

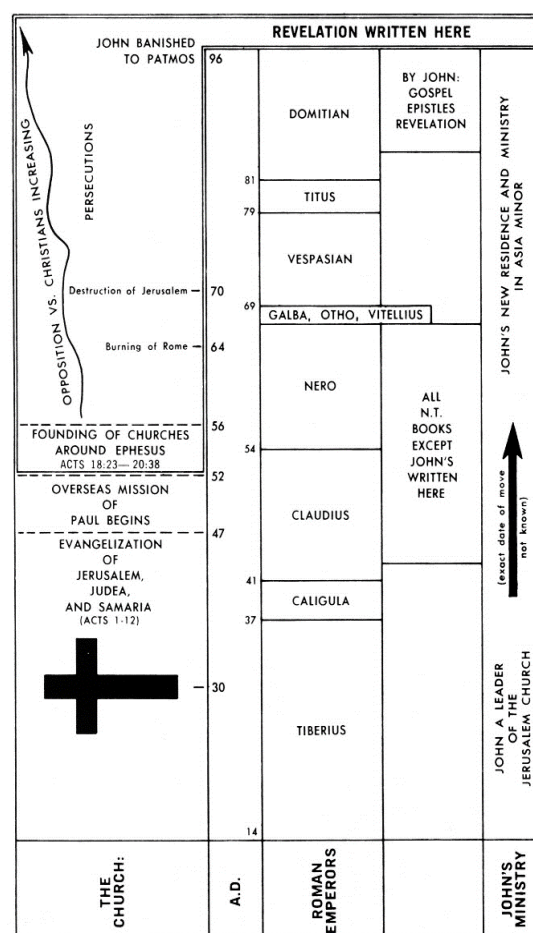
1. Introducing Revelation

The **Announcement** [Authority] of the Book

- Revelation begins with the statement, “The Revelation [*apokalypsis*] of Jesus Christ”. The word *apokalypsis* means ‘a disclosure’ or ‘to unveil’ (remove the cover), cf. Luke 2.32; Romans 8.19. In all its uses it describes *something* or *someone*, once hidden, becoming visible. The *someone* being unveiled is the person of Jesus Christ. The *something* is an unveiling of future events, or “things which must shortly come to pass” (1.1). Things are coming to a grand climax!
- The title “Revelation of Jesus Christ” can mean a revelation *about* Christ (the one being revealed) or a revelation given *by* Christ (the one who gives the revelation). Both are true. In 1.1, the emphasis is on the latter.
- The Revelation carries divine *authority*. The revelation was given by the Father to “Jesus Christ” which He, in turn, gave to John, sometimes directly from Himself and sometimes using an angel (1.1). John shared the message with the churches. God Himself stands at the apex of the chain of revelation – this is a divine unveiling.
- The title of the book is *singular*. There are numerous revelations throughout, but they blend into a single harmonious whole. We do not require a 67th book of the Bible – Revelation is the *capstone* and *climax* of divine revelation.

The **Author** of the Book

- The human author of the book is the apostle John. He refers to himself *five* times by name (1.1, 4, 9; 21.2; 22.8) just as he also refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” *five* times in his gospel. In his epistles he is “the elder” (2 John 1; 3 John 1), but in the Revelation a “servant” (1.1) and a “brother” (1.9).
- There is weighty external evidence for John’s authorship in the writings of early church fathers. Hitchcock says, “*In the second century AD, Justin Martyr identified the apostle John as the author. This became the accepted view in the early church (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Origen all held this view). So those who were closest in time to the writing of Revelation believed that the apostle John was the author.*”
- The **date** of the book is important. Although some date it to the reign of Nero (AD54-68), the evidence is very weak, and adherents are biased to suit their *preterist* interpretations (see “Approach to the Book”). The best evidence supports a probable date of AD95-96 during the reign of Domitian (AD81-96). See chart from Jensen (right).
- According to the Roman historian Suetonius (AD69-122), Domitian insisted on being called “lord” and “god”. This fits the language used to the Seven Churches which were facing pressure to participate in emperor worship. In addition, the evidence of the early Christian writer Irenaeus is compelling. He spent his youth in Smyrna, and claims to have been taught by Polycarp, a disciple of John. In his work “Against Heresies” (c.180AD), Irenaeus says the vision of the apocalypse was seen “*no long time ago, but almost in our generation, toward the end of Domitian’s reign.*”



The **Approach** to the Book (Interpretation)

- Revelation is a book of **symbols**. This is indicated by the word “signified” (1.1) which Newberry explains as ‘made known by signs or symbols’. The more general meaning of the word is ‘to make known’, ‘to indicate’ or ‘to declare’.
- When symbols are employed, they refer to something that is literal (cf. 1.20). They can communicate a volume of truth concisely and graphically (cf. 11.8). In addition, the Bible is consistent in its use of symbols. If they are not immediately explained in Revelation, the meaning can be found by comparison with other OT scriptures.
- **Methods of interpretation.** More than 1 in 4 verses of the Bible are prophetic. The OT has taught us to interpret these prophetic statements *literally*. For example, there were over 300 prophecies literally fulfilled by the first coming of Christ. Bethlehem was a real, physical place (cf. Micah 5.2)!

- The words of Revelation should therefore be taken in their ordinary, usual and literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate text clearly indicate otherwise. The golden rule of Bible interpretation still stands strong, “*When the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense lest it become nonsense.*”
- There are *four* main systems of interpretation of the book of Revelation. *Two* are noted below.
 - **Preterist.** Advocates such as *RC Sproul* and *Kenneth Gentry*. Preterism (from Latin *praeteritum*, ‘the thing that is past’) teaches that the events of Revelation have almost all been fulfilled by events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 or the fall of Rome in the 4th century. This interpretation denies the most likely date of the writing of Revelation and leads to ambiguous spiritualisation and allegorisation of the text.
 - **Futurist.** The dominant view of the early church (Irenaeus, Justin Martyr). Advocates include *JF Walvoord* and *JD Pentecost*. This is the correct view of Revelation. It interprets the events of Revelation 6-22 as chapters which “*literally and symbolically depict actual people and events yet to appear on the world scene.*”
- There are also *three* main views of the nature and timing of the Millennium. *Three* are noted below.
 - **Amillennial.** Believes there will be no (hence the prefix ‘a’) future, literal earthly 1,000-year reign of Christ. Understands the thousand years to be merely symbolic of a long period of time. This view interprets the Millennium as being fulfilled spiritually now in the church (either on earth or in heaven).
 - **Postmillennial.** Teaches Christ will return to earth *after* the Millennium which is not literal but symbolic of a golden age the church will usher in by preaching the gospel. The whole world will eventually be Christianised. Ultimately the gospel will prevail, and the world become a better place.
 - **Premillennial.** Christ will return to the earth *before* (hence the prefix ‘pre’) the Millennium begins, and reign over the earth with his saints for a literal 1,000 years. This properly fulfils the expectations of many OT prophecies (e.g. Psalm 2) and the teaching of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 24).

The Aim of the Book

- **Prophecy.** To reveal the future. Ultimately, “the tabernacle of God” will be with men and there will be no more tears, death, or sorrow! This is the glorious consummation of divine purpose. Against the dark background of intense *persecution* by the Roman Empire, believers could rejoice in the final outcome of human history.
- **Purpose.** God has a programme for planet *earth*. It will not always be defiled and distorted by sin. Christ is God’s agent to reclaim the earth, hence He is called “the prince of the kings of the earth” (1.5) – a King in waiting.
- The earth has been polluted by sin – capitalism, corruption, idolatry, and immorality – so much so that God will take the church out of the earth (3.10). When earth is on the brink of extinction, the Lamb will take the title deeds and reclaim it for God. After a series of judgments which will leave the earth almost desolate, Christ will come and reign for 1,000 years. *Politically*, there will be peace. *Militarily*, there will be no threat of war. *Socially*, there will be perfect justice and equity. *Financially*, there will be an abundance of prosperity and bread.
- **Practical.** Revelation is intended to have *sanctifying* effect on the daily life of the saints. The impending defeat of evil and subsequent judgment on the world *exhorts* believers to *repent* of and *resist* worldly compromise, spiritual complacency, and false teaching (2.14-16, 20-23; 3.15-19). But the fact God is in total control of all the events of human history *encourages* and *strengthens* believers to hold fast to their testimony, steadfastly endure trials, and resiliently hope in God (1.9; 2.10; 3.11; 14.12; 22.7).

The Analysis of the Book (Themes)

- [Old] **Testament.** Revelation is the glorious *capstone* and *consummation* of divine revelation, telling us the end of the story that began in Genesis 1. Without Revelation, the Bible would be an unfinished story.
- Fruchtenbaum says, “*The value of Revelation is not that it provides a lot of new information, but rather that it takes the scattered OT prophecies and puts them in chronological order so that the sequence of events may be determined. This book provides a framework for the understanding of the order and the sequence of events found in the OT.*”
- Of the 404 verses in the book, at least 278 allude to the OT, though there are no *direct* quotations.
- *Genesis*. If Genesis is the ‘seed-plot’ of the Bible, Revelation is its *harvest field*. See table (below).

<i>In Genesis</i>	<i>In Revelation</i>
Paradise is closed to man	Paradise is opened to man (2.7)
Man is barred from the tree of life	Tree of life is available to man (2.7; 22.2, 14)
Sin entered bringing sorrow and pain	Sin is banished with sorrow and pain (21.4)
The first tears are shed	The last tear is wiped away (21.4)
The curse enters and brings death	The curse is removed, and death is banished (22.3)
Satan enters the world stage	Satan banished to the Lake of Fire (20.10)
Adam and his wife ruling over the earth	Lamb and His wife ruling over the earth (19.7; 21.9)

- *Exodus*. Revelation is played out in miniature in Exodus. For example, Exodus begins with a people in *captivity* (like John on Patmos) and finishes with the *tabernacle* of God amongst men (21.3). God brought his people out of Egypt by redemption (Passover lamb) – the Agent of God’s great programme in Revelation is the Lamb. In Exodus, God used nine plagues in *three* groups of three. God will use *three* sets of seven judgments in Revelation. After the nine plagues, God Himself came with the tenth. So, Christ Himself will return in Revelation 19. There is much more to be found! For example: the tabernacle, lampstands, songs of redemption, gems of the HP etc. Revelation is Exodus repackaged.
- *Daniel*. There is a close correlation between the 27th book of the OT (Daniel) and 27th book of the NT (Revelation). Both are *apocalyptic* in character. Daniel shows us the future from the standpoint of *Israel*. Revelation shows us the future from the standpoint of *assembly* testimony in the present era.
- The visions of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 find their consummation in the final world empire of the Beast (Revelation 13). The *Son of man* is prominent in both books (Daniel 7.13; Revelation 1.13; 14.14) as is the archangel *Michael* (Daniel 10.13, 21; 12.1; Revelation 12.7).
- **Tribulation**. In Revelation, the “acceptable year of the LORD” has become “the day of vengeance of our God”. The majority of the book is concerned with the seven-year tribulation period and its associated judgment. This is the theme of the whole book. The first chapter presents Christ as the one supremely qualified to judge. Judgment is then poured out on the *earth* and *nations* (6-16), *Babylon* (17-18), the *Satanic trinity* of evil (19-20) and *sinner*s at the Great White Throne (20). Solemnly, judgment begins at the *house of God* among the Seven Churches (2-3).
- **Titles** of the Lord Jesus. Names and titles of Christ abound (at least x30) including *faithful witness* (1.5), *Son of man* (1.13), *Son of God* (2.18), the *Amen* (3.14), *Lion of the tribe of Judah* (5.5), the *Word of God* (19.13) and the *Bright and Morning Star* (22.16). However, the most common title by far is the *Lamb*. The word “lamb” occurs 29 times in Revelation (AV), 28 referring to the Lord Jesus (cf. 13.11 for the odd one out). It is the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God and the redemption he has bought by his blood that secures divine purpose (5.9).
- It is delightful to see *one* great revelation of the Lord Jesus in each of *three* major sections of the book. He is the Son of God *walking* (2.1), the Lamb of God *standing* (5.6) and the Word of God *sitting* upon a white horse (19.11).
- **Thrones**. The word throne occurs x40. Most of these references are to the throne of God in heaven – the highest most powerful throne in the universe (4.2). This is the Father’s throne (dais) on which the Lord Jesus is now seated (3.21). During the millennium, Christ will sit on His own glorious throne (Matthew 19.28; 25.31), or “my throne” on which believers are also invited to sit alongside Him (3.21) – we will share the administration of the kingdom with Him. In eternity, these thrones will be combined to form the “throne of God and of the Lamb” (22.1, 3). There is also a reference to Satan’s throne, once in Pergamos (2.13), the throne of the beast (possibly in Babylon, 16.10) and the solemn Great White Throne at the end of time from which the Lord Jesus will judge sinners (20.11).
- **Triumph**. The book contains *seven* ‘blessings’ for believers including having part in the first resurrection (20.6) and an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19.9). The primary blessing is contained in reading, hearing and obeying the words of the Revelation (1.3). In the early church, the scriptures would be read aloud to believers as they did not have their own copies. There is still blessing today for those who read, listen to and obey the word of God.
- **Tabernacle**. The word “tabernacle” occurs *three* times in the book (13.6; 15.5; 21.3) and “temple” *sixteen* times. Most of these references refer to the *heavenly* dwelling place of God on which the *earthly* tabernacle and temple were patterned. At the beginning of major sections in Revelation there is a glimpse into the heavenly reality, and an item of furniture is seen. There are lampstands (1.13), a throne (4.2), bowls of incense and the golden altar (8.3), the ark (11.19) and the tabernacle of testimony (15.5). In 19.11, heaven is opened to reveal Christ himself (the antitype). All is calculated to show that God is in complete control of events on earth, moving it all towards the ultimate purpose of the “tabernacle of God with men” (21.3).

The Arrangement of the Book

- The book can be divided in several ways. The divine structure is found in 1.19: “Write the things which thou hast seen (*Revelation 1*), and the things which are (*Revelation 2-3*), and the things which shall be hereafter (*Revelation 4-22*).”
- John’s *four* visions “in the Spirit” also serve as additional structural markers. See 1.10; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10.
- The scene of Revelation constantly switches between *heaven* and *earth*. This alternating pattern re-assures readers that the chaos on earth is being controlled by heaven. God is on His throne and superintends.

A more detailed arrangement of Revelation can be seen on the chart and is expanded below.

- **Prologue (1.1-8) and Epilogue (22.6-22)**. These two small sections are a *mirror image* with repeated themes. There is a literary tidiness and correspondence with no loose ends. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that God’s programme is likewise self-contained and complete.

- **Seven Churches (1.9-3.22).** These are selected to illustrate Christian testimony throughout this present period of the church age. The conditions and characteristics of testimony during this era can be seen in the characteristics of one, or perhaps a combination of more than one, of these churches.
- **Three Cycles (4.1-16.21).** The cycles cover thirteen chapters of the book, focussing attention on the seven-year tribulation period. This period is divided into two halves which are variously described in the book as 42 months or 1260 days. The three cycles are severe but righteous measures God will employ in order to reclaim this world for Himself. God will deal with the sinful and Satanic society of earth and its inhabitants and, by cycles of judgments, will clear the way and set the stage for the return of His Son to claim the inheritance.
 - *Seven Seals (6.1-8.1).* These are preparatory in nature and occupy the earlier part of the Tribulation. They will set in motion the providential dealings of God with society as He begins to dismantle the infrastructure of men's system of evil. War, pestilence, poverty and widespread mortality will escalate as society spirals out of control. Men will imagine the great day of God's wrath has already come but they will be mistaken (6:16-17). Still more severe visitations are on the way!
 - *Seven Trumpets (8.2-11.17).* These will follow the seal judgments with possibly some overlap. They will sound a loud call of warning to the 'earth-dwellers' and God uses these visitations to discipline the iniquity of men and their sin-saturated, satanic society. They will articulate unmistakable calls for men to repent but will largely be unheeded. Together, the seals and trumpets will inflict serious damage upon the earth and well over half of the population of the planet will be killed in the horrific devastations.
 - *Seven Vials (15.1-16.21).* These shallow dishes will contain the concentrated wine of God's wrath and they will be poured out in quick succession in the final stages of the Tribulation, bringing unparalleled suffering to the impenitent worshippers of the Beast.
- Each of these three cycles of judgment is prefaced by a **Prelude** and punctuated by an **Interlude**. The Preludes give us a vision of God's throne room and assert His right as Creator of the planet to reclaim it as His own rightful possession. The Agent employed in the plan of reclamation is no less than His own Son, the rejected Christ and the redemptive Lamb of Calvary. In the *Preludes* the repeated references to lightnings, thunderings, voices, earthquakes demonstrate that God's throne room has all the fire power well able to overcome sin and Satan's strongest opposition.
- The *Interludes* in each cycle present a window of encouragement and hope, demonstrating that when God is pouring His wrath upon sinful society, He will preserve a people for Himself – sealed, saved and separated to Himself.
- **Two Cities (17.1-22.5).** The book concludes with a description of two cities which are polar opposites. The evil of man's system is depicted as the harlot city, Babylon (17-18) and the glory of God's people depicted as the holy city, Jerusalem (21). Between the two descriptions of these cities and their diverse destinies we have the delineation of the *seven* great final events of world history (19.11-21.8). This series (note the repetition of "I saw" in this section) indicates the last events which will divide these two cities, and what they respectively represent, forever.

Taken and adapted from D. Gilliland (Lurgan, 2019)

The Arithmetic of the Book

- In all, there are 174 *cardinal* numbers in Revelation. In addition, there are 19 numbers which are fractions or cardinal numbers with fractions (3½). Finally, there are 61 *ordinal* numbers (e.g. second) which make a total of 254 numbers.
- Numbers suggests that everything is *carefully calculated*. God will bring everything to a tidy end. The main numbers are **three** (number of God), **four** (number of earth), **seven** (completion or perfection) and **twelve** (administration). When three is *added* to four, it equals *seven*. When three is *multiplied* by four, it equals *twelve*. God (3) is dealing in judgment with the earth (4). Ultimately, divine purpose will result in perfect and complete (7) administration (12).
- In the midst of the cycles of *seven* judgments comes a satanically inspired man whose name has a number – 666 (13.18). When he is revealed, the numerical value of the letters of his human name will add up to 666. The best man Satan can produce falls well short of divine perfection. In fact, the name "Jesus" adds up to 888 (in Greek)!
- Why is the number seven so prominent in Revelation? In seven days, God created the heavens and the earth. Likewise, in sets of seven he will bring it all to a glorious consummation.

The Assurance of the Book

- In Revelation 1, the glory of the risen Christ causes John to fall down at His feet as dead. Things are different at the end of the book. John is no longer breathless and prostrate with nothing to say, but has a conversation with Christ (22.16-17, 20 NET)! What has made the difference?
- David Gilliland says, "*The book of Revelation is intended to win our hearts to Christ, that we might be a people in communion with Him. John speaks to Christ and Christ speaks to John – the Bible ends in the final chapter with a conversation between John and divine beings. How does the first chapter of the Bible end? God created man in his own image, and God said to 'them'! Deity is communicating with man. In the last chapter of the Bible, man is communicating with deity. The disruption of sin has gone, and there is a reconnection because of the Lamb of Calvary.*"