

THE BOOK OF  
**REVELATION**





# INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Apostle John, the disciple, writes a pastoral letter to the churches in Asia Minor in apocalyptic language. An apocalypse is about “making something clear that was previously hidden”, and this word is used to describe more than just the end of the world.

**Revelation 1:1-2**, *“The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup>who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.”*

The goal of Revelation is to bring encouragement to believers of all ages that God is working out His purposes even in the midst of tragedy, suffering, and apparent satanic domination. It is the Bible’s battle cry of victory, for in it, more than anywhere else in the New Testament, the final victory of God over all the forces of evil is revealed.

One of the great tragedies in the church today is how Revelation has been so narrowly and incorrectly interpreted with an obsessive focus on the future end time. As a result, the congregation has missed the fact that it contains many profound truths and encouragement concerning Christian life and discipleship.

# THE BIG IDEAS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## ■ Jesus as the Conquering “Slain Lamb of God”

The slain Lamb of God is a central theme in the Book of Revelation, representing Jesus Christ and the sacrifice He made for humanity’s sins. The Lamb’s blood is the blood of Jesus, who redeems people from sin and brings them into God’s kingdom.

What fascinates a reader of the Book of Revelation is the paradox used to represent Jesus as two contrary animals, **a lion and a lamb**. It is difficult to think of two more different animals to pair together. Lions represent strength and royalty, and they had a particular connection with the tribe of Judah (see Genesis 49:9; 1 Kings 10:19–20), from which it was prophesied the Messiah Himself would descend. A lamb, on the other hand, is an animal often associated with gentleness and meekness, in every way opposite to the lion.



As if to emphasize the meekness of the Lamb even further, this Lamb is slain, and it is the shedding of the blood of the Lamb that sets in motion the redemptive events of the present and future age.

## ■ **Willingness to Suffer for Christ Is the Path to Ultimate Victory**

Even as the cross sealed Christ's victory over Satan, so the present suffering of Christians seals their victory over the powers of darkness. One of the main goals of the book, therefore, is to exhort believers to remain faithful to Christ despite present sufferings, because this faithfulness will eventually be rewarded in the heavenly kingdom.

The heavenly visions serve as motivators for Christians now suffering in adversity to hold to the glorious promises of God and not to fall away. In the same way, Christians today should still read Revelation and allow its portrayal of the divine majesty to motivate us to continued faithfulness. Christians are to live according to the values of this new world, not those of the world in which they live.

John challenges us to live in the promise of God that Jesus, who loved and died for this world, will not let the evil of this world and evil nations go unchecked. One day, Jesus will return to remove evil from His good world and make all things new, including His people! And that is a promise that should motivate faithfulness in every generation of God's people until the King returns: On Earth as it is in Heaven!

## ■ The Sovereignty of God in Human History.

In chapters 4 and 5, John is given a vision of the throne room of God. The word “*throne*” appears seventeen times in these two chapters (out of thirty-four times in the book as a whole) and signifies the sovereignty of God. In the vision, the Lamb is given a place of equal honour to God Himself, and so the chapters portray the victory of God and the Lamb. Because this vision serves as the introduction to all the subsequent visions in the book, its significance is to demonstrate the authority of God and of Christ over all that is about to unfold in the remainder of the book.

The trials of the believers, the apparent triumph of the forces of the enemy, the eventual destruction of the enemy, and the victory of the church **are all under the sovereign control of God**. The cross has been transformed from tragedy into triumph, and so also will God transform the earthly woes of believers into heavenly and eternal victory. The people of God have no other destiny during the church age than that of the Lamb during His earthly ministry. This is why Rev. 14:4 says that they “*follow the Lamb wherever He goes.*”

## ■ The New Creation as Fulfilment of Biblical Prophecy

The main prophetic themes of both the Old Testament and the New Testament culminate in the new covenant, the new temple, the new garden, the new Israel, and the new Jerusalem, all of which are summed up in the concept of the new creation. These themes appear in 21:1–22:5 at the climax of the book.

The story told by the Bible **begins and ends with “creation.”** From its opening words, *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1)*, to its final depiction of the world transformed into *“a new heaven and a new earth”* (Rev 21:1), Scripture presents the story of the world as God’s creation project.

In both Revelation and other parts of the New Testament, these realities are seen to have **already begun to be fulfilled in Christ** — believers as the new creation, the church as the new Israel, and so on. These prophetic realities are then *consummately* fulfilled, especially as envisioned in 21:1–22:5.



# CHAPTER SUMMARY

## Revelation 1-3

### Jesus' words to Seven Churches

Rev. 1:18

*"I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."*

## Revelation 4-5

### Vision of Heavenly Throne Room

Rev. 4:8

*"... 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' Who was, and is, and is to come."*

## Revelation 6-16

### Seven seals, trumpets, signs and bowls

Rev. 7:10

*"And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"*

## Revelation 17-19

### Judgment of Babylon and the Beast

Rev. 18:21

*"With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again."*

## Revelation 20-22

### New Creation – Church in perfect glory!

Rev. 22:12,

*"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done."*

# CHAPTER 1-3

## JESUS' WORDS TO SEVEN CHURCHES

John says he was exiled on the island of Patmos, where he saw a vision of the risen Jesus standing among seven golden lampstands. The image, adapted from Zechariah 4, is a symbol of seven local churches in Asia Minor. Jesus addressed the specific problems facing each church. Some were complacent due to wealth and affluence, while others were morally compromised. But there were others who remained faithful to Jesus and were suffering harassment and persecution. Jesus warned them that a *"tribulation"* was upon the churches that would force them to choose between compromise or faithfulness.

God's sovereign rule is highlighted by referring to Him as the One **who is and who was and who is to come**, which means that God is the **Almighty**. The Lord's description of Himself using the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, **the Alpha and the Omega** is a figure of speech that states that God is the beginning and end of history and stresses His presence throughout and His rule over all events in between.

The first things John **sees** are the **seven golden lampstands**, which represent the church (cf. 1:20). John sees seven lampstands, each representing one of the seven churches and all together representing the universal church. The church, as the continuation of true Israel, is likewise to draw its power from the seven lamps, which represent the Holy Spirit (Rev. 1:4; 4:5), as it seeks to build the new temple of God.

Then John sees the **Son of man**. The vision is drawn from Daniel 7:13-14 and 10:5-6. Even as the OT priests tended the lamps and **lampstands**, so Christ is pictured here as a heavenly priest who tends the lampstands by correcting and exhorting them, as chapters 2 and 3 will unfold. Christ's eyes



like a **flame of fire** (v. 14) speak of His role of judgment. Christ's **feet like burnished bronze, fired in a furnace** (v. 15) speak of a foundation of moral purity in Christ which He wants to also to build in the church. The description of the Son of Man's **head and hair** is taken from the picture of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9, showing how Christ and God can be thought of in the same terms. The description of **His voice being like the sound of many waters** is also taken from a vision of the Almighty, though this time from Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:24; 43:2). That Christ (v. 16) holds in His hand the **seven stars** (identified in v. 20 as the angels of the churches) shows that His authority extends also to the heavenly realms. The **sharp two-edged sword** coming out of Christ's mouth (see also 2:16 and 19:15) is based on the prophecies in Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2, both speaking of Christ in His role as judge.

In v. 18, Jesus refers to Himself as the **Living One**, and Christ having the **keys of death and Hades** shows that He now rules. He also is the One who **lives forever and ever**, the same

used of God the Father in the OT (Deut. 32:40; Dan. 12:7).

The letters to the seven churches: Christ encourages the churches to witness, warns them against compromise, and exhorts them to hear and to overcome compromise in order to inherit eternal life (2:1–3:22)

| "He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches..." |                                                                          |                                                                                     |                                                                                |                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| To the church                                                           | Your Strengths                                                           | Your Faults                                                                         | Instructions                                                                   | Promise                                                                      |
| <b>Ephesus</b><br>(Revelation 2:1-7)<br>"Loveless"                      | Hard work<br>Patient endurance<br>Reject evil<br>Persevere               | You have forsaken your first love.                                                  | Repent and do the works as you did at first.                                   | You will eat from the tree of life.                                          |
| <b>Smyrna</b><br>(Rev.2:8-11)<br>"Suffering"                            | Endure your suffering and poverty, yet you are rich.                     | None                                                                                | Remain faithful even when facing prison, persecution or death.                 | I will give you the crown of life. You will not be hurt by the second death. |
| <b>Pergamum</b><br>(Rev.2:12-17)<br>"Worldly"                           | Loyalty to Christ<br>Refuse to deny Him.                                 | Tolerate cults, heresies, idolatry, and immorality                                  | Repent                                                                         | Hidden manna and a stone with a new name on it.                              |
| <b>Thyatira</b><br>(Rev.2:18-29)<br>"Wrong Doctrine"                    | Deeds, love, faith, service<br>Patient endurance<br>Constant improvement | Tolerate cults, idolatry and immorality                                             | Judgment coming<br>Repent<br>Hold fast until I come.                           | I will give you authority over the nations and gift of the morning star      |
| <b>Sardis</b><br>(Rev. 3:1-6)<br>"Spiritually Dead"                     | Some have kept the faith                                                 | Church is dead                                                                      | Wake up, repent. Turn to Jesus again.<br>Strengthen what little remains.       | Faithful will walk with Jesus and not be blotted out of the book of life.    |
| <b>Philadelphia</b><br>(Rev. 3:7-13)<br>"Spiritually Alive"             | Kept my word.<br>Have not denied my name                                 | None                                                                                | I have placed before you an open door. I will keep you from the hour of trial. | I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God                             |
| <b>Laodicea</b><br>(Rev.3:14-22)<br>"Lukewarm"                          | None                                                                     | Neither hot nor cold. You rely on riches but don't realize your wretched condition. | Turn from indifference and repent                                              | I will invite those who overcome to sit with me on my throne.                |

## CHAPTER 4-5

### VISION OF HEAVENLY THRONE ROOM

John's next vision is of God's heavenly throne room, described with images from many Old Testament prophetic books. Around God are creatures and elders, representing all creation and human nations, who are giving honour and allegiance to the one true God. In God's hand is a scroll with **seven wax seals**, symbolizing the scrolls of the Old Testament prophets and Daniel's visions. Their message was about how God's Kingdom would come on Earth as in Heaven.

However, no one is qualified to open the scroll until John finally hears of the one who can. It's *"the Lion of the tribe of Judah"* and the *"Root of David"* (Genesis 49:9; Isaiah 11:1). These are classic Old Testament **descriptions of the messianic King** who would bring God's Kingdom through military conquest. **That's what John hears, but what he sees is not a lion-king but a sacrificed, bloody lamb who is alive again, standing ready to open the scroll.**

**Revelation 5:9**, *"And they sang a new song, saying:  
"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased for God  
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."*

This symbol of Jesus as the slain lamb is crucially important for understanding the book. John is saying that the Old Testament promise of God's future Kingdom was inaugurated through the crucified Messiah. Jesus died for his enemies as the true Passover lamb so that others could be redeemed. His death on the cross was his enthronement and his "*conquering*" of evil. The vision concludes with the lamb alongside the one on the throne, and together they are worshiped as the one, true Creator and Redeemer. The slain lamb then begins to open the scroll, a symbol of his divine authority to guide history to its conclusion.



## CHAPTER 6-16

### SEVEN SEALS, SEVEN TRUMPETS, SEVEN SIGNS, SEVEN BOWLS

As the lamb opens the scroll's first four seals, John sees **four symbolic horsemen** (an image from Zechariah 6) who **symbolize times of war, conquest, famine, and death**. The fifth seal depicts the murdered Christian martyrs before God's heavenly throne. The sixth seal is God's ultimate response to their cry. He brings the *'great Day of the Lord'* described in Isaiah 2 and Joel 2.

At this point, John pauses the action to answer a question. He sees an angel with a signet ring coming to place a mark of protection on God's servants enduring all this hardship. He then hears the number of those sealed: 144,000. It's a military census of twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (Numbers 1). Now, the number of this army is what John heard, just like he heard about the conquering lion of Judah. In both cases, what he turned and saw was the surprising fulfilment through Jesus, the slain lamb. John is seeing the messianic army of God's Kingdom. It's made up of people from all over the world, fulfilling God's ancient promise to Abraham. **This multiethnic army of the lamb can stand before God because they've all been redeemed by his blood. They are called forth to conquer not by killing their enemies but by suffering and bearing witness like the lamb.** With this, the seventh and final seal is broken. But before the scroll is opened, the seven warning trumpets emerge, and only then does the

*'Day of the Lord'* come to bring final justice once and for all.

When we come to the **seven trumpets**, John backs up and retells the story once again, this time with images from the Exodus story. **The first five trumpet blasts replay the plagues sent upon Egypt, while the sixth trumpet releases the four horsemen from the first four seals.** John then tells us that, despite these plagues, *"the nations did not repent,"* just like Pharaoh. God's judgment alone does not bring people to humble themselves before him.

John then pauses the action again. An angel brings John the unsealed scroll that was opened by the Lamb. John is now told to eat the scroll and proclaim its message to the nations. Finally, the Lamb's scroll is open, and we discover how God's Kingdom will ultimately come.

The scroll's content is spelled out in two symbolic visions. **First, John sees God's temple and the martyrs within it, and he is told to measure and set it apart.** John is using the new temple as a symbol for God's new covenant people. The vision shows that while Jesus' followers may suffer persecution, this external defeat cannot cancel their victory through the Lamb.



This idea is elaborated in the scroll's second vision. God appoints **two witnesses as prophetic representatives to the nations.** Some think that this refers literally to two prophets who will appear one day. However, John calls these characters "*lampstands*," one of his clear symbols for the churches (Rev.1:20). *It's likely that this vision is about the prophetic role of Jesus' followers, who like Moses and Elijah, are to call idolatrous nations and rulers to turn to God. Then a horrible beast appears, who conquers the witnesses and kills them* (see Daniel 7). But God brings the witnesses back to life and vindicates them before their persecutors. This results in many among the nations repenting and giving honour to the Creator God.

God's warning judgments through the seals and the trumpets did not generate repentance among the nations. Now the lamb's scroll reveals the strange mission of his army. **God's Kingdom is revealed when the nations see the Church imitating the sacrifice of the lamb and loving their enemies instead of killing them.** It's God's mercy, shown through the Church, that will move the nations to repentance. After this, the last trumpet sounds, and the nations are shaken as God's Kingdom comes on Earth as in Heaven.

After exploring the surprising message of the lamb's opened scroll, John offers a series of **seven visions that he calls "signs"** (Rev. 12-15). That word means "*symbol*," and these chapters are full of them. **The purpose of these visions is to expand further on the message of the lamb's scroll.**

The first sign reveals the cosmic, spiritual battle behind the Roman Empire's persecution of Christians, the ancient conflict that started in Genesis 3:15. The serpent in the Garden of Eden, the source of all spiritual evil, is depicted here as a dragon. It attacks a woman and her seed, who represent the Messiah and His people.

But the Messiah defeats the dragon through his death and resurrection, casting him to Earth. There, the dragon may inspire hatred and persecution of the Messiah's people, but God's people will conquer him by resisting his influence, even if it kills them. **John is showing the seven churches that neither Rome nor any other nation or human is the real enemy. There are dark spiritual powers at work that can be conquered only when Jesus' followers remain faithful and love their enemies.**

John's next vision replays the same conflict, this time with the symbolism of Daniel's animal visions (Daniel 7-12). John sees two beasts, one representing national military power that conquers through violence. The other beast symbolizes the economic propaganda machine that exalts this power as divine and demands full allegiance from all nations. This is symbolized by taking the mark of the beast and his number **666** on the forehead or hand. **The beast's mark on the hand or forehead represents the opposite of God's seal on the foreheads of his servants (Rev. 7:3; 9:4). Both are signs of ownership, symbolizing our allegiance to God and the Lamb or to Satan and the beast.**

John was fluent in both Hebrew and Greek, and his readers knew that Hebrew letters also function as numbers. If you spell the Greek words "*Nero Caesar*" or "*beast*" in Hebrew, both amount to 666. John isn't saying that Nero was the precise fulfilment of this vision; rather, he's a recent example of the pattern explored in Daniel. **Human rulers become beasts when they assign divinity to their power and economic security and demand total allegiance to it.** Babylon was the beast of Daniel's day, followed by Persia, then Greece, and now Rome in John's day. The pattern stands for any later nation who acts the same.

Standing opposed to the dragon's beastly nations is another king, the slain lamb and his army, who have given their lives to follow him. From the New Jerusalem, their song goes out to the nations as "*the eternal Gospel*" (Rev. 14:6). All people are called to repent, worship God, and come out of Babylon. **Then John sees a vision of final justice, symbolized by two harvests.** One is a good grain harvest where King Jesus gathers up his faithful people. The other is a harvest of wine grapes, representing humanity's intoxication with evil, which is taken to the wine press and trampled. With these "*sign*" visions, John places a choice before the seven churches. **Will they resist Babylon and follow the Lamb, or will they follow the beast and suffer its defeat?**

John then replays a final cycle of seven divine judgments, symbolized as **seven bowls**. Similar to the Exodus plagues,

the bowls do not bring about repentance but the opposite. The people resist and curse God just like Pharaoh. With the sixth bowl, the dragon and beasts gather the nations together to make war against God's people in a place called **Armageddon**. This refers to a plain in northern Israel where many battles had been fought against invading nations (Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29). Some think that this image refers literally to a future battle, while others think it's a metaphor for final judgment. Either way, John has taken these images from Ezekiel 38-39, where God battles Gog, who is of rebellious humanity. And so, in the **seventh bowl, evil is defeated among the nations once and for all.**

## CHAPTERS 17-19

### JUDGEMENT OF BABYLON AND THE BEAST

John fully unpacks **three key themes** introduced earlier: *the fall of Babylon, the final battle to defeat evil, and the arrival of the New Jerusalem*. Each one explores **the final coming of God's Kingdom** from a different angle.

John envisions a striking woman, adorned like a queen, yet intoxicated with the blood of martyrs and innocents. Seated on the beast from earlier visions, she's identified as "*Babylon the prostitute*." This imagery was unmistakable to John's original audience, symbolizing Rome's military and economic dominance. However, the vision also draws parallels with Old Testament prophecies against Babylon, Tyre, and Edom, revealing Rome as the latest embodiment of humanity's

rebellion against God. **Babylon will come and go, leading up to the day when Jesus returns to replace them all with His Kingdom.**

Up to this point in the book, the *"Day of the Lord"* has been depicted as a day of fire, earthquake, or harvest. Here at the conclusion of the book, it is described as a final battle over evil (Rev. 19:11-21, 20:7-15) that results in the vindication of the martyrs (Rev. 20:1-6).

John takes us back to the sixth bowl as the nations gather to oppose God. Jesus appears as the great hero, riding a white horse and ready to *"conquer"* the world's evil. Notice, however, that he's covered with His own blood before the battle even begins (Rev. 19:13). And his only weapon is *"the sword of his mouth"*, an image adapted from Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2. John is trying to tell us that Armageddon is not a bloodbath.

After this, John sees a vision of Jesus' followers who have been murdered by Babylon. They are brought to life to reign with the Messiah for one thousand years. After this, the beast once again gathers the nations of the world to rebel against God, but they are all brought before God's throne of justice and face the consequences of eternal defeat. **The beast, Babylon, and all those who choose them are eternally quarantined, unable to spoil God's new creation ever again.**

Revelation's 1,000-year interval between battle scenes is open to interpretation. While some understand it as a chronological sequence of Jesus' return, millennial reign, and final judgment, others view it as symbolic of spiritual victory. Despite differing

views, John's central promise remains: Jesus will return to conquer evil and justify His faithful followers.

## CHAPTERS 20-22

### NEW CREATION – CHURCH IN PERFECT GLORY!

The book concludes with a vision of the marriage of Heaven and Earth (Rev. 21:1 – 22:9). An angel shows John a stunning bride, symbolizing the new creation that comes to forever join God and his covenant people. God announces that he has come to live together with humanity forever and make all things new (Rev. 21:5). It depicts a new Heaven and Earth (Isa. 65:17), a restored creation that's been healed of the pain and evil of human history. **It's also a new Garden of Eden (Gen.2) and paradise of eternal life with God.** However, it's not simply a return to the garden; it's also a step forward into the New Jerusalem. It's a great city where human cultures in all their diversity work together in harmony.



But in the most surprising twist, there is no temple. The presence of God and the Lamb, once limited to the temple, now permeates every inch of this new world (Rev 21:22-23). This is when the new humanity will fulfill the calling that was placed on them back on page one of the Bible (Gen. 1:26-28), to rule as God's image and partner with God in taking his creation into new, uncharted territory.

John did not write this book as a secret code for deciphering the timetable of Jesus' return. It is a symbolic vision that brought challenge and hope to the seven first-century churches and every generation since. **It reveals history's pattern and God's promise, showing how every human kingdom eventually becomes Babylon and must be resisted. But the Messiah, Jesus, who loved and died for our world, will not let Babylon go unchecked. He will return one day to remove evil from his good world and make all things new.** This promise should motivate faithfulness in every generation of God's people until the King finally returns.

## CONCLUSION

The Book of Revelation offers a profound vision of hope and redemption, assuring believers that God's sovereignty prevails despite temporal darkness. Through its apocalyptic imagery, Revelation exposes the depths of human rebellion and the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom. May Revelation's timeless message propel us toward radical discipleship, unwavering hope, and passionate worship, as we eagerly anticipate the day when God will *"wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* (Rev. 21:4).





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