

Some thoughts on the Book of Revelation

How should we interpret Revelation?

There are four main interpretations of the Book of Revelation:

1. **The Contemporary-Historical or Preterist Interpretation.** This holds that the book refers only to the events in the 1st century AD which saw the fall of Jerusalem together with predictions of the Fall of Rome.
2. **The Historicist Interpretation.** This holds that the book refers to the whole history of the last 2000 years. Some Protestants have thought it refers to the errors of the papacy. Some of the symbolism is thought to refer to significant religious and political events.
3. **The Idealist or Timeless Interpretation.** This regards the book as purely allegorical and without any literal fulfilment.
4. **The Futurist or Eschatological Interpretation.** This holds that the book only refers to the End Times which are still future, although some have held that the letters to the churches are actually portraying the state of the church in various periods of history.

I have come to the conclusion that none of these views is adequate in itself.

- I find it difficult to believe that the book, prominent as it is at the end of the New Testament, is directly relevant only to a few generations, either the early generations (as in the Contemporary-Historical/Preterist view) or a few still future generations (as in the Futurist/Eschatological view). In any case, Revelation depicts the final destruction of evil, which certainly didn't happen in the first century AD.
- Also it seems strange if the book which is addressed to the early churches was largely irrelevant to them, referring only to subsequent events in the last 2000 years (as in the Historicist view). Another problem is that the historicists seem completely unable to agree on their interpretation.
- Finally, I feel uneasy with the idea that none of Revelation is referring to specific events but that it should all be treated as an allegory. Admittedly, Revelation has been subject to many weird and naive literalistic interpretations but the Idealist/Timeless view seems to me like an easy way out of the challenges and difficulties of the book.

The only view which seems adequate to me is that all of these views contain part of the truth, namely:

- a. The book was directly relevant to the situation in which the early church found itself.
- b. It has been similarly relevant throughout the centuries (and will continue to be so)
- c. There is a great deal of symbolism (allegory) in the book. John wrote in terms of his own culture and the tradition of ancient apocalyptic.
- d. There will be a final major specific fulfilment of its prophecies in the future.

I think we should approach Revelation on the basis of how Jesus himself dealt with the matter of future prophecy. In the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24 etc.) he foretold the future fall of the temple and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 but he merged this into speaking about the End Times with reference to cosmic disturbances and the Second Coming. He was addressing the whole period of future history up to the climax of the ages (For the reasons I believe scholars who deny Jesus was referring to his Second Coming are mistaken see the Appendix to my paper *Can we ignore what Jesus said about the signs of his return?*). However his aim was clearly to exhort the disciples to be vigilant and discerning (Matt 24:23-26, 32-33, 42-44; 25:1-13) and to be faithful even in the suffering and persecution which would come (Matt 24:10-13).

The Book of Revelation has a similar message. Suffering and persecution will be the regular experience of the church. There will be great pressure to compromise one's faith and many will give way to it. But those who stand firm to the end will be saved. More important, God is with us by his Spirit and he is sovereign. John bases his reference to the

“seven spirits” (3:1; 4:5; 5:6) and the “two witnesses” (11:3) on Zech 4 which includes the statement “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.” Despite all the difficulty and suffering, which will greatly intensify at some stage in the future, he will preserve his church and bring it to ultimate victory and reward when he finally defeats Satan and the power of evil. Those who overcome will sit with Christ on his throne (3:21).

It would appear that much of John’s symbolism applied to the experience of suffering and persecution under the Roman Empire. But he also speaks (symbolically) of the even greater manifestation of evil in the future and the greater pressure and persecution which the church will face. He is not just giving generalised, timeless challenge and encouragement. He is also referring to various specific future events to which we shall return later.

How should we understand references to the imminence of the End?

The Prologue of Revelation states: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. ... 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, because the time is near.” (Rev 1:1-3). Jesus says: “Behold, I am coming soon! ... He who testifies to these things says, Yes, I am coming soon.” (Rev 22:12, 20). Such statements are also found earlier in the NT and raise a difficulty 2000 years later when these events have still not taken place. There have been various suggestions:

- It means shortly after the appointed time arrives.
- It is speaking of the certainty of the events, rather than the timing.

The above two suggestions don’t seem very helpful. More helpful is the next suggestion:

- It is similar to 2 Peter 3:3-9 “First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Perhaps the best suggestion is the following:

- It is part of the prophetic tradition which holds that the End is always imminent. James writes: “Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near The Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:7-9). He pictures Jesus standing in the wings ready to come on stage on the earth at any moment.

Will there be a “Great Tribulation” in the future?

It seems clear from the teaching of Scripture, including from Revelation, that there will be a time of extraordinary suffering before the Return of Christ. It is taught in various biblical books:

Daniel prophesied: “There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Dan 12:1-2). (See Appendix: A short outline of Old Testament eschatology).

Jesus foretold “days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now— and never to be equalled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no-one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.” (Mark 13:19-20)

In Revelation 3:10 Jesus refers to “the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” In 7:14 refers to those “who have come out of the great tribulation.” The fact is that the judgments described from Revelation 6 onwards are referring ultimately to the Great Tribulation (although, as we said above, they are also relevant to the whole history of the church). The Beast of Revelation 14 has repeatedly attacked the church but is now depicted as making one great final attack which led to its destruction. This final attack is the Great Tribulation.

Revelation 12 describes Satan making attempt to regain his original position in heaven but being thrown out and down on earth. His fury and awareness of the imminence of his final defeat is the background to the Great Tribulation. It is the occasion of his worldwide deceit and his final all out attack on the church.

Is there a secret “rapture” of the believers before the “Great Tribulation”?

The whole emphasis of Revelation is on faithfulness in persecution and patient endurance in suffering. This is such a strong emphasis that the idea of the church being caught up before the going gets too tough seems alien to the book.

However, what about Rev 3:10 “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth”? The Greek original can mean either mean “keep you from undergoing” or “keep you right through” the hour of trial. The context of Revelation strongly supports the latter meaning. So this verse cannot be relied upon to support the idea of the church being removed before the Great Tribulation.

Some see the ascension of the Two Witnesses to heaven in Revelation 11:12 as referring to the Rapture. However this is not a secret rapture. Rather it is very public. Also they were attacked, overpowered and killed by the Beast (11:7) so they could hardly be said to have been kept *from* tribulation.

In chapter 6:9-11 when the martyrs ask how long it will be before the Lord steps in they are told: “to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow- servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.” (verse 9).

We should also remember the prayer of Jesus in John 17:15 “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

In view of all this, and particularly since the emphasis of Revelation is upon faithfulness in persecution and patient endurance in suffering, it seems clear that the idea of the church being “raptured” to heaven before the Great Tribulation is mistaken.

Will there be an Antichrist?

The 1st Epistle of John is explicit about the coming Antichrist but also makes it clear that there will be lesser manifestations of the spirit of antichrist throughout church history. This is in harmony with our approach to the interpretation of Revelation – various lesser fulfilments of a prophecy leading to an ultimate major fulfilment.

John writes of the Antichrist: “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming” but he adds “even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist— he denies the Father and the Son.” (1 John 2:18-22). He adds: “Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world” (1 John 4:3 cf. 2 John 7).

Paul foretells the ‘man of lawlessness’ who corresponds to the Antichrist:

“Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.” (2 Thess 2:3-10).

Revelation speaks of the Antichrist as the Beast out of the sea in 13:1ff and 17:3 (but that is not to rule out lesser meanings of the Beast, e.g. in the power of the Roman Empire).

It does seem clear that Scripture does foretell the emergence in the End Times of the Antichrist, who will deceive the world and attack the church.

Will there be a Battle of Armageddon?

Armageddon comes from the Hebrew Har Megiddo, “Mount Megiddo”, but there is no Mount Megiddo. The plain of Megiddo in Israel has been a place of various great battles. I have on a number of occasions looked down on the plain near Tel Megiddo and it is an attractive idea that it could be the place of the final battle between good and evil. But there has been a great deal of discussion and disagreement over the location being referred to in Revelation 16:16. In the end the geography doesn’t matter. It seems clear that there will be a great historical event which will finally destroy the power of the Antichrist. But will it be a literal battle?

Many of those who believe that God still has a purpose for the Jewish people, including in bringing them back to their ancient land, preparing for a time when “all Israel will be saved” through faith in Christ (Rom 11:26) tend to see Armageddon as a literal battle against Israel. They refer back to Zechariah whose prophecy we have already noted as influencing John (See Appendix: A short outline of Old Testament eschatology):

I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. The Lord says through Zechariah:

“On that day [the Day of the Lord, the End Times], when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness, declares the LORD. I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.” (Zech 12:2-9).

Similarly the Lord says:

“I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south” (Zech 14:2-4, cf. Joel 3:9-16).

The fact that there has been a literal return to Israel and a growing Messianic movement (of Jewish people who have come to faith in Christ) supports the idea of a literal battle. All Israel being saved through faith in Christ would, of course, make it part of the church, so the Battle of Armageddon would be a battle against the church.

Will there be a literal Millennium on earth?

It is quite true that Revelation 20:1-10 does not speak of the Millennium being on earth. It also seems to refer only to those who “had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus” (verse 4), namely the martyrs. It is therefore not really possible to be dogmatic as to whether there is a literal Millennium on earth to be enjoyed by all the faithful.

However, I personally think that the argument that Jesus should be vindicated by a literal earthly reign is a strong one, although not without difficulty.

Will there literally be a New Heavens and a New Earth?

It does not seem to be important whether there is a totally new creation or a radical renewal of the present creation. But it seems to me that there are good arguments for expecting one or the other literally.

Firstly, the present creation is adversely affected by sin. Paul makes this clear in Romans 8 when he says: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Rom 8:19-22). This is linked with our

own anticipation of bodily resurrection: “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23).

Secondly, the Bible speaks about redemption of the created order. This is clearly literal in Romans 8 and suggests that other passages (though sometimes using symbolical language) are referring to a literal renewal of the whole of creation.

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox” (Isa 65:17-19, 25). (See Appendix: A short outline of Old Testament eschatology).

What about the wrath of God in Revelation?

The wrath of God is a prominent theme in the Book of Revelation. Various points should be noted:

1. *The wrath of God is not uncontrolled anger or vindictiveness. It is the reaction of perfect holiness to persistent wickedness and unwillingness to repent, despite warnings about the consequences of impenitence.*
 - In 2:21 Jesus says of the woman referred to as Jezebel “I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.”
 - The trumpet judgments are partial not total, so seem like a warning, giving a chance to repent. However “The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts” (9:20-21).
 - The more serious bowl judgments caused plagues. People “cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him ... [they] cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.” (16:9, 11).
2. *Most people will have treated evil as a god (worshipped the Beast) which is extremely serious.*
3. *Jesus speaks explicitly of hell/eternal punishment in the Gospels.*
 - He urged people to “be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28 cf. 5:22, 30; 18:8-9). He warned of “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:41-46 cf. Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:19-31).
 - He speaks of people not being forgiven in the next age (Matt 12:32 cf. Mark 3:28; Luke 12:8-10; 13:28-30).
4. *Jesus died to save humanity from hell/eternal punishment*
 - God has done everything for unworthy sinners to be saved, the only condition being repentance. Anyone who repents – even a death bed repentance like the thief on the cross - can be saved. As we have seen, this repentance was lacking in many people referred to in Revelation.

Is there a chronological order in Revelation?

I have referred to the Great Tribulation, the revelation of the Antichrist, the Battle of Armageddon, the Millennium and the New Heavens and New Earth. They would appear to be in the correct chronological order but many people have tried to find a much more detailed chronology in Revelation, for example in the Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments. There would appear to be a certain amount of chronology here in that they show an increasing severity. We can parallel this to the predictions of Jesus.

In Matthew 24 there are preliminary signs of the end “wars and rumours of wars Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth-pains” (vv 6-8). These appear to be events which will happen frequently throughout history but which are a reminder of the End.

Then Jesus says: “You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (vv 9-14). Clearly persecution, apostasy, deception and evangelism take place throughout the history of the church. But Jesus seems to be speaking of them in the context of a time nearer the End.

Finally, Jesus says: “There will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now— and never to be equalled again false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect— if that were possible Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (vv. 21, 24, 29, 30).

However, it must be remembered that Revelation is apocalyptic, i.e. it reveals the future in highly symbolical terms and is more a passionate statement than a neat, tidy, logical account. So John is not really interested in fitting the various visions together in a neat and orderly fashion. He is not even interested in using symbolism consistently. He is faithfully describing the visions God gave him. We shall not therefore be able to construct a complete, clear, detailed chronology from what John writes and there is no need to try. He is conveying certain truths, revealed in the visions. The detailed chronology does not matter.

Are the numbers in Revelation literal?

These numbers have been a happy hunting ground for all sorts of speculative, even weird, interpretations. But the fact is that the numbers are all part of the apocalyptic symbolism and they should not be taken literally.

Three and a half: This is half of seven and so half of completeness. It signifies something which is on-going, limited or incomplete. (This relates to 42 months and 1260 days which amount to 3 and a half years in the old calendar).

Seven: is a number speaking of completeness or perfection. This relates to the seven days of creation and the Sabbath which God took when he had completed creation.

Ten: means extensive but limited or can again symbolise completeness.

24: is again referring to completeness because it includes the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles.

144,000: This is 12 squared multiplied by 1000 which are two ways of indicating completeness

666: There have been many interpretations of this figure which is “the number of the beast.” One widespread interpretation is that perfection would be 777 so 666 is the number of imperfection – “Man’s number” (Rev 13:18).

Another widely-accepted interpretation is that, in Gematria (the system of assigning numerical value to a word or phrase), 666 is the numerical equivalent of “Nero Caesar” in Hebrew. Nero was, of course, the emperor behind the first Roman persecution of the Christians. There was a myth that Nero would return after he was deemed to be dead.

Some scholars object that John was writing in Greek, not Hebrew, and many of his readers would be Greek-speaking. They also point out that 666 is based upon a misspelling of “Caesar.” Thirdly, these scholars point out that no ancient commentators interpreted it as referring to Nero.

Others reply that each church would have Hebrew speakers. They add that the misspelling was actually used of Nero.

One thing is fairly clear, it is unwise to be too dogmatic about how 666 should be interpreted.

A brief outline of the Book of Revelation

[As stated above, we must beware of seeing too definite a chronology in Revelation. The images are flexible and not necessarily completely consistent with one another.]

After the letters to the seven churches encouraging them to persevere and, where necessary, repent of compromise with paganism, John saw the “divine control room” in heaven with the 24 elders around the throne. They have been variously interpreted as angels or believers (12 apostles and 12 tribes). There are also four creatures who are regarded as angels.

Then there was distress that no-one can open the seven-sealed scroll (God’s book of destiny) but John was reassured that the Lamb who is the Lion of Judah (Jesus) is worthy to open them. This led to worship.

So Jesus opened the seals and as he opened each one preliminary judgments were meted out on the earth: 1. Conquest, 2. Removal of peace, 3. High inflation, 4. Famine and plague killing a quarter of the population, 5. The martyrs cried about how long the suffering will continue and were told the full number of people will soon be martyred, 6. Cosmic disturbances. The first four seals are the inevitable consequence of human sin but then the active wrath of God was being revealed.

The angels were then ready to judge land and sea but the 144,000 of Israel must be sealed with God’s seal first. A countless number God’s people who have come out of tribulation worshipped God and the Lamb. Probably both the 144,000 and the great multitude refer to all God’s people.

Then the 7th seal was opened and there was silence for half an hour, after which the angel with the censor offered incense with prayers of saints, then threw the censer onto the earth.

After this seven trumpet judgments occurred, affecting not a quarter but a third of the earth: 1. Hail, fire, blood fell on the earth. 2. A blazing ‘mountain’ fell into sea. 3. An asteroid(?) destroyed one third of water supplies, and many died. 4. One third of sun, moon, stars and of each day were darkened. An eagle warned that three woes (the last three trumpet judgments) were coming. 5. Locusts with scorpion-like sting emerged from the abyss, ruled over by Abaddon/Apollyon, and tortured those without the seal of God on their foreheads. (It is not clear what the locust symbolise but certainly there is more demonic activity in the End Times). 6. A voice from the altar called for release of four angels bound near Euphrates to kill a third of humanity, using mounted troops. Those not killed by these plagues did not repent of their sins: idolatry, murder, thieving, sexual immorality and magic.

An angel with open scroll stood with one foot on land and the other on the sea and cried out. But John was forbidden to record his words. The angel then said: “No more delay” and told John to eat the scroll which was sweet to the taste but bitter in the stomach. He was commanded to prophesy to many peoples. He was also told to measure the Temple, excluding the outer Court of the Gentiles. The Gentiles will control the city for 42 months (a limited period). It is very unlikely that John is thinking of a literal temple. The Temple probably symbolizes the church and the measuring its preservation.

The two witnesses prophesied for 1260 days (42 months – a limited period). Some say the witnesses are two prophetic individuals (cf. Moses and Elijah) but others say this refers to the prophetic witness of the church in the End Times which is symbolised by two witnesses because two witnesses are required for adequate testimony (Deut 19:15). They had supernatural power to punish enemies, prevent rain (for 1260 days – a limited period), and strike the Earth with plague. Then the Beast from the Abyss (the Antichrist) killed them, exposing their bodies for 3.5 days, after which they are resurrected to heaven.

Then the 7th Trumpet (3rd Woe) sounded and the world became the Kingdom of God and of the Messiah. The elders praised God and foretold final judgment and rewards for the faithful.

The pregnant woman (the messianic community from which the Christ and the church are born) clothed in the sun with the moon beneath her feet appeared. Then a red dragon (Satan) with 7 heads (great authority) and 10 horns (great power) sought to devour her child (who will rule the world) but he was caught up to heaven. The woman fled to the desert (a place of spiritual protection) for 1260 days (a limited period). However the Archangel Michael defeated the dragon (who is also the accuser of the faithful) and cast him down to earth, causing him to be filled with fury,

knowing his time is limited. He pursued the woman (persecutes the church) and she was transported into the desert for 3.5 years (1260 days) and protected from attack.

The Beast from the sea appeared. It had seven heads and ten horns, each head with a blasphemous name. This Beast may represent secular power and the sea may represent political chaos or simply evil chaos. One head was fatally wounded but healed. The dragon gave the beast authority and all those not in the Lamb's book of life worshipped the beast which spoke blasphemously. The beast attacked God's people.

Then the Beast from the Earth appeared, which had two horns, spoke like a dragon and exercised miraculous power. It set up an image of the first Beast, which it brought to life, and made people worship the first Beast. It also forced people to receive the Mark of the Beast 666, without which no-one could buy or sell. This Beast probably represents religious power which forces people to worship the first Beast (secular power).

At this point there was a vision of the Lamb on Mt Zion with the 144,000 who sang a new song of worship. One angel announced judgment, another the fall of Babylon (the godless secular system), which had seduced the nations. A third angel announced the judgment of hell on all who worshipped the Beast and the Son of man and angels reaped the harvest of judgment. Those triumphant over the Beast sang songs of victory next to what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire.

Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels the seven golden bowls of the final plagues and the bowls were poured out. 1. Ugly festering sores broke out on those with the mark of the Beast. 2. The sea turned to blood and everything in it died. 3. All water-sources turned to blood. 4. The sun scorched people and they cursed God but didn't repent. 5. The kingdom of the Beast was plunged into darkness. People were in agony and cursed God but didn't repent. 6. The Euphrates dried up allowing three kings to cross. 3 spirits like frogs came from mouth of Beast and false prophet who gathered the nations for Armageddon (see above). 7. There was a cry from heaven: "It is done!" A great earthquake split the great city into three parts and other cities collapse. Babylon was judged. Huge hailstones fell and people cursed God but didn't repent.

Then John saw the great prostitute - Babylon the great (probably originally referring to Rome and then to the godless world powers). She was sitting by many waters on a scarlet beast which had seven heads and ten horns, and was covered in blasphemous names (the Beast from the sea). The prostitute was dressed in purple and scarlet, glittering with jewels. She had drunk the blood of the martyrs. The seven heads are the seven hills on which the city was built. They are also seven kings, (five have fallen, one is and one will come briefly). The beast who was and is no longer is an eighth king. The ten horns are ten kings who will have authority with the Beast for one hour (a very brief time). They will unsuccessfully attack the Lamb. The waters are many nations. The Beast and ten kings hate and attack the prostitute.

The fall of Babylon was announced. The kings of the earth who had committed adultery with her and the merchants who had grown rich from her lament her demise and their financial loss which happened in one hour (very quickly). However there was great rejoicing and worship in heaven. The church (the Bride of Christ) was prepared for the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

Heaven opened to reveal a rider called Faithful and True, with blazing eyes, many crowns, a robe dipped in blood and sitting on a white horse. He is the Word of God. Armies follow him and a sharp sword comes from his mouth. He judged the nations. On his robe and thigh was written "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. The Beast and false prophet were thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest were killed with the sword.

Then Satan was bound for 1000 years, during which the martyrs ruled with Christ. The rest of the dead came to life after the 1000 years and Satan was released after the 1000 years. He summoned Gog and Magog (who symbolize the nations of the world) to fight against God's people. But fire from heaven defeated them and Satan was cast into the Lake of burning sulphur. The dead were judged before the great white throne. All whose names were in the Lamb's book of life were saved. Death, Hades and all the others were thrown into the lake of burning sulphur.

Finally, there was a new heaven and a new earth. All sadness and death disappeared. The New Jerusalem, brilliant like jewels, with 12 gates, descended from heaven. It was illuminated by the glory of God and those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life enjoyed it and saw God. A crystal-clear river flowed from the throne of God and the Lamb through the city, watering the tree of life and providing fruit and healing for the nations.

The book ends with Jesus saying: "Yes, I am coming soon."

An outline diagram of the Book of Revelation

		Throne in heaven: With the rainbow, 24 elders, Sea of glass and 4 living creatures				
		Lamb as if slain, on throne Praised because worthy to open scroll				
Lamb opens SEALS	1st Seal: White horse – conquest	2nd Seal: Red horse – removal of peace	3rd Seal: Black horse – scales, high inflation	4th Seal: Pale horse – Death & Hades quarter of earth killed sword, famine, plague	5th Seal: Martyrs under altar: How long? Given white robe, soon full number will be martyred	6th Seal: Earthquake, Sun dark, Moon blood red, stars fall, people hide. Wrath of God has come
			Angels ready to judge land and sea but the 144,000 of Israel must be sealed first. Countless number of God's people out of tribulation, white robes, palm branches, worship God and the Lamb			
			7th Seal: Silence for half an hour Angel with censor offered incense with prayers of saints. Then threw censor onto earth			
7 angels with TRUMPETS: 1st Trumpet: Hail, fire, blood. One third of earth burned	2nd Trumpet: Blazing 'mountain' falls into sea. One third of sea and living creatures destroyed	3rd Trumpet: Asteroid? destroys one third of water supplies, many die.	4th Trumpet: One third of sun, moon and stars darkened and one third of each day Eagle cries "Woe" about final 3 Trumpets	5th Trumpet (1st Woe): Locusts with scorpion-like sting torture those without seal of God on foreheads. From the Abyss ruled over by Abaddon/Apollyon	6th Trumpet (2nd Woe): Voice from altar calls for release of 4 angels bound near Euphrates to kill a third of humanity, using mounted troops	Those not killed by these plagues did not repent of their sins: idolatry, murder, thieving, sexual immorality, magic
		Angel with open scroll stands with one foot on land and the other on the sea and cries out. But John forbidden to record his words. Angel then says: "No more delay."	John told to eat the scroll: sweet taste but bitter in the stomach. He is commanded to prophesy to many peoples.	John is told to measure the Temple , excluding the outer Court of the Gentiles. They will control the city for 42 months		

	<p>The 2 witnesses will prophesy for 1260 days (42 months). They have supernatural power to punish enemies, prevent rain (for 1260 days), and strike the Earth with plague</p>		<p>Then the Beast from the Abyss kills them, exposing their bodies for 3.5 days, after which they are resurrected to heaven.</p>	
		<p>7th Trumpet (3rd Woe): The world becomes the Kingdom of God and the Messiah. The elders praise God and foretell final judgment and rewards for the faithful</p>		
<p>The pregnant woman clothed in the sun with the moon beneath her feet appears.</p>	<p>The red dragon with 7 heads and 10 horns seeks to devour her child (who will rule the world) but he is caught up to heaven.</p>	<p>The woman flees to the desert for 1260 days.</p>	<p>Michael defeats the dragon. The dragon (devil, accuser of the faithful) is cast down to earth, filled with fury.</p>	<p>He pursues the woman who is transported into the desert for 3.5 years (1260 days) and protected from attack.</p>
<p>Beast from the sea, 7 heads, 10 horns, blasphemous name.</p>	<p>One head fatally wounded but healed.</p>	<p>The dragon gave the beast authority.</p>	<p>All not in the Lamb's book of life worshipped the beast which spoke blasphemously.</p>	<p>The beast attacked God's people</p>
<p>Beast from the Earth, 2 horns, spoke like a dragon.</p>	<p>It made people worship the 1st Beast.</p>	<p>It exercised miraculous power.</p>	<p>It set up an image of the 1st Beast which it brought to life.</p>	<p>It forced people to receive the Mark of the Beast 666.</p>
		<p>The Lamb on Mt Zion with the 144,000 sang a new song.</p>		
	<p>One angel announces judgment, another the fall of Babylon, which had seduced the nations.</p>	<p>A 3rd angel announces the judgment of hell on all who worshipped the Beast.</p>	<p>The Son of man and angels reap the harvest of judgment.</p>	
		<p>Those triumphant over the Beast sang songs of victory next to what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire</p>		
		<p>One of the 4 living creatures gave 7 angels 7 golden bowls of the final plagues</p>		

1st Bowl: Ugly festering sores on those with the mark of the Beast	2nd Bowl: Sea turned to blood and everything in it died	3rd Bowl: All water-sources turned to blood	4th Bowl: Sun scorches people. They curse God but don't repent	5th Bowl: Poured on throne of Beast. Its kingdom plunged into darkness. People in agony, cursed God and didn't repent	6th Bowl: Poured on the Euphrates, which dried up allowing 3 kings to cross. 3 spirits like frogs came from mouth of Beast and false prophet who gather the nations for Armageddon.	7th Bowl: Cry from heaven: "It is done!" Great earthquake splits great city in 3. Other cities collapse. Babylon judged. Huge hailstones. People curse God but don't repent.
The great prostitute, Babylon the great, sitting by many waters on a scarlet beast which had 7 heads and 10 horns, and was covered in blasphemous names.	Prostitute dressed in purple and scarlet, glittering with jewels.	She had drunk the blood of the martyrs.	7 heads are 7 hills on which city built.	They are also 7 kings, (5 have fallen, 1 is and 1 will come briefly). The beast who was and is no longer is an 8 th king.	The 10 horns are 10 kings who will have authority with the Beast for 1 hour. They will unsuccessfully attack the Lamb. The waters are many nations.	The Beast and 10 kings hate and attack the prostitute.

The **fall of Babylon** is announced. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her. The merchants grew rich from her. They lament her demise and their financial loss which happened in 1 hour.

There is huge rejoicing and worship in heaven. The church (the Bride of Christ) is prepared for the **Wedding Supper of the Lamb**.

Heaven opened and a rider called Faithful and True , with blazing eyes, many crowns, a robe dipped in blood sat on a white horse. He is the Word of God.	Armies follow him. A sharp sword comes from his mouth. He judges the nations. On his robe and thigh is written "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."	The Beast and false prophet were thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest were killed with the sword.
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Satan was bound for 1000 years.

The martyrs rule with Christ. The rest of the dead came to life after the 1000 years.

Satan is released after the 1000 years and summons Gog and Magog to fight against God's people. Fire from heaven defeats them and Satan is cast into the Lake of burning sulphur

The dead were judged before the ***great white throne***. All whose names are in the Lamb's book of life are saved. Death, Hades and all the others are thrown into the lake of burning sulphur.

There is a ***new heaven and a new earth***. All sadness and death disappears. The New Jerusalem, brilliant like jewels, with 12 gates, descends from heaven. It is illuminated by the glory of God and those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life enjoy it and see God.
A crystal-clear river flows from the throne of God and the Lamb through the city, watering the tree of life and providing fruit and healing for the nations.

Jesus says: "Yes, I am coming soon."

Appendix: A brief outline of Old Testament eschatology

In the End Times:

Israel will be re-gathered to their own land (Isa 11:11-12; 60:4; Eze 38:8).

The four “empires” or “beasts” (Neo-Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman) are followed by another beast - the antichrist (Dan 2, 7, 8). The antichrist is a selfish, greedy, corrupt leader who will afflict the people of God (Zech 11:15-17). Deceitful false prophecy will also characterise the end times (Zech 13:2-6). “Ten” i.e. many kingdoms will arise out of the antichrist’s kingdom (Dan 7:24). The laws and times will be changed and God’s people will be in the antichrist’s power for 3.5 years (Dan 7:25) - the “time of trouble for Jacob” (Jer 30:7).

[Note the different interpretations of Daniel’s 70th week (Dan 9:25-27):

- *Many hold the 70th week to be fulfilled in Jesus’ ministry and immediately following.*
- *Others conclude there is an indeterminate period between the 69th and 70th seven and the latter will be a period of ‘war’ and ‘desolation’ v. 26. According to the latter, the ‘little horn’ or ‘beast’ of the last days – the one that sets up the “abomination that causes desolation”, an antitype of Titus - will establish a covenant with the Jews (the “many”) for 7 years but will violate it half way through, but see v. 27]*

The nations seek to destroy the people of God (Isa 24:16; Eze 38) and will besiege Jerusalem (Zech 13). This will bring about the day of the Lord – a day of judgment and blessing (Isa 1:11 etc., Jer 30:7). The Lord will intervene supernaturally against the coalition (Eze 38:22-23) to save Jerusalem. The Son of Man will return (Dan 7:13) and there will be various topographic, cosmic and cataclysmic changes (Isa 24:23; 34:4; Zech 14). The coalition against Israel will turn against one another (Eze 38:21) and the antichrist will be defeated at the “holy mountain” (Dan 11:45).

Israel will be restored and never again destroyed (Amos 9:11, 12, 15)

The kingdoms of the world will be replaced by the eternal kingdom of God (Dan 2:44). The Messiah will rule the earth with a rod of iron (Isa 11:4) and the conditions will be like Eden (Isa 35:5-6; cf 11:5-9; Amos 9:13-14; Mic 4:4-6). There will be healing and water from the desert.

Israel will have political domination (Isa 11:13f etc., 14:2; 49:23; 60:12; Mic 4:7-8).

The mountain of the Lord, Jerusalem, will be central in the end times (Isa 2:2 etc., Mic 4:1-3). It will be a restored (New) Jerusalem (Isa 54:11-12). The nations will be attracted to Jerusalem (Isa 55:5; Zech 14 attendance at the Feast of Tabernacles will be mandatory). Jerusalem will be enriched by the nations (Could this be by Gentile converts?) (60:5, 13).

[Note the different interpretations of Ezekiel’s new temple (Eze 40ff):

1. **Literal:** *Ezekiel intended a new temple to be built when the exiles returned. He was, after all, a priestly as well as a prophetic figure, cf 43:10-11 ““Son of man, describe the temple to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their sins. Let them consider its perfection, 11 and if they are ashamed of all they have done, make known to them the design of the temple—its arrangement, its exits and entrances—its whole design and all its regulations[d] and laws. Write these down before them so that they may be faithful to its design and follow all its regulations.”*

However:

- *Ezekiel is a prophet not a builder. If literal there would be more detail about materials.*
- *Also there are many gaps in details. Those who have tried to reconstruct it have found it difficult.*
- *40-48 is a unity and there are many elements which are so impractical that a literal interpretation must be ruled out e.g.*

- *the siting on a very high mountain 40:2,*
 - *the impossible source and course of the river of life 47:1-12;*
 - *the unreality of the boundaries of the tribes which could never be worked out geographically in hilly Israel*
2. **Symbolic Christian:** *fulfilled symbolically in the church, cf. Ezekiel is used in Revelation in the New Jerusalem*
But: it must have had relevance to the current generation – the prime concern of the OT.
 3. **Dispensationalist:** *Scofield “Israel in the Land during the Kingdom-age” All the festivals, blood sacrifices, priesthood and worship are to be reintroduced*
But this is inconsistent with the significance of Christ’s salvation. Scofield said the sacrifices would be memorial of the cross
 4. **Apocalyptic:** *i.e. symbolism, numerical symmetry, and futurism. (Chs 38-39 are similar). This is Ezekiel’s pattern for the Messianic Age. It was future but arose from the present. The vision of the temple was a kind of incarnation of all that God stood for, all he required and all he could do for his people. In summary:*
 - *Centrality of worship (expressed in meticulous detail and concern for ritual).*
 - *Abiding presence of God amidst his people.*
 - *Blessings that will flow from God’s presence to barren places of earth (river of life).*
 - *Orderly allocation of duties and privileges to all God’s people (cf temple duties and apportionment of land (cf Rev 7:4-8).]*

There will be a new heavens and new earth (Isa 65:17) but there will also be eternal punishment (Isa 66:24).

Tony Higton