

# Revelation

**Purpose:** “To assure Christians that Christ knows their condition and that He calls them to stand fast against all temptation; because their victory has been secured through the blood of the Lamb; and the Christ will come soon to defeat Satan and all his agents, thus allowing God’s people to enjoy everlasting peace in His presence” (edited from the New Geneva Study Bible).

*Since Christ was, is, and shall be victorious, so were, are, and shall Christians be victorious.*

**Outline:** 1:1-20 – Introduction

2:1-3:22 – Exhortations to the Seven Churches

4:1-22:5 – Heavenly Visions (7 Cycles and the New Jerusalem)

22:6-21 – Final Exhortations and Blessing

**Author:** John, the Apostle – author of the Gospel of John, and the 3 letters of John

**Date:** 95 AD (during the reign of Roman Emperor Domitian)

**Original Audience:** Revelation is addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day western Turkey). Each church receives rebukes and encouragement in accord with its condition. Persecution had fallen on some Christians, and more was coming. Roman officials would try to force Christians to worship the emperor. Heretical teaching and declining fervor tempted Christians to compromise with pagan society.

Revelation is also a letter, with greeting (1:4,5) a main body of teaching (1:5-22:20), and a farewell (22:21). The main portion of the book (4:1-22:5) consists of seven cycles of judgments, each of which leads to a description of the Second Coming (4:1-8:1; 8:2-11:19; 12:1-14:20; 15:1-16:21; 17:1-19:10; 19:11-21; and 20:1-15). A final, eighth, portion presents the supreme vision of the New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5). Each cycle is best understood as depicting the same spiritual war, but from a fresh vantage point. Later cycles concentrate more and more on the most intense phases of conflict and on the Second Coming itself.

**Major interpretive approaches to Revelation:** “*Preterists*” think fulfillment occurred in the 70 A.D. fall of Jerusalem (if Revelation was written in 67-68 A.D.), the fall of the Roman Empire, or both. “*Futurists*” think fulfillment will occur in a period of final crisis just before the Second Coming. “*Historicists*” think that 6:1-18:24 offers a basic chronological outline of the course of church history from the first century (6:1) until the Second Coming (19:11). “*Idealists*” think that the scenes of Revelation depict not specific events but principles of spiritual war. A combination of these views is probably closest to the truth.

The “Heptadic” Structure of Revelation

1). 7 letters to 7 churches promising the last things (1:1-3:22)

2). 7 seals: messages of judgment (4:1-8:1)

3). 7 trumpets (8:2-11:19)

4). 7 symbolic histories (12:1-14:20)

5). 7 bowls (15:16-21)

6). 7 messages of judgment on Babylon (17:1-18:24)

7). 7 last Things: final – celebration, battle, elimination of evil, judgment, heavens and earth, city, paradise

Symbolic personages are introduced into the drama one by one, and their destinies are revealed in reverse order, as follows:

A. The people of God depicted with the imagery of light and creation (12:1,2)

B. The Dragon – Satan (12:3-6)

C. The Beast and the False Prophet (13:1-18)

D. The Bride: The people of God in the imagery of sexual purity (14:1-5)

E. Babylon the Harlot (17:1-6)

E. Babylon destroyed (17:15-18:24)

D. The Bride is blessed with marriage (19:1-10)

C. The Beast and the False Prophet are destroyed (19:11-21)

B. The Dragon is destroyed (20:1-10)

A. The people of God in imagery of light and creation (21:1-22:5)

The Seven Churches of the Apocalypse (1:20-3:22)				
Church	Commendation	Criticism	Instruction	Promise
Ephesus (2:1-7)	Rejects evil, perseveres, has patience	Love for Christ no longer fervent	Do the works you did at first	The tree of life
Smyrna (2:8-11)	Gracefully bears suffering	None	Be faithful until death	The crown of life
Pergamum (2:12-17)	Keeps the faith of Christ	Tolerates immorality, idolatry, and heresies	Repent	Hidden manna and a stone w/a new name
Thyatira (2:18-29)	Love, service, faith, patience greater than at first	Tolerates cult of idolatry and immorality	Judgment coming; keep the faith	Rule over nations and receive morning star
Sardis (3:1-6)	Some have kept the faith	A dead church	Repent; strengthen what remains	Faithful honored and clothed in white
Philadelphia (3:7-13)	Perseveres in faith, keeps His word, honors name	None	Keep the faith	A place in God's presence, new name
Laodicea (3:14-22)	None	Indifferent	Be zealous and repent	Share Christ's throne

CHAPTERS FOUR & FIVE – God appears in a beautiful scene of worship as the King of heaven and earth. He is surrounded by angelic courtiers. Chapter five shifts the worship action from creation to redemption and re-creation. God's purpose of redemption is accomplished through Jesus Christ the Lamb who was slain. This chapter constitutes the opening scene for the first cycle of judgment (5:1-8:1). The Lamb and the sealed scroll are introduced. The opening of the seals (6:1-8:1) sets in motion a series of judgments that have their origin in the God's throne and purpose.

CHAPTERS SIX & SEVEN – In Chapter Six the first six seals of God's judgment are opened. First Seal: The Conqueror; Second Seal: The Conflict on Earth; Third Seal: Scarcity on Earth; Fourth Seal: Widespread Death on Earth; Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs; Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances.

The seventh seal is dramatically delayed while the saints receive assurance that God knows them, and protects them in the midst of the calamities depicted in chapter 6. The seventh chapter is also known for its introduction of "The Great Tribulation" that many identify as a final period of persecution shortly before the Second Coming. But tribulations for Christians occur throughout the church age, so that the whole age can also be characterized as a time of tribulation (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12). This passage was intended to comfort first century Christians as well as those in the final crisis (and so us too).

**Major Interpretive Approaches to the Rapture and "The Great Tribulation":** For those who insist that a great tribulation will come at the Second Coming with a rapture (from the Latin word meaning "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 [which isn't about the rapture]), there are three major views. Pre-Tribulation says that the rapture will take place and then there will be a seven-year period of tribulation (Seven years coming from the "Seventieth Week" described in Daniel 9:24-27). Mid-Tribulation says that the rapture will take place during the seven-year tribulation. Post-Tribulation says that the rapture will take place after the seven-year tribulation (viewing the Great Tribulation as merely an intensification of the kind of tribulation the church has suffered throughout history).

**Chapter Six:** The first six seals are broken revealing the first cycle of God's judgment on the earth. The first four of the seven judgments reveal four horseman. The white horse carries the conqueror. Some compare this horse to the one in 19:11 ridden by Christ. Yet, Christ's conquering is a good thing; this conquest is part of God's judgment. Thus it may refer to the anti-Christ, or simply earthly conquests and calamities. The red horse symbolizes bloodshed and war. The black horse symbolizes famine on the earth. The pale horse carries Death, who is given the power to kill by sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts.

The fifth seal reveals the cries of the martyrs (those killed because of the testimony they maintained). They are given the white robe of blessedness and purity and told to wait until the right time – when God's justice is fully manifested. The sixth seal reveals cosmic disturbances that will signal the Second Coming. Similar descriptions are given in Luke 21:25-27 and Mark 13:24-26 and to some degree Matthew 24:7; also see Acts 2:19-20 (from Joel 2:28-32). **Who can stand? (Rev. 6:17b)**

## Chapter Seven

**Who can stand?** The 144,000 and the great multitude – because of God and the Lamb.

Who are the 144,000?

They are the Jewish and Gentile saints – the “servants of our God.”

What is the “seal on their foreheads?”

The symbolic spiritual sealing, assuring that the 144,000 saints will be protected from the coming judgments. There is not an actual, physical, seal put on anyone’s forehead – it is a spiritual designation. It is a bit shallow (and silly) to think that God needs a mark put on a forehead so that he can remember who is a saint and who isn’t.

Who is the “great multitude?”

You and me and all of those who have received salvation.

What is “the Great Tribulation?”

There are four views:

- 1) Pre-Tribulation – the saints and all believers will be raptured shortly before a time of unprecedented hostility prior to Christ’s return.
- 2) Mid-Tribulation – the saints and all believers will be raptured in the middle of this hostility.
- 3) Post-Tribulation – the saints and all believers will be raptured at the end of the tribulation.
- 4) Jesus is coming back – saints and believers have always had to deal with tribulation, it has been made worse through the coming of Christ, which has ushered us into the end times. There will be no “rapture.” We will all be raised into eternal life when Christ returns.

Remember that this is being written to encourage and comfort Christians – from the first century to the twenty-first century (and beyond...).

The saints and all believers are brought before the throne of God to serve him day and night. They/We will “never again hunger..thirst” or suffer; and “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

After this, the seventh seal is opened – which offers a time of silence, a prelude to the next cycle.

## Correlation between Chapter 7 and Chapters 21-22

Seal on the Forehead (7:3 & 22:4)

The 12 Tribes of Israel (7:4-8 & 21:12)

The Nations (7:9 & 21:24, 26)

The Throne of God (7:9, 15 & 22:1, 3)

The Service Rendered (7:15 & 22:3)

The Temple (7:15 & 21:22)

The Dwelling of God (7:15 & 21:3)

Thirst and Springs of Living Water (7:16-17 & 21:6)

The Wiping of Tears (7:17 & 21:4)

Chapter 14 discusses the 144,000 saints alluded to in 7:4-8 (Jewish and Gentile believers). According to vv. 1-8 the saints are known by God individually, and none slips by his care. According to vv. 9-17 no human can count their number. We then hear about three angels. First Angel: Proclaims Gospel to every nation, tribe, language, and people; Second Angel: Proclaims Babylon has Fallen; Third Angel: Proclaims wrath of God for those who worship the Beast. 14:14-20 is a description of the Second Coming as the harvest over which Christ presides. The grain harvest may symbolize the harvest of the righteous, followed by the harvest of the wicked (grapes).

The Reformed, evangelical, view of the end times goes something like this: We are living in the “end times.” Christ’s victory over Satan through His death and resurrection has ushered us into the “Seventieth Week” – the final age. This age will last until the unknown appointed time when Christ returns to bring final judgment. The “Great” Tribulation will be a short, indefinite period of time preceding Christ’s return. There really is no “rapture” per se, we will all be “caught up” together to meet the Lord in the air upon his return.

### The Church Age

