

Revelation:

It's Not What You Think It Is [Part 1]

Author: John of Patmos

Date: 90-100 CE [Destruction of Jerusalem was around 70 CE]

Audience: Seven Churches in Asia Minor—and believers everywhere

Purpose: Comfort, hope and strength in the midst of persecution

Context: Writing at the height of Roman imperial prosperity in Asia Minor, John proclaims the message of hope that Rome's unjust reign would last only a little while longer, and that Rome had already been defeated by the nonviolent history of Jesus the Lamb.

Genre: Several literary genres characterize Revelation:

- **Apocalypse**—It means revealing or pulling back a curtain. Apocalypses were a popular type of literature for Jews and others in the ancient world. Apocalypses communicate their message not by logical proofs or arguments but by means of visionary journeys and pictures, creating an alternative world of vision. They typically use exaggerated imagery in order to heighten a sense of urgency and call readers to commitment and action.
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- **Prophecy**—Like other biblical prophets, John's primary purpose in writing prophecy was NOT to predict future events but rather to wake people up to the peril of their present situation. In John's view, faithfulness to God necessitated uncompromising resistance in the midst of the Roman Empire.
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- **Epistle/Letter**—John employs the format of a letter to communicate his message, much like the letters of the apostle Paul.
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Outline: Because **Revelation does not unfold in linear fashion**, it can be difficult to outline. Numbered sequences of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, as well as messages to seven churches, may have provided a structure helpful for those listening to the oral performance of this book. However, Revelation unfolds in cyclical or spiral fashion, often showing the same series of judgments from different angles. Each cycle of visions includes warnings as well as hymns, blessings, and promises.

Like other apocalypses, Revelation also has a narrative framework. It tells a story—the story of the Lamb Jesus who defeats evil and leads the faithful on a great exodus out of the unjust empire, personified as a dragon. The narrative journey ends in a utopic new city, the bridal new Jerusalem, with a river of life, a healing tree, and a renewed creation. The entire book draws on texts and images from the Hebrew Bible, without ever quoting Scripture directly. Stories of the Exodus, plagues, Danielic beasts, exile in Babylon, and other biblical narratives are remapped by John.

When trying to understand Revelation, most people ask the question "What does it mean?" The real question we should ask ourselves is "How does it make us feel?" In the midst of events that cause us to be anxious and afraid, Revelation reminds us that:

- God is in control
 - God alone is worthy of worship
 - God is faithful to God's covenant
 - God has the final word
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CHAPTER 1 – The Introduction

Revelation—(Gk. APOKALUPSIS) a peak, to pull back the curtain, laying bare.

[4] Grace and peace to you from the one who is and was and is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before God's throne, [5] and from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, [6] who made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and always. Amen. [7] Look, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him, including those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. This is so. Amen. [8] "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and was and is coming, the Almighty." [CEB]

QUESTION: What is the tone of the opening verses? How does it make you feel? Does this tell us anything about how it was meant to be received?

NOTES: The interesting thing to me is how John appeals to God's eternal nature. Twice he refers to God as "the one who is and was and is coming." The grammar may be a bit awkward but I think it's intentional. John's focus is on the "one who is" present with us now. It's meant to be a sign of comfort and hope. God is also referred to as "The Alpha

and the Omega" which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It's also a reference to God's eternal nature. This title appears three times in the Bible and only in Revelation.

[9] I, John, your brother who shares with you in the hardship, kingdom, and endurance that we have in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and my witness about Jesus. [10] I was in a Spirit-inspired trance on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice that sounded like a trumpet. [11] It said, "Write down on a scroll whatever you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

[12] I turned to see who was speaking to me, and when I turned, I saw seven oil lamps burning on top of seven gold stands. [13] In the middle of the lampstands I saw someone who looked like the Human One [*i.e. Son of Man*]. He wore a robe that stretched down to his feet, and he had a gold sash around his chest. [14] His head and hair were white as white wool—like snow—and his eyes were like a fiery flame. [15] His feet were like fine brass that has been purified in a furnace, and his voice sounded like rushing water. [16] He held seven stars in his right hand, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword. His appearance was like the sun shining with all its power.

NOTES: He begins his letter by expressing solidarity with his hearers. He knows what they are experiencing and it appears he has been exiled because of his proclamation of the gospel.

He also claims that he received this vision directly from Jesus whom he refers to as the "Son of Man." Here John borrows his imagery from Daniel 7 which describes the "Ancient of Days" taking the throne and giving eternal dominion to the "Son of Man." The two-edged sword" is the Word of God which separates truth from deception.

QUESTION: What is John saying about Jesus by the way he describes him?

REVELATION: NUMBERS ARE IMPORTANT IN REVELATION

One — unity, that which is unique and alone

Two — strength redoubled courage and energy

Three — Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Four — Boundaries of the earth, creation, world

Six — That which falls short of perfection

Seven — a perfect, holy number, 3 [Trinity] + 4 [Earth] = 7!

Ten — human completeness (fullness or power).

Twelve [Patriarchs, tribes, apostles] — organized religion, divine government.

1,000 — $10 \times 10 \times 10$, a large span of time sufficient to complete the divine will of God. Completeness upon completeness upon completeness.

12,000 — 12×1000 — divine completeness times symbol for organized religion on earth.

144,000 — 12 [tribes of Israel] \times 12 [apostles] \times 1000 — the number of those who will be saved. It's a symbolic rather than a literal number.

[17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. But he put his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid. I'm the first and the last, [18] and the living one. I was dead, but look! Now I'm alive forever and always. I have the keys of Death and the Grave. [19] So write down what you have seen, both the scene now before you and the things that are about to unfold after this. [20] As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands, here is what they mean: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

NOTES: John's audience is reassured again with the phrase "Don't be afraid." WE also see the eternal nature of Jesus being repeated again as the one who is "the first and the last, and the living one... forever, and always"
