

I. Apokalypsis

- The Greek word translated “revelation” in 1:1 is found in other locations in the Bible (i.e., Romans 2:5; 8:19; 16:25; I Corinthians 1:7; 14:6, 26; II Corinthians 12:1, 7; Galatians 1:12; 2:2; Ephesians 1:17; 3:3; II Thessalonians 1:7; I Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13). It simply means a disclosure, uncovering, appearance of things previously unknown. The English word “apocalypse” has come to be seen as something else, leading to misinterpretation of this book.
- Authorship is generally accepted to be the John who was a disciple of Christ, the apostle who helped Peter in Acts, and the author of a gospel plus three other epistles in the New Testament (besides Revelation). The author indicates that he is the one who bore witness AND testified to the Word of God, the testimony of Jesus, and “all he saw”.
- It is believed that this book was composed by John on the isle of Patmos around 94-96 A.D. while Christians were being persecuted under Domitian. A few scholars argue for an earlier date, like 69-79 A.D. under the rule of Vespasian (not a persecutor) and the persecution referred to was that of Nero, Vespasian’s predecessor. The later dates of composition are supported by:
 - ✓ Irenaeus (c. 185 A.D.) indicates the writing of Revelation took place in the latter part of Domitian’s reign
 - ✓ Eusebius (4th century) agrees with a later date of composition in his Ecclesiastical History
 - ✓ The declining state of the seven churches supports a later date, as it is unlikely they would drop away so quickly just after Paul’s influence was known.
- Patmos is an island in the Aegean Sea, located about 50 miles SW of Ephesus. The island is small, approx. 300 sq. miles (see map).
- The first few verses define the nature and mission of this prophecy:
 - ✓ Jesus Christ is revealing the knowledge
 - ✓ It was given to Christ by God
 - ✓ It is being revealed to show Christians things that will occur “soon” (Gk. *tachos*, meaning speed, swiftly, quickly). See also Rev. 3:11; 22:7-10 and compare with Daniel 12:4
 - ✓ The message is sent and made known via God’s angel
- Verse 3 states that this is a prophecy. The Greek word, *propheteia*, used is defined in a Biblical sense as: *A discourse emanating from divine inspiration & declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden, especially foretelling future events.*
- The audience/recipients are the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (modern day western Turkey).
- In a vision, an image of Jesus appears to John and begins to instruct him. Jesus is among seven lampstands, which represent the seven churches. In His hand are seven stars, representing the “angels” of the seven churches. It is unclear who exactly these angels represent. Some say that these were the “guardian angels” of each church, others perhaps the eldership or a representative sent to John and even the collective “spirit” of the congregation. Each church gets a specific message:

II. Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)

- Doing good: Jesus knows of their unceasing works and labor, their patience, and that they will not contend with evil men and false apostles. They also hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, a sect who upheld idolatry and fornication.
- Needs improvement: They have lost their “first love”. Jesus predicts that tough times will bring about betrayal, strife, and absence of love among brotherhood (Matthew 24:5-14). There is much disagreement on exactly what this means, but verse 5 seems to indicate they have stopped doing the works they used to do. Typically “works” are defined as what we do to help others (cf. James 2:14-26; Matthew 25:31-46).
- Overcome: eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God

III. Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

- What is going on: Tribulation is occurring in Smyrna. They are poor (but rich, cf. James 2:5, I Corinthians 6:10; 8:9). There are evil speaking and lying “Jews” among them, a school of Satan himself (cf. Romans 2:28-29). Jesus provides a dire portent: imprisonment and more persecution are coming.
- Good news: Do not fear. Be faithful until death and they will receive a crown of eternal life
- Overcome: No harm will come at judgment (“second death” will occur for sinners)

IV. Pergamos (Revelation 2:12-17)

- Doing good: Working hard and faithful despite being at the “throne of Satan”. Pergamos is a prominent Roman city, the center of the imperial cult in the province and known for the worship of the serpent god, Asclepius. One of their members, Antipas, has been martyred.
- Needs improvement: There are those there that follow the doctrines of idolatry and sexual immorality, including the aforementioned Nicolaitans. They are to repent.
- Overcome: be giving the hidden manna (spiritual sustenance) and a white stone (relates to white/black voting pieces of the time). A new, currently unknown name will be written on the stone (????).

V. Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

- Doing good: Known for their works, love, service, faith and patience. Their current works surpass their early ones.
- Needs improvement: They seem to tolerate a female false teacher (called “Jezebel”) who promotes idolatry and sexual sin. She has been given ample time to repent and failed to do so. Punishment for her and her disciples will be sickness and death (physical and/or spiritual).
- Encouragement: Those who have not followed her will be spared any further burdens.
- Overcome: Will share in Jesus rule over all things, given to Christ by God the Father. Psalm 2:8 is quoted. Jesus describes Himself as the morning star in Revelation 22:16

VI. Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)

- Doing good: There are still a few remaining in Sardis who walk undefiled (in “white”).
- Needs improvement: Their works are unacceptable to God. They must repent and take hold of true doctrine. Jesus tells them that He will come without warning.
- Overcome: Clothed in perfection (white), name shall remain in Book of Life (important, see Rev. 20:12-15; 21:22-27), and Jesus shall confess their/our name before the Father (cf. Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9)

VII. Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)

- Doing good: The Lord knows of their works, that they have kept His word and have not denied Him.
- Encouragement: Jesus will defeat the efforts of the “Jews” among them (again called the “synagogue of Satan. He will also spare them from the upcoming trial and test (persecution?) that will envelop the world. He tells them to hold fast and that His arrival is not far off.
- Overcome: Will be made a pillar in God’s temple (cf. Galatians 2:9; Isaiah 56:5) and the name of God and His new city (Heaven)

VIII. Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

- Needs IMMEDIATE improvement (in stark contrast to Philadelphia): The works of the believers in Laodicea are neither hot nor cold, but a disgusting and nauseating taste to Christ. They have placed their faith in wealth, thinking they need nothing more.
- Action required: By “gold” from Jesus, clothe yourselves in purity and open your eyes and ears. Be zealous for Him and repent. It is because Jesus loves the brotherhood at Laodicea that He chastens them. He is standing at their “door” and requesting admittance-let Him in and commune with Him
- Overcome: Will sit with Jesus on his throne, just as Jesus did at His Father’s throne when he overcame sin and death.

