

THE APOCALYPSE

REVELATION: AN INTRODUCTION

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Dr. D. Edmond Hiebert summarizes the feelings of most believers regarding a reading or study of Revelation when he states:

The Apocalypse is commonly regarded as being the New Testament book most difficult to understand. Its strange symbolism and grotesque imagery are difficult for the modern reader to envision, leaving the uneasy impression that they are devoid of sober significance. Its sweeping apocalyptic visions of devastating world judgments seem unreal and far removed from the experiences of the common man, striking him as improbable of realization. Although the book presents itself as a “revelation,” not a few have felt that it might more appropriately be designated a “concealment.” For many readers it remains a closed book. It is unquestionably one of the most misunderstood and misused books of the New Testament.” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, Chicago: Moody Press, pp. 231-32).

Dr. Hiebert’s words are true, and just perhaps they are true for you. If so, I don’t want you to remain in the interpretive fog, rather I want to do my part to assist you in getting a firm handle on this book’s moving message and meaning. To accomplish this goal, I would first invite you to come with me for a little background study.

Before we head in this direction, permit me to make a few points about the class:

1. You will need your Revelation outline for each class for taking notes. No additional notes will be given after this, nor will slides be supplied. I suggest if you like a given slide, use your cell phone to take a camera shot.
2. Some of this information will be new to you, which means you might feel cognitively overwhelmed. Don’t worry. You will learn much as you stay committed to being in class each week.
3. I will not teach the book by referencing all the various theological viewpoints of how the book can be interpreted. We would never finish this study were I to head in this direction.
4. I will not be able to answer email questions about the book. As you can imagine, preaching three times on Sundays, and then teaching a one-hour class, plus all the other pastoral duties I have puts great constraints on my time.
5. Likewise, I will not be able to read/watch things you discover which might be pertinent to the book. Again, my time is limited.
6. I love answering questions; however, my ability to do that on a Sunday evening is

- going to be curtailed by the demands of the day.
7. I have had many semester long classes in eschatology while in graduate school, and I have read thousands of pages on the topic since. Hence, I will only touch upon certain concepts here and there as we move through the book. Some of these, of course, require a deep dive but we will not be able to do that. I can point to books to read on pertinent subjects as they arise.
 8. Pray for us as we dig into this magnificent, instructive book. Why? This is the last thing our Adversary wants us to understand, so he will oppose in a variety of ways.
 9. Do anticipate God blessing you greatly. After all, this book contains a promise of blessing to those who read/study it (Rev. 1:3).

How Should We Approach to Revelation?

Two Extremes to Avoid

- 1.
- 2.

Presuppositions to Consider

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What Is the Nature of the Book?

Definition of Apocalyptic Literature

Revelation is an apocalyptic book; hence it is important that we understand what this means. Definition: “Apocalyptic literature is symbolic visionary prophetic literature, consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author

and explained through a diving interpreter, and whose theological content is primarily eschatological.”

Characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature

1. Dualistic (clear division between good and evil).
2. Eschatological (focus on future events or the end times).
3. Use of visions to convey the content.
4. Messianic emphasis.
5. Emphasis on Spiritism or supernatural forces (i.e., angels, demons, etc.).
6. Extensive use of symbols to convey content.
7. Often pseudonymous (a characteristic of extra-biblical apocalyptic).
8. An interest in animal symbolism.
9. The use of numbers to communicate meaning.
10. An interest in the heavenlies (i.e. stars, moon, sun, etc.)

What Are Principles of Apocalyptic Interpretation?

1. The interpretation of apocalyptic is primarily futuristic. It looks to the establishment of Christ’s kingdom.
2. Apocalyptic literature often contains a reiteration and elaboration of previous prophetic promises of God concerning the latter days.
3. Apocalyptic literature is more nationalistic than individualistic. (Individuals take the background.)
4. Divine interpretation is to be sought and permitted to stand alone without additions, or without seeking to interpret the interpretation.
5. Every item in a vision does not necessarily need to be interpreted.
6. The interpreter must apply the concept of literal interpretation with respect to the basic nature of the symbol, and to the divine interpretation of the symbol. Sometimes the biblical text explains the meaning of a symbol. This must be taken as literal, i.e. no more symbols found in the explanation.
7. Symbolism must be interpreted within its own context.
8. Comparison should be made with other biblical symbols presented elsewhere in the Bible (presumably in prophetic literature).
9. Similarities do not always mean equivalents. Thus Jezebel mentioned in Revelation 2:20 does not mean that this wicked woman was resurrected from the dead. Her name is used only to teach a symbolical truth.

(These notes were adapted from Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible*; Alexander, “Hermeneutics of Old Testament Apocalyptic Literature; and Rist, “Apocalypticism” found in *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, vol.1.).

Who Is the Book's Author?

Although most apocalyptic works were pseudonymous, Revelation is not. Four times John gives his name (Revelation 1:1,4; 22:8). Early church fathers also supported the fact that John wrote the Apocalypse. Justin Martyr supported John's authorship (150 A.D.); as did Irenaeus, who knew Polycarp who in turn was a disciple of John; Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen in 25 A.D. The chart which follows later describing the comparisons between Revelation and the Gospel of John also demonstrates that the same author is in view.

What Is the Book's Date?

During Reign of Claudius (41-54 A.D.)

1. Reasoning: Epiphanes, a church historian from the 3rd century, says that Revelation was written by John at this time.
2. Rebuttal: This date is entirely too early for the churches of Asia mentioned in the first three chapters.
3. During the Reign of Nero (54-68 A.D.)
4. Reasoning: (1) Jerusalem is recorded as if it is still standing, (2) Revelation 13:18 . . . Nero's name equals 666 in Greek, (3) Revelation 17:9-11, five kings falls, one is, one is yet to come points to Nero being the sixth king, (4) The church father, Clement, argues this position.
5. Rebuttal: (1) It assumes the fulfillment of present history, when the book really looks to the future, (2) It is a guessing game ultimately (points 1 and 3).

During Reign of Vespasian (69-79 A.D.)

1. Reasoning: Revelation 17:10-11 identifies the eighth king, which would naturally fit the chronological order of the Roman emperors.
2. Rebuttal: This is the preterist view which looks upon the future statements as if they are past. Also, there was no real persecution under Vespasian, so this would argue against this position.

During Reign of Domitian (81-96 A.D.)

Domitian was, I believe, the emperor alive at the time Revelation was written.

1. Reasoning: The ancient church accepts this (Irenaeus, Victorinus, Clement of Alexandria); It agrees with the conditions of the churches in Asia; Laodicea appears as a prosperous city. It was destroyed in 62 A.D. By the time of Domitian's rule, the city could have been rebuilt and recovered; Emperor

worship flourished under Domitian's rule; Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:15) were not even hinted at in the Pauline epistles. This shows that time was needed before this sect could be firmly established. (These notes were taken from a lecture by Dr. Harold Hoehner at Dallas Seminary in the spring of 1985).

Based upon this evidence, I believe Revelation was written around 95-96 A.D.

2. What were the times of Domitian like? The book *Fox's Book of Martyrs* gives us a good idea.

“The emperor Domitian, who was naturally inclined to cruelty, first slew his brother, and then raised the second persecution against the Christians. In his rage he put to death some of the Roman senators, some through malice; and others to confiscate their estates. He then commanded all the lineage of David to be put to death. Among the numerous martyrs that suffered during this persecution was Simeon, bishop of Jerusalem, who was crucified; and St. John, who was boiled in oil, and afterward banished to Patmos. Flavia, the daughter of a Roman senator, was likewise banished to Pontus; and a law was made, ‘That no Christian, once brought before the tribunal, should be exempted from punishment without renouncing his religion. A variety of fabricated tales were, during this reign, composed in order to injure the Christians. Such was the infatuation of the pagans, that if famine, pestilence, or earthquakes afflicted any of the Roman provinces, it was laid upon the Christians. These persecutions among the Christian increased in number of informers and many, for the sake of gain, swore away the lives of the innocent. Another hardship was, that, when any Christians were brought before the magistrates, a test oath was proposed, when, if they refused to take it, death was pronounced against them; and if they confessed themselves Christians, the sentence was the same” (p. 6).

The times of Domitian are also described in great detail by the Roman historian Suetonius (born A.D. 69). He, at one time, was the personal secretary to the Emperor Hadrian, so he had access to the Imperial and Senatorial archives. His book “The Twelve Caesars” serves to introduce us to the emperor who was behind the book of Revelation and who was personally responsible for persecuting John. Here are some excerpts from his book. I hope they help you get a handle on this wicked time so you can better appreciate the message and meaning of Revelation.

“At the beginning of his reign Domitian would spend hours alone every day doing nothing but catch flies and stabbing them with a needle-sharp pen. Once, on being asked whether anyone was closeted with the Emperor, Vibius Crispus answered wittily: ‘No, not even a fly.’ Then he awarded his wife Domitia the title of Augusta. She had presented Domitian with a daughter during his second consulship and, in the following year, with a son. But he divorced her because she had fallen in love with Paris, the actor. This separation, however, proved to be more than Domitian could bear; and

he very soon took her back, claiming that such was the people's wish. For a while he governed in an uneven fashion: that is to say, his vices were at first balanced by his virtues.

Later, he transformed his virtues into vices too - for I am inclined to believe that this was contrary to his original character; it was lack of funds that made him greedy, and fear of assassination that made him cruel. Domitian presented many extravagant entertainments in the Colosseum and the Circus. Besides the usual two-horse chariot races he staged a couple of battles, one for infantry, the other for cavalry; a sea fight in the amphitheater; wild-beast hunts; gladiatorial shows by torchlight in which women as well as men took part. Nor did he ever forget the Games given by the quaestors, which he had revived; and allowed the people to demand a combat between two pairs of gladiators from his own troop, whom he would bring on last in their gorgeous Court livery.

Throughout every gladiatorial show Domitian would chat, sometimes in very serious tones, with a little boy who had a grotesquely small head and always stood at his feet dressed in red. Once he was heard to ask the child: 'Can you guess why, on the last appointment day, I made Mettius Rufus Prefect of Egypt?' A lake was dug at his orders close to the Tiber, surrounded with seats, and used for almost full-scale naval battles, which he watched even in heavy rain. He also held Saecular Games, fixing their date by Augustus's old reckoning, and ignoring Claudius's more recent celebration of them; and for the Circus racing, which formed part of the festivities, reduced the number of laps from seven to five, so that 100 races could be run off in the day.

In honour of Capitoline Jupiter he founded a threefold festival of music, horsemanship, and gymnastics, to be held every five years, and awarded far more prizes than is customary nowadays. The festival included Latin and Greek public speaking contests, competitions for choral singing to the lyre and lyre-playing alone, besides the usual solo singing to lyre accompaniment; he even instituted foot races for girls in the Stadium. When presiding at these functions he wore buskins, a purple robe in the Greek fashion, and a gold crown engraved with the images of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva; and at his side sat the Priest of Capitoline Jupiter and the Priest of the Deified Flavians, wearing the same costume as he did, except that their crowns were decorated with his likeness as well. Domitian also celebrated the annual five-day festival of Minerva at his Alban villa, and founded in her honour a college of priests, whose task it was to supply officers, chosen by lot, for producing lavish wild beast hunts and stage plays, and sponsoring competitions in rhetoric and poetry . . .

10. His leniency and self-restraint were not, however, destined to continue long, and the cruel streak in him became apparent - rather before his

avaricious traits. He executed one beardless boy, in distinctly poor health, merely because he happened to be a pupil of the actor Paris,' 'and closely resembled him in his style of acting and appearance. Then Hermogenes of Tarsus died because of some allusions that he had introduced into a historical work; and the slaves who acted as his copyists were crucified.

A chance remark by one citizen, to the effect that a Thracian gladiator might be a match for his Gallic opponent, but not for the patron of the Games', was enough to have him dragged from his seat and - with a placard tied around his neck reading: 'A Thracian supporter who spoke disloyally' - torn to pieces by dogs in the arena. Domitian put many senators to death, among them a group of ex-Consuls, three of whom, Cívica Cerealis, Acilius Glabrio, and Salvidienus Orfitus, he accused of conspiracy; Cerealis was executed while governing Asia; Glabrio while already in exile. Others were executed on the most trivial charges. Aelius Lamia lost his life as a result of some suspicious but old and harmless witticisms at Domitian's expense: he had been robbed of his wife by Domitian, and when someone later praised his voice remarked drily: 'I have given up sex and gone into training!'; and then, encouraged by Titus to marry again, asked: 'What! You are not wanting a wife, too, are you?'

Salvius Cocceianus died because he continued to celebrate the birthday of the Emperor Otho, his paternal uncle, and Mettius Pompusianus, because his birth was said to have been attended by imperial portents, and because he always carried with him a parchment map of the world and a collection of speeches by kings and generals extracted from Livy - and because he had named two of his slaves 'Mage' and 'Hannibal!' Sallustius Lucullus, Governor of Britain, had equally offended Domitian by allowing a new type of lance to be called 'the Lucullan'; so had Junius Rusticus, by publishing eulogies of Thræsea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus in which he described them as saintly characters - an incident which led Domitian to banish all philosophers from Italy; and Helvidius the Younger by his farce about Paris and Oenone, which seemed a reflection on Domitian's divorce; and Domitian's own cousin, Flavius Sabinus, by being mistakenly announced by the election day herald as Emperor, instead of Consul.

After his victory in the civil war, Domitian grew even more cruel. He hit on a novel form of investigation, scorching his prisoners' genitals to make them divulge the whereabouts of other rebels still in hiding; and cut off the hands of many more. It is a fact that only two leaders of the revolt - a colonel of senatorial rank and a centurion - earned his pardon; which they did by the simple expedient of proving themselves to have been so disgustingly immoral that they could have exerted no influence at all over either their commander" or the troops.

11. Domitian was not merely cruel, but cunning and sudden into the

bargain. He summoned a Palace steward to his bedroom, invited him to join him on his couch, made him feel perfectly secure and condescended to share a dinner with him — yet had him crucified on the following day! He was as gracious, or more than usually gracious, to the ex-Consul Arrecinus Clemens, a friend and agent, just before his death-sentence, and invited him out for a drive. As they happened to pass the man who had informed on Arrecinus, Domitian asked: ‘Shall we listen to that rascally slave tomorrow!’ And the abuse he inflicted on his subjects’ patience was all the more offensive because he prefaced all his most savage sentences with the same speech about mercy indeed, this lenient preamble soon became a recognized sign that something dreadful was on the way . . . On his accession Domitian did not scruple to boast to the Senate of having himself conferred the imperial power on Vespasian and Titus — they now merely returned it to him! He also spoke of his action in taking Domitia back, after the divorce, as ‘a recall to my divine bed’; and on the day of his public banquet delighted to hear the crowd in the amphitheater shout: ‘Long live our Lord and Lady!’

At the competition of Capitoline Jupiter, when unanimously implored by the audience to pardon Palfurius Sura, whom he had expelled from the Senate some time previously but who had nevertheless won the prize for public speaking, Domitian would not reply and sent a public crier to silence them. Just as arrogantly he began a letter, which his agents were to circulate, with the words: ‘Our Lord and God instructs you to do this!’ and ‘Lord and God’ became his regular title both in writing and conversation. Images dedicated to Domitian in the Capitol had to be of either gold or silver, and of a certain weight; and he raised so many and such enormous arcades and arches, decorated with chariots and triumphal insignia, in various city districts, that someone scribbled ‘arci’, meaning ‘arches’ on one of them - but used Greek characters, and so spelled out the Greek word for ‘Enough!’ He held seventeen consulships, which was a record. Only the seven middle ones formed a series, but all were virtually nominal: he relinquished most of them after a few days, and every one of them before 1 May. Having adopted the surname ‘Germanicus’ after his two triumphs he renamed September and October, the months of his accession and birth, respectively, ‘Germanicus’ and ‘Domitianus’.

14 All this made him everywhere hated and feared. Finally, his friends and favorite freedmen conspired to murder him, with the connivance of his wife." Astrological predictions had long since warned him in what year and day he would die; they even specified the hour and manner. Vespasian once teased him openly at dinner for refusing a dish of mushrooms, saying that it would be more in keeping with his destiny to be afraid of swords. As a result, Domitian was such a prey to fear and anxiety that the least sign of danger unnerved him. The real reason for his reprieving the vineyards,

which he had ordered to be rooted up, is said to have been the publication of this stanza: You may tear up my roots, goat, But what good will that do? I shall still have some wine left for sacrificing you.

Though he loved honours of all kinds, this same anxiety made him veto a Senatorial decree that, whenever he held the consulship, a group of knights should be picked by lot to walk, dressed in purple-striped robes and armed with lances, among the lictors and attendants who preceded him. As the critical day drew near his nervousness increased. The gallery where he took his daily exercise was now lined with plaques of highly-polished moonstone, which reflected everything that happened behind his back; and no imperial audiences were granted to prisoners unless Domitian were alone with them, and actually had tight hold of their fetters. To remind his staff that even the best of intentions could never justify a freedman's complicity in a master's murder, he executed his secretary's Epaphroditus, who had reputedly helped Nero to commit suicide after everyone else had deserted him. 15 Finally he executed, suddenly and on some trivial pretext, his own cousin, Flavius Clemens, just before the completion of a consulship; though Clemens was a man of despicable idleness, and Domitian had previously named Flavius's two small sons as his heirs and changed their names to Vespasian and Domitian.

Domitian was a cruel ruler and certainly typified, although in a small way, the Antichrist who will one day come. John's words, therefore, would have given the Church at large the hope they needed at this wicked time that Jesus would one day settle the score with all wicked potentates.

Who Was It Written To?

Chapter 1:4 tells us:

“John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: ...”

As we learn in chapters two through three, these seven churches were Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Where Was It Written?

Revelation 1:9 gives the location of the composition:

“I John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

What Is the Book's Purpose?

Purpose Statement: To encourage saints to remain faithful in a wicked age by presenting the outworking of God's kingdom program through the revelation of the glorified Jesus Christ.

What Is the Book's Structure?

From a literary perspective, Revelation is a well thought out book. It is by no means a haphazard arrangement of topics and visions. Quite the contrary, the book is a carefully designed and built upon a mostly linear, chronological foundation.

Pertinent Verse (Revelation 1:19)

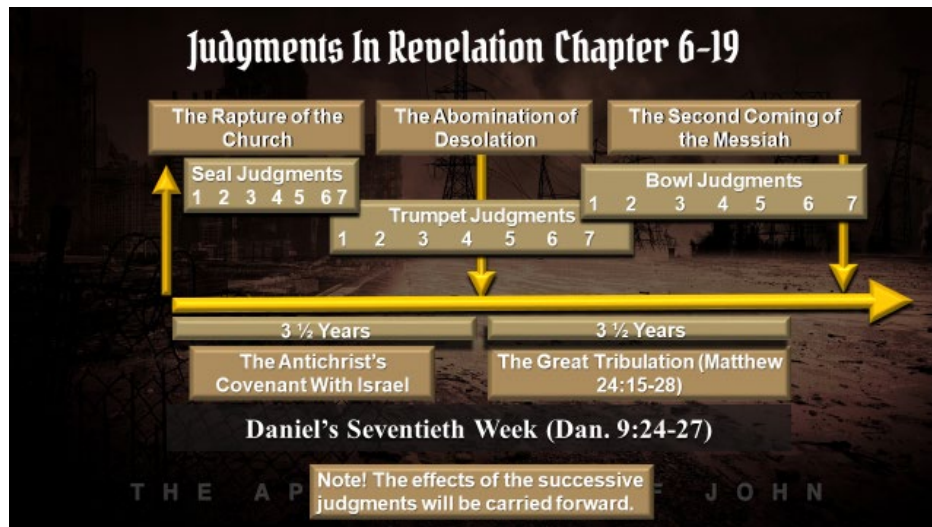
Revelation 1:19 gives us the chronological grid of the book. Here John writes by way of inspiration:

“Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.”

Translated: “The things which you have seen” equal John's immediate past; “the things which are” represent John's present setting; while “the things which shall take place after these things” speaks strictly of the future from John's perspective. If this is true, then the book follows this time structure, with chapter 1 dealing with the past, chapters 2 through 3 dealing with the present, and chapters 4 through 22 concerning themselves with the future.

Possible Structure

Concerning the following chart, I would like to add one key point: Revelation is a linear, chronological arrangement; however, this structure is broken at times by parenthetical sections sovereignly designed to give us added information about the period of judgment. Thus you find the flow temporarily broken in places like chapters 12, 13, 14, 17, 18. These breaks create havoc for the novice interpreter, but once you know they are there you learn to appreciate their placement and purpose.



What Are Sound Principles for Interpreting Prophecy?

1. Follow the normal hermeneutic of historical-grammatical-rhetorical interpretation. The *historical* element means that the cultural background and circumstances of the prophets are considered. The *grammatical* element means (a) that words are taken in their normal sense unless it is evident that a figure of speech or symbol is used, and (b) that words are considered in the light of their immediate and broad context. The rhetorical element considers the special features of apocalyptic and prophetic genres and considers the place of figurative and symbolic language.
2. Compare parallel passages, and fit all prophetic passages together in a unified whole. An understanding of the book of Revelation, for example is aided by an

- understanding of the Book of Daniel.
3. Recognize the principle of “foreshortening” or perspective, in which events separated by many years are seen together (e.g., Isa. 9:6-8;61:1-2).
 4. Recognize the several themes of both fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecy.
 5. Follow consistency in interpreting prophecy.
 6. Determine if the predictions are conditional or unconditional.
 7. Determine if the predictions are fulfilled or unfulfilled. (These notes are taken from a class lecture by Professor Roy Zuck on biblical hermeneutics at Dallas Theological Seminary).

What Are Various Methods of Interpretation?

The Preterist View

The word “preterit”, which means “past”, was first expounded by the Jesuit Alcazar in 1614 A. D. This view maintains that the message and prophecies of Revelation are factual, yet it argues that these prophecies were already fulfilled when John wrote the book. This view then stands as a symbolical expression of the persecution the Christians experienced during the reigns of Roman emperors like Nero, Domitian, and Vespasian. *The book is not prophetic per se, but is concerned with the immediate past and present, i. e. John’s day.*

Advocates, like F. W. Farrar, assert that much of the book, except for the description of the eternal state, occurred between 64 A.D. to 70 A.D. More specifically, Farrar believes the statement “the things which are” refers to the historical events of 64-68 A.D., while the statement “the things which are about to come to pass after these things,” cover the years of 68-70 A.D. Farrar’s support for the fact that the majority of the book has been historically realized is based upon the use of “immediately” in 2:5, 16; 3:2; 11:14; 22:20. He then logically concludes that the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was the prophesied Second Coming. Now, while these points might seem somewhat probable, they are highly improbable in light of the following points.

First, the promise that the prophecies would occur “immediately”- does not prove they have transpired already. One alternative interpretation is to take this word as meaning that when the prophecies are fulfilled that it will occur quickly from that point in time.

Second, it is extremely difficult to believe, let alone prove, that the fall of Jerusalem was the second advent. As Dr. Gary Cohen correctly states, “If the events relating to the Beast and the False Prophet of Revelation 13 are assigned to Nero and Vespasian, such as Farrar assigns them, then the logical outcome makes the coming of Christ on the white horse with His armies in Revelation 19 to occur in the lifetime of these men since at the time Christ cast both of these fiends alive into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20)” (*Understanding Revelation*, p. 26).

Third, this view is diametrically opposed to the overall purpose the book stated in Revelation 1:1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto

his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.” According to this verse, the contents of Revelation, are yet future, not in the past or present. If the book was written in the mid to late 90s, how could John make this statement? The events would have already occurred in the years 64-70 during Neronian persecution.

In light of these points it seems inappropriate and illogical to suppose that Revelation is applicable only to the past and not the future. Indeed, this view has some merit, yet it has to many hermeneutical difficulties to make it appealing.

The Spiritual/Idealist’s View

This view maintains that Revelation does not predict the future of the earth and man, but rather sets forth spiritual principles which govern the experience of the Church during the entire period of its earthly pilgrimage (Hiebert, *An Introduction to The New Testament*, p. 264). The book is then seen representing the classic struggle between the forces of good and evil and the problem of the suffering of the righteous. The book thereby stands as a sign of hope that God’s kingdom will triumph in the end.

The benefits of this view are that it recognizes the spiritual character of the book. Revelation does teach concepts of faithfulness and the need to deal with sin. Spiritual truths are part and parcel of the book. The view also rightly emphasizes the victory of God over the forces of evil. But it is at this point that this view breaks down,

Prophecy, by nature, refers to future events—not spiritual truths. If the understanding of prophecy were strictly spiritual then we could conclude that Christ’s Olivet Discourse concerning the future and the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are not literal prophecies but words of spiritual application. It is at this point that the absurdity of the view presents itself. Revelation 1:1 claims that this book is a prophecy and nothing more. To argue that it is only communicating spiritual principles is to miss the point of the book.

The Historicist View

This view argues that Revelation is factual and prophetic and that it covers the present course of the Church from the time of John to the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, according to this position, Revelation is fulfilled progressively throughout Church history.

Albert Barnes, a leading exponent of this position, illustrates in his commentary on Revelation how the prophecies of the book have been fulfilled are being fulfilled in the history of the Church. For example, he states that the first seal in Revelation 6, i.e, the white horse, denotes peace and triumph in the Roman Empire from Domitian to Commodus (96-180 A. D.); the second seal, i.e. the Red Horse, describes the bloodshed from the death of Commodus onward; and the third seal, i.e. the black horse, denotes the calamity in the time of Caracalla and onward, as can be seen from these few examples, this view places the fulfillment of Revelation within in scope of history. However, as we shall

see, this position is quite problematic for a number of reasons.

First, this view heavily employs the use of allegorization. Allegorization looks past the literal meaning and seeks to uncover a deeper more significant meaning. For example, the sun becoming black like sackcloth is taken as a fulfillment of the threat of invasion by the Goths and Huns (Revelation 6:12) Sure it does! The allegorical method is totally unwarranted as the go-to method of prophetic interpretation. The similes in this verse merely attempt to describe what will happen to the earth when the Lord's wrath breaks out under the seal judgments. No other meaning between the lines should, therefore, be sought.

Second, the similarities between the judgments listed in Revelation 16 and those of the judgments upon Egypt demonstrate that the judgments will occur literally. The historicist argues that Revelation 16 details the time of the French Revolution and its aftermath. But this cannot be the case by any stretch of the interpretive mind. The first bowl, which brings sores upon men, is similar to the boils which smote the Egyptians (Ex. 8:8-12); the third bowl turning rivers to blood (Revelation 16:4-7) is similar to the turning of the Nile to blood (Ex. 7:19-21); the fifth bowl which brings darkness (Revelation 16:10-11) is similar to the ninth plague of Egypt (Ex. 10:21-23), and the hail judgment (Re. 16:17-21) is similar to the hail of the seventh of Egypt (Ex. 9:22-26). The point is clear: since the Egyptian plagues took place literally, then it is more than possible that the Revelation judgments will also be literally fulfilled,

Third, according to Revelation 1:3 blessing can be obtained by reading, listening to, and studying the book. The implication is that the book can be understood by any saint. If the historical school is true, then, it must be asked how believers could profit from a study of this book if they didn't have a background in church history? The point is that the historical view limits the application of the book to only a select few. Based upon these points, therefore, I find this view tenuous at best. Further, if allegory is the interpretive method then the sky is the limit for what the interpreter sees in the text. Wherein is meaning then?

Fourth, this view is readily aligned with the movement of the western Church, while ignoring the spread of the Church in other regions. How can this be?

The Futurist View

This view is the view I adhere to. Futurists typically take the first three chapters as being historically fulfilled, while chapters. 4-19 point to future events. Walvoord, a major proponent of this view, offers this definition:

“In contrast to the other approaches to the book of Revelation, the futuristic position allows a more literal interpretation of the specific prophecies of the book. Though recognizing the frequent symbolism in various prophecies, the events foreshadowed by these symbols and their interpretation are regarded as being fulfilled in a normal way. Hence, the

various judgments of God are actually poured out on the earth as contained in the seals, trumpets, and vials. Chapter 13 is considered a prophecy of the future world empire with its political and religious heads represented by the two beasts of this chapter. The harlot of chapter 17 is the final form of the church in apostasy. In a similar way all other events of Revelation relate to the climax of history contained in the second coming of Christ” (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 21).

The literal understanding of Revelation is founded, for the futurist, upon the literal fulfillment of 69 weeks of Daniel’s 70-week prophecy. Put differently, since the 69 weeks were fulfilled literally, then this last week must be as well. And since this last week hasn’t occurred yet, in a literal fashion, then it must still be future.

According to Daniel 9:27, the seven-year tribulation will be divided into two literal 3 ½ year segments. It is also at this time, according to Daniel 9:20-27, that the Lord again will deal personally with the nation Israel. Furthermore, according to Daniel 7:27 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, the Antichrist will have a major role during this 7-year time period. This Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel and will, during the middle of the Tribulation, break his covenant and desecrate the temple (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3-4). For the rest of the 3 ½ years the Antichrist will persecute the Church and Israel, and he will then be destroyed at the end of this seven-year period when God establishes His rule (Jer. 30:7-10; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 24:29-31). Scripture is very clear about the duration of the Antichrist’s reign being 7 years (Dan. 4:25, 32; Rev. 12:6, 14; Dan. 7:25).

If the literal sense is denied, then one is forced to adopt an allegorical approach. Yet I think logic would lead one to stick with the plain meaning of words. If a friend wrote you that in seven days they were coming to see you and that they would stay for 2 weeks, it would be illogical to assume that what they really meant is that the seven days denote seven years and that the two weeks represent the length of time you have been friends. Such reasoning is dubious and absurd. If we wouldn’t apply such interpretive methods to a letter, why, then would we do it to the prophetic Word of God? The Scripture, in numerous places, details the duration and events of the great day of Tribulation. Why should we not believe the message of Scripture as clearly stated?

Prophecy Positions



Note: The next three views are wedded to a premillennial/dispensational view of the book.

Arguments favoring this view

1. The Rapture is distinct from the Second Coming. In the Rapture Christ descends to retrieve His believers, while the believers come with Him at the Second Coming according to Revelation 19. In the Rapture, Jesus meets believers in the air, while in the Second Coming they are already in the air with Him as they return. The Rapture is followed by the Judgment Sea of Christ for believers (1 Cor. 3), while the Second Coming is followed by the judgment of the Anti-Christ and the establishment of the Messiah's millennial kingdom (Rev. 19-20). The Rapture allows time for Christ to judge His saints, to be wed to them as His bride, and to enjoy the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Taking into account the ancient Jewish marriage ceremony, and reading all of this in light of Christ's words in John 14, some very interesting points emerge:
 - a. Established fact: The Church is the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33).
 - b. As the groom traveled from his father's home to create a covenant with his bride, Jesus left the glory of heaven to seal a New Covenant with the Church (1 Cor. 11:25). John chapter fourteen takes place within this covenantal promise as Christ prepared to leave His bride.
 - c. The Jewish groom paid a price for his bride, as did Jesus for his by laying down his life (1 Cor. 6:19-20).
 - d. Once the marriage covenant was established, the bride was sanctified and set apart for the groom. So it was/is with Christ and His Church

- (Eph. 5:25-27; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Heb. 10:10; 13:12).
- e. As a cup of wine served as a symbol of the marriage covenant between bride and groom in Jewish life, so it is with the institution of communion. It is the sign of our New Covenant (1 Cor. 11:25).
 - f. As the Jewish groom left his bride for an unspecified amount of time to return to his father's house to prepare a home for his bride, so, too, did Jesus leave His Church to create a home for her after His glorious resurrection (John 14:2; 6:62; 20:17).
 - g. Just as the groom came with his entourage to claim his bride after an unspecified time period, so, too, will Christ come all of a sudden with His angels to take His bride to be with Him in heaven.
 - h. Just as the groom's arrival was announced with a shout, so, too, will Christ's arrival for His bride be announced (1 Thess. 4:17).
 - i. Just as the Jewish bride returned with her groom to his father's house, so, too, will the Church do the same with Christ as He takes us to heaven (1 Thess. 4:17; John 14:2-3).
 - j. Just as wedding guests were present to meet the bride and groom upon their arrival at the Father's house, so, too, will the Church meet Old Testament saints, who will be the guests for the special wedding.
 - k. Just as the bride and groom went into "hiding" to consummate the marriage, so, too, will Christ spiritually consummate the marriage with His Church in private.
 - l. Just as the bride, then, remained out of view for a period of seven days after which she was presented to the guests in all of her glory, so, too, will the Church be out of view for a period of seven years, after which she will be revealed to the earth at the Second Coming (Col. 3:4).
2. The Rapture prior the tribulation has many proofs:
- a. The tribulation is a time when God acts in wrath against the wicked, not the righteous (Zeph. 1:15-18; Isa. 26:20-21; Joel 1:15, 2:2; Amos 5:18).
 - b. According to Jeremiah 30:7, the tribulation is the time where God prepares Israel for the Messiah, Jesus (Jer. 30:7). It is a time of "Jacob's trouble," not that of the Church.
 - c. There is a definite distinction in the Bible between the Church and Israel (Eph. 3:1-7; Rom. 16:25-27; Col. 1). God has one program for Israel and one for the Church. His program for Israel involves covenants He must fulfill for they are wedded to His unconditional promise and His perfect character (Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, New Covenants).
 - d. Daniel's prophecy of the seventy-weeks, or the 490 years of man's rule until the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom (Dan. 9:24-27), is most instructive. The first 69 weeks or 483 years were literally fulfilled and pertained to Israel. This leads us logically to conclude the last week, or seven years, will be literally fulfilled by Israel.
 - e. The sealing of the 144,000 Jewish believers at the beginning of the tribulation shows God is now going back to deal with Israel, not the

- Church (Rev. 7).
- f. Several NT texts teach that the Church will be spared this tribulational judgment (Rev. 3:10; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11).
 - g. The word church, *ekklesia*, does not appear in Revelation 4:1-22:15 which covers the tribulation because the Church is not present.
 - h. The doctrine of imminence is built on the concept of a Rapture, otherwise the Church could predict the timing of the Lord's coming by studying the timing of the 21 judgments of the tribulation. This doctrine teaches that the Church must be ready at all times to meet Christ (John 14:2-3; Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:4; 1 Tim. 6:14; Jas. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:3-4).
3. Daniel 9:24-27 tells us the tribulation will last seven years.
 4. The earthly character of the reign of Christ is foretold all through the Old Testament. Revelation 20 merely tells us how long this kingdom will be in this fashion before it merges with eternity. If you want to get acquainted with this subject, I would direct you to Chapter XXVIII, *The Scriptural Doctrine of the Millennium* in J. Dwight Pentecost's book *Things to Come*. Also, read Charles Ryrie's *The Basis of Premillennial Faith*, or John Walvoord's *the Millennial Kingdom*.



Arguments favoring this position are as follows:

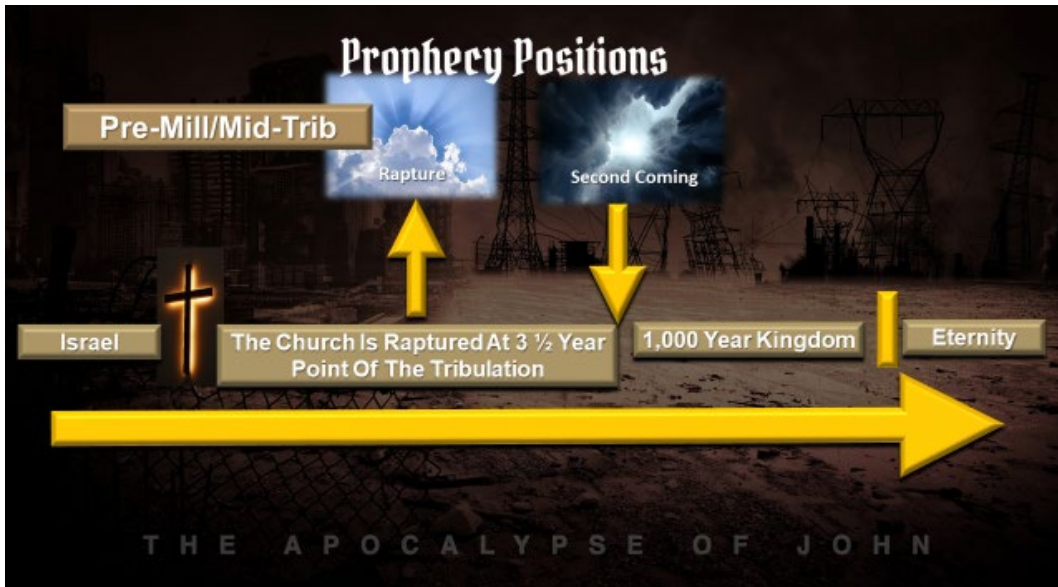
1. Scripture does not specifically say the Second Coming of Christ and the Rapture are two events separated by a seven-year tribulation.
2. In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus said the signs of the end of time would be known by off-the-grid tribulation (Matt. 24:3-22). After this He would appear. Nothing in His words seems to suggest saints are spared the tribulation.
3. Resurrection of saints is tied to the rapture, to be sure. Revelation 20:4-6, however, says the "first resurrection" occurs after the Second Coming. Hence, the Rapture and the Second Coming must be one event (Dan. 12:1-2).

Arguments against this position are as follows according to Duffield and Cleave:

1. The tribulation period is not a Church period, but is the final week of Daniel's vision regarding God's dealing with Israel: "Seventy weeks are determined upon THY people and upon THY HOLY CITY, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness ..." (Dn. 9:24, also 25–27). It is a time of God's dealing with Israel and of His wrath upon the godless nations (Rv. 6:15–17). The tribulation period is called by Jeremiah "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:4–7).
2. Paul declares regarding the Church: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ ..." (1 Thess. 5:9). The Church has suffered and will suffer many trials and tribulations, but not the Great Day of His Wrath.
3. The Lord had promised the faithful that they will be kept from that hour of wrath: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rv. 3:10). (See also 2 Pt. 2:9; Lk. 21:34–36.)
4. Nowhere in the book of Revelation, after chapter four, is the Church mentioned specifically, until chapter nineteen, where the Church is seen in Heaven as the Bride of Christ. Many scholars identify the Church with the four and twenty elders who are in Heaven throughout the Apocalypse. The four and twenty elders are arrayed in white with crowns of victory on their heads, symbols of the Redeemed. The Tribulation saints (those who are saved during the Tribulation and martyred) are seen as a group only in Heaven. The Righteous who are seen on earth are the 144,000, who are said to be Jews (Rv. 7:1–8; 14:1–5). Furthermore, if the Church is to be on earth during the Tribulation, why is witnessing assigned to the two witnesses who are apparently Jews (Moses and Elijah)? (Rv. 11:1–14)
5. The Rapture and the Final Coming cannot happen simultaneously, nor hardly on the same day, for two important events separate the Rapture and the Resurrection of the Saints from the Coming to Earth to Rule. The two events are the believers *Bema* Judgment of Awards, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rv. 19:5–9; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:9–11).
6. Since the Church age terminates with the beginning of the Tribulation (Daniel's seventieth week, Dn. 9:27; "the fullness of the Gentiles" Rom. 11:12, 25, 26, 27), the Church plays no more part in earthly affairs until the Millennium.
7. Regarding the Resurrection recorded in Revelation chapter twenty, and referred to as the "first resurrection," careful reading will reveal that the resurrected ones mentioned are those who are beheaded during the Tribulation; no mention is made of the saints of the entire Church age who must have been raised up at the time of the Rapture before the Great Tribulation. Daniel (12:1, 2) places the Resurrection of the Old Testament saints at the end of the Tribulation, but John does not mention it in Revelation chapter twenty. Christ is called the "first fruits of them that slept"; at Christ's Resurrection, a number of saints arose from the dead (Mt. 27:52, 53). In Revelation 11:11, 12, the two witnesses are resurrected; in Revelation 7:12–17, the Resurrection of the Tribulation saints is recorded. Apparently all those who are resurrected before the Millennium are a part of the "first resurrection"; those who are raised after the Millennium are raised unto judgment and perdition

(Rv. 20:13, 15).

8. The strongest argument for a pre-tribulation Rapture is the fact that throughout the New Testament exhortation is given to look for and wait for the Coming of Jesus (Mt. 24:42, 43; 25:13; Mk. 13:35; 1 Thess. 5:6; Ti. 2:13; 1 Jn. 3:3; Heb. 9:28; Jn. 14:3). Jesus promised, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:3). Here Jesus’ Coming is for the purpose of receiving the Church unto Himself and taking her to a place in the Father’s house; this Coming cannot be the same as His coming with the Church to earth as the post-tribulationists contend. The blessed hope of an imminent Coming of Jesus is one of the strongest incentives to practical godliness and diligent service (Ti. 2:12–14; 1 Jn. 3:3). If the Tribulation must come first, with the manifestation of the Antichrist, before the Rapture, who will look for a Coming of Jesus until many of the events of the Apocalypse have transpired? The parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants recorded in Matthew chapter twenty-four teaches the tragic result of saying, “My lord delayeth his coming” (24:44–51).¹



This view teaches the Church will be raptured after the first 3½ years of Daniel’s prophecy of the 70th week of prophetic judgment (Dan. 9:24-27).

Arguments favoring this position according to Duffield and Cleave:

1. The last trumpet, mentioned in connection with the Rapture in 1 Corinthians 15:52, is identified with the seventh trumpet sounded in Revelation 11:15 which occurs in the middle of the Tribulation (Rv. 11:2, 3). If the two trumpets are

¹Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), 530–531.

- identical, then the Rapture occurs in the middle of the Tribulation.
2. Since the Church is raptured before the “Great Tribulation” (the last three and one half years), the Church escapes the “wrath” of 1 Thessalonians 5:9, and the “hour of temptation” of Revelation 3:10.
 3. The resurrection of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:11, 12 is declared to be a reference to the Rapture and Resurrection of the Church, or to happen simultaneously with the Rapture.²

Arguments against this position:

1. The trumpets in 1 Corinthians chapter fifteen and Revelation chapter eleven are not the same. Paul’s “trump of God” is a trumpet call of victory over death; John’s seventh trumpet is the seventh in a series of announcements of judgment upon the wicked and final triumph over Satan’s reign.
2. The entire seventieth week of Daniel is Jewish in character, therefore the Church does not belong in any part of it. God’s wrath is also poured out in the first half of the tribulation period (Rv. 6:12–17). (Also 1 Thess. 5:9; Rv. 3:10; 2 Pt. 2:9).
3. The two witnesses appear to be Jewish from the Old Testament symbols—the temple, olive trees and lampstands (Zec. 4:3, 12), withholding rain, and smiting with plagues (Ex. 7:20; 8:1–12:29; 1 Kgs. 17:1; 18:41–45; 2 Kgs. 1:10–12; Jas. 5:17, 18). If the Church were on the earth, why would God assign Jewish prophets to the mission of witnessing to the nations? Until the end of the Church age, it is the Church’s mission to witness to all nations. Dr. Buswell believes, however, that the Church age and the tribulation period will overlap three and one half years.
4. The same objection can be made to the Mid-tribulation Rapture position that is made to the Post-tribulation position; that is, that the Mid-tribulation position removes the any-moment expectation of Christ’s Coming. The tribulation period begins with the Antichrist’s making a covenant with the Jews, an event that could not be concealed. If the Church is going through any part of the tribulation period, Christ cannot come for the Church until the Tribulation has begun with Antichrist’s covenant to restore the daily sacrifice (Dn. 9:27). Both of the theories discussed above require us to look for the Antichrist’s coming before Christ’s Coming.³

²Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), 532.

³Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), 532–533.



Note: This position is typically aligned with the spiritual and/or allegorical interpretation.

Arguments for this position:

1. Since Israel rejected the Messiah, the Church has now replaced Israel and is rightly described as the new and spiritual Israel (Rom. 2:2, 28, 29; 9:6-8).
2. Where prophecy is concerned, allegorical or spiritualization of the text is the best method of interpretation.
3. The nature of Christ's kingdom is spiritual and heavenly, not political and earthly. Repentance and the new birth are necessary for entrance into the spiritual kingdom (Matt. 3:2).
4. Jesus said his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36).
5. The kingdom is present and universal and is founded in the hearts of saints (Matt. 11:12; Luke 17:21).
6. The Parable of the Wheat and Tares in Matthew (Matt. 13:25ff) demonstrate that good and evil will grow together until the final judgment. The wheat represents the invisible Church, and the tares stand for the lost. This evil age climaxes with the appearance of the Anti-christ and the final revelation of Jesus, the true Christ to defeat the Devil and his forces.

Arguments against this position:

1. A grammatical, historical, and literal interpretation of the Bible should apply equally to all forms of revelation, be they narrative or prophetic. An allegorical hermeneutic leads to subjective ideas and concepts being read into the text, while overlooking the authorial intent.
2. Paul argues definitively in Romans 9-11 that God has not, and will not, forsake the His unconditional plan with His chosen people, the Jews.
3. Nowhere in Scripture is it stated that Christ is currently seated on the throne of David.

4. The literal interpretation of Old Testament passages readily demonstrates that God will fulfill all of His covenant with a literal Jewish people (Isa. 11; 60; Zech. 12). Allis, an amillinarian, admits, “The Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age” (*Prophecy and the Church*, p. 238).
5. The sealing of 144,000 converted Jews at the beginning of the tribulation demonstrates there is a plan for Israel, which is distinct from the Church.
6. Christ’s kingdom is both spiritual and eventually physical. The Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah’s glorious kingdom to earth, and Jesus did not correct the disciples prior to His ascension when they looked for the immediate establishment of the earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6).
7. Revelation 5:10 states saints will reign with Christ on earth.
8. One of the best books to read on this subject is by Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views*. Another great book about the coming messianic kingdom is by Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*.



Note: This position is historically wedded to the Preterist Interpretation of Revelation. It appears in two forms. One, liberal postmillennialism from the nineteenth century with its love of the social gospel and its ability to address and solve societal evils. The rise of Darwinism also dovetailed with this position since man was supposed to move to a higher plane of existence. World Wars I & II, the Great Depression, terrorists, nuclear weapons have rendered this position highly questionable. Two, it is aligned with biblical postmillennialism which believes the gospel will have a profound, transformative, and positive impact on the world as we head toward the Second Coming of Christ. Since this view is in many respects a positive position in relation to Amillennialism, some of the same arguments posed against Amillennialism equally apply.

What Are Key Words?

Here is a brief list of some of the more important words in Revelation:

- Lamb (5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3).
- Throne (1:4; 3:21; 4:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10; 5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6:16; 7:9, 10, 15, 17; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3, 5; 16:17; 19:4, 5; 20:4; 21:5; 22:1, 3).
- I saw (1:12, 17, 19, 20; 4:4; 5:1, 2; 6:1, 2, 9; 7:1, 2; 8:2; 9:1, 17; 10:1, 5; 12:13; 13:1, 2, 3; 14:6; 15:1, 2; 16:13; 17:3, 6, 8, 12, 15, 16, 18; 18:1, 7; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1, 2, 22).

What Is a Revelation Acrostic?

An acrostic is where the first letters of a verse or sentence are linked with other first letters to form a statement. The acrostic I've put together for Revelation hopefully gives you some insight into the theme structure of the book. The acrostic for Revelation I propose is: THE LION AND LAMB IS COMING. I know it is not grammatically correct, but it works! You give it a try.

Chapter Acrostic Description

1 The Awesome Vision

2 Hey Churches!

3 Eyes of The Judge

4 Looking at The Throne

5 In Comes the Lamb of God!

6 Open The Seals!

7 Number The Tribes

8 Activating The Trumpets

9 Nowhere to Hide

10 Dining On a Scroll

11 Looking at Two Witnesses

12 A Heavenly War

13 Man of Sin

14 Beast Worshippers

15 Interlude of Worship

16 Seven Bowls of Wrath

17 Comes The Harlot

- 18 Over and Out!
- 19 Messiah and Megiddo
- 20 Introducing God's Kingdom
- 21 New Heavenly Home
- 22 God's Kingdom Comes

What Is the Relation of This Book to John?

There are many interesting parallels between Revelation and John, and there should be because they were both written by the same author. Consider the charts:

John & Revelation: A Comparison

- Fiery temper (Mk. 3:17).
- “logos” speaks of Jesus (John 1:1, 14).
- Lamb is Jesus (John 1:29).
- Record of Jesus’ side being pierced (John 19:34).
- Many storm descriptions (Rev. 11).
- “logos” is used in Rev. 19:13.
- Lamb is Jesus (28 times).
- Jesus side is pierced .

THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

John & Revelation: A Comparison

- “Overcomer” used of believers (John 16:33; six times in 1 John).
- Word “dwell” is used of Jesus (John 1:14).
- Conflict between good and evil
- “Overcomer” is a key word in Rev. 2-3.
- Word “dwell” with reference to Jesus occurs four times.
- Conflict between good and evil.

THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN



What Is the Purpose of the Tribulation?

Why is God going to bring this terrible judgment against the earth? Here are some answers:



What Is the Prophetic Timeline of Revelation?

The following chart is designed to give you an idea of how prophecy will be played out according to God's plan. Look over it carefully and realize that the time is, indeed, at hand!

