

Introduction to Revelation

Where is it in the Bible?

Revelation is the twenty-seventh and last book in the New Testament and the last book in the Christian Bible. This book is sometimes called “The Apocalypse” because *apokalypsis* is the Greek word that means “unveiling” or “revelation”.

Who wrote it?

According to 1:1, Revelation was written by a man named John. The early Church identified him with John, the son of Zebedee and one of the twelve disciples. He was also presumed to be the author of the Gospel according to John and the three Johannine letters. However, neither of these things appears to be true. Because the author does not indicate that he had seen Jesus, many have concluded that he was not the apostle but an early Christian prophet with the same name. It also does not seem likely that he was the author of the Gospel and the three epistles because differences in style and theology.

When was it written?

There are a number of theories about when Revelation was written. The leading one is that it was written toward the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian, most likely around 95. This was the belief of the early church and is reflected in the writings of leaders such as Origen, Irenaeus, and others. The concerns addressed in the book correspond well with this time period. Another suggestion is that the book was written earlier during the reign of the emperor Nero (54-68). Yet another proposal is that what we have is a second edition which was completed around 95 and was an expansion of an earlier edition that was produced during the time of Nero.

What is it about?

“The book of Revelation calls Christians to remain faithful to God and Christ and to resist the powers of evil in the conviction that God will prevail and bring salvation in the new Jerusalem. The book consists of six cycles of visions, each of which warns of the dangers arising from sin and evil. Yet each cycle concludes by showing readers the glories of worship in God's presence, which gives reason for hope.”¹

How is it structured?

- I. Introduction (1:1-8)
- II. Christ and the Seven Churches (1:9-3:22)
 - a. Vision of Christ among the Churches (1:9-20)
 - b. Messages to the Churches (2:1-3:22)
- III. The Seven Seals (4:1-8:1)
 - a. The Heavenly Throne Room (4:1-11)
 - b. The Scroll and the Lamb (5:1-14)
 - c. The First Six Seals (6:1-17)
 - d. The 144,000 and the Great Multitude (7:1-17)
 - e. The Seventh Seal (8:1)

¹ Craig Koester at <http://www.enterthebible.org/newtestament.aspx?rid=66>

- IV. The Seven Trumpets (8:2-11:19)
 - a. The First Six Trumpets (8:2-9:21)
 - b. The Angel and the Little Scroll (10:1-11)
 - c. The Temple and Two Witnesses (11:1-14)
 - d. The Seventh Trumpet (11:15-19)
- V. The Dragon and the Beast (12:1-15:8)
 - a. Woman, Child, and Dragon (12:1-18)
 - b. Beasts from the Sea and the Land (13:1-18)
 - c. Followers of the Lamb and the Beast (14:1-13)
 - d. Reaping the Earth's Harvest (14:14-20)
 - e. The Heavenly Temple (15:1-8)
- VI. Seven Plagues and the Fall of Babylon (16:1-19:10)
 - a. Seven Bowl Plagues (16:1-21)
 - b. The Whore and the Beast (17:1-18)
 - c. The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)
 - d. Rejoicing in Heaven (19:1-10)
- VII. Final Visions (19:11-22:5)
 - a. The Defeat of God's Enemies (19:11-21)
 - b. The Millennial Kingdom (20:1-10)
 - c. Final Judgment (20:11-15)
 - d. The New Heaven and the New Earth (21:1-8)
 - e. The New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)
- VIII. Epilogue (22:6-21)

What are some things to look for?

- **Corruption of Society:** Revelation portrays an empire that is outwardly powerful and prosperous as being corrupt and unjust. The book “usually is recognized as offering the most sustained political critique of an 'anti-God society' ... that claims for itself the prerogatives of authority and power that belong to God alone”² in the New Testament.
- **God's Victory:** In spite of the powerful evil in the world, Revelation shows God as the one who is in control and will conquer God's. In fact, the victory has already been won through the Lamb who was slain.
- **Symbolic Language and Numbers:** This book is full of symbolism. The visions involve groups of seven. The numbers 12 and 1000 are also prominent, for example in the gates to the new Jerusalem and in the 144,000 people of God. Then there is 666, the famous number of the beast. There are vivid and colorful images of buildings, furnishings, and especially creatures. They are “like something Dr. Seuss might have thought up after a sleepless night reading Stephen King.”³
- **Worship:** Revelation portrays God and the Lamb as the ones who are worthy of worship by including songs of worship and praise throughout the text. No earthly power can come close. Worshipping God brings blessing while revering powers of evil leads to destruction.

2 Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 535.

3 Powell, 519.