

### Alarm bells...

You will find many books which claim to have “unlocked” Revelation or found codes that predict 9/11, Diana’s death, the Euro zone crisis and maybe even the results of the next Doncaster Rovers match. We need to hear the alarm bells ringing when we meet someone who claims to know exactly what it all means. They don’t. And it means that we cannot take Revelation necessarily as a literal or chronological account. This is not a timetable, it is a vision. The events may lead on from one another and they may appear exactly as described. Or the pictures may point to a different, but no less true, reality.

### It’s just weird!

Imagine if you took someone from first century Palestine and placed them in London for a few hours. When they got home what would they describe? Chariots that drive themselves, people trapped in boxes that are inexplicably thin, flying beasts and magic talking stones. We would call them cars, televisions, planes and mobile phones. Now imagine being taken into heaven by definition the most amazing place in all of time and space and even eternity. Then try and do better than your ancient Palestinian describing London. Just because the language is a bit extreme doesn’t mean that there aren’t things there to explore and maybe even understand. Yes, some of it will always be beyond us this side of heaven, but some is there to see and to learn from – even if John seems to have a very vivid imagination.

### A thank you!

Much of the inspiration for these handouts for our “Year with the Bible” come from “The Bible Book” by Nick Page. ISBN 978-0007119677. This handout contains much of his material which better than what I could write. Buy a copy! It is REALLY good!

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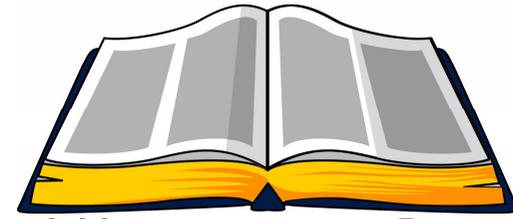


Thanks to Tophier 12-09-2002  
HERE'S THE WAY REVELATION WILL WORK JOHN  
... I'LL WIPE OUT THE BAD GUYS AND SAVE  
ALL THE GOOD GUYS, SIMPLE, EH? ... JOHN?

### We’ve seen the end – God wins!

From Chapter 21

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”



A YEAR WITH THE BIBLE

Part

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## REVELATION

John wrote revelation because he was told to. I mean, if you get a vision from God and you are told to write it down you go ahead and do it. The book also gives a picture of the future – albeit one that it illustrated with obscure images. And it was written at a time when the churches were facing pers4cution of a type they had not experienced before. In the early years, Rome, the great imperial power, didn’t take much notice of what it saw as just another stranger Jewish sect. By the time Revelation was written, however, the situation had changed. After about AD60 the Roman authorities viewed Christianity as something to be suppressed. In AD64, fire broke out in Rom and Emperor Nero avoided blame by accusing and then persecuting the Christians. Although Nero was on the “mad” side of “dysfunctional,” subsequent, saner, emperors continued his work. They did it more officially and more efficiently, and for the next 250 years Christianity had no legal right to exist.

It is against this background that Luke wrote his “official” account of the life of Jesus to combat the more ludicrous rumours that were doing the rounds, while Peter urged his readers to live respectably and quietly and to face suffering with fortitude. Later, John is imprisoned on Patmos, a small island off the coast of Asia Minor, and he is granted a vision for these tough times. “The battle is tough now,” he says, “but I’ve seen the ending. And we win.”

That is the key message of Revelation: Christ wins. Whatever else the book brings up, whatever obscure theories and strange details we encounter along the way, the book is about God’s victory over evil.

However, it would be wrong to see the book as entirely about the future. There is plenty in it that talks to us now. Jesus, through John, addresses the churches of the day, and the messages he gives them are as much about the need for Christians to stand against idolatry, sin and oppression as they are about the future of the planet.

There is something very important to say about Revelation right here at the beginning: *no one really understands it*. Oceans of ink and forest of paper have been spent trying to decipher this most obscure of all Bible books. But the truth is, there is much in there that we cannot understand. There are two main reasons for this: First, we don’t live in the first century AD. Some of the images would be familiar to them and not to us. Modern experts can make some guesses but there is a lot that is still unknown. Second even those in the first century probably couldn’t understand some of it. Sometimes we can only understand things when we look back on them. Revelation is like that. We will only fully understand when we reach the end and look back!

**Pergamum (2:12-17)**  
 God's words to the church at Pergamum are as sharp as a two-edged sword: they have kept true and faithful despite tragedy, but they are following false teaching. They must turn back before it is too late.

**Thyatira (2:18-29)**  
 Thyatira was a garrison town and also the birthplace of Lydia, Paul's first convert in Philippi (Ac 16:14). The church is praised for its endurance and service, but warned against the teaching of a woman called "Jezebel"—a reference to the notorious queen—who is spreading false teaching. The church is urged to hold to the teaching they already have.

**Smyrna (2:8-11)**  
 A prosperous town and a faithful ally of Rome, Smyrna was famous for the magnificence of its public buildings. The church, however, had known suffering, poverty and persecution by local Jews. God reassures the church and promises that if they keep the faith, they will be rewarded.

**Sardis (3:1-6)**  
 Sardis was living on former glories. Once a great city, now it had lost much of its greatness. The church reflects the city: although it has a reputation of life, it is virtually dead. God urges the church to wake up, to recover its strength, to hold firmly to the truth.



**Ephesus (2:1-7)**  
 The church is praised for its integrity, work and endurance, but it is threatened by apathy and complacency. The followers are urged to turn back to first principles.

**Philadelphia (3:7-13)**  
 Though small and weak, the church has remained faithful in the face of persecution. God praises them for their faithfulness and assures them of victory.

**Laodicea (3:14-22)**  
 Laodicea was a rich and prosperous city that lay on the main trade route. The only problem with the city was that the water had to be piped from hot springs to the south, meaning that it arrived lukewarm. The church, like the city, is smug and complacent. And as lukewarm as its water.

The Seven Churches who got "Letters"

