



## End Times Made Easy

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# | Getting to Grips With Revelation

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

The book of Revelation has baffled interpreters for centuries! Many readers approach the book from one of two extremes: either they get locked in an unhelpful and confusing pursuit of imagery and symbolism; or else they decide that the whole book is beyond them and give it very little attention! Neither approach is fruitful.

The challenges of Revelation should not lead us to avoid its content and - above all - its purpose and message for us today. Moreover, since “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...” (2 Ti 3:16) we would be most unwise not to give time and attention to any part of it!

“In God’s estimate...this book is of supreme value. In it we behold the end and consummation of all God’s work and plan, the climax and outcome of all his...dealings with men; and in it every prophecy and promise, every purpose and covenant finds its ultimate goal and fulfilment. In Genesis we have the beginning of all, in Revelation we have the end and goal of it all.”<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 The Meaning of ‘Revelation’

“Revelation” (or apocalypse) means an *unveiling of what was hidden*. At the outset let us realise that the book is meant to *reveal* truth to us, not to hide it or make things more mysterious!

Revelation does not present any essentially ‘new’ material: all that is described has already been introduced elsewhere in the Bible (see Appendix).

## 1.3 Overall Purpose and Message of Revelation

Most scholars believe that Revelation was written by the apostle John, probably around AD95<sup>2</sup>. It is addressed to the “seven churches in Asia” which were at that time experiencing the persecution which took place under Emperor Domitian (AD 90-95). John himself had been exiled to the island of Patmos (off the coast of

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<sup>1</sup> RH Boll, quoted in J Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1960, Volume 6, pages 334

<sup>2</sup> A dating of AD90-95 has been traditionally held by most theologians. Some, however, have suggested that the book was written much earlier - before AD70 - and therefore that many of the prophecies and events were fulfilled in the destruction of the temple of that date (ie the Preterist viewpoint).



Asia) during this empire-wide persecution of the Christian church, for refusing to stop preaching the Gospel ([Rev 1:9](#))

Despite the difficulty of some of the imagery and symbolism, the underlying message of the book is extremely clear and simple: *Jesus Christ will triumph over Satan and all his other enemies*. Jesus will be enthroned on the earth just as He is in the heavens, and His followers will overcome and triumph with Him; God will defeat all evil in the end!

This theme is summarised well in [Rev 17:14](#) **“They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”** This overall theme of the conflict between God and Satan - and the ultimate triumph of God - is portrayed in a number of different ways: the woman and the dragon; Babylon and Jerusalem; Michael and Satan, etc.

The purpose of the book was and is to comfort believers in their struggles against the forces of evil. It is full of hope and encouragement for Christians!

## 2 Approaches to Interpretation

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### 2.1 Appreciating the Context

As noted, Revelation is the record of the visions of a suffering apostle for a suffering church. Any interpretation that forgets this denies the first and most basic principle of Bible interpretation: that the Bible must be interpreted in terms of the normal grammatical meaning of the language and in a way that makes sense in light of the historical context of the passage; that is, the original sense of the words for the original (human) author and readers is its true sense.

### 2.2 The Prophetic Nature of the Book

Revelation therefore speaks of some things which are still to come, some which have had (at least a partial) fulfilment, and others which are general truths and concepts.

As noted in Part (1), four positions have arisen regarding the prophetic nature of Revelation, as follows:

1. **PRETERISTS** regard the majority of the events described in Revelation as having been *already fulfilled* in the early history of the Church (particularly in the destruction of the temple in AD70); they therefore see no prophetic element in the book at all.
2. **HISTORISTS** regard the book as a *prophetic programme* covering events that have/will take place between the early church days and the end of time.
3. **FUTURISTS** believe the majority of things described in Revelation are *still to happen*, most shortly before (or actually at) the second coming of Christ.
4. **IDEALISTS** regard Revelation as depicting great *spiritual realities* rather than specific historic or prophetic events.

As we have noted, there are elements of truth in all four approaches – and much prophecy is fulfilled at more than one level. The OT prophets had two views in their prophetic perspective: first the events of the present and the immediate future; and second their ultimate consummation in the end times. It is the same with Revelation: parts of it have both an historic *partial fulfilment* and also an end time *final consummation*. We must understand that “the main purpose of

prophecy is not to give a programme or chart of the future but to let the light of the ultimate consummation fall on the present.”<sup>3</sup>

## 2.3 Use of Symbolism and Numbers

The book is written in *apocalyptic* form – a Jewish literary style (genre) which uses imagery to communicate hope to those in the midst of persecution. As such, it is important to appreciate that the events are ordered according to literary, rather than chronological, patterns. Throughout the book we see great use of *symbolism* alongside *literal truths* and realities. Any interpretation that fails to take the apocalyptic genre into account will lead to the wrong conclusions!

Several numbers (and combinations thereof) are used repeatedly in the book. Understanding some of the common uses of these numbers therefore provides a key to our understanding:

Examples of Biblical Numerology		
	Often Means	Examples
1	Unity	One Lord, one faith, one baptism
3	Trinity	Father, Son, Holy Spirit
4	Creation, The World	4 seasons, 4 corners of earth, N,S,E,W
6	Man/imperfection	Man’s number “666” (see below)
7	Spiritual Perfection	Seven-fold Spirit, seventh day/Sabbath
10	Government	10 Commandments
12	God’s People	12 OT tribes, 12 NT apostles

<sup>3</sup> Terry Brooks, *Revelation: Meaningful Mysteries for Today*, Harvestmen, Bradford, 1988



40	Trials	Israel wandering, Moses on Mt Sinai, Jesus in desert
1000	Completeness	The thousand years (see below)

## 2.4 Our Approach

Our approach to understanding Revelation will be to view it as a great *drama*. This will enable us to gain an essential grasp of the key messages. The drama comprises different acts, scenes, characters and several subplots which run alongside the main story. Like a drama, it has an opening introductory scene and a glorious triumphant climax! The background scenery is dramatic and colourful, adding to the intensity of the drama. The pace is fast-moving and the scenes change often. But the underlying story is complete and consistent.

In watching the drama unfold we must recognise that what we are seeing will not always represent a precise chronology of events. Revelation contains 'flashbacks' and repetitions of the same scene (or at least the same part of the story) on several occasions.

## 3 Basic Outline of the Drama

A broad overview is necessary before we go any further<sup>4</sup>:

<b>Overview of Revelation</b>		
<b>Act 1: Enthronement of Christ in Heaven!</b>		
Scene 1	Chs 1-3, Chs 1-3	Seven Churches
Scene 2	Chs 4-5	Worship around the Throne
<b>Act 2: Enthronement of Christ on Earth!</b>		
Scene 1	Chs 6-7	Seven Seals
Scene 2	Chs 8-11	Seven Trumpets
Scene 3	Ch 12	Woman and Dragon
Scene 4	Ch 13	Two Beasts
Scene 5	Ch 14	Judgement Announced
Scene 6	Chs 15-16	Seven Bowls
Scene 7	Chs 17-19:10	Destruction of Babylon
Scene 8	Chs 19:11-20:10	Final Showdown
Scene 9	Chs 20:11-15	Final Judgement
<b>Act 3: Enthronement of Christ in New Creation!</b>		
Scene 1	Chs 21-22	New Heaven and New Earth

<sup>4</sup> Basic outline suggested by J Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1960, Volume 6, pages 341-348

## 4 The Drama Unfolds: Scene-by-scene...

Now we can survey the whole book of Revelation, scene by scene.

### ACT 1, SCENE 1

#### LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES ([Chapters 1-3](#))

John describes the background and circumstances, and his vision of Christ. Jesus then gives him a series of messages for the seven churches of Asia Minor. The churches are both praised and reprimanded, and warned about losing their passion, compromising, immorality and superficiality. The message to each church can be summarised:

Letter to...	REF	Commended	Rebuked
<b>Ephesus</b>	2:1-7	Hard work, perseverance	Lost first love
<b>Smyrna</b>	2:8-11	Suffering persecution	-
<b>Pergamum</b>	2:12-17	Remaining true to faith	Compromise
<b>Thyatira</b>	2:18-29	Love, faith, service	Immorality
<b>Sardis</b>	3:1-6	Effective	Superficiality
<b>Philadelphia</b>	3:7-13	Faithful	-
<b>Laodicea</b>	3:14-22	-	Lukewarm

### ACT 1, SCENE 2

#### WORSHIP AT THE THRONE IN HEAVEN ([Chapters 4-5](#))

John then sees a vision of God Almighty on His throne, surrounded by worshipping believers and angels. A scroll with seven seals is given to the worthy Lamb, Jesus Christ.

## ACT 2, SCENE 1

### OPENING THE SEVEN SEALS ([Chapters 6:1-8:5](#))

Jesus the Lamb opens each of the seven seals on the scroll. As each seal is opened a new vision appears. The scroll represents the complete purpose of God, which is *to establish His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven*. The breaking of the seven seals symbolises the breaking open or realisation of the kingdom. That is, the opening of the seals signifies that the final purposes of God – the establishment of His Kingdom – are now in progress.

As the seals are opened the result is essentially one of suffering and persecution on the earth, which we might identify as the **Great Tribulation** described in [Matthew 24](#) and the Thessalonian epistles.

- As the first four seals are opened ([6:1-8](#)) riders appear on horses of different colours – and war, famine, disease and death are in their path.
- As the fifth seal is opened John sees the Christian martyrs in heaven ([6:9-11](#)).
- As the sixth seal is opened a set of contrasting images appears: a huge earthquake, stars falling from the sky, the sky rolling up and a time of great distress as the time of God’s wrath is anticipated ([6:12-17](#)); but also **144,000** ([7:1-8](#)) and **a great multitude** ([7:9](#)), together symbolising all of God’s people who have come through the tribulation and are now worshipping God before the throne ([7:14](#)).
- At the opening of the seventh seal there is silence in heaven ([8:1](#)). Seven angels appear, each with a trumpet ([8:2](#)). Another angel hurls a golden censer from heaven to the earth ([8:3-5](#)).

## ACT 2, SCENE 2

### SOUNDING THE SEVEN TRUMPETS ([Chapter 8:6-11:19](#))

The seven trumpets are sounded; each one announcing an aspect of the outpouring of God’s judgement or wrath upon earth. It seems that this judgement of God is at least partly the result of the “prayers of the saints” described in [Rev 8:3-5](#).

- The first four trumpets announce events which destroy a third of the earth. The first brings hail and fire, destroying a third of the land ([8:7](#)); the second brings a burning mountain which destroys a third of the

seas (8:8-9); the third brings a falling star which pollutes a third of the rivers (8:10-11); and the fourth darkens a third of the sun and the moon (8:12).

- The fifth trumpet brings an army of locusts who terrorise unbelievers for five months (9:1-11).
- The sixth trumpet releases four angels from the Euphrates and brings a vast army of angel-warriors on horseback (9:13-16); plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur from the horses kill a third of unrepentant mankind (9:17-21).

There is then an interlude in which a mighty angel announces the imminence of God's final judgement and completion of His purposes (10:1-7).

John is given a little scroll to eat (10:8-11), and following this he is commanded to measure the temple of God (11:1-2). He sees two witnesses who prophecy for **3½ years** (see below) whilst God's judgement is carried out (11:3-6). They are then killed by a beast (11:7-10), but resurrected and taken up to heaven 3½ days later (11:11-12).

- Finally, the seventh trumpet is sounded; loud voices in heaven proclaim that Jesus will reign forever (11:15) and declare that God's wrath and judgement have come (11:16-18). There is thunder and lightning, earthquakes and a great hailstorm (11:19).

## ACT 2, SCENE 3

### THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON (Chapter 12)

John then sees a vision of a pregnant woman and a dragon in heaven. As soon as the woman gives birth, her son is snatched up to God and she flees to the desert. A war breaks out in heaven, with Michael and his angels defeating the dragon (Satan) and his angels who are hurled to earth.

The dragon pursues the woman on earth but she is kept safe for 3½ years. The dragon seeks to make war against the rest of her offspring.

The woman can be understood to represent God's faithful people (of whom the Jewish nation 'gave birth' to Christ). She is *Israel, the people of God*. The dragon is explicitly defined as Satan (Rev 12:9 and Rev 20:2). The child is surely *Christ himself*, whom Satan tried to destroy at his birth.

The whole scene describes the cosmic conflict which resulted from the birth of Christ; a conflict between Michael and his angels and Satan and his demonic army. There are also references back to the original fall of Satan and a third of the heavenly host (Ez 28:12-19, 2 Pe 2:4). We are told that Satan is enraged at his



failure to kill Christ and goes off to wage war against the woman's offspring (God's people everywhere).

## **ACT 2, SCENE 4**

### **THE TWO BEASTS** ([Chapter 13](#))

John sees a **beast coming out of the sea**, given great authority by the dragon (Satan). The beast has a 'fatal wound that has been healed' which astonishes and thus deceives many. He exercises his authority for **3½ years** during which time he makes war against the saints. Unbelievers are deceived by this blasphemous beast, and begin following him and worshipping the dragon.

Then John sees another **beast coming out of the earth**. He performs miracles to deceive the world and cause them to worship the first beast. He orders an image to be set up in honour of the first beast. He forces everyone to receive a mark on the forehead, being the number of his name (**666** - see below).

## **ACT 2, SCENE 5**

### **JUDGEMENT ANNOUNCED** ([Chapters 14](#))

After seeing the beasts, John is shown a contrasting picture of the **144,000** worshipping God on Mt Zion, and with the name of the Lamb and the father on their foreheads.

He then sees three angels. The first makes a final proclamation of the gospel to all people and announces the hour of judgement. The second proclaims the fall of Babylon. The third announces torment and judgement for all who have worshipped the beast.

John sees an image of judgement: Christ harvesting the earth by separating the righteous and the wicked.

## **ACT 2, SCENE 6**

### **SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH** ([Chapters 15-16](#))

John then sees seven angels with "seven last plagues" (seven bowls of God's wrath). They seem to be the ultimate expression of God's wrath against evil; after these his wrath is completed.

- The first bowl pours out painful sores on all who have worshipped the beast ([16:2](#)).



- The plague of the second bowl destroys the seas (16:3).
- The plague of the third bowl destroys the rivers (16:4-7).
- The plague of the fourth bowl causes the sun to burn the unrepentant (16:8-9).
- The fifth bowl is poured out on the beast and his kingdom (16:10-11).
- The sixth bowl is poured out on the Euphrates (16:12) and prepares the way for three demon spirits who perform miracles and gather the kings of the earth for battle at *Armageddon*. Rev 16:16 is the only Biblical reference to Armageddon. There is no actual place called Armageddon anywhere in the world; John uses the term to describe in symbolic terms the place of defeat for all who will take a stand against God.
- When the seventh bowl is poured out (16:17-21), John hears an announcement from the throne in the temple saying “It is done!” There is thunder and lightning, earthquakes and a great hailstorm.

## ACT 2, SCENE 7

### THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON (Chapters 17-19:10)

John is then shown the punishment of Babylon. He sees a prostitute (“Babylon the Great”) on a scarlet beast (17:1-6). The angel explains that the beast will be set free for a short time, will destroy the prostitute, but will then itself be destroyed by the Lamb (17:14-16).

Another angel then announces the fall of Babylon (18:1-3), urging God’s people to come out of her so that they will not share in her sins or her destruction (18:4-8). Many kings and merchants will mourn because of the destruction of this great city (18:9-24).

John then hears the sound of joyful victory in heaven, with a great multitude praising God for His destruction of Babylon (19:1-10).

Historically, Babylon was an evil city and an immoral empire that ransacked Jerusalem and carried the people of God into captivity (see 2 Kings 24). Prophetically, Babylon has a meaning at several levels. First, it represented the Roman Empire, which was the ‘Babylon’ of John’s day<sup>5</sup> – oppressing the people of God and later destroying Jerusalem. These visions of the destruction of the Roman Empire would have encouraged John’s readers. But secondly it represents the enemies of God’s people in more general terms. Babylon symbolises a *godless human society*.

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<sup>5</sup> John may have felt constrained against speaking openly about Rome, and his readers would certainly have known that this reference was to Rome and its empire. References to ‘Babylon’s’ seven hills in Rev 17:9 were a clear reference to the landscape of the city of Rome.



## ACT 2, SCENE 8

### THE FINAL SHOWDOWN! (Chapters 19:11-20:10)

John then sees the final victory of Christ over Satan:

- First, he sees Jesus riding out on a white horse, leading the armies of heaven; angels are announcing the imminent victory – the great supper of God (19:11-18).
- The beast and the kings of the earth and their armies are also gathering together to make war against Christ and his armies (19:19).
- The beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown into the fiery lake; their armies are also killed (19:20-21).
- Satan (the dragon) is seized and bound in the Abyss for a **thousand years** so that he cannot deceive the nations for that time (20:1-3).
- Christian martyrs are raised to life to reign with Christ for the **thousand years** (20:4-6).
- John sees that after the **thousand years** Satan will be released for a short time to deceive the nations once more. But he is soon thrown into the fiery lake, where the beast and the false prophet were thrown (20:7-10).

## ACT 2, SCENE 9

### FINAL JUDGEMENT (Chapters 20:11-15)

John sees the dead standing before the throne of God, each judged according to what they had done (as written in the books). If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life they were thrown into the lake of fire.

## ACT 3, SCENE 1

### THE NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH (Chapters 21-22)

The drama concludes with the sight of a “new heaven and a new earth”, and a “new Jerusalem” coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride. A voice from heaven proclaims that God has begun to dwell with His people and that there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain, because a “new order” has arrived!





John then sees the new Jerusalem in more detail: glorious and radiant, built of precious stones and jewels, totally pure and holy. There is no temple in the city (because God Himself is its temple), and no need for day or night because the glory of God gives it light.

The Greek word for “new” has the meaning of something which already exists but is completely renewed or recreated. Maybe God will *totally transform the heavens and the earth to make them as new*. This sense is in keeping with the Biblical themes of restoration of all things (see Acts 3:21) and of the total liberation of the created world (Rom 8:19-21).

The new Jerusalem represents *the church*, for we are told that she is “prepared as a bride for her husband” , the metaphor used elsewhere to describe the meeting of Christ and his church (see Eph 5:25-27).

Finally, John sees the river of life flowing from the throne of God through the city and with the trees of life on each side. The residents of the city will see and serve God, and will reign for ever and ever.

The book of Revelation ends with invitations from God for all who are thirsty to come to Him, and with the promise that He is “coming soon”!

## 5 Some Hot Potatoes!

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### 5.1 The 144,000 and the Great Multitude

As the first six seals of [Rev 6](#) are opened, John sees the great tribulation and suffering which will affect God’s people. Then in [Rev 7:4](#) we are introduced to the 144,000 servants of God who have been sealed, and are told that there are 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. We also see “a great multitude...from every nation, tribe, people and language” worshipping God before His throne, and are told that they are those who have come out of the great tribulation. Later in [Rev 14](#) we again see the 144,000 worshipping God on Mount Zion.

These servants of God have been ‘sealed’ so that they will be able to stand firm during the terrible times of which John has caught a vision (during the opening of the first six seals). The sealing of God’s servants implies a safeguard and security ([see also 2 Cor 1:21-22 and Eph 1:13-14](#)) during this time of tribulation.

How should we understand these 144,000 people? 144,000 is 12x12x1000 which in more ways than one symbolises *completeness*. There were 12 tribes in the OT and 12 apostles of the lamb in the NT; together they represent all of God’s people. 1000 is the number of totality; so that 144,000 can represent the *full number of God’s people*. This is consistent with the preceding verse ([Rev 7:3](#)) which speaks simply of the sealing “of the servants of God”. We conclude that all of God’s servants will be ‘sealed’ so that they will survive the times of tribulation.

If this is so, however, why are we told that the 144,000 comprised 12,000 from each of the OT tribes? Does this mean that they are exclusively Jewish? No; we can reject this on a number of grounds. First, we know that “the servants of God” includes both Jewish and Gentile believers. Second, the description of Gentile believers as Israelites is simply consistent with the common NT teaching which applies to the Christian church many of the titles and privileges of Israel<sup>6</sup>. Third, the listing of the tribes is in any case different from any other given in the Bible (with the rebellious, idolatrous tribe of Dan excluded and the tribe of Manasseh (one of Joseph’s sons) included), suggesting that we are not to read it as prime facie a list of the OT people; rather it is a symbolic list of God’s true followers.

We can understand the “great multitude” as simply another view of this full number of God’s servants.

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<sup>6</sup> The church is described as “the twelve tribes” in [Jas 1:1](#), [Mt 19:28](#), [Lk 22:30](#). The Christian is described as the “true Jew” in [Rom 2:29](#), as “Abraham’s seed” in [Gal 3:29](#) and as “the circumcision” in [Phil 3:3](#). The church is described as the “Israel of God” in [Gal 6:16](#). Elsewhere, descriptions of the old Israel are frequently applied to the church by the NT writers (e.g. see [1 Peter 2:9-10](#) and [Eph 1:11,14](#)).

Having said this, we must emphasise that this “full number” of God’s servants will include a “full number” of Jews. Paul writes extensively in Romans concerning the place of ethnic Israel in the purposes of God. In [Rom 11: 25-26](#) he says that “all Israel will be saved” after “the full number of the Gentiles has come in”, adding that “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” ([Rom 11: 29](#)). Different views exist regarding Paul’s use of the phrase “all Israel”. Some take this to mean that literally all Jews will be saved; others regard the phrase as meaning *the full number* of the Jews coming to Christ. Certainly, the whole passage seems to imply that large numbers of Jews will turn to Christ and be saved before He returns.

## 5.2 The 3½ Years

This time-period is referred to on several occasions, either in terms of months (“42 months”), days (“1260 days”), or symbolically (“time (=1), times (=2) and half a time<sup>7</sup> (=½ ”). We are told that for this 3½ year period:

- The gentiles will trample on the holy city ([Rev 11:2](#));
- The two witnesses will prophecy ([Rev 11:3](#));
- The woman (see 4.5 below) will be protected by God in the desert ([Rev 12:6](#)); and
- The beast will exercise his authority ([Rev 13:5, see below](#))

The 3½ year period could be literal, or may be symbolic, representing half of the ‘perfect’ seven. Some commentators regard it as representing the entire church age. Whatever, the references seem to be to the times of the *tribulation* of which all these things will surely be features. [Daniel 12:7](#) also speaks of the period of trouble which will last for this time.

As we have seen, the Jerusalem temple was trodden down by Gentiles (the Romans) and finally destroyed in AD 70. This would represent a partial fulfilment of these pictures, but (in keeping with the general thrust of the end time prophecies) with a total fulfilment still to come at the end of then age.

The main point is that the period of tribulation *is a limited one*, and this is in keeping with Jesus’s teaching in [Mt 24:22](#).

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<sup>7</sup> Where time =1, times =2, and half a time =½



## 5.3 The Beasts, the Mark, and the Number of the Beast

In [Rev 13](#) we are introduced to two ‘beasts’:

- The “**BEAST OUT OF THE SEA**” is given power and authority by the dragon (Satan, see above). He seems to have a fatal wound that has been healed (a parody of the death and resurrection of Christ), and deceives many, causing them to follow and worship him despite his hideous blasphemies.

We can identify this beast with *the antichrist* (or the period of great tribulation), that person who will arise in the end times and deceive unbelievers leading them to worship him. [the ‘abomination that causes desolation’ of [Matthew 24](#)?]

- The second beast comes “out of the earth” and performs counterfeit miracles to deceive men and cause them to worship the first beast. He also forces unbelievers to receive the ‘mark’ (the name or number of the beast). The second beast is later specifically identified as **THE FALSE PROPHET** (see [Rev 16:19 and 19:20](#)).

The ‘mark’ referred to is simply a parody of the mark or sealing that God’s people have received on their foreheads (see [Rev 7:3](#)). The number (666) is symbolic of incompleteness and human activity, six being less than God’s number of perfection (seven). It is a number which looks like truth and perfection but isn’t! That is why it is the number of this beast; ie the ‘number’ which best represents a *false prophet or false religion*<sup>8</sup>.

Are these beasts representative of actual people who will emerge in the last days? Many commentators suggest that the first beast represents *the state* itself (and to John’s readers it would certainly have been identified with the Roman empire<sup>9</sup>), and that the second represents *religious activity or ideology* which encourages devotion to the state rather than to God.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Many readers have tried to show that the ‘number’ 666 is symbolic of particular individuals: suggestions have included Nero, Caligula, Domitian, Muhammed, Cromwell, Napoleon, Martin Luther and an assortment of popes!

<sup>9</sup> Note also that many commentators seek to show that the number 666 is derived from both the Greek and Hebrew spellings of Caesar Nero. Hugh Thomson (“The Return of Jesus” seminar notes from Restoration 93, published by CMI) notes that many commentators point out that NERON KESAR in Hebrew lettering has the total numeric value of six hundred and sixty six.

<sup>10</sup> If the first Beast is identified with the Roman Empire, then the second beast (the False Prophet) can be seen as the cult of Emperor-worship that had developed in John’s day. Julius Caesar and his successors were worshipped as gods. This was celebrated once a year on “Emperor’s Day” which may be what John refers to when he describes the “Lord’s Day” (1:9, being a different phrase to the more usual “Day of the Lord”)



Whilst a partial fulfilment in these terms may be true, there is enough evidence to conclude that the Antichrist and the False Prophet may also finally emerge as actual human deceivers in the end times. A study of the “Man of Lawlessness” in [2 Thessalonians 2](#) seems to support this.

## 5.4 The Thousand Years

A full discussion of the “millennium” will be included in Part (4)



## 6 Putting it All Together

### 6.1 The Recurring Themes

We may now stand back and review the major and recurring themes of this great drama. They are:

- Conflict between the forces of Satan and God
- Wickedness and blasphemy by Satan and his followers
- Worship of the Lamb by His people
- Destruction of Satan and Babylon; Triumph and Victory of the Lamb
- Judgement executed and the Wrath of God outpoured

### 6.2 A Useful Framework

We will conclude by suggesting a framework for putting the pieces of this drama together. This is based on a framework by J. Sidlow Baxter<sup>11</sup> First, each of the three Acts described above is essentially an unveiling of Christ's "three enthronements", dividing Revelation into three clear parts:

- **Act 1 (chs 1-5)** climaxes with the enthronement of Christ *in heaven*
- **Act 2 (chs 6-20)**, the main part, climaxes with the enthronement of Christ *in the earth*
- **Act 3 (chs 21-22)** climaxes with the enthronement of Christ *in the new creation*

Act 2 (the main part of the drama) runs in two parallel groups of chapters (**chs 6-11 and chs 12-20**), with both groups depicting the *same series of happenings*, each from a different aspect or perspective: In **chs 6-11** we have a view of things from earth; in **chs 12-19** we have another view of those same things, this time from heaven.

Both chapter-groups of Act 2 show us two awful epochs: The Great Tribulation and The Wrath of God. The seven *seals* of the first chapter-group parallel the seven *persons* of the second; the seven *trumpets* of the first parallel the seven *bowls* of the second. In both groups there is a picture of the sealing of God's people and the worship of the saints in heaven. Sidlow Baxter says that "many readers find themselves in a chaotic mix-up because they fail to see that

<sup>11</sup> J Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1960, Volume 6, pages 341-348

chapters 12-19 are a parallel ‘repeat’ of chapters 6-11.” We can summarise this as follows:

Act 2: Enthronement of Christ on Earth			
Chs 6-11 (Earth’s perspective)		Chs 12-19 (Heaven’s perspective)	
The great Tribulation			
6	<b>Scene 1: Seven Seals</b>	<b>Scene 3,4: Seven persons</b>	12-13
7	(1) Israel sealed before ‘wrath’ (2) Saints in heaven	<b>Scene 5: Judgement announced</b> (1) Israel sealed before ‘wrath’ (2) Saints in heaven	14
The Wrath of God			
8-9	<b>Scene 2: Seven trumpets</b> (1) On the earth (2) On the sea (3) On the rivers (4) Sun, moon and stars (5) Darkness, scourge (6) Euphrates: army (7) “Nations angry”; “wrath”; “great voices”; “time has come”	<b>Scene 6: Seven bowels</b> (1) On the earth (2) On the sea (3) On the rivers (4) Sun (5) Darkness, scourge (6) Euphrates: kings (7) “Nations fell”; “wrath”; “voices”; “thundering”; “it is done”	15-16
10-11:14	Preservation of Jerusalem in THE GREAT TRIBULATION	<b>Scene 7: Destruction of babylon</b> in THE WRATH OF GOD	17-18
11:15-19	After the seventh trumpet: (1) Kingdom of the Lord (2) 24 Elders worship	After the seventh bowl: (1) Lord God reigns (2) 24 Elders worship (3) He has judged	19



	(3) Time to be judged (4) Wrath is come	(4) Armageddon	
19:11-20	<b>Scene 8: Final showdown</b> The Millennial reign of Christ, The Final Outrage and the Doom of Satan <b>Scene 9: The final judgement</b> Judgement of the dead		

## 6.3 Conclusion

Revelation gives us a dramatic glimpse into the consummation of all things. In graphic descriptions we are assured of the triumph of Christ over all His enemies! In Revelation we see the climax of all history: Satan and all evil destroyed forever, the curse removed and a glorious new heaven and earth ushered in where we will live eternally with God.



## Appendix

As noted, many of the pictures and events described in Revelation are consistent with other Scriptures. The following table gives some examples:

Revelation's parallels with other scriptures		
Revelation	Event	Other references
4:2-3, 10:1-3	Rainbow around the throne	Ezekiel 1:22-28
5:6-8	Christ the Lamb	Isaiah 53:7
6:1-8	Horses and riders	Zech 1:7-11, 6:1-8
6:12, 8:5, 11:13	Earthquakes	Isaiah 2:19-22
6:12	Moon turns blood red	Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:14-21
6:13	Stars falling from the sky	Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:25
6:14	Sky rolled up like a scroll	Isaiah 34:1-4
6:15-17	God's wrath	Zeph 1:14-18, 1Thess 5:1-3
9:1-2, 17:3-8	Abyss	Luke 8:26-34
9:3-11	Plague of locusts	Joel 1:2-2:11
11:1-2	Trampling of Jerusalem	Luke 21:20-24
11:3-6	Two olive trees	Zechariah 4
13:1-10	Beast from the sea	Daniel 7
13:11-15	Counterfeit signs by beast from earth	2 Thessalonians 2:7-14
20:7-10	Conflict with Gog and Magog	Ezekiel 38-39



20:11-15	Final Judgement before Throne	John 5:19-30
21:4	Tears wiped away	Isaiah 25:1-8
22:1-2	Tree of Life	Genesis 2:8-14
22:5	Believers reigning with God forever	Daniel 7:18-28

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