

# SIMPLIFYING REVELATION

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11 SESSIONS

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OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

# **Simplifying Revelation: How to Read the Book of Revelation**

Shane J. Wood, Ph.D.

## ***Session 1: Introduction***

### **I. Revelation is...**

#### **a. ...Scary**

- i. The images in the book are unfamiliar and difficult to process.
- ii. It is a scary book!

#### **b. ...Ignored...**

- i. Because it is scary, we oftentimes just ignore the book completely. Which is odd, because:
  - 1. Revelation is the only book that offers a blessing to those who read it, hear it, and obey (Rev 1:3).
  - 2. Revelation is the only book that promises a curse on anyone who adds or takes anything away from the book (Rev 22:18-19)

#### **c. ...or Abused**

- i. And yet, this book is one of the most widely abused books in church history.
- ii. Some people are obsessed with the book of Revelation—transforming every ancient or modern discussion into a discourse about Revelation.

#### **d. ...Confusing**

- i. Which is why many people simply find Revelation confusing.
- ii. MY GOAL: I want to simplify the book of Revelation.

### **II. Key Principles:**

#### **a. Principle of Humility**

- i. It's okay to disagree, but when we do:
  - 1. Respect
  - 2. Tell me "why."

#### **b. Principle of Submission**

- i. Committed to having the Word of God transform me instead of the opposite.

#### **c. Principle of Context**

- i. If you take the Bible out of context you can make the Bible say whatever you want!
- ii. Examples:
  - 1. Matt. 27:5b; Lk. 9:60; Lk. 3:11; Jn. 13:27b)
  - 2. Philippians 4:13

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### **Session 2: Challenging Assumptions**

- I. The danger of assumptions
  - a. We come expecting Revelation to answer questions like:
    - i. What will the end look like?
    - ii. Is the rapture almost here?
    - iii. Are we living in the end times?
  - b. Assumptions can cause not a little pain and an awful lot of problems.
- II. Key assumption for the Book of Revelation
  - a. WE ASSUME: **Revelation is a chronological roadmap for the future.**
    - i. End of the World:
      - 1. Seals (Rev. 6:12-17)
      - 2. Trumpets (Rev. 11:15-18)
      - 3. Bowls (16:17-21)
      - 4. Revelation 14
      - 5. Revelation 19:19-21
      - 6. Revelation 20:11-15
      - 7. Revelation 21:1-8
    - ii. Other problems with the Map:
      - 1. Seven Thunders (Revelation 10:3b-4)
      - 2. Revelation 12:1-8
- III. Conclusion
  - a. But what if Revelation's target is bigger than prediction...what if Revelation's target is YOU!

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### **Session 3: Defusing Semantic Bombs**

- I. Are we living in the Last Days?
  - a. To answer this question, we need to ask: “What is the biblical definition of ‘last days?’”
    - i. OUR DEFINITION: Last Days = last 24 hr. periods before 2<sup>nd</sup> coming
    - ii. BIBLE’S DEFINITION: “Last days” or “last times” in the NT [7 passages—not used: James 5:1-3; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 Pet 1:20].
      1. 2 Tim 3:1 – “last days”
      2. Jude 17-19 – “last times”
      3. Acts 2:14-24 – “last days”
      4. Heb 1:1-2 – “last days”
    - iii. Conclusion: The Biblical Definition of the “last days” = time between Christ’s 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming
- II. What is Prophecy?
  - a. Common Definition: Prophecy = Prediction
  - b. How does the Bible Define Prophecy?
    - i. Key Observation:
      1. Around 17% of the time the words prophecy, prophesy, or to prophesy are used, the verses are in the context of a prediction.
      2. Over 83% of the time the words prophecy, prophesy, and to prophesy refer to something else besides prediction.
    - ii. Prophecy...
      1. ...prosecutes and persuades a rebellious people.
      2. ...reveals
        - a. Who God is
        - b. What God desires
        - c. What God demands of us
- III. Conclusion:

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### **Session 4: The People of the Revelation (Historical Background)**

- I. The Importance of Understanding the Historical Background
  - a. It is easy to forget, but Revelation was written to: Real people at a Real time going through Real issues.
- II. The Historical Setting of Revelation Can Be Summarized With One Word: CONFLICT
  - a. DEFINITION: Conflict – when two people or two kingdoms try to occupy the exact same space at the exact same time.
  - b. How do we know there is conflict in Revelation?
    - i. There are over 95 passages that refer to conflicts and/or oppositions.
      1. Rev. 1:9; 2:2, 3, 4, 5b, 6, 7b, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17b, 19b, 20-23, 26; 3:3, 9, 12, 16; 5:6, 9, 12; 6:2, 4, 6, 8b, 9, 11, 12-17; 7:2b, 14b; 8:5, 7, 8-9, 10-11, 12; 9:3-11, 15-19; 11:2b, 5, 7, 10b, 13, 18; 12:4, 7, 8-9, 12b, 13, 15-16, 17; 13:6, 7, 10b, 15, 16-17; 14:8, 9b-11, 12, 13a, 19-20; 16:1, 2, 3, 4, 5b, 6a, 6b, 8-9, 10-11, 14b, 19b; 17:6, 14, 16; 18:8b, 20b, 21, 24; 19:2, 15, 17b-18, 19, 20b-21; 20:2-3, 4a, 7-8, 9b, 10, 15; 22:18, 22.19.
  - c. CONFLICT: THREE GROUPS AND TWO METHODS
    - i. The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan
      1. The cosmic battle raging since Genesis 3.
      2. This battle's fullest expression plays out in the lives of people on earth.
    - ii. Christians and...
      1. Jews in the Roman Empire (cf. Matt. 12:14; 21:33-46; 26:4; Mark 11:18; 12:1-12; 14:1; Luke 19:47; 20:9-19; John 5:18; 7:19, 25; 8:37, 40; Acts 7:54-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-6; 17:5-9, 13-15; 18:6; 21:27-36; 23:1-11, 12-22; Rev 2:9, 14, 20-24; 3:9).
      2. Roman Society
        - a. The Christian message was political (cf. Matthew 6:9; Revelation 1:5)
    - iii. What does the Conflict Look Like?
      1. Physical Persecution
        - a. Examples
          - i. Pliny the Younger's (A.D. 111-112) Letter to Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-117)—*Epistles* 10.96-97
          - ii. Biblical Texts

1. Rev. 1:9
2. Rev. 2:10
3. Rev. 2:13

2. Non-Physical Persecution

- a. Slander (Rev 2:9)
  - i. Cannibals
  - ii. Incest
- b. Social Seduction (Rev 3:14-22)

III. Conclusion

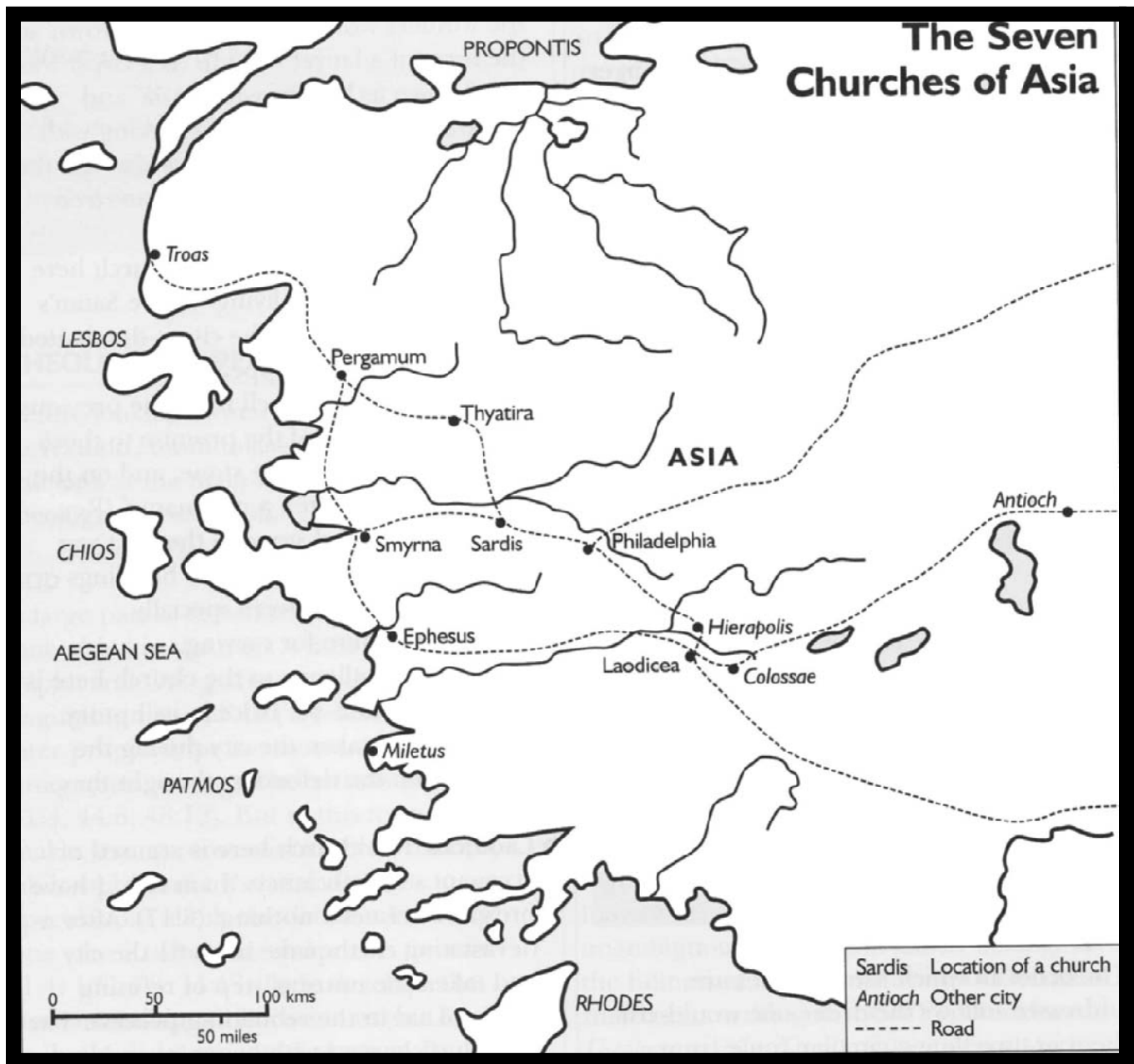
- a. If our interpretations of Revelation do not take this struggle seriously, we rob the first century Christians of a Revelation that truly impacts their lives—for these are real people, at a real time, going through real struggles.

## The Seven Churches of Revelation and the Connecting Trade Route

From

*Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Letters & Revelation*, vol. 2

I. Howard Marshall, Stephen Travis, and Ian Paul



## Simplifying Revelation: How to Read the Book of Revelation

### **Session 5: Learning to Ask the Right Questions (Genre)**

- I. Introduction
  - a. If you ask the wrong questions, then you will get the wrong answers.
  - b. So...How do we know what questions to ask? Genre!
- II. All about Genre
  - a. What is Genre?
  - b. Who Cares About Genre?
    - i. Genre is a governing tool for the reader to know *how* to read what they are reading.
    - ii. The primary importance for understanding a genre, then, is to be able to ask the right questions of the particular text, because the genre dictates the appropriate questions (cf. Who won the game? Have the Tigers been captured? etc.)
  - c. How Do I Learn Genres?
- III. What are the Genres of the Book of Revelation?
  - a. Revelation is governed by three different genres:
    - i. Epistolary Genre
      - 1. Rev. 1:4-5a; 22:21
      - 2. Why is this important for interpretation?
        - a. The message must make sense to the 7 churches in Asia Minor first.
      - 3. KEY QUESTIONS: Who is writing to whom? Why is the person writing to them? How does this book apply to the original audience?
    - ii. Prophetic Genre
      - 1. Revelation 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18
      - 2. Why is this important for interpretation?
        - a. More than mere prediction, Revelation is a clarion call for God's people to both "stand firm" in the face of opposition and for those who have compromised with the opposition to "repent."
          - i. Why?
            - 1. Because of who God is—the sovereign ruler over all creation and history
            - 2. And what God desires—the return to a garden where the curse is in reverse



3. KEY QUESTIONS: What is this prophecy revealing about who God is?  
What is this prophecy revealing about what God desires? What is this  
prophecy revealing about what God demands from us?

iii. Apocalyptic Genre

1. What is it?
  - a. Apocalyptic Literature = A revelation of transcendent realities often communicated by other-worldly beings with a great amount of symbolic language to comfort and exhort an oppressed people.
2. How do we know?
  - a. John's use of symbolic language (Rev. 1:20; 12:9; 19:8b)
3. KEY QUESTIONS: What does this symbol point to? A principle? A reality?  
Where are these symbols used in the Old Testament? How would these  
symbols affect the original audience?

b. Revelation is a Christian Prophetic-Apocalyptic Letter

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### **Session 6: The Imagery in the Book of Revelation (Symbols)**

- I. Literal vs. Figurative
  - a. The literal interpretation must be more than the “surface reading of a text.”
  - b. We should read the book of Revelation not literally or figuratively but **naturally**.
- II. Does Revelation use symbols?
  - a. If not = CONTRADICTION: Rev. 3:12 **vs.** Rev. 21:22
  - b. CONCLUSION:
    - i. Does Revelation have symbols? ABSOLUTELY!
    - ii. IN FACT: In the book of Revelation every number, color, animal, and piece of furniture symbolizes something.
  - a. THIS SHOULD NOT SHOCK US!!!! God consistently reveals himself and his truths through symbols in the Bible.
    - i. Symbols for God (Deut. 4:24; Psalm 5:2; 23:1; 80:1; Isa. 6:5; 8:21; 30:27; Jer. 10:10; Matt. 25:32; Heb. 12:29)
    - ii. Symbols for Christ (Matt. 2:6; 26:31; Mark 14:27; John 1:29, 36; 10:7, 9, 11, 14)
    - iii. Symbols for God’s Church (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 12:27; Eph. 4:12; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9)
  - b. Why Symbols?: Symbols have POWER!
- I. How do we interpret the symbols of Revelation?
  - a. *Context* – How is this symbol used in the immediate context or the verses around this current verse? (cf. Acts 7:60)
  - b. *Context* – How is this symbol used in the larger context of the entire book of Revelation? (Key – Rev 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1)
  - c. *CONTEXT* – How is this symbol used in the broader context of the Old Testament?
- II. CONCLUSION:
  - a. Without understanding John’s use of symbols, we can and will miss the entire point and message of Revelation.

## **Simplifying Revelation: How to Read the Book of Revelation**

### ***Session 7: A Peculiar Organization of Thought (Structure)***

- I. An Unfamiliar Organization of Thoughts
- II. Progression vs. Recapitulation
  - a. Western/American Minds (Progression)
    - i. We look at most things linearly.
    - ii. PROBLEM: John did not write the book of Revelation from a western perspective.
  - b. Jewish Minds (Recapitulation)
    - i. A Jewish mind looks at things cyclically.
    - ii. This is how John wrote the book of Revelation – cyclically.
- III. Defining Recapitulation
  - a. The definition of recapitulation: the retelling of the same events from a different perspective with a different purpose commonly involving intensification.
- IV. The Structure of Revelation
  - a. Example of cyclical progression in Revelation: The end of the world (Rev. 6:12-17; 11:15-18; 14; 16:17-21; etc.)
  - b. THUS: Different interpretative keys need to be identified:
    - i. Interludes: The seals, trumpets, and bowls.
      1. All are a Series of 7—Completion
      2. All come to the end of the world
      3. All have an interlude between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> element of their series
    - ii. Dialog/Narrative Interruptions
      1. Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9
    - iii. Structural Interruption
      1. Introduction to the Unholy Trinity
        - a. Characters
          - i. Satan (Rev 12:3; cf. Rev 2:9, 10, 13; 3:9)
          - ii. 2 Beasts (Rev 13)
        - b. Parody ministries with the Holy Trinity
        - c. THE PEOPLE OF THE TRINITIES:
          - i. Babylon (Rev 14:8)
          - ii. The Church
      2. The Collapse of the Unholy Trinity

- a. [a] Dragon introduced (Rev 12)
  - i. [b] Two Beasts introduced (Rev 13)
    - 1. [c] Babylon introduced (Rev 14)
    - 2. [c`] Babylon destroyed (Rev 17-18)
  - ii. [b`] Two Beasts destroyed (Rev 19)
- b. [a`] Dragon destroyed (Rev 20)

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### ***Session 8: The Message of Revelation (Application)***

#### **I. GOD IS...IN CONTROL**

- a. “Flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder”
  - i. Revelation 4:5—emanating from the throne
  - ii. Revelation 8:5—Seals
  - iii. Revelation 11:19—Trumpets
  - iv. Revelation 16:18—Bowls
- b. Even when the world seems like it is spinning out of control, God is in control.

#### **II. The Message is in the INTERLUDES:**

- a. Seals = You are Spiritually Secure.
  - i. Revelation 6:17—“Who can stand?”
    - 1. The 144,000—Revelation 7:4-8
    - 2. The Great Multitude—Revelation 7:9a
    - 3. Angels—Revelation 7:11
  - ii. Answer: The servants of God can stand because they are spiritually secure.
- b. Trumpets = So go witness Body of Christ!
  - i. Revelation 11:3-12—The two witnesses
- c. Bowls—We witness by what we do!
  - i. Our ethic matters—Revelation 16:15 (cf. Rev 2:4; 19:8b)

#### **III. Conclusion**

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### **Session 9: CASE STUDY: What about the Mark of the Beast? (Revelation 13:16-18)**

#### I. Introduction

##### a. Legends, Lore, and Abuses

##### i. What do we do about the mark of the beast—666?

1. Fear

2. Abuse

3. CONCLUSION: There are as many interpretations of the Mark of the Beast as there are people.

##### ii. Key Questions:

1. Was the meaning of the number clear for the people of his time or just as confusing to the original readers?

2. Are we missing the forest by focusing on this one tree?

#### II. The Context of the Mark of the Beast

##### a. Revelation 13:18

##### i. Approach

##### ii. The Number of its Name (Rev 13:17; 15:2)

##### iii. Gematria (cf. Pompeii graffiti; Gen 14:14; *Sibylline Oracles* 1.324-9)

##### b. What is the solution?

##### i. The answer is simple: “beast.”

##### ii. If the Greek word for beast—θηρion—is transliterated into Hebrew—תריין—and the letters are added up, it equals = 666.

#### III. Interpretation

##### a. Why on the forehead and hands? (Deut 6:4-9; Matt 23:5)

##### b. Other references in Revelation

##### i. Revelation 14:1—Seal on their foreheads

#### IV. CONCLUSION:

##### a. Who you worship defines who you, and it should be as clear as if you had it stamped on your forehead and on your hands.

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### ***Session 10: What about the Rapture? (Revelation 4:1)***

- I. Historical Origins of the Rapture
  - a. Key Figures:
    - i. Margaret MacDonald (1830)
    - ii. John Nelson Darby (Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century)
    - iii. Cyrus Scofield (1909)
    - iv. Dwight L. Moody (Early 20<sup>th</sup> century)
    - v. Billy Graham (Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century)
    - vi. Hal Lindsey (1970)
    - vii. Edgar Whisenant (1988-1999)
    - viii. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins (1990s)
  - b. Conclusion: The Rapture theology develops quite late in church history.
- II. Biblical Texts Regarding the Rapture
  - a. Matt. 24:36-41
    - i. Who is taken?
      - 1. Rapturists – The good are taken and the bad are left behind
      - 2. The Bible – The bad are taken and the good are left behind
  - b. 1 Thess. 4:13-18
  - c. Revelation 4:1
- III. Conclusion

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### ***Session 11: What about Heaven? (Revelation 21-22)***

- I. The Mythology of Heaven
  - a. What do you picture when you think of heaven?
- II. New Heavens and a New Earth
  - a. Revelation 21:1
    - i. Key elements:
      - 1. What does “new” mean?
      - 2. “No longer any sea”
    - ii. We are still going to use this place, but it will be a purified presence.
- III. What will heaven look like?
  - a. Restoration of Relationships Ruined
    - i. There will be a restoration of four relationships that were shattered by the fall:
      - 1. Humanity and Self (Gen 3:16a ; Rev 21:27a)
      - 2. Humanity and Humanity (Gen 3:16b; Rev 21:8)
      - 3. Humanity and Creation (Gen 3:17-18; Rev 22:2b-3a)
      - 4. Humanity and God (Gen 3:23-24; Rev 21:1-7)



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