

New Testament Books: The Revelation of St. John

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:4-6

1. A Few Important Keys to Reading Revelation:

- a. It's all about Jesus. Revelation 1:1
- b. Revelation is not written to scare you, but to comfort you. It is not a book of fear-mongering or wild speculation, but to console you, give you hope, and encourage you in Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil.
- c. Revelation is highly symbolic, illustrative –its images and symbolism are truthful yet not meant to be taken literally like reading a dictionary for example. The key or “code” to understanding Revelation is the Old Testament symbolism and language used throughout the book.
- d. Revelation is steeped in the Old Testament. In fact, you could say, tongue in cheek, that it is the most plagiarizing book of the NT because of how often it quotes or alludes to the OT. Especially Isaiah 6, Daniel 7-12, Ezekiel, Zechariah 1-3.
- e. Revelation is highly sacramental, meaning we should keep in mind God's gifts of Baptism, Absolution, and especially the Lord's Supper as we read this book.
- f. Revelation is also a thoroughly liturgical book, meaning it says a great deal about the life of worship for the Christian Church, what Lutherans refer to as the Divine Service.
- g. G.K. Chesterton once wisely, and humorously, observed that “in the Apocalypse of St. John, the apostle saw many strange things, but none so wild as his commentators.”

2. Genre:

- a. It is an apocalypse with visions and words of prophecy (1:1-3; cf. 22:7,10,19).
- b. Revelation is known as apocalyptic literature. Apocalypse means “revealing” or “unveiling” or “manifesting”. Revelation reveals Jesus in his glorious victory over sin and death for us.
- c. The use of imagery is meant to be symbolic and true, yet not literal. See Rev. 1:16-20.
- d. Apocalyptic literature is also found in the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and parts of Jesus' end times teaching in the Gospels (e.g. Matthew 24-25).
- e. It communicates a vision of present events in the light of eternity and the end of world history (1:19).
- f. It is couched in the form of a letter to the seven churches in Asia Minor (1:4).
- g. Like other New Testament books, Revelation moves forward in a pattern or series of repeating cycles; it is not organized chronologically or topically. This is why Revelation can't be read as a horoscope or in search of some kind of hidden key that unlocks future events with particular dates, etc.

3. Circumstances:

- a. The apostle John was in exile on the island of Patmos during the persecution of Domitian about 95 AD (1:1,4,9;22:8).
- b. The Roman authorities were enforcing the cult of emperor worship which contradicted the confession of Jesus as Lord (see mark of the beast in 13:16-18).

- c. John was told by the angel to write the contents of his visions to the seven churches which had been under his care in Asia Minor (1:10-12; 21:5).
4. **Author:** St. John the apostle/evangelist while exiled on Patmos.
 5. **Date:** The traditional date for Revelation (hailing from Irenaeus) is A.D. 95.
 6. **Main Theme:** The Revelation of St. John is Jesus' extended letter/sermon of comfort, strength, encouragement, and victory for his weary, beleaguered saints. Although it often appears that in this life evil, sin, death, and the devil have won, in fact, Christ has conquered all by his death on the cross and you share in this victory with him, the Lamb who is slain and yet standing victoriously.
 7. **Purpose(s):**
 - a. To urge Christians to resist the demands for emperor worship
 - b. To encourage them to remain faithful to Christ in persecution
 8. **Theological Themes:**
 - a. The hidden rule of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus in his church over all creation by virtue of his triumph over all evil powers (1:4- 5a, 17-18; 5:5-10; 11:15; 17:14)
 - b. Christian worship as priestly participation in heavenly worship, together with the angels and all creation (1:5b-6, 10-16; see also 4:1-5:14; 7:9-17)
 - c. Participation of Christians in Christ's victory and reign through faithfulness in their witness to him and their endurance in suffering (2:10-11,24-28; 3:21; see also 12:10-11; 14:12)
 - d. The attack of Satan on the church (12:1-17)
 - e. Promise of a new heaven and earth, after the destruction of all evil powers, with the participation of the church in Christ's glory as heavenly Jerusalem and the bride of Christ (19:1-9; 21:1-4,9-14,22- 27; 22:1-5; see also 3:12; 22:17)
 9. **Structure**
 - a. Prologue
 - i. Introduction to the letter: 1:1-7
 - ii. **The first word of God** to John: 1:8
 - b. Seven cycles of visions
 - i. (1) Scene 1: **the church in the world:** 1:9-3:22
 1. Introduction : the presence of the risen Lord with his seven churches (1:9-20)
 2. Seven letters to seven churches (2:1-3:22)
 - ii. (2) Scene 2: **the suffering church:** 4:1-8:1
 1. Introduction : presentation of the scroll to the Lamb (4:1- 5:14)
 2. The opening of the seven seals (6:1-8:1)
 - iii. Scene 3: **the fate of the world:** 8:2-11:18
 1. Introduction: the hearing of the saints' prayers (8:2-6)
 2. The sounding of the seven trumpets (8:7-11:18)
 - iv. Scene 4: **the hidden drama of human history:** 11:19-15:4
 1. Introduction : the opening of the heavenly sanctuary and the casting of Satan from heaven to earth (11:19-12:17)
 2. Seven visions of the cosmic conflict and the victory of the saints over the beast (13:1-15:4)
 - v. Scene 5: **the judgment of the world:** 15:5-16:2

1. Introduction : the release of God's wrath from the heavenly sanctuary (15:5-16:1)
2. The seven bowls with the seven plagues of God (16:2-21)
- vi. Scene 6: **the doom of the prostitute Babylon**: 17:1-19:10
 1. Introduction : the offer of the angel to show 'the prostitute' (17:1-2)
 2. Seven words of judgment on Babylon (17:3-19:10)
- vii. Scene 7: **the divine goal of world history**: 19:11-21:8
 1. The opening of heaven and the seven visions of the final victory (19:11 - 21:4)
 2. **The final words of God to John** (21:5-8)
- viii. Concluding visions and words: 21:9-22:21
 1. The offer of the angel to show the bride (21:9)
 2. Three visions of the bride and the lamb (21:10-22:5)
 3. Final words of encouragement and blessing (22:6-21)

10. From Luther's Preface to Revelation: *In a word, our holiness is in heaven, where Christ is; and not in the world, before men's eyes, like goods in the market place. Therefore let there be offenses, divisions, heresies, and faults; let them do what they can! If only the word of the gospel remains pure among us, and we love and cherish it, we shall not doubt that Christ is with us, even when things are at their worst. As we see here in this book, that through and beyond all plagues, beasts, and evil angels Christ is nonetheless with his saints, and wins the final victory.*

11. Key chapters:

- a. 1-3
- b. 5
- c. 6-7
- d. 12
- e. 18-19
- f. 20-22

12. Liturgical Use:

- a. Rev. 1:1-6 – Feast of St. John
- b. 1:4-18 – Easter 2 C
- c. 5:1-14 – Easter 3 C
- d. 6:9-11 – Martyrdom of John the Baptist
- e. 7:2-17 – All Saints' Day, Easter 4 C
- f. 12:7-12 – St. Michael and All Angels
- g. 14:1-5 – Holy Innocents
- h. 14:6-7 – Reformation Day
- i. 21:1-7 – Easter 5 C
- j. 21:9-27 – Easter 6 C
- k. 22:1-20 – Easter 7 C



Revelation 1:5, "...Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth."

Faithful Witness – Crucifixion

Firstborn of the Dead – Resurrection

Ruler of the Kings – Ascension

And this is the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by His blood. www.fulllofeyes.com