

ALL THINGS NEW

The Last Things & Revelation



Introduction

The purpose of the book of Revelation is hope! To give us hope for the future. It serves to give us a number of signposts that point the way to where we're going. Signposts can point the way, but until you actually arrive you don't know exactly what it's like. The central theme is that of Christ's victory and His Kingdom over Satan and the kingdom of darkness. The title of the book in Greek is "The Apocalypse of John" which means the unveiling or revealing by John, and the main focus of the unveiling is Jesus. The title "Revelation" is fitting when we remember that it is Jesus, and not the symbols-prophecies-or their interpretation, who is being revealed in His fullness and glory.

You can think about prophecy a bit like a pre-operative appointment. A doctor informs you of things to come, often in language or with terms you've never heard before. Though it is scary, though there may be pain in the process, the end result is something good. Some things in biblical prophecy and in the book of Revelation are forthtelling (the word of the Lord for the present - at time of writing) and others are foretelling (future events).

Prophecies of the end were never meant to cause fear. Dragons and beasts written in an apocalyptic literary style were not meant to confuse but to give hope. In fact, interpretations or applications that stir up fear or are the result of fear cause us to move in the opposite direction Jesus intends. Jesus himself says in Matt. 24 that He doesn't know the day or the hour of His return (and we can assume He doesn't know all the specific details either) If that's true of Jesus then we can't either. So these things are to let us know in general what will happen so that we are ready and so we can recognize that the end is coming. An end where Jesus returns, Jesus is victorious over sin/death/evil, where there is a new heaven and earth and we, the followers of Jesus – known as the church, will spend eternity in the presence of God.

We believe that the real reason we don't have full details on the specifics and striking clarity on many important pieces is so that we will have one thing as we move towards the end. It is what the early church had, it's what we see in Acts, and the Epistles. Rather than a detailed knowledge of each date and event (that may lead to a life more distant from God) we are given HOPE that works itself out in faithful dependence to God.

Our hope is in one thing alone – Resurrection... because of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit in the same way Jesus was raised. This will take place when Jesus returns (second coming) and is linked to final judgement. The spiritual life I have in Christ is incomplete until my body, and all creation are made new without sin, death, decay - ALL THINGS NEW!!!

The book of Revelation is written by the apostle John in about AD95, though some also would date the writing in about AD67. Often how someone interprets the book of Revelation will determine whether they choose an earlier or later date of writing and whether they believe that some of the prophecies in the book of Revelation have to do with the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem by Rome in AD70. This letter and book of prophecy is written down by John to record what he was told to write by Jesus through an angel in a vision. God showed him all these things while John was under house arrest on the island of Patmos. He was being punished for sharing the good news of Jesus.

Revelation is written in "apocalyptic" form or style. This is a type of (Jewish) literature that uses symbolic imagery (metaphors) to communicate hope (in the ultimate triumph of God) to those experiencing persecution. Things aren't always ordered in a chronological timeline and are arranged for the literary style that includes interludes and flashbacks. The symbolism and literary style are part of the reason that there are different interpretations of the book of Revelation.

is why it becomes difficult to put together a concrete timeline.

In the same way Jesus taught in parables, God spoke about what is to come through prophets. Often the people hearing the parables at the time did not understand what Jesus meant until Jesus had explained it or until later events brought the truth to light. So understanding will take time and God's wisdom and voice to help you understand and have hope.

Revelation is ultimately about your relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and how the rest of the story will unfold.

Understanding

There are 3 main questions we want to answer in this resource.

1. What do I need to know to understand Revelation?
2. When will Jesus return?
3. What happens when I die?

What Do I Need To Know To Understand Revelation?

Interpreters of Revelation normally fall into four groups:

1. **Preterists** understand the book exclusively in terms of its first century setting, claiming that most of its events have already taken place.
2. **Historicists** take it as describing the long chain of events from Patmos to the end of history.
3. **Futurists** place the book primarily in the end times.
4. **Idealists** view it as symbolic pictures of such timeless truths as the victory of good over evil.

Most people are a mix of interpretations or perspectives. Many people believe that some prophecies from the Old and New Testament about the unfolding of Jesus' return have happened (eg. 7 Letters to 7 churches in Rev. 2-3) and others have not yet been fulfilled. Many people believe that the prophecies contain both symbolic pictures and literal references.

A Brief Overview of the Book of Revelation

(from the Life Application New Testament Commentary)

Revelation is a complex book that has baffled interpreters for centuries. We can avoid a great deal of confusion by understanding the literary structure of this book. This approach will allow us to understand the individual scenes within the overall structure of Revelation and keep us from getting unnecessarily bogged down in the details of each vision. John gives hints throughout the book to indicate a change of scene, a change of subject, or a flashback to an earlier scene.

John begins by relating the circumstances that led to the writing of this book (1:1-20), then relates special messages given him by Jesus for the seven churches of Asia Minor (2:1-3:22).

Suddenly caught up into heaven, John sees a vision of God Almighty on his throne. All of Christ's followers and the heavenly angels are worshiping God (4:1-11). John watches as God gives a scroll with seven seals to the worthy Lamb, Jesus Christ (5:1-14). The Lamb begins to open the seals one by one. As each seal is opened, a new vision appears.

As the first four seals are opened, riders appear on horses of various colors; war, famine, disease, and death are in their paths (6:1-8). As the fifth seal is opened, John sees those in heaven who have been martyred for their faith in Christ (6:9-11).

A set of contrasting images appears at the opening of the sixth seal. On one side, there is a huge earthquake, stars fall from the sky, and the sky rolls up like a scroll (6:12-17). On the other side, multitudes are before the great throne, worshiping and praising God and the Lamb (7:1-17).

Next, the seventh seal is opened (8:1-5), unveiling a series of God's judgments announced by seven angels with seven trumpets. The first four angels bring hail, fire, a burning mountain, and a falling star, and the sun and the moon are darkened (8:6-13). The fifth trumpet announces the coming of locusts with the power to sting (9:1-12). The sixth trumpet heralds the coming of an army of warriors on horses (9:13-21). In 10:1-11, John is given a little scroll to eat. Following this, John is commanded to measure the temple of God (11:1-2). He sees two witnesses, who proclaim God's judgment on the earth for three and a half years (11:3-14).

Finally, the seventh trumpet sounds, calling the rival forces of good and evil to a decisive battle. On one side is Satan and his forces; on the other side stands Jesus Christ with his forces (11:15-14:5). During this battle God reveals the absolute futility of Satan, who knows his time is short (12:12) and who, though he desires power and wants to rule, can only parody God and Christ. For example, the fatal wound that heals (13:3, 12) is an imitation of the Resurrection, and the mark of the Beast (13:16-18) imitates God's seal (7:3-4). In the midst of this call to battle, John sees three angels announcing the final judgment (14:6-13). Two angels begin to reap this harvest of judgment on the earth (14:14-20). Following on the heels of these two angels are seven more angels, who pour out God's judgment on the earth from seven bowls (15:1-16:21). One of these seven angels reveals to John a vision of a great prostitute called Babylon riding a scarlet beast (17:1-18). After the defeat of Babylon (18:1-24), a great multitude in heaven shouts praise to God for his mighty victory (19:1-10).

The last three and a half chapters of Revelation catalogue the events that complete Christ's victory over the enemy: the judgment of the rebellious nations, the Beast, and the false prophet (19:11-21); Satan's one-thousand-year imprisonment (20:1-10); the final judgment (20:11-15); and the creation of a new earth and a new Jerusalem (21:1-22:6). An angel then gives concluding instructions concerning the visions John has seen and what to do once he has written them all down (22:7-11).

Revelation concludes with the promise of Christ's return, an offer to drink of the water of life that flows through the great street of the new Jerusalem, and a warning to those who read the book (22:12-21). John finishes by praying, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20).

This book, and thus the whole Bible, ends with a message of warning and hope for men and women of every generation. Christ is victorious, and all evil has been conquered. As you read Revelation, marvel at God's grace in the salvation of the saints and his power over the evil forces of Satan, and take hope in the reality of his ultimate victory.

Key Concepts and Themes

As you read through biblical prophecy about the end times and Jesus' sure return (especially in the book of Revelation) there are several concepts to know that will help your understanding.

The Church Age – period of time from Jesus ascension to His Second Coming.

Seven Churches/Lampstands – Seven of the churches that existed at the time of writing. We can find similarities between these churches and our own churches today.

Rapture – Though this term can be used in any interpretation to refer to when Jesus returns for His church, but is most often liked to a Pre-millennial & Pre-tribulation rescue of the church from the earth before the great tribulation.

Return – When Jesus will return physically in the same way he departed.

Resurrection – The literal resurrection of the body. All people will experience resurrection. Followers of Jesus are resurrected to glory and unity with God, and the lost are resurrected to separation.

Dragon – In the book of Revelation is used to refer to Satan

Lamb - Jesus

Beast of Earth/False Prophet – An evil spiritual leader who supports the Antichrist to deceive people on earth (Rev. 13:11-17, 19:20) who will be conquered by Jesus.

Beast of Sea/Antichrist – A false Christ, possibly a political leader who will claim to be Christ or like Christ. A great personal opponent of Christ who will spread evil throughout the world and will be conquered by Jesus.

Prostitute – a false religious movement that the false prophet will lead likely in worship of the Antichrist. There is a second interpretation that Israel or even the church may be referred to as a prostitute in Revelation since this is a term used throughout scripture when they turn their backs on God.

Heaven & Hell (lake of fire) – Heaven has 3 meanings in the bible: 1. refers to creation and the place (out there) where the stars are, 2. the term is used as a synonym for God (eg. “kingdom of heaven” or “things given to you by heaven”), 3. the place where God dwells (the heavenly realm). Hell is the lake of fire (gehenna) where the devil, the antichrist and the false prophet will be thrown after judgement. Those who are not in the book of life will follow and spend eternity there too.

New Jerusalem – This is the place, in the new heaven and earth, where believers spend eternity with God

Babylon – an organized nation or political entity that defies God. It is also a real city in the bible. This can refer to nation or political entities opposed to God now and in the future that follow the pattern of opposition to God like ancient Babylon.

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – Executioners of judgement that are released when the Lamb (Jesus) opens the first four seals in Rev. 6

Great White Throne Judgment – the Last & Final Judgement by Jesus for those who are not followers of Jesus.

Judgement Seat of Christ – the Judgement for followers of Jesus to give account for how they lived for Him.

Tribulation – a 7-year period of increasing great distress (natural disasters, wars, plagues etc.). This is the period that includes the seals, trumpets, and bowls. Some people view the 2 halves of this period as involving different kinds of tribulations for different people.

144000 – Literal or metaphorical number of Jews who will follow the Lord or return to Him during the last days. This number itself lends itself to meaning the full or complete number of Jews returning to Jesus rather than an exact number.

The seven seals (Revelation 6:1-17, 8:1-5), seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6-21, 11:15-19), and seven bowls/vials (Revelation 16:1-21) are three succeeding series of end-times judgments from God. The judgments get progressively worse and more devastating as the end times progress. The seven seals, trumpets, and bowls are connected to one another. The seventh seal introduces the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1-5), and the seventh trumpet introduces the seven bowls (Revelation 11:15-19, 15:1-8).

Why would God bring judgements on the earth of those who don't follow Him as well as allowing the persecution of the church? Because Satan wants to keep as many out of the kingdom of heaven as possible so Satan will increase persecution as the end comes near. However, God is slow to anger and overflowing with grace and desires as many as possible to turn to Him for forgiveness and salvation before the end and will use suffering and judgement as a last resort to draw people to Himself. In the end, at present, and in the Old Testament we find examples of God letting people increase in their sin, permitting terrible things to happen, or even sending plagues/judgements as a last resort so that people might finally turn to Him having rejected His kindness and love.

What Happens when you Die?

This section does not refer to the final state, either with God or separated from Him. Rather what happens when you die before Jesus returns.

Common Views

Soul Sleep – This is an uncommon and unbiblical view that was written against as early as the 3rd century. It has been held by some people throughout the ages but now mainly by Seventh Day Adventists & Jehovah's witness. This is commonly viewed as heresy. 3 reasons for this: Humans need unity of soul & body to exist, sleep in scriptures refers to death, the parable of Rich man and Lazarus doesn't show this view.

Purgatory – This is predominantly a Roman Catholic belief and is not held by Evangelicals. This view believes that those who die in good relationship with the church go to a place called Purgatory because they are not good enough to go to heaven but not bad enough to go to hell. As Evangelicals we do not find this to be biblical and came about in church history through tradition and teaching rather than from biblical truth.

(Evangelical) Protestant Common Intermediate State - Hades/Sheol and Paradise. Hades is equivalent in scripture to the grave. It is the place that receives the unrighteous during the intermediate state and is apart from God. Early church fathers say that all go to Hades, but scriptures say in Ps 16 that the righteous don't. Instead, those who are saved and declared righteous go to a place called Paradise where they are with Jesus. Jesus tells a thief on the cross beside Him that on that day the thief would be with Jesus in Paradise. Both places are not the fullness of heaven or hell but are waiting places before Jesus' return and final judgement with no option to change final state.

Final Judgement

The present church age will end in judgement. It is a future judgement.

Hebrews 9:27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

Hebrews 10:27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

2 Peter 3:7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Revelation 20:11-15 The Judgment of the Dead

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Jesus is the judge, and all people will be judged. **There are 2 judgements** – The Great White Throne judgement (only for non-believers) based on the book of life, & The Judgement Seat of Christ (only for followers of Jesus) based on how we have used what we have been given (those who know more/given more are more accountable). This judgement is final and irreversible.

Millennium

The Millennium is a 1000 (literal or figurative) physical reign of Christ on the earth. It is based on Rev 20:1-10. A few good questions are; Why? Will there be one? Will the second coming be before or after? Will Jesus actually reign on the earth?

3 views.

1. **Ah-millennium** – There is no millennium (physical reign of Christ) but this period of time refers to the 1000 years of time leading up to Christ's return and final judgement.
2. **Pre-millennium** – Jesus returns before the millennium
This is the most commonly held belief and there are 2 different kinds of pre-millenniumism. Dispensational premillennialism is typified by a contrast between Israel and the church and holds to a pretribulation rapture of the church to protect them from tribulation. The second is historical or classical premillennialism which holds to a continuity between Israel and the church (though we don't believe the church replaces Israel) and believes in a post tribulation return of Christ.
3. **Post-millennium** – Jesus returns after the millennium.
The church will mature morally, spiritually & will slide into the millennium where the world itself has become effectively "Christian." This is an optimistic view of a golden age of the church that continues on into eternity. This is not a commonly held or biblical view.

When will Jesus Return?

There are several common beliefs about when Jesus will return. Some are more widely held than others, some hold more biblical weight than others. The views below are all Pre-Millennium views and includes a key passage of disagreement. Some see this as a clear pretribulation rapture to take the church from the earth before tribulation and great persecution, while others note that it uses common language and ceremony (in NT times) for welcoming a king home after victory and suggests that the rapture and return happen at the same time to welcome the King to reign.

1 Thessalonians 4:15–18 (NLT) ¹⁵ We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. ¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ So encourage each other with these words.

Pre-Tribulation

This view holds that the tribulation will not take place to discipline the church (believers) or to purify it (them). Jesus will return to rescue His church before the tribulation. When the word "rapture" is used, it is most commonly used to refer to a Pre-Tribulation rapture.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NLT) And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.

1 Thessalonians 5:9–11 (NLT) 9 For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. 10 Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. 11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

Matthew 24 is also used in this view to point out that in an unknown moment, Jesus will rescue His church (rapture).

Mid – Tribulation

Not commonly held, but the rapture falls at the ½ way point (3 ½ years) of the Tribulation before the Great Tribulation.

Post-Tribulation

Jesus' return won't take place until after the Tribulation. Often this view avoids the use of term rapture. This view sees the Tribulation as a time of testing and purification for the church and God will walk with His church through this time. This has a less literal interpretation of the last days and the period of Tribulation (possible not be exactly 7 years). This view holds that there is a distinction between the wrath of God and Tribulation. Believers won't undergo God's wrath, but will go through testing that God allows and persecution from Satan.

Matthew 24:29 (NLT) "Immediately after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." The noun form of the word "anguish/distress" in this verse has to do with persecution and not God's wrath. So it is often interpreted that the church will be saved from the wrath of God, but not that of Satan.

ABOUT THINGS TO COME

The Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada statement

We believe that God intervenes in the affairs of this world. At the time of God's choosing, **Jesus will bodily return** to the earth **in power and glory to judge and rule the world**, as God's Kingdom is fully and forever established.

We believe the promise of Scripture that God will create **a new heaven and a new earth** which will be the eternal dwelling place of those who have been made righteous in Christ.

We believe in the **bodily resurrection** of all humanity to stand before God for final judgment. Those who have not accepted His life-giving grace will be raised to experience eternal punishment being separated from God and all that is good. Those who have trusted in Christ **will be raised to live eternally in God's presence and receive the promised reward**.

Matt 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:24-29. 14:1-6; Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:11-15; 21:1-9

What's Most Important?

What's most important is that we would have hope in the reality that Jesus is returning, and those who have chosen to follow Him and have been made new will be resurrected to eternity with Jesus in a New Jerusalem (new heaven/new earth). There has always been and will always be persecution, but Jesus has warned us about it and walks with us and makes us strong while going through it. There has always been kingdoms and rulers who oppose God and Jesus and His kingdom are victorious over them all. There is a judgement, but Jesus has prepared you for it. Those who walk with Jesus need not fear judgement. Jesus has promised to never leave us and has told us what to watch for as the end draws near so that we are prepared, so that we will stand firm until the end, and so that we will have **HOPE!**