

Theme. The theme of the book of Revelation is unveiling, unfolding, as in to reveal or disclose. As curious humans, we want to know what's behind the curtain and, more so, what's coming. We don't like secrets unless they are secrets that we know. We constantly investigate, and we constantly conjecture and predict, out of our urge to know the future. God, though, we should know reveals. The Bible's innumerable prophecies prove God's prophetic presence. God knows not only the past and present but the future. And God lets us see just enough of the future to benefit us the most. Too much disclosure, and we'd give up. Too little disclosure, and we'd give up, too. In Revelation, God gives us just what we need to know.

Author. Revelation shares its author's name, John, three times at the beginning of its first chapter and a fourth time at the book's end. From the early church forward, tradition has soundly credited the disciple John, author of the fourth gospel book, as the John who wrote Revelation. In his later years, John left Jerusalem, where he had helped to lead the emerging church, to serve Asia Minor's churches. The book of Revelation and external sources record John's exile to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, as punishment for preaching the gospel. John's exile likely took place around 95 A.D., near the end of the persecutor Domitian's reign. Domitian's assassination a year later likely enabled John to return to Asia Minor to die there, probably near Ephesus, around 98 A.D., with his reputed tomb in the ruins of St. John's Church at Selcuk in modern-day Turkey. If that history is correct, then John may well have been the only one of the twelve disciples to die of natural causes, as the end of his gospel account suggests, and as tradition also holds. Read more about John in the sections on his gospel book and his letters.

Context. Revelation's canonical context is that it serves as the Bible's last book, well after the four gospel books and at the end of the New Testament's twenty-one letters. Somehow, some way, the Bible must capture and project forward everything that went before the Bible's last book. Revelation splendidly fulfills that difficult role. The author paragraph just above indicates the book's historical context. Following Jesus's resurrection, the church had emerged from Jerusalem, spreading from the Jews to the Gentiles, north and west all the way to Rome, where it had recently met with cruel persecution. Persecution in Jerusalem had sent the church outward to Rome, but Rome had responded with its own wave of persecution. Rome had also destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, responding to Jewish rebellion. The world had changed since Jesus's resurrection, in ways that Jesus had prophesied. John thus wrote to a maturing church, one that was moving from excitement over its establishment and growth, toward wonder at what its future held.

Structure. Revelation structures its extraordinary narrative around seven emerging visions, each symbolic or allegorical for future historic developments involving Christ and the church. The first vision, comprised of chapters one to three, shows Jesus standing among seven golden lampstands, then addressing seven specific churches, each church representative of patterns that followers would find among the churches. Revelation's second vision, comprised of chapters four to seven, begins a chronological narrative. John, taken heavenward, sees God's throne and several seals, each to be broken. Revelation's third vision, in chapters eight through eleven, involves seven trumpets announcing successive judgments. The fourth vision, in chapters twelve through fourteen, shows a symbolic Christ figure set against a mighty dragon. The fifth vision, in chapters fifteen and sixteen, depicts God pouring out seven successive bowls of wrath. The sixth vision, in chapters seventeen to nineteen, depicts the fall of Babylon, in symbols involving a woman and beast. The final vision, in the concluding chapters twenty to twenty-two, shows the new heaven and new earth, after which John concludes with a brief epilogue. Whether John used allegory to protect his writing from the scrutiny of persecutors, or whether the allegory is simply a better way to serve his communication purpose, Revelation's extraordinary imagery leaves the reader fully satisfied as to God's complete vision for our next-times future.

Key Events. Key events give further structure to John's remarkable vision. The first such event was God's instruction to John, who was in the Spirit on the Lord's day on Patmos, to write God's vision on a scroll. John recorded, in chapter one, his simultaneous vision of the resplendent Lord. After John recorded the Lord's words to the seven churches, God then called John to heaven, as the fourth chapter records, where John saw elders and creatures worshipping God on his throne. The fifth chapter records an angel asking who would open a scroll, when John saw a slain Lamb, the Lord Jesus, step forward to take the scroll, at which millions of angels encircled God's throne to praise the Lamb. Revelation then has the Lamb open the seven seals, one by one, extraordinary events in heaven proceeding from each of them. Great woes on earth proceed out of the seven successive trumpets, during which John receives a measuring rod for the temple. Chapter twelve records a war in heaven between Michael and his angels, and the dragon Satan, who in losing, God casts to earth with his evil angels. In figurative language, Satan pursues Christ's church on earth. Beasts on earth, perhaps representing kingdom and nation powers, arise to join Satan. But the Lamb stands on Mount Zion with his followers. Seven angels bring plagues to earth, pouring out God's wrath. Babylon, representing earth's powers, finally falls, giving way to Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, at the end of which Satan gains release from prison only to be thrown into

an eternal fire. God on a great white throne judges the dead at book's end, just before the Holy City, a new Jerusalem, God's dwelling place and the bride of the Lamb, descends from heaven. God restores Eden, his paradise garden.

Key Locations. Revelation's two key locations include God's throne in heaven, around which array worshipping elders and creatures, and gather throngs of celebrants, and earth, on which Satan and his beasts and demons pursue the church but suffer destruction from heaven. At Revelation's end, God joins those two locations when his Holy City, the New Jerusalem, descends to earth, restoring the Eden garden into which God had placed humankind at his creation. Revelation also mentions the location Patmos from which John wrote, and the location of the seven churches around Asia Minor to whom Jesus spoke. Yet Revelation's dominant theme is of the final battle that heaven wages on earth to rid it of Satan's presence, to restore humankind to God's presence. Revelation's last two chapters are quite clear as to the full benefit to humankind of Eden's restoration, that God's throne and Lamb will be in the Holy City, healing the nations, where humankind will find no more death, mourning, crying, or pain.

Revelation of Christ. The book Revelation finally fully reveals Christ the slain Lamb in his glory both in heaven and on earth. No other Bible book gives as complete and detailed a picture of Christ's authority, including his worship by angels, creatures, and millions of followers. No one can read Revelation without recognizing Christ's absolute power to conquer all evil, destroy all curse, and restore the earth to its original, pristine, garden condition, as God intended earth to be for humankind. John ends Revelation with the only fitting tribute to Jesus as the loving, creating, conquering God, which is to celebrate that he is coming soon.

Application. Revelation both challenges us to ensure our commitment to Jesus as Savior and comforts us that Jesus will indeed save, in every possible aspect. We need only come to him, taking, as Revelation 22:17 says, his gift of the water of life. Take from Jesus as he offers. Live in the sure knowledge that he is removing from us every pain, especially the pain of death. See in Revelation a fully worthy Savior who has a paradise place for each of us. Let Revelation stun you into the greatest admiration, greatest humility, and fullest worship of the one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Memory Verses. 1:7: "Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." 3:20: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me." 7:9: After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could

count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. 12:9: The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. 19:11: I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 20:11: 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. 21:1: Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 22:18: I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If any one of you adds anything to them, God will add to you the plagues described in this scroll.