

## Overview of the Book of Revelation

### I. Basic principles / observations that guide my approach

1. John's book brings the OT prophets to a climax (Rev 1:3; 10:7; 22:7).
2. The book is not in a simple chronological order. John often circles back to the beginning of this age to revisit the timeline from a different perspective. (A particularly clear example: the dragon / baby / woman story in ch. 12: clearly this is an allegory for the birth of Christ, yet it comes *after* a description of the end of the age in 11:15–19.)
3. Some visions depict general spiritual realities, rather than a specific once-only event in history (e.g., the wars and famines in the first seals).
4. Even some of the “once-only” events (e.g., the final destruction of Babylon) had a shadowy first fulfillment in the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. (“Historical Referent” column focuses on ultimate fulfillments)
5. Everything is symbolic: John is not predicting a literal beast arising out of the sea, or Jesus with a sword coming out of his mouth riding on a literal white horse, etc.

### II. Overview of the book

Section	Content	Function in the Book	Historical Referent
<b>I. Prologue (1:1–8)</b>			
1:1–8	Greeting and doxology	Introducing the book, God, and John	John's receiving the revelation in the 1 <sup>st</sup> c.
<b>II. The “things that are” (1:9–3:22)</b>			
1:9–20	Jesus among the lampstands speaks to John	John commissioned to write	John's receiving the revelation in the 1 <sup>st</sup> c.
2–3	Letters to the seven churches	Introduction to the pastoral issues	Initially: the 7 literal churches in Asia Ongoing reuse: all churches in this age
<b>III. The “things that shall take place after this” (4:1–22:5)</b>			
<b>A. The foundational heavenly reality (4–5)</b>			
4	God on the throne receiving worship	Showing God-centered reality as it ought to be	Heaven in the time from Noah until Christ
5	The Lamb takes the scroll and receives worship	Unlocking God's kingdom purposes that will flow forth in the rest of the book	The ascension of Christ in the 1 <sup>st</sup> c.
<b>B. The gospel's unique power to produce true repentance (6–11)</b>			
6–9	Seven seals and six trumpets, with partial judgments	The inability of partial judgments to bring about repentance	All calamities in this present age
10	John takes the book and eats it	John receives the message Jesus has made possible	John's receiving the revelation in the 1 <sup>st</sup> c.

11:1-14	Two witnesses who die but are raised; people repent	The power of the witnesses to produce repentance	The preaching of the gospel by the church in this present age
11:15-19	7 <sup>th</sup> trumpet: rewards and wrath	Snapshot of the end	The final judgment and reward of the saints
C. Five ways to view history in light of the end (12:1-22:5)			
12-14	The dragon and beast persecute, but the true worshipers keep pure	1. Illustrating the fundamental conflict of this age	From the birth of Christ to the final judgment
15-16	Seven bowls of utter judgment	2. The final plagues that complete God's wrath	The final judgment
17:1-19:10	The demise of Babylon	3. Showing the outcome of once-great powers	The present age to the final judgment
19:11-21:8	The destruction of the beast (& false prophet), Satan, and death, and the reward of the saints.	4. Contrast between the destruction of the enemies and the joy of the saints.	Each its own window: 1. Beast and false prophet (19:11-21): present age to final judgment 2. Satan (20:1-10): present age to final judgment 3. Death (20:11-15): final judgment 4. New creation (21:1-8): final reward
21:9-22:5	The new Jerusalem comes	5. Showing the everlasting reward of the saints	The final reward
IV. Epilogue (22:6-21)			
22:6-21	Final exhortations		John's receiving the revelation in the 1 <sup>st</sup> c.

### III. Conclusions about history

Based on this overview of the book, here are the four main phases of history:

1. Kingdom inaugurated (~33 AD): Jesus inaugurates the kingdom in his death, resurrection, and ascension.
2. The interim period (33 AD–Christ's return): a time of conflict between Satan and Jesus' church
  - a. The church suffers greatly for their testimony
  - b. But they nevertheless win the victory, advancing the kingdom
    - i. Partial judgments break into this age in response to their prayers
    - ii. People come to repentance through their testimony
3. Towards the end of the age (leading up to Christ's return): the conflict intensifies, with a surge both of suffering and victory for the church
4. Christ's return: He issues a final judgment of Satan and the wicked, and a final reward for the saints.