



**The Story Of Salvation**  
**NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010**  
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### 31. The Book of the Revelation.

No book in the Bible is thicker with images than the book of the Revelation. It is regarded as one of the most difficult books of the Bible. As we enter the book we move in a strange and sometimes incomprehensible world.

The theological position of the reader would give a biased slant to the explanation of the symbols. There are also various schools of interpretation and the literature is enormous. Some firmly believe that John is wholly occupied with his community, which makes it meaningful for them, but meaningless for all subsequent readers. Others view the book as an inspired forecast of the whole of human history, but mainly the history of Western World until the second coming of Christ. This view would see the whole of history as under the control of God, but then to the early Christians the book would have been an incomprehensible puzzle. This view curiously ignores the world outside Europe. Others maintain that there are few if any references to happenings, but only ideas and theological principles are expressed on which God acts throughout human history. This secures its relevance for all periods of the church's history. Another view is where the cycles of sevens are parallels of the same age, i.e from the first to second coming of Christ. For a satisfactory understanding of the book it is best that elements from more than one of these views are required, but that we must always begin with the situation of the church to which it was written, to make any sense of this difficult book.<sup>1</sup>

Opinions also differ over the particular matter of the thousand-year period (the 'millennium') described in chapter 20. There are premillennialists, postmillennialists and amillennialists and any of these positions will influence how the book is interpreted.

A warning:

Seeing these things should warn us against coming to the book with presuppositions. Some of the finest scholars of prophecy have changed their views, not only from time to time, but even later in life. It behoves us to be gently with those who differ from us, seeing men of Godly integrity hold differing views. This does not mean we not hold one or other of these views. It would seem that one or another of these, only, could be correct, but it may be that none is really, of itself, correct. We must, then, be open to what the Book says, and seek, by the Spirit to unlock its practical value and truths to us, in the world in which we live today.<sup>2</sup>

The author of the book is a man named John (Rev 1:1, 4, 9 and 22:8). He was well-known by the churches of Asia as he calls himself their brother, who shared with them in Jesus the persecutions and the kingdom and the patient endurance. Nowhere in the book does he call himself an apostle, but he does call himself a servant (Rev 1:1) and claims to be a prophet (Rev 22:9) and calls his book a prophecy (Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 19 and 19). The book describes

<sup>1</sup> Morris, Leon, *Revelation*. Revised Edition. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), pp. 17–21.

<sup>2</sup> Bingham, Geoffrey C., *Revelation, a Commentary*, (Blackwood: New Creation Publication Inc., 1984), pp. xii–xiii.

itself as a ‘revelation...to show...what must soon take place’ (Rev 1:1 and 22:6). This John had a fantastic knowledge of the Old Testament, as the book is full of implicit allusions to it. To be rooted in the Old Testament certainly helps to better understand the book but the book is not written for scholars. The Revelation is revelation and meant to be understood; the entire book is a letter to be read or heard and to be kept by the seven churches with promises of blessings (Rev 1:3–4). The book also teaches us about true worship.

One of the keys to the book’s structure is the sevenfold motif that occupies it:

Prologue (1:1–20).

The Seven Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1–3:22).

A Vision of Heaven (4:1–11).

The Seven Seals (5:1–8:5).

The Seven Trumpets (8:6–11:19).

The Seven Significant Signs (12:1–14:20).

The Seven Last Plagues (15:1–16:21).

The Seven Events of Final Judgment and Consummation (17:1–22:5).

Epilogue (22:6–21).

Others structure the book according to its four visions. But the book is so complex that there are as many structural analyses as there are commentators.

It is *the* book of the clash of the two kingdoms; the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The triumph of the King of Kings Jesus Christ our Saviour with the angelic host and Christ’s followers versus the usurper king of the kingdom of darkness with his foul fiends and followers. It is nothing less than a mortal combat on a cosmic scale. A leading motif of the book is contrast. At every turn it confronts us with the great “either/or” of human life, that is the choice between goodness and evil. Within the general conflict of good versus evil we find a whole system of parallel clashes: Christ versus Satan, the Lamb versus the dragon, the saints versus the followers of the beast, the bride of Christ versus the whore of Babylon, heaven versus sinful earth, the city of God versus the “the great city” of evil, New Jerusalem versus Babylon, the sealing of the saints versus receiving the mark of the beast. We encounter the extremes of the heights of heaven to the depth of the bottomless pit, from the utmost desolation and lament to the highest ecstasy of celebration, from the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, representing all that is good and holy, and the unholy trinity of Satan and his two beasts representing absolute evil and all unholiness.

### **Symbolism**

The book’s symbolism belongs to the first century making it difficult to understand. Even if they are Old Testament symbols it would still be problematic. It uses images as symbols for characters and events that really exist or will really occur, but not in a literal manner. Numbers have symbolic meanings, such as seven to denote completeness or fullness. The sword of Jesus’ mouth in Rev 2:16 really exists but it is not a literal sword. Believers who conquer are made a “pillar in the temple” (Rev 3:12) and this depicts a reality but nobody imagines that believers will be literal pillars. The angel in Rev 20:1 does not hold the literal key to the literal bottomless pit and a literal great chain. But what is depicted is that the physical symbols are spiritual realities that really exist, so there is an actual key and an actual bottomless pit and an actual chain. Symbols are used to unveil truths, which can not be seen by normal investigation or expressed in any other way. “A symbol is much richer in meaning than any meaning we can draw from it”.<sup>3</sup> When interpreting a symbol the best question to ask

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<sup>3</sup> Chilton, p. 35.

of a given passage is of what theological fact or event in salvation history does this passage seem to be a symbolic version? The symbolic imagery of the Revelation has an open-ended quality. The predictions of the book have been fulfilled many times in history and will ultimately be fulfilled at the end of history. For example the Babylon of Revelation was the Roman Empire for John's original audience, but it has taken many forms since then and is in fact a picture of the human race in rebellion against God, as we find it in our own culture. The visions of the book are always up to date, and it is the symbolic mode of the book that makes them such.

### **Cosmic Imagery**

The book is epic like in the sweep of its action and settings. It encompasses all of reality, including heaven, earth and hell. Only in the letters to the seven churches are we rooted in a specific historical setting. Most other references to the earth extend to the whole earth and all the nations. We should also note that the cosmic forces become actors in the drama. The sun becomes black (Rev 6:12), the stars fall to the earth (Rev 6:13), a burning mountain is thrown into the sea (Rev 8:8), and rivers become blood (Rev 16:40). These cosmic forces as actors are images of power beyond human ability to resist and they show that events are happening at the very core of the created order. The cosmic world of Revelation is a surrealistic nightmare of disease and death and unnatural happenings. We encounter grotesque and unsettling images as water turning to blood, heavenly bodies falling from the sky, people covered with painful sores, gigantic locusts that attack people, the drying up of vegetation, the pollution of the environment, huge hailstones weighing about 45 kg dropping from the sky and vanishing islands and mountains (Rev 16:20–21). The only healthy place is heaven, which is God's dimension of present reality.<sup>4</sup> Revelation portrays a world in transition. Nothing remains static for very long, things keep on changing either for the worse or better as one vision follows another.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Book of great Hope.**

But it is a book of great hope. Although the world is subject to God's judgment and is in a process of degeneration and collapse, the book brings tremendous hope for Jesus' followers. Christians are assured that God reigns supreme and in control of history and is acting and will be acting decisively. Christ is risen and has conquered and by the blood of the Lamb they will conquer even if it will cost their lives (Rev 12:11). Their salvation is assured, forces of evil and political powers will be destroyed and finally the book gives glorious visions of the marriage of the wonderful Bridegroom and his beautiful Bride and of the marriage of heaven and earth.

Our Christian hope is for a full recreated life in the presence and love of God, a totally renewed creation, an integrated new heavens and new earth, and a complete humanness—complete not in and for itself as an isolated entity but complete in worship and love for God, complete in love for one another as humans, complete in stewardship over God's world, and so, and only in that complete context, a full humaneness in itself. Of course, the most glorious feature of the whole renewed creation, the new heavens and the new earth, will be the personal presence of Jesus himself.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wright, N.T., *New Heavens, New Earth. The Biblical Picture of Christian Hope*, Grove Biblical Series, (Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd., 1999), p.14.

<sup>5</sup> *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery. An Encyclopedic Exploration of the Images, Symbols, Motifs, Metaphors, Figures of Speech and Literary Patterns of the Bible*. General Editors: Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 713–716.

<sup>6</sup> Wright, p. 24.

### **The Lordship of Jesus Christ in the Book of the Revelation.<sup>7</sup>**

There is a famous passage in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 where Jesus is depicted as defeating all enemies which still persist to the last in opposing God and His Messiah, even though they were defeated at the Cross, and their ultimate doom was sealed there.

Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

This passage may well be called a summary of the whole book of the Revelation as it declares clearly that Jesus was and is the Lord of history.

Thomas Torrance asks:

Have we seen Jesus Christ in the unveiled richness of His glory, or have we seen only the One who was made poor, and of no reputation? Have we seen Him in the blaze of His transcendent majesty, or have we seen Him only as the Jesus of history, the carpenter of Nazareth? Is that all we have seen? Or breaking through all that, have we seen God Himself in Jesus and fallen down before him and said, “Truly this is the Son of God”.

*Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ!*

*Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father!*

Until we have seen Christ like that, we cannot understand this book.<sup>8</sup>

John was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day when the exalted Saviour was revealed to him as Lord and God. Without the Spirit no one can say, “Jesus is Lord!” It is the Spirit who gives prophetic insight and understanding (Rom 8:9–11; 1 Cor 2:14). We too need to be “in the Spirit” to understand John’s revelation not only to see the glorified Christ in all his majesty, but also to see pure worship of a Holy God and Creator and the Lamb (Rev 4:2). Without the Spirit we will not understand the gaudiness and unholiness of the false bride (Rev 17:3) and the radiant beauty of the glorious Bride of the Lamb (Rev 21:9–10).

Revelation 1:5–7

...Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Revelation 1:17–18

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

Revelation 2:8

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

Revelation 2:26–28a

To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered—even as I also received authority from my Father.

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<sup>7</sup> This study is based on Bingham, Geoffrey C., *The Revelation of St John the Divine. Commentary and Essays on the Book of the Revelation*, (Blackwood: New Creation Publication Inc., 1993), pp. 230-241.

<sup>8</sup> Torrance, Thomas F., *The Apocalypse Today. Sermons on Revelation*, (London: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1960), p. 14.

## Revelation 3:14

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation:

## Revelation 11:15

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”

## Revelation 17:14

they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

This book tells us that Jesus Christ is the faithful witness. He alone tells the truth, lives the truth and bears witness to the truth, especially the truth of God (Jn 5:30–47). He is the firstborn of the dead and that means that he is the first person to triumph over death and therefore over sin (Rev 7:9). He is the risen Christ who was dead and who came to life again and now lives forever and ever. The fact that he died means that he was truly a man and the first one of the human race to be raised from the dead and glorified.

Paul writes,

and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,... (Rom 1:4)

Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth. The Son of Man has received authority from the Father to rule the world’s political powers (the nations) and is now the Lord of lords and King of kings whose reign will last forever over the nations and over God’s creation. There is a strong allusion to Psalm 89:27 where God is saying that His King will be the highest.

I will make him the firstborn,  
the highest of the kings of the earth.

This man Jesus, like God the Father, is now the first and the last, and the living one, the Alpha and Omega (Rev 22:18). This is a stupendous claim to make for it means that He is the Initiator and Originator of all things and as the Living One always acting; it is a claim to deity. He has the keys of Death and of Hades meaning that He has authority over death and life, that He is the Lord over the living and the dead. Paul writes,

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living (Rom 14:7–9).

## Revelation 5:5–14

“Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne (Rev 5:5-7). When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sing a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.” Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!” Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them,

singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!” And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

This is one of the most significant passages in the entire book. It tells us that the greatest and most powerful rulers and conquerors and makers of vast empires have not the slightest ability to take the seven-sealed book of the world’s history and open it. Neither have the greatest men of God who ever lived, like Enoch, Abraham, Moses and Elijah. Those who are great in the eyes of men are lifeless and insignificant when it comes to directing the affairs of the world and the events of history. John is told to see the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David<sup>9</sup> but what he sees is a slaughtered Lamb. Through the Cross and Resurrection this man Jesus has become the Lord of the universe (Phil 2:5–11).

The world’s history is nothing but abominable violence and injustice and indescribable filth. The events of history tell us that mankind has nothing but hatred and contempt for God, but loves its idols to which it is enslaved. The incredible and almost unbelievable wonder is that God has never abandoned his creation and still so loved the world that He sent Jesus to free us from our idols and by his blood ransomed sinful men and women, creating God’s family from every nation under the sun. No wonder all the creatures of heaven and the universe burst out in a new song, falling down in worship and adoration before their Redeemer-King.

#### Revelation 11:15

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”

#### Revelation 12:10

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

#### Revelation 14:14

Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand!

#### Revelation 17:14

they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

#### Revelation 19:11–16

Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Again and again the sovereignty of God and his Messiah is loudly proclaimed. God’s kingdom rules over all and the kingdom of the evil one is utterly defeated by the Lamb, who is Lord and King of the kingdom. This Lamb, this Messiah, this Son of God (Rev 2:18) is one like the Son of Man<sup>10</sup>, which brings us straight to that mysterious figure of Daniel 7:13–14 who was given great authority, power and glory to reign over the nations everlastingly,

<sup>9</sup> Gen 49:10; Isa 9:6–7; Ps 2:6–7; 89:27; Ezek 34:23–24.

<sup>10</sup> See also Rev 1:13.

I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

What powerful passages these are on the Lordship of Jesus Christ! There is only One in the book who has eyes like a flame of fire; the Son of Man of Rev 1:14 and the Son of God of Rev 2:18. There is only one who is Faithful and True and He is the Lord of the Church, “the holy one, the true one” in Rev 2:7 and the “Amen, the faithful and true witness” in Rev 3:14 and the “Sovereign Lord, holy and true” in Rev 6:10. He is called The Word of God and King of kings and Lord of lords. The Lamb is indeed a fearsome and powerful and awesome figure. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to conquer the nations and to rule them with an iron rod. Even more awesome is the fact that He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. We love to hear of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but we may find it difficult to accept that the nations and their governments may want to hide from the face of the One seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:15–17). This slaughtered Lamb of God is the Judge who Himself was judged and so his “judgments must be understood in the light of the Cross and from the perspective of him who bore the judgment of the cross”. This crucified Lamb who bore the judgment once for all also reigns as the glorified Son and as Lord over all. The Word of the gospel is Christ Himself as He is called The Word of God. He brings death to those who reject Him and life to those who obey Him (1 Thess 1:8–10; cf Mt 25:46; Rev 20:11–15).<sup>11</sup>

#### Revelation 7:9–10

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

#### Revelation 20:4

Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Jesus Christ reigns in the millennium with those who are saints and martyrs. This is not only an evidence of his Lordship, but the very outworking of it. One thing is clear Satan cannot take control of the millennial age.

#### Revelation 21:22–23

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

#### Revelation 22:1

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

#### Revelation 22:12–16

“See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” Blessed are those who

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<sup>11</sup> Meatheringham, Deane, *The Judgments of God*, (Blackwood: New Creation Publications Inc., 1983), pp. 14–15.

wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

The Lordship of Christ is shown as the Lamb who is one with the Father, being on the same throne. They are the very Life and Light and Temple of the city. Like the Father He is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. This Man, this Lamb, this Rewarder and Judge, this Root and descendant of David and bright morning star is one with the Father and the source of the river of life and the tree of life.