

Unlocking the Book of Revelation

Why Was This Book Written?

To comfort the militant Church in its struggle against the forces of evil from the ascension of Christ until His Second Coming. The book was intended for people living in John's day and age. It is God's answer to the prayers and tears of severely persecuted Christians (6:10) scattered about in cities of Asia Minor (western Turkey). The book is also intended for the encouragement of believers in every generation since the ascension of Christ and until His return in glory.

"Revelation assures Christians that Christ knows their condition. He calls them to stand fast against all temptation. Their victory has been secured through the blood of the Lamb (5:9 – 10; 12:11). Christ will come soon to defeat Satan and all his agents (19:11 – 20:10), and His people will enjoy everlasting peace in His presence (7:15 – 17; 21:3 – 4)."
[Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation*, P & R Publishing, ©2000, p. 55]

What is the Book About?

The conflict between the Church and the World and the ultimate victory of Christ (and of His Church) over the dragon (Satan) and his helpers (world governments, world religion, worldly seduction): 1:18; 2:8; 5:9ff; 6:2; 11:15; 12:9ff; 14:1, 14; 15:2ff; 19:16; 20:4; 22:3

While it *seems* as if the Church is being overcome by Satan and the world, the Book of Revelation assures us that things are *not* as they seem (John 16:33).

Key Verse: Revelation 17:14

Seven Cycles of Church History Under Two Divisions

Each of the Seven Cycles is a unique perspective on the entire church age, from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ. Each section (except for the first) ends with the coming of the Lord in judgement.

The cycles are not linear or chronological. **They are parallel.** Each cycle reveals a different aspect of history from the birth (or ascension) of Christ to His Second Coming.

The Seven Cycles are divided into two parts: the first part describes *the surface conflict* between believers and unbelievers (chapters 1 – 11); the second part describes *the unseen conflict* between Christ and Satan, which is the ultimate cause of the persecution, trials, and afflictions of the Church (chapters 12 – 21) (see John 15:18 – 21; Acts 9:1 – 5; Ephesians 6:10 – 12).

First Division: The Visible War on the Church (Chapters 1 – 11)

1. *The Seven Churches: Chapters 1 – 3*

Each of the letters to the seven churches describe conditions that are true of the church throughout history. Christ is in the midst of His Church: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (age)" Matthew 28:20.

2. *The Seven Seals: Chapters 4 – 7 Judgment: 6:15 – 17*

The Son of God, exalted in glory, governs the world in the interest of the Church

The Throne and Its Surroundings is the control tower of God's sovereign providence over all of history: the throne of God is central, surrounded by 24 thrones (the redeemed), surrounded by the four living creatures on the four sides of the throne.

The Seven-Sealed Book is God's Eternal Decree. As the seals on the book are broken, trials and persecutions are unleashed that affect not only the unbelievers in the world, but believers as well. The trials purge and purify the Church and are overruled for the good of the Church.

The Sealed Multitude (144,000) is a symbolic number. The multitude is the complete number of those who were chosen by God from the foundation of the world to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (compare 5:9, 7:9 and 14:4 – 5).

3. *The Seven Trumpets: Chapters 8 – 11 Judgment: 11:16 – 18*
Judgments upon those who persecute the Church, intended *to warn* unbelievers to repent. These judgements are God's answer to **the prayers of the saints in 6:9 – 11.**

The Two Witnesses (Chapter 11) are symbolic of the Ministers and Missionaries who carry on the work of the Church under extreme persecution by the World and Satan

Second Division: The Invisible War on Christ and the Church (Chapters 12 – 22)

4. *Seven Symbolic Histories: Chapters 12 – 14 Judgment: 14:14 – 20*
 - The Woman is *the Church*
 - The Man-Child is *Jesus Christ*
 - The Dragon is *Satan*
 - The Beast Out of the Sea is *World Governments* (13:1 – 10)
 - The Beast Out of the Earth is *World Religion* (13:11 – 18)
 - The 144,000 is *the Redeemed Elect* (14:1 – 5; see also 7:1 – 4)
 - The Harlot is *Worldly Seduction* (14:8; 17:1 – 6)
5. *The Seven Bowls: Chapters 15 – 16 Judgment: 16:16 – 21*
The final outpouring of God's wrath on those who did not repent after the Trumpets
6. *The Judgment of the Harlot and the Two Beasts: Chapters 17 – 19 Judgment: 19:19 – 21*
7. *The Judgment of the Dragon; the New Heaven and the New Earth: Chapters 20 – 22 Judgment: 20:11 – 15*

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

- Hendriksen, William. *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, 1940. Reprinted 2015, Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI
- Poythress, Vern S. *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation*, 2000. P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ
- Johnson, Dennis E. *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, 2001. P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ
- Poythress, Vern S. *Understanding the Book of Revelation*, 2014. Video Lecture: Westminster Seminary, PA
<http://faculty.wts.edu/lectures/left-behind-understanding-the-book-of-revelation/>