

An extract from

A Revelation of Love

A study of the Bible book of *Revelation* and the End Times

The Bible book of *Revelation* and the End Times may seem scary, but it's actually all about God's love

Karl Schank

A Revelation of Love: A study of the Bible book of Revelation by Karl Schank.

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Preface

Do you like love stories? Then you'll love the Bible's book of *Revelation* because it's the ultimate love story.

Do you like action-packed thrillers? Then you'll love *Revelation* because it's the ultimate thriller with the ultimate battle.

Do you like documentaries? Then you'll love *Revelation* because it's all true.

Do you like the news? Then you'll love *Revelation* because it's news before it happens.

The Bible's book of *Revelation* reads like an engrossing page-turner of a novel. It has a plot, a theme, characters, acts, scenes, twists, a climax, and a resolution. But unlike a novel, it's all true.

John wrote *Revelation* for the church, the family of believers, at Jesus' direction to show what will happen ([Revelation 1:1](#)) so that we will be ready and prepared. It reveals Jesus in His glory. *Revelation* may seem scary to some, but it speaks of divine love! It was written in part to *allay* such fears by believers. And to instill the fear of God – and of consequences – in nonbelievers.

Unfortunately, much that is written, preached, and taught about *Revelation* is narrow-minded dogma based on wishful thinking, fear, other parts of the Bible, rationalization, or anything *but* the actual text of the book of *Revelation*.

In this book, we will take an expository, exegetical look at the book of *Revelation* itself to see what it *actually* says. We bring in other related verses when they shine light on *Revelation*; this is all based on Scripture itself. We take a fresh, multi-perspective look at *Revelation* independent of much-debated, yet often dogmatic, theories about the millennium, the rapture, and hypothetical timelines.

At the same time, this book is for ordinary people. Written in straightforward, everyday language, instead of complex theological jargon, it answers common questions about *Revelation* and the End Times.

The goal is better understanding and a better relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The eBook edition (Kindle edition) includes active URL links. Clicking on the underlined Scripture citations will open Bible Gateway with the text of the Scripture in a separate window.

Introduction and Overview

Fear not, but be Prepared

This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants what must soon come to pass. He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John, who testifies to everything he saw. This is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

– [*Revelation 1:1-2*](#)

The book of *Revelation* is God's revelation of Jesus to His church, showing what will happen ([*Revelation 1:1*](#)) so that we will be ready and prepared, and revealing Himself and His glory. *Revelation* may seem scary, but that speaks of divine love! *Revelation* shows that God gives it whatever it takes to accomplish the restoration of all things and the invitation of His followers into glorious Heaven with Him forever.

What this book is all about

As noted, this book takes a fresh, multi-perspective look at *Revelation* independent of millennial theories. It traces major themes throughout the book, including Jesus Christ and God's love. It also addresses common questions (and objections) about *Revelation* and the End Times. As hinted at above, it also shows why believing Christians have nothing to fear from the “bothers, battles, and beasts” in *Revelation*. Indeed, even *those* show God's love. Furthermore, this book includes application questions to ponder as we study. Finally, it includes a “safe” reading plan for those who may initially be anxious about tackling the strange book of *Revelation*.

Preview of major themes in Revelation

Revelation deals with themes such as the following:

Love – Believe it or not, *Revelation* is all about God's love, and ...

Jesus Christ, Who comes back for us, as He promised, for the purpose of ...

Redemption and restoration to the way God always intended things to be when He initially created us, so that ...

We will be with Him forever; in other words, ...

Completion of what God began in Genesis and in John 1

More on all of this as we study.

Structural outline of Revelation

Table 1 – Structural outline of Revelation

Subject		Events	Chapter	Verses	
Prologue			Ch. 1		
Letters to 7 churches		Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira	Ch. 2		
		Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea	Ch. 3		
Throne room		God's throne room in Heaven	Ch. 4		
Seven seals	Intro.to scroll & seals	Scroll & Lamb	Ch. 5		
		Seals 1-4: 4 riders of “Apocalypse”	Ch. 6	6.1-8	
		Seal 5: Martyrs		6.9-11	
		Seal 6: Terror		6.12-17	
	Interlude	Angels seal God's servants	Ch. 7	7.1-3	
		144,000		7.4-8	
		Multitude from Great Tribulation		7.9-17	
		Seal 7: silence in Heaven	Ch. 8	8.1	
	Trumpets		Intro. to trumpets		8.2-6
			Trumpets 1-4: Plagues		8.7-12
Interlude		3 Woes		8.13	
		Trumpet 5: Abyss & scorpion locusts	Ch. 9	9.1-12	
		Trumpet 6: Army on weird horses		9.13-21	
Interlude		Angel & little scroll	Ch. 10		
		Two witnesses	Ch. 11	11.1-14	
		Trumpet 7 (last trump): Christ's reign prophesied		11.15-19	
Dragon, beasts, tribulation, grapes of wrath		Unholy Trinity – Dragon Satan, Antichrist beast, False Prophet beast	Woman, Child, & dragon (Satan)	Ch. 12	12.1-6
			Dragon Satan cast out of Heaven		12.7-17
	Beast from sea (Antichrist)		Ch. 13	13.1-10	
	Beast from Earth (False Prophet)			13.11-18	
	Wrath and vengeance on followers of beast	Lamb and 144,000	Ch. 14	14.1-5	
		Three angels		14.6-13	
		Reapers with sickles & grapes of wrath		14.14-20	
Bowls of plagues, wrath	Intro. to angels with bowls of plagues		Ch. 15		
	Bowls 1–6: Plagues of wrath		Ch. 16	16.1-12	

Christ, church, Creator – ch 1-5

← Bothers, battles, and beasts – Ch 5-19:6 →

Christ, church, Creator –
ch 1-5

← Bothers, battles, and beasts – Ch 5-19:6 →

Subject	Events	Chapter	Verses
The harlot Babylon	Interlude		Gathering for battle of Armageddon
			16.13-16
			Bowl 7: Wrath completed
			16.17-21
		Ch. 17	Harlot Babylon on beast
			17.1-13
			Nations turn on harlot Babylon
Second Coming			17.14-18
		Ch. 18	Babylon is fallen
			18.1-8
			World laments over harlot Babylon
Judgment and reign			18.9-24
		Ch. 19	Fourfold Hallelujah over fall of Babylon
			19.1-6
			Marriage of the Lamb
			19.7-10
New Heaven and New Earth			Coming of Christ
			19.11-19
			Doom of Antichrist Beast and False Prophet
			19.20-21
		Ch. 20	Satan chained in Abyss for 1000 years
Epilogue			20.1-3
			1000 year Millennial Reign with Christ
			20.4-6
			Satan freed, last battle, Satan doomed
Epilogue			20.7-10
			Great White Throne judgment of all
			20.11-15
Epilogue		Ch. 21	New Heaven and New Earth
			21.1-9
			New Jerusalem & its description
Epilogue			21.9-27
		Ch. 22	River & tree of life in New Jerusalem
			22.1-5
Epilogue			John & angel, final messages
			22.6-11
Epilogue			Epilogue
			22.12-21

↗ The end and a new beginning – ch 19-22 ↘

“Safe” *Revelation* reading plan

A major goal of this book is to remove the fear that many people have of the book of *Revelation*.¹ As our title says, it’s all about God’s love. However, many people don’t realize that.

Some people are afraid to read *Revelation*. They’ve heard about the bothers, battles, and beasties from movies and books and maybe sermons. They’re unpleasant and intimidating and can scare people off. They needn’t do so.

¹ For clarity, I’ll italicize *Revelation* when I’m referring to the Bible book of *Revelation*. I’ll keep it non-italic when I’m referring to a revelation in general or to a specific revelation but not to the book. I also won’t italicize it in Bible citations (like the ones below), in which I’ll also usually abbreviate.

The first thing to remember is that if you're a believing Christian, the scary parts aren't directed at you!

Sure, at worst, there may be some collateral damage. But Jesus will be with us every step of the way and will take care of us and help us through it. And at best, we may not even have to go through it at all! (More on *that* when we discuss the "rapture" later.) But really, it doesn't matter: Either way, He loves us and He *will* take care of us ([Revelation 9:4](#); [Rom 8:31-32, 35, 37-39](#)).

God's carrot and stick

God seems to use both a carrot and a stick.² His heartfelt desire, born out of His boundless love, is that *everyone* would turn to Him in faith and be saved. His determination is that *no one* who does will perish ([2 Pet 3:9](#); [John 3:16](#)). So He invites and even entices us with His love, blessings, and many benefits ([Rom 2:4, 7, 10](#)). That's the "carrot".

But eventually, if we don't respond, He will get out His "stick" to *drive* us to Him.³ That's what *Revelation's* bothers, battles, and beasts are: God's attempt to get as-yet-unbelieving people to turn and cry out to Him for salvation from the scary stuff. Because people *do* turn to God in trouble and distress. As it is said, "there are no atheists in foxholes." (Nor, perhaps, in math exams.)

But all that trouble in *Revelation* is directed at those who do not yet believe, not at those who do. That's not punishment (that may come later); it's "redirection". (See also "*Carrot and stick (reprise)*", p.15, below.)

*"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but **shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.**"*

*-- C. S. Lewis, [The Problem of Pain](#)
[boldface emphasis added]*

As noted, there may be collateral damage, and believing Christians may be affected (or may not). But believers are not specifically targeted. What's more, God will be with us and sustain us no matter what happens. Not only that, He will use any such tribulations for our good ([1 Pet 4:12-13, 17](#); [Rom 8:28](#); [Genesis 50:20](#); [John 16:33](#); [Rom 8:1](#)).

Realizing this, and sort of backing into it more easily, everyone can read *Revelation* without fear. Here is a plan:

First read:

Revelation chapters 1 and 22 – Reasons, commission, and conclusions. The bookends of *Revelation*, so to speak.

Then read *Revelation* chapters 1-3 and 21-22 – All the above plus the warning-and-commendation letters to churches, and God's holy city (New Heaven and New Earth). (That's right – you'll be re-reading a couple of chapters; that's intentional.)

² **Carrot and stick:** Wikipedia. at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrot_and_stick

³ The "stick" quite often works. People often turn to God in times of trouble, medical and health issues, math exams, in foxholes, and so forth.

Then *Revelation* chapters 1-4 and 20-22 – All the above plus God’s throne room, wedding supper for believers, and the vanquishing of evil.

Then *Revelation* chapters 1-5 and 19-22 – All the above plus the Lamb of God and God’s final triumph. As you can see, it’s *all good* so far.

Then you’re on your way. By this point, you ought to be able to handle reading the whole thing:

Revelation chapters 1-22, the entire book. This time, read it with us chapter by chapter in order.

Why study *Revelation*?

John wrote *Revelation* shortly after he wrote his Gospel (see “[Scribe – John, son of Zebedee](#)”, p.10, below). In some ways, the *Gospel of John* is the beginning of the story of Jesus ([John 1:1](#); [Mark 1:1](#)), and *Revelation* is the end of the story (or the story of the end) ([Rev 1:1](#); [22:13](#)). Of course, we can also say that *Revelation* ends the story that Genesis begins (see “Genesis and Revelation: Bookends of the Bible”, p.17, below).

Redemption

The entire Bible is a single story from beginning to end, with a plot and a theme. The major theme is redemption: God created us in the first place to share His love and so that we would love Him back. But Jesus had to come to pay our sin penalty for us (redemption) before that could happen. From the beginning, His plan to redeem us is Jesus Christ. There is no “plan B”. There is no need for one. (Therefore, we could also validly say that the major theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ.)

God created us for love. But in the Garden of Eden, Adam decided to go his own way and not God’s way. Worse, every one of us throughout history has done the same thing. Only God is eternal, so only He has eternal Life. So, going in a direction other than the way that Eternal Life Himself is going is separating ourselves from Eternal Life. That’s eternal death.

So the Bible is the story of God’s redemption and restoration of us to His original intent – mutual love and walking together. To solve the problem of our spiritual death, God paid our death penalty Himself! He came to Earth as Jesus, the 200% man (100% man and 100% God) and died in our place, paying the penalty. (For more on this, please see my short book [Jesus Saves ... but How?](#).⁴)

Unfortunately, there’s still sin, separation, and evil in the world. The final chapter of the Great Story is in *Revelation*, when God ends all of that once and for all, and completes the restoration that began with Jesus’ redeeming death. We’ll see all this as we study *Revelation*.

(More on all of this, later.)

Most of the events of *Revelation* happen in the future. Yet, like the rest of the Bible, it is both relevant to today and applies to us and how we live our lives. And regardless of when the events in *Revelation* occur, they are closer every day.

But why should we study Revelation?

Because the revelation was given to us by Jesus ([Rev 1:1a](#))

Because the revelation is about Jesus, our Savior ([Rev 1:1a](#))

⁴ Schank, Karl, 2024. [Jesus Saves ... but How?: Why did Jesus have to suffer and die And why does sin earn a death sentence](#). Independently published: [KSPubs.com](#). 80 pgs. ISBN: 979-8323895236. Amazon.

Because He gave it for us ([Rev 1:1b](#))

Because He gave it to prepare us for what's to come ([Rev 1:1c](#))

Because we'll be blessed by God if we study and apply it ([Rev 1:3](#)).

What is Revelation all about?

It's all about Jesus Christ ([Rev 1:1a](#))

It's all about what is to come ([Rev 1:1c](#))

It's all about God's love and His desire that all turn to Him, repent, believe, and live with Him forever ([2 Pet 3:9](#); [1 Tim 2:3-4](#); [Ezek 18:23, 32](#); [John 3:16-17](#); [Acts 3:19-20](#))

It's all about the restoration of all things to the way God originally intended them to be ([Acts 3:20-21](#); [Rom 8:21](#); [Acts 1:6-7](#))

Best yet, it's not an evenly matched battle between good and evil, God and Satan, with the outcome a cliff-hanger. It's already a "done deal" ([Rev 5:6](#); [19:13](#)). In case anyone had any doubt (another spoiler), God wins in the end.

How to use this book

This book is useful for individual Bible study and for small group discussion-based Bible study. It includes Scripture cross-references (see below), application questions, and thought questions to ponder. It is oriented toward the ordinary "Berean"⁵ Christian rather than the professional theologian or academic.

"We will help ourselves in understanding this book [*Revelation*] that is so often hard to understand if we recognize that its teachings are more about God and God's Christ (Messiah) than about the future, whatever its details. The God of the Book of Revelation is a God who inspires awe. ... In fact in the background of the entire Book of Revelation, even of the battle scenes, is the truth that the victory has been won already. The victory was won at the cross of Christ, the Lamb of God, before which we can only stand in awe. ..." ⁶

It will also help if we consider what it meant to its original readers, since "The first readers of this book were dealing with great opposition and difficult, terrible circumstances. Maybe you are, too. If so, you may be in a better position to understand the book, for often the people who understand the revelation best are those who are suffering for the sake of Christ."⁷

Scripture footnotes. In the eBook edition (Kindle edition), clicking on the underlined Scripture citations will open Bible Gateway with the text of the Scripture in a separate window. Alas, that is not possible in the printed editions.

⁵ "Berean": [Acts 17:11](#) -- Now the Bereans were more noble-minded than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if these teachings were true.

⁶ BaptistWay, 2005. *Study Guide on The Book of Revelation: Visions that Encourage and Challenge*. BaptistWay press. Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT).

⁷ BaptistWay Study Guide, 2005 -- see reference above

[Author's note: Since this present book is not a scholarly academic work, rather than using Latin abbreviations I simply say "see reference above" or the like.]

Internal appendices. For the reader's convenience, I have moved the appendices from the end of this book to follow the chapters to which they primarily refer. Let's call them "excursions". (The academic term would be "excursus", but let's avoid Latin where we can.) They can be recognized by their italic print and whole-page line-border. Since they refer to things discussed in nearby chapters, it may be most useful to simply read them where they appear in the book between exegetical chapters. Or, as they interrupt the flow of study of John's narrative relation, they could be momentarily skipped then read later, like any other normal appendix.

Asides or sidebars, as here, are shaded and set off with partial line boxes.

Proper names, typography, tense, and appendices

⁸ Ross-Larsen, Bruce, 1982. *Edit Yourself: A Manual for Everyone Who Works with Words*. NY: Barnes and Noble Books.

Background and introduction to Revelation

Background, setting, and intro to Revelation

Literal, Inerrant, or true?

Before we start, let's clarify something. Our basic assumption – our ground truth – is that the Bible is true. That includes *Revelation*. Is it literal? Many portions are, but many are poetic, metaphorical, allegorical, apocalyptic, and other forms of literature. (See “[Apocalyptic literature](#)” and “[Prophecy](#)”, p., below.) Is it inerrant? Much debate has swirled around that word, and most of it seems to be because people define the term differently. I simply say that the Bible is *true* ([John 14:6](#)). It is God's own written word, authored by Him, in some cases literally dictated by Him to human writers ([2 Tim 3:16-17](#); [2 Pet 1:20-2](#)). It is true. Period and amen.

Context: W5H

*"I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are **What** and **Why** and **When**
And **How** and **Where** and **Who**."*

*– Rudyard Kipling, “The Elephant's Child”,
[Just So Stories](#), 1902 [emphasis added]*

It is always useful to consider the newspaperman's “five Ws and an H” – what, why, who, where, when, and how. Let's consider these for Revelation. John (or actually Jesus) has made it easy for us as most are addressed in Revelation chapter 1, so for further detail, see “**Error! Reference source not found.**”, **Error! Reference source not found.**.

What – Subject – Jesus Christ ([Rev 1:1a](#))

As mentioned, *Revelation* is all about Jesus Christ and His return to come for us and bring us to be with Him ([John 14:1-2](#)).

Why – Purpose – to prepare His church ([Rev 1:1b](#))

Jesus told – and showed – these things to John in order to show him – and through him to show us – what will happen. That is, God gave us this revelation to prepare us for the future. (See also “[Apocalyptic literature](#)” and “[Prophecy](#)”, pp.13 & 14, below.)

Revelation is also intended to encourage us. The two-word summary of the entire book of *Revelation* is “God wins”. God is in control – always. What's more, He is good and is loving. Jesus gave John this revelation out of love, and encouragement is part of that love. It is encouraging to know – especially in this troubled and troubling world, and the even more troubling future of tribulation, beasts, and battles – that God is in control. He loves us and will take care of us. (See also “[Theme\(s\) of Revelation](#)”, p.15, below.)

What is Jesus asking and commissioning you to do?

How will you do what Jesus is asking you to do?

Who – Jesus Christ ... and more

Specifically:

Author – Jesus Christ and God the Father

While John writes the book (he is the scribe), Jesus is the author. He not only tells John what to write, but as we will see, He orchestrates the whole thing ([Rev 1:1a](#))

Scribe – John, son of Zebedee ([Rev 1:1d](#), [4](#), [9](#))

Some commentators and theologians claim that there are several “Johns”. Their view is that John the Apostle, John the Evangelist, John the Elder, John the Revelator, John the son of Zebedee and brother of James, the author of the Gospel according to John, the author of each of the epistles ascribed to John, and the author of *Revelation*, are several different people. Traditionally, however, all are recognized as one and the same person: He is the son of Zebedee, brother of James, and disciple / Apostle of Jesus. In this book, I take this traditional view, as do an increasing number of modern theologians as well.

Narrators – Jesus, Angels, John

Revelation has several Narrators. In chapters 1-3, Jesus both speaks and essentially dictates to John what to write, so He is one narrator ([Rev 1:1a](#), [2](#), [5](#); [22:16](#), [20](#)). In Chapter 1 and several chapters in the body of the book, angels speak and sometimes tell John what to write. So they're narrators, too ([Rev 10:8-9](#); [17:1, 7](#); [21:9](#); [22:16](#)). And of course John himself, as recording scribe (see above), directly narrates the bulk of the book ([Rev 1:1d](#); [22:8](#)).

Audience, to whom written – the church, including us today! ([Rev 1:1b](#), [11](#); [2:7](#))

John's first (and proximal) audience was the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey). Jesus told him to write *Revelation* to them ([Rev 1:11](#)). However, like Paul's letters to various churches (Ephesus, Colossae, Rome, etc.), *Revelation* is also equally for us.

Subject – Jesus Christ

Revelation, like the Bible as a whole,¹ is all about Jesus. *Revelation* is specifically about Jesus' return and how God is redeeming and restoring all things through Him (see “W5H

Where – Heaven and Earth

The events in *Revelation* take place in both Heaven and on Earth. So, it is important to take note of the context of each section.

¹ **It's all about Jesus:** "Christ's life, death, resurrection, and return are the central theme of all of history" and of the Bible as a whole. (Alastair Begg. "Truth for Life" email newsletter, 3.Aug.2024.)

"... Christ is the key to life and history. Nothing really makes sense apart from the Christ ..." (BaptistWay, 2016. *Study Guide on The Book of Revelation: Terror and Triumph*. Dallas: BaptistWay press, BGCT.).

Troxel, Steve, 2013. *Jesus from Genesis to Revelation*. San Antonio, TX: Disciple Daily Publishing. ISBN: 978-0-9912151-1-9. <https://shepherdssupport.org/jesus-from-genesis-to-revelation/>

Eldredge, John, 2012. *Epic: The Story God is Telling*. Thomas Nelson. 112 pgs. ISBN: 978-0785288794.

Schank, *Jesus Saves ... but How?* -- see reference p.9 above

*“There are more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”*

*-- William Shakespeare, Hamlet,
Act I, Scene v (lines 167-8)*

John received the revelations from the Lord while he was in Roman exile on the island of Patmos off the coast of what is today Turkey. This was close to the city of Ephesus, where John had been pastor and elder.

The things that the revelation describes take place both on Earth in the Near East and in Heaven.

When – Past, Present, and Future

Therefore write down the things you have seen, and the things that are, and the things that will happen after this.

-- Revelation 1:19

When Revelation was written

The Book of *Revelation* was written around AD 85-100², not long after John wrote the Gospel according to John and the epistles of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Like that Gospel, it was written several decades after the rest of the New Testament. That’s the easy part.

When Revelation takes place

But now it gets tricky. The things described in the revelation take place in various time frames:

from “soon” (Rev 1:1) meaning about 2000 years ago (though often, “quickly” might be a better translation, and that can have a different connotation),

through the end of time on Earth,

to the times in Heaven *after* the end, in the New Heaven and New Earth (essentially, in eternity; Revelation 21-22).

What’s more, it is quite possible that portions of *Revelation* take place at or near Creation on Earth and/or at that time in Heaven. Some even seem to take place in Heaven before the beginning of time. The timeline of the book also seems to jump forward and backward like flashbacks and foreshadowing or flash-forwards. Or perhaps it describes the same events twice: first in brief, the *what* of various events, then later in detail, the *how* of those events.

All of this makes interpretation and understanding difficult.

As Paul Kroll points out, “John is not interested in chronology or creating a blueprint of end-time events.”³ John makes no attempt to fit it all together in a modern chronological timeline.

² Some believe it may have been written before AD 70 because John doesn’t mention the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in that year, and they (not unreasonably) assume he would have done so. However, for various reasons, I and most others conclude that AD 85-100 is more likely. But that’s a story for another time.

³ Kroll, Paul. “Revelation 13 and its beasts”. GCI International. <https://www.gci.org/articles/revelation-13-and-its-beasts/>

The timelessness of God

Adding to the difficulty of Revelation is the issue of the timelessness of God. It seems that God, in the spiritual realm of Heaven, does not live on a timeline like we do with a past, present, and future. God is always present (omnipresent), so to Him, everything is the present time (omnitemporal). Consequently, it may be that at least some of what John saw occurring in Heaven is constantly happening for all time (not just at a particular time in our future, and not just sequentially). At the end, we see the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21-22) after earthly time ends. This is eternal and constant, too, in a different sense. None of this makes Revelation any easier to understand or interpret.

For more on how the various parts of *Revelation* might fit together in time, see “Excursion 2 – Timelines in Revelation” below.

What about [Revelation 1:3](#), “the time is near”?

It’s been 2000 years so far, and the clock’s still ticking. How is that time *near*?

Time is relative. Biblical Greek has two words for time. *Chronos* is essentially ordinary clock- or calendar-time, time duration; it has a quantitative sense. *Kairos* usually means the opportune time, the best or perfect time; it has a more qualitative sense. This verse uses *kairos*. So the online interlinear Bible and Strong’s concordance and dictionary both prefer the translation, “the opportune time is near (or nigh)”. In other words, don’t delay or ignore this prophecy, because the time for “heeding” ([Rev 1:3b](#)) is near; in fact, it’s *now* ([John 4:23](#); [5:25](#)). Once the events of *Revelation* happen, it’ll be too late.

How – Understanding Revelation

Kinds of literature, layers of meaning

While the purpose of *Revelation* is to prepare us and to encourage us (see “Why – Purpose – to prepare His church”, p.9, above), it can be very confusing.

I’m convinced that we won’t understand some parts of *Revelation* until it actually occurs. Then it’ll click. We’ll say, “Say.... That sounds familiar. *That* was in *Revelation*! I didn’t get it when I first read it, but I can see it now that it’s happening. And, having read it already, I’m prepared. I know what’s going to happen, and I know what to do.”

But until then, there are parts of *Revelation* that, as humans, we are completely *unable* to understand. Of course, that doesn’t mean we should ignore it. The Holy Spirit can and does provide insight and revelation (no pun intended) at any and all times. Furthermore, much of *Revelation* is intended for our understanding even now. We would miss out if we ignored it.

Layers of meaning

John often writes with several layers of meaning. We can read certain passages and ask, Did he mean *this* or did he mean *that*? We must often conclude that he intended to mean both. It’s not *either-or*, it’s *both-and*.

The more I read, the more I’m convinced that *Revelation* as a whole is intended to have at least three simultaneous layers of meaning:

It meant something to its **initial audience**. This often had something to do with their persecution by Rome. They saw great encouragement that, in spite of circumstances, God – not Rome – was in charge. It also encouraged them that God would ultimately judge the Roman Empire for its sins. This is instructive to

us. Moreover, generally speaking, a passage “cannot mean what it never meant”.⁴ So wishful thinking and strained interpretations inconsistent with this are suspect.

It also means something about what will happen at “**the End of the Age**” (as Jesus phrased it, [Matt 28:20](#)): at the end of time (or the times of the end). It’s **prophecy – history before it happens**. It tells what will happen so that those who will live through it will be prepared and encouraged ([Rev 1:3](#)). Indeed, several passages clearly state that the book is prophetic.

It has a **universal** meaning for all Christians and all churches of all time. Lessons about God’s love, protection, judgment, sovereignty, and what He requires of us. And how we are to act in light thereof. After all, God inspired the Bible and intended it for all of us in all ages ([Rom 15:4](#); [2 Tim 3:16-17](#); [2 Pet 1:20-21](#)). “As the Muratorian Fragment (ca. AD 170) asserts, ‘John ... though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all’ (lines 57- 60).”⁵

Any given passage can have meaning on *all* these layers (and more) *at the same time*. And most usually do. As we discuss *Revelation* – particularly some of the problematic passages – it will help us to think of it on *each* of these levels.

Understanding *Revelation* is also difficult because of its use of several different types of literature, some of which are rather unusual and unfamiliar to 21st-century ears.

Apocalyptic literature

Revelation is apocalyptic literature.

“Apocalypse” is Greek for “Revelation”. *Apocalyptic literature*, in this context⁶, is inspired writings about the End Times that can’t be understood on our own but can only be revealed by God. Apocalyptic literature can appear like fantasy or even sci-fi because it involves strange things unseen in the natural world. It can also include the use of metaphorical, parabolic, and symbolic language similar to poetry. Oftentimes, apocalyptic authors under persecution heavily used symbol, metaphor, and parable to portray counter-cultural concepts to an “in crowd” (such as Christians) who could understand it. Yet the authorities (e.g., Rom) would view it as mere fantasy unworthy of note or persecution.

However, unseen things revealed by God can be difficult to distinguish from such symbols and metaphors. This is especially true today, in a different culture 2000 years later. This is compounded when the future things described are so different than the present that they cannot be understood (or even recognized) until they actually happen. Dealing with unseen and unknowable things in the spiritual realm of Heaven itself is even more problematic. All this makes understanding and interpretation difficult. Regarding this use of metaphor and symbol, Zondervan notes, “Revelation’s symbolic visions function like parables to encourage and exhort John’s readers and transform how they perceive the world.”⁷

⁴ Fee, Gordon and Douglas Stewart, 2014. [How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. 304 pgs. ISBN: 978-0310517825.

⁵ Quote from [NIV Zondervan Study Bible](#), 2015. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2912 pgs.

⁶ **Apocalyptic fiction**, in other contexts, may simply be dystopian and often symbglic stories of the end of civilization, unrelated to revelation of God as used here. (Contrast, for example, Wikipedia’s “[Apocalyptic fiction](#)” with “[Apocalyptic literature](#)”.)

⁷ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* [see earlier reference]

Prophecy

Revelation is also prophecy ([Rev 1:3](#)).

There are several ways to look at different kinds of prophecy. Perhaps most importantly, prophecy can be either *foretelling* the future (history before it happens) or *forthtelling* God's word for the present. Sometimes prophecy can be both foretelling and forthtelling at once. *Revelation* appears to primarily include foretelling, but has both types (see also "Layers of meaning", p.12, above).

Here is a perspective that seems useful in looking at prophecy in the Book of *Revelation*:

Verbal prophecy is prophecy that is given by, or even dictated verbatim by, God to a scribe. Some examples:

It is verbal prophecy when Isaiah says, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.'" ⁸

Similarly, it is also verbal prophecy when he says, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me.' He said, 'Go, and tell this people: "Keep on listening but do not perceive; keep on looking but do not understand." ' " ⁹

They are direct quotes from God given to Isaiah for his audience and for us. *Inspiration* by God without explicit dictation of the exact words to use, can also be verbal prophecy ([2 Pet 1:20-21](#)).

Visual prophecy is visions given by the Lord and narrated by the prophet. The visions may be in dreams, or waking visions, or descriptions of actually being transported to Heaven itself. When Isaiah describes Heaven in [Isaiah 6:1-6](#) that's visual prophecy. He's describing what God showed him. There is much of this in *Revelation*.

Dramatic prophecy is a prophetic message acted out for our benefit like a play. [Ezekiel 4:1-3](#), where God tells Ezekiel to act out something that is an object lesson for Israel, is dramatic prophecy.

These methods of prophecy may overlap. They may even be called by different terms. For instance, *experiential prophecy* is visual prophecy wherein the narrator is describing something that happened to him when he was transported to Heaven. (As contrasted with describing a visual phenomenon that he was told or inspired to describe without personally experiencing it himself). This seems to be a hybrid, halfway between visual and dramatic prophecy.

The Book of *Revelation* uses all these methods of prophecy.

Summary and overview of the book of Revelation

Revelation, of course, is the last book and conclusion of the Bible. It is the culmination and resolution of the story that the Bible is telling. And the beauty of it is that it's a true story. Like any other story, it has themes, characters, a timeline, and a plot. *Revelation* is the final chapters of that plot, its denouement and conclusion. (For details, see "Excursion 1 – Context of Revelation's fit in Bible".)

⁸ **God speaks in prophecy:** [Isaiah 28:16](#)

⁹ **Another example:** [Isaiah 6:8-9](#)

The Bible also has a theme (several, in fact). *Revelation* completes the theme and brings it to fruition with Jesus' Second Coming and His restoration of all things.

Theme(s) of Revelation

Some themes of *Revelation* include God's encouragement of His believers; His challenge to unbelievers to repent, turn to Him, and be saved ([Rev 1:9](#); [2:10](#); [3:11](#); [12:17](#); [14:12](#); [22:7](#); [2:14-16](#); [2:20-23](#); [3:2-3](#); [3:15-19](#)); and the assurance that He is always in control. (See also "Purpose", p.9, above) However, as noted above, more major themes include:

Love – Believe it or not, *Revelation* is all about God's love, and ...

Jesus Christ, Who comes back for us, as He promised, for the purpose of ...

Redemption and restoration to the way God always intended things to be when He initially created us; in other words, ...

Completion of what God began in Genesis and in John 1

God's love and grace

The word "love" is rarely explicitly mentioned in *Revelation*, but God's love is nevertheless there throughout, often between the lines.

So it seems – rather unexpectedly – that **the major theme of *Revelation* is God's love** and grace expressed through Jesus Christ! Not doom and gloom, not tribulation, not beasts and battles, but God's love. (As noted in our Introduction, some people are too scared of this to even *read* the Book of *Revelation*. But one of the implications of this theme of God's love is that there's nothing for us to fear in reading this book.)

Amazingly, all those fearful things are incidental side effects of His love. God's very nature is love ([1 John 4:8](#)), and He loves *all* the people He has created. (Again, see "Excursion 1 – Context of Revelation's fit in Bible".) God doesn't want *anyone* to reject Him and perish, but wants *everyone* to repent, turn to Him, and be saved ([2 Pet 3:9](#); [1 Tim 2:4](#); [Ezek 18:23, 32](#); [John 3:16-17](#)). God loves us so much that He will do *anything* it takes to make this happen! Including even coming to Earth in the form of Jesus and *dying* on the cross to pay our death penalty for us!¹⁰ (Sadly, it doesn't work unless we *accept* Who He is and what He did for us.)

Carrot and stick (reprise)

In *Revelation*, we can see two of God's major tactics to get people to repent and believe: He uses both a carrot and a stick (see "[God's carrot and stick](#)", p.4, above). In fact, that seems to be the key to the entire book of *Revelation*. In love, God invites us and even entices us to come to Him. That's the carrot, and that's most of the New Testament and the early parts of *Revelation*.

But if that doesn't work, if we still don't come, then He uses the stick to *drive* us to Him. That's the middle part of *Revelation*, the tribulations, battles and beasts, doom and gloom. They're all intended to drive unbelievers to Him to beg for relief, recognize Him for Who He is, repent, and believe. This may be wrathful and punishing, but in truth, there's no real judgment until the very end. And that is only for those who have refused to ever believe, no matter what. This tribulation of the "stick" is unpleasant, but it is still love – *tough* love – essentially a last-ditch effort to get us to turn to Him and be saved.

Note that this all applies to unsaved unbelievers ([Rev 9:4](#); [Rom 8:31-32, 35, 37-39](#)). Believers are already in God's Kingdom and His care. They don't need to be driven. The tribulations, battles and beasts, doom and

¹⁰ For *why* sin has to earn a death penalty, see "Excursion 1 – Context of Revelation's fit in Bible" and my short book: Schank, *Jesus Saves ... but How?* -- see reference p.9 above

gloom, are not designed or intended for believers. That is why we need not fear the Book of *Revelation* or what it depicts of the future: The bad stuff doesn't apply to us. Only the good stuff applies to believers (possible collateral damage notwithstanding).

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do bad things happen to saved Christians?

Unfortunately, there may still be collateral damage. This is still a war. Satan still wants to harm anything that belongs to God, including us ([Rev 12:17](#)). He still wants to take as many with him as he can when he goes to destruction. We may get injured in this war. We may be harmed by backlash from part of God's "stick" intended for unbelievers. But God will take care of us anyway, through thick and thin. Any tribulations will be "light and temporary" ([2 Cor 4:17](#)). Our eternal salvation is not in doubt. We will spend our eternity with God and Christ in love in Heaven forever.

So, the bottom line is that while it rarely uses the word love, the Book of *Revelation* is really all about God's love. He loves us so much that He will take any means necessary to get the maximum number of people to turn to Him, believe, be saved, and spend eternity with Him.

And that God's love is expressed, as always, in Jesus Christ.

Other themes in Revelation

And that is a good reminder of other themes in *Revelation*, which include:

Jesus Christ, the center and consummation of everything

Redemption and restoration to the way God always intended things to be when He initially created us

Eventual judgment

Eternity, whether with God and Jesus forever, or in the Lake of Fire

Completion of what God began in Genesis and in John 1

We'll see all of this as we continue our study.

Summary of Revelation

As noted above, a summary of the entire Book of *Revelation* (and the Bible, for that matter) could be "God wins in the end". But I think a much better summary would be, "God wins; there's nothing to fear." There has never been any doubt of the outcome; *Revelation* shows this. But there's more to it than that; and again, it's really all about God's love. Nevertheless, God's ultimate triumph is very encouraging – and very true.

Structure of Revelation

So, let's look at the structure and flow of *Revelation* in a little more detail.

There are three major sections of the Book of *Revelation*:

Christ, the church, and the Creator (Revelation 1-5), including a glimpse into God's throne room in Heaven (Revelation 4-5)

Bothers, battles, and beasts¹¹ (Revelation 5-18) – that's the "stick". (I occasionally call it "bothers, battles, and beasties" to emphasize that believers needn't fear these things. But *Revelation* itself uses the term "beasts", so perhaps it's better to try to stick to that most of the time.)

¹¹ Some call the body of *Revelation* things like "The Judge and the Judgments" or something similar. But that's misleading because the true and final judgment doesn't come until Chapter 20.

Chapter 5 seems to be a transition with feet in both the first and second sections, so I've listed it in both. The duplication was intentional.

The end and a new beginning (Revelation 19-22) – that’s the restoration

We can see how the chapters of *Revelation* develop this structure in the “[Structural outline of Revelation](#)”, p.2, above.

We might note that this seems to form a classic story arc of the “man in a hole” form¹²: starting out good, then falling to trouble, then climbing to a happy ending.

We could also almost look at it as:

The good – Christ, the church, and God’s throne room in Heaven (Revelation 1-5), and at the end, the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21-22)

The bad – the final judgment and the Hell of the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19-22)

The ugly – all the troubles and tribulations in between (the “stick”) that befall mankind to try to turn us to God (Revelation 5-18)

For now, we’ll stick with the first taxonomy structure rather than the second. We’ll see the details of this structure as we go through the chapters.

Genesis and Revelation: Bookends of the Bible

The Bible is all a single, true Story from beginning to end. The last part of the last book in the Bible reads like the close of the Story begun in the first part of the first book in the Bible. That’s no accident. In a sense, they’re the “bookends” that frame the Bible. Like any other story (a *true* Story in this case), the Bible not only has characters and themes and chapters, but it has a plot. *Genesis* begins the great Story; and *Revelation* ends it, draws it to a conclusion, and ties up all the loose ends. *Genesis* and *Revelation* mesh together as perfectly as fingers in praying hands.

Here’s a comparison –

Table 2 – Genesis – Revelation Comparison

Beginnings in Genesis:	The end in Revelation:
“In the beginning God created the Heavens and Earth” (Gen 1:1)	“I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth” (Rev 21:1)
Holy Spirit of God “broods” over creation (Gen 1:2)	Holy Spirit of God invites, “Come!” (Rev 22:17)
God created first heavens and first Earth (Gen 1:1-3)	God created the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21)
“The darkness He called night” (Gen 1:5)	“There shall be no night here” (Rev 21:25)
“God made the two great lights [Sun and Moon]” (Gen 1:16)	“The city has no need of the Sun nor the Moon” (Rev 21:23)
“The gathering together of waters He called the sea” (Gen 1:10)	“And the sea is no more” (Rev 21:1)
Man lived in a special garden (Eden) (Gen 2:8-9)	Believers live in a special new garden in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:1-2)

¹² See: “3. Man in a hole (fall then rise)” in Bunting, Joe, “How to Shape a Story: The 6 Types of Story Arcs for Powerful Narratives” at <https://thewritepractice.com/story-arcs/>

Beginnings in Genesis:	The end in Revelation:
Tree of life in the garden (Gen 2:9)	Tree(s?) of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:2)
Man's primeval home was by a river, as seen in Gen 2:10	Man's eternal Home will be beside a river, as seen in Rev 22:1
"In the day you eat thereof you shall surely 'die' (Gen 2:17)	"Death shall be no more" (Rev 21:4)
Bride formed for her husband (Gen 2:21-23)	Bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2); wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-10)
Satan appears as deceiver of mankind in Gen 3:1, 4	Satan disappears Forever in Rev 20:10
Shown a garden into which defilement entered (Gen 3:6-7)	Shown a city into which defilement will never enter (Rev 21:27)
Walk of God with man interrupted (Gen 3:8-10)	Walk of God with man resumed (Rev 21:3)
Initial triumph of the serpent / Satan (Gen 3:13)	Ultimate triumph of the Lamb (Rev 20:10 ; 22:3)
Redeemer promised (Gen 3:15)	Redemption accomplished (Rev 5:9-10)
Christ the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15)	Christ the root and descendant of David (Rev 22:16)
"I will greatly multiply your pain" (Gen 3:16)	"Neither shall there be pain any more" (Rev 21:4)
"I will greatly multiply your sorrow" (Gen 3:16)	"There shall be no more death or sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain (Rev 21:4)
"Cursed is the ground for your sake" (Gen 3:17)	"There shall be no more curse" (Rev 22:3)
Daily sorrow (Gen 3:17)	"There shall be no more sorrow" (Rev 22:3)
Man's dominion broken in the fall of the first man Adam (Gen 3:19)	Man's dominion restored in the rule of the new man, Jesus Christ (Rev 22:5)
Return to the dust (Gen 3:19)	No more death (Rev 21:4)
God made them clothing of skins (Gen 3:21)	God dressed believers in clean, white, fine linen (Rev 19:14)
They were driven from the Tree of Life in Gen 3:22-24	The Tree of Life re-appears and access to it restored in Rev 22:2
First paradise closed (Gen 3:23)	New paradise opened (Rev 21:25)
They were driven from God's Presence in Gen 3:24	"They shall see His face" (Rev 22:4)

I find it amazing, don't you?

Suggested further readings about Genesis and Revelation –

Halley, Henry, 1965. [Halley's Bible Handbook: an Abbreviated Bible Commentary](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. Page 740.

Wilkinson, Bruce and Boa, Kenneth, 2005. [Talk Thru the Bible](#).. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. Page 515.

Garland, Tony. "13.8 Genesis and Revelation as Bookmarks",
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/Revelation/introduction/Genesis-and-Revelation-as-bookends.html>

“[Paradise Restored](#)“ article, 2015. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. Kindle Edition eBook (Kindle Locations 296468-296482).

Let’s take a brief digression and look at *Revelation*’s fit in the Bible (Excursion 1) and timelines in *Revelation* (Excursion 2), after which we can return start our study of Revelation chapter 1.

Excursion 1 ¹—Context of Revelation's fit in Bible

Revelation, of course, is the last book and conclusion of the Bible. It is the culmination and resolution of the story the Bible is telling. And the beauty of it is that it's a true story.

Revelation is the ending “bookend” that frames, matches, and meshes perfectly with the beginning “bookend” of Genesis. Themes that are begun in Genesis and that wind through the whole Bible are concluded in Revelation. Ideas and visuals that are begun in Genesis are found again and concluded in Revelation. (see “Table 2 – Genesis – Revelation Comparison”, p.17, above)

Revelation also complements and meshes well with prophecies by Dan, Jesus (e.g., in Matthew 24 and 25), and Paul in Corinthians and Thessalonians. And by Ezek, Isa, and many other books of the Bible.

The conclusion and completion of the Bible

The Bible tells the story of God and of Jesus Christ. Like any other story, it has themes, characters, a timeline, and a plot. We may not always see this clearly because the Bible is not set out chronologically. It is true, nevertheless. And Revelation is the culmination, conclusion, and resolution of the plot. It completes the themes and ties up all the loose ends. In literary terms, it is both the (second) climax (since there are two) and the denouement of the story.

The overall plot and structure of the Bible story²

What is the plot of the Bible, and how does Revelation fit in?

It's the good, the bad, and the ugly – and the restoration.

The intent, the plan – the good

Before the beginning, even before Creation, there was always God. And He was always a Trinity. He was (and is) so great that one person has never been enough to encompass Him. In fact, He's actually one God with three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's enough to make your head spin (or at least mine), but it's both true and is necessarily so.

God had such a great thing going amongst Himself (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) that He just had to share it with us. That thing he had going is agape love. Indeed, agape³ Love is His very nature. So, He had to create us in order to share His love. However, we are not pure Spirit like Him, but have a physical body that has needs. So, He first had to create the Earth to support us. And He had to create a universe to support that. So He created us and the entire universe in order to share His love. (Are there others in the universe that He also shares His love with? Possibly. It will remain a mystery. What we do know is what He did here: He came to us in love to pay our sin penalty.)

¹ “Excursions” are my term for internal appendices. “Excursus” may be a more typical term, but I minimize Latin terms in order to be more accessible. Since these excursions refer to things discussed in nearby chapters, it is probably most useful to simply read them where they appear in this book between exegetical chapters. Or, as they interrupt the flow of study of John's *Revelation*, you can skip them and come back to them later, like any other appendix. Whatever works best for you.

² For more detail, see Schank, [Jesus Saves ... but How?](#) – see reference p.9 above; and Eldredge, *Epic* – see reference p.16 above

³ **Agape** is the Greek word for God's kind of deep, selfless, unconditional, sacrificial grace-love, gift-love or covenant-love. It is selfless, sacrificial love that puts the other first.

"Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" [Revelation 4:11]. We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine love may rest 'well pleased'."

-- C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

So He created it all, and it was very good ([Gen 1:31a](#)).

Now, for us to love God, He had to give us free will because robots can't love. But that's a risk because we could misuse our free will to reject Him or to put something else before Him. Yet for that kind of love, it was worth that risk. So God did it.

The problem – the bad

Tragically, however, we did misuse our free will by putting ourselves (and other things) first and rejecting Him. This is how it happened:

God said, Walk with Me here in the Garden in fellowship; walk this way. But we said, No, I'd rather go that way. Now, when eternal Life itself – Himself – goes one way and we choose to go the other way, we've separated ourselves from eternal Life. That's about as good a definition of sin as I've ever heard. Now, what is that called – separating ourselves from eternal Life? Eternal death, of course! And after all too short a time, physical death also, since we're then unconnected from Life.

But wait! Adam did that, not us ... didn't he?

Of course, it was Adam who physically did that. But we inherited that self-centeredness, that "my way" attitude, that built-in Sin nature in our "spiritual DNA". We're no better than Adam. If we were there in the Garden in his place instead of Adam, every one of us would have sooner or later done the exact same thing: We would have gone our own way instead of God's way. We know we would have, because eventually we each did! That's Sin. Bottom line: We're equally culpable.

So we sinned along with Adam and chose eternal death rather than God's eternal Life.

What's the difference between Sin and sins, heart and action?

It's that built-in tendency to go "my way" rather than God's way – our baked-in Sin nature – Sin with a capital S. That's what causes us to commit sins (sin with a little s). That's why Jesus could say that lusting in your heart is equivalent to adultery ([Matt 5:27-28](#); [Jas 1:14-15](#)) – because it's the lust that, when acted out, leads to the act of adultery. Similarly, that's why He could say that it is out of the heart that the mouth speaks ([Matt 12:34b](#); [15:18-19](#)). It is the Sin nature in the heart that only God can see, that causes us to commit the sinful actions that we all can see.

So who caused the Fall, the separation from God? We did; you and I did; we chose to go our own way apart from God. Adam first acted it out for us, but we did it.

But Satan did, also. He's the one who tempted Adam and tempts us. He's the one who's goading us on and putting us up to it. He's the one who's trying to pull the strings behind the scenes. We fell for it, acted on it, and are responsible for our actions. We're culpable. But at the same time, so is Satan. Fortunately, his power is limited!

The battle for the heart – it could get ugly

Unfortunately, that doesn't stop Satan from pursuing his narcissistic plan for world domination. Indeed, his plan is to un-seat God Himself and usurp His throne as ruler of the universe ([Isa 14:13-14](#)). He'll stop at nothing to achieve his goal, and he doesn't care about collateral damage. In fact, he'll try to take as many casualties as possible (as we'll see later in this study).

“Now we are engaged in a great civil war.”

—from Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address

So, like it or not, we’re caught up in the great cosmic war between good and evil, God and Satan. In fact, we’re foot soldiers in the war. We’re either on God’s side as soldiers in God’s army or we’re on Satan’s side as Satan’s (perhaps unwitting) minions. There is no neutrality and there’s no fence-sitting.⁴ We shouldn’t be surprised if there are casualties.

What’s the prize? Our souls. Our eternity. And the world itself. God’s plan has always been to restore things to the way they were originally intended before the Fall. He wants to restore us to loving fellowship with Him ([2 Pet 3:9](#)). That, of course, requires that we repent from our sins, turn around 180 degrees, stop going our own way, believe in Him as our Lord and Savior, and follow Him. If we fail to do so, Satan ultimately owns us, and our destiny is the same as his ([Rev 20:10, 15](#)). If we repent and believe, we’ve not only been saved from destruction but have enlisted in God’s army.

We are members of God’s body of saved believers – the church, the Body of Christ. We are God’s hands and feet on Earth to do His will, as He, the Head of the Body, decides. This involves a life of

gradual sanctification as we are being transformed into His image; ([Rom 8:29](#); [12:2](#))

- *spreading the Good News of salvation so that many others may be saved;*
- *helping others;*
- *engaging in spiritual warfare when the battle turns in our direction;*
- *and doing whatever other things He specifically wants us to do at any given moment.*

It sounds like the US Army: training, recruiting, humanitarian relief, combat, and “other duties as assigned”. That doesn’t earn our salvation any more than that’s what qualifies a soldier to enlist. Rather, this is what God does in and through us because we are saved.

What if I’m a non-combatant?

Perhaps you haven’t experienced spiritual warfare yourself. Whether military or spiritual, not all soldiers go into battle. As Milton says, “They also serve who only stand and wait”⁵ or, paraphrasing David (who I imagine inspired Milton), “they also serve who only guard the baggage”.⁶ Nevertheless, that doesn’t mean we’re neutral. We’re on one side or the other, even if we’re temporarily not in combat.

Fortunately, the battle’s already won. Christ won it for us on the Cross when God came to Earth and paid our death penalty for us. But that hasn’t stopped Satan. It’s similar to the Battle of New Orleans, which was fought after the official end of the War of 1812 because the word hadn’t yet reached Louisiana. Satan (presumably) does know his fate, but he continues to fight and wants to take as many casualties with him as possible. (Again, more on this later in our study.)

⁴ See also “**Billy Graham: You cannot be neutral**”, June 1, 2024. *Decision* magazine. Charlotte, NC: BGEA. <https://decisionmagazine.com/billy-graham-you-cannot-be-neutral/>

⁵ John Milton, 1673. “[When I consider how my light is spent](#)”, line 14.

⁶ **1 Samuel 30:24** -- ... The share of the one who went to battle will match the share of the one who stayed with the supplies. They will share alike.

It's important to note that none of this is describing the Great Tribulation and battles of Revelation. That's quite another thing and we'll get to it later. This, rather, is the substance of the whole Bible from Genesis 4 to the letter of Jude. This is normal life as we know it.

Everything will be restored to the way it was always intended

Nevertheless, the end is sure. There has never been any doubt about it. Satan is greatly – infinitely! – overmatched by God. God wins in the end. And when He does, He restores all things to the way He originally intended them before Creation: fellowship together with Him and harmony with each other.⁷

So it begins in Genesis, "Once upon a time long, long ago..." and ends in the New Heaven in Revelation, "And they lived happily ever after." How is that anything less than the epic story of all epic stories? The mother of all epic stories, literally.

Conclusion

That is the plot of the story of the Bible; and Revelation is its final chapters, its denouement and conclusion.

But what is the theme of the Bible? There are several recurring themes in the Bible, but the major theme throughout the entire Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, is Jesus Christ and His redemption of us – the “scarlet thread of redemption”.

- *The entire Old Testament promises, points to, and prophesies of Jesus and His redemption;*
- *the Gospels tell of His life on Earth and what He did for us;*
- *the Book of Acts tells what He continued to do through the Holy Spirit;*
- *the New Testament letters explain it and show how we should apply it in our lives;*

and Revelation completes the story and brings it to fruition with Jesus' Second Coming and His restoration of all things.

⁷ **God restores all things in the end:** [Revelation 21-22](#)

Excursion 2—Timelines in Revelation

Seals, bowls, and trumpets

How do Revelation's seven seals, trumpets, bowls, (all of which we'll get to later) fit together in time? How does Revelation fit together in time? No one knows for sure, but many have strong opinions about it. Here are some of the options:

Sequentially as written

This view takes it sequentially and literally as written in the book:

The seven seals (Revelation 5:1-8:1)

come before and lead to ...

the seven trumpets (Revelation 8-11),

which come before and lead to ...

The interlude of the unholy trinity, and battle in Heaven, and the wrath and vengeance on followers of the beast (Revelation 12-14),

which come before and lead to ...

the seven bowls of God's wrath (Revelation 15-16),

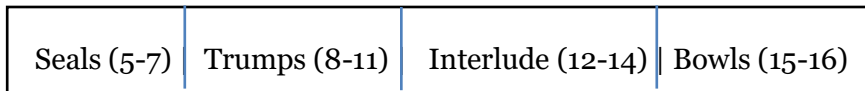
which come before and lead to ...

the harlot "Babylon" (Revelation 17-18),

which comes before and leads to ...

Jesus' Second Coming and Judgment (Revelation 19-20) and the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21-22)

Diagramming the timeline is simple and looks like this:



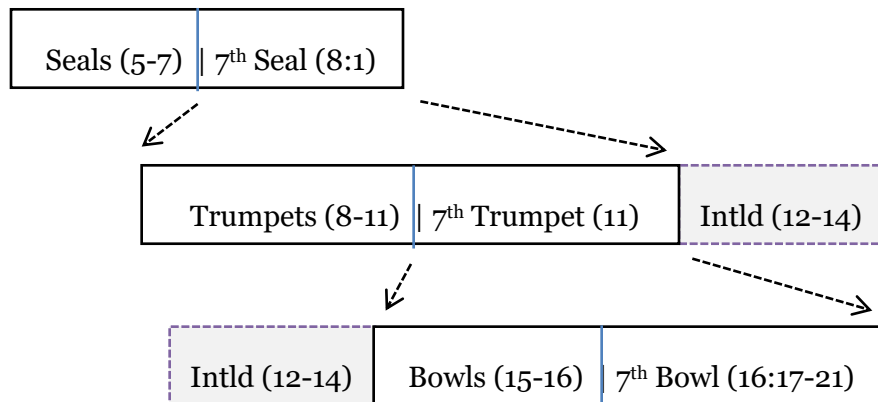
*Figure 1 - Option 1: Sequential timeline
(Diagram by author)*

For now, let's call this option **1**.

Overlap

The next option observes great similarity between the ordeals of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. It views all seven trumpets as occurring during the time of the seventh seal; and all seven bowls occurring during the time of the seventh trumpet. So it would look like this. Let's call it

2a:



*Figure 2 - Option 2a: Overlapping timeline
(Diagram by author)*

What happened to the Chapter 12-14 interlude? Is it part of the trumpets or the bowls? Neither, actually. But in this view, we'd probably consider it to be associated with the end of the trumpets. (Or perhaps the beginning of the bowls?)

We could also draw that diagram like this. Let's call it **2b**:

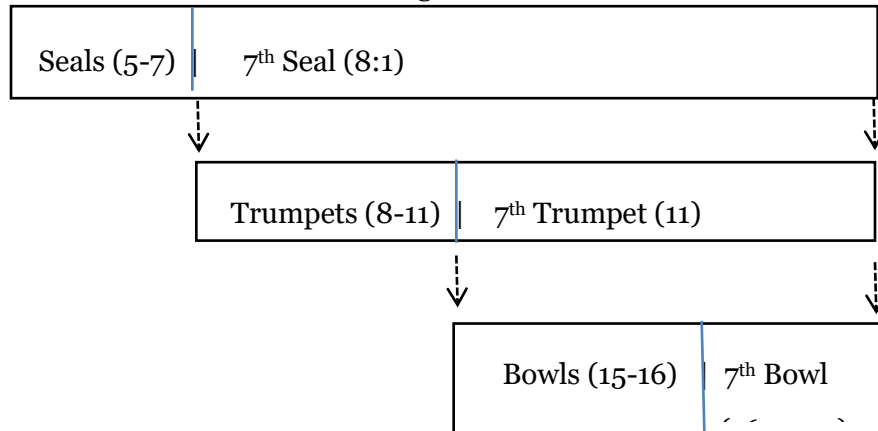


Figure 3 - Option 2b: Overlapping timeline
(Diagram by author)

Where did the Chapter 12-14 interlude go this time? It's harder to tell. It would probably be somewhere between Chapters 11 and 15, but how to show it is less than obvious.

Parallel but different points of view

But there are more similarities to the seals, trumpets, and bowls than just between the seventh of one and the whole of the next (as above). The entire seals section seems somewhat similar to the entire trumpets section. And that seems somewhat like the entire bowls section. So, in this case, the three sections would be completely parallel. They would see a single common reality from three different points of view. It would look like this:

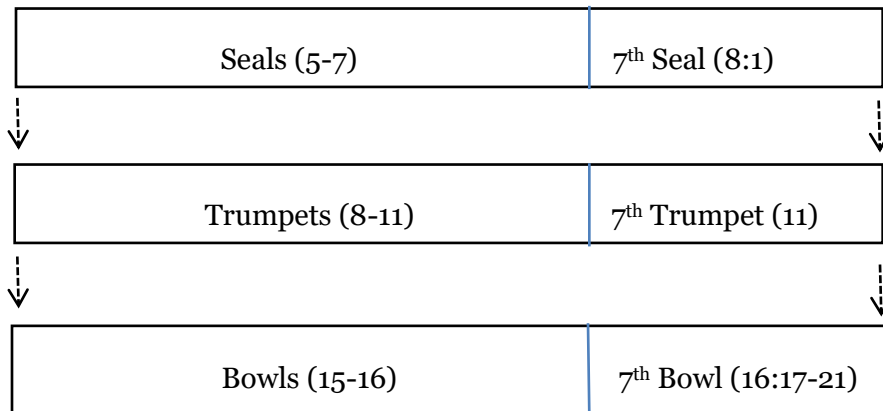


Figure 4 – Option 3: Parallel timeline

(Diagram by author)

Call it option **3**.

But are they that much alike and that strongly related? The differences seem more significant than that.

Independent

Finally, many see the different visions of Revelation as being independent of each other, not necessarily even in the same time sequence. The chapters may (or may not) be in the sequence that John saw and experienced them. Rather, they could be quite different in the actual timeline and in relation to each other. For instance, it could be that in reality, the bowls depict something that actually happened before the seals. However, it seems that John saw the seals' vision first, then later saw the trumpets, then later still the bowls. (Or any other sequence.) I'll call this option

4.

Perhaps it's something like a flashback or flash-forward where we see things out of the sequence of their actual occurrence.

In this case, the three sections cannot be easily diagrammed. At best, they would look random and unrelated. Perhaps something like this?

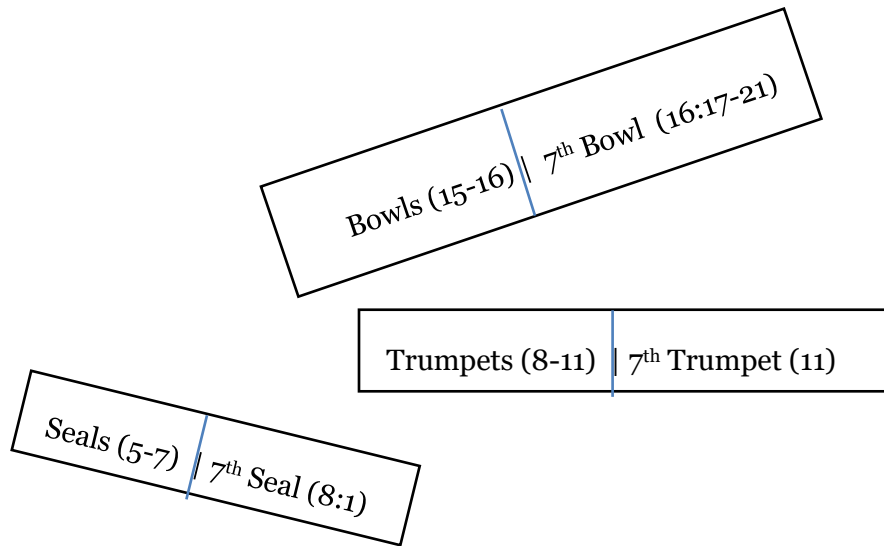


Figure 5 - Option 4: Independent timeline

(Diagram by author)

Which is it?

So which way is it? Nobody is sure (probably not even John). However, many theologians and commentators make vehement arguments for one view or the other. (But they can't all be right, can they!)

I take a modified version of the simple, sequential view of the first option (let's call this new one option **5**). It is basically in sequential order as John wrote it. However, some portions (notably the seventh of each group) are previews of what is to come. Then the following group is the details of how it happens. Sometimes there are digressions or interpositions, and the details of the how are delayed to an even later chapter. Sometimes there seem to be flashbacks to previous events and flashforward previews of what is yet to come. But most flashforwards seem to me to be of the first-what, later-how kind.

This viewpoint seems consistent with Occam's Razor, Einstein's Razor, and what I'll call Lucado's Razor, all of which say that the simpler view is preferred.

So, to my sense, this is the better approach, while realizing that many details are delayed. (Unfortunately, I don't know how to diagram this. Suggestions are welcome.)

Occam's Razor

"All else being equal, the simpler of two competing theories or explanations must be preferred."

*– William of Ockham, c.1330
(paraphrased in modern English)*

Lucado's Razor

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, we will seek no other sense."

– Anon.

*Recounted by Max Lucado in
What Happens Next? 2024*

Timing of the Great Tribulation

When, then, does the Great Tribulation occur? It depends in part on which of the above viewpoints we take.

Some say that the entire sequence from Chapter 5 through Chapter 16 is all the Great Tribulation.

Some (myself included) note that [Revelation 7:14](#) introduces a “great multitude” that has “come out of the Great Tribulation”. For that to happen, the Tribulation would have to come before Chapter 7. (It would probably be before Chapters 5 and 6 because all three chapters depict the same vision of the seven seals.) Of course, that assumes at least some sense of sequence in Revelation. If the fourth viewpoint above (random, independent) were the case, we couldn't make that assumption and couldn't say anything about the timing of the Tribulation.

Placing the Tribulation after Chapter 7 or in the entire span of Chapters 6-16 is usually done for what I'll call external reasons. That is, it might make other passages in the Bible easier to understand (see below). Yet, there's nothing in Revelation itself that requires this.

So, for internal consistency in Revelation and for simplicity, I assume that the Great Tribulation comes some time before Chapter 5 (or at least before Chapter 7).

However, I'm not sure that it matters. Neither God, Jesus, nor John is explicit about the Tribulation's timing. That means to me that it's not important, at least not now. If it were, He would have told us.

Timing of the Rapture

But you really wanted to know when the Rapture occurs, right? Especially when it occurs in relation to the Tribulation. That's much harder. The Rapture, you see, is never mentioned in Revelation. It is in other books of the Bible, but not Revelation. Since it isn't even mentioned in Revelation, it is impossible to determine with certainty when it occurs in Revelation's End Times timeline.

Sorry about that.

That does not at all imply that the Rapture is invalid or heretical. It is genuine and is found in other books of the Bible. However, we can't fit it into this Revelation timeline easily, nor without making a lot of other assumptions.

Many theologians, for various apparently valid reasons, place the Rapture before the Tribulation. Others, for equally valid reasons, place it after. Still others validly place it in the middle. As with the Tribulation, they are very vehement about which it is. But again, they can't all be right. And as noted, there's no certain way to know for sure.

I don't even attempt an answer to this one. To me, it's something that God knows but we don't. And we won't know until we experience it.

That doesn't bother me. In a sense, I don't care. Sure, like everyone else, I'd prefer to be "raptured out" before the horrors of the Tribulation! But even if we're not, God will take care of us and will be with us every step of the way. That doesn't mean it'll be easy or that we'll be immune to the troubles. However, as we see elsewhere ("*Why do bad things happen to good people*", p.16, above), the troubles are not directed at us. Rather, they're intended to drive unbelievers to God, begging for relief. They're intended to make unbelievers turn to God in repentance and accept Jesus for Who He really is!

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean there won't be collateral damage. If we are still on Earth when the Tribulation occurs, it will hurt. It will be almost unbearable (but He will help us bear it). We may even be casualties; but in that case, we'll go to be with the Lord in Paradise, Heaven, or whatever exists at the time. That's a win!

But first we ought to ask, "what is the rapture, anyway?" It's when Jesus returns and "we meet him in the air" ([1 Thes 4:17](#)). (Actually, the Greek word literally means "snatched" or even "violently snatched". That does not imply that the rapture of [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) will be violent, but that it will be sudden and unexpected.) We'll have more on this later in this study when we encounter it in those Scripture passages. For now, just ponder what would be the implications of the rapture, look for it as we study, and we'll get back to it later in our study of Revelation.

So, when does the Rapture occur? I do not know; God does. And that puts it in the very best possible hands!

After these digressions, let's return to Revelation 1 in Part 1.

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