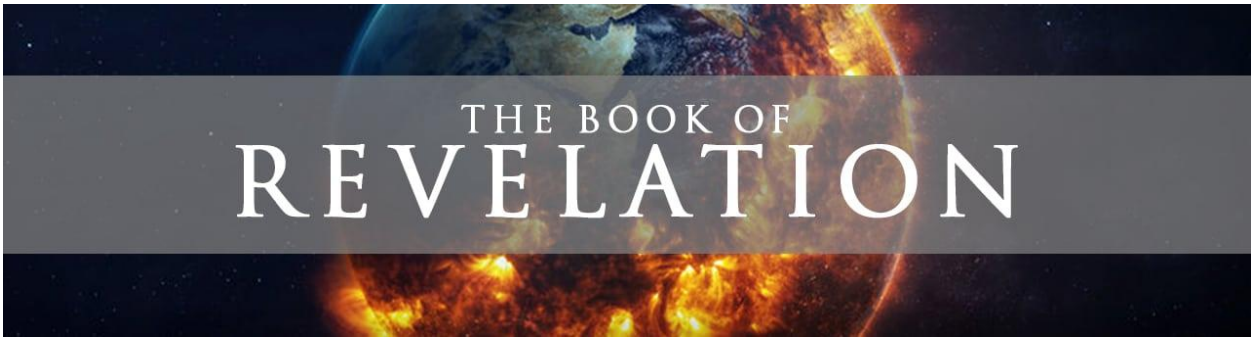


Revelation Guide - Part 1

As we arrive at the Book of Revelation in our New Testament Challenge, some might be encountering a book you've never read or that you tend to avoid because of its strange and confusing symbolism. The Book of Revelation is a particular style of writing known as an apocalypse. The word comes from the Greek *apokalysis*, which means uncovering, disclosure or unveiling. Key features of an apocalypse, which Revelation shares, are a human intermediary who receives visions or dreams that reveal divine truths, cosmic battles between good and evil and ultimate judgment.

Ways to interpret this style of writing have varied greatly through the church's history and among denominations. Pastor Ralph has attempted to provide a few notes to serve as a guide through the features of this often-misunderstood text. While there are some terrifying descriptions to be sure, Christians can be confident that God will prevail and will always look after his people.

Author:
Early tradition is unanimous that the Apocalypse was written by John the Apostle. Many of the early patriarchs claimed that the Revelation was the work of the Apostle, "which Jesus loved."

Date:
Book of Revelation has been dated as early as Claudius (AD 41-54) but most scholars date it during the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96).

Place of Writing:
Island of Patmos where John was exiled for his "testimony of Jesus." (Rev. 1:9)

Interpretative Approach:
1. **Preterist**: Those who take this view see the Apocalypse was written for the 1st century to Christians under Roman persecution.
2. **Futurist**: Those who take this view see everything after Rev 4:1 regards the future.
3. **"Blended":** Those who see this as describing Roman domination in the 1st century and see it as an explanation of history's sinful state.

Purpose:
Pastor Ralph leans toward a blended approach. Therefore, he sees the original intent of the Revelation to describe what was happening in the political and religious systems of the first century Roman empire. John then used these events to foretell that these same patterns of sin and degradation would continue throughout history until the Great Tribulation. He also wanted to assure 1st century Christians under Roman persecution that in Christ, there is always hope.

CHAPTER 1

1:3: "Blessed" (occurs 7 times) Hebrew for "finding right path amidst false pathways."
1:4-8: John's message to 7 churches in Asia (modern day Turkey)
- 1:4 Seven spirits: wholeness: 7 archangels in Jewish tradition
- 1:5 First born=pre-eminent
- 1:8 First and last letters of the alphabet

1:10: "In the spirit on the Lord's Day" (only here in scripture)
1:12: First vision: 7 golden lampstands=7 churches (vs 20)
1:14: "hair like white wool" (purity)
1:16: "7 stars" = angels (vs. 20)

CHAPTER 2

2:1-7: EPHESUS (largest of the 7)
- 2:2-4: Diligent Christians who have forgotten primary love for Jesus and one another.
- 2:6 Nicolaitans: heretical group of false teachers

2:8-11: SMYRNA: Only 1 of 7 still in existence.
- 2:9: Center of emperor (Caesar) worship.
- 2:10: "10 days" devil's power is limited. "Crown of Life": reward for faithfulness in suffering.

2:12-17: PERGAMUM
- 2:13 Capital of Roman Province (Asia). Home of many Roman temples.
- 2:14 Teaching Balaam: Idolatry/sexual immorality
- 2:15 Teaching of Nicolaitans: Loose living
- 2:17 White stone: Roman symbol of valor and new identity

2:18-29: THYATIRA
- 2:20 Jezebel: symbolic name for false prophetess
- 2:24 "Deep things" depth of sin: spells, magic, satanic
- 2:28 "morning star" = Hope (Jeremiah 33:15)

CHAPTER 3

3:1-6 SARDIS
- 3:1-2 God judges church: those who appear to have faithful works but are dead
- 3:3 "If you do not wake up, I will come as a thief." City was twice attacked by their enemies at night.
- 3:4-5 "White robes": represent purity and also simplicity. Sardis known for colorful garments

  "I will not erase his name from the book of life". Difficult statement; possibly means grace is always accompanied by repentance (not soiled garments).

3:7-13 PHILADELPHIA
- 3:7 Key of David = Jerusalem

3:8 Open doors provided by God. Jesus opens/shuts doors by His power for His purpose
3:9 "SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN" = Jews who oppose Christians? Jews who also practice idolatry who recognize Christians' relationship to God.
3:12 Overcomer is a pillar of stability and permanence. Believers are citizens of New Jerusalem.

3:14-22 LAODICEA
3:15-16 Water supply brought in from outside city was often tepid
3:18 Eye Salve: Phrygian ointment
3:20 Open door that luke-warmed have closed; but Jesus knocks so that they can open door of heart (BE HOT!) to Christ.

CHAPTER 4

4:1 Some think that John is transported to heaven here: Rapture! (Futuristic position)
4:2-4 Heavenly Scene
24 thrones/24 Elders: there were 24 priestly divisions among Levites
(1 Chron 24:4; 35:9-13)
4:6-7 See Ezekiel 1
4:8 Isaiah 6:2
Six wings to swiftly carry out God's will

CHAPTER 5

5:1 "Seal": sealed for divine secrecy
5:2-5 Who is worthy to open the scroll? Jesus: Only "Lion of Judah" (Gen 49:9, Isa 11:1)
5:6 "Lamb" = Greek: "Little Lamb"
- 7 horns: complete; perfection (horn = power)
- 7 eyes: completeness of vision

5:8 "golden bowls of incense…" Incense: Hebrew way to curry God's favor.
5:9-14: 7-fold praise song (worship): Rev 4:11
5:12: Attributes of the Lamb (power, riches, wisdom, might)
5:12 What the Lamb receives: (honor, glory and blessing)

CHAPTER 6

6:1-2 First Seal broken: 1st of 4 horsemen
6:2 "White" Horse represents military conquest (militarism)
6:3-4 2nd Seal: "Red" Horse suggests slaughter and war.
Sword: short sword used in close combat
6:5-6 3rd Seal: "Black" Horse = famine
Quart: for a day's wages = scarcity
6:7-8: 4th Seal: "Pale" Horse
Death and Hades = always linked. Pale Horse given authority but limited in amount of destruction
"Wild Beasts": result of land devastated by famine.

6:9-11 5th Seal
Martyrs who died because of faithfulness to the word
"White robe": sign of blessedness and purity
6:12-14: 6th Seal
Earthquake: symbolic of divine visitation (Joel 2: 28-31)
A geologic and astronomic upheaval of creation
Judgment even touches creation
6:15-17 "Great Day of Wrath"
6:15 Powerful fear God's judgment
6:16-17 People hide from God's/Lamb's wrath

CHAPTER 7

7:1-3: The angels are commanded to restrain destructive power of 4 winds (4 horsemen of Chapter 6?) until the foreheads of God's servants are sealed. Ezek 9: 3-8
7:4-8: Number of those sealed: 144,000. Symbolic number representing "completeness" (12,000 x 12=144,000).
1. Does the number represent God's ultimate faithfulness to Israel or depicting the church as the "new" Israel?
2. Some see the 144,000 as a reference to martyrs during tribulation period.

7:14: "Great Tribulation" (Dan 12:1, Matt 24:21, 29-30)
1. Is this a historical period of testing on earth (Rev 3:10) or a reference to the testing of all who follow Jesus? (John 16:33)
2. Some see this as a final period of testing before Jesus' return; while others believe it occurs after the 2nd coming.

CHAPTER 8

8:1-2: 7th Seal: Sounds of silence (Heb 2:20). Is this a time of heavenly worship?
8:2,6: 7 angels about to announce God's coming eschatological wrath with 7 trumpets
8:3-5: Another angel mingles incense with prayers or incense is the prayers. This is similar to the priests in the temple who offered praises on the golden altar of incense.
8:6-12: First of the 4 trumpets (used to announce both victory and defeat)
8:7: Hail and fire (Exo 9:18-26) One third of earth consumed by fire (sin's effect on nature!)
Key Point: one third represents divine restraint otherwise annihilation could be the outcome.
8:8-9: Second Trumpet (Sea)
8:8 Sea became blood (red sands of the Sahara). One third of marine life destroyed. Some attribute this to natural destruction such as volcanic eruption but mostly likely human cause (Exo 7:20-21)
Third Trumpet (destroyed one third of the rivers and springs).
8:10-11 Great Star (meteor)
Seen as God's visitation; fresh water

8:11: Name of star: Wormwood (bitter). Ancients saw spirits' association with water and darkness with judgment

8:12: Fourth Trumpet (Exodus 10:2-23) One third of the sun, moon and stars. Darkness=judgment of God.

8:13: Appearance of eagle or vulture is an omen of even worse dangers to come! (Luke 17:37)

CHAPTER 9

9:1: "star": A fallen angel?
"Bottomless Pit": ABYSS

9:2-4: Locusts: usually a symbol of vast destruction
Creatures have power to torment but only those who do not have God's seal on forehead

9:5-6: Mission not to kill but torment the wicked for 5 months (life cycle of locust?); these people will seek death, people in great pain seek deliverance.

9:7-10: Appearance of locusts (symbolic representation)
1) Size of a horse
2) Crowns of gold: Roman soldiers
3) Hair like of women
4) Teeth of lion: fierceness
5) Breastplates of iron: no vulnerability

9:11: ABADDON=Destruction
APOLLYON=Destroyer
King=Emperor Domitian? (compared to Roman god, APOLLO, who was a manifestation of the underworld)

9:13-14: 6th Trumpet
9:14: 4 Angels of Destruction: Euphrates is the eastern boundary of Roman Empire as well as Soloman's kingdom and the furthest extent of God's promise to Abraham (some see this as the invasion of the Parthians)

9:15: 1/3 of humankind (justice?)

9:16: 200,000,000 (another way of saying incalculable!)

9:17-19 Vision of Horses:
1) Some see this as a reference to Ezekiel 38-39 (GOG)
2) 3 plagues: 3 destructive elements
3) Some see this as invading armies of John's day, others as modern warfare!
4) A third interpretation is simply a description of demonic origin of warfare.

CHAPTER 10

10:1: "another strong angel" = Gabriel?

10:2: "little book" (scroll): similar to Ezekiel 3:36; eat scroll=consume God's word

10:3-4: 7 peals of thunder: God's voice (Psalm 29)

10:8-10: (Ezekiel 2: 8-3:3)
"Little book": A message to believers extrapolated in Rev 11:1-13?
Bitter stomach: prophecy is tough to take!

Sweet as honey: God's will prevails!

CHAPTER 11

11:1: Measuring rod or reed (Ezekiel 40:3-42:20)
(A symbolic way of assertion, presentation of temple)
11:2-3: Court of Gentiles (some see this as a reference to the church)
42 months=1260 days (a primary reference to a period of Jewish suffering under Syrian Ruler Antiochus Epiphanes in 167-164BC)
therefore this time frame is a symbol of a limited time where evil is free to rein!
11:4: "2 olive trees/2 lampshades" (Zechariah 4:3, 11-14)
Lampshade=symbolic as the church
Olive tree=oil (Holy Spirit)
11:5-6: Protection for God's 2 witnesses
11:7: Beast kills 2 witnesses
Most see this as "anti-Christ" others Nero or Roman Empire
11:8: great city=Jerusalem? Rome? "where the Lord was crucified"
Sodom/Egypt=represent the moral degradation and oppression in a world ruled by Antichrist.
11:11: Resurrection of the church in perilous times (Ezekiel 37: dry bones live!)
11:15: 7th Trumpet
Barclay: "A summary of all that is to come"
11:16-17: Worship in Heaven (Rev. 4-5)
11:19: Ark of His Covenant: symbol of God's presence and faithfulness

CHAPTER 12

12:1-2 "sign" – a common word used by John in his gospel for miracle
"woman" – probably not a reference to Mary; rather, a description of the Messianic kingdom (the ideal Israel)
12:3-4 Red Dragon: Satan (red = murderous character
- 7 heads: universality of power
- 10 horns: recalls beast from Daniel 7
- 1/3 of stars: symbolizes fallen angels or vast power of the dragon
- Satan seeks to kill Messiah

12:5-6 male child to rule all nations (Psalm 2)
From birth to ascension (Ps 110)
- Woman 9Messianic community) is nourished in the wilderness by God (church survives facing martyrdom)
- 1260 days of nourishment corresponds to 1260 days of persecution (Rev. 11:2)

12:7-8 War in heaven
Satan vs. Michael, prefiguring final days of tribulation: Satan and angels defeated
12:9 Satan as serpent of old (Genesis 3:1)

"accuser": (William Barclay: name of paid informant who made a profession of accusing people before authorities)

12:10-11: Satan overcome by "blood" of the lamb

12:13: Failing to destroy child (Jesus), Satan attacks Christians

12:14: Two wings of great eagle: symbolizes the church given power and freedom to seek spiritual nourishment in wilderness (in times of oppression)

12:15-16: River of water: Metaphor for overwhelming evil (some see as reference to Jewish war 66-73 AD)
"Earth open its mouth!" God at work
(Korah's rebellion: Numbers 16:30)

12:17: "Testimony of Jesus": Jesus' testimony (the cross?) not believers'

CHAPTER 13

13:1 "Beast" = Rome
10 horns = 10 kings (ten Seleucid rulers between Alexander the Great (app. 330 BC) and Antiochus Epiphanes (167-164 BC)
7 heads – Dragon also has 7 heads (Rev. 12:3)
7-eaded beast represents Rome's complete (#7) opposition to God's people
"Blasphemous names" = Roman emperors
Assumed names of deity

13:2 Power of Rome from Satan (dragon)

13:3 1 head slain = Nero, not JFK!
"Fatal wound was healed" = Nero committed suicide in 68 AD; many believed that he hadn't really died; others believed tat Rome reestablished dominance after Nero's unsettled reign

13:5-6 "Blasphemies" = emperors taking on divine title: Caesar is Lord!
42 months (Rev 11:2): approx. time for religious persecution

13:7-8 Rome makes war with saints; the world joins in worship of political system of Rome

13:11 "Beast coming out of earth": a deceptive leader who portrays himself as Savior, like a lamb but speaks like Satan

13:12: 2nd beast in 13:11: purpose is to get people to worship 1st beast
(is the 2nd beast the religious establishment that conforms to emperor worship?)

13:13-14 False worship leads to "great signs" (deceptive miracles) to deceive people

13:16 Mark of the beast (see Rev. 7:3)
In ancient times, defeated soldiers would receive a mark of defeat
also a mark used on official documents

13:17 Without mark of beast (Rome)
No commercial transactions; no food for those who refuse to comply with Rome

13:18 "666" - # of Beast
1. Nero 2. Titus 3. Roman empire

CHAPTER 14

14:1-5
- A vision in obvious contrast to the second beast in Chapter 13 (false religion; emperor worship)
- Is this 144,000 the same as Rev. 7:19?
- Mark: symbol of total allegiance
- 144,000 virgins: chaste followers of the lamb
- Virgins: celibacy? Or those who kept themselves from sexual immorality?

14:6-7 "eternal gospel": only place in Scriptures where gospel used in this manner
A reference either to normal usage or good news that Creator is to bring judgment on Babylon the great

14:8 Babylon the Great: Babylon is a symbol of oral degradation; most likely Rome (1 Peter 5:13)

14:9-12 3rd Angel
14:9-10 In Rev. 13:15, 17 – the reference is to those who refuse to worship beast; here, God's judgment is on those who worship beast his image and receive mark

14:10-11 "Wine of the wrath of God"
- Wine often used in OT to describe God's righteous response ("grapes of wrath") to humanity's refusal to respond to God's love
- Wine not mixed with water = wrath is full strength
- Fire and brimstone (burning sulfur)

14:11 Some call the final disposition that "their torment goes up forever" a sub-Christan doctrine. But consequences for rejecting God's love is a NT reality (Matthew 10:28)

14:12-13 A warning to persevere; price of apostasy far more severe than death!

14:14-16 "Son of Man": reference in Daniel 7:13 to Messiah; Jesus returning in judgment (final harvest)

14:17-20 Altar associated with prayers of saints in Rev. 8:3-5
- Do the prayers of saints expedite judgment of wicked?
  14:18 "power over fire": commonly a metaphor for authoritative judgment
  14:20 "wine press": treading of grapes was a familiar method describing execution of God's wrath on his enemies
  "outside the city": Jerusalem (same location were Jesus died on cross, outside the walls
    - Lit. 184 miles

CHAPTER 15 "A Scene from Heaven"

15:1: "Another sign": In chapter 12 the woman and great red dragon also called signs
7 angels & 7 plagues: (1 bowls of wrath in ch. 16) = God's complete judgment on unrighteousness; only final judgment to come

15:2-4: "An interlude of victory: Son of Moses" (Ex 15:1-18)
Moses' victory over Egyptian oppression

Compared to final victory over sin and unrighteousness

"Sea of glass": figure of speech to highlight luminosity of triumph over the beast

15:5-6 "temple of the tabernacle": an allusion to God's sojourn in the "tent of meeting"; the source of 7 plagues are from God

4 living creatures: (see Rev. 4:6) defined as intermediaries between God & 7 angels who are exalted beings whose purpose is to praise God (seraphim?)

15:8 smoke associated with God's glory

No temple worship until 7 plagues complete = then judgment