

**Winter 2013 Newsletter**  
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# REVELATION

*“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is at hand.” Revelation 1:3*

As one year ends and another begins, it is typical to look back over the events of the past and try to predict the course of the coming year. The year 2012 has seen the continued upheaval of governments in the Middle East, financial distress in Greece and Spain and fiscal difficulties worldwide. The United States passed through another national election and concluded the year with the vicious slaughter of children and their teachers in a school in Connecticut. The year also saw the uneventful passing of two end-of-the-world predictions.

Amidst such world-wide upheaval, the question of what the future holds stirs the minds of many as they face the new year. Science ponders the effects of global warming on the one hand and the threat of "killer volcanoes" in Iceland on the other. Economists talk about the "fiscal cliff" and sagging global economies. Politicians struggle with clashing ideologies and popular uprisings. Is there no hope?

While the world in its desperation to have answers might turn to the Mayans or Zoroastrian forecasts, Christians perhaps turn to the Book of Revelation for knowledge of what is coming. Unfortunately, they too are treated to

fabulous scenarios of gloom and doom. Revelation clearly holds a fascination for many; but can it be understood? Does it contain a coherent message? How can one make sense of this book? Yet, Revelation 1:3 promises *"blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy..."* Therefore, to assist the diligent student, here are three basic rules for the study of Revelation:

- **First Rule—Revelation is a Book of Symbols**
- **Second Rule—Revelation is a Book of Structure**
- **Third Rule — Revelation Completes Biblical Prophecy**

Together these rules help to bring order to a seemingly chaotic series of visions. By following these guidelines, the message of Revelation can be seen as the culmination of the plan of a just and loving God.

## First Rule — Revelation is a Book of Symbols

The book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John after receiving a series of visions while he was an exile on the Isle of Patmos around the year 96 AD. The first verse

of Revelation reads: *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John"* (Revelation 1:1). The Greek word translated "signified" in the King James Version of this verse means (more specifically) "expressed through signs" or "expressed through symbols" (in modern language).

Perhaps the most daunting task in the study of Revelation is deciphering its symbols. However, in some places in Revelation they are defined for us, as in Revelation 1:20 where *"the seven lampstands are the seven churches,"* or in Revelation 17:12 where *"the horns which you saw are ten kings."* In other places the symbols are not defined, and yet, clearly, the language of these passages is not to be taken literally. Consider Revelation 12:1-4 (New American Standard Bible) as an example:

*"And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth."*

The question of the meaning of the unidentified symbols remains a challenge, but looking elsewhere in the scriptures can help with these. For example:

**A woman represents a church:** A virtuous woman represents the faithful church. (2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:7-9) Thus by contrast, a faithless woman represents false religion. (Revelation 17:1-6, 18:2-4)

**Light represents truth and knowledge:** (Ephesians 1:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

**The sun represents the gospel:** (Compare Psalm 19:4-6 with Romans 10:17,18; Malachi 4:2)

**Stars represent teachers:** (Daniel 12:3, Jude 11-13)



**The dragon represents Rome:** Secular historical sources help with this interpretation. Roman Imperial ensigns and coins bore the image of a dragon as Rome's symbol just as the bald eagle is associated with the United States. The

scriptures also associate the dragon with Satan. (Rev. 20:1; 12:9)

**The moon** is not directly identified in scripture, but as its light is a reflection of the sun's light, it seems reasonable that we may identify the moon with the teachings of the Old Testament. (Luke 24:27; Hebrews 10:1)

Putting this all together, we therefore understand that the woman pictured in Revelation 12:1 is the early Christian church, clothed with the gospel of Jesus, supported additionally by the lessons of the Old Testament, crowned with the teachings of the twelve apostles, but under attack from Rome which is seeking to debase her and, in fact, succeeds in drawing some of her teachers down.

Consider a few more examples:

**Mountains represent kingdoms:** In Daniel 2:35, 44, the mountain that fills the earth is interpreted as the future Kingdom of God. In Isaiah 2:2-4, the mountain of the house of the LORD which is established above the other mountains once again represents God's kingdom ruling over the other nations (or mountains). When Revelation says there will come a time when the mountains (earthly governments) will vanish (Revelation 16:20) it is referring to this era of the coming Kingdom. See Revelation 11:15.

**The sea represents unstable elements in society** that are restless and demanding change. (See Psalm 65:7; Isaiah 57:20; Luke 21:25) When we read in Revelation 21:1, *"and there is no longer any sea,"* this is a reference to the time of the Lord's kingdom rule when all will be satisfied, and those once dissatisfied and rebellious will be at peace. (1 Corinthians 15: 21-28; Haggai 2:6)

**Water represents truth:** (See Ephesians 5:26; Habakkuk 2:14.) By extension, we can then see that hail represents hard truths, (Isaiah 28:17; Revelation 8:7) and fountains represent sources of truth. (Revelation 7:17)

**A lamb represents Jesus:** (John 1:29; Revelation 5:12; 14:1)

## Second Rule — Revelation is a Book of Structure

Although Revelation can be a very complex study, recognizing its structure will help the student navigate through its narrative. Revelation can be divided into three main sections:

- **Section 1 (Chapters 1-13)** presents the history of the Christian or Gospel Age written in advance. This is the period of time when God is calling out from all of mankind a group referred to variously in Scripture as: The Church, The Bride, Christians, A People for His Name, The 144,000, The Little Flock, Saints (Acts 15:14; 11:26; Revelation 21:2, 9; 14:1; Philippians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Luke 12:32)
- **Section 2 (Chapters 14-19)** represents the events at the end or "harvest" of the Gospel Age. Jesus spoke of this time period in the parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13:30, 39) saying, "The harvest is the end of the **age**"(The King James version says "world," but New King James and most other translations use "age" which is the correct meaning of the Greek word). We are now living in this time and Revelation has much to tell us about it.
- **Section 3 (Chapters 20-22)** is a picture of the Messianic or Millennial Age which follows the Christian or Gospel Age. This Age is referred to in the Scriptures by various names: The Kingdom, The Thousand Years, The Day of the Lord, The Day of Judgment, The Regeneration, The Times of Restitution of All Things (Matthew 26:29; Acts 1:6; Revelation 20:2,3,4,6; 2 Peter 3:8, 10, 7; Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:20,21)

The booklet *Revelation--How to Study It and Have It Make Sense* treats these time frames in much greater detail, as well as explores such questions as: who are the seven angels to the seven churches? who are the 24 elders? what are the seven trumpets and seven seals? and how long is a day in prophecy? The book of Revelation is challenging, but not because there is anything chaotic about it.

### Third Rule — Revelation Completes Biblical Prophecy

Revelation does not stand on its own. It is part of the much larger mosaic of Biblical prophecy and promises. Revelation is a microcosm of the central themes of scripture--the atonement for the fall of man and the eventual deliverance of mankind back to life and paradise and harmony with God.

In the first three chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1,2,3) we see man's fall and loss of life and paradise. In the last three chapters (Revelation 20,21,22) we see mankind restored to what he lost in Eden. Between these beginning and ending points of the Bible there are scores of passages that synchronize with Revelation and help us to interpret the book. (See Daniel 7, for example)

Just as it is a mistake to try to interpret Revelation literally, it is also a mistake to think that its testimony is all in the past or all in the future. By its own account, it is a book of symbols picturing things which would begin to be fulfilled in the Apostle's day—*"things which must shortly come to pass."* (1:1) Revelation is the prophecy which identifies events affecting the Christian Church from the time of its establishment by the Lord and the Apostles to the present day, and beyond, into God's kingdom. Its prophecy spans the time from the first to the second advent of Christ and the setting up of his Kingdom as is recorded in Revelation 11:15: *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."* (NASB) Recognition of the symbolic nature of its testimony and the time frames represented in its prophecy allow the student to benefit from the message of the book.

God **will** bring peace and justice to the world by the promised establishment of his Kingdom. This aspect of the heart of God is revealed in the final chapters of Revelation. God's desire for a restored relationship with mankind is clearly demonstrated in his invitation to any who will to *"take the water of life without cost."* (Revelation 22:17 NASB) That God has a glorious future intended for mankind is stated in one of the most awe inspiring promises of the Scriptures:

*"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."  
Revelation 21:4*

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### REVELATION—How to Study It and Have It Make Sense

Mail your request to:

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