

Christ's Revelation to John

Warning before we begin...in order to study the letter of Revelation without compromising the intent and meaning of the message, one must spend time "setting up" the letter and the study to better, more fully understand the history, context, signs and symbols revealed to John by Christ. However, make no assumption that one will completely and fully understand every detail of this writing following this study!

THEME: GOD AND HIS PEOPLE ARE VICTORIOUS!

Read Introduction

Reasons as to why Revelation not favorite among Christians:

- 1) People are confused by it.
- 2) Some are repulsed by it.
- 3) Most are intimidated by it.

Before we begin a more detailed study, let's look at the framework and structure of the letter...

- 22 total chapters
- This is not the "revelation of John" rather the "Revelation of Jesus Christ to John"
- Which John was it: most likely the apostle John, not John Mark
- Revelation has been attributed to the apostle John by early church leaders such as Papias, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.
 - o John moved to Ephesus around AD 70, time of destruction of Jerusalem
 - o Next 25 years he was a prominent Christian leader in Asia Minor
 - o During that time, he was exile to the island of Patmos most likely during the reign of Domitian, and quite possibly by Domitian
 - Rev. 1:9
 - Patmos was used as a place of exile by many Roman emperors – like a penal colony or settlement
 - Small (approx. 4mi. X 8mi.), rocky island in the Aegean Sea some 50 miles southwest of Ephesus, off the coast of modern Turkey.
 - According to Sir William Ramsay, exile was "preceded by scourging, and it was marked by perpetual fetters, scanty

- clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, work under the lash of military overseers.”
- John was likely quite old when he wrote the book around AD 94-96
 - John was Jesus' witness and secretary
 - o Rev. 1:1,2
 - John most likely penned the book himself

 - Some believe it was during Nero's reign, but the evidence seems more overwhelming that it was during Domitian's reign in the late 90's
 - o Evidence shows that condition of seven churches fit the late 90's better than the 60's when Nero reigned.
 - Church of Ephesus was thriving in the 60's whereas the 90's they were struggling spiritually.
 - o Revelation written during a time of great persecution of the church
 - Rome ruled the world in the first century
 - Christianity had gone relatively unnoticed for many years
 - As time went on, Christians came into conflict with Rome AND fellow countryman
 - Several reasons Christianity became increasingly persecuted:
 - o Discipleship – due to this it became an “illegal religion”
 - o Universality – available to all; Rome saw that as a threat to their power
 - o Christianity was “exclusive” – refused to accept anyone as “brother” and rejected the more common heathen and pagan traditions and customs
 - o Converts were often the poor and outcasts
 - o Christians refused to compromise their faith in Christ and Rome HATED that!
 - o Christians would not worship the emperor.

The AUDIENCE

- Written to the 7 churches of Asia
 - o Not the continent of Asia but Roman province of Asia – eastern shore of Aegean Sea, now western coast of Turkey
 - Ephesus
 - Smyrna
 - Pergamum
 - Thyatira
 - Sardis

- Philadelphia
- Laodicea
- More than 7 churches in that province – Troas, Colossae, Heirapolis (read about these in Acts 20, Col. 1 and Col. 4)
- These 7 were chosen as “typical” or “representative”
- Note the “he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7) – this extends even to us today!

WRITING STYLE AND CHARACTERISTICS

- Some have said that this is not the same John who wrote the “Gospel according to John” and “1, 2, & 3 John”...why?
 - Style of Rev. seems more awkward
 - Very few similarities between Rev. and the other writings...but those similarities are strong and important:
 - Only John referred to Jesus as logos (λογος) [John 1:1,14; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13]
 - John favored John the Baptist’s reference of Jesus being the “Lamb of God” [Jn 1:29,36]
 - In Rev. we see the term “Lamb” in reference to Jesus some 22 times
 - Only John mentions in his Gospel account that Jesus’ side was pierced (Jn 19:34) – a fact re-visited in Rev (1:7)
 - Several other similarities between passages in John and Rev
 - The differences could be accounted for due to:
 - Content is different – recording visions and describing symbols not the same as writing a biography of someone’s life or writing a conversational toned letter
 - Experience was different – much seems to be written down while John was seeing the visions and hearing the voices – much different than recording observations after the fact
 - Difference in procedure – his other writings may have been written down with the help of a “secretary” or “amanuensis”. Rev. was likely written in John’s own hand.
 - Design was different – needs to be considered. Although the style may have been awkward, rarely unclear. Perhaps the “feel” of John’s writing was done “on purpose” to achieve a certain effect – after all, this writing, just as the others, would have been guided by the Holy Spirit.

Revelation is part apocalyptic literature, part prophecy, and part epistle.

- 1) Apocalyptic
 - a. Goes to the word "Revelation"
 - b. Revelation translated from the Greek -- αποκαλυψις — apokalupsis or Apocalypse
 - c. Some translations "The Apocalypse"
 - d. Special type of writing that's filled with strange symbols
- 2) Prophecy
 - a. See 1:3; 22:7,10,18,19
 - b. Prophets were God's inspired spokesmen, concerned about "proclaiming any word from God – whether command, instruction, history or prediction."
- 3) Epistle or letter
 - a. After opening statement, moves into "letter greeting" (1:4)
 - b. An obvious author and recipient(s)

Apocalyptic literature

"What does 'apocalyptic' mean?"

- Today has become a synonym for doom and devastation
- Greek word *apokalupsis* does not have that connotation
 - Simply means "an unveiling"
 - Combines the greek words for "cover" (*kalupto*) and "from" or "away" (*apo*)
 - Thus meaning "uncover"
 - Refers to anything which was unknown in the past and has now been revealed
- Also applied to a special type of literature that flourished during the last two centuries B.C. and the first century A.D.
- Message is conveyed through symbols
 - Do not merely enhance the message, they are the message
- Symbols
 - Not ordinary or familiar
 - Many are grotesque or nightmarish
 - Makes it hard for us to relate to as our modern literature does not have this kind of language usage
- Did the original readers understand it?
 - Most likely – this approach to writing was not uncommon
 - Seen in Ezekiel, parts of Daniel, sprinkled in Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah
 - The period between the testaments (as written about in the Apocrypha) full of apocalyptic writings

- Ray Summers – “When the Christian apocalypticist John held out to his suffering companions the hope of the destruction of Rome and the victory of God’s cause, he was following a well-beaten path leading past many familiar landmarks. In confidently resorting to apocalyptic imagery for a solution of his difficulties he was moving in an atmosphere thoroughly congenial to many Christians, acquainted as they were with these Jewish antecedents of their own religion.”
 - Why was this approach used?
 - Writers were trying to tell men about the intervention of God in their affairs
 - This kind of language actually aided communication rather than hindering it.
 - Political and religious climate
 - “Troubled times”
 - Ezekiel/Daniel = The Babylonian captivity
 - Writings between the testaments = Oppression by the Syrians
 - Revelation = Christian persecution under Nero and Domitian
 - Symbolic language had two purposes:
 - To reveal the message to the initiated who understood the meaning of the symbols
 - To conceal the message from the uninitiated
 - Jesus parables were similar (see the connection – Christ revealed this to John!!!)
 - Consider the message of Rev. = Assurance to first-century Christians that their oppressor, the Roman Empire, would ultimately fall.
 - What if the Roman officials had understood the message?
 - Difficult for John to get his message off the island
 - Roman authorities would never have allowed it to circulate
 - Used as evidence against Christians to “prove” their rebellion against the state
 - As it was, Roman officials would have likely paid it no mind

Is Revelation meant to be understood?

- Short answer...yes
- God has never dangled carrots of this kind in front of his creation
 - God expects us to understand the basic messages of Rev.

- The book is intended to be a revelation, not concealment!
 - It would be of no spiritual benefit and guidance, which is a major intent of the Word of God, if we were unable to understand the central teachings of the book – even if it weren't originally written to us.
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Approaches of Interpretation

- When a rocket is fired, a deviation of a few degrees at the point of departure can make a difference of hundreds of miles in where it lands.
- Same can be said in a study of Rev.
 - Start from the right place, you will have a fuller and richer understanding of it
 - Start from an erroneous place (as so many do) and some bizarre conclusions can be drawn!
- So, how should one approach this kind of study?
 - Two essentials to keep in mind in interpreting Rev.
 - The book had to have meaning when it was written
 - “Soon take place” and “time is near” (1:1,3)
 - Was written to persecuted Christians in a particular time in history – what did it mean to them in this context
 - Exegesis
 - The book has to have meaning now
 - A universal message for all time
 - 2:7
 - 22:18
 - “What meaning does it have for us today”
 - Hermeneutics
 - 4 Primary approaches:
 - Futurist
 - Continuous-Historical
 - Preterist
 - Symbolic
 - “Select-Wisely” – our approach – combines the Preterist and Symbolic with an emphasis on the symbolic

4 Primary Approaches to Interpretation:

- A. Countless variations
- B. Point out strengths and weaknesses
- C. Futurist

- a. DEF: Most of the book describes events in the distant future of when the book was written
 - i. Most events still in the future
 - ii. Events immediately preceding the second coming
 - iii. Very, very popular interpretation
- b. Most common: Premillennialism
 - i. Jesus will return before his thousand-year reign
 - ii. Will reign 1000 years
 - iii. After, a general judgment where people are assigned heaven or hell
 - 1. Some believe that final judgment only for wicked
- c. See Diagram
 - i. Jewish Rejection – Jesus came to earth to establish an earthly kingdom but failed because the Jews rejected Him.
 - 1. Jesus plans postponed
 - ii. The “Church Age” – Jesus then set up church as temporary measure until kingdom could be established
 - 1. Great distinction between “church” and “kingdom”
 - iii. Chapters 1-3 – tell of the almost 2000 years that the church has been in existence.
 - 1. 7 churches
 - a. Seven ages of the church
 - b. Seven churches then, but typical representatives then and now
 - iv. Jewish Acceptance – At some point, Jews will accept Jesus as Messiah and the plan will get back on track.
 - v. Rapture & Tribulation (7 years) – Then, a 7 year period will occur
 - 1. For believers, it will begin with Rapture (caught up)
 - 2. After the faithful have departed, a 7 year period of tribulation will begin on earth.
 - 3. Jesus and his followers will hover in the air as chaos reigns on the earth
 - vi. Chapter 4 – 19 – Details about the 7 year period with most of the section telling of the Tribulation
 - vii. Jesus’ Reign on earth (1000 years) – Then Jesus will descend, defeat his enemies, and set up an earthly kingdom.
 - 1. He will reign in Jerusalem
 - viii. A “little season” – 1000 years will be followed by a short period where Satan will be allowed to gather a mighty army – but will then be defeated by Jesus in a great battle!
 - ix. Judgment – The Day of Judgment follows the battle.

- x. Chapter 20 – tells of the 1000 year reign, the little season and the Day of Judgment.
- xi. Eternity – Follows the day of judgment with the righteous in heaven and unrighteous in hell
- xii. Chapters 21,22 – tell of heaven
- d. Major flaw: Revelation is a book primarily about the chaos on the earth during the 7 years of Tribulation
- e. Strengths:
 - i. Message is “repent...Jesus is coming soon!”
 - ii. They believe a strength is that they take Rev. literally
- f. Weaknesses:
 - i. Unbalanced view (focuses on the wrong thing)
 - ii. Wooden Literalism
 - iii. Inconsistent with John’s own statement in 1:1
 - 1. Must = moral necessity (dei)
 - 2. Soon = quickly, shortly (en tachei)
 - iv. Little or no message for persecuted 1st century Christians
 - v. Conflicts with plain Bible teaching
 - 1. Depreciates the blood-bought church of Jesus Christ
 - 2. Church was a part of the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:10, 11, 21)

D. Continuous-Historical

- a. DEF: Revelation gives a detailed blueprint of history, especially the history of the church, from the first century to the end of the world.
 - i. AKA: chronological view, outline-of-history approach, historicist
 - ii. Very popular among Protestants
 - iii. Used to show the parallel/timetable of history of Western Europe
 - iv. Many years, many symbols were interpreted to apply to Roman Catholic Church in general and the pope specifically
- b. Strengths:
 - i. Special appeal to those who oppose Catholicism
 - ii. Message for today: “The whole of history is under the control of God”
- c. Weaknesses:
 - i. Largely speculative and subjective – no solid evidence
 - ii. Interpretations vary greatly
 - iii. Arbitrary focus on events of Western Europe largely ignoring other places in the world
 - iv. Often used to predict the second coming of Jesus
 - 1. Generally assume one day = one year

- v. Assumes that most of events are far removed from the first century
- vi. Generally views the visions as chronological – which presents problems throughout the book
- vii. Would have held little comfort for persecuted Christians in first century
 - 1. Wouldn't have made much sense at all!
- viii. Fatal flaw – too often historical commentators place the final events of the book in their own day – makes for constant revision of the timetable in which Christ will return!

E. Preterist

- a. DEF: Most, if not all, of the book tells what happened in the early centuries of the church – i.e., in our past.
 - i. From the Latin word meaning “beyond” or “past”
 - ii. Extreme approach – Rev. speaks of events already in the past at the time of the writing
 - iii. Advocated by those who support the “A.D. 70 theory”
 - iv. Second coming was in A.D. 70
 - v. When Jerusalem was destroyed
 - vi. Most common preterist view is AKA “contemporary-history view”
- b. Strengths:
 - i. Solidly rooted in historical situation of the 1st century
 - ii. Strong message for Christians: “The Roman Empire may look invincible, but God is still in control. In the end, Rome will be destroyed and you will be vindicated!”
- c. Weaknesses:
 - i. Everything was fulfilled in the days of the Roman Empire
 - 1. Message today would be limited
 - 2. This view ignores teachings on “last things”
- d. Many have modified their view and do believe the last few chapters speak of Judgment Day and of eternity.

F. Symbolic

- a. DEF: Rev. is speaking symbolically about the conflict between good and evil in every age, a conflict in which good will ultimately triumph.
 - i. More or less unconcerned with the historical background of Rev.
 - ii. Stresses that the overall thrust of the visions is more important than the details
 - iii. Symbols are not specific things, but general principles
- b. Strengths:

- i. "Least dangerous" because it concentrates on timeless ideas and principles
- ii. Whether you know the historical background of Revelation, the message is still vital today: "The Lord reigns! Be strong in the Lord! His cause will triumph!"
- c. Weaknesses:
 - i. Lack of emphasis on the spiritual and political situation when Revelation was written.
 - ii. Can't ignore the references to the current events of the day.

G. Select-Wisely

- a. A combination of the Preterist and Symbolic views
 - i. Importance placed on the history and the symbolic
- b. Interestingly enough, the idea of all 4 approaches are the same:
 - i. If we remain faithful to God, we will win!

Review of Interpretation approaches & discussion on Symbolism approach

To many, Revelation is unknown territory and is viewed with the same fear that perhaps the first mapmakers had about the unexplored world...

- These areas were forbidding and dangerous
- Often filled with mythical creatures – "here be dragons!"
 - For those who study Rev., this is a true statement because in 12:3 we read about the great red dragon!
- Reminds me of those sailors who had only the stars to navigate by...
- Throughout the book, many other strange and exotic creatures:
 - Winged creatures with eyes in front and back (4:6-8)
 - Locusts with tails like scorpions (9:3-11)
 - A fearsome beast with seven heads (13:1,2)
 - Three unclean spirits that look like frogs (16:13,14)
- What's the initial reaction to these?
- For the next little bit, we will review symbols in general and symbols particular to Revelation to help us get our bearings straight.

Symbolism

- Symbol – sumballo
 - Compound of "with" (sun) and "to throw" (ballo)
 - Means "that which is thrown with [something else]"
 - Refers to two concepts – one tangible and one intangible – being "thrown together" to convey a concept
 - Similar to the word "parable"

- That which is thrown alongside
 - Dictionary DEF: something that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention, especially a material object use to represent something invisible”
 - Synonym
- We deal with symbols on an everyday basis:
 - Skull & Crossbones -- poison
 - Elephant/Donkey – Republican/Democrat
 - Dove – peace
 - Horseshoe – luck
 - Traffic sign – stop
- In the book of Revelation, keep in mind that we must understand that visible objects will be used to represent invisible truths.

Rules about Symbolism

- The book of Revelation conveys its message through symbols, and one must interpret it accordingly.
 - Reverse the usual rule of interpretation
 - “A passage should be taken as literal unless it involves an impossibility or an absurdity, unless it involves a contradiction or inconsistency, unless it involves an immoral conclusion, unless the context demands a figurative use, unless the inspired writer says a figure of speech is involved, or unless common sense tells us that figurative language is being used.”
 - This rule must be reversed when apocalyptic language is used.
 - Symbolic language does not “mean what it says and says what it means”
- How do we know what it means?
 - Occasionally the text explains it
 - For instance the seven lamp stands in Chap 1 is the seven churches (1:12,20)
 - Golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints (5:8)
 - Sometimes context helps us
 - 1:4,5 – context shows us that the “seven Spirits” in v4 are the Holy Spirit
 - Sometimes helped by how certain symbols are used in apocalyptic literature in general.
 - Horn indicates power
 - Historical background helps us
 - Revelation is deeply rooted in events contemporary to the writing

- Knowing the OT
 - More than 400 references to the OT in Revelation
 - More on this later...
 - Then, basic rules of biblical interpretation take over
 - With regard to figurative language
 - Two basic principles
 - Harmonize the figure with that to which it refers.
 - Note the similarities between the symbol and that which it symbolizes
 - Luke 13:32 – Jesus calls Herod a fox
 - Sly, crafty
 - Makes sense
 - Rev. 1 – 7 churches are referred to as 7 lamp stands
 - Purpose of a lamp stand – give light in darkness
 - Christians and church to be light of the world according to Matt 5:14 – makes sense
 - Avoid pressing the figure too far
 - “Do not look for the significance of warts”
 - Not every detail is important!
 - Christians called sheep (Jn 10:16)
 - Not covered with wool and eat grass
 - This rule is especially needed with a book like Revelation!
 - While the symbols may be complex and have multi-messages, not meaning in every detail and we must not force it!
 - Why are they all there?
 - Some for dramatic effect
 - Fill out the scenery
 - What is most important is the overall message!
 - Must be careful not to get bogged down in the nitty-gritty details and pick it to death!
- Each Vision – as we consider:
 - 3 steps
 - Look at the big picture or the primary message
 - Move in to examine the details and see if they add anything to that message

- Move back to see the big picture again so we don't lose sight of it
- In addition to the special rules of interpretation, we must also look to the general principles of interpretation:
 - Never base a major doctrine on an obscure passage
 - Example – Jesus will reign for a literal 1000 years in earthly Jerusalem
 - Never interpret a figurative passage in such a way that it contradicts plain teaching elsewhere!
 - Teaching by J.W.'s – Only 144,000 will go to heaven
 - Rest of faithful live on restored earth
 - Violates 1 Peter 1:3-5
 - No doctrine is found in Rev. that is not found elsewhere!
 - Must be harmony between Rev. and rest of the Bible!
 - The meaning of figures of speech can change!
 - A symbol can have one meaning in one setting and mean something different in another setting.
 - Sheep
 - When people are compared: Is. 53:6; 1 Peter 2:25 – less desirable qualities
 - When Christ is compared: Is. 53:7; Acts 8:32; Jn 1:29 – more desirable qualities
 - False assumption – symbol means the same no matter what or when or where!
 - Example – two women of chapters 12 & 17
 - One a holy one
 - One a harlot
 - Often times when comparing an OT reference with it's counterpart, look for the twist!
 - When we do not know???
 - Some things are the secret things that belong to the Lord (Deut. 29:29)
 - That is why we must beware of adding to or taking away from God's word!
 - And why opinions should never be allowed to disrupt the harmony of God's people!

KINDS OF SYMBOLS

3 dominate types of symbols in Revelation:

- Numbers used Symbolically
- Symbolism used from the OT

- Symbols based on historical background
1. Use of numbers as symbols is HUGE in Revelation
 - a. In a time when a Hebrew word would have many meanings, the use of numbers became important as numbers would represent definite concepts or truths.
 - b. Even today
 - i. Number 13
 1. Unlucky
 2. Some buildings do not have a floor "13"
 - c. Take a look at the "numbers as symbols" list (we will come back)
 - d. Most numeric symbols are derived from only 3 numbers – 3, 4, & 10
 - i. Three
 1. Number of the Deity
 2. Concept of the "trinity" – Father, Son, Holy Spirit
 3. Homer Hailey – "symbolic of a complete and ordered whole"
 - ii. Four
 1. "Cosmic Number"
 2. Number of creation
 3. Perhaps associated with 4 directions – North, South, East, West
 - a. NEWS
 4. Often refers to all of humanity
 - iii. Combination of 3 and 4
 1. Seven
 - a. 3 + 4
 - b. Very frequent in Rev – more than 50x
 - c. Appears throughout all the Bible
 - i. Starting with 7 days of creation
 - d. Represented perfection
 - e. Most sacred # to the Hebrews
 - f. Deity plus the universe equals all that exists
 - g. In Rev., a listing of seven items often consists of a grouping of 3 plus a grouping of 4 or vice-versa.
 - h. Other derivations:
 - i. The # Six
 1. One short of seven
 - a. Imperfection or evil
 2. To many Jews of the day, same as our "13"

- 3. Almost seven
 - a. Implied deception
 - 4. Used to forecast disaster
 - a. 666 (13:18)
 - 5. However, keep in mind that "6" is also "3 pairs"!
 - ii. The # Three and one-half
 - 1. Half of seven
 - a. Incompleteness
 - 2. Generally associated with:
 - a. Trial, hardship, testing
 - b. Implied a better day ahead
 - 3. Alternate ways of saying it:
 - a. 42 months
 - b. 1260 days
 - c. "a time and times and half a time"
 - d. See 12:6, 14
- 2. Twelve
 - a. 3 x 4
 - b. Another frequent number use throughout the Bible
 - i. 12 tribes
 - c. Even multiple of 12
 - i. 144
 - ii. Often found
 - d. Carries the idea of completeness since 12 resulted from 3 (Deity) multiplied by 4 (creation).
 - e. In Hebrew thought, related to religious completeness
- iv. Ten
 - 1. Also signified completeness, fullness or power
 - 2. Perhaps stemming from "10 fingers" from a person
 - 3. Perhaps a pre-cursor to the decimal system
 - 4. As it multiplied, so did it's significance
 - a. 10 commandments – human completeness
 - b. 10^3 (10x10x10) = 1000 – perfection – strong symbol
 - 5. Also, 5, which is half of ten
 - a. Limited strength or duration
- v. One
 - 1. Idea of unity
 - 2. Mainly used in the phrase "one hour"

- a. Something standing alone and thus weak
 - b. Short period of time that will pass quickly
- vi. Two
 - 1. Double of one
 - 2. A number of strengthening
 - 3. Rev. speaks of "two witnesses" (11:3) and other numbers strengthened being multiplied by 2
- vii. Most other numbers...
 - 1. Combination of the previous numbers
- e. Be careful of "modernized weights and measurements"
 - i. Such as with NASB
 - ii. 12,000 furlongs becomes 1500 miles
 - iii. Numbers can lose their meanings when we modernize
- f. Fractions
 - i. Meant "a part but not the whole"
 - ii. $1/10$ = a small part
 - iii. $1/4$ = some
 - iv. $1/3$ = a substantial part
 - 1. Dividing anything into 3 parts weakens it
 - v. McGuiggan suggested that fractions show "part payment"
 - 1. Rest to come later
 - 2. Credit is common concept today.
- g. Two warnings:
 - i. Do not let your imagination run wild!
 - 1. Metzger said "Rev. is unique in appealing primarily to our imagination – not, however, a free-wheeling imagination but a disciplined imagination."
 - 2. These meanings come from study of OT and other Jewish writings – especially apocalyptic literature.
 - 3. Not invented for Rev.
 - 4. Not the result of someone's "wild imagination"
 - ii. Understand that using numbers symbolically in apocalyptic literature is NOT the same as occult numerology – i.e., the study of the occult meanings of number and their supposed influence on human life.
 - 1. Several attempts at analyzing Rev. under these circumstances has failed and been written about.
 - 2. This is not numerology, but symbolism

2. Symbolism from the OT

- a. More than 400 references to the Old Testament
 - i. Although none are direct quotations
 - ii. Most of these references are to characters or events
 - iii. Note the partial list compiled and shown on the slides

- iv. Note also that there is borrowed symbolism from apocalyptic segments of the OT.
 - 1. Note the partial list compiled and shown on the slides
 - 2. Note the wording and how it compares
- v. Also, when comparing OT references, look for the “twist”
 - 1. The Rev references will often have one or more details that vary from the OT reference.
 - 2. This indicates that Rev is not referring to the exact same thing but to something similar – a similar concept.
 - 3. Example: 7:4-8
 - a. List of the 12 tribes
 - b. List is not literal – it is wrong
 - i. See lists in Gen. 35:22-26
 - ii. Levi is included
 - iii. Dan is missing

3. Symbols based on Historical Background

- a. What about those symbols connected with first-century historical background?
 - i. Knowing something about the history of the time is imperative and extremely valuable
 - ii. This includes:
 - 1. cities
 - 2. doctrinal errors creeping into the church
 - 3. knowing about the Roman empire
 - 4. Knowing about other nations not in the empire
- b. Let’s take a quick survey of the Roman Empire and how it related to Christianity.
 - i. Early History
 - 1. Legend – Romulus and Remus founded Rome in 753 BC
 - 2. It was built on 7 hills
 - 3. In 509 BC they drove out an oppressive king and established a republic
 - ii. Julius Caesar (49-44 BC)
 - 1. A military genius and a politician
 - 2. In 49 BC, subdued the Roman Senate with military force and declared himself dictator
 - 3. For all intents and purposes, he was a dictator, not emperor
 - 4. He is given credit for starting the Empire
 - 5. Ultimately, “Caesar” was the title of the Roman emperor.

6. Recognized as a god and temples were dedicated to him.
 7. On March 15, 44 BC, he was assassinated by Brutus, Cassius and other conspirators.
- iii. Augustus (Octavian) Caesar (27 BC – AD 14)
1. Julius Caesar's nephew – adopted by him and was made his heir
 2. When Caesar died, civil war erupted, eventually Octavian became emperor
 3. In 27 BC he restored the republican government and the Senate conferred upon him the title of Augustus, "the exalted one."
 4. His rule prepared the way for Christianity
 - a. Pax Romana (Roman peace)
 - b. The spread of the Greek Language
 - i. Koine
 - c. The building of massive networks of roads
 5. He was ruling when Jesus was born
- iv. Tiberius Caesar (AD 14 – 37)
1. Was a stepson & son-in-law of Augustus
 2. He was ruling during the personal ministry and death of Christ.
 3. He was still in power when the church was established.
- v. *Gaius Caligula (AD 37 – 41)*
1. *Great-nephew of Tiberius*
 2. *Became mentally unbalanced because of an illness*
 3. *Known as the "mad emperor"*
 4. *Initiated some religious persecution, mainly against the Jews*
 5. *His own officers murdered him*
 6. *He is not mentioned in the NT*
- vi. Claudius Caesar (AD 41 – 54)
1. Nephew of Tiberius and uncle of Caligula
 2. Declared emperor by imperial guards
 3. During his reign, Rome became the commercial center of the world
 4. Mentioned twice in the NT (Acts 11:28, 18:2)
 5. Drove the Jews from Rome – which probably included Christians
 6. Was poisoned by his 4th wife (and niece) who wanted the empire for her son...Nero
- vii. Nero (AD 54 – 68)
1. Adopted son of Claudius

2. During the first part of his reign, advised by good men.
3. He was Caesar when Paul appealed in Acts 25:10-12
4. About the time Paul was released from his first imprisonment, selfish and calculating rivals gained control of Nero – his reign quickly declined.
5. In AD 64, when Nero was accused of starting the fire that swept Rome, he made Christians his scapegoat.
6. The first REAL persecution of Christians by the Roman government.
 - a. Wasn't empire-wide, but set a precedent
7. Was widely untrusted by Romans
8. In AD 68, Roman armies revolted and claimed Galba, their leader, emperor
 - a. Nero fled
 - b. Was tracked down, committed suicide.
9. A myth arose that Nero would one day return.
- viii. "Year of the 4 emperors" (AD 68 – 69)
 1. A quick succession of 4 emperors
 - a. Galba (June 68 – Jan 69)
 - b. Otho (Jan – Mar 69)
 - c. Vitellius (April – Dec 69)
 - d. Vespasian
- ix. Flavius Vespasian (AD 69 – 79)
 1. confirmed by the Senate in Dec. 69
 2. To prevent civil war, he designated his son as heir
- x. Titus (AD 79 – 81)
 1. Destroyed Rome in AD 70
 2. Famous for completing construction of the Colosseum
 3. Eruption of Vesuvius, which destroyed Pompeii
 4. Died of fever in AD 81 – some think he was poisoned by his brother, Domitian
- xi. Domitian (AD 81 – 96)
 1. Younger brother of Titus
 2. Was overly ambitious and kept out of government because of it
 3. Was an effective emperor in some ways
 - a. Boundaries of empire grew to it's height
 - b. Restored many ancient practices, including emperor worship
 - i. He took it very seriously
 - ii. "Lord and God"
 - iii. Erected images of himself

- iv. Forced people to pay homage to the image of him
 - v. To refuse was nothing less than treason – and worthy of death
 - 4. Initiated organized persecution of the church
 - a. Common punishments
 - i. Torture
 - ii. Death by beheading
 - iii. Exile
 - iv. Confiscation of property
 - v. Revoked citizenship
 - 5. Became paranoid near the end of his reign
 - 6. Was stabbed by an assassin in AD 96
 - 7. Memory was cursed by the senate and his name was erased from public monuments.
- xii. Late History and Fall
 - 1. Domitian followed by “five good emperors”
 - a. Nerva
 - b. Trajan
 - c. Hadrian
 - d. Antonius Pius
 - e. Marcus Aurelius
 - 2. During their reigns, empire reached height of its prosperity
 - 3. Also known as the “beginning of the end”
 - 4. Marcus’ reign ended Pax Romana and 100 years of war followed
 - 5. In AD 313, Constantine issued the “Edict of Milan”, which made Christianity a legal religion.
 - 6. Rome fell in 476 following Constantine’s death and a period of disorder that followed.
 - 7. Who knows how long Rome would have lasted had it not decided to take on God!

- c. Why did Rome persecute Christians?
 - i. The moral elements had fallen out of the state religion.
 - ii. Any official religion was nothing more than political or military tool used to promote solidarity of the state – not salvation!
 - iii. Rome was a “polytheistic” state
 - 1. Licensed
 - 2. Unlicensed
 - a. Could be punished by law
 - b. Generally tolerant of other religions
 - c. Christianity was one
 - i. However, it was considered an offshoot of Judaism which was licensed
 - ii. From Nero on, Christianity became suspect
 - iv. Conflict between Rome & Christians was inevitable – why?
 - 1. Both were worldwide empires
 - 2. Appeared on the scene within a few years of each other
 - 3. Both asked for full allegiance
 - 4. The Truth of Christianity would inevitably conflict with any error
 - v. Why was Christianity singled out for punishment among ALL unlicensed religions?
 - 1. The idea of “kingdom” is foremost in Christianity and most people did not understand the difference between a spiritual kingdom and a temporal kingdom
 - 2. The “last times” view of Christianity sounded revolutionary to those who did not understand
 - 3. The sudden appearance of Christianity with so many adherents made the government leaders nervous
 - 4. Christianity was intolerant – an all or nothing venture
 - 5. Christianity was exclusive – not everyone was called “brother” or “sister”
 - 6. From the government’s viewpoint, Christians were obstinate since they wouldn’t do even the littlest thing – such as putting a pinch of incense on the altar.
 - 7. Christians were considered atheists because they said that the gods of other faiths were not gods at all
 - vi. Christians were inevitably blamed for every problem, catastrophe and disaster of the time.
- d. Rome’s rival – Parthia
 - i. Noted in Acts 2:9 – among the nations present for Pentecost
 - ii. Located in what is now northern Iran

- iii. By the time of Rev. writing, Parthia had taken over much of the old Persian empire.
 - 1. It was the ONLY significant military power on the frontiers of the Roman Empire and a thorn in their side for hundreds of years!
 - iv. Some of the imagery in Revelation may refer to Parthia
 - 1. 6:2 -- rider with the bow and crown
 - 2. Chapters 9 & 16
 - a. "the great river Euphrates"
 - b. Would have been a symbol to the Romans of Parthia – and the people of the time!
 - e. Why did Rome fall?
 - i. 3 primary reasons
 - 1. Natural calamity
 - 2. Internal decadence
 - 3. Outside invasion
 - ii. But internal decay was the deciding factor:
 - 1. Rapid increase of divorce – undermined the family, the basis of society
 - 2. Higher and higher taxes and the rampant spending of public money for "handouts" and "welfare"
 - 3. Mad craze for pleasure – remember the Coliseum
 - 4. Building a great armament when the real enemy was within
 - 5. Decay of religion and faith
- 4. Other kinds of symbols
 - a. Colors
 - i. White = victory
 - ii. Red = war or conflict
 - iii. Black = lack of something (food in famine, health in plague, etc)
 - b. NT Symbolism
 - i. Jesus as the "lamb unblemished" – 1 Peter 1:19
 - ii. Church as the spiritual offspring of Abraham – Galatians 3:7
 - c. Other images we will point out throughout the study

THE MESSAGE

Victorious Christianity

Νικαω (nikao) – verb form of the Greek word for “victory”

- Found 17 times in the 22 chapters
- Generally translated as “overcome”, “conquer” or “[be] victorious”
 - 5:5
 - 12:11
 - 15:2
 - 21:7

1. The message has three parts
 - a. The conflict between good and evil
 - b. The apparent defeat of good
 - c. The ultimate victory of good
 - i. Example is 11:3-13
 1. 3-6
 2. 7-10
 3. 11-13
 - d. This would have been EXTREMELY important to 1st century Christians because they needed that hope!
 - i. No matter how hopeless the situation might *appear*, God was still in control and ultimately the faithful would be on the winning side!
 - e. It is a message that is repeated over and over again – at least 7 times!
 - f. Revelation is not chronological
 - i. If you try interpreting it in this way, you will struggle with understanding Revelation.
 - ii. It actually jumps back and forth through time
 - iii. “The book looks at the same period and the same events under different aspects in its different parts.”
 - iv. Seems as if it’s divided into 7 sections and each section runs parallel to each other in regards to “time”
 - v. Revelation might be thought of as a series of valleys and mountains
 1. Tallest and most majestic at the end of the journey
2. The message is unified
 - a. There is a true harmony to the book of Revelation
 - b. This can be seen in developments of themes throughout the book...many of which are introduced in the letters to the 7 churches in chapters 2 & 3!

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

1. Many commentators agree that the book naturally divides itself in two (more-or-less) equal parts with 11 chapters in each.
 - a. First section concentrates on surface battle between good and evil (church vs. the world)
 - b. Second section more concerned with the battle beneath the surface (Christ vs. Satan)
 - c. Chapter 12 seems an obvious dividing point because the chapter seems to restart the story with an account of the birth of Jesus.
 - d. Simple Outline:
 - i. Christ in the midst of the 7 seven churches (1 – 3)
 - ii. The book with the seven seals (4 – 7)
 - iii. Sounding of the seven trumpets (8 – 11)
 - iv. Introduction of the enemies of the church (12 – 14)
 - v. Seven bowls of wrath (15 & 16)
 - vi. Destruction of most of the enemies of the church (17 – 19)
 - vii. Destruction of the dragon, followed by the new heaven and earth (20 – 22)
 - e. Note that there are “7” divisions
 - i. “3” in the first half
 - ii. “4” in the second half
 - f. Note the Detailed Outline (slide)