church: “The things which are.” Chs. 2, 3.

III. Concerning the Kingdom: “The things which shall be.” Chs. 4-22.

Facts to be remembered in studying Revelation:

1. The book is confessedly the most difficult of interpretation of all the books in the canon. One has said, “His courage is greater than his wisdom who finds no room for doubt in the interpretation of much in the Apocalypse.” In meeting some portions the meaning of which is not clear, rather than seek for strained, fanciful and far-fetched interpretations, it is better to say, “I do not understand,” and then wait patiently for light.

2. It is quite probable that the interpretation of the book will become clearer as time arrives for the fulfillment of its prophecies. In Old Testament times, the coming of the Messiah was a fact agreed upon by all the pious of the nation; but to them, Messianic prophecy must have presented many difficulties of interpretation, as the book of Revelation does to us. Even the prophets did not always understand their own prophecies (I Peter 1:10,11).

It was as the prophecies concerning the Christ began to be fulfilled that the spiritually enlightened among the people - of whom Simeon (Luke 2:25-35) is an example - would find their perplexities disappearing as the rays of the “**bright and morning Star**” would shine on the pages of sacred Writ. We can all agree as to the main facts of the book - coming tribulation and judgment, the coming of Christ in glory, the setting up of His kingdom, etc. - and then wait patiently till further study, increased spiritual enlightenment and passing events shed light on those details which at present seem obscure.

3. Apart from the interpretation of the book, there are many valuable lessons to be learned, many warnings to be heeded, many promises to encourage, that make the book of Revelation of real practical value to the Christian.

For example, the messages to the churches contain practical teaching that can be applied both to the church and to the individual. In this connection it is well to remember that it is always more profitable to practice the things that we do understand, instead of puzzling, speculating, and splitting hairs over the things that we do not understand.

4. Since the book of Revelation is a mosaic of Old Testament prophecies and symbols, the study of certain prophets - Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah - will provide the key to many a closed door in its interpretation.

I. Concerning Christ: “The things which thou hast seen.” Ch. 1.

1. The introduction (vv. 1-3).

- (a) Note the correct title of the book, “the revelation (unveiling) of Jesus Christ.”
- (b) The means of communication (v. 2). The Lord “**signified**” it; i.e., communicated it by means of signs or symbols.
- (c) The blessing to the reader, hearer and the keeper of the sayings of the book (v. 3).

2. The salutation (vv. 4,5), from

- (a) The Father (v. 4).
- (b) The seven Spirits; i.e., the Holy Spirit in His diversities, power and operation (v. 4).
- (c) From Jesus Christ (v. 5).

3. The praise (vv. 5. 6).

4. The proclamation - the coming of Christ (vv.7,8).

5. The Prophet (vv. 9-20).

- (a) His mood, “**in the Spirit.**”
- (b) The time of the vision, “**on the Lord’s day.**”
- (c) The place, the isle of Patmos.
- (d) His vision.

“It is well that our memory should dwell much upon the Christ who lived and walked as the Son of man upon this earth, but this scene in Revelation is a picture of the Christ of to-day. It is the picture of the Christ who sits on the right hand of God in glory. This is the coming Christ. This is the Christ we think of as we wait and look for His coming. And what a figure!

The Spirit ransacks the realm of nature for symbols that might convey some faint conception to our dull and finite minds of the glory, splendor, and majesty of the Coming One, who is the Christ of Revelation.” - McConkey.

II. Concerning the church: “The things which are.” Chs. 2,3.

The churches mentioned in these chapters actually existed in John’s day and the conditions prevailing there then called forth the Lord’s message to them. But these local churches are evidently a type of the entire church and therefore the messages may be applied to the church in every age, as shown - by the following facts: the number, seven, is clearly typical, for there were more than seven churches in Asia Minor in John’s time. “Then, too, mark the space given to them. The book of Revelation is so terse and so condensed that but one chapter is given to the millennium, and less than one to the advent of Christ. That these two chapters here, comprising ten per cent of the book, should be given over to messages to the seven churches bespeaks the wider scope of the messages.” - McConkey.

In studying these chapters we shall notice the following facts concerning each church:

- (a) A message of commendation.
- (b) A message of rebuke.
- (c) A symbolic title of Christ suited to the needs of the church.
- (d) A promise to the overcomers.
- (e) A historical reference that will cast some light on the message.

1. The message to the church at Ephesus. 2:1-7.

- (a) Commendation: works, patience, abhorrence of false teachers.
- (b) Rebuke: spiritual declension.
- (c) Title of Christ: to a church which has lost its first love He is one walking in the midst of the seven candlesticks - a superintendent subjecting their works and motives to a severe scrutiny.
- (d) Promise to overcomer: tree of life.
- (e) Historical reference. Ephesus has been called the “Vanity Fair” of Asia. It was a wealthy, cultured, corrupt, and idolatrous city, the center of the cult of Diana, to whom a magnificent temple had been erected.

2. Message to the church at Smyrna. 2:8-11.

- (a) Commendation: endurance in persecution.
- (b) There is no message of rebuke to this suffering church.
- (c) Title of Christ: to a church facing persecution, the Lord reveals Himself as the One who suffered, died and rose again.
- (d) Promise to overcomer: deliverance from second death.
- (e) Historical reference. **“I will give thee a crown of life.”** The **“crown of Smyrna”** was a circular street consisting of a ring of magnificent buildings. One of their philosophers advises them to value more a crown of men than a crown of buildings.

3. Message to the church at Pergamos. 2:12-17.

- (a) Commendation: faithfulness in testimony.
- (b) Rebuke: the prevalence of licentiousness and idolatry.
- (c) Title of Christ: to a church tainted with immorality and idolatry He is the One who will fight against it with His two-edged sword.
- (d) Promise to overcomer: hidden manna.
- (e) Historical reference. Pergamos was the center of idolatry, and had a great altar erected to the worship of a serpent god. This may explain the words **“where Satan’s seat is.”**

4. Message to the church at Thyatira. 2:18-29.

- (a) Commendation: charity, service, faith.
- (b) Rebuke: toleration of corrupt teachers.
- (c) Title of Christ: the One with eyes as a flame of fire (see v. 23), and One with the feet like brass (symbolical of judgment).
- (d) Promise to overcomer: power over nations.

(e) Historical reference. Thyatira was a prosperous city celebrated for its trade guilds.

Membership in one of these guilds conferred many privileges. Perhaps there is a warning here to Christian tradesmen not to join themselves to pagan brotherhoods and thus participate in idolatrous customs (v. 20).

5. Message to the church at Sardis. 3:1-6.

(a) Commendation: works (though imperfect).

(b) Rebuke: spiritual deadness.

(c) Title of Christ: to a church spiritually dead, He is One holding the seven stars - churches - in His hands, and also the seven Spirits of God, the power of which is able to quicken those churches.

(d) Promise to overcomer: clothed in white raiment and name confessed before the Father.

(e) Historical reference. **“I will come upon thee as a thief.”** Sardis was the scene of the final overthrow of Croesus, the great Lydian king, when the Persians attacked the city. In the year 546 B. C., thinking himself absolutely safe in his citadel which he considered impregnable, the king neglected to set a watch. Finding an unguarded spot, where the rain had washed away a cleft in the soft rock, the Persians climbed up one by one and captured the city. Thus by one night of carelessness the great Lydian empire fell.

6. Message to the church at Philadelphia. 3:7-13.

(a) Commendation: obedience to Christ’s commands and steadfastness in testimony.

(b) Rebuke: there is no direct reproof, although “the faint praise of a **‘little strength’** has in it the shadow of a rebuke.”

(c) Title of Christ: to a church eager to enter the open door of missionary service, Christ is the One who has the keys that open doors no man can shut.

(d) Promise to overcomer: pillars in God’s temple; a new name.

(e) Historical reference. At one time Philadelphia was destroyed by an earthquake, and so terrified were the inhabitants ever afterwards that they lived outside the city in huts and booths. **“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God** (in a building which no earthquake can shake), **and he shall go out no more** (as the people did during the earthquake).”

Later the city was built at the expense of the Roman government, and was given a new name, this last signifying that the city was consecrated in a special way to the service and worship of the emperor. **“I will write upon him my new name.”** However, the city later dropped its new name.

7. Message to the church at Laodicea. 3:14-22.

(a) Commendation: praise is lacking for this church.

(b) Rebuke: spiritual lukewarmness.

(c) Title of Christ: to a lukewarm church, unfaithful in testimony, He sets Himself forth as the Amen, the true and faithful witness.

(d) Promise to overcomer: to share Christ’s throne.

(e) Historical reference. Laodicea was a wealthy and prosperous city. Following an earthquake, when other cities were accepting imperial help, it declared its independence of such assistance. It was “**rich**” and had “**need of nothing**.” It was celebrated for the manufacture of a soft black wool, and for costly garments which were made from it (v. 18). It was celebrated throughout the Roman empire for its school of medicine, and for the “Phrygian powder” from which its well-known eye-salve was made (v. 18).

III. Concerning the Kingdom: “The things which shall be.” Chs. 4 to 22.

1. The vision of God’s throne (Ch. 4). The prophet is caught up, in spirit, to the throne of God, and from there—from the viewpoint of the heavenlies, he is made to see the judgment that will be poured out upon the earth in the latter times.

2. A vision of the Lamb (ch. 5). The main feature of this chapter is the unsealing of a book handed to the Lord.

In discussing the nature of this sealed book, Mr. McConkey says: “What is the symbolism of a seal? A seal may be indeed used to attest the signature to a title-deed. But it is also used to conceal and safeguard the contents of a written document. We seal a letter for that purpose. In prophecy God uses the seal in precisely this way. He tells Daniel (Daniel 12:4) concerning certain prophecies which are to be hidden that he is to “seal the book.” He tells John concerning the very prophecies of Revelation which He wants disclosed to His servants “**seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book**.” Revelation 22:10. This use of the seal therefore to conceal the prophetic word seems to be the clear and natural usage here with the seven-sealed book . . . In it the scroll of New Testament prophecy is unrolled by Jesus Himself as He breaks the seals in their divinely appointed order.”

3. The seals (Chs. 6 to 8:1). The author quoted above raises the question as to whether Revelation has a story thread, or a story-flow, and whether Christ ever told the Revelation story before. He then points out that the seals constitute the story thread of the book, and that their message resembles closely that of Christ’s discourse recorded in Matthew 24. Another scholar, Milligan, takes the same view. Following the suggestions of these men, but not their exact outlines, we offer the following parallel:

Matthew, Ch. 24	Revelation, Ch. 6
False Christs (24:5)	First seal
War (vv. 6, 7)	Second seal
Famine (v. 7)	Third seal
Pestilence (Death) (v. 7)	Fourth seal
Tribulation (v. 21)	Fifth seal
Celestial disturbances (v. 29)	Sixth seal
Second advent (v. 30)	Seventh seal

4. We have then seen that the seals represent the very backbone of Revelation. But what is the relation of the trumpets and the vials to the seals?

The explanation given is that they do not run parallel, but the seventh seal expands into the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet expands into the seven vials. Mr. Graham Scroggie holds the same view, explaining these sections on the principle of inclusion, the seven trumpets being included in the seventh seal, and the seven vials in the seventh trumpet.

5. In following the story-flow of Revelation, the student will notice that we have passed over certain episodes. This has been done because these do not form part of the story thread, but are detached from it. Mr. McConkey refers to these as “insets.” For example, in examining a map of a state, we may see in a corner a map of a certain city in that state. This is an inset, giving a “close-up” view of the city. Or in a picture of a famous battle, there may be given in the same space pictures of special portions of the battlefield, or portraits of famous generals who took part in the campaigns. So in Revelation, the writer passes along rapidly, describing the course of events that terminate in Christ’s coming, but here and there he stops to give us a “close-up” view of some particular personage, company, or city. Of such we may notice the following:

- (a) Two companies, a Jewish and a Gentile. Ch.7.
- (b) The angel and the book. Ch. 10.
- (c) The two witnesses. Ch. 11.
- (d) The two wonders. Ch. 12.
- (e) The two beasts. Ch. 13.
- (f) Two pictures of Christ - the Lamb and the Reaper. Ch. 14.
- (g) Babylon. Chs. 17, 18.

6. Having noticed the main story thread of Revelation, and the parentheses, we shall sum up the conclusion briefly:

- (a) The second advent. Ch. 19.
- (b) The millennium. Ch. 20.
- (c) The new heavens and the new earth. Chs. 21, 22.

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