

Revelation

Studying To Show
Ourselves Approved



By Charles Willis

REVELATION

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By Charles Willis
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author

The writer is John (1:4, 9, 22:8). He calls his writing a work of prophecy (1:3, 22:7, 10, 18–19) “*which God gave him*” (1:1). Throughout the letter, John refers to being “*in the Spirit*” (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10) when he receives messages, visions, and instructions. There is much internal evidence indicating a man very familiar with Hebrew Scriptures as well as the society and surroundings of Jerusalem. It is an easy conclusion to reach that this is written by the apostle John who also wrote the gospel of John, and the three small epistles of John.

Date

In my library I possess (in various books) a total of more than two hundred pages of printed material regarding when this letter was written, and what time-frame it refers to in history. This is an important concern for it effects our understanding of what is written and the conclusions we are to reach. The intent of this workbook is not to be exhaustive, but some attention must be given to this issue.

John was on the isle of Patmos “*because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*” (1:9). Eusebius (*Church History* III.18.1) indicates this was a penal colony to which John was banished by Emperor Domitian in 95 A.D. This was no doubt because he was a Christian, and an apostle. The writing of Eusebius and other early non-inspired Christians claim a later date for Revelation. Most who hold the date of 95–96 A.D. see the great harlot of chapter 17 as a symbol of Rome as the capital of the Empire, and that this is a fulfillment of prophecy from Daniel 2:31–45 and 7:12–28. God’s eternal kingdom would be established in the reign of the Roman kings (Daniel 2), and Revelation 17–20 certainly demonstrates God’s victory over all others.

Some push for an earlier date of 68-70 A.D. This is at the end of Emperor Nero’s reign. These look at the fall of Babylon (Revelation 17–19) as a depiction of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. There are many problems with this view, most obviously a preponderance of non-biblical testimony of the later date. Those that hold this earlier date believe all the things spoken of in the letter have already taken place.

Four ideas about the date are generally held. These differences account for why there are so many different ideas coming out of the same writing.

1. I will be presenting in this workbook a **historical-background** view that holds to the later date of the writing. This view considers the writing relevant to the recipients (having meaning to them) and was a message of hope and encouragement “*for the time is near*” (1:3).
2. The **continuous historical** view understands the book as relaying a “synopsis of church history” (*Truth Commentary*, Revelation, Harkrider, lxxviii). All the things stated point to historical references which culminated in a great apostasy. There is much pointing to the Catholic church as the apostasy, as well as some efforts to connect Revelation to the reformation era and the restored worship of God in coming out of Catholicism. There are many difficulties with this understanding which cannot be overcome satisfactorily.
3. The **historical and preterist** view looks to the Revelation as a being fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. This is the understanding of those who strictly hold to the earlier date.
4. The **futurist** view believes the things written in Revelation are all literal, and will be accomplished in and about the time of Christ’s second coming. This is the understanding of all premillennialists.

Again, these four views are based on disagreements about the date of Revelation. Some in regard to when it was written, but all relate to the time to which it refers. There are volumes of reading on the subject, but this brief explanation should suffice for our study.

Recipients

Revelation 1:1 says this was given to John *“to show to His bond-servants.”* *“Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and the Philadelphia and to Laodicea”* (Rev. 1:11). The recipients are those whom Christ has *“released...from sins by His blood”* (1:5) and are referred to as *“a kingdom of priests”* (1:6). These indicate the message of the book had to have had meaning and purpose to the original readers and that encouragement is found in the letter for all *“who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it”* (1:3).

The letters to the seven churches (chapters 2–3) are arranged in the order that a messenger would have traveled following the Roman roads. This region of Asia Minor was wealthy (straddling the trade routes between the Aegean culture and the Mesopotamian culture) and was populated mostly by Greeks. The Greek society in the Roman period was dominated by idol worship, including Emperor worship.

Emperor Nero was to be worshiped as a god, but Christians would not. This led to great persecutions against Christians in 64 A.D. In reality, Nero used Christians as a scapegoat for a great fire in Rome which was later understood to have been started by Nero to make room for his building plans. Nevertheless, his persecution became a strong influence for later Emperors. Nero’s persecution was limited to the region around Rome, but thirty years later under the reign of Domitian, the persecution spread to all regions of the Empire. During this period, the faith of Christians was literally put to the test: worship Christ or worship Caesar. If Christians did not comply to the Roman edict of emperor worship they were arrested and many were killed.

The message of the book is that this spiritual battle between the forces of Satan and God would ultimately be won by God. The Kingdom prophesied in Daniel 2 would stand forever and never be defeated by the kingdoms of man. The believers who would be persecuted and die would ultimately be victorious with Christ and receive the eternal rest. It is a message of hope and encouragement.

Apocalyptic Writing

Many view Revelation as a book which is impossible to understand. This is false, but we do find the book difficult because of the style of writing. “Revelation” (1:1) means “laying bare, making naked” (Thayer), “disclosure” (Strong’s). Vicent’s Word Studies of the Greek says it is *“the unveiling of something hidden, which gives light and knowledge to those who behold it.”* The book is intended to reveal things through signs and symbols.

Apocalyptic writing was broadly found for a period of some three hundred years (200 B.C. – 100 A.D.). Most of these are non-inspired works, yet examples of this style are seen in the later parts of Daniel as well as in Ezekiel, Zechariah. As a genre of writing, there are many common features which will help us to understand Revelation. Symbolisms are frequent. Visions are used to introduce concepts. Angels are often present to disclose meanings. Adversity was always present and frequently a battle in which God wins. These writings always point to a future of victory and deliverance from trials, meaning they were always a message of hope and encouragement for those living righteously.

This style of writing for the book of Revelation was needed in the midst of the persecution of Domitian. Had a believer been detained with a possession of a book describing the fall and defeat of Rome, he surely would have been put to death. But the enemies would not understand that message when they read about the fall of Babylon. The readers understood the imagery, but the enemy did not.

It is very helpful to read the Revelation in large portions. Getting stuck in the phrase of one verse and not seeing it in the context of the “vision” often leads to confusion and misunderstanding. Not every detail of the vision has meaning. When viewing a scene from a movie we see the knight on the horse saving the princess. We do not question why the horse was brown or black, nor do we need to know why his helmet was a certain shape. We need to be caught up in the moment of the vision, to see the whole picture to get the message.

This was God’s way of revealing. He sent a vision to Nebuchadnezzar which had to be interpreted by Daniel (Daniel 2) when God could have just told him his kingdom was about to be destroyed. The prophet Jeremiah

was instructed to use visual aids in delivering God's message (the potter and clay [18:1–17], the broken jar [19:1–15], and saw a vision of figs which God explained [24:1–10]). God sent visions to Peter (Acts 10) rather than just saying the Gentiles are now welcome into the Kingdom.

In Apocalyptic writing, numbers have symbolic meaning. This is not too foreign to us, for in our culture “13” is associated with bad luck while “7” is often associated with good luck. The chart below helps as a reference when reading through the book.

Contemporary world powers are pictured as dangerous animals (Daniel 7, Revelation 13) who terrorize the faithful. The literature answers the question “how long” will the believers have to remain in a present persecution (Revelation 6:10).

Most importantly, Apocalyptic literature presents a dual view of the world. The physical world which we can see, and a spiritual world which we cannot see. In the literature someone is allowed to “peek behind the curtain” to see what is taking place in the spiritual world, and an explanation is given to help us understand what is going on in the physical world. Thus we see the battle between the forces of God and Satan (Revelation 19–20).

Conclusion

Do not shy away from Revelation. Study it. Learn the message. It is a wonderfully encouraging message of hope for the believer. It will help to sustain us in times of difficulty.

Symbolic Meaning In Numbers:

1 - unity

2 - twice one, symbolizing strength. Two witnesses confirm the truth (11:3–12)

3 - the symbol of divine representing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

4 - represents the physical world. Several references are made to the four corners of the world.

6 - failure. It falls short of completeness. It had a sinister meaning (much like our Friday the 13th). It was associated with evil.

7 - the perfect divine number representing completeness. We see 7 churches, 7 Spirits, 7 lampstands, 7 bowls

10 - completeness and power. The complete power of government is seen in the beast with 10 horns. We also see 10 diadems, 10 kings.

12 - God's people. In the Old Testament there were 12 tribes. In the New Testament there were 12 apostles.

3 1/2 - seven cut in half meaning broken or incomplete. It is used to describe indefinite periods of persecution. It is found in several forms: 3 1/2, a time, times and half a time; forty two months, 1260 days.

1,000 - a complete or full period of time. It is a result of multiplying 10x10x10. It is a confirmation of the certainty of fulfillment. Nothing will interfere or break this time until God wills it.

144,000 - a multiple of the number meaning fullness (1,000) and the number representing God's people (12x12=144). It signifies the full number of God's people on earth at any given time.

Recommended Resources

Understanding Apocalyptic Literature by Mark Roberts

Truth Commentaries - Revelation by Robert Harkrider

Revelation, An Introduction And Commentary by Homer Hailey

Revelation Chapter 1

The Glorified Christ

Lesson 1

1. What can be learned from 1:1–3 about the timing of the things revealed, and to whom this was revealed?
2. How is God described (1:4)?
3. How is Jesus described (1:5–7)?
4. What is meant by being the “Alpha and the Omega” (1:8)?
5. What three things does John say he is a fellow partaker of (1:9)?
6. What did the loud voice tell John to do (1:10–11)?
7. 1:12–20 is a description of what John saw while “in the Spirit” (1:10).
 - A. What do the seven lampstands represent?
 - B. Who is the one in the midst of the lampstands?
 - C. What significance is intended by the following descriptions of this one?
 - Eyes like fire, feet of burnished bronze (1:14–15)
 - Holding stars (1:16)
 - A two-edged sword coming out of mouth (1:16)
 - Face shining like the sun (1:16)
 - D. How does this one describe himself (1:17–18). Please explain the meaning of the descriptions.
8. What is the instruction to John (1:19)?

Revelation Chapter 2

The Seven Churches (Part 1)

Lesson 2

Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)

1. What deeds does Jesus “*know*” about the church in Ephesus?
2. What did Jesus have “*against*” the congregation? What does this mean?
3. What instructions are given enabling them to be restored in their relationship with God?
4. Jesus threatens to remove their lampstand out of its place (2:5). What does this mean?
5. For what does Jesus additionally praise the congregation?
6. What is the blessing to him who overcomes?

Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

7. What does the Lord know about this congregation?
8. What were they about to suffer? What was to be their attitude about it?
9. What is the blessing to him who overcomes?

Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)

10. What is meant by “*Satan’s throne*” and “*where Satan dwells*” (2:13)?
11. What was the teaching of Balaam (2:14)? How were some holding to this teaching?
12. What is important about the imagery of the sword (2:12, 16)?
13. What is meant in 2:17 by the “*hidden manna*,” “*a white stone*,” and “*a new name*”?

Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

14. List the deeds of which Jesus knew (2:19).
15. What did Jesus have against them?
16. What lesson must we learn from God’s condemnation of their toleration of Jezebel (2:20-23)?
17. Explain the blessing to him who overcomes (2:25-29).

Revelation 3

The Seven Churches (Part 2)

Lesson 3

Sardis (Revelation 3:1–6)

1. Why were they told to “wake up” (3:2–3)? What three things were they told to do?
2. How had some in Sardis “soiled their garments” (3:4)? What was the state of the congregation?
3. What are the blessings for him who overcomes?

Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7–13)

4. What deeds did Jesus know about the saints in Philadelphia?
5. What will become of the Jews who were persecuting the saints in Philadelphia?
6. What principle is taught in the latter half of verse 11? Why is this important to our understanding?
7. What is promised to those who overcome?

Laodicea (Revelation 3:14–22)

8. What deeds did Jesus know of this congregation?
9. How could Jesus wish that some were cold (3:15)?
10. What was Jesus’ advice to the Laodiceans? What is His advice to us (3:18)?
11. What were they told they needed to do (3:19)?
12. Relate how Jesus stands and knocks at the door today, explaining 3:20.
13. What is the blessing to him who overcomes?

Look back at all the messages to the seven churches (chapters 2–3) and list the imagery of Christ describing Himself with that of chapter 1. (Most are found in the first statements of each message.)

Revelation Chapters 4–5

Scene of Heaven

Lesson 4

1. While “in the Spirit” (4:2), what was the scene shown to John?
2. Some of the difficult imagery is listed below. It is possible to analyze the imagery too much and miss the point of the vision. We will plan to discuss these aspects in class from a standpoint of typical apocalyptic literature imagery. In preparation, give your understanding of each.
 - A. The twenty four elders (4:4)
 - B. The seven Spirits of God (4:5)
 - C. The four living creatures (4:6–8)
 - D. The seven seals (5:1)
3. What is indicated by the twenty four elders casting their crowns before the throne (4:10)?
4. Taking the entirety of chapter four as a scene, the point is all about what is said by these elders and beasts in 4:8 and 4:11. Convey what is said about God.
5. The scene shifts in chapter five to a new character described in 5:5. Who does this refer to? Compare the descriptions with other Scriptures that help us understand who this is.
6. Relate the significance of the imagery of the character in 5:6.
7. What do all of the others present around the throne sing about the lamb (5:9-10)? What other Scriptures would agree with this?
8. The angels join the vision (5:11), as well as all created things (5:13). What do they say about the lamb?

Revelation Chapters 6–8:1

The Seven Seals

Lesson 5

1. The first six seals are broken by the lamb (6:1–17). Identify what each seal is.
 - A. First Seal (6:1)
 - B. Second Seal (6:3–4)
 - C. Third Seal (6:5–6)
 - D. Fourth Seal (6:7–8)
 - E. Fifth Seal (6:9–11) Why are they given a white robe (6:11)?
 - F. Sixth Seal (6:12–17)
2. Chapter seven sees the scene shift by the words “after this.” We again see some imagery that has been abused by many, making application that are literal rather than figurative. We will plan to discuss the following images in class. In preparation, try to give your understanding of each.
 - A. Four angels, four corners of the earth, four winds (7:1)
 - B. The 144,000 who are sealed (7:4-8)
3. Again, by the words “after this,” we see a shift in the scene to that of a great multitude (7:9).
 - A. How are these clothed (7:9)?
 - B. What were they saying (7:10–12)
 - C. Who are they (7:13–14)?
 - D. What are these doing around the throne (7:15)?
 - E. What blessings are stated that come to the multitude (7:16)?
4. What happened when the seventh seal was broken (8:1)?

Revelation Chapters 8:2–11:19

The Seven Trumpets

Lesson 6

1. We are introduced to an angel with a golden censer before the throne (8:3–5).
 - A. What does this represent, especially when mixed with the smoke?
 - B. Compare with Exodus 30:7–9; Leviticus 16:12–13; Psalm 141:2
2. For each of the following trumpet sounds, describe what happened.
 - A. First Trumpet (8:7)
 - B. Second Trumpet (8:8–9)
 - C. Third Trumpet (8:10–11)
 - D. Fourth Trumpet (8:12–13)
3. The Fifth Trumpet (9:1–12)
 - A. What came from the “bottomless pit”?
 - B. What does this represent? What is the meaning of the imagery?
 - C. Who had the seal of God on their foreheads (9:4)? (See also Rev. 7:3)
 - D. What is the name of the King of the Abyss (9:11)?
 - E. Why is the “fifth trumpet” referred to as a “woe” (9:12)?
4. The Sixth Trumpet (9:13–21)
 - A. What was the result of releasing the four angels bound at the Euphrates?
 - B. What was the attitude of men toward their sin?
5. Interlude of the little book and the two witnesses (10:1–11:14)
 - A. What caused the seven peals of thunder (10:1–4)?
 - B. What did the angel with the little book say (10:5–7)?
 - C. What does the book represent which tastes sweet but is bitter in the stomach (10:8–11)?
 - D. What was God’s role for the “two witnesses” (11:3)? What authority was given to them?
 - E. How do the two witnesses die (11:7)? Where does this happen (11:8)?
 - F. What is the attitude of men toward the deaths of the two witnesses (11:10)?
 - G. What happened to the two witnesses (11:11–14)
6. The Seventh Trumpet begins (11:15–19)
 - A. What truths are stated about God and the Kingdom?

Revelation Chapters 12–14

The Beasts

Lesson 7

1. The two signs in heaven (12:1–6)
 - A. Try to determine who is being represented, by the woman in labor, the great red dragon, and the male child.
 - B. What message is conveyed by the imagery?
2. The war in heaven (12:7–17)
 - A. Who are “*Michael*” and “*the dragon*”?
 - B. What does the loud voice in heaven declare (12:10–13)?
 - C. What happens to the woman (12:13–17)?
3. The beast from the sea (13:1–10)
 - A. What does this scene convey about the saints?
 - B. Does this beast represent an historical person?
4. The beast from the earth (13:11–18)
 - A. Is this beast worshiped by men?
 - B. What signs are given to him?
 - C. What mark does he give men?
 - D. What can be learned from the phrase “*calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man*” (13:18)? Does this beast represent an historical person?
5. The Lamb at Mount Zion (14:1–5)
 - A. Who is the Lamb (see chapter 5)?
 - B. Who are the 144,000?
6. The Angels (14:6–13)
 - A. What is the role of the first angel?
 - B. What did the second angel declare? What is “*Babylon the great*”?
 - C. What is the warning of the third angel?
 - D. What is the blessing pronounced from heaven (14:13)?
 - E. Who is portrayed as the “reaper” (14:14–16)?
 - F. What is conveyed by the image of the angels in 14:17–20?
7. From chapters 12–14, make a short list of things that can be easily seen as figurative.

Revelation Chapters 15–16

The Seven Bowls

Lesson 8

1. Who is seen in heaven? What is the Song of the Moses and the Lamb (15:2–4)?
2. What was the role of the seven angels (15:1, 5-8, 16:1)?
3. Identify what occurred when each bowl of God's wrath is poured out.
 - A. First bowl (16:2)
 - B. Second bowl (16:3)
 - C. Third bowl (16:4–7)
 - D. Fourth bowl (16:8–9)
 - E. Fifth bowl (16:10–11)
 - F. Sixth bowl (16:12–16)
 - Identify the “Dragon”, the “beast”, and the “false prophet” (16:13)
 - What truth is conveyed about the coming of God in judgment at Har-Magedon?
 - G. Seventh bowl (16:17–21)
 - Identify the “Babylon the great” (16:19).
 - What was the attitude of men toward God (16:21)?

Revelation Chapters 17–19

Judgment Of The Great Harlot

Lesson 9

1. How is the great harlot described (17:3-7)
 - A. What was her “immorality” (17:2, 4)?
 - B. What is the difference in the “blood of the saints” and the “blood of the witness” (17:6)?
2. What does the beast represent?
 - A. The seven heads (17:8–11)
 - B. The ten horns (17:12-13)
3. These wage war with the Lamb (17:14-18).
 - A. How will the war end?
 - B. What does the water in the vision represent (17:15, from 17:1)
 - C. What will the ten horns do the harlot?
 - D. Who is the harlot (17:18, 17:5)?
4. What is the message of the angel (18:1–3)?
5. What is the message from heaven (18:4–8)?
6. What will be the response to God’s judgment?
 - A. The Kings of the earth (18:9–10)
 - B. The Merchants (18:11–19)
 - C. Heaven and Saints (18:20)
 - D. Why does the strong angel say Babylon will be thrown down? (18:21–24)
7. Describe the message of the four Hallelujah’s (19:1–6)

8. Convey the imagery of the marriage to the lamb (19:7–9).
 - A. Include other passages that teach this truth.
 - B. How was John impacted by this image?
9. From 19:11–16, list the names of the one on the white horse, and give Scriptures that relate the same truth.
10. What is symbolized by the sharp sword coming out of his mouth (19:15, see also Rev. 1:16)?
11. What does the angel know which is described as the “great supper of God” (19:18–21)

Revelation Chapter 20

God's Victory

Lesson 10

1. What do the following images symbolize?
 - A. The key of the abyss (20:1)
 - B. A great chain (20:1)
 - C. A 1,000 years (20:2)
2. How is Satan bound (20:2–3)? (Consider also Matt. 12:28–29; Heb. 2:14–15)
3. Who came to life again? (20:4) Explain again the imagery (from earlier in the book) of:
 - A. The beast and his image
 - B. The mark on their forehead and hand
4. What is the first resurrection (20:5–6)?
5. What will occur when Satan is released from his prison (20:7–9)?
6. What is the last thing said about Satan (20:10)?
7. What is the next scene shown to John (20:11–15)?
 - A. Who will be there?
 - B. What “books” are opened?
 - C. What is meant by “death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire” (20:14)?
8. Many errors are taught from Revelation 20. It helps us to teach others to understand their error.
 - A. What is falsely taught regarding the 1,000 year reign of Christ (20:2–6)?
 - B. What is falsely taught about the “first resurrection” (20:5–6)?
 - C. What is falsely taught about “the war” (20:8–9)?

Revelation Chapter 21–22:5

The Eternal Inheritance

Lesson 11

1. John is shown “*a new heaven and a new earth*” (21:1).
 - A. What has passed away?
 - B. What “*sea*” is “*no longer*” (21:1)?
2. Describe the choices of the imagery for heaven (21:2–3).
 - A. New Jerusalem
 - B. A bride adorned for her husband
 - C. Tabernacle of God among men
3. What “*first things have passed away*” (21:4)?
4. What will the one inherit who overcomes (21:5–7)?
5. What will become of those who do not overcome (21:8)?
6. Who is the “*lamb*” and what is his “*wife*” (21:9)?
7. Try to explain some of the symbolism in the following:
 - A. Brilliance like a very costly stone (21:11)
 - B. A great and high wall (21:12) and the dimensions of the city (21:16–17)
 - C. Twelve gates with names of the tribes of Israel (21:13)
 - D. Twelve foundation stones with names of the apostles (21:14) and the foundation stones adorned with precious stones (21:18–20).
 - E. Gates of pearl and street of gold (21:21).
 - F. No temple or sun (21:22–23)
8. What glory will be brought into the city (21:24–26)?
9. Who will come into the city (21:27)?
10. The beginning of chapter 22 indicates a return to paradise which man lost in the garden. What is important about the following:
 - A. The river of water of life (22:1)
 - B. The tree of life (22:2)
 - C. No curse (22:3)
 - D. Servants will see God’s face (22:4)

Revelation Chapter 22:6–21

Assurances And Warnings

Lesson 12

1. What is revealed about the timing of the things described in Revelation (22:6–7,10,12; also 1:3)?
2. What are the “words of the prophecy of this book” which we are to heed (22:7)?
3. What was John’s reaction to the angel, and the angel’s response (22:8–9)?
4. Why the instruction of 22:11? What does this mean?
5. From 22:14–16
 - A. Identify in Revelation where the imagery is located.
 1. Wash their robes
 2. Tree of life
 3. Enter by the gates into the city
 4. The root and descendant of David,
 5. The bright and morning star
 - B. From the same imagery, try to identify other New Testament teaching that conveys the same truth.
6. To whom were these things revealed (22:16; 1:11)?
7. Explain the importance of the statement in 22:17.
8. What warnings are given (22:18–19)?
9. What message does John end with (22:20–21)?