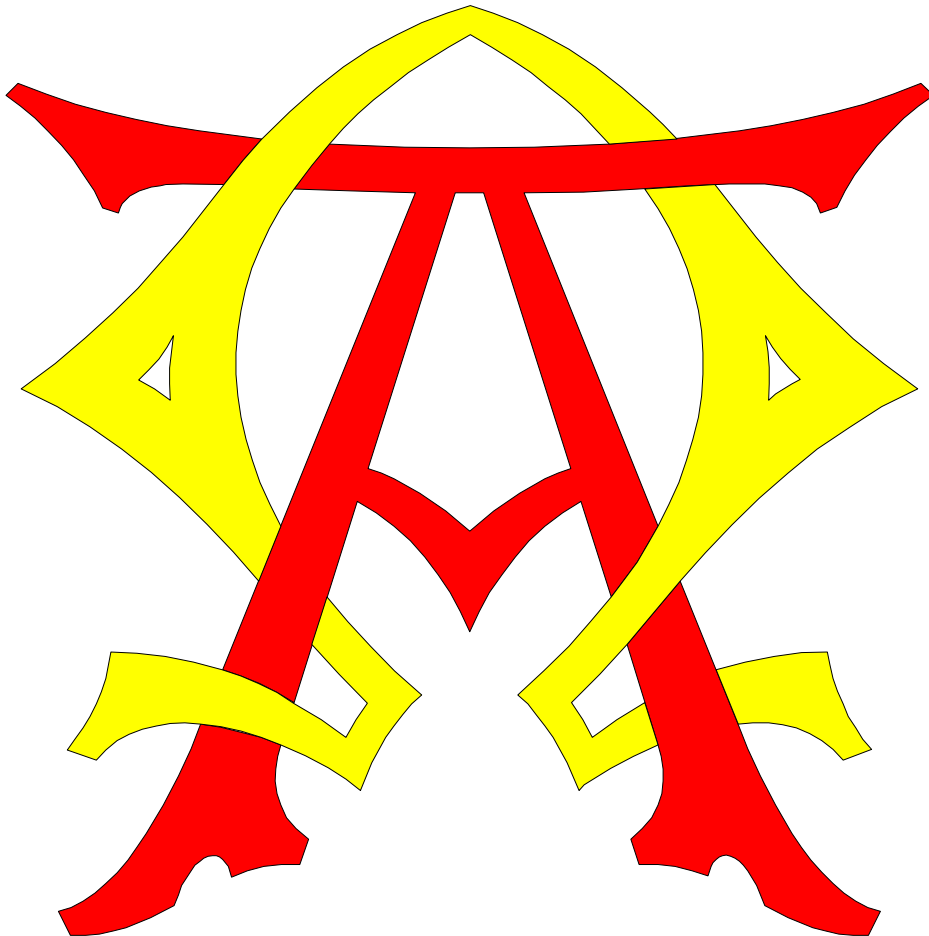
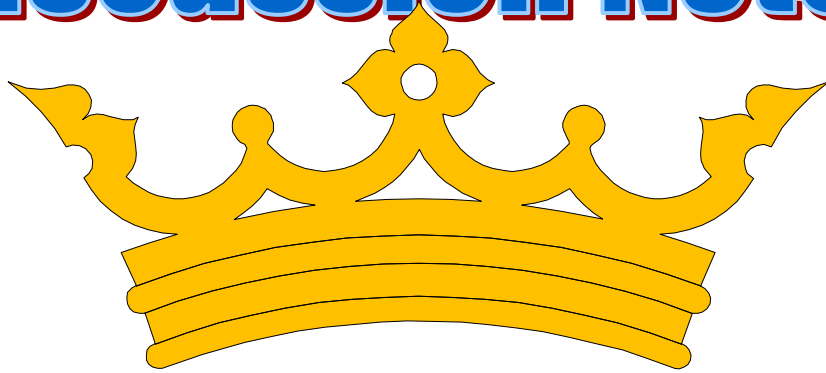


# REVELATION

## Discussion Notes



*Before you begin...*

*It is important to read the relevant chapters of*

*Revelation prior to the discussion.*

*If you can read the whole book in one sitting so much the better.*

*Refer to the outline pages to try and establish an overview in your mind.*

*As you read jot down any questions that arise, to bring up with the group.*

*Bear in mind that Christians differ in places as to the interpretation of some things, but these need not be causes of division. They are usually not of crucial importance in the final analysis. It is the overall thrust of the book which is important and the gospel which is central to it.*

## **Read Page one, introduction and the five-part overview Re-read Overview one**

### **Introduction**

Revelation is a message first to the seven churches (of chapters 2 and 3) and then to the Church of Jesus Christ throughout history. Any understanding of the book should have made sense to the original readers (probably living under the reign of Domitian - AD 81-96), and also to the Church in every age, not just to Christians living at the very end of time.

The message of Revelation is the gospel message. That Jesus Christ's death on the Cross was the perfect sacrifice for Sin; that through His death and resurrection He has conquered Satan and rules supreme over the world; and that because of this, all those who claim Jesus as Lord will, despite opposition, inherit eternal life. The call to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 is a call to endure in the Faith to the end. The rest of Revelation is to encourage them (and us) further in that goal.

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Mystery or Revelation?**

It seems like the most mis-named book in the Bible. When you consider that it's called "Revelation" most people seem to actually regard it as the greatest mystery they've ever read. To be sure, it was probably better understood by the original readers, and I know I've changed my mind numerous times over what some of the details mean. However, I'm convinced that even those who interpret the book differently can agree on the general gist of it.

### **1: Hang in There! (Revelation 1-3)**

Revelation is written first to the seven churches mentioned in chapters two and three, and secondly to all churches in every age which experience what they did. And what did they experience? Impostors, hardship, heretics, poverty, idolatry, immorality, deadness, and lukewarmness. Even John is writing to them from the island of Patmos, where he has been banished for his faith. Obviously things are pretty crook!

But Jesus, who is described in a different way to each church (picking up from the description in chapter one), has a message for them. He praises each where praise is due, points out where they're going wrong, and where appropriate gives warnings of what will happen if they continue on the same track - In the case of Ephesus, their light will go out! Jesus doesn't mince words, but the bottom line is that he is encouraging each church to hang in there. He says, "To everyone that conquers I will give..." - what? Well it's described as "the tree of life," "the crown of life," "a white stone with a new name," "the morning star," one's name in the book of life," "made a pillar in the temple of God and have the name of God," and "the right to sit with Jesus on the throne." And each is the promise of eternal life.

*Whatever your circumstances, remain faithful to God, hang on to the faith, because deliverance is at hand.* As we shall see that's not just the message of the first three chapters, but of the whole book, and it's not just for them, it's for you and me.

### **2: Worthy is God and the Lamb. (Revelation 4-5)**

If Jesus' message to the seven churches in Revelation (and to us) is to hang in there. then the rest of the book gives us good reasons for doing so. John gives a glimpse into heaven. Chapter four, verse one says, "...and there in heaven, a door stood open." And beyond the door? An awe-inspiring vision of God sitting on his throne surrounded by his merciful promises (the rainbow), special angels (elders), by the most powerful of the animal kingdom (the creatures) and signs typical of the presence of God (lightnings, rumblings and peals of thunder). The elders and creatures worship God and submit to

him. "You are worthy, our Lord and God," they sing, "to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things." What better message for a minority people, feeling persecuted and discouraged, to realise that God is Lord and King. There is nothing outside of his control.

"But what of all the evil in the world!" I hear you say. "Where is justice? Will no-one put right all the evil?" That is exactly the question in 5:2.... "Who is able to open the scroll and break its seals?" For the scroll seems to represent the outworking of God's justice and judgement. Opening the seals is the way to enact God's plan of deliverance. But there is no-one worthy to do so, and John weeps for the sin of the world, the unworthiness of humankind and the apparent hopelessness of the situation. But not for long. He is told that "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and the seven seals." None other than Jesus Christ holds the key to the future! But when John looks, he sees, not a lion but a lamb, as if slaughtered. The pathetic figure of weakness reminds us that the way to victory is the way of suffering, for there is no hope and no glory without Jesus' death on the cross. And the elders and creatures in an acknowledgement of Jesus' divinity, sing, "You are worthy... by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation... and they will reign on earth." In the midst of strife, Christians of every age can know that hope springs anew through Jesus. The scroll is to be opened, and the future laid bare. But what will it reveal?

### **3: Seals, Trumpets and Bowls**

What follows is three series of judgements which are similar to the plagues in Egypt from Exodus: six seals (chapter 6), six trumpets (8:2 - 9:20) and six bowls (chapter 16). Some think that all these things happened symbolically prior to Jesus, others that even we have yet to see these things happen, and still others that they are the history of the world where things become worse and worse with each cycle. I think that, although the destruction becomes worse in each cycle, each is basically saying the same thing, for the seventh seal (The Silence, 8:1), the seventh trumpet ("The Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord") and the seventh bowl ("It is done") denote completion, akin to a seventh day of rest, and the judgement day having arrived. It seems to me that the plagues are a picture of war, and poverty and death in every age, but that in each case God both allows them to happen but puts limitations on their destructiveness.

Now rings out the age-old question, "Why does God allow such things to happen?" Probably the best answer is that if God were simply to over-rule all human action (and the plagues here are obviously a result of human sinfulness) then he would have taken away both our freedom to choose and our humanity. But there is another reason. Chapter 9, verse 20 reads, "The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent..." It is not the only reason why people suffer, but often only in the extremities of suffering and death do people realise their need to change direction and turn to God. In the middle of the fearful images of these cycles, Revelation encourages those who have repented (ie. Christians, also known as saints ) to realise that in the tragedies of the world's history, God preserves his people.

### **4: Saints: "Preserve us"**

The people of God on earth certainly don't have an easy time of it! Revelation describes them as "those slaughtered for the word of God" (6:9), but also "those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand, redeemed from the earth" (7:4 & 14:1), "a great multitude that no-one could count" (7:9ff), "two witnesses" (11:3-4), "those who had been victorious over the beast" (15:2), those who came to life in the first resurrection "and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (20:5), "the Holy City, the New Jerusalem,... prepared as a bride" (chap 21), and so on. Some may wish to distinguish in these descriptions between God's people of the Old Testament, those of the New Testament church, and those who were actually martyred, but the overall picture is of people who have remained faithful to God in the face of Satan's onslaughts. These onslaughts are mediated through earthly rulers such as "the beast" and political systems such as "Babylon, the great mother of prostitutes" (chaps. 13-14 & 17), who were probably a Roman emperor and the Roman Empire at the time of writing, but could just as well apply to any godless, tyrannical rulers of past, present and future ages.

Are the people of God to escape? Well, yes and no. As Christians we should not think that we will be spared persecution. In fact the picture of the two witnesses should make us expect it! However, John's writing encourages us to realise that even in death, there is resurrection. For example, see the souls preserved under God's altar (6:9), and the dead witnesses coming to life and going up to heaven (11:11-12). In chapter 11:1-2, it has been suggested that the city is here symbolic of God's people, that the trampling of the "outer court" speaks of physical persecution and death, but that the temple (literally the inner sanctuary) is measured off or preserved. Yes, God's people will escape, not physically, but in the sanctuary of the soul which will, through faith in Jesus Christ, be in the presence of God. What will that be like? Beyond description! - Nevertheless we see how John attempts to describe it at the end of

his book.

## **5: In the end... The Beginning.**

*"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, coming for to carry me home."*

Christians know that this world for all its wonder, is not home. Peter talks of us as aliens, and the original readers of Revelation would have known what he was talking about. So would those of every age who have suffered for their faith, and those who have just suffered as part of the course of life. What is it, then, in the face of prolonged hardship, deprivation, bereavement and death, that keeps people going? The same vision which inspired the negro spirituals, sparking the light at the end of the tunnel, and bringing joy even to the worst of living conditions. The same vision which completes Revelation in chapters 21 and 22.

Evil has been dealt with. God has meted out justice on the oppressors and John is able to see a new heaven and new earth where there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain, and God's people are presented like the new city of Jerusalem, a new Israel. I remember watching the colourful spectacle of the tall ships and the fireworks at Sydney's bicentennial celebrations. Impressive though they were, they pale into insignificance, compared with this city, a huge cube, 2,400km high, wide and deep, made from precious stones with a street of pure translucent gold, and brilliantly lit by the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, the Lamb. This is a light show, to end all light shows, and it's you and me, the people of God! Here there is no more curse (Genesis 3) for in the street of this city is the river of the water of life, and the Tree of Life (also from Genesis) which brings healing to the nations.

The promises of eternal life, given to the seven churches, in chapters 2 and 3 are here painted in all their glory. *All* their glory? Well probably not. This is a picture of something which will be far more wonderful than we could ever describe on paper, but in the meantime it is enough to encourage us to persevere, and to continue issuing the invitation to others:-

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. (Rev 22:17 NRSV)*

## **PART 1 JESUS AND THE MESSAGE TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES**

### **Chapters 1-3**

**From Chapter 1** Determine...

- a) The real author of the book v1, 4-5
- b) The content of the book v2
- c) The purpose of the book v11
- d) John's situation v9
- e) The description of Jesus as compared with that of God

Discuss:-

What do you learn from this comparison?

What does the chapter teach about the Trinity?

How do the things we endure, compare with John's day?

How is the description of Jesus both frightening and encouraging?

Bearing in mind that these chapters are written primarily to churches rather than individuals discuss from chapters 2-3, and the summary...

Which church would you most... and least want to belong to?

Which church do you most identify with?

When in church life have you seen these characteristics worthy of praise

and those worthy of condemnation?

What are the threats?

Have you seen these things happen to churches?

What are the promises?

## **Re-read Overview two**

### **PART 2: Worthy is God and the Lamb 4-5**

What reinforces the picture of power in chapter 4?

Why is God worthy of praise?

In the light of chapters 2-3,  
what effect might such a vision have had on the  
seven churches?

What effect does it have on you? Can you say  
why?

Briefly determine:-

What does the scroll represent?

(This will become clearer as the seals are  
opened in subsequent chapters)

How is Jesus described in this chapter?

What is the significance of the terms  
“Lion”  
and “Lamb”

What has he achieved which makes him  
worthy to open the scroll?

What sort of confidence can we derive from  
this description?

How much does your church worship reflect  
that of heaven?

## **PART 3 TWO OF THREE CYCLES OF PLAGUES** Chapters 6-9

**Re-read Overview three  
and refer to the outline page.**

**From Chapter 6** discuss...

How much do we see aspects of the disasters brought by the four horsemen (verses 1-7) in world history and in our world today?

In the midst of disaster Christians also suffer and lose their lives for their Faith. What happens to them according to verses 9-11 (5th seal) ?

What do these verses teach us about avenging ourselves?

In verses 12-17 (6th seal) we seem to have an account of God's judgement finally arriving. (Compare with Matthew 24:29-30 and Amos 8:9-13).

**From Chapter 7** discuss...

Who are the 144,000?

What do they say?

What is their future?

Can *you* identify with them?

What is the "great tribulation" (verse 14)?

What do you think it would have meant to the seven churches?  
(refer also to the Three views of the Millenium at the end of the booklet)

What tribulations have Christians faced through the ages?

What encouragement is given to Christians who persevere?

**From Chapter 8:1-5** discuss...

The significance of the silence in heaven.

The possible content of the prayers of the saints (verse 3ff)

**From Chapter 8:6 to 9:21**

(The Plagues associated with the first six Trumpets)

[Note: The plagues are described in an “apocalyptic” highly stylised way, making it difficult to know whether they refer to particular events or disaster, war, disease and death in general.]

Some believe these plagues are all in the future, others that they have occurred through history, (perhaps with increasing magnitude). What do you think?

Why does God allow these things to happen according to 9:20-21?

**Re-read overview four**

## **PART 4 WITNESS & PERSECUTION**

### **Chapters 10-12 (Also Chapters 17-18)**

#### **Chapter 10**

What is this mystery?

What is the content of the little scroll?

Why is it both sweet and bitter?

How do you relate to this personally?  
What is your own experience of witnessing?

#### **Chapter 11**

Discuss what Sodom, Egypt, Babylon and Rome have in common in the history of God's people? (Refer also to chapters 17-18)

What were the characteristics of these dominant world powers?

What might correspond to those names today?

Make a list of some biblical characters who suffered in the course of witnessing for God and Jesus?

Do you know of any contemporary examples you can share with the group?

What is the assurance to these martyrs of the faith?

## **Chapters 12-15**

[Note: The woman appears to be the People of God, not just Mary, mother of Jesus. Satan seeks to destroy God's plans by attacking his people.]

How do you see Satan attacking the church today?

What assurances does the witnessing church have in the face of Satan's onslaughts?

How is the gospel played out in this description?

How does Satan work through leaders of nations today? (Chapter 13)

H

How are the People of God described in chapter 14?

Is this or will it be, you?

What could deflect the People of God from following the Lamb, what would be the results?

What are the rewards here for "faithful endurance"? (Chapters 14:13-14 & chapter 15)

## **PART 5 JUDGEMENT**

### **Chapter 16**

#### **The third and final cycle of Plagues. The seven Bowls.**

Compare these plagues to the plagues of Egypt in Exodus.

What are the parallels between those events and these?

What is the purpose of these plagues?

### **Chapter 17**

Why is evil unable to defeat Jesus and his followers? Verse 14

How does evil bring destruction on it's own in the world today? See verses 15-16.

### **Chapter 18**

What is the destiny of "Babylon"?

I

In what way are Christians to "come out of Babylon" (verse 4)? And why?

From what do we need to separate ourselves?

### **Chapter 19**

What are the reasons for the rejoicing of the great multitude?

Do these revelations cause you to rejoice?  
(Share your reasons)

How is Jesus described in this chapter?

What is the fate of the “Beast” (refer to chapter 13) and the “False Prophet” (16:13)?

## **Chapter 20**

What do you think it means when it refers to Satan being bound for one thousand years?

What do you think the “millenium” is (verses 1-8)?  
(Refer to the back of *Revelation Text with Notes* for three views of the millenium).

What is the fate of the devil?

How does this description contrast with the popular notion that the devil is in control of hell?

What is the fate of death and Hades?  
[Note: Hades is the place of the dead. It appears to be a waiting place and verses 4-6 suggest that it is those who have rejected Christ who occupy it.]

The fate of those not found in the book of life?

How should we respond to this knowledge?

**Re-read overview five.**

## **PART 6 HEAVEN**

### **Chapter 21**

[Note: The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb is the People of God.]  
How is the city described?

Can you identify with the description and if so how does it feel to be described this way?

What will the city's relationship be with God and Jesus on that day?

### **Chapter 22**

Compare and contrast this description in verses 1-5 with Genesis 1-3.

What encouragements and warnings do you find in verses 6-21?

What do you see as the key verse in these verses?

Share your overall impression of Revelation now?

What has spoken to you most from your understanding of it?

Is there anything in your life which you now want to change as a result of reading it?

What questions do you still have?

## FOUR MAJOR APPROACHES TO THE INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION

**The Futurist** tends to see everything from chapter four onwards as taking place just prior to Christ's return. It is a view often connected with Premillennialism and looks for fulfilment in current global trends.

**The Historicist** sees in Revelation the unfolding of history from the time of John's writing to the end of the world. A feature of this approach is to believe that the Pope, and revived Roman power is the antichrist.

**The Preterist** believes that the prophecies of Revelation have already taken place, but some still see the last few chapters as looking to the end of the world.

**The Spiritual Approach** sees much of Revelation occurring in the spiritual realm, between Satan and the angels. Where the symbolism does connect with the physical world, it is in recurring cycles of events.

Interpreters tend to major on one approach, but dip into the others at certain points.

## COMMENTARIES ON REVELATION

*"Apocalypse Now and Then"* by Paul Barnett is a good introduction to Revelation. It is easy to read and gives a good overall view.

*"Essential Vision"* by Michael Wilcock is a cheaper reprint of the Revelation commentary from the Bible Speaks Today Series. It is easy to read, clearly explained and has some very interesting insights.

*"Gospel in Revelation"* by Graeme Goldsworthy is not a commentary but emphasises the gospel theme, which in turn helps to clarify the overall message.

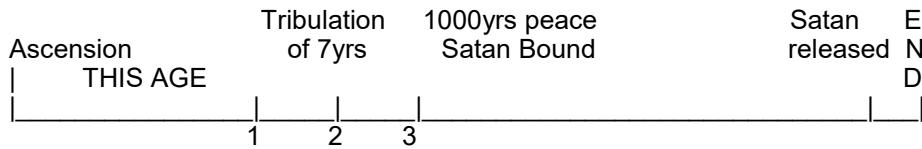
*"The Revelation of St John the Divine"* by G.B. Caird is more technical but also helps to throw light on some obscure passages. He appears to believe however that everyone will be saved in the end (Universalism) but, to my mind, without sufficient justification from the text of the Bible.

*"Revelation"* in The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol 12, is another more technical commentary which is helpful at points.

*"Revelation, Four Views. A Parallel Commentary"* ed. Steve Gregg is a very useful comparison of four approaches to the interpretation of the letter, laid out side by side.

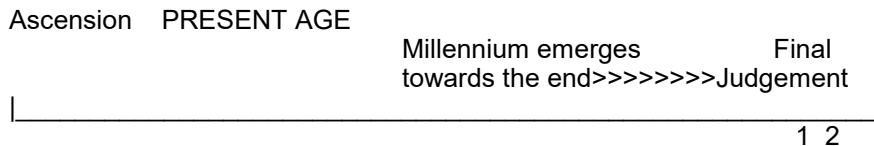
### **THREE VIEWS OF THE MILLENIUM (1000yrs) of REVELATION 20**

#### **PREMILLENNIALISM - Jesus comes before the Millennium**



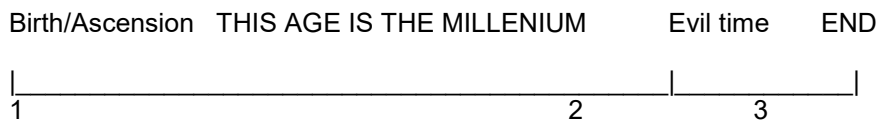
Jesus may return at 1, 2, or 3 to catch Christians up to meet him in the air. This is known as the Rapture. He establishes his reign and rules with Christians for the 1000years at 3. The Judgement is at the END. PREMILLENNIALISM tends to take descriptions and numbers at face value instead of symbolically (ie a literal 1000yrs and a literal rule over the inhabitants of the earth. It sees the chapters of Revelation as being in time sequence. The Millennium is not seen in the gospels but is additional teaching to them. It is a futurist view and tends to have less practical application to present Christian living (or to the original readers). It is also a majority view amongst evangelicals.

#### **POSTMILLENNIALISM - Jesus comes after the Millennium**



POSTMILLENNIALISM teaches that a period of good will emerge towards the end of this age (popular idea when the great missionary movements were at their peak - Less popular when world wars came along and a decrease in church attendance.) Some believe in a period of evil (1) just prior to Christ's second coming (2). Tends to play down a period of tribulation. Not a widely held view today.

#### **A-MILLENNIALISM (Literally: Without a Millennium)**



Jesus' birth, death, resurrection and ascension herald the end of Satan's deception and the start of Christ's reign. Those who die as Christians will also reign with him, NOW. Christians, although victorious in Christ spiritually, still suffer persecution, so this age is also one of tribulation. Towards the end Satan will have one 'last fling' (2) before Christ's second coming (3) and the Judgement Day

**A Summary of  
The Letters to  
the Seven  
Churches**  
*J. D. West*

**Description of  
Jesus who  
brings the  
message**



Holds the seven stars  
& walks amongst the  
seven lampstands



Alpha & Omega.  
First & Last who  
died and came to life  
again.



Perseverance.  
Test imposters.  
Endured hardship.  
Not grown weary.  
Hate Nicolaitans.

They are materially  
poor but spiritually  
rich.

Has the sharp double  
edged sword.



Remain true to Jesus'  
Name.  
Did not renounce  
their faith.

Eyes are like blazing  
fire.  
Feet like burnished  
bronze.



For their love, faith,  
service, perseverance.  
Doing more than they  
did at first.

Holds the seven  
spirits of God and the  
seven stars.



Him who is holy and  
true.  
Holds the key of  
David.



The Amen.  
The faithful and true  
witness.  
Ruler of God's  
creation.

They have kept Jesus'  
word and not denied  
his Name.  
Endured patiently.

—

**Problems**

Forsaken their first  
love.

—

Some hold the  
teachings of Baalam  
and the Nicolaitans.

They tolerate  
'Jezebel'  
- sexual immorality  
- food offered to idols

They are dead and  
asleep.  
Their deeds are  
incomplete.

—

Neither cold nor hot.  
Wretched, pitiable,  
poor, blind, naked.

**Threat**

Removal of their  
lampstand.

—

Jesus will fight  
against them with the  
sword of his mouth.

A bed of suffering for  
her and those who  
follow her.  
Her children to be  
struck dead.  
Repaid as to deeds.

Jesus will come like a  
thief.

—

Will spit them out.

**Description of  
Eternal Life for  
those who hold  
to the Faith**

Right to eat the tree  
of life in the paradise  
of God

Crown of life.  
Not hurt by the  
second death.

Given authority over  
the nations.  
The morning star.

Hidden manna.  
A white stone with a  
new name written on  
it.

Walk with Jesus  
dressed in white.  
Name not erased  
from the Book of  
Life.  
Will be acknowledged  
before God

Kept from the hour of  
trial. Be made a pillar  
in the Temple of God.  
Have the name of  
God/Jerusalem, &  
Jesus' new name.

The right to sit with  
Jesus on his throne.

# REVELATION: An Outline.

## 1. JESUS the first and the last



## 2-3. MESSAGES TO THE 7 CHURCHES

"To those who overcome I will give...  
(eternal life)"

## 4. GOD'S THRONE



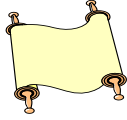
"You  
are worthy"

## 5. THE LAMB WHO IS WORTHY TO OPEN THE SCROLL



### THE SEVEN SEALS 6:1 to 8:1

- The Judgements of every age  
A Quarter destroyed.
1. WHITE horse sent to conquer
  2. RED horse of war
  3. BLACK horse of want
  4. PALE horse of death
  5. *Saints preserved under the altar*
  6. The Day of God's Wrath  
Earthquake and cosmic dislocation  
*The 144,000 preserved*
  7. Silence in heaven



### TRUMPETS 8:2 to 11:19

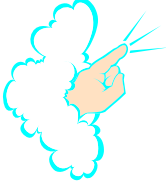


- Increased Judgements  
A Third destroyed
1. Hail and Fire - the earth burned
  2. Sea to blood
  3. Fresh water turned bitter
  4. Sun, Moon & Stars destroyed
  5. A "Star" tortures those w/o God's mark.
  6. 4 angels released. Kill humans with three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur.  
*Scroll of witness  
The Two Witnesses*
  7. "The Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord...time for judging"  
Temple in heaven opened

- 12-13** Persecution of the church  
(the woman)  
**WAR IN HEAVEN**  
Satan - the dragon  
hurled to earth.  
Seeks to make war  
v. God's people &  
uses the Beast &  
another beast to  
do so.
- 14** 144,000 redeemed  
Warnings v.  
worshipping he  
Beast.
- 15** *Vision of those  
who endured*

### BOWLS 16

- Last Plagues completing God's Wrath  
Total destruction
1. Sores
  2. Sea to blood
  3. Fresh water to blood
  4. Sun scorches
  5. Darkness
  6. Euphrates dries,  
gathering to Armageddon
  7. "It is done" God's Wrath  
Judgement on "Babylon" ch 17-18  
Praise to God for justice done 19:1-10  
Jesus - rider on a white horse 19:11-21  
Beast & false prophet burned in sulphur lake.



## SATAN 20

Is bound 1000 yrs in the Abyss  
Set free a short time  
- deceiving the nations  
- gathers for battle v. God's own  
Defeated and burned in sulphur lake

## GOD'S PEOPLE 20

*Came to life and reigned 1000yrs (The 1st Resurrection)*  
the second death (lake of fire) doesn't touch them  
  
Rest of the dead raised after the 1000yrs for  
JUDGEMENT DAY 20:11-15

## GOD'S PEOPLE 21-22

*New heaven and earth  
New Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb  
River of Life  
Tree of Life*

