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REVELATION

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 GOD'S
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REVELATION—TRIBULATION AND TRIUMPH

by Practical Christianity Foundation

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Cover art: The Resource Agency, Franklin, Tennessee

Strang Communications Design Director: Bill Johnson

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International Standard Book Number: 978-1-60098-037-4

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INTRODUCTION



The word *revelation* is derived from the Greek word *apokalypto*, which means to disclose, uncover, manifest, and reveal that which is hidden.¹ In the entire Bible, there is perhaps no other book that generates more conversation or controversy, none that is more studied yet less understood than this last book in the canon of the Christian Scriptures.

The problems of interpretation are generated from attempts to decipher each detail in such a way as to reflect the current world situation. However, as the world situation changes, so do the interpretations of this book. The first century Church expected Jesus to return in a very short time. It is evident that Jesus' closest disciples began to rethink their position even before the apostolic period ended. Toward the end of his life (around A.D. 68), [Simon Peter](#), the leader of Christ's apostles, wrote a second epistle that seemed to address such concerns. ⁸*Dear friends, don't ignore this fact: One day with the Lord is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.* ⁹*The Lord isn't slow to do what he promised, as some people think. Rather, he is patient for your sake. He doesn't want to destroy anyone but wants all people to have an opportunity to turn to him and change the way they think and act* (2 Peter 3:8–9). Ever since that time, Christians have struggled to understand the Book of Revelation in the context of world history as they watch the slow progression of events that impact their lives. In times of terrible persecution, famines, wars, and human atrocities, Christians have concluded that the end was near, wondering when Jesus would return and right all wrongs.

Because of these multiple streams of Christian thought, today's Christians, no matter how sincere and passionate in their pursuit of biblical knowledge, find themselves at a juncture that challenges their best efforts at unraveling the mystery of this marvelous book. In the midst of this noble pursuit, they may discover that there is no other subject that will generate more heated debate than this one. Instead of discovering the glorious Christ of John's Revelation, they often find themselves embroiled in debates that appear to have no satisfactory resolution.

Despite all of the debates, all of the numerous theories and interpretive systems, and all of the controversies that consume the energy of Christ's Church, there is perhaps no more exciting book in all of God's Word. It is the crowning jewel of God's unending plan to save for Himself a people that will live with Him and praise His Holy Name for all eternity. From the beginning of Genesis, one overriding, all-consuming theme comes to light in God's Word—*redemption*. Revelation is the consummation of that theme when Christ completely destroys all evil and invites His bride to the marriage feast of the Lamb. We view Christ as high and lifted up. Here we discover the glorious riches of His Kingdom that He has prepared for those who have been invited to share in this feast. Now, at long last, the Lord Jesus Christ ascends His throne that has been preserved for Him from the foundation of the world, and every knee bows at the awesomeness of His unsurpassed majesty, power, dominion, and glory. On this theme—on this revelation—all Christians who love the Word of God will universally and enthusiastically agree.

Generally, there are four positions by which the Book of Revelation is traditionally interpreted: historicist, preterist, futurist, and idealist (sometimes called the spiritual or symbolic view).

- The *historicist* believes that the Book of Revelation is an outline of the history of the church between the first and second comings of Christ.
- A *preterist* believes that a majority of the prophecy in Revelation was fulfilled in the first century and that the main theme of the book points to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

- A *futurist* believes that Revelation contains end-times prophecies and, more specifically, prophecies pertaining to the tribulation and second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- An *idealist* believes that Revelation is largely (in some cases exclusively) symbolic, that it should not be taken literally, and that it merely illustrates the greater cosmic struggle between good and evil.²

Obviously, these camps vary greatly in their viewpoints, and the impact and significance of this book depend upon whether one believes that the events depicted within have already occurred, are yet to occur, or have never and will never occur in a physical sense at all. Granted, these positions were created by men, defined by men, and defended by men. If any one of these positions could be shown to be true beyond question or doubt, all other positions would be rendered obsolete. Such is evidently not the case. Each position has certain arguments that seem valid and worthy of consideration, just as each position has certain areas of susceptibility and fallibility. Some verses of the book are more easily understood through the arguments of one position while other verses seem to make more sense as interpreted by an alternate position. This is both the frustration and fascination that surrounds the Book of Revelation.

The dilemma is that as soon as one agrees with a certain interpretation on a specific point, he is quickly dismissed by an opposing view as an advocate for the position that most closely aligns itself with that interpretation. To avoid such labels, some have even adopted new labels, such as “partial preterists,” but in doing so perhaps only further cloud the already murky waters.³

The point is this: each position has at least some merit or else it would not have gained credibility among the other viewpoints. There is no “safe” way to approach the interpretation of Revelation except to agree neither to fully adopt nor to fully reject any of these positions. Still, such an approach should not be misconstrued as indecisive or uncertain. Rather, it is only with a clear understanding of these and other viewpoints that one could even attempt to interpret this book. There is always a sense of mystery when attempting to explain the ways of God.

For instance, one can scarcely question that the [seven churches](#) addressed in chapters one through three were literal, historical churches that existed in Asia Minor, yet one would have great difficulty proving that all of the events depicted in later chapters of Revelation have already occurred. Therefore, one must conclude that the book contains both historical and prophetic elements. Similarly, both symbolic and physical elements coexist. Few can doubt that there is a great deal of symbolism in the book, yet to suggest that its contents in their entirety are merely symbolic illustrations of spiritual realms is to disregard the physical ramifications of its many conditional warnings, such as repent, change your life, return to God ([Revelation 2:5, 2:16, 2:22, 3:3, 3:19](#)). Indeed, the entire book is imbued with physical judgments, physical conditions, and physical consequences.

Furthermore, a variety of interpretations have been entertained regarding the authorship of Revelation. Most of the early church fathers agree that the book was written by [John](#), the beloved apostle of Jesus. Some critics doubt the apostolic authorship of Revelation because of the inferior style and grammar of the Greek with which the book was written when compared to that of other writings by John the Apostle.⁴ However, [Acts 4:13](#) refers to John as someone with “no education or special training,” so the use of such unpolished Greek should not be surprising, especially considering the urgency and exhilaration with which he surely felt compelled to record the visions as they were occurring. Some commentators even suggest that John owed the more skillful Greek demonstrated in his Gospel and epistles to an *amanuensis* (or secretary), who was, for obvious reasons, not accessible to the apostle during his banishment on the isle of Patmos.⁵ For these and many other reasons, the acceptance of an apostolic authorship is favored.

Even more a subject of debate is the dating of the text. Most preterists insist on an authorship occurring between A.D. 54–68 during the reign of the notorious Roman emperor Nero, which assists an explanation that the events in the book depict the grueling cultural climate of the first-century church, culminating with the destruction of the [temple \(view image\)](#) and the city of Jerusalem in [A.D. 70 \(view image\)](#).⁶ More popular and more convincing are the arguments that the writing occurred between A.D. 90–96 during the reign of the Roman emperor [Domitian](#). The historical recordings of early-church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Jerome substantiate a later dating of the book.⁷ Furthermore, some scholars have suggested that chapters two and three reveal the prominence of certain

cities that would only be historically consistent with their conditions in the late first century.⁸

An in-depth study of the varied interpretations regarding the countless symbols, numbers, events, judgments, sequences, and visions presented in Revelation is surely better reserved for those books which endeavor to present a thorough critique. In virtually every book written about Revelation, even the smallest details are credited with having monumental significance. Ultimately, there is far too much controversy over Revelation to be adequately presented in what is intended as a devotional study. With the preceding foundation laid, we approach this commentary on Revelation from the viewpoint that the prophecies within are perhaps telescopic (also called expanded or double-fulfillment prophecy). Whereas, not to dismiss altogether the possibility of an earlier date of authorship and a partial fulfillment of certain prophecies with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, we uphold the tenet that the events described within Revelation pertain to the final judgment of Almighty God upon the reprobate inhabitants of the earth in the last days. Apart from such an interpretation, one might find little validity or usefulness to this book in the modern world.

Almighty God has yet to judge the entire sum of unrepentant inhabitants on the earth (*Revelation 6:16–17; 14:7*). He has yet to pour out the full measure of His wrath and indignation (*Revelation 14:10*). The world has yet to experience the utter devastation that will come upon its environment (*Revelation 16*). The Lord Jesus Christ has yet to return to the earth in triumphant glory (*Revelation 19:11–16*), to conquer wholly the world's evil (*Revelation 19:19–21*), to reign upon the earth for a thousand years (*Revelation 20:1–5*), to finish the judgment of Satan and his followers (*Revelation 20:7–15*), or to establish and reign in His eternal Kingdom with those He has redeemed (*Revelation 21, 22*).

Aside from the wrath and tribulation uniquely depicted in Revelation, no other book so fully illustrates the magnificent splendor of the everlasting Kingdom that awaits those who have placed their faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Indeed, there is much to be gained by reading this book despite its tendency at times to seem puzzling, overwhelming, and even frightening.

So, what is the benefit in reading a book whose interpretation is so difficult to affirm with absolute certainty? God did not give us the Book of Revelation to frustrate us but to strengthen us, not to confuse us but to encourage us.⁹ Instead, we should take confidence both to persevere in the

midst of tribulation and to anticipate the Lord Jesus Christ's glorious, ultimate triumph. Therefore, we approach this book with full cognizance of the debates with which the Christian community struggles, but with full devotion to the Savior Who has redeemed us, Who is redeeming us, and Who will one day redeem us when He ushers us into His eternal Kingdom. While we acknowledge that we now "see a blurred image in a mirror, then we will see very clearly" (*1 Corinthians 13:12*) and admit that our understanding has been obscured by the boundaries of our human limitations. We can perhaps find the simplest benefit written in the first lines of the first chapter: "Blessed is the one who reads, as well as those who hear the words of this prophecy and pay attention to what is written in it because the time is near" (*Revelation 1:3*).

1. J. D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1962), 1024.
2. Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation: A Reasonable Guide to Understanding the Last Book in the Bible* (1957; reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 135–146.
3. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 153–159.
4. Bruce B. Barton et al., *Life Application Bible Commentary: Revelation* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2000), xi–xii.
5. Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 13.
6. Barton et al., *Life Application Bible Commentary: Revelation*, xiii.
7. Albert Barnes, *Revelation, of Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (1884; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), xlvi–xlix.
8. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, of The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 19.
9. Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2000), 11–13.

Revelation 2:5

⁵ Remember how far you have fallen. Return to me and change the way you think and act, and do what you did at first. I will come to you and take your lamp stand from its place if you don't change.

Revelation 2:16

¹⁶ So return to me and change the way you think and act, or I will come to you quickly and wage war against them with the sword from my mouth.

Revelation 2:22

²² Watch me! I'm going to throw her into a sickbed. Those who commit sexual sins with her will also suffer a lot, unless they turn away from what she is doing.

Revelation 3:3

³ So remember what you received and heard. Obey, and change the way you think and act. If you're not alert, I'll come like a thief. You don't know when I will come.

Revelation 3:19

¹⁹ I correct and discipline everyone I love. Take this seriously, and change the way you think and act.

Acts 4:13

¹³ After they found out that Peter and John had no education or special training, they were surprised to see how boldly they spoke. They realized that these men had been with Jesus.

Revelation 6:16-17

¹⁶ They said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the anger of the lamb, ¹⁷ because the frightening day of their anger has come, and who is able to endure it?"

Revelation 14:7

⁷ The angel said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the time has come for him to judge. Worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs.”

Revelation 14:10

¹⁰ will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured unmixed into the cup of God’s anger. Then he will be tortured by fiery sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the lamb.

Revelation 19:19-21

¹⁹ I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰ The beast and the false prophet who had done miracles for the beast were captured. By these miracles the false prophet had deceived those who had the brand of the beast and worshiped its statue. Both of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹ The rider on the horse killed the rest with the sword that came out of his mouth. All the birds gorged themselves on the flesh of those who had been killed.

Revelation 20:1-5

¹I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key to the bottomless pit and a large chain in his hand. ² He overpowered the serpent, that ancient snake, named Devil and Satan. The angel chained up the serpent for 1,000 years. ³ He threw it into the bottomless pit. The angel shut and sealed the pit over the serpent to keep it from deceiving the nations anymore until the 1,000 years were over. After that it must be set free for a little while.

⁴ I saw thrones, and those who sat on them were allowed to judge. Then I saw the souls of those whose heads had been cut off because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its statue and were not branded on their foreheads or hands. They lived and ruled with Christ for 1,000 years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not live until the 1,000 years ended.

This is the first time that people come back to life.

Revelation 20:7-15

⁷ When 1,000 years are over, Satan will be freed from his prison. ⁸ He will go out to deceive Gog and Magog, the nations in the four corners of the earth, and gather them for war. They will be as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore. ⁹ [I saw that] they spread over the broad expanse of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's holy people and the beloved city. Fire came from heaven and burned them up. ¹⁰ The devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were also thrown. They will be tortured day and night forever and ever.

¹¹ I saw a large, white throne and the one who was sitting on it. The earth and the sky fled from his presence, but no place was found for them. ¹² I saw the dead, both important and unimportant people, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened, including the Book of Life. The dead were judged on the basis of what they had done, as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up its dead. Death and hell gave up their dead. People were judged based on what they had done. ¹⁴ Death and hell were thrown into the fiery lake. (The fiery lake is the second death.) ¹⁵ Those whose names were not found in the Book of Life were thrown into the fiery lake.

1 Corinthians 13:12

¹² Now we see a blurred image in a mirror. Then we will see very clearly. Now my knowledge is incomplete. Then I will have complete knowledge as God has complete knowledge of me.

Revelation 1:3

³Blessed is the one who reads, as well as those who hear the words of this prophecy and pay attention to what is written in it because the time is near.

ACROPOLIS — The high point of the city, the elevated, fortified section of various ancient Greek cities.[... **READ MORE**]

The **Acropolis** of Athens, a hill about 260 feet (80m) high, with a flat oval top about 500 feet (150m) wide and 1,150 feet (350m) long, was a ceremonial site beginning in the Neolithic Period and was walled before the 6th century B.C. by the Pelasgians. Devoted to religious rather than defensive purposes, the area was adorned during the time of Cimon and Pericles with some of the world's greatest architectural and sculptural monuments.

The top was reached by a winding processional path at the west end, where the impressive Propylaea stood. From there, the Sacred Way led past a colossal bronze statue of Athena (called Athena Promachus) and the site of the old temple of Athena to the Parthenon. To the north was the Erechtheum and to the southwest the temple of Nike Apteros (Wingless Victory). On the southern slope were the Odeum of Herodes Atticus and the theater of Dionysus.

Although the Acropolis was laid waste by the Persians in 480 B.C. and was further damaged by the Turks and others, remains of the Parthenon, Erechtheum, and Propylaea still stand. Many of its treasures are in the national museum of Greece, in Athens. Over the years, the Acropolis has suffered severely from pollution and from well-intentioned but badly executed attempts at repair. In 1975 the Greek government began a major restoration project, which by the mid-1990s was only about 40% complete.¹

The Acropolis at Athens (Vol 11; Greece; tb011501034)

¹ Paul Lagassé and Columbia University, *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. (New York; Detroit: Columbia University Press; Sold and distributed by Gale Group, 2000).

THE FIRST JEWISH REVOLT AND THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM — Uprising in A.D. 66–70, occurred as the result of a series of ineffective Roman governors in Judea. [... [READ MORE](#)]

The last Jewish king, Agrippa I (the Herod of Acts 12), died in A.D. 44, and the next 20 years were filled with persecution and humiliation for the Jews in Palestine. The unrest needed only a spark to flame into open revolt; the spark was provided by Florus, the Roman governor appointed in A.D. 64. His demand for money from the temple treasury, and the slaughter and pillage by Roman soldiers, provoked the Jews into an uprising in the year 66.

Rebellion quickly spread throughout Palestine, accompanied by a general struggle between Jews and pagans in several eastern Mediterranean cities. The revolt in Palestine was led by the Zealots, a Jewish group that had long wanted the Romans to leave Palestine. After an initial Jewish victory at the pass of Beth-horon, the emperor Nero dispatched his most able general, Vespasian, to direct the operation of punishing the rebels. By the autumn of A.D. 67 all of Galilee and other northern lands were back in Roman hands. In 67 and 68 further operations in Samaria and Judea left only four strongholds in Jewish control. At this point the Roman campaign slackened. Nero committed suicide in A.D. 68, and after three short-lived emperors, General Vespasian gained control of the empire in A.D. 69. His son Titus took command of the forces in Palestine, and laid siege to Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The Jews in the capital might have been better prepared had they taken advantage of the turmoil in Rome to consolidate their own position and resolve disputes among warring Jewish factions. As it was, the arrival of Titus with 80,000 soldiers forced them to unify for a last defense of the city.

Arch of Titus in the forum in Rome
It commemorates Titus' conquest of Jerusalem in A.D. 70
(Vol 15; Rome; Arch of Titus; tb112105061)

The siege of the city lasted for some 5 months. Jerusalem held out heroically against the advancing Romans, forcing a step-by-step conquest of the city. A tragic moment in Jewish history came early in August, A.D. 70, when for the first time in centuries, the morning and evening sacrifices were not offered at the temple. About August 29, under circumstances still not

clear, the sanctuary was put to the torch and the temple destroyed, thereby fulfilling Jesus' prophecy (*Matthew 24:1, 2; Mark 13:1, 2; Luke 19:43, 44; 21:5–7*). For another month some resistance continued, but by the end of September the conflict was over in the desolated city. In all, perhaps 1,000,000 Jews were killed and 900,000 taken captive during the course of the revolt.¹

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988). 792.

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