

The Book of Revelation

Session 1 - Introduction to the Book (Chapter 1)

Book Overview

The Book of Revelation can be divided into five sections:

1. Introduction: Establishing Context and Conflict (Revelation 1-5)
2. Action: The Main Story - Focus on God's Perspective (Revelation 6-11)
3. Action: The Main Story Retold - Focus on Satan's Schemes (Revelation 12-14)
4. Action: The Main Story Retold - Focus on Mankind's Sinfulness (Revelation 15-19)
5. Ending: Resolution (Revelation 20-22)

While the story arc of Revelation isn't hard to follow, we need to be aware that the movement isn't always linear. In Lord of the Rings, Tolkien split his books into two halves. They both told the same story but from different perspectives. In the Book of Revelation the main story is told three times in total so that we might gain new understanding by studying each perspective.

Chapter 1 introduces us to the main themes of the book, as well as the characters and the author.

The Book of Revelation can also be seen as a repeat of the Exodus story, where through signs and wonders God delivered his people out of Egypt and into the promised land. The Book of Revelation describes many of the same themes and events being played out on a global level preceding Jesus' return:

1. God's people prepared (Revelation 2-3, Jeremiah 4:1-4, Matthew 24:44, Ephesians 5:25-27)
2. God's people protected (Revelation 7:3, 9:4, Isaiah 31:4-5, Luke 21:18-19, 1 Thessalonians 5:9)
3. God's plagues released (Revelation 6, 8-9, 11:6, Isaiah 24, Luke 21:10-11, 2 Peter 3:10)
4. God's people persecuted (Revelation 13, Daniel 7:19-25, Matthew 24:15-21, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)
5. God's enemies destroyed (Revelation 15-16, 19, 20:7-15, Ezekiel 38:17-23, Matthew 24:37-51, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, 9)
6. God's people delivered into the promised land (Revelation 21-22, Zechariah 14:4-5, Matthew 24:31, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)
7. God's name revealed through his actions (Revelation 1:7-8, 22:13, Jeremiah 16:14-15, Matthew 24:30, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

Chapter Overview

This chapter can be divided into three sections:

1. About the Book (Revelation 1:1-3)
2. Themes and Characters (Revelation 1:4-8)
3. About the Author (Revelation 1:9-20)

This chapter sets the scene for the rest of the book, giving us vital information as to how we read and understand the book. It states clearly the literal and futural nature of the visions John received, and that they are centred around the return of Jesus. It also makes plain that the greatest treasure found in this book is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, revealed through His plans and purposes.

About the Book (Revelation 1:1-3)

Verse 1:

“The revelation from (of) Jesus Christ” - This book was given so we would know Jesus better.

“What must soon take place” - This book is talking about literal events. God wants us to be informed, not confused.

Verse 3:

“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy” - God intended for this book to be shared and understood.

“Blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it” - It is good and right to study this book.

“The time is near” - We are called to live in a state of readiness.

Themes and Characters (Revelation 1:4-8)

Verse 4:

“Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and is to come” - This book emphasises the eternal nature of God, who is before and after all things.

“From the seven spirits before his throne” - The Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, was deeply involved in the writing of this book.

Verse 5:

“From Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness” - Jesus is the one at the heart of this book, who testifies of who the Father is

“The firstborn from the dead” - Jesus is the one who has power over death and will one day completely destroy it (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

“The ruler of the kings of the earth” - Jesus is the one appointed to rule the earth (Psalm 2).

“To him who loves us” - This book must be read through the lens of Jesus' love for us.

Verse 6:

"A kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father" - The destiny of the church is one of the key themes of this book, that we have been called to serve God as His kingdom on this earth.

Verse 7:

"Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him" - The main theme of this book is the future, literal, return of Jesus (Daniel 7:13-14, Zechariah 12:10-13, Matthew 24:30)

About the Author (Revelation 1:9-20)

Verse 11:

"Write on a scroll what you see" - Jesus is the great storyteller. He is the one leading history.
"Send it to the seven churches" - This book is relevant to all generations, including to the churches written to, but it finds its deepest meaning in the time before Jesus' return.

Verse 13:

"Dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest" - Jesus is our great high priest. He is the one who has defeated - and will defeat - sin once and for all and will reconcile us to God (Exodus 28:4).

Verse 14:

"The hair on his head was white like wool" - Jesus is wholly righteous, pure and wise.
"His eyes were like blazing fire" - Jesus is burning with love and desire, and this motivates his actions.

Verse 15:

"His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace" - Jesus will bring justice and final judgement to the earth. His anger is ready to be poured out (Isaiah 63:1-6).
"His voice was like the sound of rushing waters" - Jesus's words are powerful, with the power of life and death.

Verse 16:

"In his right hand he held seven stars" - Jesus holds us securely. We are part of His plan to bring about His purposes on the earth.
"Coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword" - Jesus is the Word of God. His words bring judgement and reveal all that's hidden (Hebrews 4:12).
"His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance" - Jesus is utterly beautiful.

Verse 17:

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." - This book is all about the revealing of Jesus in the fullness of His power and glory to the whole earth.
"I am the First and the Last" - Jesus is the only one who sees all that has been and all that will be (Isaiah 44:6, 48:12).

Verse 18:

"I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" - Jesus commands even death itself. We are to fear Him, not dying, for He is the One who has the final word. Even death is being used to serve Jesus' ultimate purposes (Luke 12:4-5).

Verse 19:

"Write, therefore, what you have seen" - Jesus wants us to have understanding and to be prepared. The more we understand who Jesus is, the more we understand and come into agreement with His plans.

"What is now and what will take place later" - This book speaks into present and future realities.

Verse 20:

"The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" - Jesus makes it clear throughout this book when he's speaking symbolically (Revelation 4:5, 12:1, 15:1, 17:7-8,9-11,12,15,18, 19:8)

"The seven lampstands are the seven churches" - We were made to be burning with love and bringing forth incense through our prayer and worship.

Summary

This chapter emphasises three key points about the Book of Revelation:

1. This book was given to us first and foremost so that we might know Jesus better (Revelation 1:1)
2. This book was given to us so we might understand it and respond to its message (Revelation 1:1,3)
3. This book, though relevant to all generations, is concerned mostly with literal, future events (Revelation 1:1,2,7,19)

This chapter introduces us to the four main characters of the book:

1. God the Father (Revelation 1:4,8)
2. The Holy Spirit (Revelation 1:4)
3. Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:5)
4. God's people (Revelation 1:6)

This chapter introduces us to the main themes of the book:

1. The return of Jesus (Revelation 1:7)
2. The establishing of His kingdom on the earth (Revelation 1:5-6)

This chapter highlights five key aspects of who Jesus is that help us understand his actions:

1. Jesus is the great storyteller (Revelation 1:10-11)
2. Jesus is leading His people (Revelation 1:11,18,20)
3. Jesus is the One who will bring an end to sin and death (Revelation 1:18)
4. Jesus is burning with love for this world (Revelation 1:14,5)
5. Jesus is holy (Revelation 1:13,15-16)