

## HOW TO STUDY REVELATION

Prophecy holds a strong fascination for many in the world today. Questions are constantly being raised concerning the 144,000, the beast, the image to the beast, the mark of the beast, the number 666, Babylon, Israel, the tribulation and Armageddon. It seems that some are able to find every twist and turn of the economic and political world portrayed in Revelation. It also seems that commentators on Revelation give a variety of different meanings. Is it possible to understand Revelation? What do the prophecies of Revelation really say?

### THE KEY IS IN THE FIRST CHAPTER...

Most authors introduce the theme of their writings in the preface or introductory chapters. John the revelator did just that. Chapter 1 is the key to the book. We will do three things in our study of this chapter:

1. Look for the theme of Revelation.
2. Endeavour to grasp what John tells us about Jesus Christ.
3. Note special characteristics that we must keep in mind as we study Revelation.

### THE THEME... What is the purpose of Revelation?



Q1 **Although Revelation is sometimes called "The Revelation of Saint John," who is really the central character of the book?**  
Revelation 1:1,2

A

Q2 **Who will be blessed by the Revelation?**  
Revelation 1:3

A

Q3 **Where was John at the time of writing?**  
Revelation 1:9-10

A

Patmos is a delightful Greek island today. However, when John was there conditions were not as pleasant. John was suffering for his faith. Also, the believers in the seven churches to which the book was addressed, were his companions in persecution. This revelation, which John received in vision on the Lord's Day, centres upon Jesus Christ who had suffered and died for them. It reveals Jesus Christ as the One who had risen from the dead and was able to meet the needs of believers. It portrays the attacks of evil upon the Saviour and His people. It reveals that God has not forgotten His followers.■

### WHAT DOES JOHN TELL US ABOUT JESUS?



Q4 **In addressing "the seven churches in the province of Asia," how did John describe Jesus Christ?** Revelation 1:4,5

- A
1. Jesus is the One who gives
  2. Jesus is the
  3. Jesus is the
  4. Jesus is the

Jesus Christ is far greater than the greatest of this earth. He is greater by virtue of His nature and character. He is greater by virtue of the fact that He not only died for us but that He arose from the grave. He was not the "first" to rise from the dead for even in His own life upon earth He raised the dead. He is called the "firstborn from the dead" for His resurrection is that upon which all others depend. (Read 1 Corinthians 15:14,20; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:18; Philippians 3:20,21.)



Q5 **What two things does John say Jesus has done for his readers?** Revelation 1:5,6

- A
1. Jesus loves us and has
  2. Jesus has

Twice in this chapter, believers in Jesus Christ are spoken of as members of a "kingdom." (See Revelation 1:6,9.) The King is Jesus and His nation in New Testament times is made up of those who are believers in Him. In Old Testament times His nation was Israel. However, because they rejected Him the kingdom was given to believers. (See Matthew 21:33-46; 23:37-39; 1 Peter 2:9,10.)

## WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS BOOK?

### I Revelation was *RELEVANT TO THE FIRST READERS*



Q8 **Who were the first to read and receive a message from Revelation?** Revelation 1:11

A

The whole book was addressed to the seven churches in existence in John's day. It was written during times of intense stress and severe persecution. To ignore these facts is to expose ourselves to many fanciful and sensational theories.



Q6 **Read the vision that John had of Jesus Christ walking among the seven golden lampstands in Revelation 1:12-20. What two important facts did Jesus reveal about Himself?** Revelation 1:17,18

- A
1. Jesus said, "I am the ... "
  2. Jesus said, "I am the ... "

Q7 **Jesus Christ walked among the seven golden lampstands and held the seven stars! What does this reveal about His attitude to His people?** Revelation 1:19,20.

A **Jesus**

Weak and defective though we may be, Jesus Christ loves to be close to us. He wishes to sustain and guide us as He does the stars in the sky.☐

However, although the prophets primarily spoke for their time, the messages of Revelation are meaningful to people today. The seven churches were models of the Christian church from John's time until the coming of Jesus. To avoid falling for every theory, and to understand the message that Jesus has for us in Revelation, we must interpret this book according to: (i) the history of the time, (ii) the meaning of the individual words in the original language, (iii) the best understanding of the grammatical principles of the time, (iv) the context of the passage, and (v) the analogy or context of Scripture. We must always remember: Revelation was *RELEVANT TO THE FIRST READERS!* ☐

## 2 Revelation uses **SYMBOLS**



Q9 **What symbols are used to portray the seven churches to which Revelation was addressed?** Revelation 1:12,20

A

Revelation is full of symbols such as these. There are a couple of points that we should note concerning the symbols of Revelation:

1. The symbolism is *JEWISH*: There is hardly a paragraph in Revelation that does not draw on the experience of Israel in Old Testament times. The language and stories of the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, the Babylonian captivity, and especially the temple are used and must be understood to correctly interpret the Revelation. Each of the chains of prophecy in Revelation begins with a vision of the "heavenly" temple.
2. The symbolism is *APPLIED TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AS THE NEW ISRAEL*: In the New Testament the Christian church takes the place of literal Israel. (See Romans 2:28,29; Galatians 3:26-29.) Revelation is addressed to the Christian church, the true Israel, believers scattered throughout the world. Believers in Jesus Christ make up His kingdom in New Testament times. (Revelation 1:6.)

In the rest of the Revelation the contrasts are extended to include those between good and evil. "The word of God abounds in sharp and striking contrasts. Sin and holiness are placed side by side, that, beholding, we may shun the one and accept the other . . . We are left free to copy either, as we choose. The fearful results of transgressing God's commands are placed over against the blessings resulting from obedience. We ourselves must decide whether we will suffer the one or enjoy the other." - E.G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 676.

Edwin R. Thiele lists a number of the contrasts in Revelation in his *Outline Studies in Revelation*, on page 7. Here are some of the contrasts found in Revelation:

The work of Satan and his cohorts	The work of Christ and His church
The wine of the wrath of God	The fruit of the tree of life
The terrors of the doomed	The joys of the redeemed
The mark of the beast	The seal of God
Destruction by the Lion of Judah	Salvation by the slain Lamb
Woes to the unrepentant	Promises to the overcomer in Jesus
The resurrection of death	The resurrection of life
The lake of fire	The sea of glass
Babylon fallen in shame	The New Jerusalem coming in glory
Destruction	Deliverance

When the scene depicted by the prophet switches from earth to heaven, or heaven to earth, it does not necessarily mean that those events follow the others in time. Revelation is not written in chronological order. The events may be occurring together and should be seen in *CONTRAST*.

We don't look to the events or news of today to find the interpretation of the symbols of Revelation. Because "red" may represent communism, we are not to assume that the "red horse" of Revelation 6 represents socialism today. Because our imaginations may see a likeness between "scorpions," "locusts" and modern helicopters, we are not to assume that Revelation 9 portrays helicopters in a war zone today. Nor are we to suggest that credit-cards, file numbers and computers are related to the mark of the beast simply because we may be fearful of the direction some of these things may be leading. We must look back to the experiences of God's Old Testament people to gain an understanding of Revelation's *SYMBOLS*. These *SYMBOLS* have a world-wide application for they apply to the true Israel, believers in Jesus Christ, scattered in every nation.■

## 3 Revelation is full of **CONTRASTS**



Q10 **What contrast is drawn in Revelation 1:8?** Compare Revelation 1:17

A

#### 4 Revelation is a **MOSAIC OF PREVIOUS SCRIPTURE**



Q11 **Where else in Scripture do we find a vision of Jesus Christ that is similar to that found in Revelation 1:12-16?** (See footnote or marginal reference on Revelation 1:13)

A

In the Revelation, Jesus Christ used the stories and experiences of His Old Testament people to speak to believers. He unsealed the book of Daniel. And, the Revelation is also the climax of the New Testament. It enlarges on the words Jesus spoke while on this earth. It has been said that Matthew 24, as well as Mark 13 and Luke 21, is a miniature of Revelation. In Revelation all books of the Bible meet. It is a *MOSAIC OF PREVIOUS SCRIPTURE!*

#### 5 Revelation is **CHRIST-CENTERED & CHURCH-CENTERED**

This book is Christ-centred - "The revelation of Jesus Christ." Revelation 1:1. It is also church-

centred for Jesus told John to "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches." Revelation 1:11. Revelation depicts Jesus Christ's nature as Lord, the Word, the Alpha and Omega, King, Master, Lamb, Lion and Morning Star. It portrays Jesus Christ's activities and ministry as Creator, Saviour, Priest, Judge and King. It describes Jesus Christ's relationships with the Father, the Holy Spirit, angels, believers and unbelievers. All but three verses (verses 3,4,19) in chapter one mention Him. We will discover that every chapter of Revelation reveals Jesus Christ.



Q12 **What glorious and important truth about Jesus is revealed in Revelation 1:7?**

A

Two thousand years ago He came in meekness. He will come again in power. Two thousand years ago He came in humility. He will come again in glory. Two thousand years ago He came to purchase our freedom. He is coming again to dwell with us. He is coming to take us home. This is the point of Revelation. There is hope. Jesus is coming again.☑

**my**

**response...**

Chapter 1 contains the keys to the book. It reveals Jesus Christ to be the theme of the book. It reveals that Jesus our Saviour walks among believers and that He is coming again. It reveals the keys that, if used carefully, will unlock the blessings of Revelation.

Revelation is not to be read as an intellectual exercise to derive elaborate schemes of the past or the future, for, although it portrays the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God, it focuses upon His gift of free choice to us all. To read Revelation as an intellectual exercise, or simply to satisfy one's curiosity, is to miss the essential message of the book. The purpose of Revelation is to lead the reader into a saving relationship with, and a living commitment to, Jesus Christ.



**In Revelation Jesus speaks to His followers. What do you think it means to choose to believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour? How does living in harmony with every Bible truth that you already know fit into this?**

