

Brief Overview of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ

The theme of the book is “The Victory of Jesus and His Followers Over Satan and His Helpers.”

At the present time, given the conditions in our world, it does not seem that things are going the way of victory for the Church, but we must never have doubts about the ultimate outcome. God initially announced what the outcome would be immediately after the disobedience of Adam and Eve. He said to the creature who deceived them, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel” (*Genesis 3:15*). It has been many many centuries since God made that promise but we learn from the book of Revelation that it will be fulfilled.

The structure of the book is explained in the following paragraphs. The Apostle John was given a number of visions which he was to put in writing and pass on to several church fellowships. These visions were presented to John in a series of “sweeps” or groups of “overviews.” Each “sweep” presented a different aspect of the activity of Jesus during the interval between His first and second advents.

The first sweep describes Jesus in the midst of seven churches which were representative of fellowships in the 1st Century as well as fellowships throughout this entire Church Age. Jesus understands the circumstances of His followers. He warns them about their spiritual deficiencies and encourages them to be strong in their faith. Jesus expects His followers to be faithful to Him even if it costs them their lives.

In the second “sweep” we learn about the authority granted to Jesus. We learn that He takes the scroll of human history from the hand of the Father and opens the seven seals of judgment. He is proclaimed “worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because ... with His blood He had purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people group and nation” (*Revelation 5:9*). After the sixth seal, just before the end of the age, the inhabitants of the earth will “call on the mountains and the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb” (*Revelation 6:16*).

The next “sweep” describes seven trumpet judgments. The purpose of these judgments is to get earth dwellers to repent. Included in the sequence of these judgments are demonic hordes who are permitted to torment and torture the inhabitants of earth and kill a third of mankind. However, they are not permitted to harm the people who have the seal of God on their foreheads. After the sixth trumpet judgment, John observed that “the rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent” (*Revelation 11:20-21*).

The fourth sweep provides a history of the efforts of the devil to stamp out the Church. This series of visions begins with the attempt of the dragon, Satan, to stop the incarnation of Jesus. He is not only unsuccessful in that endeavor, but, after the atoning death of Jesus, “He is hurled to earth, and his angels with him.” Because the devil realizes that his time is short, he “makes war against ... those who obey God’s commandments and hold fast to the testimony of Jesus” (*Revelation 12:17*). We learn that Satan will raise up two helpers in the pursuit of his efforts, the Antichrist and the False Prophet (*Revelation 13*). In the sixth scene in this sequence, the earth is harvested. Believers are gathered to the One who is “like a son of man,” and non-believers were thrown into “the great winepress of God’s wrath” (*Revelation 14:14-20*).

The next “sweep” describes the outpouring of the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the evil inhabitants of earth. The last scene in this “sweep” is the gathering of the people “for battle on the great day of God Almighty” (*Revelation 16:14*), followed by a brief description of the end of the age.

In the sixth “sweep,” all the forces of evil which are contaminating creation will be destroyed. The world system, represented by the city of Babylon, is destroyed (*Revelation 17*). Next, the kings, mighty men, and armies of the earth are defeated. The Antichrist, the False Prophet, and Satan are all condemned to the lake of fire. All the people who have ever lived are gathered at the great white throne judgment seat of God. Those individuals whose names are not found in the Lamb’s book of life are thrown into the lake of fire.

In each of these overview scenarios, Jesus is victorious over the evil powers. His followers are the targets of hatred and persecution throughout the Church Age, but their ultimate destiny is never in question. Believers are sealed and protected by God, assuring them that they will be with Him for eternity. Evildoers succeed in physically killing many of Jesus’ followers, but this is actually a step of spiritual victory for believers.

In the seventh and final overview picture in the book, John is given a vision of the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. God's undisguised and fully displayed presence on earth will be possible because all the effects and influences of evil are removed from the earth. The old order of creation is gone, and our holy God is once again able to dwell with people. The new city is an unimaginably magnificent and awesome place, prepared by God to be the eternal home for His people.

The most important point to understand about the structure of this book is that the first six of the "sweeps" lead up to the return of Jesus to earth at the end of the age. The outcome of these "sweeps" is when "the accuser of the people of God is cast down and the salvation and power and the authority of God is revealed." For example, when "the seventh angel sounded his trumpet" there were loud voices in heaven which said, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." That's when the twenty-four Elders could say, "You have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding the saints, and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (*Revelation 11:15-18*).

For us in the 21st Century, the book of Revelation is a look back at the spiritual dynamics which are behind the physical history of the human race. The book is also a look ahead, a pre-recorded history of what God will do to reestablish His spiritual authority over all things physical and material. Believers can have confidence that God will achieve His purpose of cleansing the earth of evil and restoring His relationship with humanity.