

OVERCOMING

Guide to Understanding the
Book of Revelation



Steve C. Singleton

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Note: References with no book indicated refer to the Book of Revelation. Extra-biblical sources (including the Apocrypha; Jewish Pseudepigrapha; rabbinical writings; the Dead Sea Scrolls; Christian Pseudepigrapha; ancient philosophers, historians, authors, and poets; and the Church Fathers) are distinguished from biblical references by the use of italics. English translations of the Old Testament nearly always favor the Hebrew text when it differs from the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation, abbreviated as "LXX"). In some cases, where the Septuagint has a significant reading in contrast to the Hebrew, I will point it out with the designation "LXX" after a reference.



Angel binding the Dragon (Albrecht Durer's 16th Century illustration of Rev. 20:1-2)

Contents

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Prologue | 1 |
| “He Arose!” | 2 |
| INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION | 3 – 87 |
| 1. Hermeneutics | 4 – 7 |
| a. General Hermeneutics..... | 4 |
| b. Special Hermeneutics for the Book of Revelation | 5 |
| 2. Internal contexts | 8 – 30 |
| a. Immediate Context—Sentence, Paragraph, Book..... | 8 |
| b. Remote Contexts—Author’s Other Writings, New Testament | 9 |
| c. Remote Contexts—Old Testament | 9 |
| d. Main Old Testament Backgrounds for the Book of Revelation | 10 |
| e. Understanding Biblical Predictive Prophecy | 21 |
| <i>Time to rethink biblical prophecy?</i> | 27 |
| 3. External Contexts | 31 – 53 |
| The Geography of the Book of Revelation (map) | 31 |
| The Seven Cities of Asia and Patmos (map) | 32 |
| a. Geographical and historical backgrounds | 33 |
| 1) Historical overview | 33 |
| 2) The Island of Patmos | 34 |
| 3) Ephesus | 35 |
| 4) Smyrna | 37 |
| 5) Pergamum | 38 |
| 6) Thyatira | 41 |
| 7) Sardis..... | 42 |
| 8) Philadelphia | 44 |
| 9) Laodicea | 44 |
| 10) Rome | 45 |
| 11) Jerusalem..... | 45 |
| 12) The Roman emperors and the rise of the emperor cult | 45 |
| 13) The eruption of Vesuvius | 47 |
| 14) Parthian empire | 47 |
| b. Literary and cultural backgrounds..... | 49 |
| 1) Revelation and Other Apocalyptic Literature | 50 |
| 2) Clash of Various Religions | 51 |
| 4. The various interpretations of the book | 54 – 76 |
| <i>Commentaries on the Apocalypse</i> | 54 |
| Introduction | 55 |
| a. Premillennialism | 56 |
| 1) Dispensationalism | 56 |
| <i>Can Israel inherit a special blessing apart from Christ’s church?</i> | 61 |
| <i>Will Christ return in stages?</i> | 63 |
| 2) Chiliasm | 66 |
| b. Postmillennialism..... | 68 |

| | |
|--|------------------|
| c. Amillennialism | 69 |
| 1) Spiritual | 71 |
| 2) Continuous Historical | 71 |
| 3) Preterist | 73 |
| - Destruction of Jerusalem interpretation..... | 73 |
| - Roman (Domitianic) persecution interpretation | 75 |
| <i>Predicting the coming of the Lord</i> | 76 |
| 5. Authorship of the Book of Revelation | 77 – 79 |
| The alternatives regarding authorship | 77 |
| What is the evidence for and against each of the alternatives? | 77 |
| Alternatives relating to John the apostle..... | 77 |
| Alternatives involving some John other than the apostle | 78 |
| Conclusion about the authorship of Revelation | 79 |
| 6. Date of the writing of the Book of Revelation..... | 80 – 81 |
| The alternatives regarding date | 80 |
| The evidence for and against each of the alternatives..... | 80 |
| Early: about 67 C.E. | 80 |
| Middle: about 75 C.E. | 80 |
| Late: about 95 C.E..... | 81 |
| Conclusion about date..... | 81 |
| 7. Purposes of the Book of Revelation | 82 |
| 8. Sources for the symbols of Revelation | 83 – 87 |
| Numbers..... | 83 |
| Colors..... | 84 |
| Old Testament worship..... | 84 |
| Animals..... | 85 |
| Natural disasters | 87 |
| <i>Disasters close at hand</i> | 87 |
| THE TEXT OF REVELATION..... | 88 – 231 |
| Ruler of the Kings of the Earth – Chapter 1 | 88 – 96 |
| Overview..... | 88 |
| Commentary..... | 89 |
| <i>Outlining the Book of Revelation</i> | 96 |
| Christ’s Letters to the Church – Chapters 2 and 3..... | 97 – 115 |
| Overview..... | 97 |
| Commentary..... | 100 |
| The View in Heaven – Chapters 4 and 5..... | 116 – 126 |
| Overview..... | 116 |
| Commentary..... | 118 |
| <i>Apocalyptic Worship</i> | 122 |
| <i>“Worthy is the Lamb” – The Christology of Revelation 5</i> | 123 |
| The View on Earth – Chapter 6..... | 127 – 132 |
| Overview..... | 127 |
| Commentary..... | 129 |
| Possession and Protection – Chapter 7..... | 133 – 136 |
| Overview..... | 133 |
| Commentary..... | 134 |
| <i>The Twelve Tribes throughout the Bible</i> | 135 |
| Just Before the Wrath – Chapters 8 and 9..... | 137 – 144 |
| Overview..... | 137 |
| Commentary..... | 138 |
| <i>Why Would God Allow This to Happen?</i> | 143 |
| <i>“Rise Again!”</i> | 144 |

| | |
|--|------------------|
| The Mission of the Martyrs – Chapters 10 and 11..... | 145 – 151 |
| Overview..... | 145 |
| Commentary..... | 146 |
| The Spiritual Conflict, Past & Present – Chapters 12 and 13 | 152 – 176 |
| Overview..... | 152 |
| Commentary..... | 154 |
| <i>The demise of Satan in the Book of Revelation</i> | <i>156</i> |
| <i>666 Not the Real Issue</i> | <i>161</i> |
| <i>Can we solve the 666 puzzle?</i> | <i>162</i> |
| <i>Recapitulation in the Book of Revelation</i> | <i>175</i> |
| Overview of God’s Revenge – Chapter 14..... | 177 – 182 |
| Overview..... | 177 |
| Commentary..... | 178 |
| The Bowls of Wrath – Chapters 15 and 16..... | 183 – 192 |
| Overview..... | 183 |
| Commentary..... | 185 |
| <i>The Battles of Megiddo</i> | <i>188</i> |
| God’s Wrath on the Wicked City – Chapters 17 and 18..... | 193 – 201 |
| Overview..... | 193 |
| Commentary..... | 194 |
| <i>How do we count the kings?.....</i> | <i>196</i> |
| <i>Testimony of First-century Persecutions of Christians</i> | <i>201</i> |
| The Final Conflict and Christ’s Victory – Chapters 19 and 20 | 202 – 213 |
| Overview..... | 202 |
| Commentary..... | 204 |
| <i>How Should We View the Millennium?</i> | <i>211</i> |
| <i>Who are Gog and Magog?</i> | <i>213</i> |
| God’s Covenant with the Elect – Chapters 21 and 22..... | 214 – 229 |
| Overview..... | 214 |
| Commentary..... | 216 |
| Epilogue | 230 – 231 |
| REVELATION & FICTION | 230 – 263 |
| Introduction | 233 |
| The End of the Urge?..... | 235 – 236 |
| Behind “Left Behind”: The Flawed Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and a Biblical Alternative | 237 – 281 |
| Introduction: Teaching end-times prophecies through fiction..... | 237 |
| Nine distinct interpretation errors | 237 |
| Error 1: Collapsing contexts – Uniting what should remain separate | 238 |
| Error 2: Separating what should remain united..... | 245 |
| Error 3: Taking the figurative literally or the literal figuratively..... | 252 |
| Error 4: Ignoring the evidence of the context and cavalier dismissal..... | 255 |
| Error 5: Rejecting conditional nature of prophecy..... | 264 |
| Error 6: Grasping at straws..... | 264 |
| Error 7: Depending on groundless assumptions | 265 |
| Error 8: Misinterpreting idioms and employing Midrashic quoting of Scripture..... | 266 |
| Error 9: The etymological fallacy | 267 |
| Read with your eyes open | 269 |

| | |
|---|------------------|
| What's the alternative? Seven points about the end times | 269 |
| 1. Christ's return could happen at any moment, with neither warning nor any kind of predictable signs, but when He does return, everyone on earth will know..... | 269 |
| 2. At Christ's return, all the dead (both redeemed and unredeemed will rise simultaneously, and all the living will undergo transformation..... | 270 |
| 3. At the time of this general resurrection, all creation will be transformed (or destroyed and then renewed), released from its bondage to death and decay | 273 |
| 4. Everyone who has ever lived will face judgment before Christ: the redeemed will be acquitted because of His blood; the unredeemed will be condemned because of their own sins..... | 274 |
| 5. The redeemed, now "clothed" in their eternal bodies, will enjoy the new creation in fellowship with the Godhead and with each other for ever and ever | 275 |
| 6. The unredeemed will be excluded from God's presence and will suffer "everlasting destruction," consumed by "a raging fire" with no remedy | 276 |
| 7. Meanwhile, the spirits of those who die enter into an intermediate state, awaiting the resurrection and judgment..... | 278 |
| A framework for understanding and experiencing End Times..... | 279 |
| Chart A: Dispensationalism | 280 |
| Chart B: Amillennialism | 281 |
| THE FOUR PILLARS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM | 282 – 310 |
| Introduction | 283 – 286 |
| What's happening in Israel?..... | 283 |
| Long-standing movement comes of age | 286 |
| The four pillars of Christian Zionism | 287 – 272 |
| 1. The blessing and cursing of the Abrahamic covenant | 287 |
| 2. The promise of the land | 288 |
| 3. The rebuilding of a Jewish temple..... | 289 |
| 4. The future mass conversion of Jews to Christ..... | 290 |
| Are these four pillars legitimate? | 290 – 307 |
| 1. The promise of blessing and cursing is conditional..... | 290 |
| 2. The land promise is limited and conditional..... | 296 |
| 3. The Bible makes no promise of a future restored temple | 300 |
| 4. End-time predictions have neither focus on Israel nor anticipate <i>en masse</i> conversion to Christ | 306 |
| Conclusion: Christian Zionism is neither Christian nor Zionist | 307 – 310 |
| NOTES | 311 – 346 |
| ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY | 347 – 372 |
| Bibliography..... | 347 |
| Sources | 347 |
| Hermeneutics..... | 349 |
| Historical & Cultural Background | 350 |
| Commentaries on the Apocalypse | 354 |
| Special Studies on the Apocalypse..... | 356 |
| Works on Biblical Prophecy..... | 360 |
| The Four Pillars of Christian Zionism | 365 |
| Other Works Consulted..... | 370 |
| INDEX TO SPIRITUAL SONGS REFERRING TO REVELATION..... | 373 – 375 |
| MESSAGE FROM STEVE SINGLETON | 377 |

Prologue

The Book of Revelation! The Apocalypse! People either love it or hate it; they fear it or avoid it altogether. Think of the Apocalypse as a swimming pool. Many who wade in at the shallow end soon find themselves sinking over their heads in ice-cold water. They immediately climb out and run to the far end where they think it is again shallow and comfortably warm. When the Apocalypse comes up in conversation, some close their minds and their mouths and switch on blank stares. Others show by their animated and opinionated jabbering that long ago, their minds were set—in concrete! Still others look around, frantically searching for an escape route.

Let me reassure you. I intend for this study guide to open your mind and calm your nerves about the Book of Revelation. The Apocalypse was not meant to create terror and dismay but to engender confidence and hope. And despite what you may have heard to the contrary, its message—even down to many of the details—can be understandable to the modern reader. In fact, the phrase, “The time is near” that occurs in the opening paragraph of the Book of Revelation is a key to understanding the prophecy as a whole. Once you grasp the concept of viewing it from the perspective of the original reader, most of the hard work of interpreting it is done.

I have designed this material to be usable in a number of ways. You can get a quick overview, which will guide you to the essential parts of the Introduction and the “35,000 Feet” view of each chapter. You can compare the various schools of interpretation, or study a particular passage. The annotated bibliography can guide you to a more extensive inquiry.

Of course, nothing will help you more than actually reading the text of Revelation. It is the only book of the Bible that pronounces a blessing on the person who will read it (Rev. 1:3). The best way to start is to read it in its entirety all at once, and if possible, aloud. This takes about 90 minutes. Then, of course, you should read each chapter again as you go through this study guide. You should also read those parts of the Old Testament that form the main sources for the concepts and imagery in the Apocalypse, particularly Ezekiel and Daniel.

As you read, focus on the main message of Revelation; it is easy to slog through the swamp of the details and never look up to see the mountains towering in the distance. But surely those mountains—the holy influence of a godly life, the resurrected Redeemer, and the ultimate victory of God—are your final destination. My hope is that you will make it safely through that swamp and explore those thrilling heights. Perhaps this study guide can serve as a compass.

Those of us who study Revelation can be “Overcomers” in two senses. First, we can overcome all of the obstacles that time and misinterpretation have created that hinder understanding this powerful part of God’s Word. Second, we can actually experience what the original readers of the Apocalypse did—we ourselves can become Overcomers.

My thanks to the many students through the years whose questions and comments have helped me to focus on what is important and to de-emphasize what is not. I am grateful to my family, my wife Cindy and my children, Jonathan, Michael, and Jennifer, without whose enthusiastic encouragement this study guide would still be only a vision. I have learned more from all of you than you have from me. Thank you, Cindy, for constantly reminding me to keep it practical. I hope someday that “the word of my testimony” is as courageous as yours.

Nothing will help you more than actually reading the text of Revelation. It is the only book of the Bible that pronounces a blessing on the person who will read it (Rev. 1:3).... As you read, focus on the main message of Revelation.



He Arose!

*Some say Jesus is a mystery
lost behind a solid wall.
Some say Jesus is a legend,
and He never lived at all.
Some say Jesus is a concept,
ever changing as it grows.
I say He's our only rescue, and I know
that He arose.*

*In that age before all ages,
when the Father formed His plan,
He knew He would need an answer
to the sinfulness of Man.
Then the Logos made His offer,
and His path He freely chose.
He came down to be our ransom, and He died,
but He arose.*

*If you'd lived back in the old times,
when the Romans ruled the land,
You could trace right where His sandals
made their footprints in the sand.
You could meet the risen Jesus,
place your fingers in the holes.
Then you'd say, "My Lord was murdered, but I know
that He arose."*

*I once thought I was so worthless,
there was nothing left to save.
Then they told me of the Master
and the love He freely gave.
In the water I could feel my
sinful life draw to a close.
Then I died there with my Savior, Jesus Christ,
but we arose.*

*When the world has stopped its spinning,
and when God puts out the sun,
When all humans stand in judgment,
facing all we've ever done,
Then the one thing most important
will be that His image shows,
For the Sovereign of all ages gave His life,
but He arose.*

To the tune of "The Rose," lyrics by Amanda McBroom.
Above lyrics by Steve C. Singleton. Copyright ©1996. All rights reserved.

Introduction

You may be wondering why we should spend so much time introducing the Apocalypse rather than just jumping into the text. Can't we pick up what we need to know inductively as we read along? That was certainly possible for the original readers of the Book of Revelation, believers in seven congregations of the Roman province of Asia some time during the last half of the first century after Christ. They shared with the human author of Revelation the same language, thought patterns, knowledge of the Old Testament, historical background, and cultural background.

Unfortunately, time, space, language, and culture separate us from both that original audience and the human author of Revelation. We must attempt to throw bridges over these chasms by careful gathering and analysis of information and by a close examination and refinement of our operating principles. If we believe the Apocalypse teaches one thing and not another, we should attempt to explain the basis of that belief.

To make matters a hundred times worse, we as modern readers of the Apocalypse have inherited 20 centuries of teaching about Revelation, much of it confusing and even contradictory. For most of us, it is necessary to unlearn what we have been taught, or at least to set aside our entrenched preconceptions before approaching the text of the last book of the Bible. To read Revelation critically, analytically, but with an open mind to new ideas—that is the formidable challenge that confronts us.

“Overcoming” must first mean bursting through the barriers of our assumptions about the Apocalypse, then overcoming the culture shock of reaching back to an alien time and place as we attempt to read Revelation as they would have read it only two or three generations after the cross and the empty tomb.

If you are willing to make the attempt to understand, if you are willing to take the trouble to lay aside what you may have been taught all your life, then you will find Revelation opening up for you. You will begin to discover what it means to overcome ignorance and confusion. You will find yourself listening to the Lamb Himself as He speaks to you about the challenges you face, challenges that you can overcome with His help.

“Overcoming” first has to mean bursting through the barriers of our assumptions about the Apocalypse, then overcoming the culture shock of reaching back to an alien time and place as we attempt to read Revelation as they would have read it only two or three generations after the cross and the empty tomb.



1. Hermeneutics

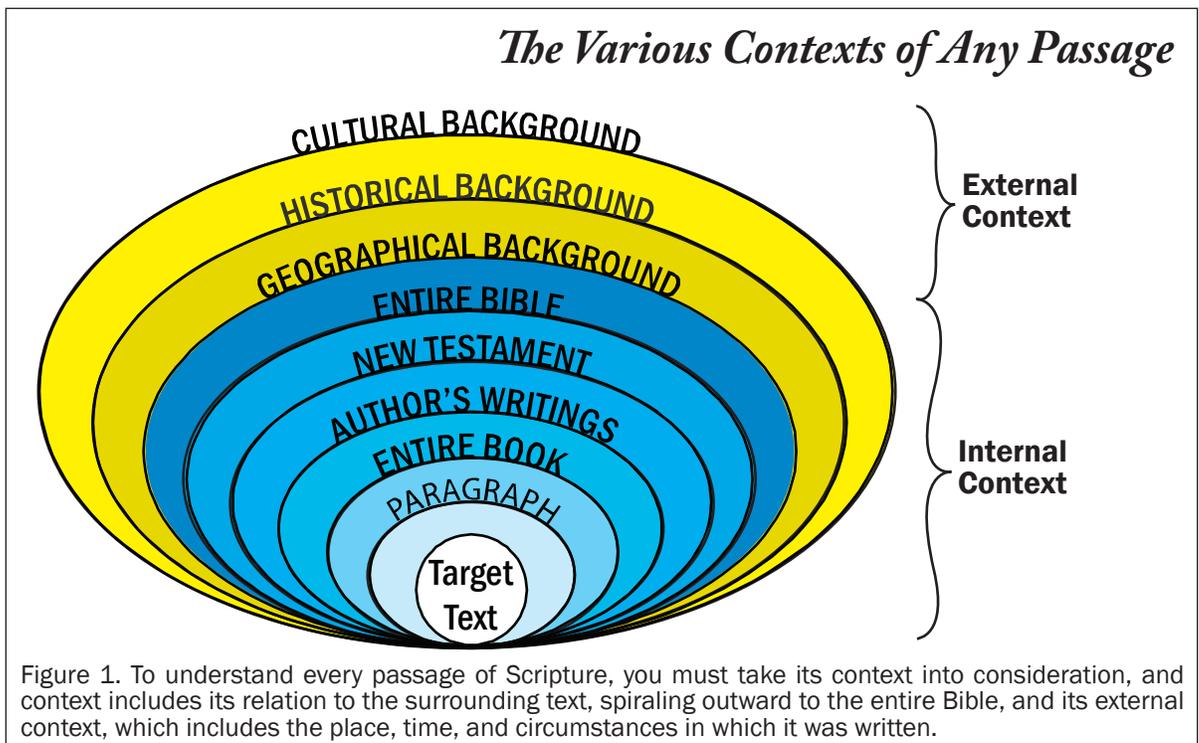
As we begin our study of Revelation, we must consider what principles we are going to use to interpret the book. The development and application of interpretive principles is called *hermeneutics* (from the Greek word meaning “to translate, to interpret”), and each principle is called a *hermeneutic*.

First, we must consider the hermeneutics applicable to every biblical text (“general hermeneutics”). Second, we will look at principles that specifically apply to Revelation (“special hermeneutics”).

a. General Hermeneutics

The following principles apply to any biblical text you are studying, whether Revelation, or Mark, or First Samuel:

1. Interpret the Bible as you would any other book. Go with the simple and obvious meaning.
2. Assume the writer employed the right combination of words and forms to get his point across the way he wanted it.
3. The meaning of any text is limited and controlled by its internal context, that is, the paragraphs and sentences leading up to and following the target text.
4. The meaning of any text is limited and controlled by its external context, that is, its geographical, cultural, and historical background (see Figure 1).
5. Assume that the author is consistent; assume that he will not contradict himself, or other biblical writers. This is the canon of *the analogy of Scripture*: use a clear passage to interpret an obscure passage, not the other way around.²



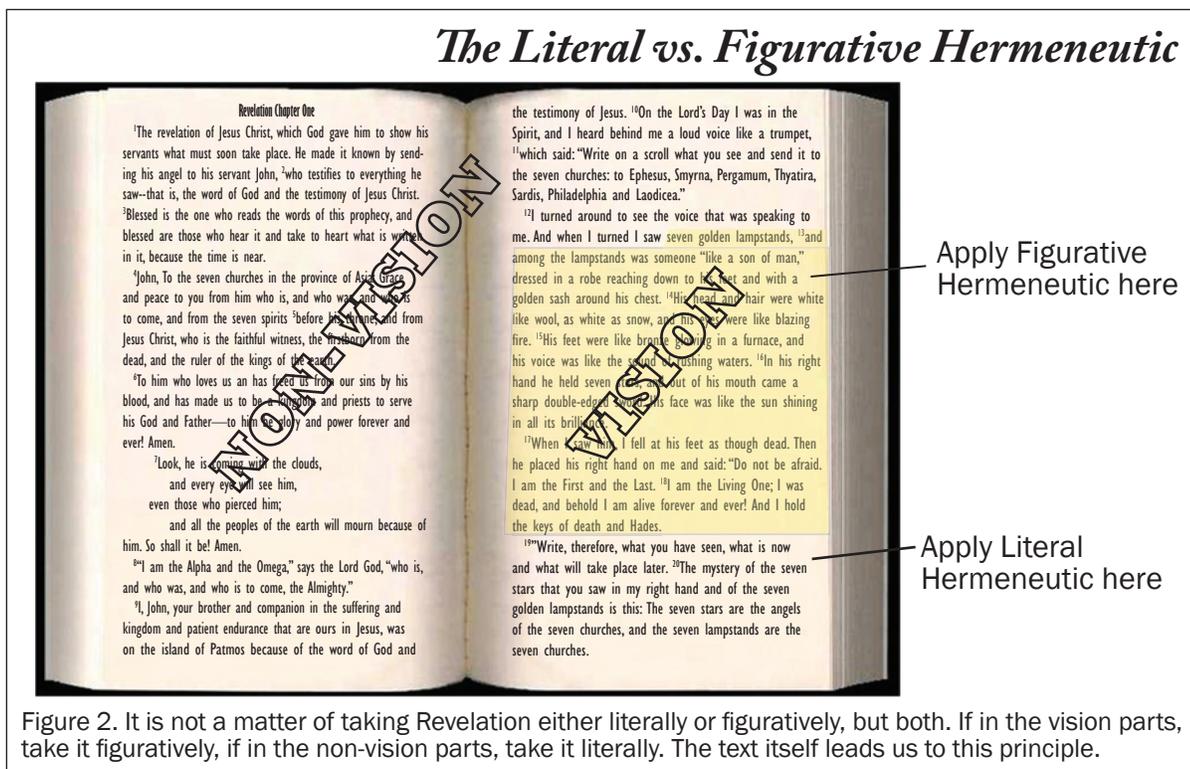
6. Recognize the genre of the document, and do not interpret it as if it were a different genre. The variety of biblical genres includes: didactic, homily, narrative, poetry, epistle, and apocalypse. Each genre has its own set of special hermeneutics, in addition to, and not in contradiction of the general hermeneutics.
7. Interpret each text in the frame of its own philosophical presuppositions.
8. Recognize the reality of progressive revelation—not that the early authors understood less than the later ones, but that we understand more about what the early authors intended in the light of what was revealed later.

b. Special Hermeneutics for the Book of Revelation

1. The Literal vs. Figurative Hermeneutic

Carefully distinguish within the Book of Revelation between the vision and the explanation, applying a figurative hermeneutic in the vision sections and a literal hermeneutic in the explanation sections. In the explanation sections of the book (e.g., Rev. 1:1–11, 19–20; 2:1–3:22; 7:13–17; 13:9–10, 18; 14:12–13; 17:7–18; 19:8b–10; 22:6–21), we should assume that what is being described is literal unless the text indicates otherwise. In the vision sections of the book (e.g., Rev. 1:12–18; 4:1–7:12; 8:1–13:8; 13:9–17; 14:1–11; 14:14–17:6; 18:1–19:8a; 19:11–21:5), we should assume the opposite: you are dealing with symbols unless you have good reasons to believe otherwise. The text itself prompts us to impose this reversal, because here and there in the text, explanations occur that indicate certain details of the vision are symbolic. These explanations, unfortunately, are few and far between, but are nevertheless suggestive of the approach we should take in interpreting the vision sections of Revelation.³

It is amazing how often those seeking to explain Revelation disregard these two principles. Some



ignore the distinction between vision and explanation and seek to explain everything literally. Others are quite arbitrary in switching back and forth, taking some things literally, some figuratively.

It is true that in some places, the two overlap—unexplained symbols occur in explanation sections (e.g., “bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire” in 17:16) and explanations are embedded within a vision (e.g., “the prayers of all the saints” in Rev. 8:3)—but these are relatively easy to untangle.⁴ What we want to avoid is making the explanation into another symbol that requires a further explanation beyond what the text provides.⁵

2. *The Hermeneutic of Original Intent*

*We must seek to limit our interpretation to those objects and events that were well within the author’s sphere of experience.*⁶ This means that we would be mistaken, for example, to expect the 666 riddle to be solved in a way that depends on the English language or the ASCII code, for both are totally alien to the author’s time and culture. Many other modern explanations of Revelation are guilty of making this same mistake.⁷

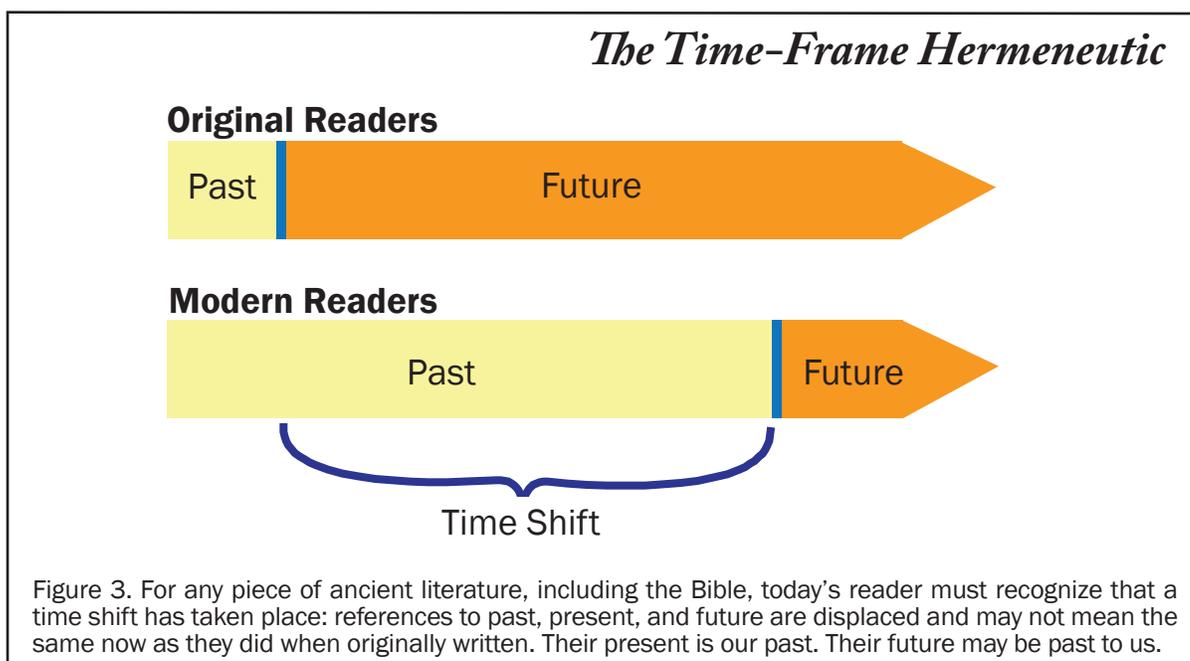
3. *The Hermeneutic of Original Audience*

In studying Revelation, first try to understand what is being said from the perspective of the original readers. As the original recipients of Revelation, the Christians of the Roman province of Asia were presumably the readers John had in mind when he wrote the book. What were their concerns? What dangers and challenges did they face? How could he encourage them not to give up their faith in Jesus Christ? Only after determining what Revelation would mean for them can we leap across more than 19 centuries and ask what it means for us today.⁸

4. *The Time-Frame Hermeneutic*

Take seriously time references in the book, rather than ignoring them or explaining them away At the beginning and the end of Revelation are carefully worded statements regarding when the predictive prophecy will be fulfilled. Recognizing these as part of an explanation section (see Special Rule 1), we should take these time frames literally. Assuming that Revelation is genuine prophecy inspired by the Holy Spirit, we should look to its fulfillment “soon” after the predictions were made.

In addition to the time frames at the beginning and the end of the prophecy, John also uses verb tenses (past, present, and future) as he explains what the visions mean. These tenses should be understood from the perspective of the original readers, not from a modern reader’s perspective, for we have undergone a time shift compared to them. Their past is in our remote past. Their present is in



our past. Even a great deal of their future is in our more recent past.

If we disregard the time-frame hermeneutic, then we will assume that no shift has taken place: things described in the present tense we would understand as being present for us, while things described using the future tense we would interpret as still future for us. This hermeneutical error wreaks havoc on the interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

Note that the time-frame hermeneutic, as regarding verb tenses and time references, applies only to the explanation sections of the book. In the vision sections, past, present, and future tenses occur with reference to what the apostle saw in his vision (with the past tense predominating). These tenses do not necessarily correspond to what is in real time the past, the present, or the future, either for the original readers or for the modern reader.

5. The Old Testament Background Hermeneutic

When choosing between two interpretations, the interpretation should be preferred which depends on the Old Testament for its symbolism or meaning.

This hermeneutic is based on rules 2 and 3, for the Old Testament was an outstanding component in the mind-set of both the author and his original readers. In fact, the Old Testament is the most important source for the symbolism found in the Book of Revelation. The Old Testament provides the key to Revelation's numerology and at least most of its symbolic colors and animals, as well as symbolism based on the Jewish cultus, the Exodus, and the cosmic catastrophe symbolism found in the literary prophets (see below: "Sources of the Symbolism of Revelation" on pp. 79–83).

6. The Historical Background Hermeneutic

In a way similar to Special Rule 4, when choosing between two interpretations, the interpretation should be preferred which depends on the historical background for its symbolism or meaning.

This rule is reasonable because the author and his original readers share a knowledge of history, perhaps obscure to most modern readers, which influences both what the author states and what the readers understand.

7. The Modern Application Hermeneutic

Only when we have determined the meaning of the text for the original readers, can we identify the significance of the text of Revelation for modern readers. The modern relevance depends on whether a particular prophecy has been fulfilled in the years since Revelation was first written. If it remains unfulfilled, we must sort through the alternative explanations available to us (see the section entitled, "Understanding Biblical Predictive Prophecy" on pp. 21–28). If we determine the prediction still awaits fulfillment in our future, then the application for us is the same as for the original readers.

If, however, the prophecy has already been fulfilled, then the meaning for us depends on how successful we are at drawing valid analogies between the situation of the original readers and our own.⁹ The resultant significance for modern readers tends to consist of general, time-transcendent principles rather than specific, one-for-one correspondences.

For instance, the "mark of the beast" of Rev. 13 apparently found fulfillment in the immediate future for the Christians of the first-century Roman province of Asia: they could not buy or sell without confronting the blasphemy of the Roman emperor, for His divine claims were embossed on their coins. By analogy, modern Christians face a similar challenge of reconciling their need to earn a living with the pervasive corruption of business and government. Like first-century Christians, we occasionally have to make hard choices, like having to sacrifice career advancement or job security for the sake of personal integrity. Revelation reassures us that God appreciates such sacrifices and rewards His servants who make them.

As we go through the text of the Apocalypse, I will point out such analogous situations and the principles we can derive from them. With the approach to Revelation that I am convinced is the correct one, these spiritual principles constitute the primary, practical value for studying the book.

2. Internal Contexts

At the beginning of the study of such a difficult book, it can only help to examine what is involved in studying the context. In doing so, we will begin with the sentence as a “bite-sized” lexical unit,¹⁰ moving ever outward in widening spirals.

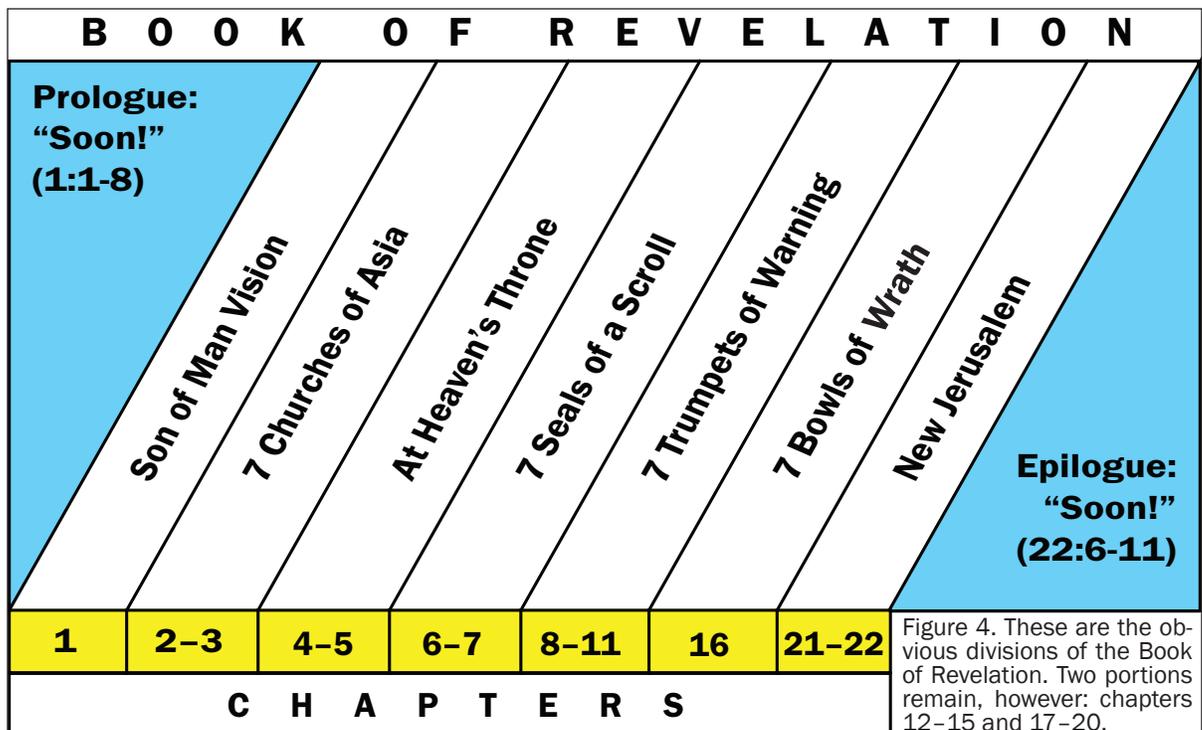
a. Immediate Context – Sentence, Paragraph, Book

Look for the punctuation that begins and ends the sentence, trying to understand what the sentence means isolated from the sentences around it. Then recognize this sentence as a part of a paragraph. Here it really helps to have a Bible that does not make each individual verse its own paragraph but divides the text into paragraphs according to sense.

Watch out for the chapter divisions. They sometimes interrupt the flow of thought, sometimes breaking up a paragraph. (At Rev. 13:1, for example, the chapter break should have been one verse later.) The main function of chapter divisions is to break up the text into chunks of roughly equal size so that we may find passages more readily.

One of the best ways to catch the flow of thought of a book is to read it all the way through rapidly—several times, if you can. You will start to get an overview, seeing the entire forest rather than just examining the bark of an individual tree. Once you have a clear understanding of the book as a whole, the individual chapters and verses will fall into place.

A rapid reading uncovers a definite structure to the book, with these main blocks as in Figure 4:



A closer look discloses that two large sections of the book are missing from this outline—chapters 12 – 15 and chapters 17 – 20. If you re-read these two sections, you will find that they seem to be as important to the book as they are mysterious. We will look at them in detail later. Also, you may

notice a pattern with the seals/trumpets/bowls sequence: the first six follow one another in rapid order, but there is a pause before the seventh finally makes its entrance. This pause has the effect of heightening the suspense as we await the final seal, the final trumpet, and the final bowl. It also serves to give a strong emphasis on the thing done during the pause. This sequence of 1-2-3-4-5-6-Pause-7, 1-2-3... serves to interlock the sections like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

b. Remote Contexts – Author’s Other Writings, New Testament

Assuming that the Apostle John is the author of Revelation (see section on “Authorship,” pp. 64–66), what does Revelation have in common with John’s other writings—Gospel of John and John’s Epistles? The chart below summarizes the main points.

| <i>Revelation and John’s Other Writings</i> ¹¹ | | |
|---|---|--|
| Topic | Book of Revelation | Fourth Gospel/Epistles of John |
| Christ as “The Word” | 19:13 | John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1 |
| Christ as “The Lamb” | 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27. | John 1:29, 36 |
| Christ as Shepherd | 7:17 | John 10:11; 21:15-17 |
| Figures of Speech: water, springs manna light vs. darkness true vs. false or truth vs. lie | 7:17; 21:6 2:17 21:23-25 2:2; 3:7, 9, 14, 17; 6:10; 14:5; 15:3; 16:7, 13; 19:2, 9, 11, 20; 20:11; 21:5, 8; 22:5, 15 | John 4:9-15 John 6:30-63 John 1:5; 3:19-21; 8:12; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:8-11 John 1:9, 14, 17, 47; 3:21, 33; 4:18, 23, 24; 5:33; 6:32; 7:18, 28; 8:31-32, 40, 44-46, 55; 14:6, 17; 15:1, 26; 16:13; 17:3, 17; 18:23, 37, 38; 19:35; 21:24; 1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 8, 21, 22; 3:19; 4:1, 6, 20; 5:6, 10, 20; 2 John 1-4; 3 John 1, 3, 4, 8, 12 |
| No need for temple | 21:22 | John 4:21 |
| Use of 7 in series | churches, seals, trumpets, bowls | 7 days at opening of ministry 7 signs to inspire faith 7 days of the Passion |

Figure 5. Despite some differences in grammar, vocabulary, and theme, Revelation has remarkable resemblances to John’s other writings. They help provide a background for understanding the Book of Revelation.

The similarity between Revelation and the rest of the New Testament centers mainly on passages involving God’s wrath (e.g. Mark 13 and parallels, 2 Thess. 1:8–10; 2 Peter 3). See also passages concerning resurrection (e.g. 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4 – 5). These and other parallels will become evident as we explore Revelation verse by verse.

c. Remote Contexts – Old Testament

Even though your English translation probably does not recognize within the Apocalypse a single direct quotation from the Hebrew scriptures, the Old Testament is by far the most important source for the structure, message, and symbolism of Revelation. An examination of the Old Testament passages lying behind each part of Revelation will richly repay any student who makes the effort. For example, Revelation draws from at least four Old Testament books to describe the fall of Babylon the Great: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.¹² Primary Old Testament sources for the Book of Revelation include Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, Joel, the Psalms, Jeremiah, Zechariah, the Exodus from Egypt, and the Jewish tabernacle/temple worship (see Figure 6). We will look at each of these more closely.

Main Old Testament Backgrounds for the Book of Revelation

| Revelation | Exodus | Psalms | Isaiah | Jeremiah | Ezekiel | Daniel | Joel | Zechariah |
|------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---|--|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1:4-8 | 3:14; 19:6 | 89:27, 37 | 44:6 | | | 7:13 | | 12:10-14 |
| 1:9-20 | 25:31-40; 34:29-35 | | 44:6; 49:2 | | 1:3, 28; 3:12, 14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1; 43:2 | 4:34; 7:9, 13; 8: 17-18; 10:5-12; 12:7 | | 4:2 |
| chap. 2 | | 2:7-9 | 62:2 | 11:20 | | 1:12, 14 | | |
| chap. 3 | 32:32-33 | 69:28 | 22:22; 60:14; 43:4; 65:15 | | 48:35 | | | |
| chap. 4 | | 29:1; 96:7 | 6:1-5 | | | 7:9-10; 4:34 | | 4:2, 10 |
| chap. 5 | 20:4 | 141:2 | 11:1-2, 4, 10 | | 2:9-10 | 4:13-14; 7:10 | | 4:10 |
| chap. 6 | | 2:2 | 34:4; 2:10,19 | | 14:21 | | 2:31 | 1:8-12; 6:1-8 |
| chap. 7 | | | 49:10; 25:8 | | 9:4-6 | | | 6:5 |
| chap. 8 | 9:23-26; 7:20-21; 10:21-23 | | | 9:15 | 10:2 | | 2:1, 30 | |
| chap. 9 | 10:12-15 | 115:4-5, 7 | | | | 5:23 | 1:6-7, 15; 2:1-11 | |
| chap. 10 | | | | 1:10 | 2:8; 3:1-3 | 10:5-6; 12:7; 8:26; 12:4, 9 | | |
| chap. 11 | | 2:1, 5; 115:13 | | | 37:10; 40:3 | 7:21 | 3:1-2 | 4:2-3, 11-14 |
| chap. 12 | 9:4 | 2:9 | | 51:34 | | 7:7; 8:10; 10:13 | | |
| chap. 13 | | | | 15:2 | | 3:5-6; 7:2-8, 20-21, 25; 11:36 | | |
| 14:1-13 | 20:11 | | 21:9; 34:10 | 51:7-8; 25:15 | | 4:30 | 3:13 | |
| 14:14-20 | | | 63:3, 6 | | | 7:13 | 3:12- 13 | |
| chap. 15 | 15:1; 40:35 | 86:9 | 6:4 | 10:7 | 10:4 | 10:5 | | |
| 16:1-9 | 9:8; 7:20-21 | | | | | | | |
| 16:10-11 | 10:21-22 | | | | | | | |
| 16:12-16 | 8:5-6 | | | | | | | |
| 16:17-21 | 9:23-24 | | | | | 12:1 | | |
| chap. 17 | | 136:3 | | 51:6-9, 12-13 | 16:39-41; 23:25-29 | 7:24; 2:47 | | |
| 18:1-8 | | | 21:9; 13:19-22 | 51:8; 50:39 | 43:2 | | | |
| 18:9-19 | | | | 51:6, 45; 50:15, 29 | 26:16-17; 27:2-3, 12-13, 22, 28-36 | | | |
| 18:20-24 | | | 23:8 | 51:63-64; 25:10 | 26:13 | | | |
| 19:1-10 | | 115:13 | 34:10 | | | 8:17 | | |
| 19:11-21 | | 2:9 | 11:3-5; 63:1-3 | | 1:1; 39:17-20 | | | |
| chap. 20 | | | | | 38:2,14-16, 18,21-22 | 7:9-10, 21-22, 26; 12:1 | | |
| 21:1-8 | | | 65:17-19; 43:18-19; 55:1 | | 37:27 | | | 8:8 |
| 21:9-27 | | | 54:11-12; 60:1-5, 11,19-20; 52:1 | | 40:1-3, 5; 48:30- 35; 48:16 | | | |
| chap. 22 | | | 62:11; 55:1 | | 47:1, 6-7, 12 | | | 14:7 |
| Revelation | Exodus | Psalms | Isaiah | Jeremiah | Ezekiel | Daniel | Joel | Zechariah |

1. Ezekiel

Because Ezekiel has some of the closest parallels to Revelation of any of the Old Testament books, an overview of its message will help us to understand Revelation better.¹³ Ezekiel’s prophecy concerns events leading up to and following from the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. In the first half, Ezekiel tells the first wave of exiles taken in 605 B.C.E. that they might as well settle down in their new country, because their exile from Judah will last a long time. He has to burst the bubble of their unrealistic optimism by telling them that God will destroy Jerusalem for the nation’s sins. The people think that because Jerusalem housed the Lord’s temple, he would surely defend it and not permit it to be destroyed. Ezekiel points out, however, that the people have defiled the temple with their idolatry. He pictures the glory of the LORD as departing from the temple and lingering on a nearby hill, awaiting the destruction.¹⁴

Finally the news arrives that Jerusalem has fallen. From that point on, Ezekiel faces the opposite problem. He has to convince the exiles, now plunged into despair, that God will restore the fortunes of the Hebrew nation. In highly figurative language, Ezekiel portrays God as the defender of His people, bringing them victory against impossible odds. Then he pictures the restored Jerusalem with its new temple, to which God’s glory eventually returns. The entire country is transformed into a “land flowing with milk and honey,” abundant with produce and free from all threats of invasion (see Figure 7).

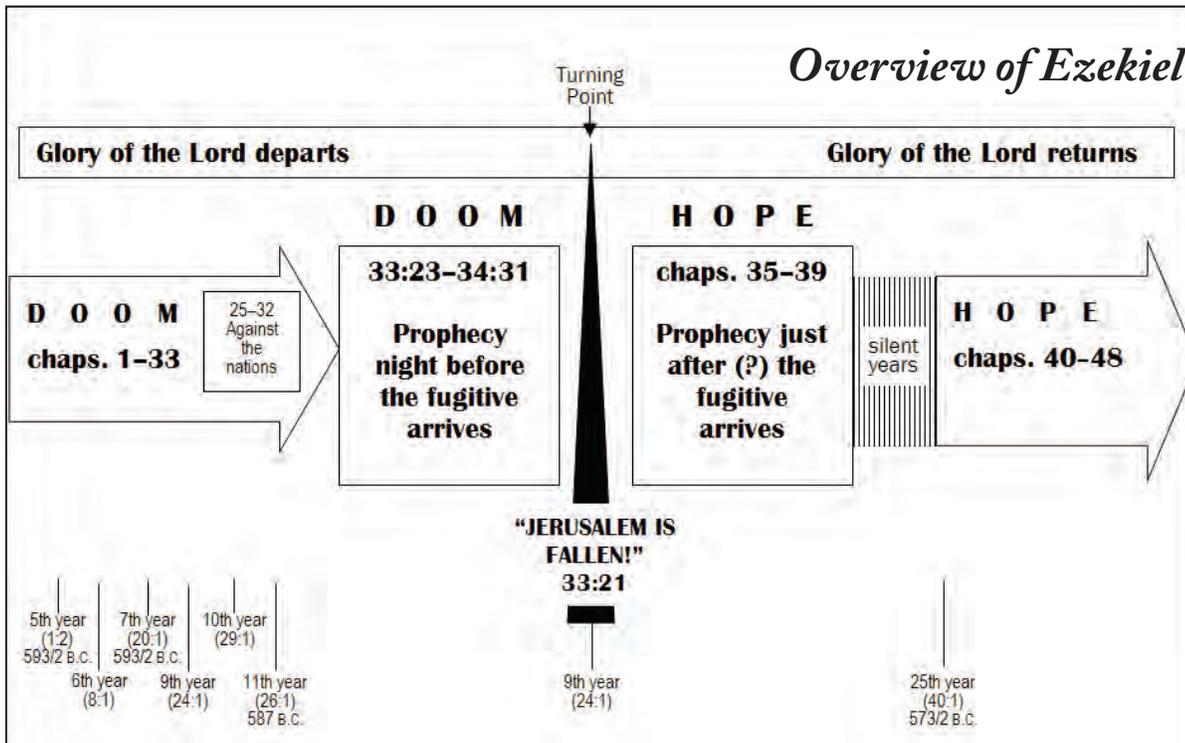


Figure 7. Ezekiel provides perhaps the most important Old Testament background to the Book of Revelation. Revelation closely parallels its basic structure (revelation of glory, judging the saints and then the nations, concluding with a glorious picture of renewed relationship with God. Revelation, however, gives much less emphasis than Ezekiel on the sins of God’s people and much more on the punishment of the nations.

The parallels with Revelation are striking. In fact, so many sections line up with each other that it would be nearly impossible to deny some kind of literary dependence. Consult Figure 8 and note that with only two exceptions (marked with shading) the sequences are in chapter-and-verse order for both Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation.

The overall theme of the first half of Ezekiel, in which Ezekiel receives an inkling of God’s glory in stark contrast with the sins of God’s people, is similar to the first three chapters of the Apocalypse: judgment begins with the household of God. The reluctant but inexorable abandonment of the temple

by God's glory¹⁵ parallels the threat of the Lord of the Churches to remove the Ephesians' lampstand, fight against the Pergamenes with the sword of His mouth, cast Thyatira's "Jezebel" on a "bed of suffering" and strike her "children" dead, steal into Sardis like a thief, and vomit out the Laodiceans.¹⁶ Yet in the following chapters of Revelation, we find no threats against Christians with such red-hot intensity—in fact, we find no threats at all.¹⁷ God turns His fury against the enemies of His new-covenant people, those whom He has made "a kingdom and priests" (Rev. 1:6).

*Parallels Between Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation*¹⁸

| | |
|--|---|
| Throne vision (1:4–28) | Throne vision (4:1–11) |
| Scroll (2:9–10) | Scroll (5:1–5) |
| Four plagues (5:12–17) | First four seals (6:1–8) |
| Slain beside altars (6:4, 13) | Fifth seal: martyrs under altar (6:9–11) |
| Wrath comes (7:2, 5–6, 27) | Sixth seal: earthquake (6:12 – 7:1) |
| Foreheads marked (9:4) | 144,000 sealed on foreheads (7:2–8) |
| Throne again (10:1) | Multitude before throne (7:9–17) |
| Coals scattered (10:2, 6–7) | Seventh seal: coals throne on earth (8:1–5) |
| No more delay (12:25) | No more delay (10:1–7) |
| Scroll eaten (2:9 – 3:9) | Scroll eaten (10:8–11) |
| Cup of wrath (23:30–35) | Cup of wrath (14:6–12) |
| Jerusalem the whore (chap. 23) | Babylon the whore (17:1–6) |
| Laments for Tyre (26:15 – 27:36) | Laments for Babylon (18:9–24) |
| Supper for birds and animals (32:4–6) | Supper for birds (19:17–21) |
| Dry bones "resurrection" (chap. 37) | First "resurrection" (20:1–6) |
| Gog from Magog (chap. 38) | Gog and Magog (20:7–10) |
| Judgment (39:21) | Judgment (20:11–15) |
| Temple vision (chap. 40) | New Jerusalem (21:1–8) |
| Temple walls and gates (chap. 40) | City gates and walls (21:9–21) |
| God's glory returns to the temple (43:1–6) | God's glory in new Jerusalem (21:22–23) |
| Ever-deepening river (chap. 47) | River of life (21:22 – 22:5) |

Figure 8. The parallels between Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation are remarkable. What is even more amazing is that, with the exception of the eating of the scroll (see shaded cell above), all of the parallels are in order. These alignments seem too synchronized to be unintentional.

2. Daniel

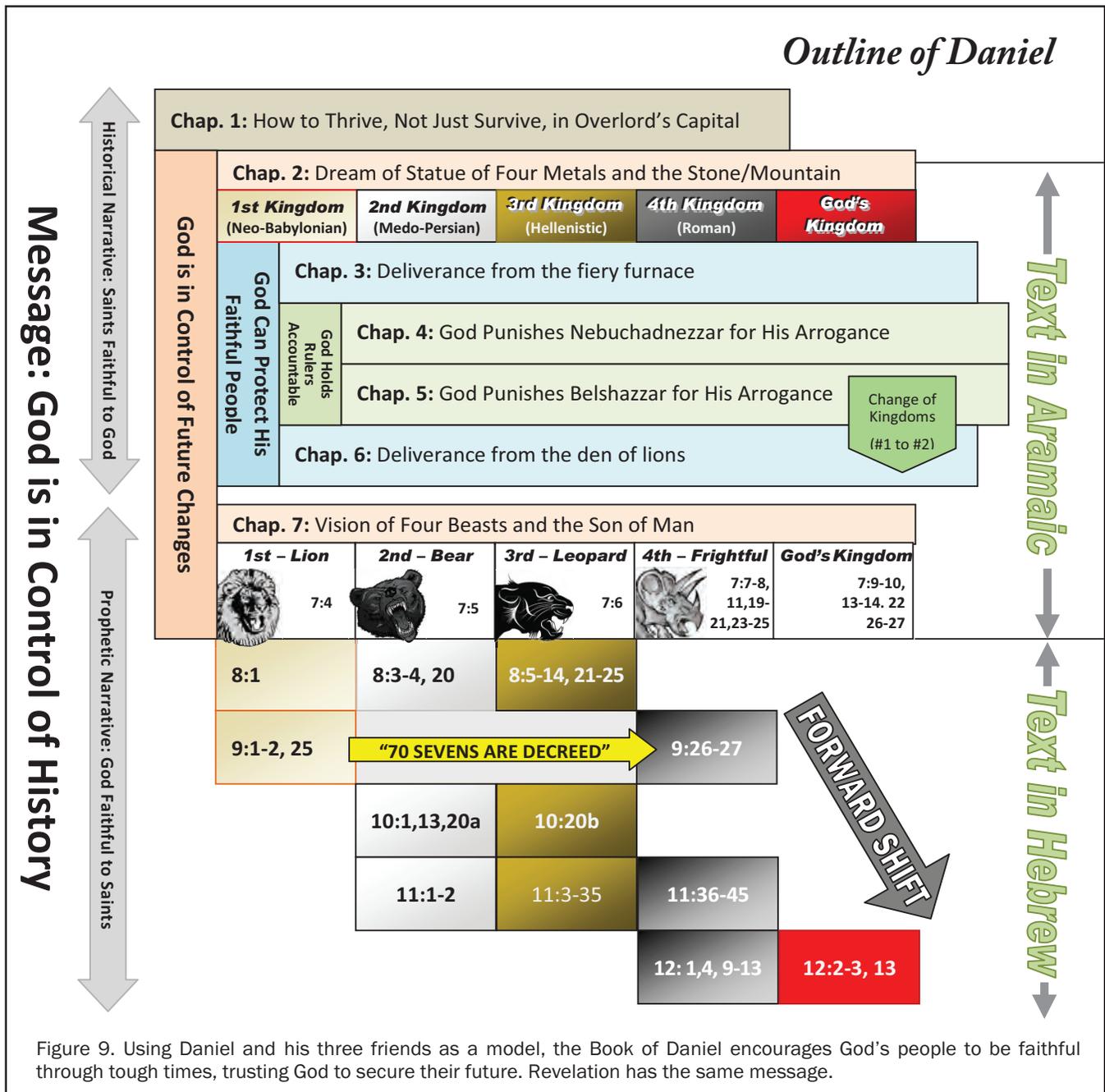
Daniel is the second most important Old Testament book for understanding Revelation.¹⁹ Like Ezekiel's, Daniel's prophetic ministry took place away from the promised land during the Babylonian Exile period (about 597 to 539 B.C.E.). Daniel served as a government official, first for the Babylonians and then for the Persians, while steadfastly continuing his devotion to the Lord. He set a sterling example of how to maintain faithfulness despite being under the political domination of wicked overlords. The situation in his day was similar to what the first-century Christians of the Roman province of Asia faced. The author of Revelation emphasizes the parallels by naming the ruling city of his day "Babylon."²⁰ and naming the Hero of the Apocalypse "one like a Son of Man,"²¹ just like the glorious figure of Dan. 7:13.

The first half of Daniel's book (chapters 1–6) is an anecdotal biography of Daniel with two glimpses of his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, better known by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They confront one test after another, all aimed at making them

give up their loyalty to God for the sake of career advancement or personal safety. They meet every challenge with rock-solid determination to serve the Lord alone, refusing to compromise with idolatry.

Interspersed among these narratives are three predictive prophecies: Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a statue composed of four metals (chapter 2), his dream of the great tree cut down (chapter 4), and the writing on the wall during Belshazzar’s feast (chapter 5). Although the first prophecy is the most significant, predicting as it does world history for hundreds of years into Daniel’s future, the theme of all three prophecies is the same as a major theme of the Apocalypse: God is the ruler over the kings of the earth.²² In fact, this message recurs in every one of the first six chapters of Daniel,²³ establishing a firm base for the rest of the book, which is a series of predictive prophecies extending from Daniel’s day until at least the Roman destruction of Jerusalem 600 years later.²⁴

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter 2 seems to provide structure to the rest of the book (see Figure 9). The metals in the image represent successive kingdoms that would arise, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar’s own (Babylonian, the head of gold). The other kingdoms, symbolized by silver, bronze,



and iron, probably represent the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, respectively. The image’s feet, composed of iron mixed with clay, seem to represent the first-century Roman empire (“partly strong, partly weak”), during which God’s kingdom would be established.²⁵ The symbol for God’s kingdom is a rock that demolishes the statue and then grows into a mountain that fills the whole earth.²⁶

The book of Daniel, therefore, concerns five kingdoms: Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman, and the kingdom of God. In the second half of the book (chapters 7–12), Daniel learns what will happen in the future. After chapter 7 recapitulates the overview of chapter 2, the emphasis of the succeeding prophecies cycle through the four kingdoms again and again, but with a definite future-shift toward the time when God’s kingdom would be established (see Figure 9 again). Revelation seems to have similar cycles, along with a similar future-shift.

The Book of Daniel concludes with a time-frame that provides a stark contrast with the ones at the beginning and end of the Book of Revelation. Daniel learns that his prophecies concern “the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4, 9), and therefore must be sealed and closed up. In other words, his predictions, stretching centuries into his future, were of no practical relevance to his own generation.

In contrast, at the end of Revelation an angel tells John, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near” (Rev. 22:10). Revelation is practical and relevant for the first-century believers who first receive it. It prepares them to be faithful through a terrible persecution about to break out upon them. It teaches them lessons similar to those of Daniel: Be steadfast in your stand against paganism (Rev. 2:14–16, 20; 9:20–21; 14:4–5; 21:27; 22:14–15) and the Lord is Ruler over the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5; 17:14; 19:16). John himself, like Daniel, sets an example of faithfulness through trials (Rev. 1:9).

The parallel sections Revelation shares with Daniel, though not as numerous or in strict sequence as with Ezekiel, are still very important (see Figure 10).

| <i>Parallels Between Daniel and the Book of Revelation</i> | |
|---|---|
| Daniel | Revelation |
| God as ruler of the kings of the earth (1:2; 2:37-38; 4:17, 25, 32, 34-35, 37; 5:18-21, 26; 6:25-27; 7:13-14, 22, 27) | Christ as ruler of kings of the earth (1:5; 2:26-27; 5:10; 11:15; 12:10; 19:1-2, 6, 15-16; 22:5) |
| Son of Man (7:13) | Son of Man (1:[7], 13) |
| Lion, bear, leopard (7:4-6) | Lion, bear, leopard (13:2) |
| 10 horns (7:7) | 10 horns (12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 12-14, 16-17) |
| “Time, times, and half a time” (7:25) | “Time, times, and half a time” (12:14) (=42 months – 11:2; 13:5; or 1260 days – 11:3; 12:6) |
| 10 + 1 - 3 (=8) horns (7:8) | 7 + 1 (=8) heads (17:11) |
| Seal the book (12:4, 9) | Don’t seal the book (22:10) |
| Righteous will stay righteous; wicked will stay wicked (12:10) | Wicked will stay wicked; Righteous will stay righteous (22:11) |

← CONTRAST →

Figure 10. Although parallels between Daniel and Revelation are extensive, note that unlike those with Ezekiel, they are not in order. They are significant, however, and some are almost quotations.

The first three beasts of Daniel 7 reappear in Revelation 13, except that they all combine into one animal, the sea-beast. The fourth beast of Daniel 7 contributes its 10 horns to the sea-beast, and the sea-beast’s iron teeth recall the iron of Daniel 2’s fourth kingdom.

Central to both Daniel and Revelation is the figure of Dan. 7:13, described as “one like a son of man.” Vigorous scholarly debate has continued over many decades regarding the meaning of “Son of Man” in Daniel, in the teaching of Jesus, and in the Apocalypse.²⁵ Most agree, however, that both Jesus and John see Dan. 7:13 as a prediction of Christ’s enthronement as “King of kings and Lord of lords.”²⁶

Some see the 70-weeks prophecy of Dan. 9:24–27 as central to the plot of Revelation, claiming that its last “week” corresponds closely to the 42 months and the 1260 days of Rev. 11:2–3, 12:6, and 13:5. But Dan. 9:24–27 is itself an enigmatic and difficult passage (which some scholars call “a dismal swamp”) that does not shed light on Revelation or any other biblical text. An important hermeneutical principle is to use easier passages to help interpret more difficult ones. Using Dan. 9:24–27 as a key to unlocking Revelation would turn this principle on its head.

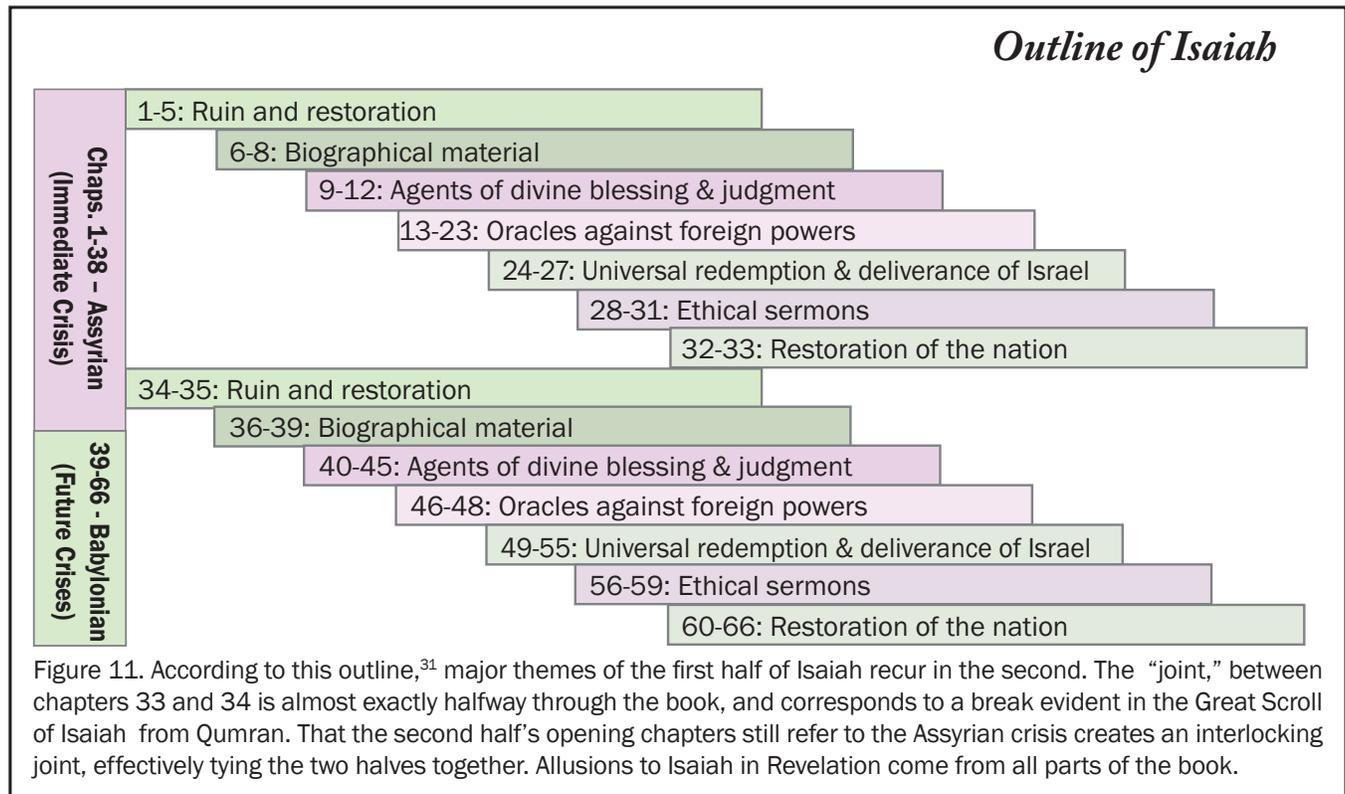
3. Isaiah

Author of the longest scroll of any of the Hebrew prophets and well known as the messianic prophet, Isaiah also contributes to the background of the Book of Revelation. This prophet of the late eighth century BCE²⁷ was a close advisor to the kings of Judah Ahaz and Hezekiah during a period when the Assyrians were conquering one nation after another, including the northern nation of Israel and its neighbors, on their way to a confrontation with Egypt.²⁸

Along with his fellow-prophet Micah, Isaiah advised that Judah should repent of forsaking the Lord, steer clear of an alliance with Egypt, and trust God to deliver it from this international danger. Hezekiah, at least, followed their urgent pleadings, resulting in a wonderful revival of spiritual fervor, followed by one of the greatest miraculous deliverances of biblical history. Overnight, God’s angel slaughtered 185,000 Assyrian soldiers just outside the walls of Jerusalem.²⁹ Emissaries from the surrounding nations, including some from Babylonia, brought gifts into Jerusalem expressing their gratitude to Hezekiah. Isaiah rebuked Hezekiah for showing off to the Babylonians the wealth of this treasury, predicting that someday the Babylonians would return to conquer Judah.³⁰

A detailed historical account of this saving event and the visit of the Babylonians concludes the first half of the Book of Isaiah, closing its prophecies concerning the Assyrian crisis. It also serves as a link to the second half which concerns the Babylonian conquest of Judah, the return from exile, and the coming of the Messiah, known in Isaiah as the Suffering Servant (see Figure 11, below).

According to Jan Fekkes, whose doctoral dissertation examines the allusions to Isaiah in the Book of Revelation,³² of the 73 allusions scholars have suggested, the 49 she regards as virtually certain fall into four categories: 1) Visionary experience and language, 2) Christological titles and descriptions,



3) Eschatological judgment, and 4) Eschatological salvation. Fekkes notes that Isaiah dominates the Letter to Philadelphia and much of the description of the New Jerusalem (see Figure 12).³³

Isaiah as Background for Revelation's New Jerusalem

| Isaiah | Revelation |
|---|--|
| Lord will wipe away every tear (25:8) | Every tear wiped away (21:4) |
| "I am about to do a new thing" (43:19) | "I am making everything new" (21:5) |
| The holy city (52:1) | The holy city (21:2) |
| City's foundations, walls, and gates built of precious stones and jewels (54:11-12) | Wall of jasper, foundations of precious stones, each gates a single pearl (21:18-21) |
| Thirsty invited to drink without cost (55:1) | Thirsty invited to drink water of life (21:6; 22:17) |
| Nations will come to Zion's light (60:3) | Nations will walk by its light (21:24a) |
| Nations will bring riches to it (60:5, 11) | Kings will bring their splendor into it (21:24b) |
| New heaven and new earth (65:17) | New heaven and new earth (21:1) |

Figure 12. Descriptions of Jerusalem's glorious renewal occur elsewhere among the Old Testament prophets (especially in Ezekiel), but Isaiah's have many parallels in the Apocalypse.³⁴

4. Joel

The Book of Joel also provides significant parallels to the Book of Revelation.³⁵ Joel, an eighth-century prophet of the northern nation of Israel, declared that the drought and locust plague the people were suffering were only the advance signals that a greater punishment would soon come. He warned his contemporaries to repent before God's wrath descended upon them in force. He promised that if they did repent, God would not only take away the drought and the locusts, but He would also bless them agriculturally and send His Spirit down on them all. He would judge the nations and provide His people with security (see Figure 13).

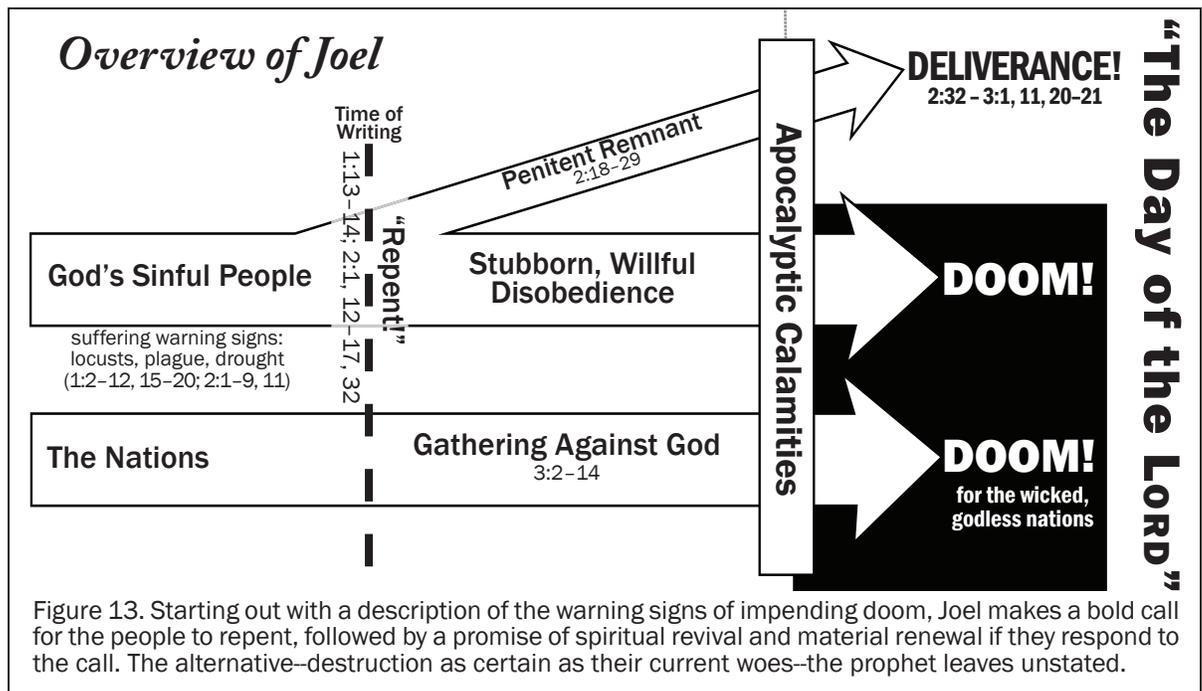


Figure 14 lists suggested parallels between Joel and the Book of Revelation. Two of these, the army of locusts and the double harvest, are stronger parallels than others.

Parallels Between Joel and the Book of Revelation

| Joel | Revelation |
|---|---|
| Trumpet as warning of wrath (2:1) | Seven trumpets (chaps. 8 – 9) |
| Army of locusts (2:2–11) | Army of locusts (9:3–11) |
| Call to repentance (2:12–17) | Call to repentance (14:6–12) |
| Call to repentance (2:14) | Call to repentance (2:5, 16; 3:3; chaps. 19 – 20) |
| Gathering of the army (3:9–12) | Gathering of the army (16:16) |
| Jerusalem holy, safe, & secure (3:12) | Jerusalem new, holy, & secure (chaps. 21 – 22) |
| Wheat harvest & grape vintage (3:13) | Wheat harvest & grape vintage (14:14–20) |
| Defeat of opposing army (3:14–16) | Defeat of opposing army (19:19–21) |
| Fountain from temple waters valley (3:18) | River of life (22:1–2) |

Figure 14. Third in significance after Ezekiel and Daniel, Joel supplies the background for understanding the locusts and the symbolism of wrath as a wheat harvest and grape vintage.

5. The Psalms

The Book of Psalms provides yet another source for the Apocalypse. Psalms that Revelation uses fall into four categories: God's judgment against the idolatrous nations, the salvation of the nations, the salvation of God's people, and attributes of God and His Anointed One (see Figure 15).³⁶ In addition to these specific allusions, Revelation's praise sections³⁷ imitate the structure and forms of the Psalms, including semitic parallelism, calls to worship, victory songs, and enthronement songs.³⁸

*Themes in Revelation from the Psalms*³⁹

| Psalm | Revelation |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| God's Judgment of the nations | |
| • Nations raged and were defeated - 2:1-2 | 11:15, 18 |
| • Nations smashed like clay pots - 2:9-9 | 2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15 |
| • Judgment according to works - 62:12 | 2:23 |
| • Drinking wine of God's wrath - 75:8 | 14:10 |
| • Nations raged & God took up reign - 99:1 | 11:17-18 |
| • Idolatry, work of human hands - 115:4-7 | 9:20 |
| • Babylon repaid for her cruelty - 137:8 | 18:6 |
| Salvation of the nations | |
| • All nations will worship God - 86:8-10 | 15:3-4 |
| Images of salvation for God's people | |
| • Not erased from book of life - 69:30 | 3:5 (13:8; 17:8; 20:14-15; 21:27) |
| • Those who fear God, small and great - 115:13 | 11:18; 19:5 |
| • Prayer rises like incense - 141:2 | 5:8; 8:3 |
| • New song sung to lyre - 144:9 | 5:8-9 |

Themes in Revelation from the Psalms (cont.)

| Psalm | Revelation |
|---|------------|
| Attributes of God and His Anointed One | |
| • Searches the human heart - 7:10 | 2:23 |
| • God's Anointed is firstborn - 89:27 | 1:5 |
| • Faithful witness - 89:37 | 1:5 |
| • Ruler of kings of the earth - 89:27 | 1:5 |

Figure 15. Individual psalms have a significant impact on the images and themes of Revelation.

6. *Jeremiah*

The Book of Jeremiah provides yet another background for Revelation. Before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (c. 586 BCE), Jeremiah stood virtually alone in advising the people to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar rather than holding out against him, hoping that the Egyptians would rescue them.⁴⁰ The king and the people of Judah regarded his advice as treasonous, and they imprisoned Jeremiah, fulfilling God's prediction that they would not listen to him.⁴¹ Jeremiah, however, was anything but pro-Babylonian, as demonstrated by his prophecy that the exile would end after 70 years, at which time God would punish Babylon.⁴² When the Babylonian army finally overran the city, they regarded Jeremiah as pro-Babylonian and granted him the freedom to choose whether to go into exile with the captives or remain in what was left of Jerusalem. He chose to remain.⁴³ After Jerusalem's fall, Jeremiah made a lengthy prophecy against Babylon (recorded in chapters 50 and 51), echoes of which recur in the Book of Revelation (see Figure 16).

Parallels between Jeremiah 50–51 and Revelation

| Jeremiah 51 | Revelation |
|---|--|
| Babylon will be uninhabited except by desert creatures and owls - 50:39 | Babylon will be home of demons and haunt of detestable birds - 18:2 |
| Call to flee from Babylon - 51:6, 45 | Call to come out of Babylon - 18:4 |
| cup of wrath for nations to drink - 51:7 (25:15) | Babylon made the nations drink her wine - 14:8; 17:4; 18:3, 6 |
| Call to wail over Babylon - 51:8a | Weeping over Babylon's fall - 18:10, 16, 19 |
| Babylon will suddenly fall - 51:8b | Disaster will befall Babylon in one day - 18:8 (in one hour - 18:10, 17, 19) |
| Babylon's judgment reaches the skies - 51:9 | Babylon's sins piled up to heaven - 18:5 |
| Babylon lives by many waters - 51:13 | Prostitute sits on many waters - 17:1 |
| Neb. like devouring serpent - 51:34 | Dragon sought to devour child - 12:4 |
| May violence Babylon did be done to her - 51:35 (also 50:15, 29) | Give Babylon back as she has given - 18:6-7 |
| Prophecy tied to stone thrown into Euphrates to symbolize Babylon's fall - 51:63-64 | Great boulder thrown into sea to symbolize Babylon's permanent fall - 18:21 |

Figure 16. Jeremiah 50-51 has many strong and obvious parallels to Revelation 17 and 18.

John's choice to refer to the city of Rome as "Babylon"⁴⁵ instead of some other Old Testament city or people (e.g., Tyre, Edom, Nineveh, etc.) probably depends on the parallels John and his fellow Jews perceived between the historical Babylon and Rome, such as: 1) both served as the capital for an ex-

tensive empire; 2) both were the center of pagan idolatry; 3) both were responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple of the LORD. Identifying Rome with Babylon was also probably a subtle way of suggesting that the new “Babylon” was in line to suffer the same fate as the original city, whose empire came to an abrupt end only 47 years after its devastation of Jerusalem.⁴⁶

7. Zechariah

Zechariah’s prophecies serve as yet another source of images and themes for Revelation.⁴⁷ Zechariah worked among the Jewish citizens of Jerusalem just after the return from Babylonian exile (520-516 BCE), more than 20 years after Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians. Zechariah and his coworker Haggai made the central focus of their ministry the rebuilding of the temple of the LORD, and they were successful in motivating the people to complete the work, finishing 70 years after Solomon’s temple had suffered destruction. Figure 17 lists the parallels Zechariah’s prophecy has with the Book of Revelation.

| Zechariah | Revelation |
|--|--|
| Horses of four colors - 1:8-17; 6:1-8 | Horsemen of first four seals - 6:1-8 |
| Measuring Jerusalem - 1:16-17; 2:1-5 | Measuring temple, Jerusalem - 11:1-2; 21:15-17 |
| Satan as an accuser - 3:1 | Satan the accuser cast down - 12:9 |
| Soiled & clean garments - 3:3-5 | Soiled/white garments - 3:4-5 |
| Stone on high priest’s forehead - 3:9 | White stone for overcomer - 2:17 |
| Seven eyes (facets) - 3:9; 4:10 | Seven eyes of lamb - 4:6 |
| Lampstand with seven lights - 4:2, 10 | Seven lamps (=seven spirits) - 4:5 |
| Lampstand, two olive trees - 4:1-6, 11-14 | Two lampstands and two olive trees - 11:4 |
| Scroll with disaster on both sides - 5:1-4 | Scroll written on both sides - 5:1 |
| Mourning over one they pierced - 12:10-14 | Mourning over one they pierced - 1:7 |
| Gathering of nations to battle - 14:2 | Gathering of nations to Armageddon - 16:16 |
| Jerusalem conquered - 14:2 | Holy city trampled - 11:2 |
| Earthquake splits Jerusalem - 14:4-5 | Earthquake splits city - 11:13; 16:17-20 |
| Lord fights against nations - 14:3 | Lamb leads army into battle - 19:11-21 |
| Absence of night - 14:6-7 | No night in new Jerusalem - 21:25; 22:5 |
| Living water flows out of Jerusalem - 14:8 | River of life flows from throne - 22:1 |
| LORD is king over all the earth - 14:9 | God reigns - 11:15; 19:6 |
| Canaanite excluded from LORD’s house - 14:21 | Wicked excluded from new Jerusalem - 22:15 |

Figure 17. Striking parallels exist between Zechariah and Revelation.

8. The Exodus from Egypt

Another important background for Revelation is the Exodus from Egyptian bondage. As the major event of Old Testament salvation history, the Exodus provides unique parallels to the new saving acts God promises to the Christians of the province of Asia. Figure 18 below summarizes the parallels:

Parallels Between the Exodus and Revelation

| The Exodus from Egypt | Revelation |
|--|---|
| Water turned into blood (Exod. 7:14-24) | Water turned into blood (11:6) |
| Plagues on Egyptians (Exod. 7 - 12) | Trumpets & bowls of wrath (chaps. 15 - 16) |
| Song of Moses (Exod. 15:1-18) | Song of Moses & the Lamb (15:3) |
| Thunder, lightning, & earthquake at Sinai (Exod. 19:18; 20:18) | Lightning, thunder, & earthquake (4:5; 8:5; 11:19) |
| Priest's linen & sash (Exod. 39:27-29) | Elders wear linen & sash (15:6) |
| Glory of LORD fills tabernacle (Exod. 40:34-35) | Glory of God fills temple (15:8) |
| Three tribes camp on each side of tabernacle (Num. 2) | Three tribe- gates on each side of walls (21:12-14) |
| Ground swallows up rebels (Num. 16:22-34) | Ground swallows river (12:16) |
| Hundred-pound hail (Josh. 10:11) | Hail as punishment (11:19) |

Figure 18. The Exodus provides significant background material for understanding the symbolism of the Book of Revelation, especially the 10 plagues, as well as the sights and sounds of Sinai.

9. The Jewish tabernacle/temple worship

Closely related to the Exodus is the tabernacle/temple with its furnishings and priestly service. All of the shrine-centered worship began at the foot of Mount Sinai and continued with a few interruptions for at least 1300 years. Much of this recurs in Revelation as symbols of heavenly realities (see Figure 19).

Jewish Tabernacle/Temple Worship as Background for the Symbols of the Book of Revelation

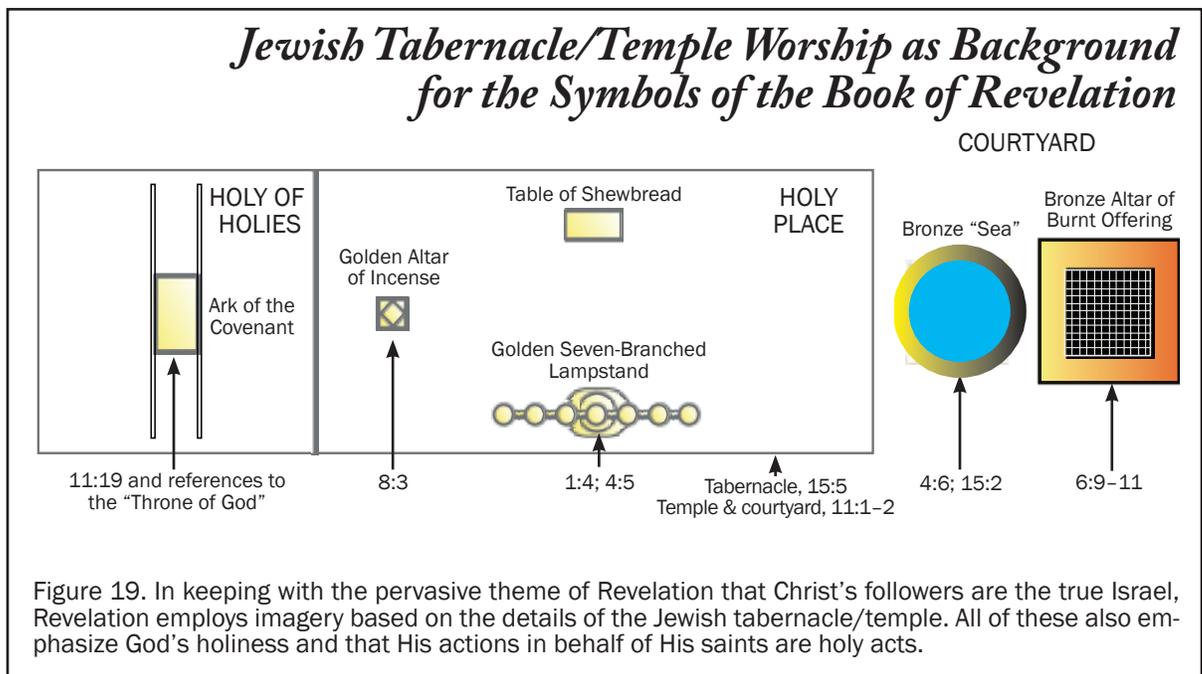


Figure 19. In keeping with the pervasive theme of Revelation that Christ's followers are the true Israel, Revelation employs imagery based on the details of the Jewish tabernacle/temple. All of these also emphasize God's holiness and that His actions in behalf of His saints are holy acts.

With the skill of a master weaver, the authorship team of one human author and the triune divine Author wove together all of these elements and more from the Old Testament to encourage the Asian Christians and us. Anyone reading Revelation today should do so with a cross-reference Bible, watching for significant Old Testament passages.

6. Understanding biblical predictive prophecy

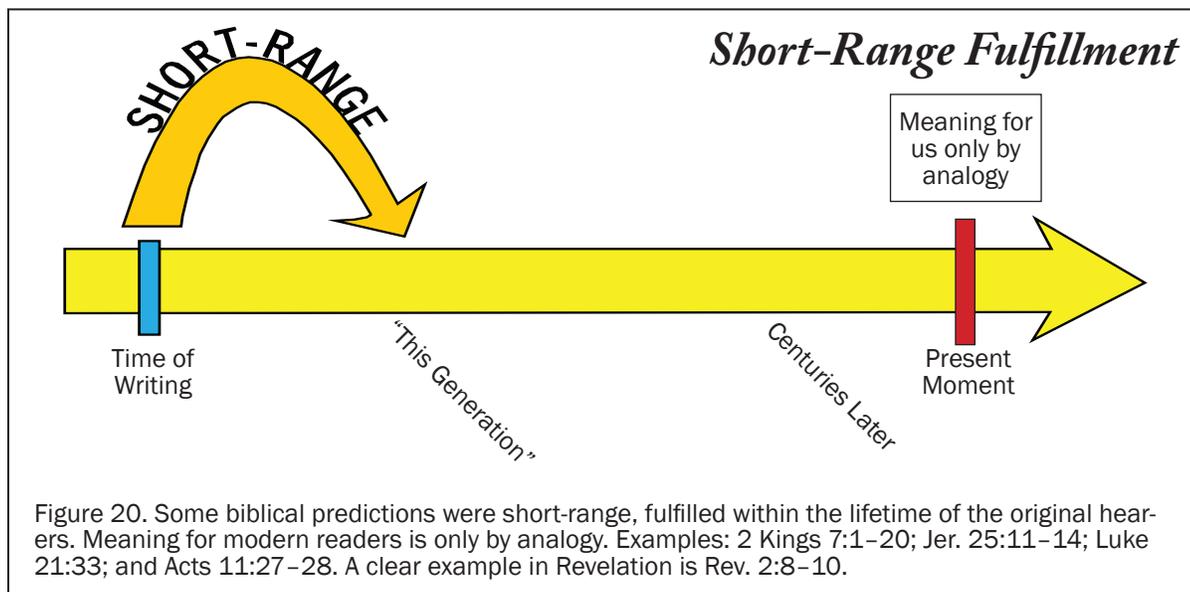
Referring to various passages in the Old Testament is not all that is involved in the Old Testament background of Revelation. We must also consider the nature of predictive prophecy. Not all prophecies should be interpreted in the same way. Here is a quick survey of the variety of ways that biblical prophecies can be fulfilled. Look up the example passages to understand each category more thoroughly.

Although we tend to make ‘prophecy’ and ‘prediction’ synonymous, not all true biblical prophecies were predictive. At times, a prophet of God merely pointed out the guilt of his people and called them to repentance. Old Testament examples of this type of prophecy include Micah 6:1-8 and Isaiah 1:1-20.

Even if a prophecy includes any number of predictions, we must try to distinguish between short-range fulfillment, long-range fulfillment, dual fulfillment, and typological fulfillment. Unfulfilled predictions fall into three categories: aborted because of unfulfilled conditions, spiritual fulfillments, and predictions whose fulfillments are still in our future.⁴⁷ Each deserves a closer examination.

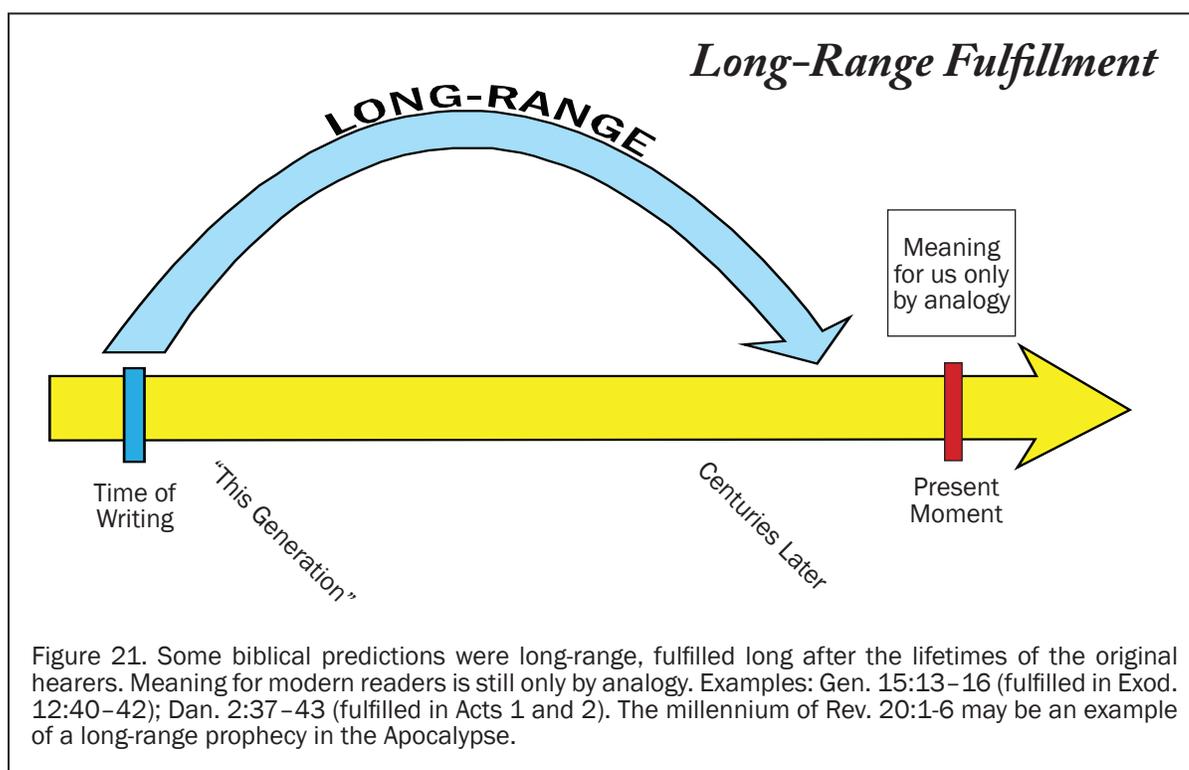
Four categories of fulfilled predictions

Short-range fulfillment – Many biblical prophecies were intended by the prophet to be fulfilled in the immediate future—certainly within the lifetime of the prophet’s contemporaries (“this generation” in Figure 20, based on Jesus’ time frame in Mark 13:30 and parallels, “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all of these things have happened”).⁴⁸



Given the time frames at the beginning and end of Revelation (1:1-3; 22:6, 10), we would expect many or all of its prophecies to fall into this category. For example, Jesus predicts that the Christians of Smyrna will suffer a persecution that will expose them to imprisonment and even martyrdom. Doubtless this prediction was fulfilled within the lifetime of the original readers. It is not a prediction of something still future to us. Likewise, Jesus promises the Philadelphians that they will escape persecution. This had a short-range fulfillment in what happened to the original readers from that city of Roman Asia.⁴⁹

Long-range fulfillment – Other predictions, however, extend beyond the immediate situation and audience (see Figure 21). They concern events in the remote future, sometimes centuries removed from the prophet and his contemporaries. A good example is God’s prediction to Abraham of the Egyptian bondage (Gen. 15:13-16). This prophecy began to be fulfilled nearly a hundred years after the death of Abraham, continuing to unfold over the next 400 years.



Some of the predictions in Revelation may have long-range fulfillments, but given Revelation's introductory and concluding time-frames, we would have to find strong contextual and historical evidence to persuade us to leave behind the short-range fulfillment category. A possible long-range fulfillment in Revelation is the prediction that the martyrs for Jesus will reign for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). Of course, chapter 20 is one of the most controversial and puzzling passages in the Apocalypse.

If a prediction has already taken place in our past, despite its long-range nature from the perspective of the original audience, we can make application of the prophecy only by analogy. From our point of view, then, as far as getting a practical lesson for us, prophecies with long-range fulfillments are just like prophecies with short-range fulfillments. The fulfillments of both are in our past, though they were in the future for the original audience, whether the immediate or the distant future.

Dual fulfillment – Other prophecies prove to be a combination of short-range and long-range fulfillment (see Figure 22). These, in other words, have a dual fulfillment.⁵⁰ To the original audience of the prophecy, it would seem to be only short-range, with a fulfillment perhaps taking place soon after the prophecy was made. But another fulfillment occurs centuries later. Many of the messianic prophecies fall under this category, such as the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, which originally had to do with a betrayal of David by his close advisor, Ahithophel.⁵¹ Isaiah's prediction of the virginal conception of Jesus apparently is an example of dual fulfillment, for the context of Isaiah 7 seems to demand an immediate fulfillment (a natural conception), while the New Testament clearly speaks of Mary's conceiving Jesus while still a virgin (a supernatural conception).⁵²

Again, some of the predictive prophecies in Revelation may have a dual fulfillment. An example is the prediction in Rev. 12:5 that the newborn baby "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." This is definitely an allusion to Psalm 2:9, the original application of which was the royal succession in the dynasty of David. Ultimately, however, it applies to Jesus Christ, the eternal and eternal King in David's line. The possibility remains that other dual fulfillments exist in Revelation, but to resort to the dual fulfillment explanation without contextual support or further revelation to confirm it is irresponsible. This, unfortunately, sometimes happens by interpreters keen to find modern fulfillments even as they acknowledge fulfillments in the late first century.

Typological fulfillment – The final category of fulfillments, typological, finds in the person or event predicted a copy of a person or event of past history. New Testament typology functions both

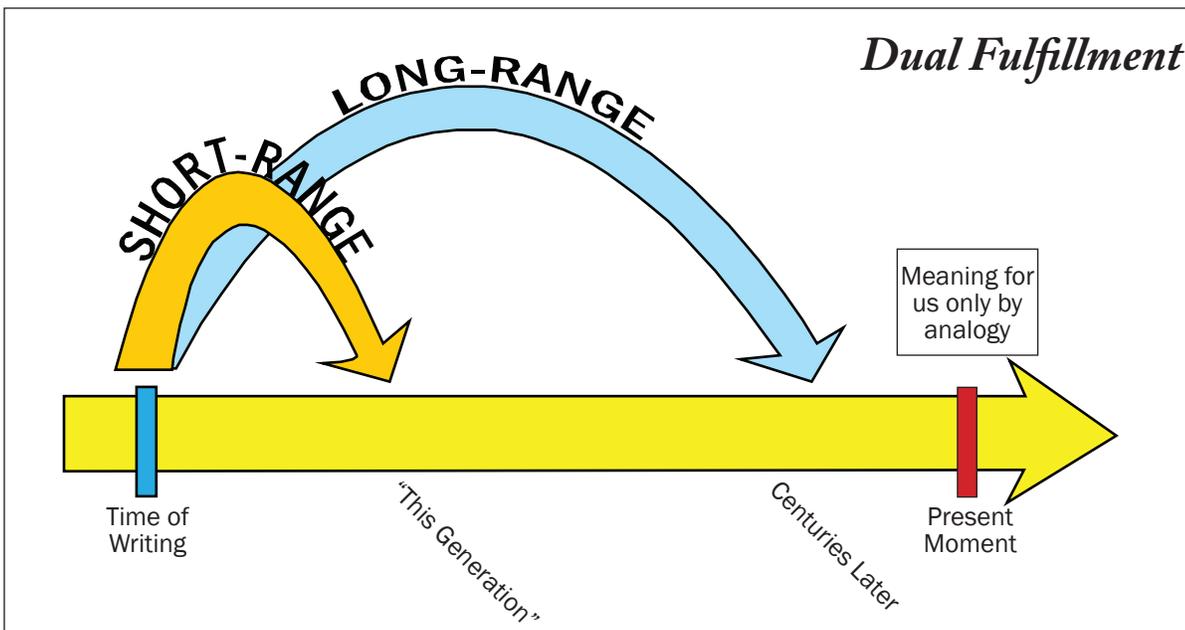


Figure 22. Some biblical predictions have dual fulfillments: one within the lifetimes of the original hearers and another as much as hundreds of years later. Meaning for modern readers is only by analogy. Examples: Ps. 69:25; 109:8 (quoted in Acts 1:20); Isa. 7:14 (quoted in Matt. 1:22–23).

horizontally (type in the past, antitype in the future, e.g., Rom. 5:14 and 1 Cor. 10:1–11) and vertically (type on earth, antitype in heaven, e.g., Gal. 4:25–26; Heb. 9:23–24).⁵³ Revelation has typology in both directions (horizontal – e.g., Rev. 8:7-12, and vertical – e.g., Rev. 11:19).⁵⁴ The legitimate typologies in the Book of Revelation fall into the recognized categories of creation typology, covenant typology, judgment typology, and christological typology.⁵⁵

The study of typology is difficult because of the subjective element involved. It is certainly legitimate to recognize the New Testament’s use of a “shadow” and its corresponding “reality” (e.g., Col. 2:17 and Heb. 10:1). It is quite another exercise, however, to identify a person or event in biblical history as a “type,” and then hypothesize links with a future person or event as its corresponding

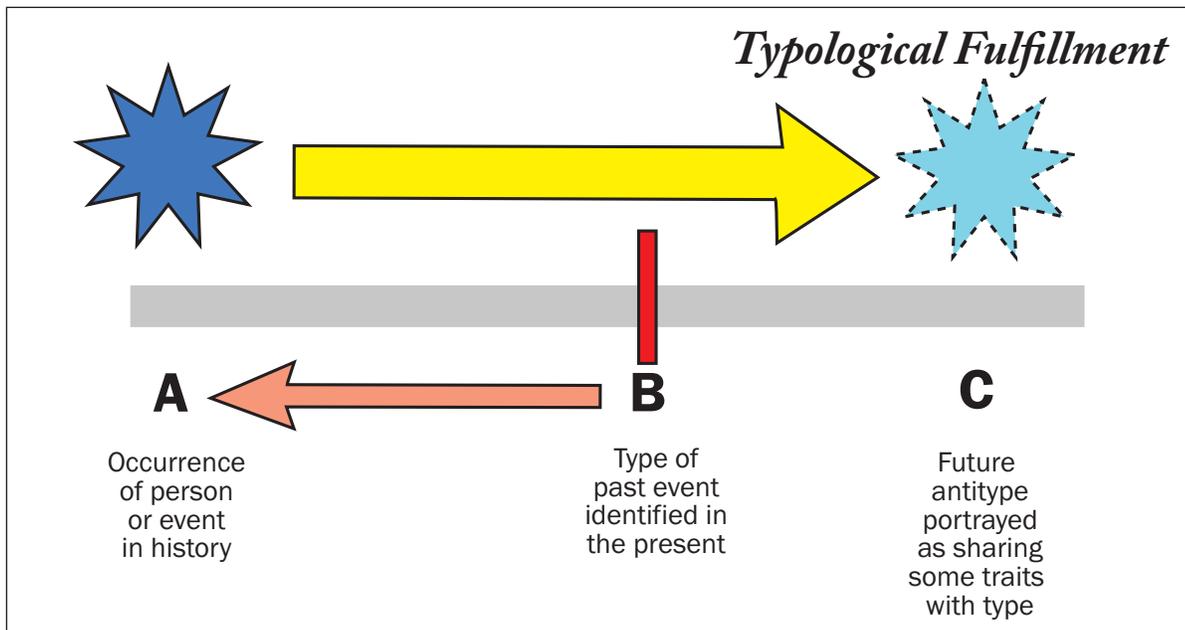


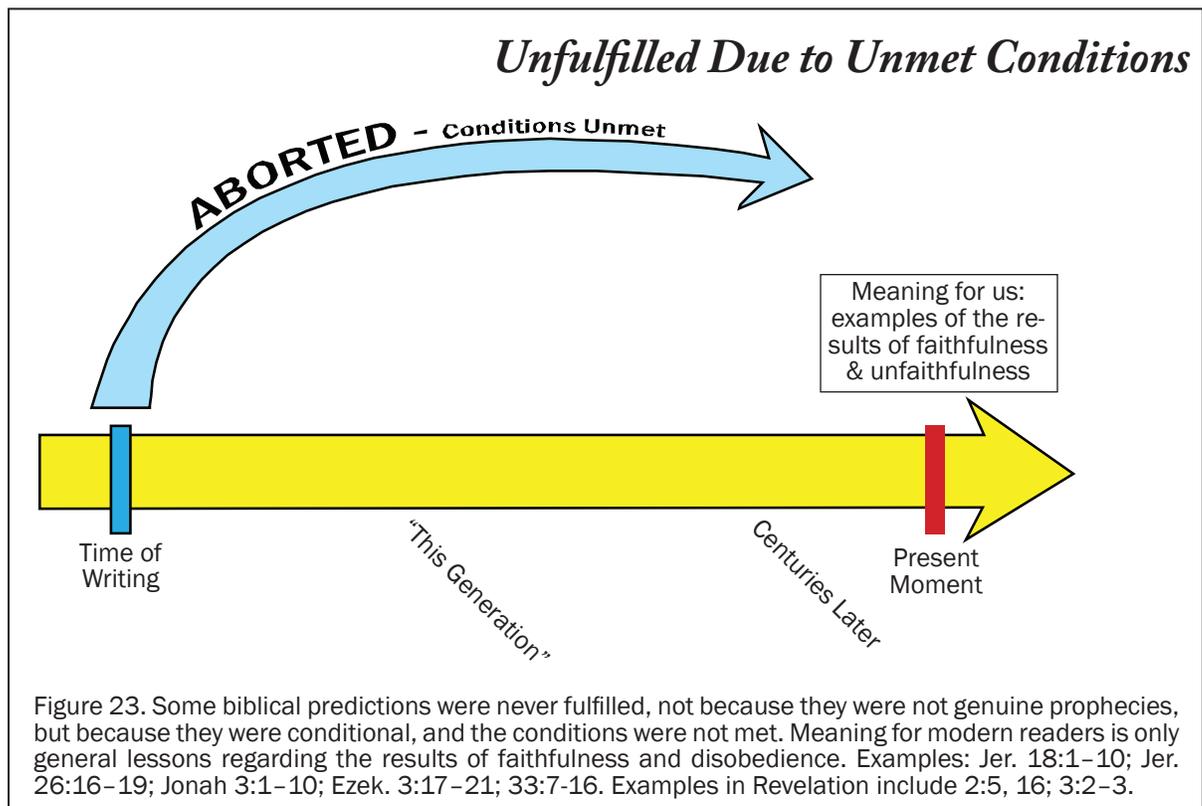
Figure 23. Typological fulfillment does not involve a prediction (e.g., “x will happen”), but instead notes points of correspondence between a person or event of the past and the person or event anticipated. The antitype (fulfillment), need not correspond in all points to the type to be a legitimate antitype.

“antitype.” Despite attempts as early as Herbert Marsh’s 1842 *Lectures on Biblical Criticism and Interpretation* to limit the identifying of biblical types to those declared to be so in the New Testament,⁵⁶ Bible interpreters continue to claim they have found one type after another in a manner that is virtually indistinguishable from the medieval practice of uncontrolled allegorization. One example is *Life of David* by Arthur Pink, who finds typological parallels with the life of Christ that must remain the author’s unveri ed speculations.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, the Book of Revelation and the study of eschatology is not exempt from imaginative identifications in the name of typology. Dispensationalists in particular are fond of finding types unveri ed by the New Testament writers. This remarkable propensity is surprisingly inconsistent with their insistence on taking prophecies literally.⁵⁸

Three categories of unfulfilled predictions

Conditional prophecy with conditions unmet – Not all genuine prophecies have been fulfilled, however. Some prophecies have not yet been fulfilled and, in fact, never will be fulfilled. This is because all along they were conditional prophecies, and because the conditions were not met, the prophecy aborted (see Figure 23). This can be true whether the prophecy is for doom and destruction or for blessing and prosperity. God taught Jeremiah that conditions are a part of virtually every predictive prophecy,¹⁸ for human beings and their governments are like clay in the hands of the Master Potter



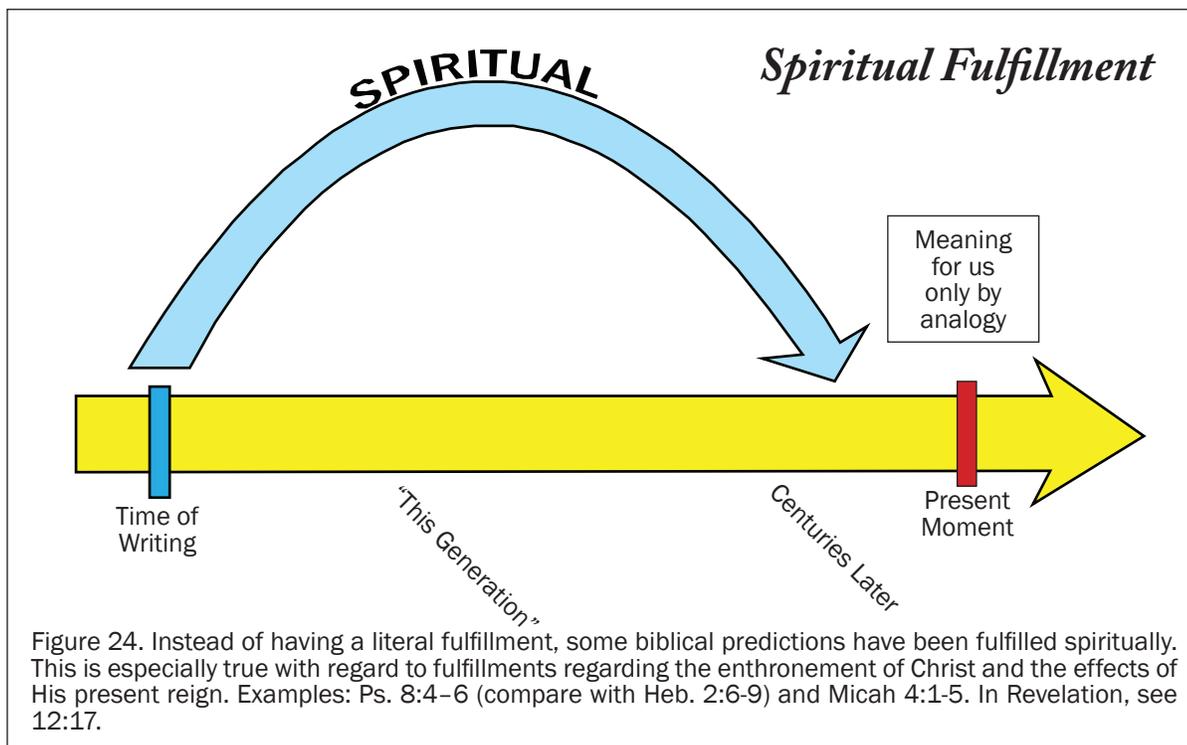
(Jer. 18:1–10). Because the prophet Jonah was aware of the conditional nature of predictive prophecy, he got on a ship bound in the opposite direction from Nineveh. He knew that if he preached to the Ninevites that they had only 40 days to live, they might repent and avoid the disaster God had in mind for them. This, in fact, is exactly what happened.

Yet note that the condition was not stated in the prophecy itself. Jonah merely preached, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed” (Jonah 3:4). The people repented, hoping that the prophecy was conditional, and God spared the city of Nineveh for another hundred years. Of course, the Bible records a few prophecies that proved to be unconditional, such as the death of David’s infant

son (2 Sam. 12:13-23) and the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 7:1-20). But these appear to be exceptions to the general rule that predictive prophecies are conditional (see Dan. 4:27 in which Daniel advises Nebuchadnezzar to repent just after interpreting a predictive dream without mentioning conditions).

Clearly some of the predictive prophecies in Revelation are in this category. Consult for instance the Spirit's letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (chapters 2 and 3). Christ reveals the consequences they will suffer if they do not repent (e.g., 2:5: "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place") and the blessings they will enjoy if they do (e.g., 2:7: "the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God"). These two prophecies present alternate futures; both cannot come true. The conditions of the one were met and the prediction fulfilled; the conditions of the other went unmet and the prediction aborted. We should watch for more examples of conditional predictions in Revelation, keeping in mind that the conditions may be present though unstated.

Unfulfilled literally but fulfilled spiritually – Other prophecies, which appear to be unfulfilled, actually ought to be regarded as fulfilled prophecies, because their fulfillment was not literal but spiritual (see Figure 24). Both Old Covenant and New Covenant prophets used a great deal of figurative language in their predictions (e.g., Deut. 28:13, 23, 44b). We should seek to recognize the hyperbole and the metaphors and not take them literally. Even prophetic language that appears to be literal may in reality have a spiritual fulfillment. For example, when the prophet Nathan promised David that he would never fail to have a descendant on the throne of Israel (2 Sam. 7:16), that prediction has not been literally fulfilled in the sense that a monarch sits on a literal throne ruling over Israel today. Yet the spiritual fulfillment in King Jesus (Col. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:25–28; Rev. 19:11–16) is greater by far than any literal fulfillment would have been.



It is certainly possible that some of the predictive prophecies in the Book of Revelation have had or will have a spiritual fulfillment. But like the discerning of dual prophecies, discerning whether a prophecy has a spiritual fulfillment is very difficult in that it involves highly subjective judgments. Only further revelation validates the correctness of such an interpretation. Lacking such further revelations, we should content ourselves with drawing analogies between the situation first-century Asian Christians faced and what we face today, applying some of John's prophecies to our situation

Revelation speaks to us, even though only a few, if any, of its predictions remain to be fulfilled in our future. We will see these practical applications as the book unfolds for us chapter by chapter.

John describes for us his encounter with a glorious personage who turns out to be Jesus Christ Himself. The details of His appearance symbolize the Savior’s wisdom, purity, and power in a most dynamic way. No one could be more glorious or powerful than He is, nor could anyone be more concerned for His saints.

The key idea of chapter one, and one of the most important themes of the entire book, is found in verses 5: “And from Jesus Christ, who is... the ruler of the kings of the earth.” Because Christ is exalted to the highest place, because He is ruler over those who would harm His saints, His people need never be afraid. He has proven His personal love for the saints by laying down His life for them, freeing them from their sins, and making them into a kingdom of priests. Even now He walks among the lampstands (the churches), inspecting them, correcting them, and then defending them.

He has blazed the trail His saints must tread by becoming the faithful Witness (martyr) and then the Firstborn from the dead. They too must be faithful witnesses, willing if need be to seal their testimony with their own blood. They too are confident of a resurrection to life eternal. Meanwhile, they are reigning with Christ in His present kingdom. They are not helpless and defenseless before the military might of the Roman Empire. They are, in fact, the true overcomers—not in and of themselves, but because of their Master.

Old Testament Background for Chapter 1

| Term or Symbol in Revelation | O.T. Passage |
|--|---------------------|
| The One Who Is | Exod. 3:14 |
| Seven Spirits | Isa. 11:2 |
| Priests for God | Exod. 19:6 |
| Coming in the Clouds | Dan. 7:13 |
| Every Eye Seeing Him & Tribes Mourning | Zech. 12:10 |
| God the Almighty | Amos 3:13; 4:13 |
| Like a Son of Man | Dan. 7:13 |
| Description of Son of Man | Dan. 10:5–6 |
| Sword out of His Mouth | Isa. 49:2 |
| First and Last | Isa. 44:6; 48:12 |

Prologue

1:1-3—Authority and purpose of the revelation

Source of the Revelation: Jesus Christ (1:1a) – The opening phrase, “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” is basic to understanding the rest of the book. The Greek construction yields three possible meanings, however. Is it *possessive*, “an unveiling that belongs to Jesus Christ”; *objective*, “revealing Jesus Christ himself”; or *subjective*, “the things that Jesus Christ reveals”? There is a sense in which all of these are true.² As the Master of space and time, Jesus certainly controls and possesses unfolding future events. Exercising that control, He discloses to His followers what lies ahead. In addition, since He is not only the Revealer but one of the main actors in the drama, the true nature of Jesus Christ himself is revealed.

Time frame of the revelation: Soon (1:1b) – Fundamental, too, is the time-frame revealed in the opening verse and repeated in verse 3: “soon” and “the time is near.” The book itself tells us that the events it predicts were to happen right away for the original readers.

A quick review of the New Testament occurrences of the word here translated “soon” confirms the straightforward meaning of “right away, quickly, within the near future.”¹ For example, in John 11:29, when Mary heard that Jesus had arrived in Bethany, she got up quickly and went to him (John 11:29, 31). In Acts 22:18, the Lord appeared to Paul, warning him to get out of Jerusalem quickly to avoid capture. Several times Paul promised this or that church that he would visit them soon (1 Cor. 4:19; Phil. 2:24). We could multiply such examples.

Likewise, a look at the occurrences of “near” leads us to the same conclusion. For example, when both John the Baptizer and Jesus announced, “The kingdom of God is near,”² how long did it take to arrive?

Outside of Revelation, only two passages warrant a closer examination. In Rom. 16:20, where Paul promises, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet,” the construction of the original is exactly the same as in Rev. 1:1. Is this a reference to the final return of Christ? The context indicates otherwise, for Paul is urging the Roman Christians to avoid the internal divisions that some would impose on them. If they are careful to heed his warning, Paul reassures them that the threat of division will soon pass.³

In James 5:7–9, the brother of the Lord twice refers to the “coming” (*parousia*) of the Lord, stating that it is near and that “The Judge is standing at the door.” Assuming that the author is James, the half-brother of Jesus, and that the account of his death by Josephus is accurate, this could not have been written later than A.D. 62.⁴ Christ came in judgment against the nation of Israel only five years later. The judgment of the Jewish war of A.D. 67–70 marked an “arrival” (*parousia*)⁵ of the Judge of all the earth.

Revelation speaks of His arrival in judgment of the Asian Christians and His arrival in judgment against their persecutors. The time references stated in the text are all quite clear that these judgments would happen right away. It must “soon” take place (1:1; 22:6). “The time is near” (1:3). “I will soon come” in judgment against the Jezebel of Pergamum (2:16), or to deliver the Philadelphians (3:11), or to bring judgment against the persecutors (22:7, 12, 20). All of these time references are outside of the vision part of the book and must, therefore, be taken literally, consistent with our hermeneutics.

The practical meaning for the original readers is plain. Jesus is about to reveal matters that make a life-and-death, heaven-or-hell difference to them. They must listen to what is being read to them and take it to heart, because it is going to happen right away.

Method of the revelation: angel to John (1:1c) – The true sequence is: God to Jesus, to the angel, to John. This sequence of intermediaries is a standard way of emphasizing the holiness and supreme authority of God.

Authentication of the revelation: John’s testimony (1:2; also see John 19:35; 21:24; 1 John 1:1-5; 5:20) – Just like in the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle, John emphasizes the validity of his visions by bearing his personal testimony. This is not something that John made up out of his own imagination. God revealed it to him, and because the source is God, the revelation bears both God’s authenticity and His authority.

Purpose of the revelation: blessing to its hearers (1:3) – The book is meant to be read aloud to a congregation (Col. 4:16; 1 Tim. 4:13). This does not necessarily indicate widespread illiteracy among the Christians in the Seven Churches. Many of them were probably slaves (see 1 Cor. 1:26–29 and the derogatory description of Celsus quoted by Origen),⁷ but often house-slaves, at least, were educated. Rather, this indicates the communal nature of the Book of Revelation. It is meant to be shared, to be discussed, to be received and acted upon by a group of believers, not just by an individual.

Responsibilities of the hearers: listen to it and take it to heart – John is saying, “It’s important for you to obey this! God is showing you how He sees the coming persecution.” This is a strong argument supporting the idea that Revelation primarily has meaning for the original readers. It was vital to their spiritual and even physical welfare that they listen carefully and that they change their perspective and their actions based on what would be revealed.

Jesus is about to reveal matters that make a life-and-death, heaven-or-hell difference to them. They must listen to what is being read to them and take it to heart, because it is going to happen right away.

1:4-8 – Greetings from the authors

Address of the book (1:4a) – After the preamble, John starts over again, as if the Book of Revelation is an epistle. This epistolary identification of the writer and the intended recipients roots Revelation in first-century Roman Asia. It has *relevance* for the original readers.

Greetings from the Godhead (1:4b-5a) – The greeting is “grace and peace.” The combination of the two—‘grace’ (*charis*) similar to the typical Gentile greeting (*chairein*), and ‘peace’ (Hebrew: *shalōm*) the typical Jewish greeting (see John 20:21, 26)—is a testimony to the uniting of the races in Christ (Eph. 2:14–22).

Term for God: “*Him who is, who was, and who is to come*” (see 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Peter 5:10; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 10:10; Hab. 1:12). This is a drawn-out way of expressing the significance of “I AM,” mirrored by Christ, who was alive, then died, and now is alive again. A diabolical imitation comes from the beast who “once was, now is not, and will come” (Rev. 17:8; compare 13:3).

Term for the Spirit: “*the seven Spirits*” or “*the seven-fold Spirit*” (see 5:6; Isa. 11:2) – The idea of fullness is conveyed by the number seven, but the connection between seven and the Spirit comes from Isaiah 11:2, in which the Spirit is described in terms of seven attributes. These attributes all go together; they are not seven separate Spirits in Isaiah or here in Revelation.

Terms for Christ (1:5): 1) “The faithful witness” (John 3:11, 31-34; 5:31-47; 8:12-19; Rev. 2:13; 11:7; 12:11); “The firstborn from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:20-22; Col. 1:18); and 3) “The ruler of the kings of the earth” (11:15-17; 12:10; 19:6, 16). All of these are fundamental to the significance of Revelation for the original readers. The faithful Witness called on them to follow His example. The Firstborn from the dead assures them that they will follow him through death to resurrection. The Ruler reassures them that they need not fear the threats of emperors and governors.

1:5b-6—The dedication of the book

1. What Christ has done:
 - a. He has loved us (1 John 4:10; Rom. 5:6-11).
 - b. He has freed us from our sins by his blood (Heb. 9:12; Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19).
 - c. He has made us:
 - 1) A kingdom (Col. 1:13; Matt. 16:18-19).
 - 2) Priests to serve his God and Father (1 Peter 2:9-10).
2. What he deserves: glory and power forever and ever

1:7-8—The promise of hope

1. The manner of his coming: in the clouds (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; 1 Thess. 4:17).
2. The result of his coming:
 - a. Every eye will see him; even those who pierced him (Zech. 12:10).
 - b. All the tribes of the earth will mourn over him (Zech. 12:10-14).
3. The assurance of his coming: the one who promised (Isa. 41:4; 44:6).

1:9 – The setting: John at Patmos

1. John identifies himself.
 - a. Your brother.
 - b. Your companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.
2. Where John was: Patmos (37 miles WSW of Miletus; an island about 10 mi. long and 6 mi. wide).
3. He was there because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:2) – Possibilities: Perhaps he had come there by revelation to receive the visions or had been exiled or sentenced there by Rome.

1:10-11 – First commission: the loud voice

1. The time of the commission: the Lord’s Day.
 - a. Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Didache 14:1; Gospel of Peter 9:35; 12:50; and modern Greek).

- b. “Day of the Lord” (Isa. 13:6,9; Jer. 46:10; Lam. 2:22; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20).
- c. “Imperial Day” (is John providing a Christian alternative to the Roman “lord?”).
2. The manner of the commission: “in the Spirit” (cf. 4:2; Ezek. 37:1; 40:1-2; 2 Cor. 12:14).
3. Description of the voice: loud like a trumpet.
4. The message of the voice: Write what you see and send it to the seven churches.

1:12–16 – The Son of Man among the lampstands

1. The seven golden lampstands (1:12; Zech. 4:1; Rev. 11:3-4; Matt. 5:15-16).
2. John’s description of the “one like a son of man” (1:13-16; Dan. 3:25; 7:13-14; 27; 10:5-6; Ezek. 1:28; 8:1-2; 40:3; 43:2; parallel Matt. 17:2 with Exod. 34:29-35).
 - a. He was walking among the lampstands (2:1)
 - b. His clothes:
 - 1) Long robe (Exod. 25:7; 28:4, 27, 31; 29:5; 35:9; Ezek. 9:2-3, 11; Dan. 10:5; Zech. 3:4).
 - 2) Gold sash around his chest (Exod. 39:20; Dan. 10:5; 1 Macc. 10:89; Rev. 15:6).
 - c. His head and his hair: white like wool; white as snow (Dan. 7:9; Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:18; Prov. 16:31; *Enoch* 46:1).
 - d. His eyes: like blazing fire (2:18; Dan. 7:9; 10:6).
 - e. His feet: like bronze glowing in a furnace (2:18; Dan. 10:6; Ezek. 1:7; contrast to Dan. 2:33,41).
 - f. His voice like the sound of rushing waters (Ezek. 43:2; Dan. 10:6; Rev. 14:2).
 - g. His right hand held the seven stars (2:1; 3:1; Job 38:31-32; Isa. 40:12; also see Rev. 1:20).
 - h. A sharp sword came out of his mouth (2:12, 16; Isa. 11:4; 49:2; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 19:15).
 - i. His face like the blazing sun (Mal. 4:2; John 11:44). (Rev. 1:16 & John 11:44 are the only two occurrences of this word for “face” (*opsis*) in the New Testament. The usual word is *prosōpon*.)

Glorious Son of Man

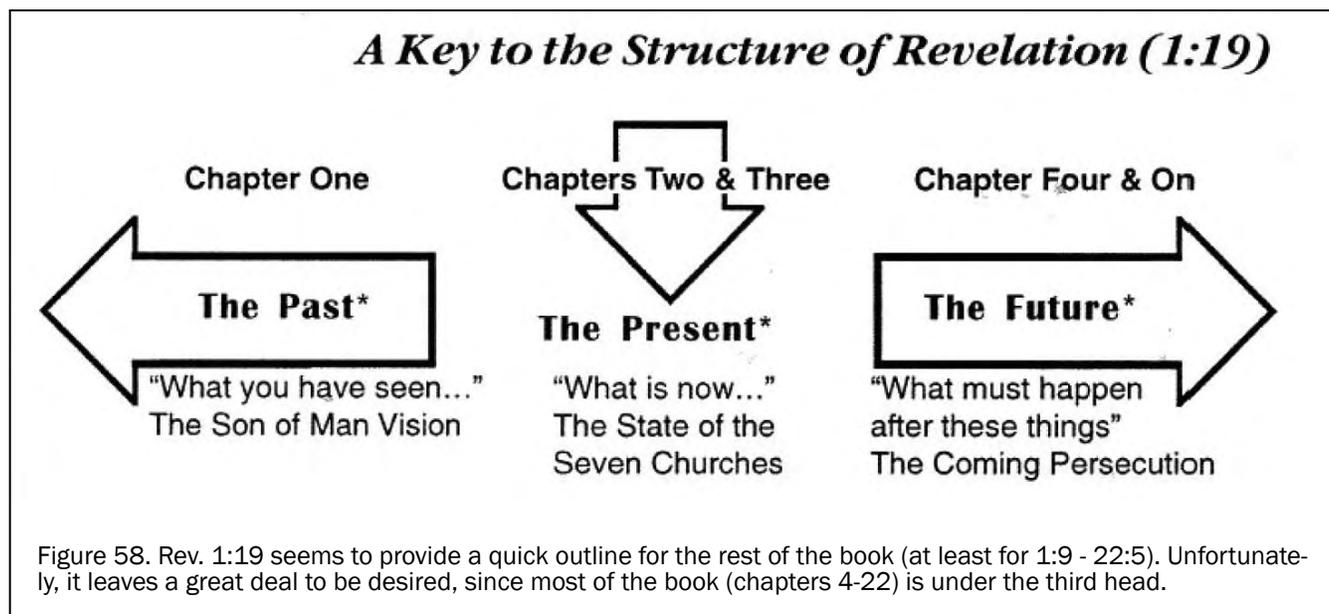


Figure 57. The image of Christ as the glorious Son of Man, recalls Dan. 7:13 but adds elements from Ezekiel as well.

1:17–20 – Second commission: the Son of Man

1. The Son of Man’s description of himself (1:17-18).
 - a. John’s reaction—he falls on his face (Matt. 17:6; Dan. 10:8-9).
 - b. The Son of Man’s assurance:
 - 1) He accepts worship (in contrast to Acts 10:25-26; 12:19-23; 14:11-18; Rev. 19:1; 22:8-9).
 - 2) He touches John (Matt. 8:3, 15; especially Matt. 17:7).
 - 3) He says, “fear not” (1:18; Matt. 17:7; 28:5, 10).
 - c. The Son of Man’s self-identification:
 - 1) The First and the Last (2:8; 22:13; Isa. 44:6; 48:12).
 - 2) The Living One; once dead but alive forever! (another title of God; Deut. 32:40; Josh. 3:10; Ps. 42:3; 84:3; Isa. 49:18; Jer. 5:2; Dan. 12:7— applied to Christ, John 5:26).
 - 3) Holding the keys to death and Hades (3:7; 6:8; 20:13-14; Ps. 49:15; Hosea 13:14; 1 Cor. 15:54-55).
2. His commission: write three things (1:19).
 - a. “What you have seen”: the vision of the glorified Christ (Chapter 1).

- b. “What is now”: the present state of the churches (Chapters 2-3).
- c. “What things are about to happen after these things”: the state of the world in the near future (Chapters 4-22; note 4:1: “I will show you what must happen after these things”).



3. His explanation: ‘Mystery’ must mean the significance of the vision’s symbols (Dan. 2:47; Rev. 17:7).
 - a. The seven stars are angels of the seven churches (*Enoch* 86:1ff).
 - 1) Are the “angels” human messengers? (Matt. 11:10; Luke 7:24; 9:52; James 2:25) or heavenly messengers? (Dan. 10:13; 12:1; Matt. 18:10; Acts 12:15—and passages in Revelation).
 - 3) Are the “angels” the prevailing spirit of a church? (Swete, *Apocalypse*, 22).
 - b. The seven lampstands are the seven churches.

This brief explanation is highly significant, because it reveals to us that what John is seeing in his vision has symbolic significance. At the one extreme are those who try to take the visions literally when the text itself, here and a few other places, explains to us the meaning of the symbols. At the other extreme is uncontrolled allegorization, which confidently assigns figurative meaning to every detail of every vision. The variety of such assignments renders such an approach highly questionable. Somewhere in the middle, between these two extremes is a moderate approach, and, I believe, the correct one. It follows a methodology that moves from absolute confidence, where the text tells us what a symbol means, to increasing uncertainty, as we allow a text’s various contexts—both internal and external—guide us to the probable, possible, or questionable meanings, depending on how far a field we have strayed in our pursuit of precedents for the symbol.

Given that the text we are interpreting is two millennia old, we should not expect to arrive at absolute certainty in every detail. Yet if we can find justification from the immediate context, more remote usage, usage elsewhere in the New Testament, or the Old Testament, or in the history and culture the original readers assumed, we can state, “Here’s what I think it means,” or “Here’s a possibility.” Better than that we cannot hope for, given our remoteness from the time, place, and culture of the original readers. The overarching messages of the Apocalypse are clear enough, even if some of the details remain stubbornly blurry.

Christ's Letters to the Church

Chapters 2 and 3

Overview

When Jesus looks at the church today, what does He think? Do we please Him who gave Himself up for us? By reading Revelation, chapters two and three, we can gain insight about how we are doing as Christians. Jesus critiques seven churches from the province of Asia. We know there were more congregations than that in the province because churches existed in Colossae and Hierapolis (Col. 1:1 and Col. 4:13). Why did Jesus choose these seven and no more?

Since Revelation elsewhere makes clear that seven is a number symbolic of completeness, perhaps Jesus chose these seven as representative of all the other churches. Bible students through many years have found that nearly every possible condition of local congregations is addressed to some degree by one or another of these letters.

One church is rich; another is poor (Laodicea and Smyrna); one has disfellowshipped false apostles while another tolerates a self-proclaimed prophetess (Ephesus and Thyatira); one is doing more now than at the beginning while a sister church has lost the love it had at first (Thyatira and Ephesus). Two are being harassed by non-Christian Jews (Smyrna and Philadelphia), while another lives in the very shadow of Satan's throne (Pergamum). The Christians in one are about to suffer imprisonment and perhaps even death for Christ; another will escape the coming hour of trial (Smyrna and Philadelphia). One is lukewarm, another is spiritually dead (Laodicea and Sardis). Two receive only praise (Smyrna and Philadelphia). One receives only rebuke (Laodicea). The rest are praised for their strengths and corrected for their faults.

Perhaps Jesus chose these seven as representative of all the other churches. Bible students through many years have found that nearly every possible condition of local congregations is addressed to some degree by one or another of these letters.

To every church the Lord says that He knows their situation. He understands what a time Ephesus has had with false teachers. While appreciating their concern for healthy teaching, He grieves that they no longer love as they did at first. This is a common problem we can characterize as the Ephesian Pendulum Syndrome. Somehow, they must learn not to be too harsh in their efforts to rid their church of heresies. Of course, they could easily slip into the opposite problem, tolerating too much in the name of love. Christ demands of all of us to love the truth of God's Word and love the people that Word brings into God's family. The heresy hunter must avoid a harsh, judgmental spirit. Christ calls on the Ephesians to repent and go back to the way they loved at the beginning. Only then will they be overcomers.

To the Christians in Smyrna, Christ is only encouraging. He is aware of their troubles, that they are both financially destitute and suffer persecution from the unbelieving Jews. He exhorts them to focus on their spiritual riches and to face the terrible trials looming ahead. He promises them that if they will stay loyal, even through death, He will reward them with the overcomer's crown of life. The danger for a poor church and for a church taking one hit after another from a hostile community is to become discouraged or intimidated. Christians in such churches could easily think their sacrifices don't count for much or their risk-taking has no value. But Jesus sees what's going on. To Him it counts. He coaches us to endure to the end, where awaits our prize.

Pergamene Christians lived at the capital of the province—inside the beltway where power broker demand favors and pay them back in a dog-eat-dog environment. In Pergamum, as in Washington and many another modern city, compromise is the key to surviving and to gaining success. This principle of business and politics does not work in Christ's church. Jesus calls Christians to repent who compromise with the world followers of Balaam, whose philosophy was, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!" These Christians were forsaking the purity of the Christian life-style to blend in with worldly friends. Sound familiar?



“Worthy is the Lamb”

The Christology of Revelation 5

Revelation chapter five is a primary text for Christology (the doctrine of the nature and work of Christ).¹ In it the Lion-Lamb reveals Himself and accepts worship. In only 14 verses chapter five presents a remarkable breadth and depth of christological insight. This treasure-trove is not buried deeply in a barren field of theological mumbo-jumbo. It lies near the surface, just outside the door of a Christian community sorely needing practical encouragement. The Asian disciples needed Christ’s unveiling of “things that must soon take place,”² but also they needed an unveiling of the Christ Himself. This latter unveiling is certainly the primary one for the modern reader of the Apocalypse.

Revelation chapters four and five form a single scene—the Creator and the Redeemer in the court of heaven.³ This scene has a decisive function in Revelation as a whole. In the face of the author’s own exile, a recent martyrdom and imminent imprisonments, of present heresies and intensifying persecutions, and of raging “beasts” and fiery retributions, the Christians of the province of Asia stand in need of remembering that heaven’s throne⁴ is still occupied. Heaven’s Champion is still “ruler of the kings of the earth.” Creator and Redeemer are the eye of the storm—the calm strength at the center of the turmoil and the upheaval. They can easily control the chaos.

Our concern is to focus on the Christology of chapter 5. What is it communicating about the person and work of Jesus Christ? As to His person, how does the vision confirm His humanity, and what can we infer from it about His deity? As to His work, what can we learn regarding the significance of the cross and its effects on humanity, and about the reality and nature of the resurrection? It is not overreaching to seek answers to these questions; though John did not intend the vision of the Lamb to be a systematic treatise, its theological depth is considerable.

The humanity of Jesus Christ was certainly a burning issue at the close of the first century. Docetism, the heresy that taught that Jesus only seemed to be human, was gaining in influence at that time, as demonstrated by the anti-docetic emphasis of Revelation’s sister books, First John and the Fourth Gospel.⁵

In at least three ways, the Vision of the Lamb affirms the humanity of Jesus Christ. First, it describes Him as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” and the “root of David.” The former title is apparently dependent on Gen. 49:9–10 and the latter on Isa. 11:1.⁶ Both connect the Messiah to an ancestry, something only possible by means of physical birth. The conception, birth, and childhood development of Jesus make a strong argument for His humanity. He is not a god assuming for the moment a human disguise. He became authentically human, which necessitated a lineage, like all of humans have.

Just as birth affirms the humanity of Jesus Christ, so also does death. In their concern to preserve the impassibility of deity (the idea that is impossible for God to suffer), the docetists taught a doctrine that Christ’s death on the cross was only an illusion.⁷ Their adoptionist cousins held that the divine spirit of Christ abandoned the man Jesus to die along (hence their version of the word from the cross, “My power, my power, why have you forsaken me?”).⁸ The Vision of the Lamb, however, refutes both theories, as it describes the Lamb as bearing the marks of slaughter.⁹

As the Lamb steps forward and takes the scroll, all the witnesses begin to give Him homage.... His perfect sacrifice guarantees He is going to do whatever it takes to ensure our safety.

More subtly, the elder’s use of ‘overcome’ (*nikaō*) to describe the Lamb’s victory implies the full humanity of Jesus Christ. Already this verb has occurred eight times in Revelation,¹⁰ the first seven referring to the overcoming of the Asian Christians. The last two of these antecedent occurrences (3:21) specifically prepare the readers for the elder’s description of the Lamb: “To him who *overcomes* I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I *overcame* and sat with my Father on his throne.” “Overcome just as I overcame” ties believer and the Faithful One into a common experience of hardship and victory.

The revelation of the Lamb does not explicitly declare the deity of Jesus Christ. The implications, however, are clearly present. For example, if one horn symbolizes power—as much power, in fact, as Alexander the Great¹¹—then having seven horns is nothing short of omnipotence, an attribute belonging only to deity.¹² Likewise, if the eye symbolizes insight or wisdom, then having seven eyes must mean possessing omniscience, which belongs to deity alone.¹³

Being the only candidate worth to open the book places the Lamb on the deity side of the dividing line between time-bound creatures and time-transcendent deity. As W. C. van Unnik has documented, the term ‘worthy’ (*haxios*) was regularly used in Hellenistic literature—pagan, Jewish, and Christian—to describe persons whose piety, experience, and/or instruction had qualified them to receive guarded secrets, read esoteric books, or participate in mysteries. John’s appropriation of such a term, says van Unnik, indicts the entire religious world:

We saw time and again that if not all men yet some very special individuals had access to the secret. Here, however, there is not a single person. That strikes out every category of favoured persons: none of those who have repudiated the world; none of the sages; none of the prophets . . . ; none of the martyrs who steadfastly preserved their loyalty to God in the face of testing. . . . Nobody fulfilled the requirements. What an implicitly, but for the ancients eloquent criticism of all sorts of religiosity, or all human religious worthies! These simple words are the end of all secret mysteries of apocalyptists and mystagogues.¹⁴

This compares with God’s challenge through Isaiah to the gods of the nations to prove their deity by revealing the future. Their silence proves the validity of the Lord’s claim, “I am, and there is no other.”¹⁵ The Lamb’s unique position as revealer of the future necessarily incorporates Him into the “I Am.”

The ultimate proof of deity in the Vision of the Lamb, however, is the worship the Lamb receives. The operational assumption of the fourth and fifth chapters is that nothing happens in the court of heaven without the approval of the One who sits upon the throne. Therefore the ascriptions of praise in the “new song,”¹⁶ composed for the occasion of the arrival of the Lamb, as well as the others that follow, are in conformity not only with the permissive will of God, but with His active intentions.

This would send a message to the Jews (from their perspective) who were rejecting Christians, among other reasons, for deifying a mere man. The Christian response would be, “Our experience of the Father’s treatment of Jesus, both before and after His death, and before and after His ascension,

David Koresh & the Fifth Seal



Figure 70. According to apocalyptic expert James Tabor and Eugene Gallagher (*Why Waco?* [Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1995]), Koresh's understanding of the fifth seal guided his actions as leader of the Branch Davidians. Tabor and Gallagher claim that the FBI's lack of understanding of Davidian theology—a blend of Adventist eschatology and Koresh's own interpretations—is what led to the fiery deaths of 75 people on April 19, 1995. Their book features the manuscript on the Seven Seals that Koresh was working on just before his death.

slain (chapters 12-13); the wrath that falls on those enemies as soon as all of the martyrs are dead (chapters 14-19); and their victory once that wrath has fallen (chapters 20-22).

1. Where the souls were: under the altar (see Exod. 27:1-8).
2. Why the souls were there: because of the word of God and because of their testimony (1:2, 9).
3. Their cry: How long before vengeance? (see *2 Esdras* 4:34-37).
 - a. Their cry is righteous because they deserve vindication.
 - b. Their cry is righteous because they relied on God's vengeance rather than taking vengeance into their own hands (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12: 19).
4. God's answer to their cry:
 - a. They were given white robes and told to wait a little longer.
 - b. They had to wait until the total number to be killed was completed (7:1-14; 14:1-5).

6:12-17 – Just before wrath (the sixth seal): calamities of nature

1. Catastrophes (6:12-14).

These natural disasters symbolize wrath about to befall God's enemies. Use of such disasters as symbols of God's wrath is common in the Old Testament (see those listed above at the beginning of the chapter) and should not be taken literally here.

 - a. Great earthquake (Exod. 19:18; Isa. 2:19; Hag. 2:6).
 - b. Sun and moon darkened (Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:31; Amos 8:8; Mark 13:24; *Assumption of Moses* 10:4-5).
 - c. Stars fall to earth (Isa. 34:4; Mark 13:25-26).
 - d. Sky rolled up (Isa. 34:4; 2 Peter 3:12; *Sibylline Oracles* 3:83).
 - e. Mountains and islands out of place (Jer. 4:24; Nahum 1:5).
2. Human reactions to these disasters (6:15-17):
 - a. They hide in rocks and caves (Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; Jer. 4:29).
 - b. They pray to mountains & rocks (Hosea 10:8; Luke 23:30; Rev. 9:6).
 - c. They express dread of God and the Lamb (see 19:11-16). They cry: "The day of wrath has come, and who can stand?" (see Joel 2:11; Nahum 1:6; Mal. 3:2).

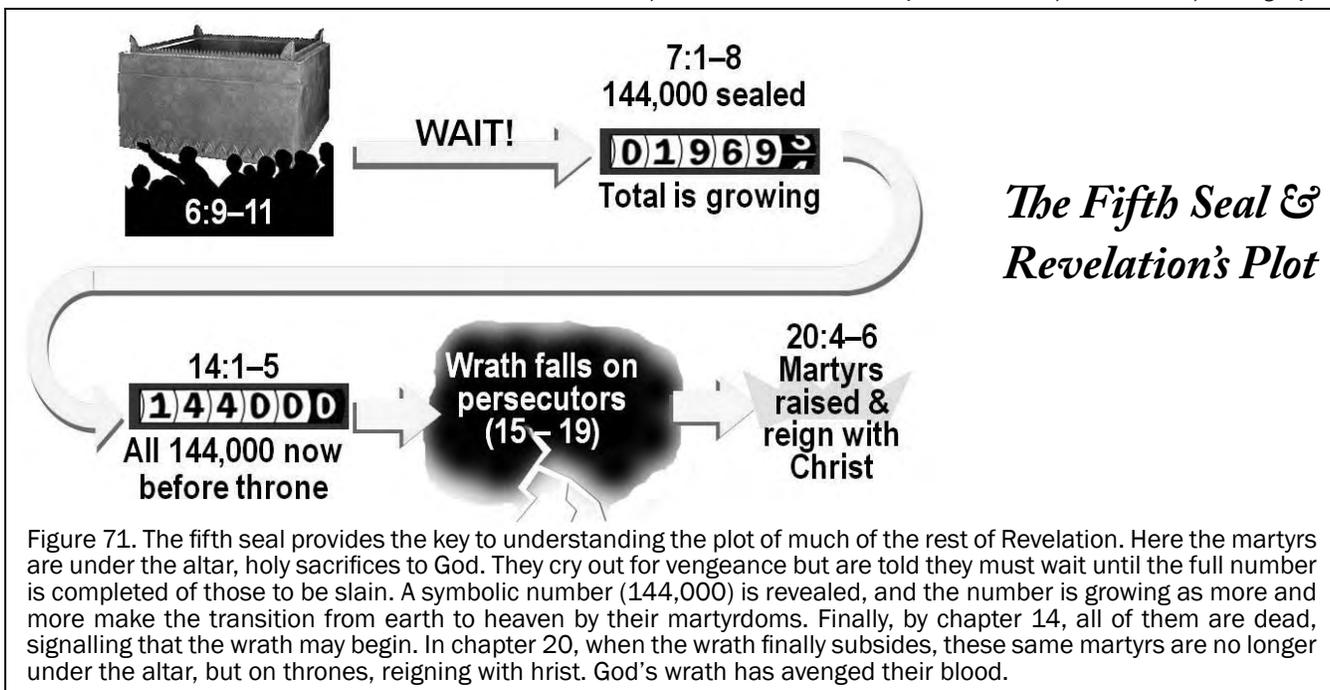


Figure 71. The fifth seal provides the key to understanding the plot of much of the rest of Revelation. Here the martyrs are under the altar, holy sacrifices to God. They cry out for vengeance but are told they must wait until the full number is completed of those to be slain. A symbolic number (144,000) is revealed, and the number is growing as more and more make the transition from earth to heaven by their martyrdoms. Finally, by chapter 14, all of them are dead, signalling that the wrath may begin. In chapter 20, when the wrath finally subsides, these same martyrs are no longer under the altar, but on thrones, reigning with Christ. God's wrath has avenged their blood.

Possession & Protection

Chapter 7

Overview

It is as if chapter seven opens with a drum roll as everyone awaits the announced wrath to fall. Yet, in what becomes a pattern throughout the rest of the book, the climax is delayed. The four winds are ready to blow on the earth, but angels restrain them long enough for the saints to be sealed. Sealing something always has a twofold significance: authority and protection. Under God's authority these saints are to be protected from God's wrath.

Their number is revealed: 144,000, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. We should take the number as symbolic. God organized His own nation into 12 tribes. The Messiah chose 12 men to be apostles. In ancient times numbers had mystical significance, and squaring a number merely intensified its meaning. Two other times in Revelation we come across 144: the area covered by the New Jerusalem (144 million square stadia) and the thickness of its wall (144 cubits). All three have the same message: here is something perfectly organized by God.

Given the theme of spiritual Israel throughout the book, consistency would demand that we understand "Israelites" here not to be literal but symbolic of people fully pleasing to God. The strange listing of the tribes is another indication that we are dealing with a symbol. God sees the Christians of the churches of Asia, most of whom are physically Gentiles, as His own chosen people, deserving to bear on their foreheads His seal. Just as the Old-Covenant high priest wore the name of God on a frontlet over his forehead, so each of those first-century prospective martyrs were serving God as holy priests. The sacrifices they would offer were their own bodies. As they died, they would join those souls under the altar we encountered in the fifth seal. Each voice would add to the swelling chorus of "How long?"

God sees the Christians of the churches of Asia, most of whom are physically Gentiles, as His own chosen people, deserving to bear on their foreheads His seal.

Remember that the answer they received was that they must wait until the number of those to be slain was completed. Soon after, a number is revealed: 144,000. And as the persecution drags on, more and more of these saints are slain, the count rising higher and higher, approaching the completeness that will mark the commencement of God's wrath on the persecutors.

Meanwhile, each martyr slain comes into God's presence, joining a numberless multitude surrounding His throne. This vast throng is celebrating in ways reminiscent of the Old Covenant Feast of Tabernacles festivities. The lesson is transparent for those remaining on earth. Do not weep for your loved ones slain for Christ. They have not perished. They have entered God's own throne room to join the saints of all ages. They are celebrating their victory with great rejoicing.

But wait a minute! Were not these 144,000 supposed to be sealed to protect them from the destruction about to decimate the earth? If they are killed, how can that be protection? Because they die faithfully serving the Messiah, not in rebellion against Him. They do not suffer His wrath, either in their physical deaths or in the more severe punishment to follow. God sees their deaths as holy sacrifices—pleasing to Him and acceptable. He receives them immediately into eternal blessedness. They die, indeed, but still they are protected, protected from both the physical and the spiritual effects of God's dreadful wrath.

By the end of chapter seven, instead of pitying the martyrs and questioning the justice of their slaughter, the original readers might actually have envied them and in faith looked forward to the day when it would be their turn. At the very least, Jesus Christ has given them a new perspective on the persecution about to break upon them, dispelling their fear, replacing it with joy.

| <i>Old Testament Background for Chapter 7</i> | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Term or Symbol in Revelation | O.T. Passage |
| Seal on foreheads of God's servants | Ezek. 9:4 |
| 144,000 servants of God | 1 Kings 19:18? |
| Great tribulation | Dan. 12:1 |
| Wash robes white in blood of Lamb | Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:15-18 |
| No hunger, thirst, heat, cold | Isa. 49:10 |
| Lamb will shepherd & water them | Ps. 23:1; Ezek. 34:23; Jer. 2:13 |

Second Cycle: The View in Heaven (Chapters 7 - 9)

Before the persecution: God's servants are protected (7:1-8).

1. The wrath is postponed (7:1-3).

- a. Old Testament background to this section is Ezek. 9 – In both Revelation and Ezekiel, the righteous are protected from impending doom. In Revelation, however, wrath is by the winds, not by the sword; the saints are sealed, not marked with ink; and 144,000 are protected, not no one, or almost no one, as in Ezekiel.
- b. Other Old Testament precedents would be the sparing of Noah's family from the flood (Gen. 6 – 9), of Lot's family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16 – 19:29), and of Rahab and her household from the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 2:1–21; 6:22–23).
- c. The seventh seal is postponed until 8:1 – Inserting a pause before opening the last seal, emphasizes its importance. God wants to give consolation to His saints before wrath upon the earth. This pregnant pause before the arrival of the wrath of God becomes a pattern that repeats again and again throughout the rest of the Book of Revelation. It has the effect of heightening the anticipation, as when before a performance the orchestra has finished tuning and everyone waits quietly for the conductor to enter. These pauses are like a drum roll. All eyes center on the throne of God. All ears strain to hear what will happen next, and all in the vast audience hold their collective breath. The preparedness of the Church is contrasted to the panic of the unprepared world (Swete, 95).
- d. The destroying winds are held back (7:1) – Four angels have control of them (14:8; 16:5) and restrain them all for the moment (Zech. 2:6; 6:5; Dan. 7:2; 8:8; 11:41; Mark 13:27).
- e. The angel with God's seal and a message comes from the east (7:2).
 - 1) Why from the east? Some possibilities are:
 - A) Because that is where the holy land is, in relation to the province of Asia.
 - B) Because that is direction of the rising sun, symbol of hope (Ezek. 43:2; Mal. 4:2).
 - 2) The angel is carrying God's seal, that is, His signet ring – The seal represents: ownership, protection, authority, authenticity, and approval (Gen. 41:42; Esth. 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:19).
- f. He delays the winds (7:3) for God's people (9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Later on, Satan imitates this sealing (13:16; 14:9; 20:4).

2. The 144,000 are sealed (7:4-8).

- a. The significance of the number: perfection; completeness.
- b. The significance of the list of tribes – it helps to survey the lists of the twelve patriarchs throughout the Bible (see Figure 72 on p. 119).

During the persecution: saints are being killed one by one (7:9-17).

1. Worship of God and the Lamb (7:9-12).

- a. Description of the multitude (7:9): Their number is countless (in contrast to only 144,000).

Behind “Left Behind”



Are the popular novels
a reliable guide to
end-time events?

Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins (hereafter called L&J), authors of the “Left Behind” series of 12 novels, present a fictitious account of future world events based on their interpretation of biblical prophecies of the end times.¹ In 1999 L&J released *Are We Living in the End Times?* (hereafter, *End Times*), an explanation of end-times prophecy.² In that same year, LaHaye published a revision of his 1973 commentary on Revelation, *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain* (hereafter, *Made Plain*),³ renaming it *Revelation Unveiled* (hereafter, *Unveiled*).⁴ Although passages here and there within the novels reveal the end-times teaching of the authors, I employ these three books, *End Times*, *Made Plain*, and *Unveiled*, as more convenient sources for L&J’s understanding. Again and again, L&J make close connections between the novels and *End Times*.

This complex synthesis, based on the interweaving of passages... depends on extensive mishandling of the Bible—both Old and New Testaments.

The latest in a long tradition

L&J’s books closely follow a scheme of end-time events known as Dispensational premillennialism. This complex synthesis, based on the interweaving of passages scattered throughout the Bible, was first introduced by 19th-century Plymouth Brethren leader John Darby. Modified and popularized in the notes of the *Scofield Reference Bible*,⁵ this teaching was promulgated by many preachers and Bible teachers for the last hundred years. Unfortunately, this teaching depends on extensive mishandling of the Bible—both Old and New Testaments.

Interpretation errors

To provide a detailed refutation of all of LaHaye and Jenkins’s errors would involve writing a book at least as long as *End Times*. I only have space to point out the common errors they repeatedly make in biblical interpretation. I call them “common” because they tend to be the kinds of errors all of us are prone to make as we seek to understand the Bible. In fact, two important books—D. A. Carson’s *Exegetical Fallacies*⁶ and James Sire’s *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways Cults Misread the Bible*⁷—have classified, explained, and illustrated such mistakes.

In what follows I will briefly describe each error and provide an example from *End Times* or one of the other sources. The purpose of this review is to convince you that L&J are much better at writing and marketing fiction than they are at faithfully interpreting biblical prophecy. Once you understand the kinds of mistakes they make, you will begin to see past what might at first sound plausible. In fact, you may find that their errors seem to jump right off the page!

Error 1: Uniting what should remain separate

L&J have committed the error of *collapsing contexts*, tying passages together merely because of similar phraseology. Here is how Carson describes this error:

What gives interpreters the right to link certain verses together, and not others? The point is that all such linking eventually produces a grid that affects the interpretation of other texts. There may be fallacies connected not only with the way individual verses are interpreted, but also with the way several passages are linked—and then also with the way such a link affects the interpretation of the next verse that is studied!⁸

Once you understand the kinds of mistakes they make, you will begin to see past what might at first sound plausible. In fact, you may find that their errors seem to jump right off the page!

To discern the meaning of a given passage in any biblical book, you should read the entire book and examine how the passage contributes its part to the message of the book as a whole. If you think you already know what a passage means, you can test your understanding by seeking to explain how the passage fits into its context. This L&J repeatedly fail to do.

An important example is the way L&J understand the Old Testament “day of the Lord” passages. They quote Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum with approval: “In every passage of the Scriptures that the term the ‘Day of Jehovah’ or the ‘Day of the Lord’ is found, it is always and without exception a reference to the tribulation period.”⁹ By “the tribulation period,” L&J refer, of course, to a future seven-year period in which they believe the personal Antichrist will rise to power and then conduct a reign of terror.

The damage this kind of generalization does to the meaning of the Bible is hard to understate. It necessarily involves ignoring the context of passage after passage. Let’s look briefly at seven Old Testament occurrences of “the day of the LORD,” examining the context of each to find an answer to the question, *To what historical event is the prophet’s expression, “day of the LORD” referring?*

Clear evidence exists within the context of each passage that the “day of the LORD” refers to one of four historical disasters in ancient times when God displayed His wrath, either against His people, the nations, or both. These four disasters are:

- a. *Assyrian domination* – the overthrow of the northern nation of Israel and the surrounding nations, ending in the destruction of the fortified cities of Judah and the unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem during the period from 732 to 701 B.C.¹⁰
- b. *Babylonian domination* – the multiple deportations of Israelites from Judah beginning in 605 B.C., leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.¹¹
- c. *Medo-Persian domination* – the fall of the city of Babylon to the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. and the fall of the Babylonian empire in the years that followed.¹²
- d. *Roman domination* – the Roman war against the Jews that began in A.D. 66, leading up to the fall of Jerusalem to Titus in A.D. 70.¹³

In addition to these, of course, is the fifth possibility:

- e. *Final judgment and transformation of the world* – this event is still in the future, even for us.

L&J assign every passage to event e, but the context of each passage must decide. In each of the examples below, I will point out which of these events the text is calling the “day of the LORD” and offer the proof from the context.

Isaiah 13:9 (disaster c) – The prophet describes “the day of the LORD” as “a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger.” He says it will be a day when God makes the land desolate and destroys sinners within it. It will be a day, he says, when “The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.”

It will be a day when God “will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins.” Isolated from their context and taken literally, these words could certainly be construed to describe some global disaster.

We must recognize, however, that the prophets frequently used descriptions of cosmic catastrophe (e.g., the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars to the earth, the descending of impenetrable clouds and lightning, and great earthquakes) to describe sudden upheavals of the political status quo.¹⁴

Such symbolism communicates this message: “You think that your nation will go on forever, as dependable as the rising of sun and moon. You assume that the other nations will continue as they exist now, just as the stars maintain their places in the night sky. You imagine that your security and your income will remain as stable as the mountains. But something is about to happen that will interrupt the continuity you think will go on forever. Nations will fall, peoples will be slaughtered or exiled, and economies, as well as incomes, will collapse.”

In contrast to such violent upheavals of the political status quo, the prophets sometimes symbolize times of great blessing by the opposite—the sun and the moon shine extra brightly, the sun refuses to set and the moon remains full, and the sea becomes calm.¹⁵

The Isaiah 13 prophecy begins with the words, “An oracle concerning Babylon” (v. 1). In verses 14–16, only a few verses after the reference to the day of the LORD and with no break in the thought, Isaiah speaks of people being captured and thrust through, being caught and falling by the sword, their infants dashed to pieces before their eyes, their houses looted, and their wives ravished. Isaiah is describing the effects of battle as experienced in his own time.

The next verses, Isaiah 13:17–19, state, “See, I will stir up against them the Medes, who do not care for silver and have no delight in gold. Their bows will strike down the young men, they will have no mercy on infants, nor will they look with compassion on children. Babylon . . . will be overthrown by God. . . .”

The “day of the LORD” that the prophet predicts was fulfilled in 539 B.C., when the Medes and Persians captured Babylon and shortly after conquered the entire Babylonian Empire. It was a “day of the LORD” because God was dealing out righteous punishment for all of the tragedies His people had suffered at the hands of the Babylonians. He punished them by allowing the Medes and Persians to conquer their empire. This passage certainly does not apply to an event still future to us. It refers, instead, to disaster c from the list above.



Roberts. “The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans Under the Command of Titus, A.D. 70.” Oil on canvas, 1850.

The prophets frequently used descriptions of cosmic catastrophe (e.g., the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars to the earth, the descending of impenetrable clouds and lightning, and great earthquakes) to describe sudden upheavals of the political status quo.

Annotated Bibliography

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Muse is a good resource if you want to know what biblical scholars and theologians have written about Revelation. This includes both Revelation as a whole and in-depth articles on specific passages. Most of these articles assume a knowledge of the original languages, and many of them are in German, French, or some other language besides English.

Sources

For the most part, I list the scholarly editions of the original sources cited in the pages above. These are available at most university libraries. You might be able to find popular editions of some of these works even in your local public library. Many of these sources in English translation are also available on my website, deeperstudy.com. Not included in the list below are versions of the Greek New Testament, the Greek Old Testament (also called the Septuagint), the Hebrew Bible, and English translations of the Bible, which are cited by their abbreviations (e.g., NIV for New International Version, KJV for King James Version, etc.).

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Erickson, Millard J. *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993.

Erickson's main contribution is his examination of the process of determining significance in a biblical text for modern (post-modern) readers. He warns against the danger of making modern applications of the text that ignore the differences between the situation of the original readers and that of readers of today and outlines the step of making the transition from original intent to modern significance.

Fuller, Daniel P. *Gospel & Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980.

Fuller argues (rightly, in my view) for a continuity between the Old and New Covenants, attempting to demolish one of the foundational axioms of Dispensational premillennialism. Fuller asserts that God's fundamental way of saving humans (by grace, through obedient faith) remained basically the same from the Mosaic covenant to Christ's. In opposition to the Dispensationalists, Fuller also argues that Christ's church is the legitimate heir of the promises to the nation of Israel.

Goodrick, Edward W. *Do-It-Yourself Hebrew and Greek*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981.

Not only can this book help you to learn Hebrew and Greek enough to use the study tools, but Goodrick also has an excellent section on how to study the Bible and on rules of hermeneutics.

Kaiser, Walter C., and Moisés Silva. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Here is an excellent introduction on a considerably more popular level than Klein. This might be a better book to start with if you are not already familiar with hermeneutics. But then move on to Klein or Osborne. See especially chapter 8: "What About the Future? The Meaning of Prophecy" on 138–158.

Kearley, F. Furman. "The Conditional Nature of Prophecy: A Vital Hermeneutical Principle." Montgomery, AL: Apologetics, n.d.

Klein, William W.; Blomberg, Craig L.; and Hubbard, Robert L., Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas, TX: Word, 1993.

This is perhaps the best recent work on hermeneutics for the general reader. The introduction to the need and method of hermeneutics (3–20) is excellent. Their section on General Hermeneutics –Prose is 155–214, and hermeneutics specifically for Revelation is 366–374.

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Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991.

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In a highly readable volume, Sire explains and illustrates the mistakes cults make in biblical interpretation—mistakes to which all of us are susceptible. Sire’s book supplements the material in Carson and is written on a slightly more popular level.

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Arnold has an extensive discussion on angel worship, in its association with first-century magic (32–59), with contemporary Judaism (61–88), and in the local area around Colossae (90–101). Since Colossae is a sister city to Laodicea in the valley of the Lycus River, this background is pertinent to John’s attempts to worship angels in Revelation 19 and 22.

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Authoritative account of the settling of western Asia Minor by Greeks, establishing cities like Smyrna, Ephesus, and Miletus on the west coast of what is now Turkey.

Bonz, Marianne Palmer. “Beneath the Gaze of the Gods: The Pergamon Evidence for a Developing Theology of Empire.” 251–275 in *Pergamon, Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development*. Helmu Koester, ed. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.

In-depth and up-to-date discussion of the rise of the emperor cult and how it was used as a way of binding the empire together.

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Provides a thorough examination of the 34 battles fought at or near Megiddo throughout history. Provides excellent support for the claim that Armageddon is figurative and not a prophetic prediction of a literal battle.

Cline, Kenneth. "A Language to Wear: Anatolian Headdresses." *Catholic Near East Magazine*. Spring 1986: 19–20.

Cline has a good discussion of the use of coins on women's headdresses and includes several good photographs.

Collins, Adela Yarbro. "Pergamon in Early Christian Literature." 163–184 in *Pergamon, Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development*. Helmu Koester, ed. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.

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This atlas provides what is perhaps the best map available of the ancient Roman province of Asia, including the ancient roads.

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Discusses the row of shops found just south of the gymnasium/synagogue complex in Sardis. The shops and some tiny on-site residences were owned by Jewish, Christian, and pagan shopowners. Crawford tells what we can deduce based on artifacts found in each shop regarding the mutual relations of the diversity of race and religion in Sardis. Caution: This is fourth-century Sardis, whose interactions are not necessarily indicative of the first century, when Revelation was written.

Deissmann, Adolf. *Light from the Ancient East*. English edition: London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1922. Reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978.

Deissmann, though dated, has a good discussion of the archaeological basis for an understanding of 666 based on genatria. See references to him in the notes above on "Can We Solve the 666 Puzzle?"

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Gives a vivid account of the 1922 massacre of the Christian community in Smyrna when the Turks killed or drove out the Greek population.

Fant, Claude E., and Mitchell G. Reddish. *A Guide to Biblical Sites in Greece and Turkey*. New York: Oxford University, 2003.

This is the most up-to-date summary of history, archaeology, and site-visit information about the Seven Cities of Asia. Of course, it has a great deal more, since it covers the scores of biblical sites in these two countries. Excellent resource for anyone wanting to understand the background of biblical cities of the first-century empire.

Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987. Rev. ed., 1993.

Here is one of the best sources available in English for the serious student of the culture, philosophy, and religions of the Roman Empire in the New Testament era. Everything is carefully documented with the best sources currently available. Ferguson is a recognized expert on ante-Nicene Christianity and the Hellenistic world. He has taught for many years at Abilene Christian University and is an elder in a church of the Restoration Movement.

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Grant provides an excellent introduction to both the traditional Greek religion and the mystery religions of Graeco-Roman syncretism.

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Grant describes the relationship between Rome and Parthia, including their battles and diplomatic engagements. This is also a great source for the role the legions had in selecting and sustaining emperors, as well as their place in the daily life within the empire.

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Grimal, Pierre, ed. *Hellenism and the Rise of Rome*. A. M. Sheridan-Smith, trans. New York: Delacorte, 1968.

Horton, George. *The Blight of Asia* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1926).

Discusses the 1922 massacre of Christians in the Turkish takeover of Smyrna.

Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.

This volume is an excellent resource for gaining an understanding of the archaeology, culture, and history that serve as the background for much of the New Testament. Arranged in book, chapter, and verse order. I could only wish it were in more depth, but it is already 842 pages long!

Koester, Helmut, ed. *Pergamon, Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.

The essays in this book provide a much-needed resource for the study of Pergamum, the first-century capital of the Roman province of Asia. Several of the articles are detailed archaeological reports, while others survey early Christian literature's references to Pergamum or explore the meaning of the letter to Pergamum found in Revelation 2:12-16 and specifically, the meaning of Satan's throne.

Kampmann, Ursula. "Homonoia Politics in Asia Minor: The Example of Pergamon." 373-393 in *Pergamon, Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development*. Helmu Koester, ed. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.

Many of the coins of the Seven Cities of Asia announce an alliance (*homonoion*) between two cities. On the coins, icons often represent each of the cities, such as the goddess Artemis for Ephesus. In the case of Pergamon, Aesklepios often represents it. Kampmann discusses the nature of these alliances, what each city gained from them, and what each teaches us about the cities involved.

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Levine has a good discussion of the Sardis synagogue.

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This excellent resource provides good, full-color photographs of some of the Seven Cities as they appear to today's visitor.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983.

Murphy-O'Connor provides important cultural background for understanding the worship of first-century house churches as well as the issues of syncretism primitive Christians confronted, as illustrated by the controversy over eating meats offered to idols.

_____. *St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology*. Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2008.

Murphy-O'Connor provides a similar historical, literary, cultural, and archaeological background for Ephesus as he does for Corinth. This is a treasure-trove of important information about first-century Ephesus.

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Shahbazi, A. Shapur. "Carrhae," 9–13 in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (available online, as of March 2010, at <http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v5f1/v5f1a001.html>).

Stauffer, Ethelbert. *Christ and the Caesars*. K. & R. G. Smith, trans. London: SCM, 1955.

In a masterful and beautifully written volume, Stauffer surveys the nature of the conflict between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men, especially as manifested by the Roman emperors who first confronted Christianity. His technical discussion of 666 (found above under "Special Studies on the Apocalypse") is here summarized on a more popular level.

Tarn, W. W. "The Heritage of Alexander." 461–504 in *Cambridge Ancient History, VI. Macedon 401–301 B.C.*, ed. J. B. Bury, et al. (New York: Cambridge University, 1927; reprint: 1978).

Willis, Wendell. *Idol Meat at Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*. Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985.

This is one of the most detailed and helpful treatments of the first-century controversy over the syncretism of Christianity with paganism.

Yamauchi, Edwin A. *New Testament Cities in Western Asia Minor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980.

This earlier volume is still an excellent and up-to-date resource for the history and archaeology of the Seven Cities of Asia. Yamauchi puts the reader in touch with the important sources for doing additional research.

Commentaries on the Apocalypse

Aune, David E. *Revelation*. Word Biblical Commentary. 3 vols. Dallas, TX: Word, 1997.

This is perhaps the most extensive commentary on Revelation in the English language, replete with extensive notes and references. This commentary assumes a knowledge of the original languages. Aune is especially good for historical and cultural background. He often has very exhaustive treatments of the subject.

Barclay, William. *The Revelation of John*. Daily Study Bible. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976.

Barclay is one of the best commentaries on a popular level. He is particularly good for historical and cultural background, as well as word studies of the Greek. Barclay is careful to make practical applications for each section. The entire text is divided into segments that can be read in about 15 minutes each.

Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, eds. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.

Beale holds to what he calls an eclectic interpretation but is primarily idealist. Revelation, he believes, portrays the perennial conflict between good and evil. He tends to agree with the preterists regarding the meaning for the original readers but affirms that they book has a greater meaning for all ages. Amen!

Beasley-Murray, G. R. *The Book of Revelation*. New Century Bible Commentary. London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974. Reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981.

Beasley-Murray emphasizes the meaning for the original readers but also sees Revelation as in some way a prophecy of the end times. Yet Beasley-Murray is much more reserved about this than many are. His commentary is intended for the serious Bible student, but no knowledge of the original languages is necessary.

Beckwith, Ibsen T. *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction, with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*. London: Macmillan, 1919. Reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979.

Beckwith is a detailed treatment of the Greek text with extensive notes and references. The reader needs a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek to use it to its fullest potential. It is also nearly 100 years old, and therefore it lacks information that has only come to light more recently, particularly in the fields of lexicography and archaeology.

Caird, G. B. *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*. Harper's New Testament Commentaries. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

Caird has written an excellent commentary that uses the original languages in a way that makes them accessible to the nonexpert. This is a good resource to find out what is the range of viewpoints on any passage in the Apocalypse. Unfortunately, however, it does not have as many references and notes as Mounce, but it is on about the same level of difficulty.

Charles, R. H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*. The International Critical Commentary. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920.

This is another critical commentary on the Greek text, written by an acknowledged expert in apocalyptic literature. Charles will provide you with as much depth as you need. His introduction is extensive, especially his work on Revelation's use of the Old Testament. This commentary is dated, however, because of all of the archaeology and lexicography that has been done since 1920. If you must study only one critical commentary, Aune is a much more up-to-date choice.

Chilton, David. *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion, 1987.

Chilton is the most recent of a number of commentaries that interpret Revelation as concerning the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Chilton is part of the Reconstruction Movement, also known as the Dominion Movement, which appears to be postmillennial in its eschatology.

Düsterdieck, Friedrich. *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*. 6th ed. Henry E. Jacobs, trans. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884. Reprint: Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983.

Düsterdieck contains much useful information, but everything true about Beckwith applies here as well.

Graham, Billy. *Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Waco, TX: Word, 1987.

Graham writes on a popular level, assuming but neither explaining nor defending the Dispensational viewpoint.

Gregg, Steve, ed. *Revelation: four views: a parallel commentary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997.

Gregg provides us with an excellent way to compare these four interpretations of the text, chapter by chapter: preterist, historicist, futurist, and spiritual. He quotes a variety of representatives for each view throughout the book. No knowledge of the original languages is necessary. This kind of commentary obviously hits the highlights only. One could wish that Gregg were more careful in identifying his sources.

Guimond, John. *The Silencing of Babylon: A Spiritual Commentary on the Revelation of John*. New York: Paulist, 1991.

This Catholic scholar presents the result of years of reflection on the meaning of the Apocalypse, combined with the results of years of discussion groups going verse by verse through the text. Although Guimond's work is subject to the same criticism of other spiritualist interpreters (fuzzy on the details), he offers much insight and spiritual meat for consideration.

Hailey, Homer. *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979.

Hailey is a well respected Bible preacher and teacher within the Restoration Movement. His commentary is on a popular level, though it is clear he consulted some of the best commentaries available in English. There is no need for Hebrew or Greek to use this volume. Hailey provides a good introduction to the historical background. Hailey provides a good refutation of the destruction of Jerusalem viewpoint (Hailey focuses on Wallace in this regard).

Hendriksen, William. *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1940.

This is an excellent popular commentary. Hendriksen is especially good at explain the principle of recapitulation, which is vital to understanding Revelation properly. His interpretation, however, tends to focus on the broad picture. He is not the one to consult when you want specific and detailed information.

King, Max R. *The Spirit of Prophecy*. [Warren, OH]: Max R. King, 1971.

The first half of this book written by a preacher of the Restoration Movement explains the author's eschatology. The last half is his commentary on the Book of Revelation, interpreting it as a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in a.d. 70. See McGuiggan's debate with him, listed below, for a detailed refutation of the viewpoint King shares with David Chilton and Foy E. Wallace, Jr., among others.

LaHaye, Tim. *Revelation Illustrated and Made Plain*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973. Revised and republished in 1999 as *Revelation Unveiled*.

LaHaye is a leading representative of the Dispensational point of view whose "Left Behind" series of novels have done much to renew interest in eschatology, though they mislead an uninformed public. See my extensive analysis of his commentaries and the book he recently co-authored with Jerry Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?*

Lindsey, Hal. *There's a New World Coming: A Prophetic Odyssey*. Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, [1973].

Lindsey presents the Dispensational point of view on Revelation. He understands the seven churches as symbols, though they should be understood literally, and he takes many of the images in the Apocalypse literally when they are really symbolic. All is presented in a newsy, matter-of-fact manner, as if this were the proven results of biblical scholarship!

Massynberde-Ford, J. *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975.

Massynberde-Ford believes that the Apocalypse is a patchwork of editing based on a pre-Christian apocalypse originating from John the Baptizer and his disciples. Her theories have been rejected by virtually all Revelation scholars. The value of the book lies in its fresh, idiomatic paraphrase of the Greek text.

McGuiggan, Jim. *The Book of Revelation*. West Monroe, LA: William C. Johnson, [1976].

I owe much to McGuiggan's refutation of both the Dispensational and the destruction of Jerusalem viewpoints. He writes on a popular level, with strong emphasis on practical application. Read this in conjunction with his other books listed below.

Morris, Leon. *The Book of Revelation: an Introduction and Commentary*. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987.

Morris is an excellent scholar who has made particular study of apocalyptic literature (see his other publications under “Special Works on the Apocalypse” and “Studies on Biblical Prophecy”). Despite his depth, he is able to keep his commentary understandable for the non-expert. My two criticisms of his commentary are both due to mandates from the editors of the Tyndale series. His commentary is based on the King James Version, whose translators, unfortunately, only had access to the later manuscripts. The earlier manuscripts differ from the later ones in numerous places, and are often more likely original. Morris is capable of detailed commentaries (see his treatment of Thessalonians and the Fourth Gospel in the New International New Testament Commentary series). But he was forced to keep this one short, which makes it disappointing in places.

Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. New International New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977.

This is one of the best commentaries on Revelation for the non-expert. Even though it is not necessary to know the original languages to use this volume, the scholar can also benefit from its insights and careful notes. If you want more than an overview and do not know the original languages, this one would be hard to beat.

Roberts, J. W. *The Revelation of John (The Apocalypse)*. The Living Word Commentary. Austin, TX: Sweet, 1974.

Roberts was a first-class Greek scholar, and it shows in his excellent commentary, which nevertheless is intended for preachers and teachers of the Restoration Movement. Only the most important sources are mentioned here, however. If you use Roberts, you will often wish he had said more on specific, puzzling passages.

Stuart, Moses. *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*. 2 vols. Andover, MA: Allen, Morrill & Wardwell, 1845.

Of course, Stuart is out of date, but it was an excellent commentary for its day and still provides many insights. He does assume some knowledge of the original languages. His discussion of the history of the interpretation of 666 is one of the most thorough up to his own day.

Summers, Ray. *Worthy is the Lamb: An Interpretation of Revelation*. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1951.

Summers is a good commentary written on a popular level. He has an especially good chapter on interpretive methods for Revelation. He constantly (and correctly) asks, “What would this have meant for the original readers?” Because Summers concentrates on the big picture, he refuses to discuss many of the details.

Sweet, John. *Revelation*. TPI New Testament Commentaries. London: SCM, 1979.

Sweet’s approach—starting with hermeneutics and seeking to understand Revelation from the viewpoint of the original readers—is very similar to mine. His commentary begins with an excellent synopsis of Revelation, chapter by chapter. No acquaintance with the original languages is needed. You might be disappointed if you want a full discussion of a particular passage, but this commentary is worth reading.

Swete, Henry B. *The Apocalypse of St. John*. London: Macmillan, 1908. Reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.

This is another excellent commentary on the Greek text. Comments on Beckwith, however, would also apply to Swete.

Wallace, Foy E., Jr. *The Book of Revelation: Consisting of a Commentary on the Apocalypse of the New Testament*. Nashville, TN: F. E. Wallace, 1966.

This famous preacher of the Restoration Movement wrote a large commentary to defend the destruction of Jerusalem interpretation. His point of view experienced a revival in the commentaries of Max R. King and David Chilton.

Special Studies on the Apocalypse

Aune, David E. "The Influence of the Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John." *Papers of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research* 28 (1983): 5–26.

Aune demonstrates that the background of the Roman imperial court may be nearly as important as the Old Testament worship background for understanding the throneroom scenes in Revelation. Particularly relevant are the constant acclamations given to the emperor, as compared to the acclamations both Father and Son receive in the Apocalypse.

Barrett, C. K. "Gnosis and the Apocalypse of John," 125–137 in *The New Testament and Gnosis*. A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn, eds. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983.

Bauckham, Richard. *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993.

_____. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993.

Beasley-Murray, G. R.; Hobbs, H. H.; and Robbins, R. H. *Revelation: Three Viewpoints*. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1977.

This book is the record of an oral exchange between these three respected Bible teachers. It illustrates how people can disagree over interpreting the Apocalypse without being disagreeable.

Baines, W. G. "The Number of the Beast in Revelation." *Heythrop Journal* 16 (1975): 195–196.

Boring, M. E. "Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54, 4 (1992): 702–723.

Carnegie, David R. "Worthy is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation," 243–256 in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie*. Harold H. Rowdon, ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982.

Clarke, John E. "Notes on chap. xiii," 2:1015–1027 in *The New Testament: A Commentary and Critical Notes* by Adam Clarke. Reprint: Nashville, TN: Abingdon, n.d.

DeMar, Gary. "The Mark of the Beast Revisited." *Biblical Worldview* 11, 3 (March 1995): 7–8.

This is an excellent and detailed discussion concerning why the UPC bar code cannot possibly have anything to do with the 666 of Rev. 13.

Ellwanger, W. H. "The Christology of the Apocalypse." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 1 (1930): 512–528.

Gagniers, Jean des, et al. *Laodicée du Lycos: Le Nymphée, Campagnes, 1961–1963*. Quebec: l'Université Laval, 1969.

This is written entirely in French, but it features excellent maps and diagrams of the archaeological work at Laodicea.

Goulder, M.D. "The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 342–367.

Goulder does an excellent job of show the parallels between Revelation and Ezekiel. Whether Goulder is right about the use of Revelation in a cycle of liturgical readers is another issue that I prefer to ignore as relatively unimportant.

Gundry, Robert. "The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People." *New Testament Studies* 29, 3 (1987): 254–264.

Gundry, a chiliast, presents much that is valuable about the symbolism involved in the New Jerusalem of Rev. 21:1 – 22:5. Unfortunately, however, he advocates taking the opulence of the city literally, suggesting that Christians of the new earth will be fabulously wealthy. If the city is symbolic, so are the precious metals and precious stones—symbolic of the immeasurable spiritual wealth that we have in Christ.

Guthrie, Donald. "The Christology of Revelation," 397–409 in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*. Joel B. Green and Max Turner, eds. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

_____. "The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation." *Vox Evangelica* 2 (1981): 64–71.

Hemer, Colin J. *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 11. Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1986.

This important work updates the books by William Ramsay on the historical, cultural, and archaeological background for the seven churches of Asia. Hemer attempts to relate all of this background to the text of Rev. 2 and 3. Perhaps he goes too far in places, but his work is helpful nonetheless.

Hillyer, Norman. "the Lamb' in the Apocalypse." *Evangelical Quarterly* 39 (1967):228–236.

Hurtado, Larry W. "Revelation 4–5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (1985): 105–124.

Keith, Michael. "The Bar-Code Beast." *Skeptical Inquirer* 12, 2 (1988): 416–418.

Khn'g, Yeo Khiok. "Christ the End of History and the Hope of the Suffering: Revelation 5 in the Light of Pannenberg's Christology." *Asia Journal of Theology* 8 (1994): 308–334.

Marlin, J. T. *The Seven Churches of Asia Minor*. Duncan, OK: Williams, 1980.

This is a travel guide to the Seven Cities, with good maps, diagrams, and photographs. It also makes some spiritual applications.

McElwaine, Robert E. "MARK-OF-THE-BEA\$T bar-code\$/scanner\$." Posting on the Internet news-group alt.peace-corps, dated Feb. 24, 1993.

McKnight, W. J. "The Letter to the Laodiceans." *Biblical Review* 16 (1931): 519–535.

Meinardes, Otto F. *St. John of Patmos and the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse*. Athens, Greece: Lycabettus, 1979.

This is a good tour guide for Patmos and the Seven Cities. It includes maps, diagrams, and photographs.

Metzger, Bruce M. *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993.

This is an excellent and readable short book summarizing Metzger's understanding of the Apocalypse. I like it so much that I have used it as a supplementary text when I taught Revelation as a university course. In this book, Metzger does not assume that you know Hebrew and Greek.

Mounce, Robert H. "The Christology of the Apocalypse." *Foundations* 11 (1969): 42–45.

Moyise, Steve. *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1995.

Moyise devotes a chapter each to Revelation's use of Ezekiel and Daniel. His conclusion is noteworthy: Revelation employs the imagery and often even the wording of the Hebrew Bible, through it also transforms the meaning behind the images and the words.

Paher, Stanley W. *Identity of Babylon and the Dating of the Book of Revelation*. Las Vegas, NV: Nevada Publications, 1997.

Paher argues in favor of an early dating for the writing of Revelation and favors an amillennial, preterist interpretation applied to the destruction of Jerusalem. His forté is in providing historical background.

Pate, C. Marvin, ed. *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.

Pate provides us with a good resource for comparing competing and often contradictory interpretations. Keep hermeneutics in mind as you read this and similar books.

Ramsay, William M. *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904. Reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1963. Updated edition: Mark W. Wilson, ed. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994

Ramsay was a classical scholar who spent his academic holidays exploring Turkey and Greece to gain insight into the biblical text. His book is good for cultural and geographical background for the Seven Churches, but it is out of date. Much archaeological work on this area has been done since Ramsay's time. Use this along with Yamauchi and Hemer's more recent books.

Reader, William W. "The Twelve Jewels of Revelation 21:19–20: Tradition, History, and Modern Interpretations." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981): 433–457.

Reader examines the three major lines scholars have followed to explain the meaning of the precious stones listed as part of the foundations of the New Jerusalem. Reader concludes that none of them adequately explains Revelation's use of the stones, though he does suggest that its connotations must spring from Judaism. His article provides access to the many resources available for a thorough study of this perplexing passage.

Rowland, Christopher. "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10 (1979): 137–154.

Sanders, Henry. "The Number of the Beast in Revelation." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 37 (1918): 95–99.

Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church: Vol. 1: Apostolic Christianity, A.D. 1–100*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910. Reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988.

Schaff has an excellent discussion of 666. See the notes on "Can We Solve the 666 Puzzle?"

Stauffer, Ethelbert. "666 (Apoc. 13,18)," 237–241 in *Coniectanea Neotestamentica*. Lund: Gleerup, 1947.

Stauffer's suggestion that 666 represents the numerical values of the inscribed abbreviations on a coin of Domitian. Each of the abbreviations in Stauffer's proposed inscription is attested on surviving coins of Domitian. The required combination of all of them on one coin, however, has not yet been discovered.

Stone, Tom. *Patmos*. Athens, Greece: Lycabettus, 1981.

This is another tour guide of Patmos, featuring the history, maps, diagrams, and photographs. Stone goes into more depth about Patmos than Meinardes does.

Stott, John. *What Christ Thinks of the Church: Insights from Revelation 2 and 3*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972.

This is an eminently practical series of sermons on the Letters to the Seven Churches. Stott's modern applications are a model of hermeneutics properly applied.

"The Number of the Beast." *Science Digest* (July 1985): 66–67.

"The Official 666 FAQ" website: www.xs4all.nl/~avg/666.htm

Thomas, Robert L. "The Chronological Interpretation of Revelation 2–3." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124, 4966 (Oct. 1967): 321–324.

Thomas shows how taking the Seven Churches of Asia as symbols of seven successive ages of church history has no foundation in the text and lies in the face of what is present in chapters 2–3 and elsewhere.

Thompson, Leonard L. *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1990.

Thompson takes a highly creative and original approach to the Apocalypse. His work on the history of Domitian's reign is particularly valuable because it relies less on the contemporary historians Tacitus and Suetonius (biased against Domitian) and more on other evidence, such as inscriptions and official decrees from Domitian's reign.

Trench, Richard Chevenix. *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia*. 6th ed. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1897. Reprint: Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1978.

Underwood, Dudley. *Numerology, or What Pythagoras Wrought*. Washington, D.C.: Mathematical Association of America, 1997.

Underwood provides us with a good discussion on 666, not as a biblical scholar or theologian but as a mathematician. Underwood also discusses the bar code as well as why the number 666 comes up so often in daily life. All of this and more constitutes his attempt to dispel superstition and quell fears.

Van Unnick, W. C. "Worthy is the Lamb": The Background of Apoc 5," 445–461 in *Mélanges: Bibliques en hommage au R. P. Béda Rigaux*. A Descamps and A. De Halleux, eds. Genbloux: Duculot, 1970.

Works on Bible Prophecy

Aldrich, Roy. "Can the End of the Age be Computed by the Day-Year Theory?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 115, 458 (April 1958): 159–165.

Allis, Oswald T. *Prophecy and the Church*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1945.

Allis has provided an excellent critique of the hermeneutics of Dispensationalism, especially its principle of literalness.

Bar eld, Kenny. *The Prophet Motive: Examining the Reliability of the Biblical Prophets*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1995.

Bass, Clarence. *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960. Reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977.

This work demonstrates the relatively recent origins of Dispensationalism and also clearly exposes its wrong assumptions and hermeneutical weaknesses. See my section on Dispensationalism for frequent references to Bass.

Camp, Gregory S. *Selling Fear: conspiracy theories and end-times paranoia*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997.

Camp takes end-times teachers and various date-setters to task for irresponsibly exploiting latent fears about the future and ill-informed suspicions about hidden conspiracies. Camp is excellent for his historical survey of end-times teachers from World War II to the end of the Cold War.

Clouse, Robert G., ed. *The Millennium: Four Views*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977.

This is one of the best resources available for studying about the millennium, because you each hear an advocate of each position present his position, and then defend it against the responses of the other participants. The four views are presented by leading advocates of each: historic premillennialism – George Eldon Ladd, dispensational premillennialism – Herman A. Hoyt, postmillennialism – Loraine Boettner, and amillennialism – Anthony A. Hoekema.

Crenshaw, Curtis I., and Grover E. Gunn, III. *Dispensationalism: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*. Memphis, TN: Footstool, 1985. Reprint with minor changes, 1987.

As former Dispensational premillennialists, Crenshaw and Gunn provide a careful and balanced refutation of the hermeneutics of the Dispensational movement. Their book is an excellent resource for helping a Dispensationalist to examine the weaknesses of the teaching and the strengths of its alternatives.

Crockett, William V., ed. *Four Views on Hell*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.

The four views are: purgatorial (Zachary Hayes), metaphorical (William V. Crockett), conditional (Clark W. Pinnock), and literal (John F. Walvoord). Following the presentation of each

view, each of the other scholars offers a critique. This is perhaps the best book to read if you are interested in exploring the biblical teaching of the eternal fate of the wicked.

Crutcheld, Larry. *Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor*. New York: University Press of America, 1992.

Froom, Leroy E. *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1966.

Froom has written perhaps the most extensive book in English on conditional immortality. He is presenting the understanding of most Seventh-Day Adventists.

Forbes, Bruce David, and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds. *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

This is a series of scholarly essays on the “Left Behind” series of novels, including measures of and reasons for its popularity, an historical background of its eschatology, a comparison of its end-times teaching with alternative views (by Stanley Grenz, a good scholar), its portrayal of Jews and Israel, and its social-political messages. It includes an annotated bibliography.

Fudge, Edward. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment*. Fallbrook, CA: Verdict, 1982.

This is a carefully written and well-documented defense of conditional immortality and the ultimate annihilation of the wicked. His book has helped to reawaken interest in the eternal destiny of the wicked (see Robert A. Morey’s book, which attempts to answer Fudge’s arguments). Fudge is an elder in a church within the Restoration Movement.

Gunn, Grover E., III. “Conditional and Unconditional Covenants,” 424–430 in Curtis I. Crenshaw and Grover E. Gunn, III *Dispensationalism: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*. Memphis, TN: Footstool, 1985. Reprint with minor changes, 1987.

Ha, Bank-Ik. “Rapture!” (pamphlet published by Taberah World Mission).

Hoekema, Anthony A. *The Bible and the Future*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979.

This is an excellent resource for evaluating the different views of the millennium. Hoekema himself is an amillennialist.

Ice, Thomas, and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future? Two Evangelical Debate the Question*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999.

This is a debate between Dispensationalist Ice and A.D. 70 Preterist/Postmillennialist Gentry. Debaters can help to clarify contrasting positions, provided they are careful to produce more light and less heat. These two do about as well as we could hope in maintaining congeniality while engaging in an in-depth discussion.

Kearley, F. Furman. “Biblical Prophecy and the Middle East Crisis.” Parkersburg, WV: Ohio Valley College, 1983.

Kearley wrote his doctoral dissertation at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati on the conditional prophecies in the book of Obadiah.

_____. “The Conditional Nature of Prophecy: A Vital Hermeneutical Principle.” Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, n.d.

King, Max R., and Jim McGuiggan. *The McGuiggan-King Debate (Jim McGuiggan – Lubbock, Texas, Max R. King – Warren, Ohio)*. Warren, OH: Parkman Road Church of Christ, [1975].

This discussion ranges over all of eschatology and much of the New Testament, not just the Book of Revelation. King believes that the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 constitutes the second coming of Christ that nearly every book of the New Testament mentions in prospect. McGuiggan agrees with King that A.D. 70 was an important “coming” of Christ, but denies (I believe rightly) that it is the ultimate one. Their major point of difference involves the general resurrection. King claims that the resurrection is a symbol for the church’s escape from Jewish persecution, represented by the raising of the ‘body’ (referring to the church, not the

physical corpse). McGuiggan argues that the raising and glorifying of the physical body is a sure and unconditional promise of God yet awaiting its fulfillment.

Kirsch, Jonathan. *A History of the End of the World: How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2006.

Kirsch is an attorney, book columnist, and broadcaster. His summary of Revelation is similar to what you will find on the Discovery Channel, but his long history of date-setters for the end of the world is fascinating. I found myself wishing he could go into more detail; he just skims over dramatic events. Yet the mere recitation of so many would-be prophets is a corrective all of us need to hear. Kirsch concludes with secular doomsday predictions.

Ladd, George Eldon. *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, reprint: 1983.

Ladd is a Chiliast (Historic Premillennialist) and also a well-respected scholar.

LaSor, William Sanford. *The Truth About Armageddon: What the Bible Says About the End Times*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.

Although a Chiliast (Historic Premillennialist), LaSor does a better job than most of presenting other views with fairness and an irenic spirit.

LaHaye, Tim. *No Fear of the Storm*. Portland, OR: Multnomah, [1992]. (Reprinted in 1998 under the title, *Rapture Under Attack*.)

The author attempts to defend the Dispensational (pre-tribulational) premillennial position, primarily against post-tribulational premillennialism. In the process of supporting a premillennial "rapture," LaHaye fall into several hermeneutical fallacies.

LaHaye, Tim, and Jerry B. Jenkins. *Are We Living in the End Times?* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999.

This is the primary book to which I respond in the section, "Revelation and Fiction." Because of their "Left Behind" novels, LaHaye and Jenkins have made a new generation familiar with the Dispensational point of view. Unfortunately, however, their theology is riddled with hermeneutical errors.

LaHaye, Tim, and Thomas Ice, eds. *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming Under Attack*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003.

This is a defense of Dispensationalism against the Preterist-Destruction of Jerusalem position. Some of its arguments could also apply to the Preterist-Domitianic Persecution position. On the one hand, it presents some valid arguments against the Destruction of Jerusalem interpretation. On the other hand, it fails to deal with some of the reasons for taking a Preterist position, especially with regard to the time frames in Revelation and the Olivet Discourse.

Lindsey, Hal, with C. C. Carlson. *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, [1970].

This is the tremendously popular and often inconsistent presentation of the Dispensational viewpoint.

McCall, Thomas S., and Zola Levitt. *Coming: The End! Russia and Israel in Prophecy*. Chicago: Moody, 1992.

McCall and Levitt assume but do not prove the Dispensational viewpoint.

McGuiggan, Jim. *The Kingdom of God and the Planet Earth*. Lubbock, TX: International Bible Resources, [1978].

McGuiggan wrote this book to answer Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. He is very successful in pointing out holes in Lindsey's reasoning and the inconsistencies in his interpretive methodology.

_____. *The McGuiggan-King Debate* (see under King, Max R.).

Morey, Robert A. *Death and the Afterlife*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984.

Takes Edward Fudge (see separate reference) to task for denying the traditional view of the eternal, conscious torment of the wicked. Read Morey for a good presentation of the traditional viewpoint.

Morris, Leon. *Apocalyptic*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972.

Morris provides an examination of the meaning of apocalyptic and its characteristics. He is careful to point out the similarities and dissimilarities between the Book of Revelation and other apocalyptic literature. For a more detailed treatment of this subject, but sadly lacking Morris's conservative approach, see D. S. Russell.

Noë, John. *The Apocalypse Conspiracy*. Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991.

Noë is by profession a corporate trainer, but he is also a careful student of biblical prophecy. His book sets out to debunk many of the popular, sensational approaches to Revelation and end-times prophecy. Chapters include: How You Can Be Raptured Right Now, Why You Won't Find the Battle of Armageddon in the Middle East, and Why Seven Years Don't Make a Week nor a Thousand Years a Millennium. I especially like his chapter entitled, Why You Won't Find the New Jerusalem in the Middle East (he believes, as I do, that Revelation's New Jerusalem is describing the church).

Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958.

Ralph, Margaret Nutting. *The Bible and the End of the World: Should We Be Afraid?* New York: Paulist, 1997.

Nutting approaches the study of end times from a hermeneutical point of view, explaining the hermeneutical errors people make and what the text means if one avoids the errors. She employs a spiritual symbolism approach to the Book of Revelation. Many of the charts in this book are excellent.

Richard R. Reiter, ed. *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

In this book, advocates of each of the premillennial positions—pre-tribulational (Paul D. Feinberg), mid-tribulational (Gleason L. Archer, Jr.), and post-tribulational (Douglas J. Moo)—presents his view, while the other two offer a short response.

Roberts, J. J. M. "A Christian Perspective on Prophetic Prediction." *Interpretation* 33, 3 [July 1979]: 240-253.

Discusses four categories of predictions: those that have already happened, those that did not come to pass and never will, those that are yet to be fulfilled for which we longingly wait, and those taking place in a way that is less--or more than--literal.

Robertson, Pat. *The End of the Age*. Dallas, TX: Word, 1995.

Robertson's novel plays out his understanding of Revelation: post-tribulational premillennialism (also called Chiliasm). See my critique of his interpretation of Revelation in "The end of the urge?"

Russell, D. S. *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 B.C. – A.D. 100*. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964.

Russell provides a careful examination of Jewish apocalyptic literature, demonstrating the distinctive characteristics these documents share. The Book of Revelation fits into this category, but does not have all of the characteristics Russell delineates. See also Morris's much more succinct treatment of the same subject.

Ryrie, Charles C. *Dispensationalism Today*. Chicago: Moody, [1965].

As one of the leading proponents of Dispensational (pre-tribulational) premillennialism, Ryrie attempts to provide the hermeneutical and exegetical basis for this understanding.

Schmitt, John W., and J. Carl Laney. *Messiah's Coming Temple: Ezekiel's Prophetic Vision of the Future Temple*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1997.

As Dispensationalists, Schmitt and Laney are enthusiastic about the building of a third temple in Jerusalem. Their book is a detailed description of the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy (which is considerably different from either Solomon's or Herod's), as well as a report of the movement among orthodox Jews to rebuild a Jewish temple on the Temple Mount. This book includes many diagrams as well as photographs of a scale model of Ezekiel's temple one of the authors built with painstaking care.

Shank, Robert. *Until: The Coming of the Messiah and His Kingdom*. Springfield, MO: Westcott, 1982.

This is a scholarly presentation of the Dispensational point of view. Shank, who left the Baptists to join the Restoration Movement, avoids the sensationalism and extremely literal positions of Hal Lindsey and others.

Sharon, William L. *2036 A.D.: The Return*. Columbus, GA: Brentwood Christian Press, 1996.

Sharon takes a continuous-historical approach that sees the Roman Catholic Church as the whore of Babylon and the pope at the person indicated by 666. I expected a complicated mathematical computation to arrive at the 2036 target, but cannot find it—it just seems to be assumed. Perhaps the author wrote an earlier volume in which he explains his reasoning. This one dates biblical events by an idiosyncratic system of dating everything from the Fall, giving dates in A.S. (After Sin). According to Sharon, Adam's fall was in 3969 B.C. (his 1 A.S.). Once more, how he arrives at that date (35 years later than Bishop Ussher's famous 4004) is anyone's guess. He doesn't tell us.

Sproul, R. C. *The Last Days According to Jesus: When Did Jesus Say He Would Return?* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998.

Sproul is one of the most respected evangelical writers of our era. His book is an examination of the Preterist-Destruction of Jerusalem position. I appreciate his willingness to consider points he was not taught in seminary. He rightly (in my view) rejects what he calls "extreme Preterism," those who believe even the resurrection from the dead of 1 Cor. 15 and 1 Thess. 4 is figurative. He has less trouble with what he calls "moderate Preterists" like Kenneth Gentry Jr.

Tanner, J. Paul. "Daniel's 'King of the North': Do we owe Russia an apology?" *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 35, 3 (September 1992): 315–328.

Walvoord, John F. *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*. Revised ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990.

_____. *Major Bible Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies That Affect You Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991.

Walvoord was one of the major scholars holding to Dispensationalism, and his books are easy to read. He sometimes discusses other points of view, but only in passing. This is an excellent reference for what Dispensationalists believe and why.

_____. *The Millennial Kingdom*. Dunham, 1959; reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975.

This is one of the primers for the Dispensationalist position. It has influenced more than a generation of preachers and teachers. Walvoord was the long-time president of Dallas Theological Seminary, regarded by many as the epicenter of Dispensationalist teaching.

Yamauchi, Edwin A. *Foes from the Northern Frontier: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982.

This expert on the ancient Middle East provides a detailed discussion about what is known of “Gog,” “Meshech,” and “Tubal,” providing archaeological and historical settings for each and thereby refuting Dispensational claims.

_____. “Meshech, Tubal, and Company: A Review Article.” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 19, 3 (Summer 1976): 239–247.

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Barclay, William. *The Mind of St. Paul*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958.

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Beasley-Murray, G. R. *John*. Word Biblical Commentary, 36. Waco, TX: Word, 1987.

Blass, F., and A. Debrunner. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Robert W. Funk, trans. and ed. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961.

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Bruce, F. F. “Israel of God,” 2:719–720 in *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1980.

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Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985.

This provides a good summary of New Testament Christology for the general reader.

Farrar, F. W. *The Gospel According to St. Luke*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1891.

Friesen, Garry, with Robin Maxson. *Decision Making and the Will of God: A biblical alternative to the traditional view*. Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980.

Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Introduction*. Naperville, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.

Hahn, Ferdinand. *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity*. New York: World, 1969.

Hurd, John C. *The Origin of I Corinthians*. Rev. ed.: Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1983.

Hurtado, Larry W. *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

Jeremias, Joachim. “אֵיִרְנֹן, אֵיִרְחַן, אֵיִרְנִיּוֹן” [“lamb”], 1:338–341 in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

Kuhn, K. G. “Βαβυλων,” [“Babylon”] 1:517 in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

Lewis, C. S. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: Macmillan, 1942?.

McGuiggan, Jim. *The Book of Daniel*. West Monroe, LA: William C. Johnson, 1978.

McGuiggan provides a common-sense approach to interpreting Daniel, seeking both the meaning for the original recipients of the book and for today's readers. In the process, McGuiggan answers the Dispensational arguments of Lindsey and Walvoord.

_____. *The Book of Ezekiel*. West Monroe, LA: William C. Johnson, 1974.

Written on a popular level, this short commentary on Ezekiel provides amillennial responses to the Dispensational understanding of Ezekiel. Because Ezekiel is such an important background for Revelation, McGuiggan's book is tremendously helpful.

Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1971.

This is an indispensable resource for considering the differences among the manuscripts. Read the excellent introduction to textual criticism before attempting to understand Metzger's comments on any textual variants in Revelation. Metzger does assume a knowledge of Greek.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985.

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This indispensable volume contains an excellent discussion of Christ as "Lamb of God."

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Plevnik, Joseph. *Paul and the Parousia: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.

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Rhoads, David, and Donald Michie. *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1982.

Robertson, A. T. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909.

Schep, J. A. *The Nature of the Resurrection Body: A Study of the Biblical Data*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964.

Schnelle, Udo. *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John*. Linda M. Maloney, trans. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992.

Sider, Ronald J. "The Pauline Conception of the Resurrection Body in I Corinthians." *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975/76): 428–439.

Slotki, I. W. *Isaiah: Hebrew Text & English Translation with Introduction & Commentary*. London: Soncino, 1949.

Stein, Robert H. "Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?" 116–126 in his *Difficult Passages in the Epistles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988.

Süring, Margit L. *The Horn-Motif in the Hebrew Bible and Related Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Iconography*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1980.

Süring identifies two basic and often contrasting meanings to horn symbolism (see Ps. 75:11, where both occur). When referring to the ungodly, 'horn' represents arrogant, aggressive, and brutal force. When referring to the powers of righteousness, it represents the intervening power of God.

Swanson, Donald C. "Diminutives in the Greek New Testament." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77 (1958): 134–151.

The application for Revelation of Swanson's survey of diminutives throughout the New Testament is that the use of *airnion* for "lamb" as a name for the Messiah has probably lost its diminutive force by the time of the writing of Revelation.

Turner, Max. "Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John—Some Questions to Bultmann and Forestell." *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (1990): 99–122.

Walton, John H. "Isa. 7:14: What's In a Name?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, 3 (Sept. 1987): 289–306.

Wanamaker, Charles A. *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.

Wanamaker has a good discussion of the "Man of lawlessness" of 2 Thess. 2.

Wilckens, Ulrich. *Resurrection: Biblical Testimony to the Resurrection: An Historical Examination and Explanation*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1978. Originally published in German: *Auferstehung*. Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1970.

Wilckens examines the New Testament testimony to Christ's resurrection, illuminated by the Old Testament teaching of life and death and the resurrection of the dead in Judaism and in apocalyptic literature. He provides a wealth of background information for this pivotal New Testament doctrine.

_____. "χαραγμα," ["mark"] 9:416 in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

Young, Davis A. *Christianity and the Age of the Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982.

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Another important principle is to learn how the Book of Revelation itself indicates what to take literally and what figuratively. Also, it explains principles for know what is certain, what is likely, what is probable, and what is possible, though uncertain. We interpreters of Revelation need more humility! We need to learn how to say, “This is what I think it means, and here’s why,” rather than “It obviously means such and so, as any nincompoop can agree.” And if its meaning remains uncertain, we need to admit it.

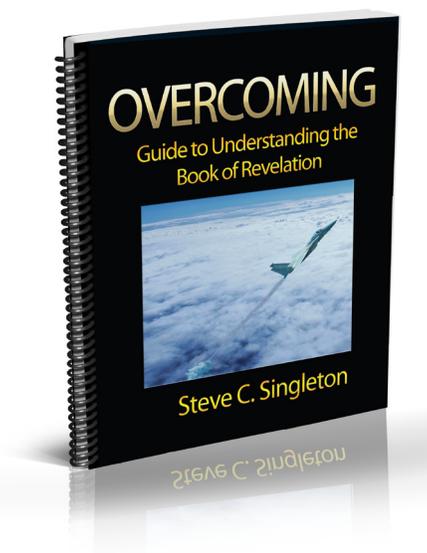
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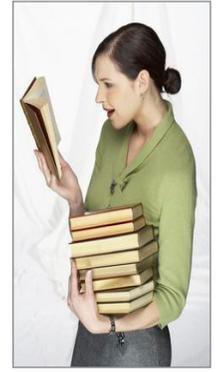
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About the Webmaster



Steve Singleton has been a Bible teacher for 30 years, providing instruction in Bible, Greek, and related subjects has in the university classroom, adult education programs, public seminars, churches, and Christian camps. He has done preaching and/or teaching in 15 U.S. states, the Caribbean, Mexico, Canada, and Russia. His degrees are in biblical studies and religion. His writings include several books and numerous business and devotional articles. He has retired from business to devote himself to promoting authentic, biblical Christianity. He has a wide variety of interests, including biblical hermeneutics and exegesis, archaeology, church history, apologetics, world religions, evangelism, missions, and the interface between Christianity and culture. He is married, with three children and five grandchildren.