

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

PART 3

These Study Notes will provide a brief survey of four basic methods that are used to interpret Revelation, nine principles to practice when interpreting prophecy, three major views on the doctrine of future events, four views on the time of the Rapture, a couple of outlines of Revelation and a graph to illustrate the time of the events in Revelation.

Methods of Interpretation. Walvoord says that there are four basic methods that are used to interpret Revelation and some interpreters mix a part of one method with a part of another method, but four methods are basic. A few of his facts are incorporated in the description of these methods (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, John F. Walvoord, pp 16-23). Knowing these methods is helpful in evaluating the worth of a commentary or a Bible study on Revelation. So an explanation of these methods of interpretation will be given at this time.

1. Allegorical – The allegorical method of interpretation began in the Alexandrian School of Egypt near the end of the second century. It rejected the natural interpretation of words in Revelation, which was the normal practice, and treated the book as a great allegory about a war during the Church age between good and evil, a war which God would win in the end. By treating it as an allegory they would give the words in Revelation “spiritual” meanings. Those who used this method believed this would make Revelation more beneficial to believers. Since the spiritual meanings would be determined by their theology, their theology has the power to change God’s Word. They would deny this charge because they take various Scriptures to support their interpretations. That is good and proper, if the Scriptures used for support pertain to the same subject. Otherwise their theology has changed God’s message.

Here is an example of the power of their theology over the message of Revelation when it is treated as an allegory. Various Scriptures are taken here and there to formulate a theology that says God has rejected Israel, because she rejected His Son as her Messiah-King, and has chosen the Church in her place. All of the promises given to Israel have been transferred to the Church. With their theology in mind the natural meanings of the words in Revelation are given “spiritual” meanings that agree with their theology and these “spiritual” meanings are used in an allegorical interpretation. When the Bible clearly says that Jesus Christ will someday be the King of Israel, the allegory claims that He is reigning now as the King of the Church, which supposedly happened when He ascended to Heaven. So the promise once made to Israel is now fulfilled in the Church. Israel no longer has favor with God; she is cursed and doomed to God’s judgment. The allegorical interpretation of Revelation has changed the clear message that God gave to John. As a result it has caused believers to despise Israel and some have joined those that have called for her destruction. What happens to believers if their theology is wrong and God will still bless those that bless Israel and curse those that curse Israel (Gen 12:1-3; Mt 25:31-46)? When one’s theology changes the clear message of God through an allegory, it is serious business. They believe the allegory ends with chapter 20 and chapters 21-22 are considered prophetic. Both liberal and conservative Amillennialists use this method to interpret Revelation

2. Preterist – Alcasar, a Jesuit who died in 1613, developed the preterist method of interpreting Revelation (preterit refers to past action). He treated Revelation as a symbolic history of the persecution that the early Church suffered by Jews and Roman Caesars (Nero and Vespasian) during the first century. He taught his followers that John did not write Revelation as a prophecy of events to come, but as a history of events already past, except for the last chapters of Revelation. He believed those chapters spoke of the triumph of the Roman Church in his day. This method is still used by many Roman Catholics. Liberal theologians also favor it, because it avoids the supernatural element of prophecy.

3. Historical – Joachim of Floris, who died in 1202, developed the historical method of interpretation. He claimed that Revelation is a symbolic representation of the entire Church age from the time of John's writing to the Second Coming of Christ. Here is an example of this kind of interpretation: in Revelation 8-9, the first four trumpets relate to the fall of Rome; the fifth trumpet is the invasion of the Mohammedans; the sixth is the arrival of the Turks; in Revelation 13-17 the history of the Papacy is given; and in Revelation 19 the triumphant salvation of the Church by Christ is promised. In different periods of history, interpreters tended to view the book as climaxing in their generation, so the meaning of symbols kept changing. There is absolutely no consistency among the interpreters as to what Revelation means. It has been said that more than fifty different interpretations of Revelation have been made using this method. Many reformers accepted this method of interpretation, but the Anabaptists of that time did not follow it. It is the method that many Postmillianialists use.

4. Futuristic – The early Church used this method of interpretation for several centuries until the allegorical method dominated the thinking of Church leaders for nearly ten centuries. The futuristic method understands the words of Revelation in the natural sense, which is the normal way to read words in other literature. In the late sixteenth century the futurist system was revived by evangelicals in many parts of the world. This was the method that the Anabaptists adopted during the Reformation era. Futurists understand that Revelation is largely a prophetic book referring to the future Tribulation, Millennial Kingdom and Eternal Kingdom. They see Revelation 1:19 as a divine outline for the book:

PAST – "Things which you have seen" [the vision of Christ that John saw - Rev 1]

PRESENT – "Things which are" [seven churches in Asia Minor that existed in John's time - Rev 2-3]

FUTURE – "Things which shall be hereafter" [scene in Heaven, Tribulation, divine Kingdoms - Rev 4-22]

The futurist method of interpreting Revelation is the one that is used in this study of the book.

Principles for Interpreting Prophecy. A proper method for interpreting prophecy is crucial for a correct understanding of its message. God has given believers an important message in Revelation that He wants His people to know. The method of interpretation used for this study is guided by nine principles.

1. Give Words Their Natural Meanings- The first criteria for interpreting Revelation is to give words their natural, normal meaning. When the natural meaning of a word is not interpreted as such, it causes confusion as to what God is saying. Ordinary believers begin to doubt that they can understand the prophecies of Revelation. This allows Satan to keep them from reading Revelation. He does not want them to know that God has said he will be defeated and locked up in the abyss for 1000 years when He sends His Son to take control of the earth. Satan knows the message of Revelation will encourage them and give them faith to be strong in their warfare against him.

When interpreters put doubts in the minds of believers about the natural sense of God's Word, they are working against the purposes of God. Such is the case when some interpreters question the natural sense of the chain that the angel will use to bind Satan for 1000 years (Rev 20:1-2). They do not see how a spirit-being can be bound by a metal chain, so they treat it as a figure of speech to indicate how Satan can be spiritually bound today by the power of Christ. It is true that Christ will give believers power over Satan, but is that what God wanted to convey in the context of this message in Revelation? Obviously it is not, God wanted to encourage His people with the truth that Satan will be incarcerated and kept from corrupting society when His Son establishes His 1000 year Kingdom on the earth. All believers will be free from the powers and deception of Satan during Christ's rule of the earth. God did not say Satan would be bound by a metal chain. It is likely that he will be bound by the same kind of chain that has bound the angels that did not keep their first estate (Jude 6). Interpreters that take the liberty of changing the natural meaning of God's words to a "spiritual" meaning that fits their theology are changing the intent of God's Word. They are actually serving the cause of Satan.

God intends for all believers to read and believe the words of Revelation in their natural sense so that they will obey Him. Then He promises to bless them (Rev 1:3).

2. Check the Bible to Find the Meaning of a Figure of Speech. – The meaning of a figure of speech in Revelation is found in the pages of God's Word. Some of the figures of speech in Revelation are actually explained in Revelation (Rev 17:9-18). However, most of them have their roots in some person, place or event in the Old Testament. Be careful when an interpreter explains a figure of speech by his own creative thoughts. Let God explain His own figures of speech. It is much safer to find the meaning of a figure of speech in the Word of God.

Therefore, the interpreter first must search the Old Testament, when encountering a figure or a symbol, to look for a clue as to its meaning. If one can find the meaning of a figure of speech by his search in the Old Testament and it makes good sense in understanding the prophecy, he should be reluctant to seek any other sense. There is a danger of interpreting a figure or symbol by one's own notion. It is safer to search the Scriptures for insight on a figure that is being used, so that the meaning of the prophecy is not corrupted by human imagination. For instance, the woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and crowned with twelve stars (Rev 12:1), is assumed to be Mary by many Catholic teachers. However a search of the Old Testament will reveal that this is a reference to the nation of Israel (Gen 37:9-10). The sun, moon and stars referred to Jacob, his wife and sons, the family that formed Israel. It is not about Mary ruling the earth and all creation. It makes a big difference in formulating one's theology if the woman is Israel rather than Mary and her Church. This shows that God has not forsaken Israel, but still has a high place for her in His plan (cf Jer 16:14-15). The believers in Israel will be protected by God in the Tribulation.

Since figures of speech and symbols pose a challenge for interpreters, why are they used? They may be used to describe a vision that the prophet saw. Or they may be used to visualize a truth. Consider some examples where figures of speech are used in Revelation that leave a vivid image in the mind of the reader. John wrote about the wickedness of Babylon with these graphic words: "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:6). Jesus Christ describes a false prophetess in the church at Thyatira with these words: "Behold, I will cast her into a bed and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation" (3:22). When John said a sword will come out of Christ's mouth (19:15), he was referring to the powerful words that will come from His mouth to destroy His enemies (cf Ps 29:4-9). So when he says a flood of water will be cast from the serpent's mouth (12:15), it would mean a flood of words will come from his mouth (possibly a torrent of orders, commanding his army to destroy the Jewish believers that have fled into the wilderness). When the earth opens her mouth to swallow up the flood, it seems that God will use an earthquake to keep Satan's army from harming the Jewish believers, just like He protected Moses from rebellious Israelites in the wilderness (Num 16:25-34). John F. Walvoord gives help for interpreting symbols in his book, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 25-30.

3. Check the Cultural-Historical Setting in a Prophecy. The third principle considers the historical and cultural setting of the message, which has an influence on the sense of the message. Archaeological and historical discoveries give us the setting of a prophecy. The historical setting for Revelation is the harsh persecution that the Roman Emperor, Domitian, brought upon the Christians for not worshipping him as God. This background information gives the setting for the blessing that the believers received when they read Revelation and learned about the triumph of Christ over the wicked rulers of the world. Here a distinction must be made between interpretation and application. An interpretation looks at the original sense of the message to the people in that day, but an application shows how it can affect people today.

4. Consider the Immediate Context of a Prophecy. The most reliable solutions to problems in the text are found in the immediate context. This is much better than seeking for answers in history books or even theology books. It is better to look at the immediate context for answers than to search in other

parts of the Bible, even though that must be done when there is no answer in the immediate context. For instance, there is a problem with understanding Revelation 11:7, which says the beast will ascend out of the abyss (bottomless pit). The beast refers to Antichrist, a man that is possessed by Satan. Will he come back from the dead? Some say, "No," and others say, "Yes." Is this a figure of speech for the Roman Empire to arise and curse the earth or can the words taken in natural sense refer to a real person? The immediate context repeatedly claims that a person will be raised from the dead (cf 13:3, 12, 14; 17:8). The context indicates that Satan (the dragon) calls Antichrist (the beast) up from the abyss (Rev 12:17; 13:1-4). This is confirmed by the immediate context. Now the interpreter must go to the remote context in other Scriptures to determine if it is possible for Satan to bring Antichrist up from the abyss (see Job 1-2; 1 Sam 28:7-19).

5. Make Christ the Center of Prophecy. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev 19:10). The interpreter will miss the point, if Jesus is not the focal point of his interpretation. Jesus made this clear when He spoke to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection (Lk 24:27, 44, 45). Jesus Christ is front and center in the book of Revelation. He will come back to earth to defeat Satan and Antichrist in their attempt to destroy Jerusalem and Israel and He will reign as King of kings over all nations from the old Jerusalem for 1000 years after the Great Tribulation and He will reign with His Father from the New Jerusalem for eternity.

6. Recognize Progress along with Gaps in Prophecy. Prophecies often refer to a time in the distant future, but that is not always evident at the time they are given. Also, prophecies may have gaps in the timeline, which are not obvious at first. Isaiah 61:1-2 is a good example of a prophecy without evidence of progress or of a gap, but when the gap is recognized, progress is realized. This prophecy speaks of Christ's mission on earth. The prophecy speaks largely about His ministry at His first coming. However, a small part of the prophecy refers to His ministry of vengeance at His second coming. When Jesus Christ was at the synagogue in Nazareth, where He grew up, He read Isaiah 61:1-2. However, He stopped reading before He finished the second verse and said these words were fulfilled that day. The last part of that verse speaks of His vengeance, which will be fulfilled at His second coming, so He did not read that part of the prophecy. Progress was shown when He fulfilled the first part of the prophecy and further progress will be seen when He fulfills all of the prophecy. These verses show us that there can be a gap of more than a thousand years in the prophecy

In Revelation progress is shown during the Tribulation by the numbering of the seals, the trumpets and the bowls of God's wrath. It is also seen by the announcements given regarding the timing of the three trumpets of woe (Rev 8:13; 9:12; 11:14). The gaps seen in Revelation occur to describe other events of importance that are happening during the Tribulation (cf 9:12-11:14; 11:15-15:8).

7. Let Other Scriptures Help Interpret a Prophecy. Many references to the Tribulation abound in the Old and New Testaments. These are helpful in interpreting the events and conditions of the Tribulation in Revelation. The prophecy about the man of sin (2 Th 2:3-12) is helpful in understanding the power the beast (Antichrist) over the people during the Tribulation as prophesied in Revelation 13.

8. Offer Only One Interpretation for a Prophecy. A prophecy has only one correct interpretation, so a person must seek other Scriptures to support his interpretation. Since there are four methods used for interpreting Revelation, only one method can be right. Even then, caution must be given to follow the rules for interpreting prophecy. Only one interpretation can be correct.

9. Keep the Interpretation Theologically Sound. Sound doctrine is the final criteria for interpreting all prophecy. Interpretations must agree with the teaching of all Scripture (cf Acts 17:11). God has inspired all Scripture, so it has no errors or contradictions in it.

The Result of Careful Interpretation – The result of diligent care in following these nine criteria for interpreting prophecy should lead one to a premillennial, pretribulational view of eschatology and to some

form of a dispensational view of God's work through the ages.

Millennial Views. At this time a brief survey of millennial views is given to help learners understand the platform from which a speaker or writer is interpreting Revelation. More information on this subject can be found in John F. Walvoord's book, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 284-289.

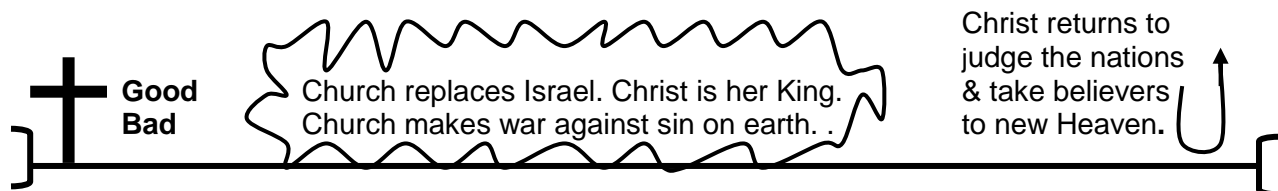
1. Pre-millennial – Pre-millennial doctrine says Christ will return “before the millennium.” Christ will return to establish His Millennial Kingdom on earth. He will return with His Bride, the true believers in the churches, at the end of the Tribulation to remove all who refuse to accept Him as their King. Then He will rule the earth in righteousness so it will bring glory to God for 1000 years (a millennium). All believers of past ages and believers that died during the Tribulation will be resurrected after the Tribulation so they can live in His Kingdom (Mt 25:31-46; Dan 2:44; 7:13-14; Rev 20:4-5). Believers that live through the Tribulation will enter His Kingdom in their natural bodies. They will marry and repopulate the earth. Those born during the reign of Christ will have to be born again to live in the Eternal Kingdom.

2, Post-millennial – Post-millennial doctrine says Christ will return “after the millennium.” They believe the Church will conquer Satan and his followers through the power of the Gospel; eventually all sinners will receive Christ as their Savior and King. This is the “millennium” in their doctrine—a figure of speech for a long period of time. When the world is converted, Jesus will come to receive His Kingdom and rule over the nations. This view was prominent among many conservative believers until WW I and WW II. These wars convinced many believers that the world was getting worse, not better. As a result a great number of believers switched to pre-millennialism. However, it has had a revival lately because it portrays a gentler and more uplifting message than pre-millennialism, which speaks of more wars, suffering and death before Christ returns to crush all evil forces and then He will establish His Kingdom.

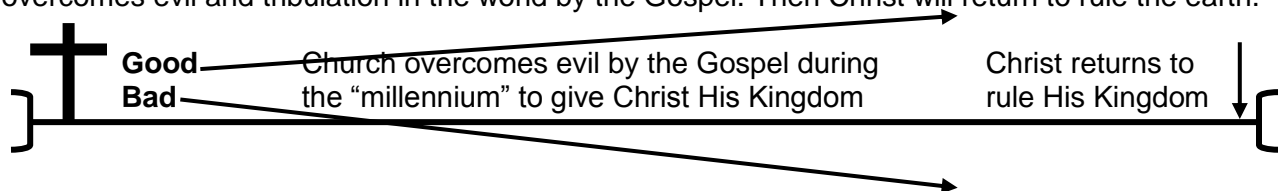
3 Amillennial – Amillennial doctrine says there is “no millennium.” There is no literal reign of Christ for a thousand years on the earth. A thousand years is a figure of speech for a long time, not a literal thousand years. Some believe He is presently ruling over believers who have gone to Heaven, while others believe He is ruling over the affairs of nations through believers on earth. When He returns, He will judge the unbelievers, destroy the earth and take all believers to live with Him in the city of God.

Diagrams of the main views regarding Christ's return and the Millennial Kingdom.

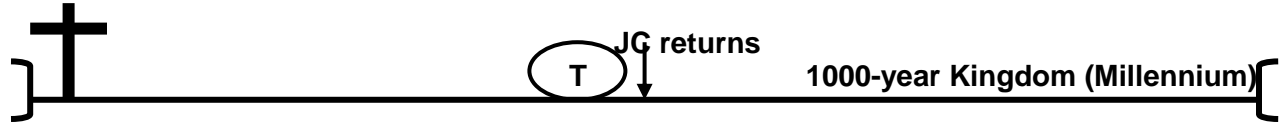
1. The **Amillennial view** says there is no Millennium. The Church has replaced Israel and Christ reigns over the world through the Church. The tribulation is now as the Church makes war against evil in the world, causing pain and destruction. In God's time Christ will return to earth to judge the nations, destroy the earth and take all believers to the new Heaven to live with Him forever.



2. The **Post-millennial view** says the Millennium is a long period of time during which the Church overcomes evil and tribulation in the world by the Gospel. Then Christ will return to rule the earth.

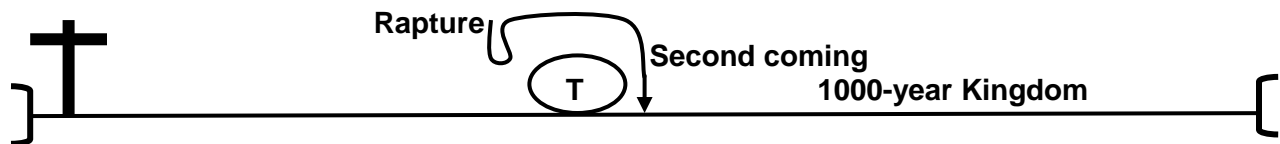


3. The **Pre-millennial view** says Christ will return to earth to destroy all rebellion against God and will establish His Kingdom on earth for 1000 literal years (a millennium). The Tribulation lasts for seven years and will happen before Christ returns to the earth.

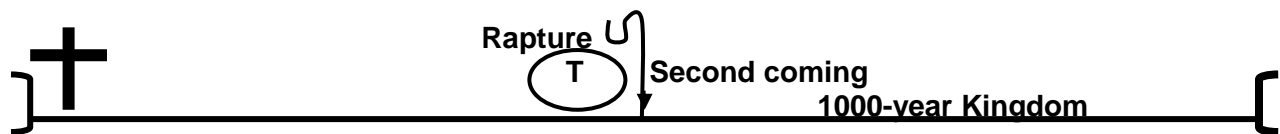


Rapture Views and the Tribulation. Those who hold a pre-millennial view of Christ's return have several views as to when the rapture of the Church will occur with regard to the Tribulation. Will it occur before, during or after the Tribulation? A brief survey of these views is presented to clarify this issue.

1. **Pre-tribulation** – Those who hold to the pre-tribulation view believe Christ will resurrect and rapture the Church to Heaven before the wrath of God comes during the seven-year Tribulation (1 Th 4:13-5:11).

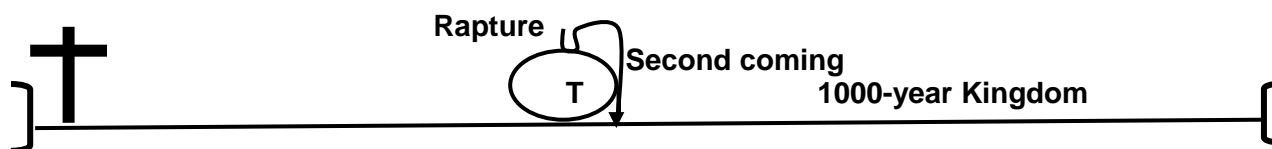


2. **Post-tribulation** – Post-tribulationists are pre-millennialists, but they believe Christ will rapture the Church at the end of the Tribulation, because “saints” will be on the earth during the Tribulation. However, a careful investigation of Scripture shows these are Tribulation saints that will receive Christ after the Rapture, not Church saints. There is no mention of churches or its members on earth during the Tribulation (Rev 6-19). Church saints will not experience God's wrath (Rom 5:9; 1 Th 1:10; 5:4-11; Rev 3:10). Some say the church saints need the Tribulation to be cleansed of its sins. To the contrary, they have already been cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Pet 1:19; 1 Jn 1:7) and by the washing of the word so Christ will have a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle; but it will be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:26-27). The Tribulation is not for the Church saints, but for the rebellious sinners that refuse to receive Jesus Christ. It is especially for Israel so that many of them will receive Jesus as their Messiah during the Tribulation. When this happens, it will prepare the way for Jesus Christ to return to Israel to receive His inheritance and rule the nations from Jerusalem during His Millennial Kingdom (cf Ps 2: 6-9; Zech 12:10-13:1).



3. **Mid-tribulation and Pre-wrath.** Mid-tribulation and pre-wrath believers have different views, but both say the Church saints will go through part of the Tribulation. The mid-tribulation view says the Church will be raptured when the seventh trumpet is sounded. This view believes the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 is the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15, which is supposed happen in the middle of the Tribulation. By this means they say the Church saints will not experience the wrath of God. This view does not appear to take into account that the wrath of God has come (Aorist tense) upon the earth before the sixth seal is opened (Rev 6:16-17), which is well before the seventh trumpet (last trumpet) is sounded. The “last trump” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 cannot be a reference to the seventh trumpet in the Tribulation. That was a series of trumpets specially revealed to John about 30 years after Paul was martyred. The “last trump” is likely a reference to a military trumpet that was blown to end a battle so the troops could go home (cf 2 Sam 18:16; 20:22). The believers’ last trump will end the Church-saints’ battle with Satan so they will go home to Heaven in the Rapture before the Tribulation begins. The Pre-wrath

view says that believers will go through most of the Tribulation, but will be raptured before the bowl judgments when the wrath of God is poured out on Antichrist's kingdom (Rev 15-16).



Dispensations – God chose to have different programs operating in different ages to reveal the progression of His complete plan. God's revelation to man was not completely given at one time, but began to be unfolded from the time He spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden until He gave His final message to the Apostle John. People are responsible to obey the revelation that God has given to them during the age in which they lived. This system of theology is the result of understanding the Bible in a natural sense, especially recognizing the distinction between God's dealings with Israel and with the churches.

The STUDY NOTES for Revelation are a brief commentary with a natural interpretation of words in the Bible to give LIGHT to the teacher in studying this important book of prophecy. Even though care has been made to give an accurate interpretation of the words in this prophecy, The Study Notes should not be a substitute for personal study of Revelation. The Holy Spirit will help the teacher that wants to teach the truth to his or her students so they can develop godly Christian lives.

A CHAPTER BYCHAPTER OUTLINE OF REVELATION

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| 1 Glorious Vision of Christ
2 Four Churches in Asia Minor
3 Three Churches in Asia Minor
4 The Throne of God
5 The Scroll of God
6 Six Seals on the Scroll Are Opened
7 Sealed Israelites; Martyred Gentiles
8 Seventh Seal Opened / Four Trumpets
9 Two More Trumpets / Are Called Woes
10 Mighty Angel with the Little Scroll
11 Two Witnesses / The Seventh Trumpet | 12 Satan's Conflict with Israel
13 The Unholy Trinity
14 Victory of Christ Anticipated
15 Seven Angels with Bowls of God's Wrath
16 Seven Bowls of Wrath Poured Out
17 Religious Babylon Destroyed
18 Political / Economical Babylon Destroyed
19 Second Coming of Christ
20 Millennial Kingdom / Great White Throne
21 New Heaven and Earth / New Jerusalem
22 New Jerusalem / Final Message |
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REVELATION			
FOCUS		DIVISIONS	
"Things which you have seen"	1:1	Revelation of Jesus Christ	1:1
	1:20		1:20
"Things which are"	2:1	The Seven Churches of Asia Minor	2:1
	3:22		3:22
"Things which shall be hereafter"	4:1	God's Throne / Christ's Scroll with 7 Seals	4:1
			5:14
		The Seven-Year Tribulation	6:1
			19:6
		Jesus Christ's Marriage / Second Coming	19:7
			19:21
		Christ's Millennial Reign / White Throne	20:1
			20:15
	22:21	New Heaven / New Earth / New Jerusalem	21:1
			22:21
PLACE: Island of Patmos			
DATE: About A. D. 95-96			

TIME LINE FOR THE EVENTS IN REVELATION

Revelation begins with the triune God in eternity past and proceeds to His Kingdom in eternity future. Even though Revelation does not deal with the ages of the Old Testament, it is filled with hundreds of references to the Old Testament. Revelation reveals many things about Jesus Christ in the first chapter. Seven churches in Asia are examined by Christ in chapters 2 and 3. Heaven is the focus of chapters 4 and 5, where God rules Heaven and earth. He gives His Son a scroll which authorizes Him to remove Satan and his followers from the earth, so He can claim His inheritance and rule the nations of earth. The main subject of Revelation is in chapters 6-19 describing the seven-year period of time known as the Tribulation. The 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth and His white throne judgment of unbelievers is found in chapter 20. The last two chapters reveal the state of affairs in the Eternal Kingdom. The circled numbers in the diagram below refer to the chapters in Revelation where these events are found.

