

Summary of Revelation

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The book begins, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to show His servants” (Revelation 1:1). The word revelation is a Greek word (*apokalupsis*) which means “to reveal or make known.” The book’s author, John, begins the book of Revelation as a letter addressed to seven churches in Asia. In his opening address he gives praise to God which pertains to some of the things that were revealed in this vision that is recorded in the Revelation. John addresses his recipients in the traditional First Century Christian fashion, wishing them grace and peace from God, whom he speaks of as the “who is and who was and who is to come” and from “the seven Spirits which are before His throne” (v. 4). The first part of this description of God is from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself. In verse 8 Jesus declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega... who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” The second part of John’s opening description of God is a reference to His continual presence with these seven churches. After Jesus instructs John to write everything that he is about to see in a book for the seven churches, the Lord then appears to John walking in the midst of seven golden lamp stands. Jesus then reveals to John that these lamp stands represent the seven churches to which he is about to write (v. 20). Next, Jesus dictates seven letters to John, one for each of the seven churches (2 & 3). After the letters are finished, John then sees a vision of God on His throne with seven lamps burning before Him (4:1-3, 5). These seven lamps, John states, are the seven Spirits of God (v. 2).

What follows the seven letters to the seven churches is a vision of God’s throne, in which John is called up into Heaven through an open door and sees the place from which God presides over the entire universe, all time, space, and matter, in absolute, undisputed sovereignty and majesty. The appearance of the One sitting on the throne is described in terms of precious stones and jewels. Twenty-four thrones surround God’s throne, and twenty-four “elders” sit on these thrones, each one wearing a white robe representing purity and a golden crown which represents their reward and dominion with God (4:1-4). Before the throne are seven burning lamps which are revealed to be the “seven Spirits of God (v. 5)” Four living and unearthly beings surround the middle of the throne and “do not rest” from giving “glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne” (vv. 8-9). The twenty-four elders join in and worship God, falling to their faces and casting their crowns at His feet, whenever these living beings give praise to Him (v. 10). This throne room scene is an obvious picture of God’s supremacy and sovereignty over all things, including all earthly and heavenly beings, as represented in the twenty-four elders and the four living beings.

The next thing that John sees is a scroll in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. The scroll has writing on both sides of it, and it is fastened with seven seals. It quickly becomes apparent that there is an expectation in heaven for someone to open the seals and read the scroll, but no one is worthy, of course, because the revelation of what is on this scroll is from God Himself (5:1-3). The great drama unfolding in this scene, centered on the scroll with its seven seals is reminiscent of Daniel's vision in Daniel chapter 12 in which Daniel was instructed to "seal up the book until the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4). Could this be the same "book" finally ready to be revealed? If the vision is meant to draw the readers' attention to the book of Daniel, then the vision of this scroll with its seven seals speaks even larger volumes in relation to God's sovereignty, alluding to a similar vision hundreds of years in the past (thousands if indeed the Revelation still represents future events in the present). However, God's sovereignty is clearly in view here since the scroll comes straight from His right hand as He is sitting on the throne and every being around the throne is continually worshipping Him day and night (4:8-10). Some dramatic event is clearly about to unfold, and the very suspense of this heavenly vision might potentially be too much for John or his readers to bear if it was not for the constant references and representations of God's supreme authority, power, and majesty.

The impending dilemma that no one is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seven seals is understandable because the scroll is from God Himself, in His right hand (5:1). This is solved by the announcement that the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David," is able to open the scroll and its seals. When John looks for the Lion, he sees a "Lamb as though it had been slain" which has seven horns and seven eyes (vv. 5-6). The seven horns are a sort of natural crown on the Lamb's head and signify complete and perfect strength and dominion while the seven eyes are referred to as the "seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (v. 6). The Lamb is worthy because He has prevailed through death and redeemed fallen humanity by His blood (vv. 9-10).

Next, the Lamb opens the scroll's seven seals, each in succession. The first four seals reveal four horsemen who bring to pass many evils upon the earth and its inhabitants. They cause wars, killings, famine, and death by each of these. The fifth seal reveals those who have been killed for the testimony of the word of God crying out to God for judgment and vengeance upon the earth-dwellers. At the sixth seal the wrath judgment and wrath of God arrives, and the heavens and earth begin to pass away (Revelation 6:1-17). All of this shows the end of God's plan as well as His sovereignty throughout the troublesome times of the first four seals. God's divine protection is made evident in chapter seven in which He has a seal set upon the foreheads of all of His servants from each of the tribes of Israel (vv. 3-8), and a great multitude appears before the throne in white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb, waving palm branches and singing the praises of God and of the Lamb. The Lamb is their shepherd who leads

them to “living fountains of water,” and “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (vv. 9-17).

The seven seals lead up to and culminate in seven angels with trumpets, and the seven trumpets lead to and culminate in seven bowl judgments which are poured out by angels upon the earth. The events and judgments of the seven trumpets and the seven bowls comprise chapters 8-16. The trumpets are interrupted after the sixth trumpet, and John is again called to prophesy before many nations and rulers. He is given a little scroll to eat which is sweet to the taste but bitter on the stomach (Revelation 10). The symbolism here seems to indicate the placing of God’s word, the word of this prophesy (22:7), into John. Indeed, the divine culmination of all things is a bittersweet message. The hope of perseverance and salvation that God’s people have is sweet to the taste, but the vast devastation that is first to be wrought upon the entire world is truly a bitter thought. Anyone witnessing or hearing of such wide-spread plagues and suffering because of humanity’s refusal to repent would probably feel the same sick-to-the-stomach feeling that John felt when he ate the book.

Just prior to the seventh trumpet God sends two witnesses with miraculous abilities out into the world to preach repentance and judgment to the world, but the people kill God’s two messengers and rejoice over their dead bodies. After three and a half days God raises them to life and calls them up to heaven. Afterward, there was a great earthquake which destroyed one tenth of the city. Then the seventh trumpet is sounded and the kingdoms of the world are declared to have become Christ’s. When God’s temple and the Ark of the Covenant are seen in heaven, an earthquake and great hail storm strike (Revelation 11).

Chapters 12-14 chronicle Satan’s war against the saints and against the angels in heaven. Satan attempts to devour God’s people, but God flawlessly rescues them out of his destructive grasp (Revelation 12). Then two great beasts arise from the sea and from the land representing a world-dominating ruler and other entity which both deceives and forces everyone to worship the world ruler (13). Those who are not sealed by God worship the beast and thereby inherit the wrath of God (14) which is poured out on the earth in the form of seven bowl judgments by seven angels (15). The beast worshippers are stricken with painful soars. All of the water becomes blood and all sea life dies. The sun scorched people and then darkened. The Euphrates River dries up, and the Battle of Armageddon ensues (16:1-16). Then God says, “It is done” (v. 17), and He rains down the worst part of His wrath on Babylon (vv. 19-21).

One of the angels takes John to see “the great harlot” riding on a blasphemous beast and drunk with the blood of God’s saints. This woman is the great Babylon and the beast is a

world system that serves the first beast (antichrist) which will try to defeat Jesus and fail. God sovereignly puts it into the hearts of this new world kingdom to destroy Babylon once and for all (Revelation 17) which is detailed in chapter 18.

In chapter 19, the bride of the Lamb is ready at last, and Jesus prepares to return to the earth in complete triumph. Heaven opens and he appears with the armies of heaven riding on white horses (Revelation 19:11-16). The gathered armies of the world and the beast attempt to fight against the “King of kings and Lord of lords,” but first an angel calls all birds to come to “the supper of the great God” so that they might eat the flesh of those that fight against the Lord (vv. 17-19). All who challenge Jesus Christ are killed and the birds gathered beforehand feast on their flesh (20-21). Satan is bound for 1,000 years (20:1-3), and the dead in Christ are raised in the first resurrection and reign with Christ over the earth for 1,000 years (vv. 4-6).

After the 1,000 years Satan is released and gathers a final army against Christ and His people. They are rapidly incinerated, and the devil is finally cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-10). Then the rest of the dead are raised and judged according to their deeds before God’s great white throne. Those whose names God had not written in the Book of Life were cast into the lake of fire along with death and the grave—the “second death” (vv. 11-15).

After the second death takes place, the heavens and the earth pass away and God creates a new heaven and a new earth, full of righteousness and void of pain (Revelation 21:1-8). Then the great and glorious city of New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven in which God and the Lamb are both its light and its temple. Nothing evil shall ever inter therein, but only those whose names are written in the Book of Life are welcomed into the city (vv. 10-27). In the city, the Lord’s servants will see Him face to face and will serve Him. A sun will be unnecessary because there will be no more night (22:3-5). The Revelation ends with a series of promises from the Lord Himself, saying that He is returning (vv. 7, 12, 16-17, 20).