

# BIBLE OVERVIEW - NEW TESTAMENT 6

## The Book of Revelation

John receives a series of visions depicting God ruling history and bringing it to a triumphant climax in Christ. The book's object – to enable suffering churches to perceive the true nature of the realities facing them every day and to respond to them in ways that will allow them to share in the triumph of the Lamb rather than in the punishment of Babylon.

### What literary genre?

In opening five verses - three descriptions of this book:

*Letter* (1.4).

*Prophecy* (1.3; 22.7, 10, 18, 19)

*Apocalyptic* ('the revelation' 1.1)

### Features of apocalyptic

- Visions
- Otherworldly 'journeys'
- Narration of the 'history' that brackets normal history (creation and consummation)

### Author and Date

From second part of the second century it was assumed that the fourth gospel, the letters of John and Revelation were written by one man, John the son of Zebedee. But some ancient and many modern interpreters note the differences in style between Revelation (a very literal Greek reflecting an Aramaic way of thinking) and the other works. Written on Patmos. Date of writing either AD 68-69 ('Year of the Four Emperors') or 95-96 (end of Domitian's reign).

### Background

Emperor worship. In some provinces emperor worship was imposed, in others it was embraced. Either way, Christians' refusal to participate led to suspicion, ostracism, economic loss and sometimes martyrdom.

### Features of the Book of Revelation

- Symbolism. Non-literal.
- Series of sevens – seven signifies completeness.
- Recapitulation – the book's linear structure is repeated in several cycles.
- Paired visions
- Liturgical scenes:
- Satanic counterfeits
- Prolific use of Old Testament imagery.

## Structure

The book structures itself into four **visions** and their **outcomes**<sup>1</sup>.  
Each introduced by a command or invitation 'to see' what is being revealed.

Prologue (1.1-8)

### First vision: of Jesus the Son of Man among the Churches (1.1-3.32)

Introduced by the voice of the risen Christ (1.10).

**Outcome** >

Christ's message to The Seven Churches (2.1-3.22)  
Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea

### Second vision: the Lamb takes up his reign in heaven (4.1-16.21)

Introduced by the voice of the risen Christ (4.1)

**Outcome** >

The Seven Seals (5.1-8.5)  
The Seven Trumpets (8.6-11.19)  
The Christ versus the Dragon and his allies (12.1-14.20)  
The Seven Bowls (or Plagues) (15.1-16.21)

### Third vision: the judgment of the great prostitute (17.1-19.10)

Introduced by the voice of an angel

**Outcome** >

The judgment of the rest of God's enemies (19.11-20.15)  
A new Heaven and a new Earth (21.1-8)

### Fourth vision: the Bride, the wife of the Lamb (21.9-22.5)

Introduced by the voice of an angel

Epilogue (22.6-21)

## Different Approaches to the Book of Revelation

- *Historicist*. The events of the book unfold the ongoing history of the Church. Protestant reformers; Geneva Bible.
- *Historical* (or Preterist). A book of its time, written out of its time and for its time. Many modern critical scholars.
- *Futurist*. After the first few chapters it concerns only events of the final years of human history. Dispensationalists and some premillennialists.
- *Idealist*. A book of its own time for all times in that it contains and communicates ideas and principles that are relevant and operational in every age. Hendriksen, Bauckham, etc.

Relevance for today: (a) Christians in Islamic societies; (b) proposed anti religious hatred legislation in the UK; (c) turbo capitalism and economic globalisation.

Picture book, not a puzzle book.

Book provides a sacred canopy under which to see more clearly the space and time in which we live.

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<sup>1</sup> There is no outcome in the fourth vision