

Session 02

Overview

In Revelation 1 we are introduced to the Author of the prophecy – God the Father communicating through Jesus and the Spirit via angels to John the Apostle, and through him to the church.

God is revealed as the Eternal One in three Persons.

Jesus is revealed in the same way but also in His role as Redeemer and coming King. He is the Lord of the Church, revealed to John in an overwhelming vision of glory. He is inspecting His churches and calling them to hear what the Spirit is saying to them.

Chapters 3 and 4 document the messages to the seven churches. Jesus describes Himself in terms of the previous vision and issues commendations, criticisms, encouragements, commands and warnings, as appropriate to each church. Together they are a representation of the states of the church through the ages, and are still relevant.

Chapters 4 and 5 transport us to the court in Heaven so that we can see the coming events on earth through the ultimate place of power and authority. The Father is on the throne. Jesus is entrusted with the task of guiding history to its ultimate destiny – by His obedience He has proved Himself worthy. It is a place of worship – appropriate activity of creatures, in contrast to much that is happening on earth. The Father is worshipped as Creator and the Son as Redeemer.

This is the foundation for the series of visions that follow.

There are parallel structures in the three groups of visions.

1-4 describe separate areas of judgement:

- **Seals** – the four horsemen bring war, slaughter, famine, and death in an indiscriminate way but partial in extent.
- **Trumpets** – judgements affect mankind via the natural world, vegetation, sea, rivers, and the heavens, again partial in extent.
- **Bowls** – more intense judgements (plagues) via the earth, sea, rivers, and sun, affecting those who have the mark (counterfeit seal) of the beast.

5 stands alone but with related themes

- **Seals** – the martyrs are under the altar pleading for justice and vindication.
- **Trumpets** – demons are released from the abyss to torment those who have not been sealed.
- **Bowls** – judgement is poured out on the throne of the beast

6 connects with the end of the age

- **Seals** – the Great Day of the wrath of the Lamb.
- **Trumpets** – Demonic hordes turn on the followers of the beast in a great final battle.
- **Bowls** – Demon spirits gather the followers of the beast to the battle of the Great day of God Almighty.

7 marks the end of the age

- **Seals** – The redeemed before the throne of God and the awesome silence.
- **Trumpets** – “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah”
- **Bowls** – the 7th bowl introduces the end of the world and the eternal state, expanded on in the final chapters of Revelation.

An interval occurs between the 6th and 7th seal (chapter 7). There are two visions.

- **The saints are sealed to protect them from ultimate harm.** This prepares for the trumpet judgements but may also be a retrospective look at the protection of the martyrs in seal number 5 – they are in the presence of God.
- **The eternal blessedness of the saints is assured** – John saw the completed multitude before the throne, as if already accomplished. The prayers of the martyrs of chapter 6 have been heard.

An interval occurs between the 6th and 7th trumpets (10:1 – 11:14). There are two visions.

- **A mighty angel gives John a book to eat and commands him to prophesy to the nations.**
- **The temple is measured (?protected) and the two witnesses complete their mission before the final trumpet sounds and the end comes.**

Following the final trumpet and before the first bowl there is a series of visions (11:19 - 15:8). These reveal the nature and actions of the various characters and forces involved in a cosmic struggle in the heavens that inspires events on earth.

The final chapters (17-22) following the bowls of wrath describe in more detail the total defeat of the enemies of God and His people, the destruction of “Babylon”, the total victory of the Lamb, the destruction of the dragon and the beast and the false prophet, the revelation of the Bride/New Jerusalem, the judgement of the ungodly, and the eternal city/temple where God and His people will live together and forever.

There is a pattern that gives insight about how to approach our interpretation of Revelation.

- **John received the visions in a chronological sequence but the events described are not chronological in “real time”.**
- There are **repeated cycles, not a linear flow.** Each ends with the final judgement. With each successive cycle, seals, trumpets, and bowls, events become more intense.
- This is consistent with an increasing emphasis on the final period of history, as is clear from chapters 17-22.
- **The “cycles” take place on earth.**
- **The “intervals”** (as well as the throne scene in chapters 4-5) **happen in parallel with the “cycles”** and **reveal the invisible world** that intersects with the visible one and affects events on earth.
- **There are many symbolic numbers.** In particular there are **numbers that symbolise periods of time.** This is a key to interpretation of **the period of history to which the visions apply. These numbers are connected to Daniel’s prophecy** where the time refers to a **period of intense persecution**, 7:25, 12:7 “Time, times and half a time” (Three and a half years), 9:27 Half a week (where weeks stand for years), 12:11, “One thousand two hundred and ninety days (42 lunar months + a correction factor of 1 month). **Revelation 11:2 and 13:5** refer to “forty two months”; 11:3 and 12:6 refer to “1260 days” and 12:14 to “Time, times and half a time” (three and a half years).

In Daniel’s prophecy the period refers to different scenarios and becomes a way of speaking about a short period of intense persecution when the current ungodly political/religious power appears to have the upper hand. It was a literal number on the first occasion – the persecution from 167-164 BCE by the Greek King, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), 8:8-14. 8:14 describes the period as 2,300 evening and mornings, (a little over 38 lunar months, referring to the desecration of the Temple as the climax of his persecution). 9:26-27 describes a parallel event when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem, with great violence. 7:23-27 projects it into the far distance, to the time of the final persecution and judgement, and chapter 12 again takes us to the events of history prior to final judgement. Jesus did the same, (Matt. 24:3 ff), when He answered a double-barrelled question about the coming destruction of the Temple and the end of the age.

In Revelation the visions of Daniel are reapplied to persecution of the people of God by the dragon and the current manifestation of ungodly political/religious power (The beast/antichrist/false prophet). The number is symbolic of this intense persecution; the actual duration may be different, as indicated by the context. In **chapter 12** the symbolic number appears to cover the whole period between the ascension of Jesus and His return – “**The Last Days**”.

Chapters 11 and 13 seem to concentrate on the most extreme part of this period – what has been termed “**The End Times**”.

It is, therefore, probably best to see a double application of these visions.

The ultimate fulfilment lies in the future but the same conflict was in action in John’s lifetime, as seen in the letters to the churches, has continued throughout the “Last Days” period until now, and will reach its climax and completion within a short time frame prior to the coming of Jesus as the glorified Son of Man/Victorious Lamb. Revelation is, therefore, relevant to followers of Jesus in all ages and places from the days of the “seven churches” to the final generation. It has special relevance to places of great persecution at the present time and will be overwhelmingly relevant in the final worldwide conflict between the Lamb and His followers and the dragon, the beast and their associates.