

Revelation Overview and Introduction

Overview

Purpose of Revelation

Comfort the church in its struggle against the forces of evil by showing that God rules all things.

Theme of Revelation

Christ and his church are victorious over the dragon (Satan) and his helpers.

Timing of Revelation

Written during the reign of Domitian (AD 81 – 96).

Author of Revelation

Apostle John

Genre of Revelation

The book of Revelation identifies itself both as “apocalypse” (or “revelation,” 1:1) and as prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19; see also 10:11; 22:9). “Apocalypse” is derived from the Greek noun *apokalypsis*, meaning “revelation, disclosure, unveiling”—that is, the disclosure of unseen heavenly or future realities. Revelation therefore stands in the apocalyptic “wing” of authentic, divinely inspired prophecy (emphasizing visionary experience, symbolism, and literary art), along with such NT texts as Jesus’ Olivet Discourse (Mark 13) and Paul’s discussion of the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2). (The ESV Study Bible, 2008)

Structure of Revelation

(Hendriksen, 1967)

1. The book of Revelation consists of seven sections. They are parallel and each spans the period from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ.
 - a. Christ in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, or the church on earth (chapters 1 – 3)
 - b. The book with the seven seals (chapters 4 – 7)
 - c. The seven trumpets of judgment (chapters 8 – 11)
 - d. The woman and the male child persecuted by the dragon and his helpers, or aspects of warfare and salvation (chapters 12 – 14)
 - e. The seven bowls of wrath (chapters 15 – 16)
 - f. The fall of the great harlot and of the beasts, or victory for Christ (chapters 17 – 19)
 - g. The judgment and the new heaven and earth (chapters 20 – 22)
2. The seven sections can be grouped into two major divisions. The first major division (chapters 1 – 11) consists of the first three sections. The second major division (chapters 12 – 22) consists of the remaining four sections. The first division reveals the church, indwelt by Christ and persecuted by the world. The church is avenged, protected, and victorious. The second division reveals the deeper spiritual background of the struggle between the church and the world. It is a conflict between Christ and the dragon in which Christ, and therefore his church, is victorious.

3. The seven sections of Revelation are arranged in ascending, climatic order. The final judgment is first announced, then introduced, and finally described.

Symbolism of Revelation

1. Revelation uses symbolism from beginning to end.
2. The first verse of Revelation says "He made it known by sending his angel." "He made it known" is translated "he sent and signified it by his angel" in the KJV. "Made it known" and "signified" translate the same Greek word (*semaino*), which is related to the noun *sign* (*sema*). It means, "to give a sign, signify, indicate" or "make known, report, communicate." Edward McDowell writes, "The author implies that the message he has received is being given to his readers under signs or symbols, Attention to this fact should save us from crass literalism in interpreting the message of the book."
3. Revelation consists of moving pictures. The details of the picture should be interpreted in harmony with its central thought. We should ask two questions. First, what is the entire picture? Second, what is its predominant idea? (Hendriksen, 1967)
4. The seals, trumpets, bowls of wrath and similar symbols refer not to specific events, particular happenings, or details of history, but to principles – of human conduct and of divine moral government – that are operating throughout the history of the world, especially between the first and second comings of Christ. (Hendriksen, 1967)

Numbers in Revelation

(Kistemaker, 2001)

1. The number one denotes unity. Dt 6:4 – Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
2. The number two is the number of persons required to validate testimony in a court of law (two witnesses – Rev 11:3).
 - a. Dt 17:6 – On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.
 - b. Dt 19:15 – A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.
3. The number three represents the triune God.
 - a. Rev 6:6 – three quarts of barley
 - b. Rev 8:13 – three angels
 - c. Rev 9:18 – three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur
 - d. Rev 16:13 – three unclean spirits
 - e. Rev 16:19 – the great city split into three parts
4. Four refers to God's creation as is evident from the four directions of the winds, the four seasons of the year, and the four corners of the earth.
 - a. There are four living creatures, four angels, and four corners of the earth.
 - b. Categories of four
 - i. Rev 5:9 – tribe and language and people and nation
 - ii. Rev 5:13 – praise and honor and glory and power
 - iii. Rev 6:8 – sword, and famine, and disease, and by the wild beasts
 - iv. Rev 8:5; 16:18 – peals of thunder and rumblings and flashes of lighting and an earthquake
 - v. Rev 9:21 – their murders, their witchcraft, their fornication, and their thefts
 - vi. Rev 10:11 – many peoples and nations and languages and kings
 - vii. Rev 18:22 – harps and musicians and flutists and trumpeters

5. Five does not have much symbolical significance. Thus, five months (Rev 9:5, 10) means a period of indefinite duration.
6. The number six is the number of man (man created on the sixth day).
 - a. Gen 1:26 – Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”
 - b. Gen 1:31 – And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
7. Seven (3 plus 4) is the number of completeness. Used extensively (54 times) in Revelation both explicitly and implicitly. God at work in the world.
 - a. Gen 2:2-3 – And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.
 - b. Seven Beatitudes
 - i. Rev 1:3 – Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
 - ii. Rev 14:13 – And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”
 - iii. Rev 16:15 – “Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”
 - iv. Rev 19:9 – And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”
 - v. Rev 20:6 – Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
 - vi. Rev 22:7 – “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”
 - vii. Rev 22:14 – Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.
 - c. There are seven spirits, stars, lampstands, seals, horns, eyes, angels, trumpets, thunder, crowns, heads, plagues, bowls, hills, and kings.
 - d. Seven attributes in Rev 5:12 and Rev 7:12.
 - i. Rev 5:12 – Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive *power* and *wealth* and *wisdom* and *might* and *honor* and *glory* and *blessing*!
 - ii. Rev 7:12 – *Blessing* and *glory* and *wisdom* and *thanksgiving* and *honor* and *power* and *might* be to our God forever and ever!
8. The number ten represents fullness in the decimal (world) system. Many times relates to the world and Satan’s servants and activities.
 - a. Rev 2:10 – ten days of persecution
 - b. Rev 12:3 – dragon with ten horns
 - c. Rev 13:1 – beast coming out of the sea with ten horns and ten crowns
 - d. Rev 17:3 – scarlet beast that had ten horns
9. Twelve (3 times 4) represents perfection. God at work in his people.
 - a. Rev 7:5-8 – elect of the twelve tribes

- b. Rev 12:1 – woman with twelve stars on her head
- c. Rev 21:12 – new Jerusalem with twelve gates, twelve angels, and twelve tribes of Israel
- d. Rev 21:14 – city has twelve foundations on which the twelve names of the apostles are written
- e. Rev 21:16 – city measures in length, breadth, and height twelve thousand stadia
- f. Rev 22:2 – tree of life bears twelve crops of fruit

Recipients of Revelation

1. Revelation was written initially for the persecuted first century church. Thus, the book must make sense and be applicable to the first century church. Only in the comforts of the West could the popular interpretations of today come about.
2. Believers were persecuted because of the “word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”
 - a. Rev 1:1-2 – The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.
 - b. Rev 1:9 – I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
 - c. Rev 6:9 – When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.
 - d. Rev 12:11 – And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.
 - e. Rev 12:17 – Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.
 - f. Rev 19:10 – Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.
3. Believer’s blood was being poured out.
 - a. Rev 6:10 – They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”
 - b. Rev 7:14 – I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.
 - c. Rev 16:6 – For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!
 - d. Rev 17:6 – And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.
 - e. Rev 19:1-2 – After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”
4. In particular, Revelation was written to the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Historical Context of Revelation

1. Revelation was written during a time of persecution during the reign of Domitian. Roman officials would try to force Christians to worship the emperor. Heretical teachings and declining fervor tempted Christians to compromise with pagan society.
2. Emperor worship was required in the Roman Empire at this time. Temples were dedicated to Roman emperors. Emperor worship of Domitian, who was honored as dominus et deus (Lord and God), was prevalent in Ephesus. Pergamum was known for emperor worship.
3. Christians also experienced persecution from Jews. Jewish people were among the first to bring charges against the Christians before the Romans, so that the Jews became a distinct threat to the church. They sought to expose the Christians by expelling them from their houses of worship and denying them civil protection. In the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia John calls the Jewish synagogues “synagogues of Satan.”

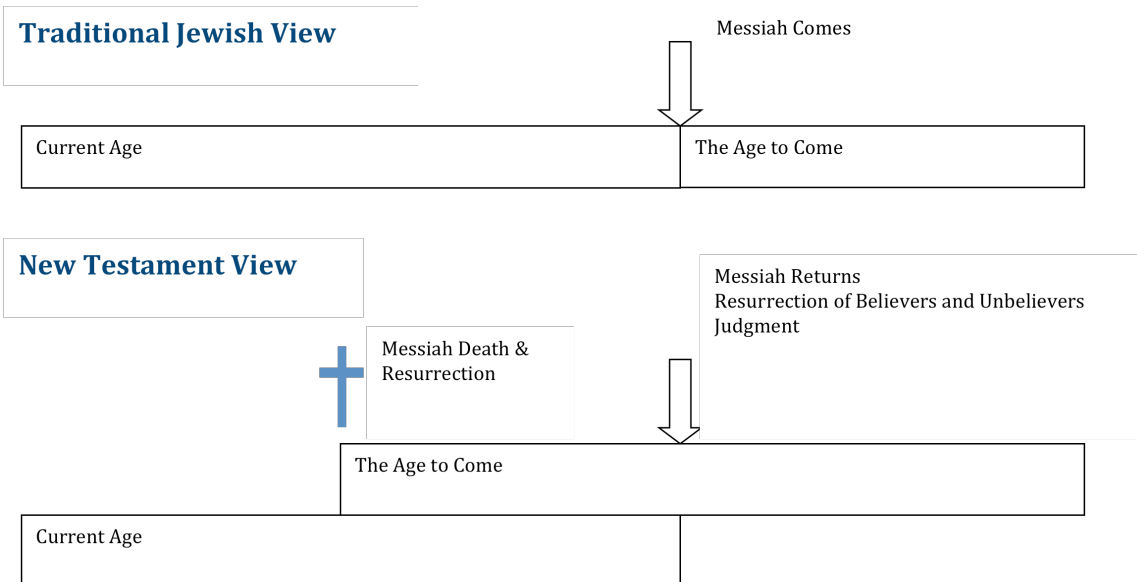
Interpretive Approaches to Revelation

(The ESV Study Bible, 2008)

1. Historicism understands the literary order of the visions, especially in 4:1–20:6, to symbolize the chronological order of successive historical events that span the entire era from the apostolic church to the return of Christ and the new heaven and earth.
2. Futurism views the visions of chapters 4–22 as representing events still future to us now, thus in a distant future from the standpoint of John and the churches of Asia. For many futurists, these coming events include a discrete seven-year period of intense tribulation (chs. 6–19), followed by a millennium (20:1–6) in which Christ will rule on earth before the general resurrection and the inauguration of the new heaven and earth (20:7–22:5). Historical futurists believe in one people of God while dispensational futurists still see the nation of Israel as another people of God with its promises fulfilled in the millennium.
3. Preterism believes that the fulfillment of most of Revelation’s visions already occurred during the early years of the Christian church. Preterists think these events—either the destruction of Jerusalem or the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, or both—would “soon take place” only from the standpoint of John and the churches of Asia. Full preterism—which insists that every prophecy and promise in the NT was fulfilled by a.d. 70—is not a legitimate evangelical option, for it denies Jesus’ future bodily return, denies the physical resurrection of believers at the end of history, and denies the physical renewal/re-creation of the present heavens and earth (or their replacement by a “new heaven and earth”). However, preterists who (rightly) insist that these events are still future are called “partial preterists.”
4. Idealism says that Revelation’s visions symbolize the conflict between Christ and his church on the one hand, and Satan and his evil conspirators on the other, from the apostolic age to Christ’s second coming. Yet idealist interpreters believe that Revelation’s visions’ do not necessarily describe particular historical events. The forces and conflicts symbolized in Revelation’s vision cycles manifest themselves in events that were to occur “soon” from the perspective of the first-century churches (as preterists maintain), but they also find expression in the church’s ongoing struggle of persevering faith in the present and foretell a still-future escalation of persecution and divine wrath leading to the return of Christ and the new heaven and earth.

The Two Age Model

This Age and The Age to Come



Old Testament

In the Old Testament Israel's future was described in two stages. First, it predicts that God's people would go through a time of sin and trouble that would eventually end with severe judgment of national exile. God promised that after the exile, upon their repentance, he would return his people to their land and bless them in greater measure than ever before. The exile would be followed by a great age of blessing. The word eschatology (doctrine of last things) derives from passages like Dt 4:30 that speak of "the latter days." (NIV Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible, 2003)

1. Dt 4:25-31 – When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27 And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. 28 And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. 29 But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. 30 When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice. 31 For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.
2. Is 2:2-5 – It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, 3 and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into

pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. 5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

3. Hos 3:4-5 – For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. 5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.

New Testament

Jesus and New Testament writers also adopted the basic twofold historical framework, but they significantly modified the scheme. The Jews to whom Jesus and his apostles ministered believed that the latter days would come suddenly and completely in the great moment when the messiah would step onto the stage of history. Yet Jesus and his followers proclaimed that the latter days would come in another manner. The New Testament teaches that instead of history moving simply from one age to the next, Jesus' first coming inaugurated the age to come; that this present age and the age to come overlap during the time between the first and second comings of Christ; and that the latter days, or the age to come, will arrive in their fullness at the consummation of all things when Christ returns. This is why Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that begins small and grows into the largest plant in the garden (Matt 13:31). It is why, although the new creation has begun in Jesus and in our hearts (2 Cor 5:17), we still await its fullness at the return of Christ (Rev 21:1-3). In a word, with Christ's first coming many dimensions of the latter days become reality, but when Christ returns we will experience them in full measure. (NIV Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible, 2003)

The "last days" began with Christ's first coming.

1. Acts 2:14-17 – But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."
2. Heb 1:1-2 – Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
3. 1 Pet 1:20 – He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you
4. 2 Tim 3:1-5 – But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

The time between Christ's resurrection and His return "is marked by the presence of the *age to come* in some *provisional* but *not fully consummated* sense. The presence of the Kingdom of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit are pledges and guarantees of the glorious blessings of the *age to come*, which will be the inheritance of believers. Christians live in the eschatological tension during the partial overlap of the two ages as they await the arrival of the age to come in its fullness." (Riddlebarger, 2003)

The “line in the sand” between the two ages is clearly set forth

1. The harvest is the end of the age, and angels are the harvesters. (Matt 13:39)
2. The weeds will be burned in the fire at the end of the age. (Judgment – Matt 13:40)
3. The angels will separate the wicked from the righteous. (Matt 13:49)

Matt 13:36-40 – Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” 37 He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

Matt 13:49-50 – So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(Riddlebarger, 2003)

The Temporal characterizes this Current Age

Matt 12:32 – There is no forgiveness for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Matt 24:3 – The end of the age will be preceded by signs.

Matt 28:20 – Christ will be with us until the end of the age.

Mark 10:30 – The present age is an age of homes, fields and families.

Luke 18:30 – Material rewards are given to us in this life.

Luke 20:34 – The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.

Romans 12:2 – We are not to be conformed to the pattern of this world (age).

1 Cor 1:20 – Philosophy is the wisdom of this age.

1 Cor 2:6-8 – (Man’s) wisdom and rulers are of this age.

2 Cor 4:4 – Satan, the god of this age, blinds people’s minds to the truth.

Gal 1:4 – The present age is evil.

Eph 1:20-21 – Christ reigns in this present age.

Eph 2:2 – The ways of this world (age) are evil.

1 Tim 6:17 – This who are rich in this age are not to hope in their wealth for the next.

Titus 2:12 – We are to live godly lives in this present age.

(Riddlebarger, 2003)

The Eternal characterizes The Age to Come

Matt 12:32 – There is no forgiveness for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

2 Tim 4:18 – The Lord will bring us to the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:30, Luke 18:30 – Eternal life is a reward.

Luke 20:35 – There will be no marriage or giving in marriage.

Eph 5:5 – Immoral people will not inherit the kingdom of God.

2 Thes 1:5 – Our faith will make us worthy of the kingdom of God.

1 Tim 6:19 – The coming age has life that is truly life.

Eph 1:21 – Christ will reign in the age to come.

1 Cor 6:9-10 – Evildoers will not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Cor 15:50 – Flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Thes 2:12 – We are encouraged to live lives worthy of the kingdom.

Matt 13:40 – The weeds will be thrown into the fire.

Gal 5:21 – Those who live evil lives will not inherit the kingdom of God.

(Riddlebarger, 2003)

Basis of Interpretation

(Kistemaker, 2001)

1. Revelation is rooted in the Scriptures. It should be interpreted in harmony with the entire Bible.
2. There are over 500 allusions to the Old Testament in 404 verses of Revelation.
3. There are 14 incomplete quotes from the Old Testament. In the verses below, the Old Testament quotation is italicized.
 - a. Rev 1:7 "*Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him and those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him*" (Dan 7:13; Zech 12:10).
 - b. Rev 2:27 "*He will rule them with an iron rod and as the earthen vessels are broken to pieces*" (Ps 2:9).
 - c. Rev 4:8 "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty*" (Is 6:3).
 - d. Rev 6:16 "*And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us'*" (Hos 10:8).
 - e. Rev 7:16 "*And they will neither hunger nor thirst anymore neither will the sun beat down on them nor any scorching heat*" (Is 49:10).
 - f. Rev 7:17 "*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*" (Is 25:8).
 - g. Rev 11:11 "*The breath of life from God entered them and they stood on their feet*" (Ez 37:5, 10).
 - h. Rev 14:5 "*And in their mouth is found no lie*" (Zeph 3:13; Is 53:9).
 - i. Rev 15:3a "*Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty*" (Ps 111:2).
 - j. Rev 15:3b "*Just and true are your ways, King of the nations*" (Dt 32:4; Ps 145:17; Jer 10:7).
 - k. Rev 15:4 "*Who does not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you*" (Jer 10:7; Ps 86:9).
 - l. Rev 19:15 "*And he will shepherd them with an iron rod*" (Ps 2:9).
 - m. Rev 20:9 "*Fire came down from heaven and devoured them*" (2 Ki 1:10, 12).
 - n. Rev 21:4 "*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*" (Is 25:8).
 - o. Rev 21:7 "*I will be a God to him, and he will be a son to me*" (2 Sam 7:14).
4. Every chapter of Revelation has allusions to the New Testament. Some examples:
 - a. Rev 1:3 – Matt 24:6, Luke 21:9
 - b. Rev 2:20-24 – Acts 15:28
 - c. Rev 3:5 – Matt 10:32
 - d. Rev 12:9 – Luke 10:18
 - e. Rev 13:8 – 1 Pet 1:19, 20
 - f. Rev 18:4 – 2 Cor 6:17; Eph 5:11
 - g. Rev 18:24 – Luke 11:50
5. Must keep in mind the original recipients.
6. Must keep in mind the historical context.

Principles of Interpretation

(Johnson, 2001)

1. Revelation is given to reveal. It makes its central message so clear that even those who hear it can take it to heart and receive the blessing it promises.
2. Revelation is a book to be seen, a book of symbols in motion. Because the appearance of individuals and institutions in everyday experience often masks their true identity, Revelation is given in visions full of symbols that paradoxically picture the true identity of the church, its enemies, and its Champion.

3. Revelation makes sense only in light of the Old Testament. Not only the visions of such prophets as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah but also historical events such as creation, the fall, and the exodus provide the symbolic vocabulary for John's vision.
4. Numbers count in Revelation. Since numbers are used symbolically in Revelation, we must discern the meaning they convey rather than trying to pull them as numbers directly into our experience, measured by calendars and odometers.
5. Revelation is for a church under attack. Its purpose is to awaken us to the dimensions of the battle and the strategies of the enemy, so that we will respond to the attacks with faithful perseverance and purity, overcoming by the blood of the Lamb.
6. Revelation concerns "what must soon take place." We must seek an understanding that touches the experience of our brothers and sisters in seven first-century congregations scattered in the cities of western Asia Minor. Revelation is not about events and hostile forces remote from their struggle.
7. The victory belongs to God and to his Christ. Revelation is pervaded with worship songs and scenes because its pervasive theme – despite its gruesome portrait of evil's powers – is the triumph of God through the Lamb. We read this book to hear the King's call to courage and to fall down in adoring worship before him.

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Introduction – Rev 1:1-8

Rev 1:1-3

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

1. This prophecy must happen
2. This prophecy must happen soon. Soon indicates that the prophecy is applicable to the original recipients. If Revelation is primarily for the distant future then the idea of soon or "the time is near" as verse 3 says makes no sense. In Daniel 12 Daniel is told to seal up the vision as it is for another time. However, in Rev 22 John is commanded to not seal up the words of this prophecy for the time is near. The coming of Christ began the last days.
3. He made it known – discussed in Symbolism of Revelation
4. Bore witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

- a. Reminds us of John 1:1 – In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.
- b. It is all about Jesus. As Rev 19:10 says, “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Also, Hebrews 1 says that God has spoken to us in these last days by his son.
5. Bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he **saw**. Notice that John primarily saw things. This indicates that Revelation consists of visions. John uses the verb saw 44 times and the verb see 9 times.
6. Blessed is the one who **reads aloud** the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who **hear**, and who **keep** what is written in it, for the time is near.
 - a. The blessing is for the original recipients and for believers at any point in history.
 - b. The blessing is for those who proclaim the prophecy (reads aloud), understand the prophecy (hear), and pay close attention to (keep) the prophecy. The work keep translates the Greek word *tereo*, which means guard or observe.
7. The progression of the revelation goes from God to Jesus to an angel to John to those who proclaim the message to those who understand the message to those who pay attention to the message.

Rev 1:4-5a

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

1. Who is and who was and who is to come – description of the Father used several times in Revelation.
 - a. Ex 3:14 – God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.’”
 - b. John 8:56-58 – Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” 57 So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”
2. From the seven spirits who are before his throne – Holy Spirit
 - a. Zech 4:1-6 – And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. 2 And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. 3 And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” 4 And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” 6 Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.”
 - b. Rev 3:1 – And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.
 - c. Rev 4:5 – From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.
 - d. Rev 5:6 – And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

3. From Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth – Son
 - a. Faithful witness – a faithful witness is one who always speaks the truth
 - i. Pro 14:5 – A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.
 - ii. Ps 89:34-37 – I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. 35 Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. 36 His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. 37 Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.
 - iii. John 14:6 – Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
 - iv. Rev 3:14 – And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.
 - v. Rev 19:11 – Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.
 - b. Firstborn from the dead
 - i. Col 1:18 – And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.
 - ii. Acts 26:22-23 – To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: 23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.
 - iii. 1 Cor 15:20 – But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
 - iv. Rom 8:29 – For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
 - c. Ruler of the kings of the earth – including Caesar
 - i. Ps 89:27 – And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.
 - ii. Ps 2 – Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 6 “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” 7 I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” 10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.
4. Notice that the Trinity is involved in all aspects of Revelation.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1. Gives praise to Jesus, which is found throughout Revelation
2. Believers are loved and freed by Jesus even though they are hated by the world and are in prison.
3. "Kingdom, priests to his God and Father" shows that they are part of the people of God as this was the Old Testament designation of Israel.
 - a. Ex 19:5-6 – Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.
 - b. 1 Pet 2:4-5 – As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
 - c. 1 Pet 2:9-10 – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
 - d. Rev 5:10 – and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.
 - e. Eph 3:4-6 – When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Rev 1:7

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

1. Coming with the clouds. Clouds are visible signs by which God displays his majesty.
 - a. Ex 13:21 – And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.
 - b. Ps 104:3 – He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind
 - c. Dan 7:13-14 – I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.
 - d. Mark 13:26 – And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.
2. Those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him
 - a. John 19:33-37 – But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. 35 He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. 36 For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one

of his bones will be broken.” 37 And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

- b. Zech 12:10 – And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.
- c. Mt 24:30 – Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Rev 1:8

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

- 1. Rev 1:17 – When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last” – Christ
- 2. Rev 21:6 – And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. – Father
- 3. Rev 22:13 – I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. – Christ
- 4. Is 44:6 – Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.
- 5. Is 46:8-11 – Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, 9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ 11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.