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REVELATION

*Hold on! Jesus wins!*

WRITTEN

90-95 AD

KEY VERSE

*"They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."*

17:14

Last updated April 30, 2023

PURPOSE

Encourage the 7 churches in Asia to stand in faith under persecution

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## INTRODUCTION

This is not an easy book to understand, and there are various interpretations of it today. Some believe that most of it is in the future, others believe that most of it already happened in the first century, and others still believe that it has happened throughout the church's history.

Already in the 200s, several church leaders said that they did not understand this book. The reason for this is that it is a genre that is unknown to us and that was unknown to most people in the history of the church, namely apocalyptic (which means precisely *"revelation"*). This was a popular Jewish genre between 200 BC and 100 AD that used a lot of symbols and numbers. The vivid details bring the vision to life, but not all the details are metaphors. Perhaps it is when we overinterpret these that we miss the point or make new points.

The common "pattern" in such writings was that although times are difficult now, God will eventually intervene and destroy evil, and the Messianic age will begin. In addition, John's Revelation uses many images from the OT, especially from Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. We also need to be familiar with these books to understand what is meant.

Apocalyptic texts did not usually speculate on when the end of the world would come but were concerned with their own time and looked for meaning in their predicament. The end of the world was a hope that they looked forward to. John also says, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20), even after all the terrible events described.

John's revelation is usually dated to the 90s and the persecutions under Emperor Domitian. Domitian breathed new life into the emperor’s worship at that time, which is probably reflected in the "beast" that requires worship. The Christians were seen as enemies of the state since they refused to make sacrifices to the emperor and therefore got into great trouble. Revelation is written to encourage the seven churches to persevere since God is in control and will prevail in the end.

It is important to remember just this - that this revelation was meant as an encouragement. If we are frightened instead of encouraged, we have probably not understood it correctly. We must assume that the first readers, the seven churches, understood what was meant by the strange images and symbols, and we must try to interpret this through their lens. The content of Revelation has to fit with what the rest of the Bible says. And it may well be that the message in it is the same as elsewhere in the Bible, just said in a completely different way.

## FOUR VIEWS CONCERNING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Dispensationalism | Most of it is still in the future |
| Partial preterism | Most of it happened in the 1st century |
| Historical Premillennialism | About the Roman Empire + the end of the world |
| Church historical | About European history |

Are we to throw away everything we have learned about the first reader, historical background, genre, etc. when we come to Revelation? If so, why?

*“But I myself would never dare to reject the book, which many good Christians value very highly, but I realize that my mental faculties are insufficient to judge it properly. I take the view that the interpretation of the various parts is mostly a mystery, something too wonderful for our comprehension. I do not understand it, but I suspect that a deeper meaning is hidden in the words; I do not measure and judge these things with my own reason, but I put more trust in faith, so I have concluded that they are too high to be grasped by me; I do not condemn as worthless what I have not understood at a glance, but instead I am amazed that I have not understood it.”* Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, 247-264 AD (the quote has been translated)

**THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

Usually dated to approximately 90 AD

**Recipients:** 7 churches in the province of Asia (1:4)

**Purpose:** Show what must soon take place (1:1) and encourage them to persevere in their persecution.

**Genre:** Apocalypse (1:1), Prophecy (1:3), and Epistle (1:4)

## AUTHOR

**Arguments against John the Apostle (from the 2nd century):**

* Does not present himself as an apostle.
* Mentions his name in Revelation but not in other scriptures.
* Revelation differs from the other Johannine writings in content and style.

**Arguments for John the Apostle:**

He introduces himself as John (1:1, 1:4, 1:9, 22:8) and does not identify himself further because he is known. The tradition from the 100th century states that this was John the Apostle.

## APOCALYPSE = REVELATION (1:1)

* A popular Jewish genre from 200 BC - 100 AD, but unknown to us today (and incomprehensible to some already in the 200s)
* The message is expressed with symbols and numbers.
* Theme: Although times are difficult now, God will eventually intervene and destroy evil and the Messiah and his kingdom will come. A joyful hope, not something dark and gloomy.
* (Usually *not* the subject: When will the world end?)

## APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Beginning in OT:

* Ezekiel 38-39
* Dan 7-12
* Zech 12-14
* Joel 3:14-22

Apocalypse of Abraham (1st-2nd century AD)

Apocalypse of Adam (1st-4th century AD)

Apocalypse of Baruch (early 2nd century AD)

The Sibylline Oracles (2nd-1st century BC)

The Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs (1st-2nd century AD)

Apocalypse of Elijah (1st-4th century AD)

1 Enoch (1st century BC)

4 Ezra (approx. 90 AD)

Apocalypse of Gabriel (1st century BC - 1st century AD)

Apocalypse of Lamech (3rd century BC - 1st century AD)

3 Enoch (2nd century AD)

Apocalypse of Moses (1st century AD)

Apocalypse of Zephaniah (1st century BC - 1st century AD)

The Aramaic Apocalypse (approx. 100 BC)

### NUMBERS HAD FAIRLY FIXED MEANINGS

3 - The Holy Number (The Trinity)

4 - The created world, the universe (the 4 corners of the world)

7 - The perfect number of God, completeness

10 - The perfect human number, worldly power

12 - God's covenant number (12 tribes/apostles)

6 - the number of accidents

3.5 - incomplete and not whole

**THE NUMBER 7 IN THE REVELATION**

* The Lord God Almighty (7x)
* He who was seated on the throne (7x)
* Jesus (14x)
* Jesus' witness(es) (7x)
* Christ (7x)
* Lamb (28x)
* “God and the Lamb” (7x)
* The 4-fold world (7x)
* Spirit (14x) ("what the Spirit says to the churches" (7x))
* Prophecy (7x)
* 7 Beatitudes
* 7 praises (e.g., 5:12)
* 7 categories of people (e.g., 6:15)
* 7 references to the altar
* 7 prophetic confirmations of Jesus' return

### APOCALYPSES WERE NOT TO BE INTERPRETED LITERALLY!

Nelson Kraybill says (the quotes have been translated):

*“If you read a telephone book as though it's a novel, you're likely to be confused. Something like that happened to Revelation in the church.”*

*"Don't get trapped with wooden literalism - unless you really expect to get to heaven and find that Jesus is a sheep."*

## HISTORY OF RECEIPT AND INTERPRETATION

### 2ND CENTURY

Marvelous reception at first. Early and consistently received as apostolic by for instance Papias (approx. 125), Justin Martyr, Meliton, Irenaeus, the Muratorian fragment, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen.

Montanus: Declared that the end was near, and the new Jerusalem would descend upon the city of Pepuza in Asia Minor. Made Revelation his main scripture.

Caused the Revelation to get a bad reputation among "traditional" Christians (— not the last time this happened)

### 3RD CENTURY

Some critical attitudes:

First: Gaius, a scholar from Rome, believed it to be a forgery by the Gnostic Cerinthus.

Dionysius (Bishop of Alexandria, 247-264) would prevent teaching about a literal millennial kingdom. Thought the Revelation could not be interpreted literally.

Christians in Alexandria argued that interpreting it literally, especially the Millennium, was a distortion of the spiritual nature of Christianity.

Victorinus (250-303): oldest source of the “recapitulation theory”:

* Revelation does not tell all the events in sequence. They cannot be put on a simple linear line.
* 3 visions (7 seals + 7 trumpets + 7 bowls) are repetitions but with a progression.

### 4TH CENTURY

Especially in the Eastern Church, more doubts arose about the book.

When Eusebius († 340) divided Christian literature into accepted/rejected/disputed, it was accepted by some and rejected by others. (Eccl. Hist. 3.25)

* rejected ⧣ heresy. rejected = not holy scripture
* Just shows that some have constantly had problems with the book, not that the entire early church was uncertain about it.

Was accepted at councils in 393 and 397 because it was old and was cited by the early church fathers as authoritative.

### SUMMARY SO FAR:

Revelation has always been a troubling book. It has seemed intimidating and confusing, for instance because:

1. one has not been familiar with the genre
2. insufficient consideration has been given to the original recipients (first reader)
3. one has not understood all the OT references

By sticking to normal biblical interpretation, we will be able to avoid many misunderstandings.

## WHEN WAS THE BOOK OF REVELATION WRITTEN?

While John was *"on the island of Patmos... because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus"* 1:9

Organized persecution only under the emperors Nero (54-68 AD) and Domitian (81-96 AD)

### A. Early dating: Under Emperor Nero (60s)

* 17:9-11 mentions that 5 emperors have fallen. If we include Julius Caesar, we get Nero as the 6th.
* 11:1-2 can mean before the year 70 if it is interpreted about the earthly temple.

### B. Late dating (the majority): Under Emperor Domitian (90s)

* Irenaeus (approx. year 180, two generations after John): "near the end of Domitian's rule"

## HISTORICAL SITUATION

### DOMITIAN (81-96 AD)

The Book of Revelation may have been written in the 90s under Emperor Domitian. Greek and Roman writers paint a brutal picture of him:

* Tertullian: *“The New Nero”*
* Eusebius: *"He showed himself to be Nero's successor in enmity and opposition to God"*

He revived emperor worship. Proclamations by the authorities during his time read: *“Our Lord and God Domitian commands…”*

Those who refused to regard him as divine were executed or excommunicated. This was seen as treason since the emperor represented Rome. He persecuted philosophers and religions he considered hostile and suppressed Judaism and Christianity.

### PLINIUS' LETTER TO TRAJAN (AD 112)

*“I asked them if they were Christians. I have asked those who answered affirmatively a second and third time, under threats of the death penalty. If they maintained their confession, I executed them. As for what they are actually supporting, I think that obstinacy and stubbornness must be punished anyway. I have determined that others who struggle with the same confusion, but who were Roman citizens, will be sent to Rome.*

*An unsigned poster was put up, accusing a large number of people by name. Those who refused to be Christians now or formerly, I thought it necessary to set free, since they invoked our gods according to the words I gave them, and since they offered wine and incense before your image which I had placed there for this purpose together with the statues of the gods. I also made them curse Christ. It is said that real Christians cannot be forced to do any of these things.*

*Others who were charged with this first admitted that they had once been Christians, but had already denied it; they had indeed been Christians but had given it up, some of them three years ago, others even earlier, some as long as 25 years ago [under Domitian]. All these worshiped your image and the idols and cursed Christ.”*

### WRITTEN UNDER PERSECUTION

Tertullian (c. 200 AD) and Eusebius (early 4th century) say that there was extensive and public persecution of Christians in John's time and that the Book of Revelation was written to strengthen and encourage them.

Christians were probably forced to worship/offer incense to the emperor and the Roman gods, say *"Caesar is Lord"* and curse Jesus.

The book is a *revelation* of the spiritual reality behind their situation; it is Satan who is behind it, and they must persevere.

## 4 TIPS TO UNDERSTAND REVELATION:

1. Read inductively. Put away preconceived notions
2. Take historical background into account. The first readers understood it and were encouraged.
3. Consider the genre
4. Consider the context: The message must fit with the rest of the Bible.

(Claim: It's the same message, just said in a completely different way.)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Part** | | **Description** | **Interpretation** | |
| Chapter 1 | Opening vision of Jesus | | | |
| Chapters 2-3 | Letter to the 7 congregations | | | |
| Chapters 4-5 | Vision of heaven, the throne of God, and the victorious lamb | | | 1st round |
| 6:1 - 8:1 | The 7 seals | Victory, war, hunger, death, the martyrs' longing, judgment, silence | A description of the rest of world history | 2nd round |
| 8:2 - 11:19 | The 7 Trumpets | Hail & fire, sea to blood, waters turned bitter, darkness, locusts, vast army, kingdom | A new exodus, this time from the Roman Empire | 3rd round |
| Chapters 12-14 | The dragon, the beast and judgment | The people worship either the beast or God and are labeled accordingly | Do not worship the emperor, be prepared for persecution |
| Chapters 15-16 | The 7 bowls | Festering sores, sea to blood, water to blood, the sun scorch, darkness, the Euphrates dries up, end | A new exodus, the day of judgment |
| 17:1 - 19:10 | Judgment on Babylon | The great prostitute on the beast,  the fall of Babylon | The Roman Empire is falling |
| 19:11 - 20:15 | Jesus' return and judgment | | |
| Chapters 21-22 | A new heaven and a new earth | | |

What would you need to hear if you were persecuted for your faith?

## CHAPTER 1 - OPENING VISION OF JESUS

Revelation is a message from Jesus to prepare them for what is going to happen soon. (vv. 1-2)

The opening (1:4-8) encourages them by reminding them that God is with them and that he is coming (3x). They are called to be credible witnesses like Jesus. Jesus is the Lord of the kings of the earth who persecute them. They belong to his kingdom.

OT References:

* The Son of Man in Dan 7:13-14
* "The Ancient of Days" in Dan 7:9
* The heavenly figure in Dan 10:5-6
* The sound from Ezek 1:24 and 43:2

**Main point:**

The powerful description of Jesus with the keys to Hades would be encouraging to the readers. He stands in the midst of the congregations and is with them in their difficulties.

## CHAPTERS 2-3: THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

* Reflects the city's geographical, cultural and religious situation - in addition to the congregation's situation.
* All had a Roman court where Christians had been or could be accused, and at least the first three had imperial temples.
* How Jesus describes himself has a theological purpose. Taken from chapter 1. Mostly characteristics that are relevant to the congregation.
* Promises to those who overcome → Ch. 21-22
* Keywords in the book: Victorious = keep the faith no matter what. The meaning of victory was redefined when Jesus triumphed by dying.
* False teachers: False apostles, the Nicolaitans, false Jews, Balaam's teaching, Jezebel...

### PERGAMON (2:12-17)

* According to Irenaeus (2nd century), the Nicolaitans had a lifestyle similar to the Gnostics (free from sin)
* Nikolaos (Gr.: *"conquer the people"*) corresponds to Balaam (Heb. *"ruler of the people"*).
* Balaam is associated with sexual immorality and spiritual adultery in Numbers 31. He caused Israel to sin, so they did not reach the land.
* Something similar in Pergamon?

### SARDIS (3:1-6)

Known for arts and crafts and for bleaching and dyeing clothes.

Twice in history, the city has been invaded by an enemy at night.

Like many other cities in the Roman Empire, it had a register of all its inhabitants. As long as a person was alive, his name was in this book. When he died, it was blotted off. To have one's name blotted off would mean losing one's citizenship.

**Observation:**

* What are the problems in the church?
* What are they being asked to do?
* What will happen if they don't change?

**Interpretation:**

* How would they understand *"if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief "* (v. 3b)?
* Why does Jesus talk about clothes and colors?
* How does the expression "book of life" communicate?

**Application?**

### LAODICEA (3:14-22)

The richest city in Phrygia. Known for its banks and proud of its wealth. Refused to accept disaster relief from the state when the city was hit by an earthquake in 60 AD. Also known for textiles (esp. black wool), the production of ear medicines, and a well-known eye ointment.

The city lacked a natural water supply. The water came from hot springs mixed with cold mountain water, so the water that reached the city was lukewarm.

Zeus was the patron god, but the city also had temples to Apollo, Asclepius, Hades, Hera, Athena, Serapis, Dionysus, and others.

**What does the text say?**

* What are the problems in the church?
* What are they being asked to do?

**What did this mean to them?**

* How could they relate to vv. 15-16?
* What attitude is Jesus referring to in v. 17?
* How does Jesus contextualize in v. 18?

**Application?**

Is there anything in chapters 2-3 that you think is appropriate for today's congregations?

## CHAPTER 4 DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S THRONE ROOM

v. 1 *“Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”* → 1:19: *“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now [ch. 2-3?] and what will take place later."*

Shifting perspective → *"in heaven"* (v. 1)

OT References:

* Lightning, rumblings, and thunder (v. 5): Exodus 19
* Visions of God's throne in Isa 6 and Ezek 1
* Sea of Glass (v. 6): Exodus 24:10, 30:18-21/1 Kgs 7:23-26

## ROUND 1: CHAPTERS 5-7

*"Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."* 5:5

*"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain"* 5:6a

### CHAPTER 5: THE SCROLL WITH THE 7 SEALS

The last wills and testaments were usually sealed with seven seals and became effective upon opening.

Only the Lamb can open the seals because he has won ➡ the book contains events that were to happen after Jesus' death and resurrection.

7 horns = almighty (horn = strength, e.g., Dan 7-8, Ps 132:17, Lamentations 2:17)

7 eyes = all seeing, all knowing, God's Spirit, who is with his people on earth. And he hears their prayers (v. 8).

vv. 9-10 from the opening (1:5-7) — a central truth that must be repeated to those who are persecuted: They shall rule as kings!

OT References:

* Scroll: Ezek 2:10
* The Lion of Judah: Genesis 49:9-10
* The Root of David (Isa 11:1, 10), the 7 spirits of God (Isa 11:2?)

What does this glimpse of the worship of God and the Lamb do to you?

### SEAL NO. 1: A RIDER ON A WHITE HORSE (6:1-2)

**1. Jesus?**

* From the 10th century through the Middle Ages
* Jesus in 19:12 - also crowned
* White is always otherwise *the good color* in this book
* Won the victory at his first coming

A picture of the gospel going out into the world, it conquers and spreads.

**2. The Parthians?**

* White horse + archer could be associated with the Parthians, the only real threat to the Roman Empire in the East (240 BC - 224 AD).
* The only mounted archers of the first century.
* The Roman Empire was never able to conquer them. Represented the outpost of civilization, a different kind of enemy.
* The Parthians crushed the Romans in the year 62 in the Tigris valley.

The first horseman belongs to the same series as the other three; he is part of the coming judgment of the Roman Empire.

### SEAL NO. 2: A RIDER ON A RED HORSE (6:3-4)

* Red was associated with war and blood
* Peace taken away: Pax Romana disappearing? (27 BC - approx. 180 AD)
* Sword = judgment by war in the OT

An image of the coming judgment of the Roman Empire and probably also of persecution and death.

### SEAL NO. 3: A RIDER ON A BLACK HORSE (6:5-6)

More persecution, this time financially, because the Christians were not part of the trade organizations that were linked to the pagan gods.

* A famine causes inflation. Wheat costs more than 10 times the normal price. Famines in the early 90s.
* The crisis affects the poor. Oil and wine: The rich are not affected. Most Christians were not rich.
* Economic persecution will also come before the Roman Empire is judged and before Jesus returns.

### SEAL NO. 4: A RIDER ON A PALE HORSE (6:7-8)

¼ - partial power

The combination of sword/famine/pestilence is used at least 18x in Jeremiah and Ezekiel to describe God's judgment.

Death will take people before the end comes, and especially swords and wild animals will be real to the first readers.

### SEAL NO. 5: THE MARTYRS UNDER THE ALTAR (6:9-11)

* Has been slain as the Lamb ➡ shares in the sufferings of Christ (2 Cor 1:5, Phil 3:10, Col 1:24, 1 Pet 4:13)
* In the OT, the blood was poured out at the foot of the altar (Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25) ➡
* The martyrs are "sacrifices".
* God's judgment is a good thing when you are persecuted.

Purpose: To empower readers to persevere even if they have to die for their faith.

### SEAL NO. 6: THE GREAT DAY OF WRATH (6:12-17)

Bad news. 6 was associated with misfortune and judgment.

The great day of wrath = a picture of the last judgment

The people on earth always represent those who do not believe. 7 groups of people = complete judgment.

OT References:

* vv. 12-14: Isa 34:4 (Matthew 24:29)
* vv. 15-16: Isa 2:10, 19-20, Hos 10:8
* *"who can withstand it"* (v. 17) - Joel 2:11, Mal 3:2.

Will the answer come in chapter 7?

### INTERLUDE SCENE 1: FLASHBACK. THE 144,000 (7:1-8)

Chronologically before the 6th seal: They have been sealed before judgment occurs (as in Ezek 9)

Unusual tribal list: Dan missing (not Levi), Joseph instead of Ephraim and Manasseh

➡ The believing Israel or a picture of God's true people?

**Is 144,000 meant literally?**

* *"Myriad"* (10,000) is the Bible's largest number and is used symbolically in 1 Sam 18:7, Ps 3:7, 68:18, and Dan 7:10.
* Not small and exclusionary, but a large number for the first readers.
* If literally: 144,000 ethnic Jews ("male virgins", 14:4) are the only ones who escape judgment. Is this consistent with the rest of the Bible?
* Symbolic: 12 x 12 x 1000: 12 tribes x 12 apostles x complete earthly completeness (10 x 10 x 10) ➡ The complete people of God. (John 5:24)

### INTERLUDE SCENE 2: THE GREAT CROWD (7:9-17)

Same picture, but after the tribulation (v. 14) and before the throne (v. 9)?

* As in 5:5-6: First, he hears about it, then he sees it.

The fulfillment of Genesis 15:5.

Palm branches: The Feast of Tabernacles, commemorating the deliverance from Egypt ➡ a new deliverance

### SEAL NO. 7: SILENCE (8:1)

### APPLICATION OF CHAPTERS 6-7:

Just as God promised the readers to judge the evil Roman Empire, he promises to judge the evil in our time. Do these chapters give you any new perspectives on how to face suffering? How do these chapters encourage you?

## ROUND 2: CHAPTERS 8-11

### TRUMPET NO. 1 (8:7)

Trombones were used a lot in the OT, i.a.:

* about God's presence (Exodus 19:16)
* to warn (Jer 6:1, Ezek 33:3-5)
* (the last) about the end of history (Isa 27:13, Matt 24:31, 1 Cor 15:52, 1 Thess 4:16)

Hail, fire, and blood from Exodus 9:23-25 ➡ Judgment and a new deliverance

The grass is still there after the 6th seal ➡ repetition

1/3: More severe now than 1/4 after the 4th seal. Still a partial judgment. Good news because it means deliverance for God's people.

### TRUMPET NO. 2-4 (8:8-12)

2. Sea to blood: Exodus 7:20 → more judgment/deliverance

3. Wormwood (v. 11) = bitterness (Proverbs 5:4, Lamentations 3:19)

* Jer 9:15, 23:15 - God will give the people wormwood and poisoned water because of their disobedience

4. Darkness (v. 12): Exodus 10:21

* Connects to the Day of the Lord in Joel 3:20 and Amos 8:9
* The stars are hit even if they fell in 6:13 ➡ repetition

### TRUMPET NO. 5: (9:1-12) (1. LAMENT)

* Like the 8th plague of Exodus 10:12, only worse.
* Attacks all but God's people ➡ presupposes 7:1-8
* The grass is back after 8:7 ➡ repetition/pictures
* OT references: Joel, especially 1:6
* Characteristics of the Parthians: Long hair and "shoots" backward
* Abaddon = the abyss/realm of death (Job 31:12, Psalm 88:12, Proverbs 27:20)
* Apollyon = destruction

Not meant literally, but the most fearsome imagery in that culture is used of the coming judgment. This is an encouragement to Christians that God will intervene and judge evil.

### TRUMPET NO. 6 (9:13-21)

The Euphrates was the border between the Romans and the Parthians.

Attacks usually came via the river.

20,000 x 10,000 = 200 million:

* A huge army. May have been more than the entire world population at the time (150-330 million based on various calculations)

The Parthians were known for their cavalry and often used fire arrows.

An even "bigger" picture of the judgment on the Roman Empire (the whole "world" for the readers)

### INTERLUDE SCENE 1: THE LITTLE SCROLL (CHAP. 10)

Ezekiel 2:8-3:3: Ezekiel ate a scroll with *"lament and mourning and woe"*, but it tasted like honey.

v. 11: *"You must prophesy"* — John is a prophet like Ezekiel

OT references: Dan 12, where an angel speaks of a coming time of tribulation and the resurrection from the dead

* v. 4 → Dan 12:4,9
* v. 5 → Dan 12:7

Following Jesus ("eating" God's word, the gospel) involves both joy and pain (?)

God's words taste sweet to those who believe but become stinging words to those who resist (v. 11) (?)

### INTERLUDE SCENE 2: THE TWO WITNESSES (11:1-14)

v. 1: If this was written in 90 AD, the temple had been destroyed ➡ an image of the Christian congregation? (3:12, Ezek 40-48)

42 months = 1260 days = 3.5 years = an incomplete period?

The two witnesses = “the two olive trees” and the two lampstands, and *“they stand before the Lord of the earth.”* (v. 4)

Case 4: Two olive trees = the high priest Joshua + the royal Zerubbabel. Does the candlestick represent the Spirit of God?

* Jesus is priest + king, and the church is *"a kingdom and priests"* (1:6, 5:10, 20:6).
* The lampstands are congregations in 1:20.
* The two witnesses = God's congregation that *"prophesies"* (= speaks for God). That is what the church does (should do).

Why two? Required in Deut 19:15. The book is about being faithful witnesses.

Sackcloth: A message of repentance to the world?

v. 6: Described as Elijah and Moses = two great prophets

v. 7: Points forward to the first beast (13:7, 17:8). If the beast is the emperor, it is fitting that the two witnesses are the church.

Witness = gr. *martus* (→ martyr)

Jesus was crucified in the great city (Rome? Because the Romans did it?) + Sodom + Egypt (symbols of evil and oppression).

vv. 9-10: The world despises the Christians.

v. 11: From Ezek 37 - where Israel as God's people is restored

v. 14: The second woe cry was the 6th trumpet + the interlude

The first interlude (Ch. 7) described the congregation as a victorious army. In this second interlude, they are described as prophets and martyrs.

### TRUMPET NO. 7 (11:15-19) (3rd WOE-CRY?)

v. 17: *"have begun to reign"* No longer he who *"shall come"* - The end has come (10:7)

*"he will reign for ever and ever"* (v. 15): Trumpets were also used when a new king was seated on the throne. (e.g., 1 Kgs 1:34)

The Ark of the Covenant disappeared after 586 BC. Symbolic of God's presence, which becomes visible when this age ends.

OT references: Psalm 2 (vv. 15, 18), Genesis 6:11-13 (v. 18)

### APPLICATION OF CHAPTERS 8-11:

What can we as a congregation learn about *"prophesying"* (speaking for God) in a hostile world? (10:11, 11:1-14)

## ROUND 3: CHAPTERS 12-22

### INTERLUDE SCENE 1: THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON (CHAP. 12)

Not chronologically after chapter 11, but flashbacks and revelations about the future from the beginning to the end. Behind the scenes.

OT References:

* Birth (v. 2): Zion/Jerusalem in Is 66:7-9, Micah 4:9-10
* "rule all the nations with an iron scepter" (v. 5): Psalm 2 ➡ Messiah
* On eagle's wings (v. 14): Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 19:4)
* *"a time, times and half a time"* (v. 14): From Dan 7:25, 12:7 - about tribulations
* The mythological chaos monster Leviathan had several heads (Job, Psalm 74, 89, Isaiah 27, 30, 51). The 4th beast in Dan 7 had 10 horns.

The woman is Israel, who "gives birth" to the Messiah, but also the church that is persecuted by the dragon (Satan). A revelation of who is pulling the strings. Encouragement to persevere and assurance that God will preserve them.

vv. 7-9: A description of Satan being defeated; not clear when it happened. The point is that he fell because of what Jesus did (vv. 10-11, Luke 10:18, John 12:31).

Does not have to mean that he was in God's heaven; can also be the "heavenly space" where it was thought that the spirits dwelled (cf. Ephesians).

He is defeated in the spirit world but active on earth.

Important: Christians also overcome him *"by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."* (v. 11) They learn that he is going to persecute them but that he can be overcome, even if it may means that they die.

### INTERLUDE SCENE 2: THE FIRST BEAST (13:1-10)

Similar to the dragon with 7 heads, 10 horns and 10 crowns.

A mixture of the dragon/Leviathan and leopard/bear/lion from Dan 7 (world powers) ➡ the evil imperial power that opposes God.

v. 4: Nero's suicide in the year 68 AD led to 4 emperors in one year and many rebellions in the provinces. It looked as if the imperial power would collapse, but then it became stronger for a long time under Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian.

Blasphemous names because the emperors took divine titles: *“Son of God”*, *“Lord”*, *“Saviour”* and even *“God”*.

The Romans came "up from the sea" (v. 1, CEV) when they landed on the coast of Asia Minor.

A revelation that Satan has "delegated" the persecution to the emperor who has power over the "whole" world. Everyone else worships him, but Christians must resist.

### INTERLUDE SCENE 2: THE SECOND BEAST (13:11-18)

Later called “the false prophet” (16:13, 19:20, 20:10)

Lamb/Dragon: May look like a savior, but has the voice of Satan.

Causes everyone on earth to worship the first beast:

* The ministers who promoted Roman rule, especially as it appeared in the emperor’s worship?
* The priests of the imperial cult who are said to have deceived people with their miracles of light and fire and ventriloquism that caused the image of Caesar to "speak" (v. 15)?
* Propaganda that makes people worship the emperor.

Worship of the beast is represented by the mark of the beast on the hand or forehead (as with the exodus from Egypt in Exodus 13:9,16 and the law in Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18)

### THE BEAST AND ITS MARK

Many suggestions:

* Luther and other Protestants: The Pope
* Catholic Church: Martin Luther = 666
* The Mennonites in the 17th century: Infant baptism
* Barcodes, VISA, www, COVID-19...

Must have to do with financial persecution

*"Mark"* (*charagma*) was used for the emperor's stamp on documents and his image on coins.

### 666

"Neron Kaisar" in Hebrew = 666

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| קסר | נרון |
| (RSQ) | (NWRN) |
| 200 + 60 + 100 | 50 + 6 + 200 + 50 |

## THE MARK OF THE BEAST AND THE SEAL OF GOD

**What is the mark of the beast? (13:17)**

The name of the beast or the number of its name.

**What is the seal of God defined as? (14:1)**

The name of the Lamb and the name of his Father

**Where on the body is the mark of the beast placed? (13:16)**

On their right hands or their foreheads.

**Where are the Lamb's name and his Father's name written? (14:1)**

On their foreheads.

**Can you have the mark of the beast and the seal of God on your forehead at the same time?**

No.

**What do these verses seem to describe? (13:16-18 & 14:1-5)**

The two names people can be "marked" with spiritually.

**What is the mark of the beast associated with? (14:9)**

Worship of the beast and its image.

**Who will worship the beast? (13:8)**

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life.

**What is written on the one who is victorious? (3:12)**

The name of God, the name of the city of God, and the name of Jesus.

**What will be on the foreheads of the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem? (22:4)**

God's name.

**When do you get the seal of God? (Eph 1:13, 4:30, 2 Cor 1:22)**

When you come to believe.

**Can a Christian have the mark of the beast?**

No.

**CONCLUSION**

Christians have God's seal on their foreheads.

A Christian cannot have both the seal of God and the mark of the beast on his forehead.

Therefore, Christians do not need to fear the mark of the beast.

**And if it is still in the future…**

* Did the first readers see microchips, visa cards, or barcodes?
* Did they understand the message in the book?
* Were they frightened by this message?
* Is it obvious that you worship the beast if you have the mark of the beast?
* Will a microchip automatically make you worship someone other than God?
* Will a vaccination pass automatically make you worship someone other than God?
* Should you worry if it doesn't make you worship anyone other than God?
* How are we saved according to the rest of the Bible?
* Is it wise to create a theology that adds something to faith from this strange book alone?
* Is there anything written in small print in our "salvation contract" with God?
* Does God want to deceive you?

## ROUND 3: CHAPTERS 12-22

### INTERLUDE - SCENE 3: THE 144,000 AND THE JUDGMENT (CHAP. 14)

First, they are seen with God's seal (vv. 1-5), and then the judgment is seen on those who have taken the mark of the beast (vv. 6-20).

v. 5 from Zeph 3:13, about *"the remnant of Israel"* (believing Israel)

vv. 10-11: Literal eternal torment before the angels and the Lamb?

* Apocalyptic literature is rarely to be interpreted literally.
* It is *the smoke* that rises forever, as from Babylon (19:3) and Edom/the nations (Is 34:10). A picture of destruction.
* "burning sulfur" is only used to describe Sodom (Genesis 19, Luke 17:29) and Gog (Ezekiel 38:22). Similar expressions in Ps 11:6 and Isa 34:9. Expression of destruction.

*“no rest day or night”*:

Also from Isa 34:10 ➡ related to the smoke. Possibly, the order is changed to create a chiasm.

"the wine of God’s fury" (v. 10) ➡ the winepress in vv. 19-20 = not an eternal process.

Figurative interpretation: The judgment occurs in front of the Lamb, and it is final.

### SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 12-14:

"The great battle" has already been won, but therefore there will be persecution (Ch. 12). They must persevere and not worship the emperor (Ch. 13), then God will intervene and judge evil (Ch. 14).

What encourages you most from these chapters?

### CHAPTER 15: THE SONG OF THE LAMB

v. 2 - The same sea as in 4:6, but now with fire (= after judgment?)

Moses' song: Exodus 15, after the miracle of the Red Sea.

Those who have overcome the beast (v. 2) stand before God. The judgment (the 7 bowls) comes upon those who live on earth and who worship the beast (16:2).

A new deliverance for God's people (meaning judgment on the oppressors). In Exodus, they stood next to the Red Sea and sang about salvation. Here they sing Moses' song again, this time *at* the sea.

### BOWL NO. 1-4 (16:2-9)

No longer 1/4 or 1/3, but completely. "Doomsday" has arrived.

1. Festering sores (Exodus 9:10-11). God's people are not affected now either.

2. The sea of blood (Exodus 7:17-21) ➡ new exodus

3. Rivers and springs of blood (Exodus 7:17-21) ➡ v. 6

* v. 5 - No longer "is going to come". The end for the 3rd time.

4. The sun is scorching. This should have caused them to repent.

### BOWL NO. 5-6 (16:10-16)

5. The beast's kingdom is put in darkness (Exodus 10:22) ➡ the new Egypt that oppresses them is judged. No repentance.

6. The Euphrates dries up (➡ The Red Sea, Jordan, Jos 4:23)

Kings from the East: The Parthians again (as the 6th trumpet). Frogs from Exodus 8:3.

Gathering of the nations: Judgment language in the prophets (Joel 3:7, Zeph 3:8, Isa 13:4-6, Zech 14:2-3). Also, Psalm 2.

Armageddon = Har-Megiddo (Mount Megiddo): Still no repentance

### THE MEGIDDO PLAIN

"Mount Megiddo" does not exist. Megiddo is instead a plain where some battles in the OT took place (e.g., Judg 5:19, 2 Kings 23:29). The nearest mountain is Tabor (Judges 4).

How much did the churches in Asia know about the geography of Israel anyway?

The kings from the East seem to be God's instrument to judge the Roman Empire, and then all the kings of the world are judged. But this war is almost skipped because in the next verse, the judgment takes place.

*"Armageddon"* is not a world war leading up to Judgment Day but occurs on Judgment Day (15:1, 16:5, 16:15).

### BOWL NO. 7 (16:17-21)

Earthquake - as at the 6th seal.

Lightning, rumblings, and thunder ➡ 4:5, 8:5, 11:19

The great city/great Babylon = Rome (17:18). Judgment on both the Roman Empire and the whole world.

*"God remembered"* (v. 19): An encouragement that justice will be done. (Nah 1:3)

v. 20 → as at the 6th seal (6:14)

Hail (Exodus 9:24) of approx. 50 kg ➡ complete destruction

Still no repentance, only mockery.

### THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON (17:1 - 19:10)

17:1 - Rome was not a port city, but the Roman Empire "sat" on the Mediterranean, people and nations (v. 15). (Jer 51:13)

17:2 - Worshiped the Roman gods/emperor, exalted Rome itself to become a goddess and the center of the world.

17:3-6 - An abominable image... (among others from Jer 51:7)

Rome sits on the beast: Is the Roman state carried by the emperors/military power?

Is the beast the persecuting imperial power?

It *was* (under Nero), *isn't* (state persecution now), but *it's coming*?

### THE ROMAN EMPERORS (17:8-11)

7 = all the emperors of Rome? ➡ Imperial power is coming to an end.

The readers knew who ruled. This is not meant to be a puzzle for other readers later.

The point is to show *what* the reigning emperor is and who is really behind it, so they are not fooled by the apparently calm period before the eruption.

### SOME OF THE CAUSES OF THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

1. Corruption and political instability. Civil wars in 180-285
2. Economic problems and too much dependence on slaves.
3. Too big to control. People far away from Rome adopted local customs and mixed with other people groups.
4. Divided into east and west in 395. Poorer external defense and internal disputes over resources. Later, there was a financial crisis in the West (Rome).
5. Invasions by barbarians (Goths, Vandals, Franks, Angles, Saxons, etc.). Rome was captured in 410, with a final fall in 476.
6. The Austrian Empire (Constantinople) stood until 1453.

### DID THE PARTHIANS PLAY A ROLE IN THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE?

The Parthians attacked in 115 AD, and the Roman garrisons in Seleucia, Nisibis, and Edessa (closest to Asia/Syria/Israel) were taken over by the locals.

161 AD: The Parthians took Armenia, Syria, and Odessa.

The Sasanians (descendants) attacked Syria and Mesopotamia in 230 and 238-240.

Constant wars throughout history, but the Parthians never really conquered the Roman Empire. The image is probably used because it made sense to the readers (as the enemy the Romans were never able to conquer), even though there were many people groups involved in the fall of the Roman Empire.

The Huns came from the northeast and caused other people groups to move west and eventually into the Roman Empire. They were a reason why the Roman Empire fell.

### WHAT IS WRONG WITH “BABYLON”?

Idolatry (spiritual fornication), blasphemy (emperor worship and kingdom self-exaltation [18:7]).

Violence, especially against Christians (18:20). *"Babylon"* is not only the Roman Empire (18:24). Jerusalem killed the prophets and may also be "Babylon" (11:8).

Wealth. Much economic and commercial language is used in mourning (18:3,11-19,23). Economic pressure was more common than violence against Christians in John's time.

Echoes from many of the judgments against Babylon in the OT prophets.

### A SUGGESTION TO THE READERS

*“Go away from her, my people!”* 18:4

* Quote from Isa 52:11, where it is used about Judah returning from Babylon.
* Where will they go? ➡ The new Jerusalem.
* Paul uses it to talk about sanctification (2 Corinthians 6:17)

### A COMMANDMENT TO US

*"'Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues"* 18:4

*"What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” Therefore, “Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” And, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."* (2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1)

The readers are not asked to leave the Roman Empire physically, but not to partake of its sins. Nor should we go out of the world, but stay away from what makes us unclean so that we can live holy lives according to God's will.

### JESUS' RETURN (19:11-21)

A wonderful sight for the first readers. Jesus and the heavenly hosts (Matthew 25:31, Mark 13:27, 2 Thess 1:7-8) dressed in white, invincible, coming to save them.

Many crowns (v. 12): The rightful king of the world

Another aspect of who Jesus is. He comes to (v. 15):

* strike down the nations and rule them with an iron scepter (Psalm 2)
* tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty (Is 63)

*"The faithful and true witness"* (3:14) has become the *"Faithful and True"* (v. 11) judge.

v. 12: Eyes like fire = judgment (Is 66:16)

v. 13: Bloody clothes before the battle begins ➡ his blood

OT references in vv. 17-21:

* The birds' feast from Ezek 39:4, 17-20 (Job 39:27-30) ➡ judgment picture (as in Matt 24:28 and Luke 17:37)
* Reversal from Zeph 1:7-9
* Psalm 2 (v.19) — the world's rebellion against God (ever since Genesis 3)

The beast and the false prophet are defeated!

* burning sulfur (v. 20) = destruction in the OT, not eternal torment
* the fiery lake = a lake of God's judgment (*"the second death"*, 20:14)

### THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM (20:1-10)

v. 2: Satan was bound at the 1st coming of Jesus (Matthew 12:29)

v. 3: He can deceive individuals, but no longer the nations because they are now part of God's people. (Isaiah 25:7)

v. 4: Allusion to Dan 7, where the 4th beast is killed and the kingdom is given to the saints. In Revelation, the beast is killed in chapter 19, while the kingdom is given to the saints here.

A. Martyrs reign with Christ until the resurrection of the dead.

B. A picture of all Christians (a “martyr church”) ruling (1:6, 5:10 and 22:5) with Christ until the resurrection of the dead. A first (spiritual) resurrection (Eph 2:6), before the final (physical) resurrection.

v. 8:

* *"Gog of Magog"* (Ezek 38-39) had already become "Gog and Magog" in Jewish tradition and was understood as the great enemy of God's people to be overcome in the last war.
* Probably a symbol of the nations in rebellion against God in Ezekiel. Probably the same here (as in 16:16, 19:18).

v. 9:

* All nations surround Jerusalem in Zechariah 12:3 and 14:2.
* Fire from heaven upon Magog in Ezek 39:6
* Here *"the camp of God’s people"* can be the congregation *"The new Jerusalem"* (3:12, 21:2)

### JUDGMENT (20:11-15)

Book of life: He who is victorious (3:5), written from the creation of the world (13:8, 17:8); they do not worship the beast (13:8); those who enter the new Jerusalem (21:27).

Lake of fire: It is not expected to take this literally in this genre (as both the animals, death, and Hades are also thrown there). Can well be understood as a sea of God's judgment (God's final, irreversible judgment).

The 2nd death: A death after an ordinary, physical death

It is easy to get caught up in the wars, the Millennium, and the lake of fire and almost overlook that Jesus will return as a king to judge righteously and wipe out all evil, even death itself.

### A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH (21:1-8)

Replacement? (2 Pet 3:13) Especially evangelical theology since the early 20th century.

Renewal? (Acts 3:21, Rom 8:21-22) Irenaeus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Aquinas, medieval theology, Luther, the Calvinists…

OT References:

* v. 3: Leviticus 26:11-12, Ezek 37:27, 48:35, Zech 2:15.
* v. 4: Isa 25:8, 65:18-19.

“*kainos, neos*:

*neos* denotes the new primarily in reference to time, the young, recent;

*kainos* denotes the new primarily in reference to quality, the fresh, unworn.”

*"the cowardly"*: the word is used for *"fear"* in Matt 8:26, Mark 4:40, John 14:27 and can therefore be understood as those who do not believe. Because fear is the opposite of faith/trust.

### THE NEW JERUSALEM (21:9-27)

12 gates, 12 angels, 12 tribes, 12 foundations, 12 names, 12 apostles, 12,000 stadia, 144 cubits, 12 pearls.

Shape: 12,000 x 12,000 x 12,000 stadia (v. 16).

As the Most Holy Place (20 x 20 x 20 cubits, 1 Kings 6:20).

Symbolizes God's covenant with mankind.

An image of God's presence (vv. 3, 22-23) that comes down to people again.

Heaven and earth, God and men, are finally reunited again after Genesis 3.

The temple's function as a meeting place between God and people is fulfilled (v. 22), and the glory of God (which was in the Most Holy Place) and the Lamb is the light of the city (v. 23).

The marriage in Genesis 2 → The wife of the Lamb

### LIFE ON THE NEW EARTH (22:1-5)

v. 1: *"the river of the water of life"*: The image is taken from Ezek 47:1-11. The Spirit is the living water in e.g., John 4 and John 7:37-39.

v. 2: The tree of life: Again within the reach of men.

The tree and the river represent the food and drink of the new earth.

v. 3: No longer any curse (Genesis 3). Everything is restored. This is eternal life.

v. 4: *"They will see his face"*: No one ever did! A powerful image of God's presence.

v. 5: *"And they will reign for ever and ever."* The first earth was given to man to cultivate and subdue. The new earth will likewise be given to the church.

*"Christian ethics... is about practicing, in the present, the tunes we shall sing in God's new world."* N.T. Wright

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| **THE OT** | **THE BOOK OF REVELATION** |
| *The city's name is "The Lord is there"* (Ezekiel 48:35) | *"God’s dwelling place is now among the people"* (21:3) |
| *"They will be my people"* (Ezekiel 37:27) | *"They will be his people (plural)"* (21:3) |
| The city is shaped like a square (Ezek 48:16) | The city is shaped like a cube (21:16) |
| Don't need the sun or moon; God will be the city's light and glory. (Isaiah 60:19) | Needs no sun or moon; God's glory shines upon it, and the Lamb is its light. (21:23) |
| The gates always stand open, and the wealth of the nations is brought in. (Isaiah 60:11) | *"On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it."* (21:25-26) |
| The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter (Isaiah 52:1) | *"Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful"* (21:27) |
| Water from the temple becomes a great river (Ezek 47:1-11) | A river of water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1) |
| All kinds of fruit trees grow along the river and bear fruit every month; the leaves are for healing. (Ezek 47:12) | The tree of life grows on both sides of the river, bearing twelve crops of fruit; the leaves are for healing the nations. (22:2) |
| Never again will a ban be lifted over Jerusalem. (Zechariah 14:11) | *"No longer will there be any curse."* (22:3) |

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| **BABYLON (ROME)** | **THE NEW JERUSALEM** |
| Prostitute (17:5) | Bride (21:2, 9) |
| Glory from earthly riches (17:4; 18:12-13, 16) | The glory of God is the glory of the city (21:11, 23) |
| Fornication and witchcraft (17:2; 18:3, 23; 19:2) | The people walk in the light of the city (21:24) |
| Bought his glory from the nations (18:12-17) | The glory of the nations is brought into it (21:24, 26) |
| Abominations, impurity, sorcery (17:4-5, 18:23) | Impurity, abominations, and lies shall not enter (21:27) |
| Wine that intoxicates the nations (14:8, 17:2, 18:3), blood and slaughter (17:6, 18:24) | Heals the nations (22:2) |
| God's people are called out (18:4) | God's people are called in (22:14) |

## WHAT DOES THIS BOOK TELL US?

* We must persevere. We will always have difficulties as Christians. As Jesus was killed, so might we. We must be prepared to suffer and perhaps die. The persecutions gave the church publicity, so Christianity spread. *"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."* (Tertullian, 2nd century)
* God will judge the evil in the world. And that's a good thing.
* We must spread the gospel because God will judge the world.
* Totalitarian regimes are a threat. The "Roman Empire" can be resurrected.