

# INTRODUCTION TO 66<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION (between A.D. 70-98, probably about A.D. 95-96)

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### A. THE WRITER OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

#### 1. Internal evidence.

a. The author of the book. The book introduces itself as the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ. The word ‘apocalypse’ means unveiling, disclosing, revealing or revelation. This is done by means of “making known by signs” (symbols and numbers)(1:1)<sup>1</sup> in visions. Thus, the real Author of the book of Revelation is God in Christ. The contents of the book are not rooted in history, philosophy or religion, but in the mind of God. The book of Revelation reveals the purposes of God throughout human history. Jesus Christ caused John to see and hear this revelation by means of an angel. According to chapter 1:17 and 2:1 etc., Christ himself spoke to John and according to chapter 5:2, 17:1 etc., angels spoke God’s words to him and showed visions from God to him. And John was given the ability to hear and see God’s revelation and to record it faithfully.

b. The writer or recorder of the book. The book of Revelation mentions the writer or rather the recorder of this revelation as John (1:1,4,9; 22:8). The only person named John in the New Testament that did not need any further introduction in the first century A.D., was the apostle John, who also wrote the Gospel of John and the three letters of John. John did not write the book in the capacity of an ‘apostle’, whose function was to be an eye- and ear witness of Jesus Christ, especially of his death and resurrection<sup>2</sup>, but in the capacity of a ‘seer’, to whom visions were revealed<sup>3</sup>.

c. The differences in style between the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. In the Gospel of John the ideas flow smoothly, but in the Revelation of John the ideas are introduced abruptly. You don’t know what the author is going to write about next. The Gospel emphasises God’s love, but Revelation emphasises God’s judgement. The Gospel describes the inner condition of the heart, but Revelation dwells on the external course of events. The Gospel is written in *beautiful idiomatic Greek*, but Revelation is written in *rugged Hebraic Greek*. The reason for these differences is that John probably made use of his Greek assistants, the elders of the congregation of Ephesus, when he wrote the Gospel of John, but lacked such assistance when he was alone on Patmos writing the book of Revelation. Moreover, John probably did not have a Greek Old Testament of which he could make use on Patmos, but made much use of the Hebrew Old Testament in Revelation, which he knew from childhood. Nevertheless, the two books agree completely in doctrine.

d. The book of Revelation has much in common with the Gospel of John. Although the style of the book of Revelation differs from that of the Gospel of John, the two books have much in common. Both speak of the following:

- the manna for the hungry (2:17 John 6:49-51).
- the authority Christ received from the Father (2:27; John 10:18).
- Christ as the Lamb of God (5:6; John 1:29).
- Christ the Redeemer through his blood (5:9; John 6:35-56).
- Christ the Bridegroom (19:7; John 3:29).
- Christ the Word of God (19:13; John 1:1).
- the Church as the bride of Jesus (21:9; John 3:29). Christ as the Light of the world (22:5; John 8:12).
- Christ as “the pre-temporal eternal being” (22:13; John 1:1).
- the water of life for the thirsty (22:17; John 7:37). an invitation to whosoever (22:17; John 3:16).

<sup>1</sup> Greek: εσημασεν < σημανω

<sup>2</sup> John 15:27; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:9

<sup>3</sup> cf. 1 Samuel 9:9; Isaiah 30:10

e. Both the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation may be divided into two parts of three sections and four sections respectively.

<b>THE GOSPEL OF JOHN</b>	<b>THE BOOK OF REVELATION</b>
PART 1. John 1-12. <b>THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST</b>	PART 1. Revelation 1-11. <b>THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD</b>
<p>1. John 1-6. <i>From Christ's first coming onwards</i> The early ministry of Jesus in Judea and Galilee <i>December 26 to December 27</i></p> <p>2. John 7:1 - 10:39. The later ministries of Jesus in Galilee and Judea <i>December 27 to December 29</i></p> <p>3. John 10:40 - 12:50. The ministry of Jesus in Perea and Bethany <i>December 29 to April 30</i></p>	<p><i>From Christ's first coming onwards</i></p> <p>1. Revelation 1-3. The establishment of the Church in the world<sup>4</sup>.</p> <p>2. Revelation 4-7. The persecution of the Church by the world<sup>5</sup>.</p> <p>3. Revelation 8-11. God's warning judgements upon the world<sup>6</sup>.</p>
PART 2. John 13-21. <b>THE PRIVATE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST</b>	PART 2. Revelation 12-22. <b>THE VICTORY OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH OVER SATAN AND HIS HELPERS</b>
<p>4. John 13. <i>The last 7 weeks before his crucifixion</i> The Last Supper.</p> <p>5. John 14-17. The instruction during the Last Supper and his high priestly prayer.</p> <p>6. John 18-19. The suffering and crucifixion of Jesus</p> <p>7. John 20-21. The resurrection of Jesus and his appearances <i>The last 40 days before his ascension</i></p>	<p>4. Revelation 12-14. The victory of Christ and his Church over the dragon and his helpers<sup>7</sup></p> <p>5. Revelation 15-16. God's final wrath upon the unrepentant<sup>8</sup>.</p> <p>6. Revelation 17-19. God's irreversible judgement upon Babylon, the beast and the false prophet<sup>9</sup>.</p> <p>7. Revelation 20-22. God's kingdom in the present and in eternity<sup>10</sup>. <i>to beyond Christ's second coming</i></p>

## 2. External evidence.

a. The earliest testimonies. The earliest Christian writers and the early Church after the apostolic period unanimously ascribe the book of Revelation to the apostle John. They are Justin Martyr (A.D. 140). Irenaeus (A.D. 170), who was a student of Polycarp (a bishop of Ephesus), who in his turn was a disciple of the apostle John. The Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170). Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 190). Tertullian of Carthage (A.D. 190). Origen of Alexandria (A.D. 225) and Hippolytus (A.D. 240). According to a strong tradition, the apostle John was banished to Patmos and spent the closing years of his life in Ephesus to which the first letter of John was addressed.

b. A period of doubt. During the first centuries, the ancient Christian Church unanimously accepted the book of Revelation as written by the apostle John. However, for one period many in the Christian Church did not regard the book of Revelation as a part of the New Testament, not because of historical reasons, but because of dogmatic reasons. The main dogmatic problem was the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10 concerning 'the thousand years'. Dionysius of Alexandria (A.D. 250) ascribed the book of Revelation to another John, because he was not called 'the apostle' John, and Eusebius (A.D. 300) adopted this view. However, besides this period, the Christian Church throughout the world has regarded the book of Revelation as a part of the New Testament.

## B. THE RECIPIENTS.

### 1. The immediate recipients.

The immediate recipients were the Christians of seven historical congregations in Asia Minor during the first century A.D. among whom the apostle John lived and worked before and after his exile to the isle of Patmos. The book of

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>5</sup> John 16:33

<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:7

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:15

<sup>8</sup> Romans 2:5

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 2:17

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:37

Revelation was first of all intended for Christians living in the John's day and age. At least in part, the book owes its origin to the contemporary conditions of the apostle John: his exile to the island of Patmos, southwest of Ephesus on Asia Minor (1:9); the seven cities in Asia Minor that had these seven congregations (1:11). Also the persecuting Roman Empire governed from the city of Rome (cf. 17:9,18). God answered the tears and prayers of Christians living in Asia Minor in the last decade of the first century A.D.

## **2. The intended recipients.**

The intended recipients are Christians during the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. Throughout this commentary the words 'Christians' and 'Church' refer only to genuine born-again believers in Jesus Christ throughout history. Nominal Christians are not Christians in the biblical sense of the word. The reasons are the following:

a. The plural instead of the singular reference to 'churches'. The letters addressed to the seven congregations clearly indicate that the warnings and encouragements in the book were meant for the entire Christian Church throughout the whole New Testament period. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to *the churches*" (plural) (2:7, etc). The seven lampstands are seven congregations (1:20) and the number 7 symbolises divine perfection. The book of Revelation is directed to all the congregations in the world throughout the whole New Testament period. It is therefore also addressed to your congregation.

b. The historical trends instead of the identifiable historical events. The visions with their symbols and numbers in the book of Revelation are not identifiable literal, but symbolic literal. They are not a kind of history-written-beforehand containing detailed references to literal events, which must necessarily be demonstrable or identifiable historical events, persons and time-periods<sup>11</sup>. *No matter how the figures and intervals in the book have been pressed and twisted into yielding literal identifiable results, no clear parallel to the literal past or present history has yet been convincingly devised, nor can any clear parallel to future history be expected. No human being can identify the end-time events in a way as to predict its arrival*<sup>12</sup>. The visions with their symbols and numbers in the book of Revelation represent historical trends rather than identifiable historical events, persons or time-periods! The principles and happenings are so broad in their scope that they cannot be confined to one definite year, time period or century in history. The events symbolised by the seals, the trumpets and the bowls occur throughout all centuries between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming.

c. The struggling congregations are typical. The persecution and sufferings to which the Church in the days of John was subjected, are typical of the persecution and sufferings of congregations throughout the New Testament period<sup>13</sup> and especially just before Christ's second coming<sup>14</sup>.

d. The readers of the book throughout the whole New Testament period. Finally, the beginning (1:3) and the end of this book (22:18) make it clear that Jesus Christ addresses himself not merely to one group of people living in one decade in the first century. He says. "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it" (1:3). Jesus Christ intended the book of Revelation for all Christians in the world throughout the whole New Testament period.

## **C. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING THE BOOK.**

### **1. Internal evidence.**

When the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, the seven congregations mentioned in chapter 2 and 3 really existed. However, from the contents of the seven letters, which Jesus Christ wrote to them, it is clear that these congregations were not newly founded congregations, but well-established congregations, which struggled against the surrounding world around them and struggled against sin in her midst. The congregation of Ephesus had already gone through a struggle against false teachers, but also had forsaken her first love for Christ. In the congregations of Pergamum and Thyatira deplorable conditions existed. The congregations of Sardis and Laodicea were spiritually in a poor state. These facts point to a considerable time after the description of the founding of these congregations in the book of Acts<sup>15</sup>. Also according to Revelation 1:9, the apostle John said that he had been banned to the isle of Patmos, because of his preaching the word of God and his testimony of Jesus Christ. Both the deplorable conditions as well as the persecution of the Christian Church point to the reign of the Roman emperor, Caesar Domitian, who reigned from A.D. 81-95.

### **2. External evidence.**

There are two main views about when the book was written:

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<sup>11</sup> Like for example: 'the Balkan wars' or 'the First World War', 'Napoleon' or 'Stalin', or a Syrian antichrist arising amidst 'the European Commonwealth' mustering 'the Russians or Chinese hordes against Israel'.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 24:36,42; 1 Thessalonians 5:2

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 5:11-12; John 15:18-21; 2 Timothy 3:12

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 24:29-30

<sup>15</sup> Acts 19:10

a. During the reign of the fifth Caesar, Nero (A.D. 54-68). Nero was the adopted son of the fourth Caesar, Claudius (A.D. 41-54). Arguments in favour of this view are the following: The reign of Nero was a time of persecution for Christians. The Greek used in the book of Revelation is cruder than that used in the Gospel and thus John did not yet know his Greek when he wrote the book.

The literal interpretation of Revelation 11:1 concludes that the temple in Jerusalem was still standing (it was destroyed in A.D. 70). The literal interpretation of Revelation 17:9-10 concludes that Nero was the fifth emperor. Revelation 17:11 appears to refer to the resurrected Nero myth, the idea that Nero, though dead, would appear once more on this earth. And the numerical value of the name 'Nero Caesar' in Revelation 13:18 according to the Hebrew alphabet would be 666. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to see why Hebrew numbers would be used in a Greek book!

b. During the reign of the eleventh Caesar, Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Domitian was the son of the ninth Caesar, Vespasian (A.D. 69-79) and brother of the tenth Caesar, Titus (A.D. 79-81). Arguments in favour of this view are the following: The reign of Domitian was also a time of persecution of Christians. Irenaeus (A.D. 170) says that the apocalyptic vision "was seen not a very long time since, but almost in our own day, toward the end of Domitian's reign"... "the church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan (A.D. 98-117) is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles". The book was written at a time when the early fervour of Christian congregations had already waned (2:4; 3:15).

After the death of the apostles Paul and Peter in about A.D. 64-65, the Lord provided the apostle John as leader for the congregations in Asia Minor. Probably shortly after the beginning of the Jewish War against Rome in A.D. 66, when the Christians in Jerusalem moved to Pella, the apostle John and other people who had seen and heard Jesus moved to Ephesus in Asia Minor. The church father Irenaeus, who lived about A.D. 170, wrote that the apostle John lived and worked permanently in Ephesus until the times of the Roman emperor, Caesar Trajan, who ruled from A.D. 98-117. Thus the apostle John lived and worked in Ephesus from about A.D. 66 to 98. The church father Clement of Alexandria, who lived in A.D. 190, wrote that even after his return from Patmos, the apostle John carried on a very active ministry as chief administrator of the congregations located in the Ephesus district.

We do not know when exactly the apostle John wrote the Gospel of John, the letters of John or the book of Revelation. We also do not know whether the Gospel of John and the letters of John were written before or after his banishment to Patmos and we also do not know whether they were written before or after the book of Revelation was written.

We conclude that the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation to the whole Christian Church between A.D. 70-98, probably about A.D. 95-96.

## **D. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK.**

The theme is: "The victory of Jesus Christ and his Church over Satan and his helpers".

The book of Revelation may be divided into two major parts of 3 and 4 sections each:

### **1. Revelation 1 to 11. The Christian Church persecuted by the godless and wicked world**

Nevertheless, the Christian Church is protected and finally victorious.

- (1) The Church in the World is indwelt by Christ (chapter 1-3) (seven lampstands)
- (2) The Church suffers trial and persecution (chapter 4-7) (seven seals)
- (3) The Church is avenged, protected and victorious (chapter 8-11) (seven trumpets)

### **2. Revelation 12 to 22. Christ completely victorious in his conflict with Satan**

This major section reveals the deeper spiritual background of the struggle between the Christian Church and the world. It is namely a conflict between Christ and the dragon, in which Christ is completely victorious!

- (4) Christ is opposed by the dragon and his helpers (chapter 12-14) (Christ and the dragon)
- (5) God's final wrath is on the impenitent (chapter 15-16) (seven bowls of wrath)
- (6) The fall of Babylon, the beast and the false prophet (chapter 17-19) (Babylon)
- (7) The doom of the dragon and the complete victory of Christ and his Church (chapter 20-22) (The present and the final state)

The theme of the book of Revelation speaks of the first coming of Christ, when he freed us from our sins by his blood, and of the second coming of Christ, when every eye will see him (1:5-7). Thus, the book contains visions concerning events between the first and second coming of Christ.

By reading through the book and especially noticing the reduplications of events, we will see that the book is divided into seven parallel sections and each section describes the whole New Testament period from the first coming to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Note that each of the seven sections of the book of Revelation

- begins with the first coming of Christ,
- is characterised by a long main period,
- followed by a short period of violent persecution, and
- ends with the final judgement day.

## **E. THE PURPOSE AND THEME.**

### **1. The purpose of the book**

The book of Revelation speaks about the people of God, the Militant Church still on earth and the Triumphant Church already in heaven. While the first book in the Bible reveals the beginning of the struggle between the people of God and Satan<sup>16</sup>, the last book of the Bible reveals the defeat of Satan (20:10) and the victory of God's people (17:14).

The purpose of the book is: "To impart comfort and encouragement to the Christians of the Militant Church on the present earth in their struggle against the forces of evil!"

Christians are never alone and destitute. Christ is present and active in their midst (1:12-20)<sup>17</sup>. Christ, their Saviour and King lives and reigns forever. He governs the world in the interest of the Church (5:7-8)<sup>18</sup>. Throughout their suffering under the seals of persecution, oppression and trials, their Christ conquers (6:2)<sup>19</sup>. Throughout the warning trumpets of judgement they are protected by God's seal on their foreheads (7:3)<sup>20</sup>. Throughout all their tribulations, their hunger, thirst and tears are seen by God (7:14-17; 21:4)<sup>21</sup>. Their prayers are heard by God and they affect the people and events in this world (8:3-5)<sup>22</sup>. The destroyers of this world will finally be destroyed and the world will finally and completely belong to their Christ (11:15,18)<sup>23</sup>. Throughout their tribulations, Christians are protected from the attacks of Satan (12:6,14)<sup>24</sup>. Their death is precious in God's eyes. Their souls immediately ascend to heaven (14:13; 20:4)<sup>25</sup>. Their final victory is assured (15:2; 17:14)<sup>26</sup>. Their blood will be avenged (19:2)<sup>27</sup>. Their Christ lives and reigns forever. He governs the world in the interest of the Church (5:7-8)<sup>28</sup>. In short, Christians are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ (17:14)<sup>29</sup>.

### **2. The theme of the book**

The book of Revelation intends to show us that:

*things are not what they seem!  
things will not remain as they are!*

a. Christ is the Conqueror. Although it often seems as if Satan and his associates control the world, in reality Christ reigns as the absolute Sovereign. The beast that comes up from the Abyss seems to be victorious: he makes war and kills the Christians and they lie unattended on the streets of the city where Christ was crucified. The evil world rejoices (11:7-10; 13:7), but their rejoicing is premature. In reality it is the Christians who triumph (17:14)<sup>30</sup>! Throughout the book Christ is pictured as the Victor, the Conqueror (3:21b; 5:5; 6:2; 17:14), the King who reigns (1:5; 5:6; 11:15; 19:16; 22:3): he conquers the beast and the false prophet (19:19-20), the dragon (12:9-10; 20:10), the people who follow the beast (14:9-12), all nations on the earth (15:4), all people in the final harvest of the earth (14:14-19), death (1:18; 2:8; 5:9-10) and Hades (1:18; 20:13-14). Christ is victorious, and consequently Christians are victorious, even when they seem hopelessly defeated!

b. Christians are conquerors. Sometimes it seems as if the prayers of Christians are not heard. They cry: "How long until you judge" (6:10)? Nevertheless, their prayers are the key that unlock the mysteries of any sound philosophy of history (8:3-5). Christians persecuted by the beast and the false prophet (13:5-8). Nevertheless, they will stand with the Lamb (14:1; 15:2). Are Christians in the great tribulation (6:3-8)? They will come out of it and stand with the Lamb (7:9,14). Are their garments filthy because of tribulations? They are made white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14; 22:14). Are Christians killed? They will again stand upon their feet (11:11). Do they seem defeated (11:7-10)? In reality they reign on the present earth. The King has lasting influence through them on every aspect of life on this present earth (spiritual, social, intellectual, physical and emotional)(5:10)<sup>31</sup>. After death they reign with Christ in heaven (20:4) and in the future they will reign with Christ on the new earth (22:5).

c. Enemies are defeated. What happens to those who seem to be conquerors in this present world? They arise in the following order: the dragon (12:3), the beast (13:1), the false prophet (13:11) and Babylon (14:8). And they go down in defeat in the reversed order: Babylon (18:2), the beast and the false prophet (19:20) and the dragon (20:10).

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<sup>16</sup> Genesis 3:1-19

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 1:20-23

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 28:18

<sup>20</sup> John 10:28

<sup>21</sup> Hebrews 4:13

<sup>22</sup> Mark 11:22-24

<sup>23</sup> Romans 8:17

<sup>24</sup> 1 John 4:4

<sup>25</sup> Philippians 1:23

<sup>26</sup> Romans 8:38-39

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 10:28

<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 1:20-23

<sup>29</sup> Romans 8:31-39

<sup>30</sup> John 16:33

<sup>31</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

d. The theme of the book. The theme of the book of Revelation is, “The victory of Christ and his Church over the dragon and his helpers”. “They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers” (17:14). “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”<sup>32</sup>!

## **F. THE SYMBOLS AND NUMBERS IN THE VISIONS.**

The book introduces itself as ‘the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ’. The word ‘apocalypse’ means unveiling, disclosing, revealing or revelation and this is done by means of “making known by signs”<sup>33</sup> (symbols and numbers in the visions) (1:1).

In the book of Revelation, the visions consisting of symbols and numbers ultimately do not have literal and numerical significance, but symbolical significance. Throughout the book of Revelation, God reveals his mind and purposes through visions. In these visions, John sees things which are not literally real, as for example “horses with heads that resemble lions and spewing out fire, smoke and sulphur” (9:17). But although the symbols in the visions are not literally real, they represent literally realities in history that far surpasses the literal reality of the symbols. In visions, John also sees things, which no longer exist in literal reality, as for example the second temple of Jerusalem, which John had to measure while exiled on Patmos (11:1). The pictures seen in visions and the numbers are one thing, but the ultimate spiritual significance and reality of these symbols and numbers is another thing!

### **1. The symbols have figurative or symbolic meaning.**

The visions of the woman (12:1), the dragon (12:3) and the seven angels with the seven last plagues (15:1) are all three called ‘signs’<sup>34</sup>.

The visions consisting of symbols and numbers cannot simply be interpreted literally, but *refer to literal realities that surpass the reality suggested by the literal symbol or literal number*. What seems to be completely impossible, unreasonable and untrue as to the literalness of the symbols, is completely possible, reasonable and true as to the reality represented or symbolised by the symbols. Examples:

In his vision, John sees horses that fight with their mouths (like that of lions) and their tails (like that of snakes). This is not literally true, because horses fight with their feet! Therefore, the vision is symbolic (9:19)!

John is shown the bride of the Lamb, but sees a city (21:9-10). Literally, a city is never a bride, but in reality, both these symbols represent or symbolise ‘the people of God’ or ‘the church’.

*The symbols and numbers in the visions represent historical trends and historical events, persons and time-periods that are literally real, but not necessarily demonstrable or identifiable historical events, persons and time-periods!*

### **2. The symbols explained in the context of the book**

(1) In section 1 (chapter 1-3) ‘the stars’ represent the angels (representatives) of the seven congregations (1:20). ‘The seven lampstands’ represent the seven churches in Asia Minor, which in turn represent all the churches in the history of the world (1:20).

(2) In section 2 (chapter 4-7) ‘the seven lamps’ represent the seven spirits or fullness of the Holy Spirit (4:5). ‘The seven eyes’ of ‘the Lamb’ (a symbol of Christ) represent the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth (5:6). ‘The golden bowls’ full of incense represent the prayers of the saints (5:8; cf. 8:3). And ‘the rider on the pale horse’ represents death (6:8).

(3) In section 3 (chapter 8-11) ‘the two witnesses’ represent anointed and gifted ministers of God like Zerubbabel and Joshua and ultimately represent the Church as an institute of proclaiming the gospel (11:3-4). ‘The city Jerusalem’ represents the wicked world that seduces (like Sodom) and persecutes (like Egypt) the Church (11:8).

(4) In section 4 (chapter 12-14) ‘the great dragon’ represents Satan (12:9; 20:2). ‘The offspring of the woman’ represents Christians that obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (12:17). ‘The number 666’ represents a human being, the antichrist (13:18).

(5) In section 5 (chapter 15-16) ‘the outpouring of the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues’ represent the completion of God’s wrath in the final judgement (15:1). And ‘the three frogs’ represent evil spirits emanating from Satan and his allies (16:13-14).

(6) In section 6 (chapter 17-19) ‘the seven heads of the beast’ represent the seven hills of Rome and seven kings (empires) of the world (17:9-10). ‘The ten horns’ represent ten other kings cooperating with the beast (17:12). ‘The waters where the prostitute sits’ represent the nations of the world (17:15). ‘The prostitute’ represents the great city that rules over the kings of the earth (17:18). And ‘the fine linen’ represents the righteous acts of the saints (19:8).

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<sup>32</sup> Romans 8:37

<sup>33</sup> ἐσημαίνεν (aorist active) <σημαίνω.

<sup>34</sup> σημαίον

(7) In section 7 (chapter 20-22) ‘the lake of fire’ represents ‘the second death’ which in turn represents something else (hell) (20:14; 21:8; 2:11). ‘The New Jerusalem’ represents ‘the bride or wife of the Lamb’ (Christ) which in turn represents something else (the Church) (21:9-10). ‘The lamp’ of the New Jerusalem represents the ever-present glory of God and his Christ in the midst of his people on the new earth (21:23). ‘The river flowing from the throne’ of God and his Christ represents the eternal continuity of eternal life (22:1). And ‘the dogs’ represent evil people who practise magic arts, who are sexually immoral and who kill other people (22:15).

*These examples show that the visions containing symbols and numbers represent literal realities that far surpass the literal reality of the symbols and numbers themselves. The symbols and numbers represent real and historic organisations, people and events, which occur again and again throughout the whole New Testament history!*

All these examples give us the key how to understand and interpret the book of Revelation. They certainly represent realities that are found elsewhere in the teachings of the New Testament.

## **G. THE ELEMENT OF TIME.**

### **1. The book contains events that refer to the past, present and future.**

Both Revelation chapter 1 to 3 as well as Revelation chapter 4 to 22 contain events that refer to the past, the present or the future. Therefore, the view that Revelation chapter 1 to 3 refers only to the past and Revelation chapter 4 to 22 only to the future (the futurist view) is flawed. Neither part can be limited to the past or future only.

a. “What must soon take place, because the time is near” (1:1,3; 22:6).

Revelation 1:1 and 22:6 both say that the visions in the book of Revelation “must soon take place”. And Revelation 1:3 and 22:10 both say that “the time is near” for them to take place. Thus the whole book of Revelation deals with events that take place from the time of the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ!

b. “What you have seen, that is, what is now and what will take place after these things” (1:19).

The futurist or dispensational way of translating Revelation 1:19 is, “Write, therefore, what you have seen and what is now and what will take place after these things”. Consequently, they divide the book of Revelation into three time sections: a past section: “what you have seen” consisting of Revelation 1, a present section: “what is now” consisting of Revelation 2 and 3, and a very large future section: “what will take place after these things” consisting of Revelation 4 to 22. The book of Revelation is then mainly a book making predictions about what would happen just before and after Christ’s second coming, thus, at a time that is still future for us living today.

However, the best translation of Revelation 1:19 is, “Write, therefore, what you have seen, namely (even, that is)<sup>35</sup>, what is now and<sup>36</sup> what will take place after these things”. The intention is not to divide the book of Revelation into three parts: a past, a present and a future section, but rather to point out that the visions shown to John in the whole book of Revelation (Revelation 1 to 22) represent events that are already taking place now at John’s present time and that will also take place in John’s future throughout the New Testament period until Christ’s second coming! These things have already begun to happen in the days of the apostle John and will continue to happen after the time of John throughout world history until the second coming of Christ. Thus, the visions in the book of Revelation must be regarded as referring to events that take place again and again throughout the entire history of the world from the time of John to the second coming of Christ. The revelations in the book of Revelation are applicable to Christians living in every century! They are applicable to Christians living today!

The visions may not be interpreted as presenting exclusively past events, events that took place only during the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and therefore are no longer applicable to us today (the preterit view). The visions may also not be interpreted as presenting only future events, events that will take place just before and just after Christ’s second coming and therefore are not yet applicable to us today (the futurist or dispensational view).

c. “What the Spirit says to the churches (congregations)” (2:7).

Revelation 1 to 3 describe the conditions of seven historic congregations in the first century A.D. There is not a single indication of the view that these seven congregations represent seven consecutive periods in Church history, the so-called ‘seven dispensations of Church history’. For example, the Philadelphian era of Church history is regarded as depicting the 19<sup>th</sup> century of missionary activity and the Laodicean era of Church history is regarded as depicting the 20<sup>th</sup> century of materialism (the historicist-futurist view).

The number ‘7’ occurs again and again in the book of Revelation. ‘The seven spirits’ do not depict seven consecutive spirits, but rather the fullness of the Holy Spirit (1:4; 4:5; 5:6) and ‘the seven horns’ and ‘seven eyes’ of the Lamb do not depict seven consecutive periods in which Christ has power and knows everything, but rather the complete power (omnipotence) and the complete knowledge (omniscience) of Christ (5:6). *Therefore ‘the seven lampstands’ also do not depict seven consecutive Church periods, but rather the complete Church of God throughout the full span of its existence from the beginning to the very end of world history (1:20).* The number 7 in the book of Revelation is therefore not intended to be a *literal or consecutive* number, but rather a symbol of divine perfection and completeness.

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<sup>35</sup> και in the sense of explaining

<sup>36</sup> και in the sense of adding

Christ is depicted as standing or walking in the middle of a circle of seven lampstands (1:13; 2:1). He is present and active amidst all the churches that exist, not consecutively, but simultaneously. The seven churches in the book of Revelation existed, not consecutively, but simultaneously in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Moreover, in every one of the seven letters, Christ himself says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*” (in the plural)! Each one of the seven letters is applicable to all the churches at the same time!

‘The seven churches’ in the book of Revelation are therefore types or examples of the conditions, not of seven consecutive Church eras, but of various individual churches (congregations) that exist simultaneously anywhere between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming. The conditions are constantly repeated in the actual life of various individual churches throughout the whole New Testament period. In the first century A.D., there existed individual churches that had lost their first love for Christ (like Ephesus) and individual churches that had kept Christ’s word (like Philadelphia). Likewise, today there are individual churches that have lost their first love for Christ and other individual churches that keep Christ’s word!

‘The seven letters’ to the seven churches are therefore Christ’s messages, not to seven consecutive Church eras, but to all individual churches that exist simultaneously anywhere during the whole New Testament period. The letters are Christ’s messages to the entire Church throughout the entire span of its existence. All seven letters are applicable to all churches in every place and in every century from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming.

d. “What must take place after these things” (4:1).

Revelation 4:1 uses the phrase ‘after these things’ (‘after this’ or ‘afterwards’)<sup>37</sup> twice. The first time it refers to ‘after’ John saw the first vision, and the second time to ‘the events that must happen after John’s present time’. The coming events begin, not in our future, but in John’s future, thus throughout the whole New Testament period until Christ’s second coming!

There is not a single indication that all the events of Revelation chapter 4 to 22 must follow *after* the so-called Church era in Revelation chapter 1 to 3, that is, after the so-called future removal (rapture) of the Church (the futurist view). The Church is certainly present in Revelation chapter 4 to 22 (5:9-10; 6:9-11; 7:4; 8:3-5; 11:1-6; 12:6-17; 13:7; 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 17:14; 18:20; 19:7-9; 20:4-6,9; 21:1-2,9-14; 22:16-17)!

And Revelation 4 to 22 certainly contains past, present and future events! For example:

Revelation chapter 4 is a symbolic picture describing the entire universe from the aspect of heaven, as it was from eternity. It teaches that the entire universe is governed by the throne occupant, even when the Christian Church experiences persecutions and trials here on earth (Revelation 6). This vision refers to the past, present and future!

Revelation chapter 5 is a symbolic picture describing heaven immediately *after* Christ’s death (5:6,9,12) ascension and enthronement (5:6-7), but *before* the opening of the seals. This event has obviously taken place in the past, at Christ’s first coming.

Revelation chapter 6 begins with a symbolic picture of “a rider on a white horse going out as a conqueror bent on conquest”. This is a symbolic picture of Christ and his activity since his first coming until the present time. This vision refers to the past, present and future!

Revelation chapter 12:1-4 begins with “the sign of a woman” confronted by “another sign of an enormous red dragon”. This is a symbolic picture describing God’s Old Testament people from whom the expected Messiah would come forth, and Satan who tried to hinder that event taking place since creation<sup>38</sup> until the time king Herod killed all the babies of Bethlehem<sup>39</sup>. These events have obviously taken place in the past.

Revelation 12:5 is a symbolic picture describing Christ’s first coming, his incarnation and resurrection, ascension and enthronement in heaven – all in one sweep! Christ’s first coming has obviously taken place in the past.

Revelation 17:9 speaks of ‘the seven heads’ of the beast as representing “seven hills on which the great prostitute sits”. This is a clear reference to the adulterous city of Rome during the Roman Empire in which John and the first century Christians lived. But it also represents “seven kings/kingdoms” of which 5 had already fallen, the 6<sup>th</sup> was still present (the Roman empire) and the 7<sup>th</sup> was still future (17:10). From the perspective of John’s time, some of these events were already in the past, some events were already present and other events were still future! Therefore, the argument that the visions from Revelation 4 to 22 refer to events taking place in our (!) future or the future after the so-called rapture of the Church, is completely unacceptable!

e. Conclusion.

The whole book of Revelation is thus relevant for Christians of all ages. It is a message of encouragement to Christians from the time of John in the first century A.D. right up to the second coming of Christ!

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<sup>37</sup> μετα ταυτα

<sup>38</sup> Genesis 3:15

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 2:13-18

## 2. The book makes use of different grammatical tenses.

Grammatically, John uses different tenses in order to emphasize something in particular. He uses the futuristic aorist and proleptic future tenses in his visions in chapter 7:9-17; 10:7; 11:15; 15:1; 19:6-10 and 20:6.

a. The futuristic aorist tense is a past tense that does not describe the past, but the future. It describes future events as if they have already taken place. The intention is *to emphasize that these events will certainly take place.* For example, “the wedding has come”<sup>40</sup> (19:7), “his bride has made herself ready”<sup>41</sup> (19:7), “clothes was given her”<sup>42</sup> (19:8). From John’s perspective, the events described in these visions must still happen in the future, but to John the future triumph of Christ was so sure that in his mind they had already taken place!

b. The proleptic (anticipatory) future tense does not describe the future, but the present. It describes present realities as anticipated future events. For example, of Christians who die before Christ’s second coming is said: “They will be priests”<sup>43</sup> (20:6) and “they will reign”<sup>44</sup> (20:6). John intends to emphasize that these events happen already now! They are already now priests and reign with Christ in heaven!

## 3. The book of Revelation contains events pertaining to ‘the last days’

### a. The expression in the Old Testament.

The expression “in the last days”<sup>45</sup> always refers to the days to come, that is, to the future. It refers to events that would take place in the lives of the Israelites<sup>46</sup>. It refers to events that would begin with the Babylonian empire and extend itself to the establishment of God’s kingdom<sup>47</sup>. *It refers to the New Testament period ushered in by the first coming of Christ, that is, to the period in which the messianic promises would be fulfilled*<sup>48</sup>.

### b. The expression in the New Testament.

The key to understanding the expressions ‘in the last days’<sup>49</sup>, ‘in the last times’<sup>50</sup> and ‘the last hour’<sup>51</sup> is not certain chronological events in the end-time, but Christ himself. In the book of Revelation, Christ says that he is not only ‘the Beginning’ (*the Prótos*)<sup>52</sup>, but also ‘the End’ (*the Eschatos*)<sup>53</sup> (1:17; 22:13). The study of the last things (eschatology) is derived from the word ‘eschatos’. What does Christ mean? At his first coming, Christ appears in power and glory (1:12-18)<sup>54</sup>. And at his second coming, Christ will still appear as powerful and glorious (19:12,15,16). What Christ was at his first coming (in Revelation 1), he still will be at his second coming (in Revelation 22)! And in between his first and second coming, Christ remains the same<sup>55</sup>.

‘The end’ or ‘the last days’ of the whole world-history cannot be limited to a few days or years immediately preceding the second coming of Christ. ‘The last days’ is an expression for the whole New Testament period. ‘The last days’ begin with the first coming of Christ and end with his second coming. ‘The last days’ *begin* when Christ was revealed (incarnated)<sup>56</sup>, when Christ spoke God’s final words to us<sup>57</sup> and when the Holy Spirit was poured out<sup>58</sup>. ‘The last days’ are characterised by terrible times in which people are lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having the form of godliness but denying its power. Timothy must turn away from such people<sup>59</sup>. ‘The last days’ are characterised by rich people hoarding wealth<sup>60</sup>, by scoffers following their own ungodly desires<sup>61</sup> and by many antichrists appearing<sup>62</sup>. Thus

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<sup>40</sup> ἡλθεν

<sup>41</sup> ἠτοιμασεν

<sup>42</sup> εδοθη

<sup>43</sup> εσονται

<sup>44</sup> βασιλευσουσιν

<sup>45</sup> Hebrew: be-acharit ha-jamim

<sup>46</sup> Genesis 49:1; Deuteronomy 4:30; cf. Hosea 3:5

<sup>47</sup> Daniel 2:28,44; cf. 10:14

<sup>48</sup> Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1; Jeremiah 23:20,5; 30:21,24; Ezekiel 39:16

<sup>49</sup> εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις

<sup>50</sup> επ εσχατου των χρονων

<sup>51</sup> εσχατη ωρα εστιν

<sup>52</sup> ο πρωτος

<sup>53</sup> ο εσχατος

<sup>54</sup> cf. Matthew 28:18

<sup>55</sup> cf. Hebrews 13:8

<sup>56</sup> 1 Peter 1:20

<sup>57</sup> Hebrews 1:2

<sup>58</sup> Acts 2:17

<sup>59</sup> 2 Timothy 3:1-5

<sup>60</sup> James 5:3

<sup>61</sup> Jude 1:18; 2 Peter 3:3

<sup>62</sup> 1 John 2:18

we are now living in 'the last days'! And 'the last days' end with the second coming of Christ when the absolute completion of salvation is revealed and the eternal state begins<sup>63</sup>.

Thus, 'the last days' consist of the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming and are determined throughout this period by Christ himself<sup>64</sup>! The end or the last days (eschatology) of the whole world-history begins and ends with the Person of Christ (1:17; 22:13).

#### **4. The visions in the book are not in chronological order.**

The visions in the book of Revelation are not seen in chronological order, nor do they describe future history in chronological order. The seven parallel sections of the book of Revelation already show that the first vision of each section is chronologically before the last vision of the previous section! For example, the events leading up to the first coming of Christ described in Revelation 12:1-6 comes chronologically before the final events shortly before the second coming of Christ described in Revelation 11:7-19.

Even within one chapter, the visions are not always arranged in chronological order. For example, Revelation 14:1-5 is a symbolic picture of the Triumphant Church after the final judgement day, while the following two symbolic pictures in Revelation 14:6-13 and 14:14-20 return to events before that, namely, warnings of the coming judgement and the final judgement day itself. Likewise, chapter Revelation 15:2-4 follows chronologically after 15:5 to 16:21.

#### **5. The book of revelation spans the whole period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming.**

Revelation 1:5-7 speaks of both Christ's first coming to free us from our sins by his blood and of Christ's second coming when every eye will see him. By reading through the book and especially noticing the reduplications, we will see that the book is divided into seven parallel parts and each part describes the whole New Testament period from the first to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Note that each of the seven parts of the book of Revelation:

- begins with the first coming of Christ
- is characterised by a long main period
- followed by a short period of violent persecution
- and ends with the second coming of Christ and eternity.

It is clear that the book of Revelation does not intend to give a linear chronological history of future events, but rather repeated visions of principles operating in world-history between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming.

The book of Revelation was a book of encouragement for Christians in the first century, when it was written, and for Christians throughout all centuries thereafter. It is an encouragement for Christians living today. And it will be an encouragement for Christians until the second coming of Christ! That is why Revelation 1:3 says that everyone who throughout the centuries reads or hears the book of Revelation and takes to heart what is written in it, is blessed!

## **H. THE PARALLEL STRUCTURE.**

The book of Revelation is a direct revelation of God revealing God's view of human history on earth. Therefore, Christians may not speculate or fantasise with regard to the contents of the book of Revelation. They must make every effort to understand God's intended meaning. The book is written in apocalyptic language. Revelation 1:1 uses the word 'apocalypse', which means God's *revelation*, revealing something, which man cannot know otherwise. God makes use of visions containing symbols and numbers to reveal his mind and purposes to us.

There are two approaches of interpreting the Book of Revelation: The *chronological* and the *reduplication* approach.

#### **1. The chronological approach to interpreting the book.**

The futurist or dispensational view stresses that the visions in the book of Revelation were meant to be kept end to end and the book should be read as a *time-table of future history*. They believe that the book of Revelation should be interpreted as a *linear chronological account of literally demonstrable and identifiable events, persons and time-periods*". They hold that the history of the book is a linear development from past to present to future. They view all the future historic events as through a telescope.

They interpret chapter 1:19, "Write what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later" as follows: Revelation chapter 1 deals with matters in *the past*; Revelation chapter 2 and 3 deal with matters in *the present*, and Revelation chapter 4 to 22 deal with matters that are all in *the future*, not meaning *John's* future, but *our* present future. This approach also interprets the symbols and numbers *literally*. And finally, this approach often *adds* materials concerning Israel and the Jews into the various parts of the book of Revelation.

The chronological approach has some serious flaws. The seven parallel sections of the book of Revelation already show that the first vision of each section is chronologically before the last vision of the previous section! Also the events referred to in the visions within one chapter of the book of Revelation are not always arranged in chronological order, as

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<sup>63</sup> 1 Peter 1:5

<sup>64</sup> cf. Ephesians 1:10

seen above. It is clear that the book of Revelation does not intend to give a linear chronological history of future events, but rather repeated visions of principles operating in world-history between the first and second coming of Christ.

The book of Revelation repeats certain same events and thus indicates that the chronological approach is flawed. For example, the wicked nations are said to be destroyed in Revelation 16:12-21, but reappear and are destroyed in Revelation 19:17-21 and reappear again and are destroyed again in Revelation 20:7-10. The book of Revelation does not describe three chronological final battles, but one and the same final battle (14:14; 19:19; 20:8), namely, the battle of Armageddon. These repetitions within the sections show that the sections are *parallel* to one another.

## **2. The reduplication approach to interpreting the book.**

The reduplication approach stresses that the materials in the book are arranged in both a *parallel* as well as a *progressive* way. The book contains repetitions with differences and looks at the history of the whole world from different points of view. The parallel repetitions view all the events in world-history from the first to the second coming of Christ *as through a kaleidoscope*, that is, looking at the same ‘last days’ (the whole New Testament period), but each time from a different point of view. A different principle operating in world-history is highlighted in each of the seven parallel sections of the book. Both the Old Testament book of Daniel and the New Testament book of Revelation are characterised by this parallel and progressive revelation of history! This view is very much recommended and is utilised in the commentary in [www.biblebooks.site](http://www.biblebooks.site).

For example: The last three sections of the book of Revelation depict *the* final battle (16:12-16; 19:17-21; 20:7-10) and *the* final judgement. Thus, the book of Revelation is not a linear, but a parallel depiction of history. Section 5 points particularly to the judgement of all unrepentant people living in the cities of the world (16:2,19). Section 6 points particularly to the judgement of Satan’s three helpers: the great prostitute called Babylon, the beast and the false prophet. Section 7 points particularly to the judgement of Satan himself and of all people (20:10-15).

## **3. The book contains events that are repeated with variations.**

The book has a *repeated* pattern with variations. Similar things are repeated emphasising different details. For example:

### a. The battle (of Armageddon).

Christ’s enemies are defeated in one section and then reappear in the next section. The wicked nations are said to be destroyed in chapter 16:12-21 (section 5), but reappear and are destroyed in chapter 19:17-21 (section 6) and reappear again and are destroyed in chapter 20:7-10 (section 7). There is no contradiction when one realises that the book repeats itself and that these three pictures are not meant to be understood as sequential. The fact that in all three these sections it is not called ‘a battle’, but ‘*the* battle’<sup>65</sup> (16:14; 19:19; 20:8; cf. 13:7) proves that the book does not picture three different battles, but one and the same battle, namely, ‘the battle of Armageddon’. In two different sections of the book of Revelation this battle is described in terms of one and the same battle in the Old Testament: ‘Gog and Magog’ (20:8)<sup>66</sup>, ‘the great supper of God’ (19:17)<sup>67</sup> and “fire came down from heaven” (20:9)<sup>68</sup>. The repetition of one and the same battle in three different places in the book of Revelation shows that the book of Revelation contains parallel sections.

### b. The fall of Babylon.

It is first announced, then introduced and finally described.

Announcement of the fall. Revelation chapter 12 to 14 (section 4) describes the seven main powers involved in the spiritual conflict, namely the woman, the dragon, the male child, Michael, the beast out of the sea, the beast out of the earth and Babylon. This section closes with an announcement that the fall of the Great Babylon (14:8) will take place at the time when “the hour of God’s judgement has come” (14:7).

Summary description of the fall: Revelation chapter 15 to 16 (section 5) describes the seven bowls of God’s wrath, containing the seven last plagues with which God’s wrath would be completed (15:1). This section closes with a summary description of the fall of Babylon. All the cities of the nations will collapse as the result of the fury of God’s wrath (17:19), at a time when “everything is done” (16:17) and the catastrophic end of all islands and mountains occur (16:20).

Detailed description of the fall. Revelation chapter 17 to 19 (section 6) describes the moral and materialistic corruption of the great prostitute, who is called the great Babylon (17:5,18). This section closes with a detailed description of the fall of Babylon (18:1-24) at a time when the final battle will take place (19:11-21).

The repetition of one and the same fall of Babylon in three different places in the book of Revelation shows that the book of Revelation contains parallel sections.

### c. The final judgement and end of this present world.

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<sup>65</sup> τον πολειμον

<sup>66</sup> cf. Ezekiel 38:2

<sup>67</sup> cf. Ezekiel 38:4; 39:17-20

<sup>68</sup> cf. Ezekiel 39:6

(1) Section 1 of the book (chapter 1-3) *announces* the final judgement by saying that Christ will come on the clouds and every eye will see him “whom they have pierced” (1:7). All the impenitent will mourn in hopelessness and despair.

(2) Section 2 of the book (chapter 4-7) describes ‘the seven seals’ that reveal the main principles of God’s plan operating throughout the history of this world. This section ends with “the great day of God’s wrath” (6:12-17), which will be accompanied by a great earthquake (6:12).

(3) Section 3 of the book (chapter 8-11) describes ‘the seven trumpets’ that affect the earth, the sea, the rivers and water sources, the sun, the inhabitants of the Abyss, the evil forces at the river Euphrates and the final judgement (11:18) accompanied by lightning, thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm (11:19).

(4) Section 4 of the book (chapter 12-14) ends with a description of ‘the final (grain and grape) harvest’. This will happen at a time when ‘God’s wrath’ will be executed (14:19).

(5) Section 5 of the book (chapter 15-16) describes ‘the seven bowls’ of God’s wrath that affect the earth, the sea, the rivers and water sources, the sun, the throne of the beast, the evil forces at the river Euphrates and the collapse of all cities of the nations and the earth. This will be accompanied by lightning, thunder, a severe earthquake and huge hailstones (16:18-21). This will happen at a time when the throne in heaven decrees “It is done!” (16:17).

(6) Section 6 of the book (chapter 17-19) ends with the collapse of the political and commercial world (chapter 18). This will happen at the second coming of Christ (19:11-16) when he will defeat his enemies in the final battle (19:17-21) and exercise “the fury of the wrath of God Almighty” (19:15).

(7) Section 7 of the book (chapter 20-22) describes the period during which Satan is bound on earth so that he can no longer deceive the nations (20:1-3) and during which the (departed) souls of believers live and reign with Christ in heaven (20:4-6). This section ends with the description of the release of Satan, the final battle (20:7-10), the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement (20:11-15). This will happen at a time when the present earth and sky flees away (20:11) and a new heaven and earth will be revealed (chapter 21-22).

The last three sections of the book of Revelation picture the judgement of God’s enemies in different visions: Section 5 pictures God’s judgement of all the unrepentant people who worship the beast (16:2) and live symbolically in the great city and all the cities of the world (16:19). Section 6 pictures God’s judgement of Satan’s three helpers, the great prostitute, called Babylon, the beast and the false prophet. And section 7 pictures God’s judgement of Satan and of all people according to what they had done as recorded in the books (20:10-15). This again clearly shows that the last three sections of the book of Revelation are parallel!

#### d. Conclusion.

The above examples show that it is clear that the repeated events are *not consecutive, but parallel* to one another. The futurist or dispensational view teaches that there will be at least three final judgements: the first for *believers*<sup>69</sup> before (in the middle or after) the Great Tribulation, the second for *the nations* in the great tribulation just before the so-called millennial kingdom<sup>70</sup> and the third for *unbelievers* after the so-called millennial kingdom<sup>71</sup>. This view must be rejected. These three Bible passages all refer to one and the same final judgement! The repetition of the one and same final judgement and final end of the world in different places in the book of Revelation shows that the book of Revelation contains parallel sections.

### **I. THE PROGRESSIVE STRUCTURE.**

The seven sections of the book of Revelation are arranged in an ascending, climatic order. There is progress in end-time (eschatological) emphasis. Although the seven sections of the book of Revelation run parallel and span the entire period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming, there is nevertheless a progression in emphasis on those events that occur just before the second coming of Christ.

#### **1. The progressive emphasis on the final judgement day.**

In Revelation chapters 1 to 11, the final judgement is first announced and then introduced, but in Revelation 12 to 22 it is actually described.

(1) Section 1 (chapter 1-3) *announces* the final judgement by saying that Christ will come on the clouds and every eye will see him “whom they have pierced” (1:7). All the impenitent will mourn in hopelessness and despair.

(2) Section 2 (chapter 4-7) *introduces* the final judgement day by picturing the terror of the impenitent on earth. Because they cannot escape from the wrath of Christ, they will beg mountains to fall on them and hide them, but it will all be in vain (6:12-17).

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<sup>69</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10

<sup>70</sup> Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>71</sup> Revelation 20:11-15

(3) Section 3 (chapter 8-11) also *introduces* the final judgement day by picturing the joy in heaven, because finally the destroyers of the earth will be punished and the servants of God will be rewarded (11:18).

(4) Section 4 (chapter 12-14) *describes* the final judgement under the symbolism of a double harvest (14:14-20).

(5) Section 5 (chapter 16-16) *describes* the final judgement by especially emphasising the outpouring of God's seven bowls of wrath, with which the wrath of God is completed (15:1; 16:1-21).

(6) Section 6 (chapter 17-19) *describes* the final judgement day by especially emphasising that Christ will exercise the fury of the wrath of God (19:15).

(7) Section 7 (chapter 20-22) *describes* the final judgement day by dropping much of the symbolism. As clear as the teachings in the rest of the New Testament, it describes the resurrection and final judgement of all the dead (both Christians and non-Christians). Everyone will be judged according to the books, which contain the *works* of their lives, and according to the book of life, which contains only *names* and shows whether they belong to Christ or not (20:11-15).

## **2. The progressive emphasis on the final state of the Church.**

Although the seven sections of the book of Revelation run parallel and span the entire period between the first coming and second coming of Christ, there is nevertheless *a progression in the description of the final state of the Church and the new earth*. Their description in Revelation 21-22 is far more complete than their descriptions in the previous sections.

(1) Section 1 (chapter 1-3) depicts 'the Triumphant Church' as those who overcome, who share in the tree of life (2:7), the new Jerusalem (3:12) and the reign of Christ (3:21)<sup>72</sup>.

(2) Section 2 (chapter 4-7) depicts 'the Triumphant Church' as a great multitude standing before the throne and the Lamb. They wear white robes, hold palm branches, serve God in his temple, are shepherded and their tears are wiped away (7:9-17).

(3) Section 3 (chapter 8-11) depicts 'the Triumphant Church' as the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ in its final phase (11:15)<sup>73</sup>.

(4) Section 4 (chapter 12-14) depicts 'the Triumphant Church' symbolically as 144 000 people standing before the Lamb on Mount Zion. They have the name of Christ and God the Father on their foreheads (14:1-5).

(5) Section 5 (chapter 15-16) depicts 'the Triumphant Church' as those who overcome the beast. They hold harps and sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (15:2-4).

(6) Section 6 (chapter 17-19) depicts 'the Triumphant Church' as those invited to the wedding of the Lamb (19:6-9).

(7) Section 7 (chapter 20-22) depicts 'the Triumphant Church' as the new Jerusalem and as the bride or wife of the Lamb (21:1-2,9-10).

## **3. The progressive message in the book of Revelation.**

Although the seven sections of the book of Revelation run parallel and span the entire period between the first coming and second coming of Christ, there is nevertheless a progression in the message of each section of the book.

(1) The message of section 1 (chapter 1-3). Wherever there is a church (congregation), it is a lampstand (1:20; 2:5) shining the light of Christ and the gospel in the midst of the darkness of this godless and wicked world.

(2) The message of section 2 (chapter 4-7). Wherever a church witnesses for Christ, there the world persecutes the church, because the world refuses to be conquered by the light (6:1-8). The persecutions, oppressions and trials are overruled for the good of the churches, because the throne is always in heaven and not on earth (chapter 4-5).

(3) The message of section 3 (chapter 8-11). Wherever and whenever a church is persecuted, Christ sees the blood of the martyrs and hears the prayers of Christians (8:3-5) and warns the wicked world through his trumpets of judgements.

(4) The message of section 4 (chapter 12-14). The struggle between the Church and the wicked world indicates a deeper spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan.

(5) The message of section 5 (chapter 15-16). All people who refuse to listen and be warned by God's 'trumpets of judgement' will be destroyed by God's 'bowls of wrath'.

(6) The message of section 6 (chapter 17-19). Satan and his helpers assume different forms throughout history and always *seem* to be victorious, but in reality they are always defeated (17:14).

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<sup>72</sup> On the throne of God the Son and God the Father in heaven!

<sup>73</sup> cf. Matthew 25:34

(7) The message of section 7 (chapter 20-22). Christ and the Church are victorious now in heaven and will be victorious on the new earth. Christians will inherit the new earth in which there will be only righteousness<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> 2 Peter 3:13

## **J. THE MAIN MESSAGES.**

There is a great likeness between the book of Daniel in the Old Testament and the book of Revelation in the New Testament. Both are books which reveal God's mind and purposes.

### **1. The book of Revelation reveals the course and significance of history from God's point of view.**

The book of Revelation is unique in the whole New Testament:

- It does *not contain prophetic proclamations* in the name of the Lord *after the manner of* the prophetic books of the Old Testament.
- It does *not relate history* after the manner of the historical books of the Bible.

Although the book of Revelation is not a historical book, it is certainly concerned with history. It is concerned, not with describing history of the past, present and future, but with revealing what may be expected to take place throughout the history of mankind between the first and second coming of Christ. Therefore, the book of Revelation is a book of revelation!

*The book reveals the course and significance of human history from God's point of view. By making use of visions containing symbols and numbers it appears to be mapping out the major principles operating within the course of the history of the Christian Church in this non-Christian world. It shows the significance of God's history within man's world and history. By means of special visions, God reveals to the apostle John what his purpose for the Church and the world is. Like the author of Genesis 1 to 11 and the book of Daniel, the Book of Revelation is concerned not only with the history of God's people, but with the history of all the nations and kingdoms and rulers of the world as well. The visions in the book are concerned with world-history from the time of the apostle John right up to the second coming of Christ.*

The contribution of the book of Revelation is that it gives Christians the real philosophy of life as well as *the real interpretation of world-history.*

The main principles that operate in world-history are the following:

- The Christian Church is the bearer of God's light in this dark world (chapter 1-3).
- The godless and wicked world is full of trials and persecutes the Christian Church (chapter 4-7).
- God's trumpets of judgements constantly warn the godless and wicked people to repent (chapter 8-11).
- The real struggle is between Christ and Satan (chapter 12-14).
- The people who refuse to repent will be destroyed by God's bowls of wrath (chapter 15-16).
- Though the wicked world *seems* victorious, it is in reality defeated (chapter 17-19).
- Christ and the Church will be victorious and inherit the new heaven and new earth (chapter 20-22)!

### **2. The book of Revelation reveals the sovereignty of God in all the affairs of man.**

Revelation chapter 4 and 5 teach one main lesson, expressed:

Psalm 99:1. "The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim."

Psalm 146:10. "The LORD reigns forever, for all generations."

Psalm 145:13. "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations"

The vision is of the whole universe governed by the throne in heaven.

- All human affairs rest in the hands, not of men, but of the Almighty God. Nothing is excluded from God's dominion.
- Everything that happens has either been decreed by God or has his permission!
- Amidst the trials and persecutions Christians face on earth, God is in complete control.

God is sovereign over the Christian Church everywhere in the world, sovereign over all the empires and their emperors, sovereign over all the false religions and enemies of God, sovereign over all events and at all times in history right up to the second coming of Jesus Christ! God sits on his throne in majesty and glory (chapter 4). He has given to Jesus Christ all the power to control all humans and their history on earth<sup>75</sup>. He has given him the power to bring human history to its appointed goal (chapter 5)<sup>76</sup>! Whatever the threat against Christians may be, God's purpose cannot be thwarted<sup>77</sup>! The reason why certain governments today forbid preaching about 'the Kingdom of God' from the books of Daniel and Revelation is that they undermine confidence in human governments in general and undermine support to proud tyrants in particular!

### **3. The book of Revelation reveals Christ as Conqueror and Christians as conquerors with him.**

The theme in the Book of Daniel. The book of Daniel described human history in terms of the rise and fall of four human empires, which issue into the rise of the eternal kingdom of God<sup>78</sup>!

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<sup>75</sup> cf. Matthew 28:18

<sup>76</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 15:25-26; Ephesians 1:10

<sup>77</sup> cf. Isaiah 14:24,27; Ephesians 1:11

<sup>78</sup> Daniel 2 and 7

The first coming of Jesus Christ marked the powerful coming of the kingdom of God onto the earth<sup>79</sup>. By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a cosmic battle had been won. According to John 12:31-32, when Jesus Christ was lifted up on the cross and finally into heaven, the prince of this world was driven out of his powerful control over the nations<sup>80</sup>. And according to Colossians 2:15, by his death, Christ disarmed the powers and authorities and triumphed over them!

The theme in the Book of Revelation. The book of Revelation takes up the theme again and shows Jesus Christ as the Conqueror over the dragon and his assistants: the beast, the false prophet, the great prostitute Babylon and the people who have the mark of the beast.

- In chapter 1, it shows Jesus Christ standing majestically between all the local churches on earth.
- In chapter 5, it shows Jesus Christ worthy and able to open the seven seals, which reveal seven principles operating in human history.
- In chapter 6, it shows Jesus Christ riding out on a white horse in order to conquer the world.
- In chapter 12, it shows Jesus Christ snatched away from the onslaught of the dragon and snatched up to God and his throne, from where the dragon is hurled down onto the earth.
- In chapter 19, it shows Jesus Christ again riding out on a white horse in order to judge the world. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords and strikes down all his enemies in the final battle.

Revelation 17:14 says, “They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.” Throughout the period from the first to the second coming of Christ, Christians will preach the gospel in the whole world, but they will also be opposed and persecuted in the whole world. In the book of Revelation they will be opposed and persecuted by the dragon, by the beast out of the sea, by the beast out of the earth, by the great prostitute Babylon and by the people who have the mark of the beast. All these will make war against the Lamb and his followers. Jesus Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet<sup>81</sup>. Every knee must bow before him and every tongue must confess that he is the Lord<sup>82</sup>. In the end it will be very clear that Christ is the Conqueror and that his people share in his victory. This is exactly the same message as in Romans 8:37-39. Christians may face trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. But “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” The apostle is convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!”

Conclusion. The book of Revelation is a piece of art: It consists of seven parallel sections describing the main principles operating within the history of this world from the first to the second coming of Christ and each section takes this history a little further. It makes use of the wonderful symbolism of pictures and numbers representing real historical powers, institutions and persons that are present and events that happen again and again from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming. God not only created all things in wisdom<sup>83</sup>, but also governs and controls human history in wisdom. The history of God’s Church (recreation) within the history of God’s world (creation) is a piece of art. But because sin caused all the brokenness in human life and society, we cannot see that creation and history are a piece of art. God needs to *reveal* to us what the real issues in human history are and what the deeper underlying principles of human history are. The history of this present world is not just a blind series of unexplainable events. No, the history of this world is serious and meaningful, has a definite purpose and is very hopeful and encouraging for Christians. The purpose of the book of Revelation is to encourage the Christians in their struggles on earth. The main message is that Jesus Christ has conquered and all people who belong to Christ are more than conquerors through him (17:14)<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> Matthew 12:28; Mark 1:15

<sup>80</sup> Daniel 10:13,20-21

<sup>81</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:25

<sup>82</sup> Philippians 2:9-11

<sup>83</sup> Psalm 104:24

<sup>84</sup> Romans 8:37