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# ENTER THE BIBLE: REVELATION

A BIBLICAL STUDY GUIDE

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**BIBLE**

# Overview

## Outline of Revelation

### 1. Christ and the Seven Churches (Revelation 1:1–3:22)

John sees a vision of the risen Christ, who directs him to write to seven churches in Asia, encouraging them to remain faithful.

#### A. Introduction (Revelation 1:1–8)

John addresses seven churches in Asia Minor, greeting them in the name of God, **Jesus**, and the seven spirits before the throne.

#### B. Vision of Christ among the Churches (Revelation 1:9–20)

John sees Christ, the Son of Man, among the seven lampstands that represent the seven churches, and Christ commands John to write what he sees.

#### C. Messages to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1–3:22)

Each of the seven churches is addressed with words of encouragement, calls to **repent**, and promises to the faithful.

### 2. The Seven Seals (Revelation 4:1–7:17)

In God's heavenly throne room, the Lamb opens the seven seals on a scroll, and with each seal threatening figures appear until John sees a vision of the redeemed singing praise to God and the Lamb for **salvation**.

#### A. The Heavenly Throne Room (Revelation 4:1–11)

God's throne stands in the heavenly throne room, surrounded by four creatures and twenty-four **elders** who offer continual praises.

#### B. The Slain and Living Lamb (Revelation 5:1–14)

John sees Christ as a slaughtered and living Lamb, and the whole **creation** joins in praising God and the Lamb for their saving help.

C. The First Six Seals (Revelation 6:1-17)

When the Lamb opens the seals on a scroll in God's hand, a series of threats appear, including four horsemen, a vision of martyrs, and a cosmic earthquake.

D. The 144,000 and Great Multitude (Revelation 7:1-17)

The threats are interrupted by a vision of 144,000 redeemed, and these turn out to be a great multitude from every tribe and nation.

### **3. The Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8:1-11:19)**

Angels blow trumpets, bringing six plagues upon the earth, only to have the judgments interrupted so that witness could be given to the nations, preparing for the announcement of the **kingdom of God** and Christ.

A. The First Six Trumpets (Revelation 8:1-9:21)

Angels blow trumpets, summoning plagues on sea and land, calling forth hideous creatures from the underworld and the River Euphrates, yet the ungodly refuse to repent.

B. John Commissioned to Prophecy Again (Revelation 10:1-11)

The movement toward destruction is interrupted by an angel who calls John to prophecy again concerning many nations and kings.

C. Temple and Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:1-14)

John sees a vision of the temple, which represents the community of faith, and two witnesses calling the world to repent. These witnesses are slain yet rise to life again.

D. Seventh Trumpet (Revelation 11:15-19)

When the peoples of the world give glory to God, the seventh trumpet sounds and angelic voices proclaim that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and his **Messiah**.

## **4. Conflict and Victory over the Dragon and Beast (Revelation 12:1-15:8)**

In a series of unnumbered visions, John sees the people of God threatened by Satan the dragon and his ally the beast, yet in the end the faithful are brought to victory beside heaven's crystal sea.

### A. The Woman and the Dragon (Revelation 12:1-18)

Satan the dragon is thrown down from heaven, and he persecutes a woman representing the people of God, although she is protected by God.

### B. The Beast from the Sea (Revelation 13:1-10)

A seven-headed beast, who is Satan's agent, rises from the sea to dominate the nations of the world and persecute the people of God.

### C. The Beast from the Land (Revelation 13:11-18)

A second beast rises from the land to make people worship the sea beast and to imprint people with that beast's name or number, which is 666.

### D. Followers of the Lamb and the Beast (Revelation 14:1-13)

A vision of 144,000 shows that those who follow the Lamb are blessed, whereas angels warn that the followers of the beast will suffer God's fiery judgment.

### E. The Harvest of the Earth (Revelation 14:14-20)

A vision of a grain harvest extends the hope that the faithful will be gathered in as redeemed people of God, while a vision of grapes being trampled in the wine press of God's wrath warns of the punishment that awaits the wicked.

### F. The Heavenly Temple (Revelation 15:1-8)

The faithful sing praises to God beside the crystal sea in heaven, then seven angels process out of the heavenly temple to bring plagues upon the earth.

## **5. Seven Final Plagues and the Fall of Babylon (Revelation 16:1–19:10)**

After angels pour seven final plagues onto the earth, John sees a vision of the fall of Babylon the whore, who personifies the political and economic powers that dominate the earth.

### A. The Seven Bowl Plagues (Revelation 16:1–21)

Seven angels pour out bowls full of plagues filled with divine wrath on the earth, yet the ungodly refuse to repent.

### B. Babylon the Whore (Revelation 17:1–18)

Babylon the whore, who represents the oppressive power that dominates the earth, rides on the seven-headed beast, until the beast turns against her and destroys her with fire.

### C. Judgment on Babylon (Revelation 18:1–24)

Angels speak judgment against fallen Babylon because of the city's arrogance, materialism, and violence. Babylon's allies grieve her downfall because it has diminished their own status and income.

### D. Celebrating Babylon's Demise (Revelation 19:1–10)

Songs of Hallelujah sound in heaven at the fall of Babylon the whore, even as the faithful hear that the bride of the Lamb is ready for the great marriage celebration.

## **6. From the Great Battle to the New Jerusalem (Revelation 19:11–22:21)**

The beast is defeated by the word of Christ, Satan is bound for a thousand years then destroyed, and after a final judgment John sees a new creation and new Jerusalem, where the redeemed worship in the presence of God.

### A. Defeating the Beast (Revelation 19:11–21)

Christ appears on a white horse to defeat the beast and his allies by the power of God's word.

B. The Thousand-Year Kingdom (Revelation 20:1-10)

After the fall of the beast, Satan is bound for a thousand years while the faithful reign with Christ; then Satan is momentarily released and destroyed by heavenly fire.

C. The Last Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15)

The dead are raised and are held accountable for their works, as written in the books of deeds, yet salvation ultimately is based on the book of life, which expresses the **mercy** of God.

D. New Heavens and Earth (Revelation 21:1-8)

A new heaven and earth appear, and new Jerusalem descends, as a voice from God's throne declares that death and grieving have passed away.

E. The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-22:5)

New Jerusalem has twelve gates through which the nations enter, and living waters flow through its streets, as the saints gather before God's throne in worship.

F. Final Warnings and Blessings (Revelation 22:6-21)

Revelation concludes with warnings against the ungodly but with repeated promises of the **blessing** to be found in relationship with God and the Lamb.

## Background of Revelation

Revelation is addressed to churches in seven cities in western Asia Minor (modern Turkey). It presents visions that John says he received while on the island of Patmos, in the Aegean Sea, off the coast of Asia Minor. John had apparently been exiled to Patmos because of his Christian witness (1:9-11). John recounts the visions in his own words, giving the visions clear literary form. He writes in his own peculiar Greek style, often ignoring proper forms of Greek usage.

The opening chapters show that the Christians in the churches addressed by Revelation faced several types of challenges: First, those in Smyrna and Philadelphia faced threats of persecution. Some in each city apparently verbally denounced Christians, placing them in danger of imprisonment and possible death. These readers receive encouragement to remain faithful in the face of hostility (2:8-11; 3:7-13). Second, readers in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira were confronted with questions of assimilation into the wider non-Christian culture. One specific issue involved eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. Some in those communities thought it acceptable to eat such food, but they are warned that doing so means compromising their faith too far (2:1-7, 12-29). Third, readers in Sardis and Laodicea seemed successful and prosperous, yet were spiritually dead or complacent. They are called to renewed zeal for the faith (3:1-6, 14-22).

These early Christian readers lived in the **Roman Empire**. Worship of the emperor was part of social life, and many cities in Asia Minor had temples to the emperor as well as to other gods. People often participated in imperial worship because Rome provided new levels of prosperity and opportunities for social advancement. The visions in the latter part of Revelation challenge this benign view of the world by pointing to ways in which the ruling power fostered false worship, engaged in violence against the faithful, and was obsessed with wealth. As an alternative to the oppressive powers personified as the beast and Babylon, Revelation calls readers to remain faithful to Christ the Lamb and to the city of God, new Jerusalem.

## Introductory Issues in Revelation

### Apocalypse

The Greek word *apokalypsis* or “apocalypse” appears in Revelation 1:1, and it simply means “revelation.” This term has also been given to other ancient writings that are written in a form like that of Revelation. Examples include **Daniel** 7-12 and the book known as 2 Esdras (or 4 **Ezra**), which is found in the **Apocrypha**. An apocalypse is a narrative in which an angelic being reveals a supernatural world to a human recipient and points to **salvation** at the end of time. Usually the revelations are given through a rich array of images. When writing the book of Revelation, John used a literary form that would have been familiar to his readers.

### Female imagery

Revelation includes the contrasting female images of Babylon the whore and new Jerusalem the bride (17:1-6; 21:2), while the people of God are pictured as a woman giving birth (12:1-17). One of John’s opponents is the woman **false prophet Jezebel** (2:20). Some find this use of female imagery problematic, since it seems to limit women’s roles. Others point out that these female figures play strong roles in the book, that male images such as the beast function similarly, and that John’s opponents include men (2:14).

### Martyrs

Revelation includes visions of Christian martyrs calling out for God to see that justice is done (6:9-11). The book also warns that the powers of evil will work to bring about the deaths of more Christians (12:17; 13:7; 17:6), while assuring readers that the martyrs will have a future place in God’s kingdom (20:4-6). Revelation does not glorify martyrdom or imply that Christians should seek it out. Rather, the book encourages all Christians to remain faithful in the face of opposition, knowing that God will not forsake God’s people but will bring them everlasting life.



## Numbers

Revelation includes visions that unfold in patterns of seven seals, trumpets, and bowls. Some passages play on the number twelve, since there are twelve gates to the new Jerusalem and 144,000 is the number used for the people of God. Such numbers do indicate completeness, as does the number 1,000, but they have no secret meaning. A special case is 666, the number of the beast, which corresponds to the name of a person (13:18). The most likely interpretation of this particular number is that it corresponds to the name Nero Caesar.

## Old Testament and Revelation

Revelation uses Old Testament language and imagery in nearly every chapter, making clear that the God of the prophets is the God to whom John bears witness. Surprisingly, Revelation does not include any exact quotations of the Old Testament. This flexible use of the Old Testament helps to show that God will be faithful and keep the promises made through the prophets, yet John does not assume that these promises will be fulfilled in a mechanistic way.

## Prophecy

Revelation identifies itself as a book of prophecy (1:3). In today's popular thought, prophecy is often equated with prediction, but this is not the way Revelation itself refers to prophecy. False prophets in the book are not faulted for making false predictions but for encouraging people to worship false gods (2:20; 16:13-14). Similarly, true prophets are not said to make true predictions but to call people to worship God and Christ (11:3; 19:10). Revelation is a true prophecy because it bears inspired witness to the true God and to the Lamb.

## Seven spirits

Revelation periodically refers to seven spirits. These spirits burn like torches before God's throne and are the seven eyes of Christ the Lamb (1:4; 4:5; 5:6). The identity of these spirits is disputed. Some think they are seven angels or angelic spirits. Others think that the number seven signifies completeness and that the seven spirits are a way to speak of the **Holy** Spirit.

## **Symbolic language**

Revelation communicates much of its message through vivid word pictures. The agent of God is **Jesus**, pictured as a Lamb, and the agent of Satan is the beast. These word pictures do not conceal Revelation's meaning but reveal something about the way God works, in contrast to the ways of evil. Many of the word pictures point to things of abiding significance. Just as the Lamb was real for people in the first century and remains real for people today, the beast symbolizes oppressive powers that were at work in John's time as they remain at work today.

## **Synagogue of Satan**

Revelation twice notes that Christians were being slandered by some from the local Jewish communities, whom the book calls a synagogue of Satan (2:9; 3:9). It is important to note that there apparently were Jewish communities in all seven of the cities mentioned in Revelation 2-3 and that there seems to have been conflicts between Christians and Jews in only two of these places. John does not demonize all Jews but is sharply critical of synagogue members who denounce Christians, since their words could have led to Christians being imprisoned and possibly killed.

## **Violence**

Revelation includes many visions in which there are destructive plagues and battles between the forces of God and the powers of evil. The book assumes that the powers of evil seek to ruin the earth and that God the Creator must therefore overthrow these powers (11:18). Significantly, the followers of Jesus are sometimes pictured as the victims of violence, but they are not the perpetrators of violence. They resist evil, but in the end the defeat of tyrannical powers comes through the word of Christ (19:15).

## **What will happen "soon"**

Revelation says that things will happen "soon," giving the impression that it describes events that are to occur shortly after the book was written (1:1-3; 22:20). Nevertheless, more than nineteen centuries have passed since Revelation was composed. Revelation speaks of things happening soon, yet the

visions John describes do not unfold according to ordinary chronological time. An hour or a day in the visionary world does not equal the same amount of time in the ordinary world. Revelation does not offer readers any way to predict when the end will come.

## Theological Themes in Revelation

### Babylon

Babylon is the name given to the whore that personifies the arrogance, opulence, and violence of the world's ruling power (17:1-18:24). The traits of Babylon resemble those of ancient Rome as well as other powers. Finally, however, the city is destroyed by its own ally, the beast, showing the destructive qualities of evil (17:16).

### Beast

A seven-headed beast is the agent of Satan, who seeks to dominate the earth by violence and economic control (13:1-18). The beast becomes the object of false worship and is the counterpart to Christ the Lamb, who brings redemption and true worship. The beast is overthrown in a final great battle and thrown into the lake of fire for eternity (19:11-21).

### Conquering

Revelation recognizes that evil powers conquer by killing and oppressing people (13:7). Christ, however, conquers by overcoming evil through his own self-sacrifice (5:5-6). The followers of **Jesus** are called to conquer by remaining faithful to him and to resist the forces of evil (2:7, 11).

### Creation

Heaven, earth, and sea were all made by God, the Creator (4:11; 10:6; 14:7). Creation finds its harmony in worshiping the God who made it (5:13). Because evil powers seek to dominate the world, the Creator works to bring their rule to an end, destroying those who would destroy the earth (11:18).

### Justice

The martyrs call out, asking how long God will permit injustice to continue on the earth (6:9-11). The visions of the beast and Babylon show tyrannical powers dominating the world through violence and the power of wealth (13:1-10; 17:1-6). God sends plagues that are designed to move the ungodly to **repent**, and God

finally destroys the powers that ruin the world, bringing liberation for those who were oppressed (19:1-8).

## **Lamb**

Throughout Revelation, Christ is portrayed as the Lamb who was slain (5:5-6). God's power is unleashed through Jesus' crucifixion, for the blood of Jesus redeems people from sin and brings them into God's kingdom.

## **Nations**

Revelation speaks often of the nations of the world. At many points the nations are taken in by the powers of evil and fall prey to idolatry (18:3). God judges the nations for their sin, yet the Lamb was sacrificed for people of every nation, and there are repeated expressions of hope that the nations will come to worship God (5:9-10; 15:3-4). The vision of the new Jerusalem extends hope that the nations will find a place there (21:24-26; 22:2).

## **New Jerusalem**

The new creation that appears in Revelation 21:1-22:5 is where the new Jerusalem is located. Readers in the seven churches addressed by Revelation find a sense of hope in knowing that God has a place for the faithful in this city, where the **tree of life** is located (2:7; 3:12). Although readers find themselves living in Babylon, the whore city, they find a new identity as citizens of the new Jerusalem, where they will reign and worship God forever.

## **Satan**

Satan or the devil is the personification of evil; Revelation pictures him as a dragon. Satan's power is manifested in untrue words and in acts of violence against the faithful (2:9-10, 13). Satan is banished from God's heavenly throne room, so that he can no longer accuse people before God, but allies himself with a beast who tyrannizes the world (12:7-12; 13:2-4). In the end Satan is banished to the underworld for a thousand years before being released and thrown into the lake of fire for eternity (20:1-10).

## Throne

A throne is a symbol of power, and the many references to God's throne emphasize the power to rule (4:2). Scenes of worship regularly center on the throne of God and the Lamb (4:10; 5:13; 7:10). Revelation recognizes that evil powers seek to maintain their own throne or power base in the world and to oppress people (13:2), but God remains sovereign and will prevail (22:3).

## Wealth

The Christians at Laodicea are complacent because of their wealth, and people ally themselves with the powers of oppression in order to secure more wealth (3:17; 18:3). When picturing the city of Babylon, Revelation notes how the obsession with luxury is often tied to arrogance and violence (18:9-24). The book urges Christians not to reduce life to obtaining commodities, but to pursue faithfulness and justice, which are forms of true wealth.

## Witness

A witness points to what is true. Throughout Revelation there is conflict between the forces of evil, which deceive, and the allies of God, who is true. Jesus is a witness who remained faithful to the point of death (1:5). Jesus' followers are also called to show steadfast faithfulness in the face of evil, for by their lives and their deaths they too bear witness to the power of God (2:13; 12:11; 17:6).

## Worship

Revelation assumes that all people worship someone or something. The only question is whether they worship the God who made them and the Lamb who redeems them (4:10; 5:14) or worship the adversaries of God, pictured as the dragon and the beast (13:4). Worship of God is associated with  **blessing** , whereas worship of the powers of evil brings destruction.

# Passages

## Revelation 1:8 – The Alpha and the Omega

### **BIBLE TEXT**

Revelation 1:8

### **SUMMARY**

The book of Revelation introduces God as the beginning and ending point of all things.

### **ANALYSIS**

God says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and omega is the last letter. Therefore, God is the beginning and ending point. Later in Revelation, Christ will also identify himself as the Alpha and Omega, the first and last, the beginning and the end (22:13). Since these statements appear in the first and final chapters, they serve as bookends for the whole message. Some have noted that in Revelation the end is not an event but a person. It is not so much that the book moves from one event to another as that it keeps moving back to God and Christ again and again. According to Revelation itself, God and Christ are the end of all things.

## Revelation 3:20 – Jesus Knocks at the Door

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 3:20

### SUMMARY

**Jesus** calls the church in Laodicea to **repent** by depicting himself as knocking at a door. If the Christians respond, they will enjoy renewed fellowship with him.

### ANALYSIS

Jesus standing at the door, knocking, is a familiar way to depict his desire for a relationship with people. The verse sits in the context of a message warning Christians who have become complacent. The church at the city of Laodicea in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) was prosperous and self-satisfied. In Revelation the people of this church are said to be merely lukewarm in faith. They are challenged to repent, and the image of Jesus standing at the door is a way of calling those who already consider themselves Christians to a renewed commitment to the faith.



## Revelation 4:6-11 – Worship around God’s Throne

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 4:6-11

### SUMMARY

John sees creatures and **elders** singing praises to God in the heavenly throne room.

### ANALYSIS

A heavenly company calls God “holy” and announces that God “was and is and is to come.” God’s holiness or otherness inspires a sense of awe and wonder. In the Old Testament, God is the “I Am.” In Revelation this is expanded backward and forward so that God is and was and will come in the future. God’s existence spans all time. Moreover, the heavenly chorus praises God for having created all things (4:11). Around the throne are four living creatures. One resembles a lion, another an ox, another a person, and another an eagle. Together these creatures represent the created order: birds, wild and domestic animals, and human beings. It is significant that human beings belong to the created order but are not at its center. God the Creator is the focus for praise.

## Revelation 6:1–8 – The Four Horsemen

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 6:1–8

### SUMMARY

Four horsemen appear when the Lamb of God opens the first four seals on the scroll he receives from God.

### ANALYSIS

These four horsemen represent threats that would have been real for people in New Testament times as well as for people of later times. The first horseman represents the threat of conquest. The second signifies the violence that people carry out against each other. The third points to economic insecurities, for it shows people spending their entire day's pay simply to put bread on the table. The fourth horseman personifies the power of death. The vision of these horsemen is designed to make people aware of their own vulnerability. As these and other threats appear in relentless succession, people are moved to ask, "Who can stand?" (6:17). This question prepares for the chapter that follows, where readers learn that those who belong to God and the Lamb are able to stand in the face of these threats.

## Revelation 7:1-8 – God’s People Are Marked with a Seal

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 7:1-8

### SUMMARY

The book of Revelation describes the people of God as sealed by God. Therefore, this great multitude of people belongs to God.

### ANALYSIS

Revelation says that the redeemed bear a seal on their foreheads. The seal consists of the names of God and the Lamb and shows that the redeemed belong to God (Revelation 14:1). The seal is presumably not a visible one but a way of indicating that people find their identity in relationship to God and Christ. This seal or relationship does not mean that people are exempt from all earthly suffering, but it does show that God has claimed them and gives them the promise of life everlasting. John hears that those who are sealed number 144,000 from the twelve **tribes of Israel** (7:4), but when he turns to look at them he discovers that they are actually a countless multitude from every tribe and nation (7:9). The 144,000 are not a special ethnic group. The imagery describes the whole people of God. The seal that they bear is the opposite of the mark of the beast, which is introduced in Revelation 13:11-18.

## Revelation 11:3–6 – The Two Witnesses

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 11:3–6

### SUMMARY

In the midst of a vision about measuring the **temple** of God, John is told about two powerful witnesses who will prophesy for 1,260 days. These figures represent faithfulness to God in the midst of opposition from the wider world.

### ANALYSIS

The two witnesses are figures that personify the community of faith calling the world to worship God. They wear sackcloth, which is a sign of repentance, and they look like figures from many points in Israel's history. Like **Moses**, they turn water into blood (Exodus 7:14–25). Like **Elijah**, they keep the rain from falling (1 Kings 17:1). Like **Jeremiah**, they are fiery preachers (Jeremiah 5:14).

Like **Zerubbabel** and **Joshua** the **priest**, they are pictured as lampstands and olive trees (Zechariah 4:3, 14). By encompassing the traits of these many prophets and leaders, the two witnesses exemplify the way the faithful are called to bear witness in many times and places, despite hostility from the unbelieving world.

## Revelation 11:15–18 – The Kingdom of God and the Christ

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 11:15–18

### SUMMARY

The sounding of the seventh trumpet heralds God's kingdom and the destruction of whatever would threaten the earth.

### ANALYSIS

The plagues that fall on the earth as each of the first six trumpets are blown do not move the peoples of the world to **repent** (9:20–21). Therefore, an angel interrupts the movement toward destruction in Revelation 10 and commands John to prophesy again. In Revelation 11:1–12, God's witnesses call the world to repent, and they are killed and raised. After this, however, many people begin to fear and glorify God (11:13). Only when this occurs does the seventh trumpet sound and the heavenly voices announce that the world has become the **kingdom of God** and Christ (11:15). Repentance rather than destruction is God's desire. Moreover, God is the Creator and therefore opposes the powers that seek to ruin the **creation**. God's kingdom means the destruction of those forces that would destroy the world God made (11:18).

## Revelation 12:1–6 – A Vision of a Woman, a Child, and a Dragon

### BIBLE TEXT

### SUMMARY

Symbols depict the threats that face the people of God. Nevertheless, God continues to nourish the church in the face of opposition from Satan, who is represented by the dragon.

### ANALYSIS

The woman clothed with the sun represents the people of God. She has traits that come from many different times and places. Like **Eve**, she has pain in giving birth and is confronted by a **serpent** (Genesis 3). Like Israel, she is initially pictured as a woman in labor and later as one who is carried on eagle's wings to a place of refuge in the wilderness (Isaiah 26:17; Exodus 19:4). Like Mary, she gives birth to the **Messiah**, yet she also symbolizes the whole Christian church (Revelation 12:5, 17). The story begins in heaven, where the woman appears with a crown of stars on her head, yet it leads into the wilderness as she is persecuted by Satan. Nevertheless, the woman experiences the saving power of God in the wilderness. Since the woman symbolizes the whole people of God, her story offers assurance that God can also meet others who suffer threats from evil in the same way.

## Revelation 12:7-12 – War in Heaven

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 12:7-12

### SUMMARY

In this vision an angelic army fights a satanic one, led by Satan the great dragon. Satan's defeat explains his fury and confirms God's power over him.

### ANALYSIS

War breaks out in heaven, and Satan is thrown down by the archangel Michael and his allies. This great conflict occurs after the **Messiah** is taken up to God's throne. It was understood that Satan once was able to make accusations against people before God (Job 1:6-12), but after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, Satan has been barred from the heavenly throne room. Moreover, the vision shows that Satan lashes out on the earth because he is angry at having lost out in heaven. Satan is like a caged animal who tries to do as much damage as possible in the space he has available. Evil is present and active on earth, but it is not all-powerful.

According to some Christian traditions, Satan rebelled against God and was thrown out of heaven at the beginning of time. This is a way of explaining how evil came into the world that was created to be good. For some, it accounts for the presence of the **serpent** who tempted **Eve** in the Garden of Eden. The story of Satan's fall at the beginning of time is not actually found in the Bible, although it is based in part on Isaiah 14:12-15, which compares an arrogant tyrant to a star falling from heaven.

## Revelation 13:1-10 – A Vision of a Beast from the Sea

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 13:1-10

### SUMMARY

A beast emerges from the sea and receives authority from the dragon. It enjoys a broad domain over the people of the earth and makes war on the people of God.

### ANALYSIS

The beast from the sea is Satan's agent on earth. Since Satan was pictured as a seven-headed dragon, the beast also has seven heads. The beast is the counterpart to the Lamb, who is the agent of God. Both the beast and the Lamb are said to have been slaughtered and yet returned to life, but there the similarities cease. Whereas the Lamb conquers by faithful suffering, the beast conquers by violent warfare. Whereas the Lamb redeems people of every tribe and nation, the beast oppresses people of every tribe and nation (5:5-10; 13:6-7). Readers living in New Testament times would have understood that the Lamb was a present reality for them. Similarly, they would have understood that the power of the beast was a present reality for them, and that this meant they were called to resist it.

The beast represents a form of tyrannical power that has operated at many times and places. **Daniel** recounts a vision of various empires pictured as a lion, bear, leopard, and ten-horned monster (Daniel 7:1-8), yet all of these are included in the one great beast in Revelation. Moreover, the beast's seven heads are later identified with the seven hills of Rome, indicating that the kind of threat posed by the beast was part of the world in which John's first readers lived. Many people refer to the beast as the antichrist, although that term is not used in Revelation itself. The popular depictions of the antichrist are created by combining various New Testament passages like pieces of a puzzle. The



term *antichrist* comes from the Johannine Epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), although those passages refer to multiple antichrists. Some then attach this name to the beast of Revelation 13, and these passages are combined with references to “the lawless one” mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10. This way of combining passages is part of some Christian interpretive traditions, but it includes many things that are not found in Revelation itself and goes beyond any particular biblical texts.

# Revelation 13:18 – 666: The Number of the Beast

## BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 13:18

## SUMMARY

After describing a beast that rises out of the earth and oppresses the world (Revelation 13:11-17), Revelation explains that “the number of the beast” is “the number of a person”: 666.

## ANALYSIS

The number 666 is one of the most famous elements in Revelation. John explains that the number corresponds to the name of the beast, which he says is also the name of a person. In ancient times, people gave numerical values to the letters in the Greek and Hebrew alphabets: a=1, b=2, and so on. By adding up the numerical values of the letters in a person’s name, one would come up with a specific number. The letters in the Greek name **Jesus**, for example, add up to 888.

The problem is that many different letter combinations can yield the same total. When ancient writers mentioned the numerical value of a name, they usually provided clues to the identity of the figure. In Revelation 13, the beast bears many similarities to the emperor Nero, who persecuted the church and claimed authority over the nations of the world. Nero was said to have died in 68 C.E., yet he was rumored to be still alive and ready to return. Similarly, the beast is said to have been slain and yet to have come back to life (13:14). Therefore, many interpreters note that 666 adds up to the Hebrew form of the name *Nero Caesar*. This does not mean that Revelation expects Nero himself to come back to life. Rather, wherever this kind of oppression and violence recurs, one can say, “It’s Nero all over again.”

# Revelation 16:16 – The Battle at Armageddon

## BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 16:16

## SUMMARY

A great conflict occurs at a place called Armageddon (sometimes spelled Harmagedon), the location of several battles in the Old Testament.

## ANALYSIS

Armageddon is the name of the place where the kings of the earth gather to battle against God. This Hebrew name means “mountain of Megiddo,” and Megiddo is a place in northern Israel. It is unlikely that Revelation uses the name to give readers geographical information about the location of this battle.

Throughout the book, Hebrew names have been used in a symbolic sense. For example, John calls false teachers **Balaam** and **Jezebel**, not because these are their real names, but because they are like Balaam and Jezebel of the Old Testament, who were idolaters (Numbers 31:16; 1 Kings 16:31). Later, John says that the city set on seven hills (that is, Rome) is called Babylon (Revelation 17:9). This does not give readers geographical information but lets them see the similarities between Rome and Babylon as oppressive powers.

The symbolism in the name Armageddon is that Megiddo was a place where opponents of God met their defeat. An invading army of Canaanites were defeated there, King **Josiah** was killed there when he refused to heed God’s warnings, and the place was associated with mourning (Judges 5:19; 2 Chronicles 35:22; Zechariah 12:11). To say that the forces opposing God gather at Armageddon means that they gather for their own defeat. When the battle is described in a later vision, readers learn that victory comes through the power of the word that Christ speaks (19:15).

# Revelation 17:1–18 – Babylon the Great Whore

## BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 17:1–18

## SUMMARY

An angel shows John the judgment of a whore named Babylon, who represents the violence and destruction that nations inflict. In the end, the beast with whom she is associated destroys her.

## ANALYSIS

The whore personifies the city that exerts an oppressive yet seductive power over the earth. As a prostitute, she reduces intimate relationships to a commercial transaction and relates to anyone who is willing to pay. Enamored with luxury, she wears opulent clothing and jewels, yet she is drunk with the blood of the saints. Revelation recognizes that many people find the pursuit of wealth to be intoxicating and that violence can be seductive.

The name of the city is Babylon, which recalls that in the Old Testament Babylon conquered Jerusalem and destroyed its **temple**. The fact that John pictures Babylon sitting on seven hills also draws on the idea that Rome—the power that conquered Jerusalem again in John’s day—was situated on seven hills (17:9). Both ancient Babylon and Rome were commercial powers, and both used violence to achieve their purposes. The city represents a form of influence that has existed in various times and places. Eventually, however, the whore is destroyed by the beast that had been its ally (17:16). The powers of evil are self-destructive. This gives readers good reason to distance themselves from the tendencies that Babylon represents.

# Revelation 19:15 – The Sword of Christ’s Mouth

## BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 19:15

## SUMMARY

God’s enemies suffer defeat by the power of the word.

## ANALYSIS

The battle described here marks the victory of the word of Christ over the powers that oppose God. The battle is normally identified by the name Armageddon, which was mentioned in 16:16. Although many think of Armageddon as a battle involving the usual military technology, the only weapon actually mentioned in Revelation is the sword that comes from the mouth of Christ. Most recognize that this sword symbolizes the power of Christ’s word. Christ is also said to wield an iron rod, which here is a tool of governing. The battle plays an important role in Revelation because it points to the end of the powers that oppress the world and seek to lure people into unbelief. The allies of Christ are not shown slaying the nations with their own weapons. Rather, the battle is a divine act that defeats evil through Christ’s word.

# Revelation 20:4-6 – A Thousand-Year Reign

## BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 20:4-6

## SUMMARY

Christ reigns for a thousand years, along with his followers who had been killed for their Christian witness.

## ANALYSIS

After the defeat of the beast and its allies, Satan himself is bound for a thousand years. During this period, the saints reign with Christ. The vision is difficult to locate in time and space. It seems clear that the location over the door to the bottomless **pit** cannot be located on a map (20:1-3). It also seems unlikely that the beginning of this period can be neatly located on a calendar. What is most important is that the followers of **Jesus** have a future with him. The description of the thousand-year kingdom does not actually say where the saints are reigning. Some think they reign in heaven, since that is where the thrones have been located in other visions (4:4). Others think they reign on earth, since Satan was banished from the earth at the beginning of this chapter. John says only that the saints are “with Christ” (20:4), and that seems to be sufficient. To be “with Christ” is the hope that this vision extends.

## Revelation 20:11-15 – The Last Judgment

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 20:11-15

### SUMMARY

All who have died appear before God's throne, where they are judged according to their deeds and saved by their inclusion in the book of life. Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire.

### ANALYSIS

The scene of the last judgment revolves around two sets of books. First, there are the books of deeds. These books assume that people are accountable for what they have done. Second, there is the book of life. The book of life represents divine **grace**. Since names are inscribed in the book of life from the foundation of the world, they must be placed in the book by divine grace. Those in the book of life are placed there because God wants them there (Revelation 13:8; 17:8). People are judged according to their deeds, yet they are finally saved by divine grace, by having God place their names in the book of life (Revelation 20:15; 21:27). People are accountable for what they do yet ultimately must trust that **salvation** is based on grace.

## Revelation 21:1-7 – All Things Made New

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 21:1-7

### SUMMARY

After the final judgment, John sees a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem. God dwells among God's people and gives the promise, "I am making all things new."

### ANALYSIS

The new Jerusalem marks the culmination of Revelation. Since the city descends from above, it is not a human **creation**. It comes down as God's gift. The city is pictured as a bride, thereby showing that it is the counterpart to Babylon the whore, the city that personifies oppression on the earth in Revelation 17:1-6. A voice from heaven indicates that in this city death and grief no longer have any place. The words echo various passages from **Isaiah** and other prophets, showing that the new Jerusalem is where God's promises of **salvation** are finally fulfilled.



## Revelation 22:1-5 – The New Jerusalem

### BIBLE TEXT

Revelation 22:1-5

### SUMMARY

In the new Jerusalem stands the **tree of life**. It is a place of perpetual light, where the people of God worship God and the Lamb face-to-face.

### ANALYSIS

The river of the water of life flows through the streets of the new Jerusalem. The imagery recalls promises from **Ezekiel** 47:1-12 and Zechariah 14:8, showing that God will be true to God's word. Within the city stands the tree of life. According to Genesis, the tree of life stood in the garden of Eden, but people were sent away from the garden and the tree because of their sin (Genesis 2:9; 3:22-24). The vision of the new Jerusalem holds the promise that the consequences of sin can be overcome, so that people can find true life in right relationship with God. Such life begins in faith, but its future is endless life in the presence of God. Therefore, the visions in Revelation culminate with the redeemed joining in worship before the throne of the God who created them and Christ the Lamb who redeems them.

# Podcast Episodes

**1.17: How Do I Read the Book of Revelation?**

**1.19: What Is Heaven Like?**

**2.10: What does the Bible say about the end times?**

**2.7: Can we believe in the Bible and science?**

**3.2 Lightning Round Part Two**

# Videos

**Imagery in Revelation**

**Last Book of Canon: Revelation**

**Revelation: Is the End Near?**

**Revelation: The Beast and the Lamb**

**Revelation: The Number 7**

**Revelation: Understanding “666”**

**Revelation: What does hope look like?**

**The Context of Revelation**