

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

END BEFORE THE BEGINNING

REVELATION

To say this is an intriguing book in the Bible would be a tragic understatement. To say this has been a popular book in the Bible would be a tragic understatement. To say that this book has confused a lot of people would be an tragic understatement. So let's try and learn it!

No, really... you should learn this book. It's not for the faint of heart. This book is not for those just looking for something exciting to study; that's not why God gave it to us. This book isn't some kind of Biblical entertainment because you want something interesting to talk about with your church friends. It is a book of complete seriousness, but it is the book that comes with a double blessing. **Revelation 1:3**, says, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." And then, at the end of this book, there is **Revelation 22:14**, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." So, you see, there is a special promise of blessing to those who read this book.

The name Revelation comes from verse 1, and it speaks to a singular unfolding. And what this Revelation intends to do is not only give us a glimpse into how God will end the program of the world, but allow us to see Jesus more clearly.

About A.D. 95, is when it is said that John was exiled to a prison on a small island called Patmos. An evil Emperor named Domitian demanded that people honor him as a god. We know of course that Christians were not able to give anyone but God that kind of honor, and so this ended up with many Christians being heavily persecuted for that kind of stand. This was John. He was exiled to Patmos for punishment, and by all accounts, this was supposed to be his final resting place. However, God had other plans for His lifelong servant.

How to Think About Revelation

Remember, John is the author who likes to tell you why he wrote in his different letters. In his gospel he tells us at the end that he wrote it so that people would believe. In John's smaller letters he told us many different reasons that he wrote them. And now, in Revelation, he tells us at the very beginning why he wrote it. **Revelation 1:19**, says, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." And this is exactly how the book is designed.

The Things You Have Seen (Revelation 1:1-20)— Here the focus is on Christ, as John is confronted with the initial message of the Revelation. You'll notice that these verses are packed full of symbolic language as it relates to what had happened in the past, and was continuing in the present with a few different churches, and even more symbolic language as John begins to describe Christ, Himself. Now, this may have been what John had seen (the golden girdle, the white hair, eyes with flames of fire, and so on; but all of these descriptions are symbols of who Christ is, and who He has always been.

The Things Which Are (Revelation 2-3): The Revelation here is primarily focused on the churches mentioned in these chapters. What makes the study here so compelling are the different ways you can study these churches. It's important to know while you're reading about these churches is that foremost, they are literal churches. That said, you can approach these churches with a **historical view** in mind. Or, you can consider these churches in a more specific application and study what Christ says about these churches and then compare them to your own church. This is what we would consider studying these churches in a **practical view**. You might find these characteristics in the different churches you would attend, and it's possible that depending upon how the church body cares for itself, you would find these different characteristics inside the same church at any given time. Then, there is the **individual view** that can be administered in these chapters. Instead of looking at this section in a local church setting, you can apply each of these churches individually and ask the question, "How does my heart compare to their heart?"

We should also mention here, that if you study the book of Revelation, you'll run into a popular understanding of these chapters called the '**dispensational view**.' All that is meant by "dispensational" is to use each church as a representation of time. For instance, the first church mentioned is a representation of the time of the first church. The second church mentioned is a representation of another age of the church, and so on, until we reach the last church, which is said to be a representation of the age that we are living in currently. While this is an intriguing thought, and there are several features in Revelation that are clearly symbolic, it is important not to jump to that conclusion anytime we get the chance. Is the dispensational view something interesting to discuss? Yes. Is it something we can make a matter of dogmatic teaching? Absolutely not. There is no definitive Biblical support for this view whatsoever.

The Church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7): This is the church that was doing great in ministry, but had left their love for Christ in the background. It's important to let our love for Christ drive what we do instead of our pride.

The Church in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11): Here we see a church barely hanging on because of persecution. This is also the only church that Jesus did not correct because of some wrongdoing in their congregation. Instead, the admonition here was to point them to staying faithful in their suffering and that if they did, Jesus would have a crown of life waiting for them.

The Church in Pergamos (Revelation 2:12-17): This is a church that had some really good church members, and some really terrible church members. The problem was, those who were faithful, were not doing anything about those who were not, and Jesus called them out for it.

The Church in Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29): At this church, we run into a similar situation of the Pergamos in that they had some great things going on, but at the exact same time, they weren't confronting blatant, and damaging errors in the church.

The Church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6): This church, like Ephesus, had a bit of a heart problem and wasn't living up to the truth that they once preached.

The Church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13): This is a church with a more encouraging message, and they too, are told by Jesus to hold on to truth even though they felt small and insignificant.

The Church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22): This is probably the most well-known church out of the seven. Everyone likes coming here to make a point about the culture, or about an individual being lukewarm and making Jesus want to vomit. Needless to say, this church had some problems. They were consumed with pride but at the same time were trying to play church and please Jesus. It didn't work.

The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter (Revelation 4- Revelation 22)— This section takes up the majority of the book and is where many people get lost and confused when they are trying to make it through Revelation in their yearly Bible reading. The primary reason for this confusion is that many people don't realize that this section is made up of two main divisions. We'll certainly discuss these divisions, but first, let's also talk about interpretive methods of the Book of Revelation so that we'll know how to approach these divisions.

Interpretive Methods

There are many methods that people hold to when attempting to understand this book, but here are the most common:

The Preterist View: This is a view that suggests that the greater part of the book of Revelation was fulfilled in the first century. The proof texts often cited in support of this view have to do with Jesus saying that He would be coming quickly. For example, in **Revelation 22:12**, "And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." However, holding this view causes those who hold it to do a substantial amount of theological and historical guesswork, forcing inferential assumptions inside of different events. When it comes to prophecy, God has always been absolutely precise in revealing future events.

The Historical View: Here we see the explanation that all of the events of Revelation were fulfilled during the history of the Christian church. Like the Preterist view, if you want to hold this view, you're going to have to answer some very difficult questions that would arise from this interpretation.

The Allegorical View: This view holds that the book of Revelation is not a prophecy at all, but just a story that shows spiritual lessons between the forces of good and evil. True enough there are allegorical references here, and true enough you find the good of God, pitted against the evil of Satan, but the person who holds this view would have to compellingly answer the question of why this book isn't a prophecy, even though Jesus expressly calls it a prophecy.

The Futurist View: This is where I would encourage you to go as you study to book of The Revelation. From chapter 4 onward, we have continual prophecies and predictions mentioned of what will happen once God's people are raptured out of this earth, and God begins His ultimate campaign against evil.

With the futurist view in mind, let's go back to the last section of our outline.

God and His Reign (Revelation 4-19): It is here where God's plans and purposes begin to be carried out. You may not capture everything going on here, and that's okay. Many scholars have given their lives to understanding these words. However, what you do need to understand are two things: 1) It's going to be very good for those who have come to God and 2) It's going to be very bad for those who have rejected God. That's the big takeaway here.

The Reality (Revelation 4-11): In these chapters, notice where God points you first in chapters 4 and 5. In these two chapters, God invites us into the greatest worship session that anyone has ever seen. We get a glimpse of what it looks like to worship God in heaven, and it is stunning. You may have experienced some great church services in the past, but you have never attended anything like this. Christ is on the throne, and there is bowing, and there is shouting, there is praising, and there is lighting and thundering. There is complete chaos on earth, but the reality is: it doesn't affect God's reign one bit.

The Details (Revelation 12-19): Now this is where people lose it. These are the chapters where people get confused. But there is a Biblical interpretation law to understand if you want to understand what is happening

here. It's called the "Law of Recurrence." It is a pattern of writing style that occurs in many ancient texts and is the pattern that John uses here. The Law of Recurrence is when mention is made of an event, and then, the writer circles back around to the same subject and gives you details about what he has just written.

For example in Genesis chapter 1, that is exactly what Moses does. Moses gives us an overview of the creation. Then, in chapter 2, Moses zooms in and gives us the details. That said, if you don't know about this style of writing, you will come to the wrong conclusion that there are two different creation accounts— which many people have.

John employs the same technique here. In chapters 4-11, John gives us the main overview of what will happen during the tribulation period. After that, John circles back around in Chapters 12-19 and covers the same period of time and starts giving you details of what had been previously mentioned in Chapters 4-11. In these chapters, you learn about the beast, battles, other personalities, and events that happen within the same period of time.

God and His Radiance (Revelation 20-22): By the time you reach the end of the book, this is where we read of God's final judgment of sin and the final ending of every effect of the curse. This is where God wipes away every tear and every sorrow of His own, and ultimately establishes a new Jerusalem where God and His people will rule and reign forever.

What to Look for in Revelation

It's incredible to even attempt to distill our thoughts in just one section. The fact is, there is just so much activity, symbolism, personalities, and lessons that this subject alone could keep us busy for quite some time. So let us keep it as simple as we can, and hit the highlights.

Signs and Symbols— Many people love to weigh in on the signs and symbols presented in Revelation. And others get completely lost. What is important to remember is that when we come across these signs and symbols, it's not an indication that they aren't real, but simply pictures that point to an overall reality. Not only this but much of the time, those symbols are defined for us either in Scripture or in other passages listed in Scripture. Let's just look at one symbol to illustrate this point.

The Lamb: You may be familiar with the significance of this symbol. You may have grown up in church and are very familiar with that very first Passover one night in Egypt, where an innocent, unblemished lamb was killed and its blood spread on the sides and top post of the door of every home who wanted to be saved from God's wrath. And you may be very familiar with how the Bible uses the symbol to point to Jesus. But just in case you're not, the symbol of the Lamb is clearly defined for you in the book. You may not know all of the significance here, but at least you'll know the reference.

Gematria— Don't let this word scare you. It's just a big fancy word for the symbolic nature of numbers. Also, not only should you not be afraid of the numbers used, but don't be consumed by them either. Many, many people have set out to do Biblical interpretation using the different numbering systems in Revelation but found themselves looking completely foolish by the time it was all said and done. Just like with the symbols, much of what is given is already defined. For those that are not, leave them alone, and we'll talk about it when we get to heaven. Let's give one example here as well:

666: This is one of the more famous numbers in all of the Bible. Many people know it as a number associated with Satan, or they will call it the "Mark of the Beast." And truly it is both of those things. A 7 would be a number of completion and 3 is the number of complete degree. For instance in Isaiah 6, when the angels cried "Holy, Holy, Holy" it is an indication that God's holiness is taken to the third degree. It is a numerical association that can only be given to God. Well, if 7 is the number of completion, then six doesn't measure up. The number 6

would fall short. Furthermore, we have the number 6 listed three time— failure to the third degree as Satan is described in numbers.

Old Testament References— The book of Revelation is filled to the brim with Old Testament references. It contains about 550 of them as you make your way through these 22 chapters.

Majestic References— The Book of Revelation is a book of majesty. Nearly everywhere you look, we're removed from our 21st-century mindsets of senates, US House Committees, and Presidents, and into the world of thrones, sovereignty, and Kingly worship.

Throne: You will read this word about 44 times in the Book of Revelation.

King: You can find the words King or Kingdom, or Rule about 37 times in the book of Revelation.

Power: You will read this word, or the word authority about 40 times in the book of Revelation.

What to Gain from Revelation

As excitingly confusing as Revelation is, there are certainly some very obvious lessons we can take away from this great book.

God Is In Control— This is the book that ultimately points us to how God has everything completely worked out. That's the point at the beginning of the book as look at John's story. John was doing hard time for his devotion to Christ. There didn't seem like much to be thankful for. His Savior had gone to heaven long ago, all of his closest friends had paid for their devotion with their life and it seemed that John was destined for the same, and all the precious people he had pastored were being persecuted by an evil king. What are you supposed to do when that happens? Well, John is given a Revelation of Jesus on the throne. It was God saying, "John, I know it looks really bad out there, but I'm here, and I'm in complete control."

And that is still God's comfort to us. As far as what we see at this time in America, we find a culture dangerously divided, and hyper-critical, and there are increasing numbers who are willing to use violence to protect their ideas. We also see lawsuits against men and women who simply want to live out their lives in a Biblical way. America is one of the world's greatest defenders of Abortion. It does look bad out there. There is plenty of wrong in our lives to have our hearts broken every day because of what sin is doing to so many. But God's Word is still the same to us, "I know it looks really bad out there, but I'm here, and I'm in complete control."

God Has A Purpose— The book of Revelation has been called an "Open Book." If you compare the book of Revelation with the book of Daniel, in Daniel's prophecy God instructed him to, "...seal up the book." But all over the book of Revelation, there are seals broken, books open, and heavenly information given.

The book of Revelation is the climax that all of history is moving toward. In the book of Genesis, we have the entrance of sin into the world; in the book of Revelation, we have the elimination of sin. In the book of Genesis, Satan is perilously revealed; in the book of Revelation, Satan is permanently retired. In the book of Genesis, we have the beginning of death; in the book of Revelation, we have the ending of death.

The book of Revelation tells us that all of history is going exactly where God wants it. Every move nationally, every decision made personally, every mark made historically, all of it is under the complete and sovereign control of God and therefore, everything we see, have seen or will see God has a purpose for all of it.



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