

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



Presented by
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Book of Revelation – Study #16

Welcome to the world of four headed leopards, horses with scorpion tails, wheels with eyes, and locusts that look like horses. It is a world of the bizarre, the symbolic, and the fantastic.

Yet, for the Scriptures, it is a means of the revelation of truth. This is the world of apocalyptic. And this is the genre in which significant parts of the Bible were written.

Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9, 10-12; Isaiah 24-27; Ezekiel 37-39, 40-48; Zechariah 9-14; Mark 13; Luke 21; Matthew 24-25; 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Peter 3:1-13; Jude; Revelation 4-21.

Revelation means an “uncovering” or “unveiling” from the Greek *apokalypsis*. It suggests that what was once hidden is now revealed, unveiled, or openly on display.

Part 1	“The Things Which You Have Seen”	1:1-20	Introduction and Revelation of Christ	1:1-20	
Part 2	“The Things Which Are”	2:1-3:22	Letters to the Seven Churches	2:1-3:22	Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea
Part 3	“The Things Which Will Take Place After This”	4:1-22:21	Person of the Judge	4:1-5:14	The Throne of God The Sealed Book
			Prophecies of the Tribulation	6:1-19:6	Seven Seals of Judgment Seven Trumpets of Judgment Seven Bowls of Judgment
			Prophecies of the Second Coming	19:7-19:21	Marriage Supper of the Lamb The Second Coming of Christ
			Prophecies of the Millennium	20:1-15	Satan – 1000 years, bound, reign, release and rebellion Great White Throne Judgment
			Prophecies of Eternal State	21:1-22:5	New Heavens and New Earth New Jerusalem
			Closing Blessing and Warning	22:6-21	

Apocalyptic is a special kind of literary form with the following characteristics.

Characteristics of Apocalyptic

- Born in a time of persecution and oppression

This literature became dominant during the time of the Maccabean revolts. The literature is intended to give hope to the beleaguered Jews in the face of persecution.

The imagery of the Book of Revelation depicts the historical realities of the times where Christians suffered under a totalitarian political system. But, as with all Biblical prophecy that is borne from a particular situation, it also speaks to subsequent generations and the future plan of God.

In other words, whatever forms the Beast may take, the assurance is that God is present, purposeful, and powerful.

- Extensive use of symbolism and vision

Symbols of colour, numbers, and animals as nations, etc., are characteristics of this literature.

For Example:

- Extensive use of numbers 4, 12, and 7
 - 4 living creatures
 - 4 horsemen
 - 4 angels
 - 12 Elders
 - 12 gates
 - 12 foundations
 - 12 varieties of fruit on the Tree of Life
 - 7 churches
 - 7 Spirits of God
 - 7 thunders
 - 7 seals, trumpets, bowls
 - 7 beatitudes

In biblical literature, 7 represents completion and perfection. Conversely, 3 ½ represents a fracturing of God's unity and is associated with the work of Satan (3 ½ years).

Other numbers are significant, such as the 144,000 in Chapter 7. This number actually refers to martyrs (John in the following passage states that it is a "great multitude beyond number". (144,000 is a multiple of 12,000 x 12). Many see this as a representation of the tribes of Israel, perhaps, even of the 12 apostles. Regardless, most hold that the essence of this passage is that no martyr will fail to see God's reward.

As for 666, most scholars see this as a representation of Nero. Hebrew and Greek letters also served as numbers, and in this case “Nero Caesar” as a numerical value comes to 666.

- Angels as mediators of revelation

Nowhere else in the Bible do we hear as much of Gabriel, Michael, and the angelic battles in the heavens.

- Dualistic in its approach to reality

The forces of good and evil are clearly contrasted. Further, the human power structures of government are anti-God, and the call is to survival in the midst of a foreign anti-God world.

- The present order of things will be terminated with the coming of the Messiah.

The overarching theme presents a day when all the present order will end with the invasion of God’s kingdom. That day will be a great day of reckoning.

- The theology emphasizes the transcendence, holiness, and sovereignty of God.

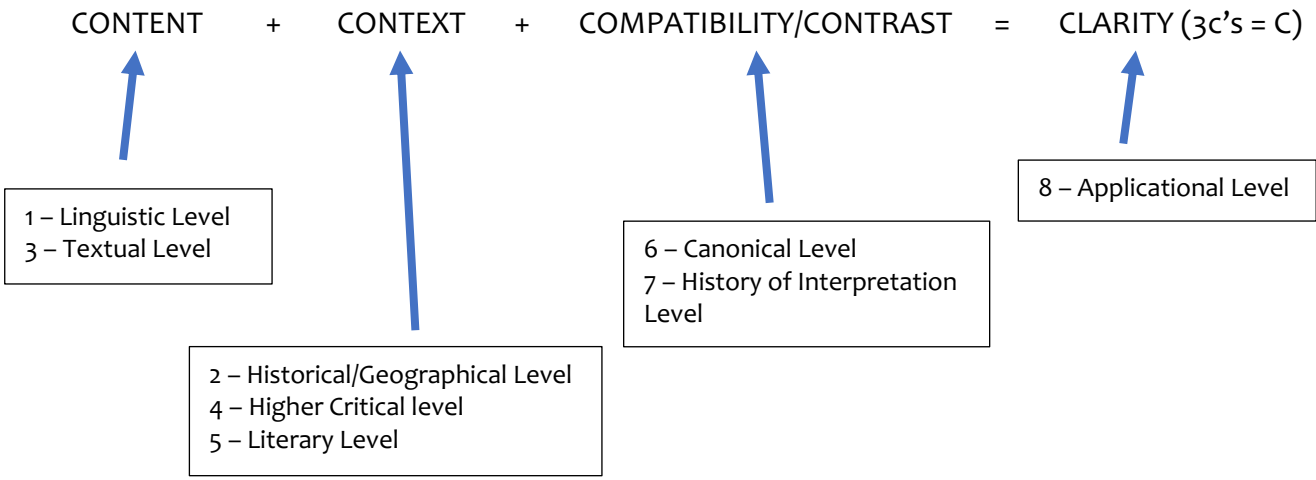
In spite of the seeming chaos and hopelessness, God is in control, and will bring His will and world to pass, as well as vindicating Himself and His people.

Key Things to Remember

- Humility, a necessary ingredient for studying the book.
- Attempt to understand the original setting.
- Strict chronology of future events is not easily discernable. Look for general signs.
- A struggle to understand literally, due to the many literary and metaphorical pictures it presents (Think of the Narnia Chronicles).
- Pay close attention when John identifies an image. For instance:
 - Son of Man is Christ
 - The seven lampstands are churches
 - The dragon is Satan
- When interpreting images and symbols, look to the Old Testament and the historical context. Did you know, the Book of Revelation contains more Old Testament references than any other New Testament book (almost 70%). (See Daniel 10:5-6 and Revelation 1:7; 12-15).

The Book of Revelation is about overcoming as believers and that in the end, God Wins!

The Simple Formula Revisited.



Finding the Key Principle(s).

Every attempt at interpreting a Biblical text is for the purpose of understanding the principle that is being taught. Two principles can be gleaned from every text.

1. A theological principle. What does it teach us about God? (The vertical dimension).
2. An applicational principle. What does this mean for me? (The horizontal dimension).

The Journey of Interpretive Discovery!

