

10. Revelation

A. Why Study Revelation?

- 1) It is a *revelation* from Jesus Christ (1:1)—truth is given to us by Christ!
- 2) Studying Revelation has God’s blessing, 1:3; 22:7
- 3) Learning Jesus’ message in Revelation gives encouragement to persevere in the faith
- 4) Revelation is necessary to understand how God’s plan for the world will work out. Just we need Genesis to understand where everything came *from*, we need Revelation to understand where everything is *going*. Without Revelation our understanding of the future is dark.

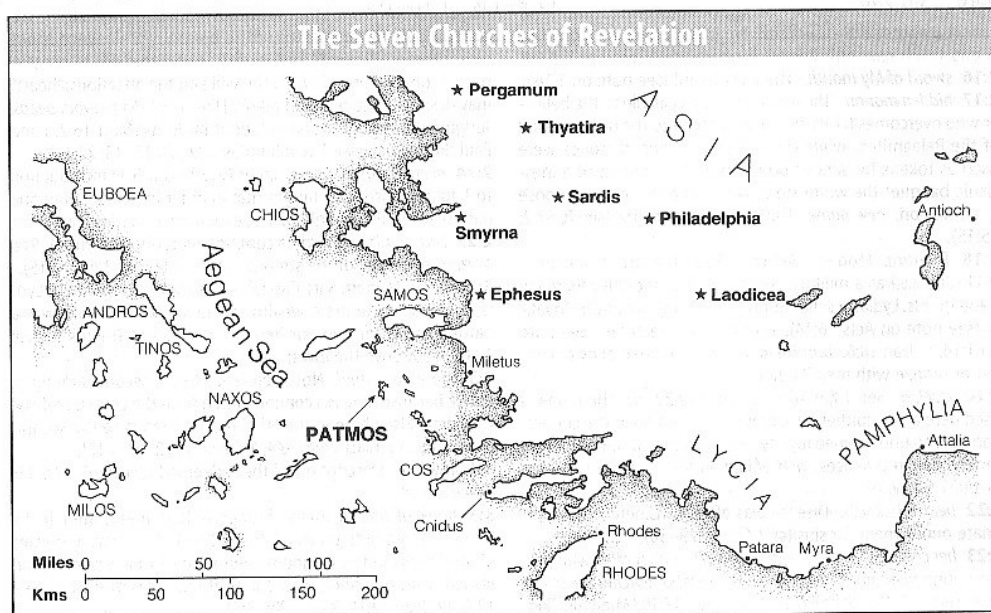
B. Authorship

The apostle John is said to be the author in 1:1. This was the belief of most of the early teachers in the church age, and the content of Revelation is consistent with the apostle John being the author.

C. Recipients

The specific readers are identified in 1:4 as the “seven churches which are in Asia” and then named individually in 1:11 and elsewhere.

On the basis of the generic statements in 1:3, 2:7, etc. referring to those hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches, it is apparent that John intended Revelation to have a wider audience than simply the seven churches addressed in the opening chapters.



(Map from the *New American Standard Study Bible*, p. 1851).

D. Occasion and Purpose

- 1) **Occasion**—John was told to record the visions given to him and send them to the seven churches in Asia (1:10-11). The churches were being persecuted by the Jews and Roman authorities.
- 2) **Purpose**—John told his readers about events in the imminent future, particularly those events surrounding Christ’s Second Coming (1:1, 19). By telling his readers about these events, they would be encouraged to be faithful to God in the midst of difficult trials and testing. Thus, **Revelation’s purpose is to encourage believers to be faithful to God in difficult times.**

Revelation accomplishes this purpose by showing that *Jesus Christ*, not *evil* will prevail.

E. Characteristics

- 1) Revelation is an **epistle**, a letter to churches. It has the normal introduction (1:4a) and conclusion (22:21) that epistles have. Also, the references to John *writing* (1:19; 2:1; etc) support this.
- 2) Most of the content of Revelation is **prophecy** (see 1:3; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18–19). The viewpoint of this letter is primarily on the **future**.
- 3) Revelation should be interpreted as it was written, a description of end-time events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ.

Many try to make Revelation say something other than what it normally says (for example—that it describes the history of the church). The only way that can be done, however, is to make it say something that Jesus and John did not originally mean!

- a. Revelation should be **consistently** interpreted in a literal, normal way, just like we interpret the rest of Scripture (and all other literature, for that matter).
- b. Revelation does have figurative expressions and symbols, but those always convey a **plain** meaning (example: Jesus said “I am the door”—this is a figurative expression using a symbol to convey a plain meaning, namely, that the way to eternal life is only through Jesus).
- c. The purpose of Revelation is to **reveal** truth, and that can only be learned by sticking to the plain meaning of the text. Once readers leave the plain meaning of the text they are left to their own imagination and Revelation’s truths are lost. **Example: “It’s going to rain tomorrow”**
- d. You won’t learn the truths Revelation provides if you are lazy, dabble in it, or are just curious. You have to work at it!

F. Keys

- 1) Theme – The revelation of Jesus Christ
- 2) Phrase– The time is **near** (1:3; 22:10)
- 3) Verses – **1:19**

G. Outlines

Here are two basic outlines of Revelation —

Following 1:19—

- 1) The things John saw, chapter 1
- 2) The things which are, chapters 2-3
- 3) The things which shall occur after these things, chapters 4-22

Following the Content of the Book—

- 1) Christ's Message to Local Churches, chapters 1-3
- 2) God's Judgment of the World, chapters 4-18
- 3) Christ's Return in Glory to Rule, chapters 19-22

Here's a more detailed outline of Revelation—

1. Prologue, 1:1-8
2. The Revelation of Jesus Christ concerning the Things Which Are, 1:9-3:22
 - a. The vision of Christ, 1:9-20
 - b. The Letters to the Seven Churches, 2:1-3:22
3. The Revelation of Jesus Christ concerning the Things Which Shall Take Place after These Things, 4:1-22:5
 - a. The Tribulation Judgments, 4:1-18:24
 - (1) The Background for the Tribulation Judgments, 4:1-5:14
 - (2) The Seven Seal Judgments, 6:1-8:5
 - (3) The Seven Trumpet Judgments, 8:6-14:20
 - (4) The Seven Bowl Judgments, 15:1-18:24
 - b. The Return of Christ, 19:1-20:15
 - (1) The Events Surrounding the Return of Christ, 19:1-10
 - (2) The Battle of Armageddon, 19:11-21
 - (3) The Millennial Kingdom, 20:1-10
 - (4) The Great White Throne Judgment, 20:11-15
 - c. The Eternal State, 21:1-22:5
 - (1) The New Heaven and Earth, 21:1-8
 - (2) The New Jerusalem, 21:9-22:5
4. The Epilogue, 22:6-21

Let's take this more detailed outline and note some important items—

1. Prologue, 1:1-8

2. The Revelation of Jesus Christ concerning the Things Which Are, 1:9-3:22

Revelation is divided into two main sections, the first dealing with John's **own** time (1:9-3:22) and the second dealing with the **end** times (4-22). Here the historical circumstances and spiritual needs of the seven churches are addressed.

1) The Vision of Christ, 1:9-20

- a. The setting for the vision, 1:9-11
- b. The description of Christ, 1:12-16
- c. Commands given to John, 1:17-20

2) The Letters to the Seven Churches, 2:1-3:22

- a. Ephesus, 2:1-7
- b. Smyrna, 2:8-11
- c. Pergamum, 2:12-17
- d. Thyatira, 2:18-29
- e. Sardis, 3:1-6
- f. Philadelphia, 3:7-13
- g. Laodicea, 3:14-22

Note—

- The word for church (*ekklesia*) is **never** used in the main body of the book where the great events of the end time are described (4:1-22:5).
- Revelation always uses *ekklesia* in connection with churches *on earth*, never with any body of the saved in heaven.
- All the churches of Revelation 2-3 are pictured as living under the sign, *until He comes* (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11). In addition, our Lord speaks **encouragingly** to the churches about things associated with His Second Coming (2:10, 23, 26-27; 3:10, 21). This is consistent with revelation given in other epistles that deal with the relation of the church to Christ's Second Coming (especially 2 Thessalonians).

3. The Revelation of Jesus Christ concerning the Things Which Shall Take Place after These Things, 4:1-22:5

This section records visions that relate to the end times. Having addressed the historical circumstances and spiritual needs of the churches of his own day, John turns to unfold for his readers the events surrounding the end times and the Second Advent.

1) The Tribulation Judgments, 4:1-18:24

These chapters focus on what is referred to elsewhere in Scripture as the Tribulation period (Matt 24:7, 9, 21), the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer 30:7), Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:24-27), and the judgment aspect of the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:1; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7 et al).

The Tribulation represents an unprecedented period of God's judgments against sinful humanity, an unmitigated outpouring of God's **wrath**. The Tribulation **begins** with the signing of the treaty between Israel and the antichrist (cf. Dan 9:27; 2 Thess 2:3) and **concludes** with the battle of Armageddon (Har-Magedon) and the return of Christ to the earth to **vanquish** His enemies and **establish** His kingdom.

a. The Background for the Tribulation Judgments, 4:1-5:14

Before the judgments of the Tribulation period are described, John sees two visions. The first shows God as the sovereign creator and ruler of the universe who has absolute authority over His creation. The second vision shows Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God who alone is worthy to "open the scroll" which involves carrying out the judgments recorded in it.

The Tribulation judgments (chapters 6-19) consist of **three** sets of judgments—seals, trumpets, and bowls—**each** having **seven** judgments. John presents these three sets as occurring in **order**, with the seventh seal judgment encompassing the seven trumpet judgments and the seventh trumpet judgment encompassing the seven bowl judgments.

The other chapters (7, 10-15, 17-19) reveal important information about the Tribulation period but are **not** arranged in chronological order. They either cover the entire period, spotlight an event within the period, or survey the first or last half of the period. Consider these chapters as **parentheses**, giving more information to help you understand what's going on.

It may be helpful to review the outline of Revelation:

1. Prologue, 1:1-9
2. The Revelation of Jesus Christ concerning the things which are, 1:10-3:22
3. The Revelation of Jesus Christ concerning the things which shall take place after these things, 4-22

Prologue, 4:1-5:14

A. The Tribulation, 6-19

1. Seal Judgments, 6

Interlude, 7

2. Trumpet Judgments, 8-9

Interlude, 10-15

3. Bowl Judgments, 16

Interlude, 17-19

B. The Millennium, 20

C. The Eternal State, 21-22

One more thing—the various judgments **increase** in severity as they are revealed. That is, the judgments get much **worse**. While the entire Tribulation period is a time of judgment, the end will be far worse than the beginning.

Back to the main outline...

- b. The Seven Seal Judgments, 6:1-8:5
 - (1) The six seal judgments, 6:1-17
 - (2) The first interlude—*tribulation saints and the 144,000*, 7:1-17
 - (3) The seventh seal judgment, 8:1-5
- c. The Seven Trumpet Judgments, 8:6-14:20
 - (1) The six trumpet judgments, 8:5-9:21
 - (2) The second interlude—*the two witnesses*, 10:1-11:14
 - (3) The seventh trumpet judgment, 11:15-19
 - (4) The third interlude—*Israel, the Beast, and the 144,000*, 12:1-14:20
- d. The Seven Bowl Judgments, 15:1-18:24
 - (1) The introduction to the bowl judgments, 15:1-16:1
 - (2) The seven bowl judgments, 16:2-21
 - (3) The fourth interlude—*Babylon*, 17-18

2) The Return of Christ, 19:1-20:15

Christ's return is in connection with the seventh bowl judgment, which includes the great earthquake and giant hailstones (16:17–21), the destruction of Babylon (18:8), and the defeat of the Antichrist and his armies at the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon (cf. 19:11–19).

Christ's return to the earth marks the transition from the Tribulation period to the kingdom age. With the return of Christ, the armies of the Antichrist are destroyed—bringing to a conclusion the Tribulation judgments—the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire, Satan is bound and placed into the abyss, the nations are judged, and the millennial kingdom is inaugurated.

- a. The Events Surrounding the Return of Christ, 19:1-10
- b. The Battle of Armageddon, 19:11-21
- c. The Millennial Kingdom, 20:1-10
- d. The Great White Throne Judgment, 20:11-15

3) The Eternal State, 21:1-22:5

The “eternal state” describes everything that follows the great white throne of judgment and the destruction of the present heavens and earth. After these events the kingdom age on earth in human history ends and merges into the eternal kingdom.

- a. The New Heaven and Earth, 21:1-8
- b. The New Jerusalem, 21:9-22:5

4. The Epilogue, 22:6-21

REVIEW—

- Why Revelation was written—
 - (1) Provide encouragement
 - (2) Show how God will bring everything to His planned end—evil will not prevail, Jesus Christ will!
- How to interpret it—in a consistently literal (normal) manner
- What is said—
 - (1) To local churches
 - (2) Concerning the future