

# REVELATION

Living in Light of Christ's Second  
Coming

# Introduction

- The book of Revelation of Jesus Christ was written by John
- It's called a revelation (*apocalypse*), a type of Jewish literature (1:1, cf. Eze and Dan)
- It recounted a prophet's symbolic dreams and visions that revealed God's heavenly perspective on history, current events so that the present could be viewed in light of history's final outcome
- It is prophetic in that it's a word from God spoken through a prophet to God's people to warn and comfort them in time of crisis
- It's prophecy because it also brings OT prophecy to its climax
- It was a circular letter sent to 7 churches in the ancient Roman province of Asia
- The number "7" is a meaningful number, a symbol of completeness based on the 7-day Sabbath cycle in the OT
- John has woven 7s into every part of this book

# Reading and Understanding Revelation

- John gives us clear guidance on how to understand this book
- Jewish apocalyptic literature is communicated through symbolic imagery and numbers
- It's not a secret predictive code about the timing of the end of the world
- John is using symbols drawn from the OT and he expects his readers to discover what the symbols mean by looking up the texts he's alluding to
- As a letter, he is addressing the situation of these 1<sup>st</sup> century churches
- Therefore, we must interpret it in its historical context

# Message to the 7 Churches (chs 1-3)

- John was exiled on the island of Patmos and saw a vision of the risen Christ exalted as King of the world and was standing among 7 burning lights
- John says it's a symbol of the 7 churches in Asia Minor which is adapted from the prophetic book of Zechariah (see ch 4)
- He addresses problems that faced each church. Some were apathetic due to wealth, while others were morally compromised. Some remained faithful to Jesus and some were persecuted as a result
- Jesus warns that things will only get worse, for a tribulation is upon the churches (2:9-10) that will force them to choose between compromise or faithfulness

# Message to the 7 Churches (chs 1-3)

- By John's time, the persecution of Christians by Nero was passed to and continued by Domitian
- The temptation was to deny Jesus and to avoid persecution by blending into the culture
- Jesus challenged them to overcome and promised a reward for everyone who conquered in the new creation (chs 21-22)
- This promise drives the plotline of the letter
- Will Jesus' people endure? Will they inherit the new creation that God has in store for them? Why is faithfulness to Jesus described as conquering?
- The rest of the book (chs 12-22) is John's answer to these questions

# Vision of Heavenly Throne Room (chs 4-5)

- John describes this vision with imagery drawn from OT prophets (Isa 6; Eze 1; Dan 7)
- Surrounding God are creatures and elders that represent all creation and nations
- Together they are giving allegiance and honor to the Creator God who is holy, holy and holy
- In God's hand is a scroll that is closed with 7 waxed seals
- It symbolizes the message of the OT prophets and the sealed scroll of Daniel's visions (Isa 8:16; Eze 2-3; Dan 12)
- These are about how God's kingdom will come here fully on earth as in heaven

# Vision of Heavenly Throne Room (chs 4-5)

- No one is able to open the scroll until John hears of someone who can
- It's the Lion of Judah (Gen 49:9) and the root of David (Isa 11:1)
- These are classic OT descriptions of the messianic King, who would bring God's kingdom through military conquest
- That's what John hears, but what he sees is a sacrificed bloody Lamb, who's alive and standing there and ready to open the scroll
- This symbol of Jesus as the slain Lamb is important for understanding the book
- John is saying that the OT promise of God's future victorious kingdom was inaugurated by the crucified Messiah

# Vision of Heavenly Throne Room (chs 4-5)

- Jesus overcame his enemies by dying for them as the true Passover Lamb, so they may be redeemed
- The resurrection of Jesus' death on the cross was not a defeat. It was his enthronement to conquer evil
- This vision concludes with the Lamb along side the one sitting on the throne and together they are worshipped. The slain Lamb begins to open the scroll
- This is a symbol of the Lamb's divine authority to guide history to its conclusion

# Three Cycles of Seven

- 7 seals (chs 6-8a), 7 trumpets (8b-11), 7 bowls (12-16)
- Each image depicts God's kingdom and justice coming here on earth as in heaven
- Some think that the 3 sets of 7 divine judgements represent a literal, linear sequence of event that happened in the past, now, or in the future when Jesus returns
- But notice how John has woven all the sevens together, so the final 7 bowls come out of the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet and the 7<sup>th</sup> seals
- The 7 trumpets emerge from the 7<sup>th</sup> seal. They are like nesting dolls—each 7<sup>th</sup> contained the next 7
- Notice also how each of the series of 7 culminate in the final judgment and they have matching conclusions

# Three Cycles of Seven

- So, it's likely that John is using each set of 7 to depict the same period of time between Jesus' resurrection and future return from 3 different perspectives
- Finally, the slain Lamb begins to open the scroll's 1<sup>st</sup> 4 seals
- John sees 4 horsemen. It's an image from Zech 1 and they symbolize time of war, conquest, famine, and death
- The 5<sup>th</sup> seal depicts murdered Christian martyrs before God's heavenly throne
- The 6<sup>th</sup> seal is God's response to the cry of the martyrs—the Day of the Lord (Isa 2; Joel 2). Who can stand?

# Three Cycles of Seven

- John pauses the action with an intermission to answer that question
- In ch 7 John sees an angel with a signet ring coming to place a mark of protection on God's servants. Who are enduring all this hardship
- He hears the number of those who are sealed—144,000
- It's a military census number (12k from each of the 12 tribes) (Num 1)
- The number of this army is what John heard, but what he saw was the fulfillment of those images in the slain Lamb
- When he sees this messianic army of God's kingdom, it's made up of people from all nations fulfilling God's promise to Abraham (Gen 17:4)
- It's a multi-ethnic army of the Lamb who stands before God, because they have been redeemed by the Lamb's blood

# Three Cycles of Seven

- They are called conquerors not by killing their enemies but by suffering and bearing witness just like the Lamb
- After this is the breaking of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal. Before the scroll is opened the 7 warning trumpets emerge. Fire is taken from the incense altar. It symbolizes the cry of the martyrs and cast onto to earth, bringing the Day of the Lord to its completion (8:5)
- By introducing the 7 trumpets (8b-11), John backs up and retells the story again. He retells the story from the book of Exodus
- The 1<sup>st</sup> 5 trumpet blasts replay the plagues sent on Egypt
- The 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet releases the 4 horsemen that came from the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 seals

# Three Cycles of Seven

- John tells us that despite these plagues the nations did not repent (9:20-21), just like Pharaoh did not repent in Exodus
- John pauses the action again, and an angel bring the unsealed scroll that was opened by the Lamb (10:1-11:13)
- And just like Ezekiel, John is told to eat the scroll and then proclaim its message to the nations
- **Now the scroll is opened and we discover how God's kingdom will come here on earth**
- The content is spelled out in 2 symbolic visions
- **First**, John sees God's temple and the martyrs by the altar, and he's told to measure and set them apart

# Three Cycles of Seven

- It's an image of protection from Zech 2. But then the outer courts in the city are excluded and get trampled by the nations
- Some think this is a destruction of Jerusalem in the past or the future
- Likely John is following the tradition of Jesus and the apostle who all use the new temple as a symbol for God's covenant people (1 Cor 3:16; Heb 3:6; 1 Pt 2:4-5)
- This image means Jesus' followers may suffer persecution by the nations, but this external defeat cannot take away their victory through the Lamb
- The **second** vision describes God appointing 2 witness as prophetic representatives to the nations
- Are these 2 literal prophets who will appear one day in the

# Three Cycles of Seven

- John calls them lampstands, which is symbolic of the churches (11:4-20)
- It's likely about the prophetic role of Jesus' followers who have taken up the mantle of Moses and Elijah and to call the nations back to God
- Then a beast appears (Dan 7) and conquers the witnesses and kills them
- However, God brings them back to life and vindicates the witnesses before the persecutors
- The result is that many among the nations finally do repent (11:13) in the Day of the Lord

# Summary

- God's warning judgments through the seals and trumpets did not generate repentance among the nations, just like the Exodus plagues only hardened Pharaoh's heart
- The Lamb conquered his enemies by loving them, dying for them
- And now the message of the Lamb's scroll reveals the mission of his army—the church
- God's kingdom will be revealed when the nations see the church imitating the loving sacrifices of the Lamb
- It's God's mercy shown through Jesus' followers that will bring the nations to repentance
- After this, the last trumpet sounds and the nations are shaken, as God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven (11:19)

# Summary

- Who is that terrible beast that waged war on God's people?
- John will tell us in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the book