

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Introduction

How many of us have read or tried to read the book of Revelation?

Did you find Revelation to be an easy or a challenging read?

Most of us, including myself, find Revelation to be a challenging read, yet a blessing is promised to anyone who reads and heeds this book.

Revelation 1:3 (ESV)

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.

What makes Revelation so challenging?

It is challenging because of the way in which God communicated His message. As you know, if you've read even just a portion of Revelation, God communicated His message using a lot of symbols. Revelation is not the only book full of symbols; God also used a lot of symbols in the Old Testament books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. In fact, as we will discover, many of the symbols used in these Old Testament books will be employed by God in Revelation.

Why did God use so much symbolism? He doesn't tell us explicitly in Revelation, but Dr. John Walvoord gives this possible reason:

The symbolism of the book of Revelation has been explained on many principles. One of the most probable and popular, however, is that it was necessary to state opposition to the Roman Empire during the persecutions of Domitian by expressing the revelation from God in symbolic terms which would not be easily apprehended by the Roman authorities. Ethelbert Stauffer explains the need for symbolism in the Apocalypse in this way:

We may read the Book of Revelation with new understanding when we see it as the apostolic reply to the declaration of war [on Christianity] by the divine emperor in Rome. And when we realize the perilous political situation in which the book was both written and "published" (22:10), we understand the reason for its mysterious and veiled pictorial language and its preference for words and pseudonyms from the Old Testament.¹

So it may be that as He sought to encourage His people through the revelation of Christ's triumph, God did so in a manner that did not unduly increase their persecution.

What we will discover is that many of these symbols are drawn from the Old Testament. It is impossible to say exactly, but it is estimated that there are nearly 300 allusions to Old Testament images. So one of the blessings of studying Revelation is a greater understanding of the Old Testament!

One of the greatest challenges is interpreting these symbols. Who is the harlot? Who is the beast? What do we do with numbers like 144,000 and 7 and 666?

First, some of these symbols will be interpreted in the book of Revelation. For instance, it is clearly explained that the seven golden lampstands refer to the seven churches in Asia and the seven stars refer to the seven angels associated with those churches (Rev. 1:20).

Second, some of these symbols are explained in the Old Testament and retain their meaning in Revelation. The beast of Revelation 13 has characteristics of a leopard, bear and lion, three images from the book of Daniel (Dan. 7) each referring to one of the three kingdoms that oppressed ancient Israel.

Third, though symbols are figures of speech, they refer to something or someone literal. This is where some have gotten into trouble, in this area of saying, "this means that". Though we want to avoid speculation, we can at the same time understand many of these symbols.

To help keep some things clear turn to Revelation 1:7.

¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Galaxie Software, 2008), 26.

The Theme of Revelation (1:7)

Throughout our study of Revelation keep clear in your mind that the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth is the theme of this book.

Revelation 1:7 (ESV)

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.

The theme of the book of Revelation is the second coming of Jesus to the earth.

➤ The theme of the book of Revelation is the second coming of Jesus to the earth.

I encourage you, if you haven't already done so, to highlight Revelation 1:7 and to write in the margin "Theme". Here in verse 7 we begin to experience the fact that things revealed in the Old Testament find their consummation in the book of Revelation. Revelation 1:7 draws on prophecies contained in Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12.

The image of one coming with the clouds is found in Daniel 7:13-14.

Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ "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.

To the prophet Zechariah God revealed a day coming when the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will look upon the Messiah Whom they pierced.

Zechariah 12:10 (ESV)

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.

Notice the connection with Jesus' description of His second coming in Matthew 24:29-31.

Matthew 24:29-31 (ESV)

²⁹ "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 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. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Like a tapestry, God weaves these various threads together in the book of Revelation giving us a clearer picture of His triumph in Christ Jesus.

So, the theme of Revelation is found in Revelation 1:7; it is the second coming of our Lord Jesus to this earth.

Now look at verse 19; here we have the outline of Revelation.

The Outline of Revelation (1:19)

Revelation 1:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

The outline of Revelation is three-fold: the things John saw, the things that are and the things that are to take place after this.

- The things John saw – Revelation 1:9-20
- The things that are – Revelation 2:1 – 3:22
- The things that are to take place after this – Revelation 4:1 – 22:21

I encourage you to highlight Revelation 1:19 and in the margin write “Outline”.

The first section, the things John saw, is Revelation 1:9-20. You might want to make a note next to the heading of this section “Things John Saw”. Notice what John writes in verses 9-13.

Revelation 1:9–13 (ESV)

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. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The second section of Revelation is “the things that are”. This section is comprised of seven letters written to the seven churches of Asia. Chapters 2 & 3 are the second division of Revelation, “the things that are”. You might want to make a note of that at the beginning of chapter 2.

The third division of Revelation is “the things that are to take place”. This is the bulk of the book and begins in chapter 4 and continues to the conclusion of the book. We can see very clearly that chapter four is the beginning of this section.

Revelation 4:1 (ESV)

¹ After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

So now we know two things: the theme of Revelation and the outline of Revelation.

- The **theme** of the book of Revelation is *the second coming of Jesus to the earth*.
- The **outline** of the book of Revelation is
 - *The things John saw – Revelation 1:9-20*
 - *The things that are – Revelation 2:1–3:22*
 - *The things that are to take place after this – Revelation 4:1–22:21*

In closing, I want to remind us of the ultimate **purpose** of all prophecy.

The Purpose of All Prophecy

1 John 2:28–3:3 (ESV)

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. ¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.