

# He Gave us the Apocalypse

## I. Introduction

A. "Lend me your eyes I can change what you see."

B. Tonight: the Book of Revelation, a.k.a. the "Apocalypse"

C. The Apocalypse in contemporary Christian culture

- Is Revelation a puzzle to be solved? A riddle to ignore?

- No. It is a rich and rewarding study (with a promise attached to its readers and hearers).

## II. Different approaches to interpreting the Book of Revelation

A. What is the Book of Revelation *about*? *For whom* is the Book of Revelation written?

B. Different approaches

1. The **preterist view** limits (most of) the book's prophecy to events that occurred prior to 70 A.D. and the fall of Jerusalem.

2. The **historicist view** sees Revelation as depicting major epochs in church history.

3. The **futurist view** believes the visions spoken of in 4:1-22:5 occur exclusively in the future, right before the end of history.

- Dispensationalism

- not much relevance to its original readers

- symbols become a wax nose (e.g., Apache helicopters)

4. The **idealist view** sees Revelation as a symbolic account of the struggle between good and evil that occurs throughout history.

5. **Modified, redemptive-historical idealism** (G. K. Beale): The Book of Revelation provides a symbolic account the struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan that occurs “between the times” of the first and second comings of Jesus Christ.

- The Book of Revelation provides a “**new exodus**” **framework** (see below) in which the church across the ages may learn a God-centered perspective on reality and cultivate steadfastness and hope in the midst of various trials

### III. Literary features of the Book of Revelation

#### A. Read Revelation 1:1-8.

B. The Book of Revelation is a **hybrid** form of literature: prophecy, letter, apocalypse.

#### 1. The Book of Revelation is **prophecy**.

##### a. Rev 1:3

b. Like OT prophecy on which it so heavily draws (e.g., Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel), the Book of Revelation reveals a **vision of the divine king** and his **sovereign plan for history**.

c. Like OT prophecy, the Book of Revelation offers us more than mere **prediction** of the future. The Book of Revelation does not seek simply to **inform us**. It also seeks to **move us** to faith and repentance, to inspire perseverance and hope by means of its various **promises and warnings** (e.g., Jesus’ words to the seven churches).

d. The Book of Revelation presents itself to us as the “**climax of prophecy**” (Richard Bauckham), God’s **final** prophetic word to his people (Rev 22:18-19).

**2. The Book of Revelation is a *circular letter*.**

a. **Rev 1:4:** salutation

b. **Rev 3-4:** *one letter* circulated among *seven churches* of Asia Minor

**3. The Book of Revelation is *apocalyptic literature*.**

a. **Rev 1:1**

b. **The vision of the Book of Revelation is *transmitted* in a manner common to apocalyptic literature:** God → Jesus Christ → angel → John (seer)

c. **The Book of Revelation is an “*apocalypse*.” As such, it “*unveils*” to God’s people a *transcendent perspective* on their circumstances.**

i. Revelation **unveils heaven:** Whatever else appearances might suggest, God is on his throne.

ii. Revelation **unveils the meaning of history:** Whatever else circumstances might suggest, God is working out his sovereign plan of salvation and judgment.

iii. Therefore, because God reigns in Jesus Christ, the people of God may **persevere through various trials and have hope.**

d. **The Book of Revelation conveys its transcendent perspective to us *by means of symbolism*.**

i. Rev 1:1: “he *signified* it”

ii. If we are to avoid misunderstanding, Revelation’s symbolism must be interpreted in its *historical and cultural context* (e.g., “lukewarm” Christians).

- Hot waters of Hierapolis were medicinal
- Cold waters of Colossae were drinkable

iii. If we are to avoid misunderstanding, Revelation's symbolism must be interpreted in its *scriptural context* (e.g., new exodus).

iv. **Example: Rev 1:8**

(a) Rev 1:8 offers three commentaries on YHWH (alpha and omega; Lord God Almighty; who is and who was and who is to come)

(b) by means of 21 (7x3) Greek words, alphabetical merism, three tenses of time

(c) What is the point of this symbolism? This "divine signature" signifies the *perfection and fullness* of the God whose eternal being underlines the prophecies and blessings pronounced in Revelation 1:1-7, thus guaranteeing their fulfillment

#### IV. Major themes of the Book of Revelation

##### A. The Book of Revelation conveys a *theocentric vision* of reality.

- The alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13)

- The throne of God above and at the center of creation (Rev 4)

##### B. The Book of Revelation proclaims the *triune God* as the supreme and sovereign center of reality.

- Rev 1:4-6

- Rev 4-5

##### C. The Book of Revelation *portrays* the triune God's work of salvation and *frames* our place "between the times" of Jesus' first and second comings *by means of a "new exodus" typology.*

- **Elements** of the exodus
- Rev 1:5-6
- Rev 7; 14: **144,000** (with the Lion and the Lamb of Rev 5)

## **V. Conclusion: the triumph of the Lamb**

**A. The world's greatest problem according to Revelation 5:** the non-fulfillment of Isaiah 6:3's vision

**B. The good news according to Rev 5:5ff:** The Lion of the tribe of Judah ... has conquered

**C. How we are more than conquerors through the triumph of the Lamb: Rev 12:11**