

# How Can I Read Revelation?



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Front image: Jan Massijs, "The Apocalypse of Saint John the Evangelist (1563)

*This is not an exhaustive nor highly technical study, but a simple introduction intended for a men's Bible study. See the footnotes to dig deeper.*

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**F**OR some Christians the book of Revelation is like a Halloween haunted house: only the brave dare enter! Why should we dare open it up? After all, greater students of the Word than us like John Calvin (1509–64) wrote commentaries on every New Testament book except for Revelation (along with 2 and 3 John). Martin Luther (1483–1546) followed the words of Jerome, who said in a letter dated 394CE:

The Apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as it has words. In saying this I have said less than the book deserves. All praise of it is inadequate; manifold meanings lie hid in its every word.<sup>1</sup>

The Dutch pastor, theologian, and even prime minister, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), wrote, “No book of the Bible has provoked such radically different interpretations as the Revelation of St. John.”<sup>2</sup> Even if you’ve just ever read it yourself and asked friends their understanding of it, this is evident very quickly.

Revelation is difficult, mysterious and seemingly unprofitable. But this attitude is tragic, for “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Revelation especially was intended by John to be read in public worship; this reading leads to one of its seven

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, “Preface to the Revelation of St. John,” in *Luther's Works*, Volume 35: Word and Sacrament I, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 398–99. For Jerome, see “Letter LIII,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (1893, repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 6102.

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *The Revelation of St. John*, trans. John Hendrik de Vries (1935; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 18.

“blessed” statements: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear” (Rev. 1:3; cf. 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14).

Unfortunately, because we as Reformed pastors have shied away from Revelation our people have as well or have sought instruction from less than kosher sources. One twentieth-century Reformed pastor described the result of this: “If our ministers continue in this manner to ignore the book of Revelation, they incur a just retribution of earnest but ill informed men outside the regular pulpits undertake to expound it, and if the Lord’s people run after such men to receive what they can not get from their own pastors.”<sup>3</sup> Here in the States, of course, the twentieth-century saw the new and novel idea— “Dispensationalism” —become the dominant position on what will happen at the end of human history: God really loves Israel, but since Israel rejected her Messiah, God created a new entity, the church; one day he’ll secretly rapture or take the church up to heaven so he can start again with Israel. And Revelation is read through this lens.

Back in 2001–02 and then in 2014–15 I preached through Revelation. Besides being the Word of the Lord for which we give thanks, Revelation remains relevant because it proclaims the politics of heaven. It reveals the truth behind what Christians see in the world, saying Jesus is Lord—not Caesar in the first century, not the U.S.

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<sup>3</sup> Albertus Pieters, *Studies in The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 80.

Constitution, not the U.N., not the *sharia* States of Islam, or anti-Christ communism in China. Revelation proclaims this to comfort us and give us confidence in our sufferings because the Lord Jesus is reigning and ruling over all things and everything is going according to his plan for the world. We see the façade of Satan's rule in the rulers and rulings of the world, but Revelation tells us the truth.

## REVELATION IS ABOUT JESUS

If you forget everything I say about every chapter and every verse, remember that Revelation is about one person: Jesus. Keep the main thing the main thing. If you're writing a report about *The Titanic*, don't veer off about the *USS Midway*. John says this is **the revelation of Jesus Christ** (v. 1). There are two main ways to interpret this phrase **of Jesus Christ**. It's either "the revelation *from* Jesus Christ" (NIV; NLT), meaning, he's the subject who doing the revealing,<sup>4</sup> or—and this is how I am taking it—this is "the revelation *about* Jesus Christ." He's the object of this revealing, the main theme the book is intending to communicate.<sup>5</sup> As the ancient Scriptures proclaimed Messiah to come, as Jesus said of himself, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39) and "beginning with Moses

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<sup>4</sup> This interpretation of the genitive as subjective is the majority view; see William Hendrickson, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (1940, 1967; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, seventh printing, 1990), 51. G.K. Beale argues that it is a generic genitive that can include both: *The Book of Revelation*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 183.

<sup>5</sup> This interpretation of the genitive as objective is followed by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 15; Pieters, *Studies in The Revelation of St. John*, 78.

and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27, Revelation is no exception. Think of a puzzle. You pour out all the pieces and they’re a big mess in front of you. You can get lost in the overwhelming amount of pieces and details. Then you sneak a peek at the box cover and you’re brought back to reality. The puzzle isn’t about all those pieces, it’s about the picture. Revelation is not about individual end-times pieces; Revelation is about a person. What this means for us is very simple. Instead of Revelation being a book that is turned into a speculative mess about such things as the 144,000, or the beasts from the sea and earth, or the “Battle of Armageddon,” we find meaning in the book because it reveals Jesus in his person (who he is) and work (what he’s done). For example, the 144,000 of chapter 7 cannot be abstracted apart from Jesus. Instead, they are those whom he’s already been said to have redeemed “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). In chapter 7 these saints of the Lord are described using the symbolic number 144,000 (12,000 of each of the 12 tribes of Israel). Therefore, the desire of the early Greeks who came to Jesus’ disciples and said, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (John 12:21), is our desire. As one writer said, “Christ *is* the Revelation.”<sup>6</sup> As another said, “We are not merely told here what [Jesus] will do, but we see Him doing it.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> William Still, *A Vision of Glory: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Didasko Series (Glasgow, Scotland: Nicholas Gray Publishing, 1987), 20.

<sup>7</sup> James Ramsey, *The Book of Revelation*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (1977; Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth, repr., 1995), 36.

## REVELATION IS JUST THAT—A REVEALING

It's meant to clarify not confuse; to communicate not obfuscate; to reveal not conceal. The opening word in Greek is *apocalupsis*, translated as **the revelation** (cf. 12:1, 15:1). This is a compound word, made up of *apo*, away from, *kalup*, to cover, and *sis*, the process of doing this. In other words, Revelation was not given to be interpreted by us but to interpret the world for us by taking the cover off it and showing us how Jesus Christ is central to all that ever will be.<sup>8</sup>

Note how Jesus is revealed: **God gave** this revelation about Jesus to the mediator between God and us, Jesus Christ, **to show to his servants**—his ancient people and us—**the things that must soon take place. He made it known** (v. 1). The verb **to show** (*esēmanen*) is used fifty-two times in Revelation for John's seeing something and the verb translated **he made it known** can be translated "signified" (NKJV). John writes what he saw in signs and symbols. This is interesting because this verb "signified" is the same word that John uses in his Gospel to speak of Jesus' "signs." Whereas Matthew, Mark, and Luke speak of Jesus' "miracles," John uses a word that interprets what a miracle is: a "sign." Signs are used to point us to something important. A freeway sign points to off-ramps for streets or use symbols such as an "X" to communicate that a railroad crossing is ahead. In a similar way the book of Revelation

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<sup>8</sup> See David A. DeSilva, *Unholy Allegiances: Heeding Revelation's Warning* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2013), 8.

communicates to us through signs, which point us to important *theological* truths. God didn't use signs to describe modern warfare in a way off future that only "prophecy experts" can discern, but to communicate to first-century Christians spiritual truths they could understand—and that we can as well by way of application. So how do we understand what a sign is pointed to? A few general rules will do.

1. *Things are not always what they seem to be.* Revelation is a visionary world that corresponds to reality. Satan isn't a big scary looking red dragon (12:3), angels aren't holding large cauldrons and tipping them over so they spill onto earth (16:1), and there isn't a manhole covering hell (20:1-3). These are vivid word-pictures to communicate to us what's happening in the spiritual world.

2. *The main thing is keeping the main thing the main thing.* Symbols are intended to communicate one main point to us and not special meaning for every detail. For example, in 9:1–11 we read of locusts who come out of the abyss. If we try to over-interpret, we'll end up saying these are cobra helicopters, with the teeth being .50 caliber machine guns, the hair being the fire out of the exhaust pipe, the breast-plates being the titanium armor, and the tails being tomahawk missiles.<sup>9</sup> This misses the point entirely as this vision had meaning for the first-century believer. What did Jews and

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<sup>9</sup> See Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming* (1973; New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 124. See the popular website BibleStudyTools.com: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/revelation-9/revelation-9-17.html>.

Gentile “god-fearers” hear in the synagogue? What did converts to Jesus Messiah hear in the church? The Old Testament! What does a locust do in the Old Testament? It destroys as in the plagues on Egypt or the judgment on Israel in Joel’s day.

3. *The meaning of many symbols in Revelation are already indicated in the visions of the Old Testament.* We need to know the Old Testament before we read Revelation. The Old Testament is the key to unlock the symbols and mysterious visions in Revelation. To crack the “code” in Revelation we need only look as far as the first part of our Bibles.

4. *When come across a symbol, it must be interpreted by the Analogy of Scripture (analogia Scripturae).* This is a Protestant principle of letting the clearer portions of Scripture interpret the more difficult portions.

5. *When come across a symbol, it must be interpreted by the Analogy of Faith (analogia fidei).* The analogy of faith are those basic doctrines of the Christian Faith that we have summarized for us in the ancient Apostles’ and Nicene creeds and that were later expressed in the Protestant Reformation’s confessions such as the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession. We must presuppose these doctrines any time we read a book of Scripture, for they come from Scripture. An example of this principle would be with Revelation 1:4. John sends greetings to the seven churches from the “seven spirits?” (1:4) We know that the Church has always believed in “*the* Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life” (Nicene Creed). The creeds speak of “*one*” Holy Spirit precisely because

the Scriptures do (Eph. 4:4)—in fact Revelation itself does (2:7; 22:17). As well, seven is an Old Testament image for fullness and it's used in Isaiah 11 to speak of the anointing of the Messiah. The one Spirit, in all his fullness is poured out upon the churches.

## REVELATION HAS AN ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

When John writes that God gave this revelation to Jesus who gave it to an angel who gave it to John **to show to his servants the things that must soon take place** and then again **blessed is the one who reads aloud...and blessed are those who hear, and who keep** (vv. 1, 3), he was writing to actual, historical, living, and breathing, first-century Christians in the seven cities of Asia Minor (v. 4) mentioned in verse 11 and then in chapters 2–3 (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).<sup>10</sup> These churches needed the strength this book offered in times of persecution and suffering while they awaited the return of their heavenly King, Jesus Christ.

This is such an obvious fact but the tendency of so many interpreters and even us is to pull Revelation out of its historical context and interpret it in the light of current events or of some future events that are predicted to come. What Revelation says to those ancient churches to comfort them it says to us by way of application to comfort us. In other words, *it's not about us although it's for us*.<sup>11</sup> One of my seminary professors

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<sup>10</sup> “A sound interpretation of the Apocalypse must take as its starting-point the position that the book was intended for believers living in John's day and age.” Hendrickson, *More Than Conquerors*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> This is one of the main critiques of the historicist and futurist interpretations we'll see in sermon 2. See Pieters, *Studies in The Revelation of St. John*, 47, 59–61. On the application of Revelation's original message to us, see Ramsey, *Revelation*, 28–29.

said 1:3 means that believers “who had not read it with their own eyes, could nevertheless understand the core of its meaning with sufficient clarity to respond to it as God desired and to receive from it the comfort, encouragement, and correction that God wanted them to receive.”<sup>12</sup>

## REVELATION IS SATURATED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

John calls Revelation **the words of this prophecy** (v. 3). It's a prophetic book in the same vein as the Old Testament prophetic books. We see that at the beginning of the book as well as at the end in 22:7, 10, 18, and 19. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that the word “prophecy” means “to predict the future.” It's true that the Old Testament prophets did this, but they were primarily preachers to their own generation of salvation and judgment, just like John is here. Revelation is not meant to predict the far-off rise of Russia or the European Union, nuclear war and advanced military tactics, or the revival of Babylon and Rome. Instead, John is called to be a prophet and commanded to “prophesy” (10:11) to the seven churches against the words of the false prophet (16:13) who has infiltrated the sheepfold (2:20).. Like the prophets of old, who warned of compromising with the ungodly world and the impending judgment of doing so but also the blessings of salvation, John warns the church of spiritual adultery but also proclaims a message of salvation to the overcomer.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 8.

<sup>13</sup> See Beale, *Revelation*, 184–185.

When I became a Christian, I was given three books: the Bible and two Hal Lindsey books, *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *The Rapture*. I was told I needed to study these two books because they were the key to the Bible. To crack the so-called code of Revelation, though, you don't need these books; you need the Old Testament.

## REVELATION IS TO LEAD TO OBEDIENCE

**Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it** (v. 3). Just listening to this word of God being read is not enough. Hearing must result in doing; the root of our faith must produce the fruits of good works. It's as if he's speaking to us like our parents spoke to us and as we speak to our children. "Did you hear me? Are you listening to what I'm saying?" Children respond, "Yes, I heard you," and what do parents say? "The why aren't you doing anything?"

To be a Christian means that God has entered into a covenant relationship with us. All covenants have two parts. He promises to save us and we promise to serve him. To be a Christian, then, is not a matter of just knowing the Word but obeying what the Word says. This is why James says to us:

be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (Jas. 1:22-25)

Revelation isn't a book of speculation, then, but of adoration and action. The Scottish preacher, William Still, once said it like this: "If the Word does not affect how we live, it has not been received as the life transforming power it is."<sup>14</sup> John calls the churches to faithfulness by rejecting the worship of local gods, Rome itself, and the Casar. He calls the churches to faithfulness by not participating in the aspects of society that required offering incense. He calls the churches to faithfulness by turning away from the allure of Roman prosperity that was promoted in all their media.<sup>15</sup>

## REVELATION AND INTERPRETATION

No book of the Bible has so many radically different interpretations because there are various interpretive methods or schools of thought about Revelation. The glasses we put on affect how we'll see it. Let me quickly mention these different glasses or interpretive methods.

The *preterist interpretation* says Revelation was fulfilled in the first century, except for the vision of the new heavens and new earth in chapters 21–22.

The *historicist interpretation* of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Reformers says Revelation is a chronological book of church history: the farther along you read the farther along in the past two thousand years you are.<sup>16</sup>

The *futurist interpretation* is the prominent view today of evangelical churches

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<sup>14</sup> Still, *A Vision of Glory*, 20–21.

<sup>15</sup> For a quick overview of Roman society as it impacted Christians, see DeSilva, *Unholy Allegiances*, 11–19.

<sup>16</sup> It's interesting that Pieters considers Hendrickson's "recapitulationist" view as a subset of the historicist interpretation. *Studies in The Revelation of St. John*, 46–47.

that hold to a Dispensational eschatology and says Revelation is about the so-called “end times.”

The *idealist interpretation* says Revelation speaks of big “ideals” through imagery.<sup>17</sup>

All these views except the idealist look to verses 1 and 3 as key: **the things that must soon take place** and **the time is near**, echoed later (22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20). To these verses the *preterist* says, “You see, everything in Revelation took place in the first century.” The *historicist* says, “Yep, the parts that were to take place in the first century took place, just like they would for every age.” The *futurist* says, “Well, what he means is that when the ‘last days’ begin these words begin to be fulfilled.” I believe John is intentionally echoing Daniel 2:28–32, which spoke of what has to happen in the “latter days.” John is saying those days are happening now (in the first century) because the church has been in the last or latter days since the coming of Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

For me, I think the best interpretative lens that makes most consistent sense is to take the strong points of preterism, because Revelation was originally written to seven congregations to comfort and encourage them, and the best of idealism, because the number “seven” used of the churches is symbolic of big theological ideas that find continued application in any age of church history, including ours.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> E.g., Ramsey, *Revelation*, 35–36.

<sup>18</sup> See G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 152–170, 181–182, 185–186.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Rainbow calls his view that of “Preterite Idealism.” See *The Pith of the Apocalypse: Essential Message and Principles for Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), vii–viii. For an older explanation of this view, see Pieters, *Studies in The Revelation of St. John*, 64–72.

Since Revelation's main theme is Jesus' soon return to save his suffering church and to judge those who persecute them, the heart of the book is seven parallel sections each climactically concluding with the Final Judgment. The following is a very basic outline:

*Introduction (1-5)*

- 1. John Commissioned as a Prophet (1:1–20)*
- 2. John's Prophetic Messages to the 7 Churches (2:1–3:22)*
- 3. The Heavenly Origin of John's Prophecy (4:1–5:14)*

*The 7 Cycles of Judgment (6:1–21:9)*

- 1. 7 Seals of Judgment on Earth (6:1–8:1)*
- 2. 7 Trumpets of Judgment on Earth (8:2–11:19)*
- 3. Rise of the Dragon, Beast, & False Prophet (12:1–14:20)*
- 4. 7 Bowls of Judgment (15:1–16:21)*
- 5. Rise & Judgment of Babylon (17:1–19:10)*
- 6. Judgment of the Beast and False Prophet (19:11–21)*
- 7. Judgment of the Dragon (20:1–15)*

*God's New Creation (21:1–22:5)*

*Conclusion (22:6–21)*

In structuring it this way, we're being sensitive to what the fathers of the ancient church called the literary device of "recapitulation." Those such as Tyconius (*ca.* 380) in his handbook on biblical interpretation, *The Book of Rules*, and Augustine (354–430) in his book to young pastors, *On Christian Teaching*, explain this principle in detail.

"Recapitulation" means "to return to the top." In Revelation one chapter or group of chapters describes an event from one symbolic point of view, while the next chapter or group of chapters returns to that event only to describe it again from a different vantage point with different emphases. This rule has been applied to Revelation in the history of the Church by The Venerable Bede in *An Explanation of the Apocalypse* (*ca.* 710), B.B. Warfield, and William Hendricksen.

If you look at the beginning in 1:1–20 there is a prescript and then if you look at the end in 22:6–21 there is a postscript. In both you hear the direct voice of Jesus.

The book then has its prophetic messages to the seven churches in chapters 2–3. Notice how verse 10 says John was "in the Spirit" and then that he heard a loud voice "like a trumpet." One of the ways we know chapter 4 begins a new section is that in 4:1–2 this pattern is reversed, as John first hears a voice "like a trumpet" (4:1) and then he is "in the Spirit." Also, notice how John sees a vision of Jesus Christ at the end of chapter 1 and then he receives the messages to the seven churches in chapters 2–3; in chapters 4–5 he again sees a more elaborate vision of God and the Lamb and then he writes what he sees in the visions of human history unfolding in chapters 6–22.

The heart of the book is this vision of heaven in which God is in control of the universe on the throne in chapters 4–5 and then his plan for human history in the scroll that Jesus alone can open in chapters 6–22. In these chapters there are seven main visions that mostly parallel each other, describing the period from Christ's first to his Second Coming. So each of these seven sections climactically concludes with the Final Judgment. This is what is called "recapitulation," literally, "returning to the top." It's like painting a wall. You start at the top, roll down to the bottom, then roll back to the top, only to begin all over again. John is painting a picture for us of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to do this he starts at the beginning and takes us to the end, but then he repeats it several different times.<sup>20</sup>

The *first cycle* is in 6:1–8:5 with the seven seals. The scroll that God the Father held in chapter 5, which no one was worthy to open except Jesus, Jesus now begins to open by breaking the seven wax seals on it. And when he does this he sends judgments upon the earth. What happens when he opens the sixth seal? It's the Second Coming and Final Judgment (6:12–17). Then chapter 7 gives a parenthetical vision of comfort to the church before returning to the scene of judgment in 8:1–5.

The *second cycle* is in 8:6–11:19 with the seven trumpets. First the seals were opened but now trumpets blast. What do trumpet blasts do? They have been used throughout human history to announce the arrival of someone or something of importance. And notice how the trumpets escalate the impending judgment as one-third of everything

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<sup>20</sup> This rule has been applied to Revelation in various ways since the ancient church. E.g., Tyconius, *The Book of Rules* (ca. 380), Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, and the Venerable Bede, *An Explanation of the Apocalypse* (ca. 710).

affected is destroyed. Chapters 10–11 give another parenthetical vision of comfort that the church will be preserved in the midst of judgment. And how do the seven trumpets end? Again, with the Second Coming in 11:15–19.

The *third cycle* is in 12:1–15:4 with the rise of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. This section introduces the enemies of Christ and his Church, who will be defeated later. The dragon is identified to us as “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan” (12:9). And notice that his war is in heaven, meaning, it is a spiritual war. But then after Satan is cast down to the earth in 12:9 two beasts rise, one out of the sea and one out of the earth, to fight the church. Then again at the beginning of chapter 14 there is a parenthetical vision of the church’s preservation before we read of the Final Judgment in 14:14–15:4.

The *fourth cycle* is in 15:5–16:21 with the seven bowls. Again, notice the progression from taking seals off the scroll, to trumpets announcing the judgments, and now the vision of bowls. What happens if you tip a bowl over? Whatever is in it pours out. Here the judgments of God are poured out. With the seventh and final bowl we reach again the Final Judgment in 16:17–21.

The *fifth cycle* is in 17:1–19:21, which takes us back to the two beasts in chapter 13. The first beast is now identified as Babylon and the second beast is now identified as the false prophet. Why Babylon? Babylon was the ancient civilization that took captive the church in 586BC. Babylon, then, was a symbol of the ungodly empires of the world. Who was the Babylon during the time John wrote to these seven churches? According to 17:9 Babylon, also portrayed as a prostitute, sat upon seven hills. Which empire was known as

*urbs septicollis*, the city on seven hills? Rome. So that's the original intent to the seven churches. How does this apply to us and every age? Over the past two thousand years what have we seen? Every empire that has persecuted the church has fallen. This is a comfort to us that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church; this is a warning to our nation. This cycle ends in 19:11–21 with the Second Coming, once again.

The *sixth cycle* is in 20:1–15, which takes us back to the first enemy we read of in chapter 12, the dragon. Now we read of his judgment. This is that great chapter about the thousand years, the so-called “millennium.” Obviously, you should be getting the hint that it's not really about a one-thousand year earthly period at all. It's about the devil being Christ's devil and Christ judging him for what he's done! At the end of this chapter in 20:7–15 we read again of the Second Coming and Final Judgment.

Finally, we come to the glorious and comforting end of all things after Christ returns in the *seventh cycle* in 21:1–22:5: the new creation. In contrast to the prostitute woman who was judged in chapter 18, we read hear of a pure bride who enters into marriage with her husband. Who is the bride? The church. Who is the husband? The Lord Jesus Christ. And when that beautiful wedding takes place, all things are made new, the curse is reversed, and all that God intended for his creation and his people is realized.

## CONCLUSION

Are you ready to open this book? There is so much confusion about the book of Revelation. But this shouldn't force us to keep it closed; it needs to be opened. As we rely on the Holy Spirit's illuminating assistance, and as we see how it was written to

real Christians in a time of real need before asking how it applies to us, as we keep the main thing of Jesus Christ and his Lordship over all the main thing, and as we keep the big picture in mind even as we focus in on the details, we'll be enabled to experience that promise of 1:3: **Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it.**