

Fundamental Facts about the Book of Revelation

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A SUMMARY OF SIX FUNDAMENTAL FACTS ABOUT THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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I. THE REAL-TIME EVENTS described therein are happening to John in TWO distinct places: (1) chapters 1-3 are happening on this earth; (2) chs. 4-22 are happening in the throne-room of God.

II. THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF NARRATIVES therein. (1) Some are real-time, historical events experienced by John or described to John: (a) ch. 1 – John is visited by Jesus on Patmos; (b) chs. 2-3 – Jesus describes to John the status of seven typical churches, then existing in Asia Minor; (c) chs. 4-22 – Here John experiences, in the divine throneroom, the main material of the book. Here he sees and interacts with the theophany of God the Father and with the glorified Jesus (chs. 4-5); and he receives a long series of revelations (chs. 6-22).

(2) The second kind of narratives are scripted, theatrical, acted-out, three-dimensional, holographic scenes presented to John as in a cosmic theater where he has the only seat. These scenes REPRESENT things that have already happened, or were presently happening, or would happen through all future history. Most are not meant to be taken literally, but are symbolic or figurative. They represent historical events ranging from the FIRST coming of Jesus until His SECOND coming and after.

III. THE THIRD BASIC FACT is that Revelation's language, images, and numbers are meant to be FIGURATIVE or SYMBOLIC, not literal. This is stated in the very first verse, which says that God "sent and SIGNIFIED" these things to John—not just "communicated." The word is *sēmainō*, meaning "to speak in signs or symbols." Many of the scenes and images revealed to John are not meant to be taken literally; they are not even intended to be applied to just one era of history. Especially, end-time prophecy is deliberately ambiguous, so that it can be applied to circumstances present in all ages and generate an "any-moment" expectation of Christ's return, no matter in what age one is reading this book.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION is NOT to give us a detailed preview of Christian history and God's plan for the end-time; its purpose is to show us that God is in charge of the whole course of history, and of the detailed affairs of this world. This is very important, especially since there are many times when things of this world seem to be in such an evil mess. Today, for example, so many enemies of God (e.g., Islam, Marxism, evolutionism, materialism, humanism, relativism) seem to be taking control of the world and constantly attacking Christianity. Wicked people are doing all sorts of evil things and seemingly getting away with them; God-fearing people are mocked and trampled upon. We look at the world and cry out: "WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?"

The Book of Revelation was written and included in the Bible specifically to answer this question, and to assure us that GOD IS IN CHARGE! Though wickedness often seems to have the upper hand on battlefield Earth, Revelation assures us that God is in charge and will be the ULTIMATE VICTOR. The theme of Revelation is VICTORY! Knowing this gives us hope, comfort, trust, strength, courage, and patience even in the most trying times.

V. THE OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION is NOT CHRONOLOGICAL, but (from chs. 6-22) is a series of PARALLEL DESCRIPTIONS (symbolic, to be sure) of Christian history leading up to the end time. It is not an unbroken chronological history, with each chapter following the previous one in time, with everything in chs. 20ff. thus describing the very end of history.

So – if the material in this book is not meant to be an unbroken chronological series, then how IS it arranged? (This is a crucial point for understanding the book.) The fact is that it is divided into several sections that are intended to be parallel descriptions of Christian history, from Christ's first coming to His second coming. It is described as cyclical, with several cycles or parallel units presenting similar things in different ways, i.e., covering the same ground from different perspectives. The details may be different, but the main point will

always be the same: GOD IS IN CHARGE!

From chs. 6-22 (introduced by chs. 4-5) there are five such segments, each giving a symbolic description of some aspect of Christian history, beginning as early as Christ's first coming. God's satanic enemies are described in various ways, but the conclusion is always the same: God and His people win the battle! This victory is described in terms of the Judgment Day, when God's justice will prevail and all things will be made right via wrath upon the wicked and heavenly glory for those on God's side. Here are the five cycles or segments as I see them:

1. Chs. 4-7 – The Seven Seals. 6:2—First coming of Christ. 6:4ff.—“Who's in charge here?” 6:12-17—Judgment Day. 7:16-17—Final Heaven.
2. Chs. 8-11 – The Seven Trumpets. Throughout: “Who's in charge here?” 11:7-10—Loosing of Satan. 11:11-14—Church's Victory. 11:15-18—Second coming; Judgment Day.
3. Chs. 12-14 – The Dragon and the Beast. Ch. 12—First coming of Christ. Ch. 13—“Who's in charge here?” 14:6-20—Judgment and wrath on the wicked.
4. Chs. 15-19 – The Bowls and Babylon. Chs. 15-18—Loosing of Satan, and “Who's in charge here?” 19:7-9—Final Heaven. 19:11-21— Eternal Hell.
5. Chs. 20-22 – The Heavenly Kingdom. 20:1-6—First coming of Christ; binding of Satan; church era. 20:7-10—Loosing of Satan; second coming of Christ. 20:11-15—Judgment Day. Chs. 21-22—Final Heaven.

VI. THE LAST BASIC FACT ABOUT REVELATION is that Christian history—the period between the first and second comings of Christ—is divided into two periods, according to Rev. 20:1-10, thus: (a) the LONG period (most of Christian history), symbolized by the figurative phrase “1,000 years,” during which Satan is bound; and (b) the SHORT period or “little while” (at the very end of Christian history), during which Satan is loosed. It is important to be aware of this while studying the various cycles, because some of them represent events happening throughout Christian history, while some picture events that are happening only in the “little while” at the end.

[FOOTNOTE: A longer explanation of each of these points can be found as chapter one, “Understanding the Book of Revelation,” pp. 5-20 in my book, “From Now to Eternity: Prophecy and the End Times,” published as vol. XII of “The Collected Writings of Jack Cottrell” (The CRA: 2019, pb, 201 pp.) This is followed by 12 more chapters, thus: The Four “Heavens” in the Bible; “The Kingdom of God Has Come!” (Matthew 12:28); “The Millennium Is Now!” (Revelation 20:1-6); Israel in Prophecy; Are We Headin' for Armageddon?; The Second Coming of Christ; The Other Side of Death; Resurrection from the Dead; What Is the Rapture?; The Final Judgment; What About Hell?; What About Heaven?. Go to the bookstore page of the CRA's website – www.thecra.org .]