

# Apocalypses: The Secret of the World

## Content table

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Worldview questions</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>THE PROLOGUE OF THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>The text</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>The nature of the text</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Numbers in revelation</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Analysis of the text</b>	<b>8</b>
2.4.1	What does the word Revelation mean?	8
2.4.2	Who is this servant, John?	9
2.4.3	What does "soon" or "this time is near" mean?	11
2.4.4	Blessed are those who keep it	11
2.4.5	Who are the seven spirits?	12
2.4.6	Which kings does Jesus rule?	12
2.4.7	What does "he is coming in the cloud" mean?	13
<b>2.5</b>	<b>But why is the kingdom not fully here?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>SOME KEY PASSAGES IN REVELATION</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>What is the Millennium?</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1.1	What did people believe in the past?	16
<b>3.2</b>	<b>What does the bible say about the Millennium?</b>	<b>18</b>
3.2.1	When will the devil be bound?	18
3.2.2	What did Jesus do?	19
3.2.3	How long did he bind him in the pit?	19
3.2.4	Who will judge?	19
3.2.5	What happens after the thousand years?	19
3.2.6	But where is the lake of fire?	20
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Where is the New Jerusalem?</b>	<b>20</b>
3.3.1	What does "new" mean?	20
3.3.2	When will the New Jerusalem come down?	21
3.3.3	Who is the bride?	21
3.3.4	What does "God is amongst us" mean?	21
3.3.5	What has happened?	21
3.3.6	But why do we need healing in the new city?	22
<b>3.4</b>	<b>What does "the sky vanished and is rolled up" mean?</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>23</b>

# 1 Introduction

The last book of the bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is the most controversial in Christian literature. A lot of people don't read the book because it does not seem understandable. The Revelation seems to be a book full of curious beasts and symbols. It is probably better to keep a distance from the book because it seems to be too speculative. But Hollywood liked it and produced apocalyptic films in order to catch their audience's interest? Several Science fiction films about the collapse of the world quickly found their way to the audience. But did Hollywood actually understand the bible?

Revelation was always a very controversial letter. Some Church Fathers didn't want to have the book in the canon. It was only through Athanasius<sup>1</sup> (367 AD) that the book got accepted as a valid part of the Bible canon by almost all Christians in the West. The eastern parts of the Roman Empire had more problems with it. Even today, Revelation is never read alone in the Eastern Churches. The Syrian Orthodox Church does not recognize it at all and does not print it in their Bibles.

The imagery, the style and the vocabulary are very different in comparison to the other books of the New Testament. This book has probably the greatest text-critical problems. The translation was therefore more complex and the book was not copied as often as the others.

Not a lot of Church fathers discussed Revelation. The reformers avoided the book. Martin Luther did not know a lot about it. He said "My mind does not want to go to this book." Calvin wrote an interpretation of almost every book in the Bible but he did not write about Revelation. Nor did Zwingli. But suddenly during the Enlightenment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the book found its way into Western society. It was primarily John Nelson Darby's theory of dispensationalism, which created a completely new understanding of Revelation. This theory was welcomed in a lot of evangelical churches, especially in Adventist, Baptist or Pentecostal communities. The same is true for a lot of so-called sects like Jehovah's Witnesses or the

---

<sup>1</sup> Saint Athanasius of Alexandria 296–298 –373, also called Athanasius the Great, was the 20th bishop of Alexandria (as Athanasius I). Athanasius was a Christian theologian, a Church Father, the chief defender of Trinitarianism against Arianism, and a noted Egyptian leader of the fourth century

Mormons. But it is probably Christian Zionism, which embraced dispensationalism the most.

In the nineteenth century, people's view of Revelation changed significantly and they started to interpret it literally. Theologians tried to prove the Bible scientifically but it led to a lot of debates and Church separations. The question remains, however, in which style Revelation was written? Is a literal interpretation of Revelation really helpful or is it contrary to the original author's intention?

Nobody would read Goethe's work literally? Goethe's work is meant to be read as poetry just as many parts of the Bible. Is it not impossible to try to understand the bible only in a systematic and literal manner? In any case, this has led to confusion and unnecessary quarrelling amongst Christians.

Furthermore, when the state of Israel was founded in 1948, a lot of Christians thought that Darby's theory of dispensationalism had been confirmed. A lot of films and books were published and this view about the Revelation almost assumed the status of doctrine in evangelical churches.

## 1.1 Worldview questions

There are a lot of different interpretations of Revelation. All claim to be biblical. Why is that? Simply doing an inductive bible study will not be enough, because everybody reads the bible through the lenses of their own worldview. Everybody has a worldview that is shaped by the environment they live in. Darby claims to be biblical. But is he right? Is he not just a child of his own time?

The enlightenment was a time when the people believed they could find truth through reason alone. They started to look at the bible in a historical, critical way and wanted to explain everything through reason.

Worldview is therefore a very important aspect in interpreting the bible, which is why everyone should understand the concept of worldview.

First, we have to ask the question why Darby, after 1800 years Christianity, argued differently from all those who came before him. This observation should give people some food for thought. Another question would be, what consequences such a worldview would have. What are the consequences for people's daily lives and for the world? Is it just a philosophical construct or does it have real-life consequences? Do these ideas fit into our overall view of the bible?

The Anglican Bishop, N. T. Wright, vehemently criticized this theory. He said that it promotes a one-sided, pessimistic worldview for Christians. They would no longer have hope that God is renewing and transforming the world through his salvation, which is already taking place in a fragmented manner»<sup>2</sup>.

Before people can understand the bible, they have to face their own worldview and figure out why they believe what they believe. It is important to ask questions in order to find out if your interpretation fits into the overall picture of the bible<sup>3</sup>.

Some Christians think that we should not quarrel over this. They think that Revelation may be interpreted in different ways, depending on your personality and situation. But does that not mean that everybody can interpret Revelation in whichever way they want? But which way is the right way? Is absolute truth still valid? Or is the bible just a book of good advice and personal encouragement?

For the Church fathers the Bible was the foundation of their world, the absolute truth where people could find orientation. Everyone was accountable to the Bible and no one could place themselves above it. To my mind, the Bible gives us the truth and therefore there is only one valid interpretation but several ways of application. You may not agree with me but if there is not just one valid interpretation, why should we do an analysis of Revelation to try to find the truth?

Today a lot of people think truth is whatever they think it is but they no longer believe in objective truth. This worldview would fit in the postmodern time where everyone has their own truth.

Revelation pretend that the people can understand it<sup>4</sup>, because they should follow it. So, we have to believe that we can understand it. If we cannot understand it we cannot follow it. This means that the book must have been understandable for the people when it was written. It also has to be understandable for us, otherwise there is no point in having this book in the bible. But to understand means to know what is right and what is wrong. If there is no such thing as right or wrong, it doesn't matter whether or not we study the Revelation. If there is no truth in it, we do

---

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, a quote from Wikipedia, the worldview what would react to a new view were dispensationalism would have no place is in the book; surprised by hope, 2009

<sup>3</sup> Some philosophical question to ask: What is the beginning of all, what is the future, what has value, from where do we know what we know or what is the solution and how can it be done? Does this answer fit to the overall view of the bible?

<sup>4</sup> Introduction of Revelation; blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written

cannot obey and follow the teaching that Revelation claims to be. Therefore, let us search for this one interpretation and understand the message so that we can follow it.

It is important to be aware of our own worldview when we begin a debate about a book. We have to be willing to give up our own opinions and start on a more or less neutral ground. Let us now have a closer look at what the book of Revelation really wants to say.

## 2 The Prologue of the Revelation of Jesus Christ

### 2.1 The text

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev 1:1–8)*

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of*

*the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*  
(KJV Rev 1:1–8)

## 2.2 The nature of the text

First, we have to ask what kind of text does Revelation is? The author says that it is a Revelation, a prophecy. The word "prophecy" is used seven times in Revelation. The prophets in the Old Testament often used language symbolically to explain God's ways. Therefore, we should not assume that Revelation can be read literally. Rather, it is safe to assume that it is symbolic with a lot of imagery just like the prophecies in the Old Testament.

Perhaps someone cannot speak about what happens to him literally but he can paint a picture that expresses his pain and needs. This could also be the case with Revelation: God shows us things that he could not express with words only. Therefore, he uses pictures to express it just as Jesus used them when he told parables. The parables of Jesus are written in a symbolic language. They are not literally about the sheep, the pearl or the candles. John didn't say that Jesus is a door. Jesus didn't speak trumpet language or have a sword in his mouth. The psalms or the proverbs are not written in a literal manner either.

John states that he "saw" over 40 times in Revelation. He saw it in a spiritual manner and not in terms of what will happen historically. Also, he didn't write down history. Therefore, it seems that Revelation is written in a poetic and symbolic language. Like a film what told John what happen in the world.

People often use symbols to describe something: The rising sun burned the eagle's wing and awakened the Lion. The bear became very alert and started to send his eyes to the whole world. The world leaders would understand this message: The country of the rising sun is Japan. The eagle is the United States because it rules the world. The lion is England and the bear is Russia because it is dangerous and strong.

Thus, let us be open to read Revelation symbolically to determine its meaning.

Not all the books of the bible are written in a chronological manner. Psalms and proverbs are a selection of verses. There are two creation stories in Genesis but it is obvious that God created the world only once. The Gospel of John almost contradicts the other gospels. The books in the bible are not ordered chronologically. The letters of Paul are ordered according to their length starting from the longest letter down to the shortest. The bible has a lot of elements that are not written chronologically and Revelation could be one of these.

It seems that in Revelation the same story is told again and again. The image of the seals shows that evil intends to destroy the world but that evil will be overcome with the last seal. We can observe the same pattern with the seven trumpets and so on. It seems that there are several images showing the same thing again and again. In the fourth image it seems that Jesus is born. Thus, it is obvious that it started again. Some scholars think that these are seven images showing the spiritual fight in the world.

I think it is obvious that Revelation is not written chronologically otherwise it would have to be quite understandable.

## 2.3 Numbers in revelation

The number seven is used 55 times in Revelation in 404 verses. That means the number seven appears roughly in every eighth verse. It seems that seven is a very important number and it is necessary to understand the meaning of it in order to make sense of Revelation.

God created the world in seven days and rested on the seventh day. For the Jews, the seventh year was a sabbatical year and after 7 times 7 years it was the jubilee. Isaiah wrote about the seven spirits of the Lord that shall rest upon him. The candlestick in the temple had seven arms. Jesus said, we should forgive 70 times 7. He sent out 70 Apostles. In the Gospel of John there are seven wonders and seven characters of Jesus Christ. In the Jewish tradition, seven was the number of perfection.

The number seven was also very important for Christians: Pope Gregory compiled the seven deadly sins (pride, avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, sloth). The Catholic Church also has the seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Marriage, Holy Orders, Anointing of the Sick). The universities had seven basic subjects: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.

Earth, water, air and fire or west, north, east, south were the created perfection symbolised by the number four. The trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit were the perfection of the divine reality. Together they make up the number seven, which means that the visible and invisible world, heaven and earth, belong together<sup>5</sup>.

The number seven was also important to the gentiles. It is a lucky number in countries like Japan and others. A lunar month has 28 days ( $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 = 28$ ) meaning 4 times 7 days. Seven stands for the seven virtues: faith, hope, love, wisdom, justice, fortitude and temperance. In fairy tales the number seven is used quite often: the seven dwarfs behind the seven mountains.

It seems that this number is a symbolic number. For example, Revelation is not just written for the seven churches in Asia, but for all the Christian communities. At that time, people used the number seven to express perfection, the visible and the invisible together, God and Gods creation.

Similarly, the number six symbolised that something was almost perfect but not quite. The number 666 is used in Revelation. There has been a lot of speculation as to what this number means. In the Jewish understanding, something was true when there were three identical testimonies to it. Therefore 666 could express non-perfection. It might also refer to a name in this time but it seems that we can also just see it symbolically.

## 2.4 Analysis of the text

### 2.4.1 What does the word Revelation mean?

The Greek word for Revelation is “apokalupsis”. Apocalypses is often used by Hollywood to describe the collapse of the world, its destruction through natural disaster or evil. Often, people’s assumptions come from these films rather than from the original text.

Revelation means that something that was hidden becomes clear or knowable. It is a secret that Jesus Christ is giving to the churches. Something that the Christians didn’t know before. A secret that cannot be discovered by humans. It has to be revealed by God. Humans cannot explain where it came from. It cannot be found by academic or scientific means. It is like someone revealing the location of a hidden treasure to you. This is what Revelation claims to be.

---

<sup>5</sup> Col 1:20



The book is different from than all the other books in the New Testament in that it claims to be directly from God. The other books are stories told by different authors or letters to specific people groups. Of course, Revelation is also a letter to the seven Churches in Asia. But could it not be that these seven Churches symbolically represent the fullness of all the churches?

The Greek term *apocalypses* refers to the present and not the future. This means that the Revelation was not written about the future as people often think. If it were concerned with the future, John would probably have said "a Revelation for the future", but he didn't say that.

The Greek text says not this is the only Revelation it pretends to be a Revelation. It is a Revelation like the prophecies in the Old Testament or through Jesus Christ himself. Revelation is also something new that would add to other Revelations from God.

#### 2.4.2 Who is this servant, John?

God revealed it to his servant, to someone who followed him and knew him. And it was John. Which John? It could be John the disciple, John the Baptist, John Markus or some other John. But it must have been a servant who followed him.

Revelation must have been written after the churches in Asia were founded. It seems that these churches were persecuted at the time or were soon to be persecuted. The first persecution by the Roman Empire happened under Nero. John the Baptist had already died by that time. Therefore, it is almost impossible that he wrote Revelation.

Often people link the number 666 in the book to the Emperor Nero. If people compare the numbers of the Hebrew letters of his name<sup>6</sup> people arrives at 666. If

---

<sup>6</sup> נרון קסר *neron kesar*; in some early biblical manuscripts, including Papyrus 115, the number is cited as 616. In the Bible, 666 is the number of talents of gold Solomon collected each year (1 Kings 10:14, 2 Chronicles 9:13 and also in Ezra 2:13). In the Bible, 666 is the number of Adonikam's descendants who return to Jerusalem and Judah from the Babylonian exile (Ezra 2:13). In the Bible, there may be a latent reference to 666 in the name of the great sixth-century BC king of Babylon. Commonly spelled *Nebuchadnezzar*, transliterating from the Book of Daniel, the name is *Nebuchadrezzar* or *Nebuchadrezzur* in the Book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 49:28–30). The number of each name can be calculated, since Hebrew letters double as numbers (see Gematria, Hebrew numerals). *Nebuchadrezzar* is 663, and *Nebuchadrezzur*, 669. Midway between the two

this is true, the letter would make most sense, if the book had been written before Nero's death.

*The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is sitting. They are also seven kings. Five of them have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come. When he comes, he must remain in power for a little while. The beast that was and is no longer is the eighth king, but it belongs with the seven kings and goes to its destruction. (Rev 17.9–11)*

When the Revelation was written in 68 AD, Nero was the 6<sup>th</sup> King who ruled Rome. Rome is built on seven mountains. 5 Caesars had come before Nero. Nero was the first Roman Caesar, who persecuted Christians. These historical facts could fit the Revelation but there are some difficulties with this: Are the kings really the Caesars? Why should we start with the first Julius Caesar? Before him, there were also Caesars but in a different way. Why does the Revelation use the term "king" and not "Caesar"? And who are the ten other kings? Let us assume that these things are symbolic otherwise Revelation would become very complicated. I think it is wiser to see this in context and to determine the overall meaning of Revelation and then to quarrel about the kings. The 10 horns of the beast should also be taken symbolically: It just means that there will be more people with power and that the end has not yet come. But these kings will submit to the beast, the symbol of evil. These kings will submit to evil and will rule the world. And they will fight against God.

Thus, we can assume that the letter was written near the end of Nero's rule (54–68 AD) or later in the first century, when Christians suffered persecution. Revelation also not mention the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70. It is therefore most likely that John the Disciple was the author of Revelation before 70 AD, which is also the position that most Church Fathers took.

---

variants is 666. If the mysteries of Jeremiah are to be related to those of Revelation, Nebuchadrezzar, who came (though bidden by God) to crush God's people, may prefigure the end-times beast Using gematria, Neron Caesar transliterated from Greek into Hebrew produces the number 666. The Latin spelling of "Nero Caesar" transliterated into Hebrew produces the number 616. Thus, in the Bible, 666 may have been a coded reference to Nero, the Roman Emperor from 55 to 68 AD

### 2.4.3 What does "soon" or "this time is near" mean?

The word "soon" is used eight times in Revelation: Twice in the prologue and twice in the epilogue.

*"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. (Rev 22:12)*

*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:20)*

Obviously, this does not mean that revelation talk about 2000 years after it is written. The word "soon" is used eight times because the author wants to emphasize it. Therefore, the Revelation was meant for the near future and it had to make sense to its original audience.

*Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. (Rev 1:19)*

God told John to write down things that he had seen happening now and that would take place later. Revelation also speaks to what will happen next, things that they couldn't see until then, that were now revealed.

### 2.4.4 Blessed are those who keep it

All who keep this message are blessed. It also says that all who do not keep this message will not be blessed. This is a call to action, to keep it, perhaps because it does not come naturally to people. People will forget this message because of the circumstances. People have to make sure that they will not forget it because the time is near.

If the people are meant to keep this message, it has to be understandable. It should be a message that people can hold on to. It has to make sense to the people in the seven churches otherwise Revelation is useless to them. I start from the premise that people can understand Revelation. Not just the educated ones. Everyone should be able to understand it, which is why it is written in a really simple manner. The real challenge of Revelation is not to understand it. It is to not forget it.

### 2.4.5 Who are the seven spirits?

Isaiah writes about the seven spirits of the Lord that shall rest upon him (Isaiah 11:2): the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. These seven spirits are also mentioned in Revelation 4:5. It is probably safe to assume that the seven spirits are the perfection of the spirit of God. As we can see the number seven is a symbolical number

### 2.4.6 Which kings does Jesus rule?

Is Nero one of them? Obviously not. The next verse will help us to understand that. Christians are to be kings and priests. Therefore, it says that Jesus is the king of the Christians, who are his representatives in the world and who must rule as kings and priests. Thus, Revelation tells us that Jesus made us kings and priests to rule over his creation.

God created the world and made people his partners. He made them in his image to rule as kings over his creation. But people didn't want to be under the king and wanted to be independent. People lost the kingship but Jesus brought it back again.

With his blood he bought the kingship back. He made them priests and kings again. They are priests and now have direct access to God. Not like in the old times where people had to go to the priest to address God. But Jesus also repossessed the rule of his creation and gave them authority to reign over his creation.

The Jewish people waited for the Messiah who they thought would bring the kingship back. They never thought the Messiah would bring them to heaven they thought that he would bring the actual kingdom back and re-establish it, like it was in earlier times.

Some of them understood that Jesus was the Messiah. But then he disappeared and the Jewish people were insecure, because of the promise that the Messiah will re-establish the lost kingdom. But when he disappeared the situation seemed to be the same as before. Revelation was written 30 years or more after Jesus' Ascension. It was almost one Generation and the Christians started to doubt this promise. A lot of letters in the New Testament address this problem but now the Revelation shows something new that was not clear before.

Jesus revealed it in this book to the churches and explained the situation. With his blood shed on the cross, the Messiah bought the authority of the Christian back. They do not have to wait any longer for the Messiah or the return of Jesus. They have the authority to rule over his creation, to take dominion and to protect what God created, like they did in the Garden of Eden. The Messiah will not build the kingdom alone: he is building his kingdom together with the Christians. This is the new Revelation, the secret of this book. He sent his spirit to the Christians and gave authority back to them. Through their rule the kingdom of God becomes more and more visible.

In the scene with the seven seals there is a question: who is able to open the seals? Jesus can open the seals. He died on the cross and became able to transform people from all nations into kings and priests. That is the secret of Revelation.

*And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Rev 5:9-10)*

Often, translations only refer to the priesthood of God or state that he made us into a kingdom of priests. In the original Greek text, there are two words: "basileus" and "hierus". "Basileus" means to be a ruler, to take dominion over something or to be a King. "Hierus" denotes a priest who can come before God and address him directly. Jesus made it possible that Christians now have direct access to God. They don't need a priest anymore. Therefore, they are priests themselves. Christians have now the authority to be priests and kings to build his kingdom.

They don't have to become kings they are kings. The question is whether Christians realise this and put this authority into practice in their lives.

#### **2.4.7 What does "he is coming in the cloud" mean?**

In this passage, the word "coming" is used in the present tense. It is not in the future tense. It means something happening now, continuously, or something happening repeatedly. It does not say that Jesus will come back once in the future. He is coming now.

What does the cloud mean? The cloud in the Old Testament is a symbol for God. The cloud in the desert leads Israel. The cloud filled the temple and the tabernacle. Now the temple is destroyed and the cloud has come over Jesus. It is not a visible cloud

in the sky. It is a symbol of God's presence, something that all Jews would have understood at that time. Therefore, this means that through our kingship in the world God's presence will become more and more visible.

What John saw was not the collapse of the old world and that the new world would some day come down from heaven. Or, in terms of science fiction: the world collapses and humans escape to planet Mordo. What John saw is the following: the continuous revelation of God's kingdom over time through the kingship of the believers. The kingdom is not just coming down it is also here in our midst. But the kingdom is not fully revealed because there is still evil in this world. But some day God will destroy that evil.

Therefore, people should not wait in their churches for Jesus to come back. They should go out there and be involved in politics, business, and education and in all the spheres of society. They have to regain the lost paradise. The fall cannot overcome his creation. That is the secret, the hidden thing, revealed through John in this book.

The reformers understood this and made the world their kingdom. The great musician Friedrich Händel ended the Messiah with his Hallelujah. The main verse is taken from Revelation and best describes what the reformers believed:

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." (Rev 11:15)*

Through this faith the world was reformed 500 years ago. They believed it and took their kingship. They built up universities, political systems, business, finance systems and so on. Western culture is a product of those reformers who believed in their own kingship. Today the West is secularised. Christians are marginalised even though they still have great churches. But have they not forgotten the kingship and their authority to build God's kingdom? Are they not in the same situation as the Christians who lived at the time when Revelation was written? Therefore, Revelation is a very relevant book even today.

## 2.5 But why is the kingdom not fully here?

But now there is a problem: Christians should rule as kings and priests but the circumstances in the seven churches are not like this. After the introduction, the passage on the seven churches in Asia begins. They did not live according to the

promise, not like kings and priests. There was a lot of suffering and fighting in these churches. Philadelphia was the only church that God did not admonish. But God told them whoever will overcome, will receive the crown. Revelation states that Christians can overcome it. They should not be blinded by evil.

After this passage, the text continues with the seven seals, the signs, the trumpets and so on. John saw that there will be wars and earthquakes but he tells us not to be shocked that such things will happen and that this will not be the end. It shows that the world is not yet perfect and that there are a lot of challenges, a lot of persecution, many wars and natural disasters. But in the end, God will win. It seems that Revelation tells the same story several times but always from another perspective. The ending – the seventh seal, sign or trumpet – is always the same. God will overcome evil.

The promise is that people do not have to wait until the end: they have the victory right now through Jesus Christ. Christians can overcome evil and are able to bring about reformation. The West became a dominant world power because they believed it. The Christian worldview enabled them to overcome evil and to bring about reformation. They were able to reform situations and not be hindered by evil. Even if they did not make situations perfect, there were small victories.

Revelation is like a science fiction theatre in seven acts and all acts have seven scenes. It always begins with God's kingdom and then horrible events happen, which threaten to destroy his creation. Evil starts to grow, but then God is victorious again. Finally, in the last act the New Jerusalem is coming down. As we know now it will not come down, it already came down or will continuously coming down. Therefore, it is not an event just in the future. The events in Revelation take place again and again in the present.

Revelation shows how God builds his kingdom step by step with small victories. One day, he will destroy evil completely but until then Christians live in a tension but with hope. They live with the hope that everything that they do is not in vain. It is for eternity. Everything that people do for God will be an investment in the New Jerusalem.

## 3 Some key passages in Revelation

### 3.1 What is the Millennium?

#### 3.1.1 What did people believe in the past?

Irenaeus of Lyons included the idea of the Millennium into the creed and declared all those who did not believe it as "heretics." Church fathers such as Tertullian and Cyprian also supported the idea of the Millennium. Augustine<sup>7</sup> thought that the Millennium had started with the first appearance of Jesus Christ. The Millennium was seen as a time when God will rule in the world.

From the 3rd century onwards this idea was forgotten within the Church. For the Catholic Church an earthly kingdom of God was no longer that important since they progressed materially and their political influence increased, which was interpreted as a sign that the kingdom of God had already begun. The "endlessness" of the kingdom of Christ was now emphasized and the idea of a future or temporary kingdom of God was officially declared as a heresy. Thus, the idea of the coming Millennium got lost in the Middle Ages.

Augustine thought that the present age is a struggle between the Church of Jesus Christ (Ecclesia) and the non-Christian world. Between the "City of Christ" and "City of the Devil."<sup>8</sup> This allegorical view prevailed widely in Christianity.

In the year 1000 AD a lot of people expected Christ to return. As it did not happen, they extended the time period to 1033 AD. Pilgrimages, heretics and barefooted people arose everywhere. But since Christ did not appear in 1033 either, it became necessary to interpret the concept of the Millennium non-literally. Now the 1000 years stood for an indefinite period of time between the resurrection and the coming of Christ.

Joachim of Fiore<sup>9</sup> in the twelfth century developed a "three-time doctrine". According to the doctrine of the trinity, there are three kingdoms or three ages: the age of the Father (Old Testament), the age of Jesus of Nazareth and the church and

---

<sup>7</sup> Augustine of Hippo 354 –430 was the bishop of Hippo Regius in north Africa and is viewed as one of the most important Church Fathers in Western Christianity.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *De civitate dei*

<sup>9</sup> Joachim of Fiore, 1135– 1202, was an Italian theologian and the founder of the monastic order of San Giovanni in Fiore.



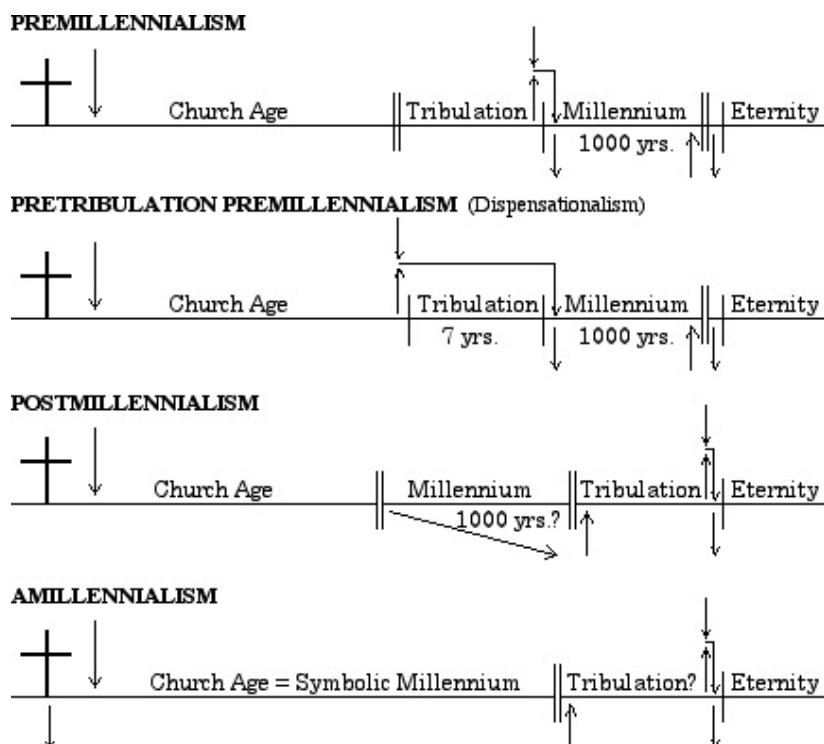
the age of the Holy Spirit. This third, happy age would be enlightened by the heavenly Jerusalem coming down.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the reformers believed that the New Jerusalem would be built up through the churches. The Millennium was seen as the period of time until the coming of Jesus, when he would completely destroy evil.

The topic resurged in the 17th century in persecuted congregations in England and the Netherlands, such as the Quakers or Radical Pietism.

However, with Darby<sup>10</sup>, the discussion about the thousand-year period and the end of time really flared up. Specifically Revelation 20:1–9 is taken by many dispensationalists to be proof of their theory.

There are basically three different views of the Millennium as shown in the graphic below.



The premillennialists believe the Rapture and Jesus is coming back before the Millennium. The second schema (Pretribulation Premillennialism) is Darby's theory. In his view, the Rapture and Jesus come back *before* the Tribulation. The third schema; Postmillennialism has Jesus come back after the Millennium. Finally,

<sup>10</sup> John Nelson Darby 1800 –1882 Pastor of the Plymouth Brethren

Amillennialism holds that the Millennium has already begun with Jesus and that the Millennium has to be taken symbolically and not literally.

## 3.2 What does the bible say about the Millennium?

This topic is addressed only once in the bible, namely in Revelation Chapter 20. Let's have a closer look at these verses.

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*

*This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev 20:1–10)*

### 3.2.1 When will the devil be bound?

Did it not happen when Jesus cast out the demons and finally died on the cross? After the cross the devil is bound and he cannot deceive the nations again. This means that the devil has no power over them. No people received the first resurrection and the second death has no power over them anymore. It means that before Jesus, the devil was not bound and he could deceive the nations. It seems

that in the Old Testament he was probably not allowed to deceive Israel but the other nations. But after Jesus he is bound that he can no longer deceive the nations. To the Jews, "nation" meant the people who were not Jewish. But now all the nations can come to God. Jesus dealt with the devil and bound him.

### **3.2.2 What did Jesus do?**

He bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, that he might not deceive the nations any longer,

### **3.2.3 How long did he bind him in the pit?**

Until the thousand years end. After that he must be released for a little while. In the context of Revelation, it absolutely makes sense that the thousand years are the time between Jesus first coming 2000 years ago and his second coming. The thousand years do not necessarily have to be a period of time in the future.

### **3.2.4 Who will judge?**

"They came to live and reigned with Christ for a thousand years". The Christians who hold on to this message will reign on earth during this time. They will build his kingdom and the New Jerusalem will become more and more visible. The rest of the dead will not come to life until the thousand years are over. The ones who did not follow Christ will remain dead. They are blind and dead in the spirit. This is the first resurrection. The first resurrection is the spiritual resurrection.

But the ones who received the spirit of God do not have to fear the second death. It has no power over them. The ones who gave their life to Jesus will rule. They will be kings and priests for Christ and they will reign with him for a thousand years. Even when they die the evil will not overcome them. Everybody will rise for the second resurrection if they took part in the first resurrection. The second resurrection will be the physical resurrection, where people will rise again and live in eternity.

### **3.2.5 What happens after the thousand years?**

When the thousand years end, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations. But then fire will come down from heaven and consume him. And then it will be finished. After 1000 years the devil will just release for a little time. Like in the other acts showed that the devil will not even fight against God. Fire will come and consume him and it will be over. It will be the final

death for the devil. He will be thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophets already are forever and ever.

### 3.2.6 But where is the lake of fire?

This lake sounds similar to the concept of hell. There are a lot of ideas around concerning hell, but the bible does not seem to be very clear on this. Some think it will be a real fire, for example the Catholics who believe in the Purgatory. But it doesn't have to be a real fire. A lot of passages in Revelation are symbolic which is why this could also just be symbolic. It could mean everlasting death instead of a real fire. That would be the second death. After that there would be no more resurrection for those subjected to it. Thus, evil will be destroyed, the devil and his followers. It will be their final death. They are no more.

## 3.3 Where is the New Jerusalem?

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and the sea was gone. I also saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "See, the tent of God is among humans! He will make his home with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There won't be death anymore. There won't be any grief, crying, or pain, because the first things have disappeared." The one sitting on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new!" He said, "Write this: 'These words are trustworthy and true.'" Then he told me, "It has happened! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give a drink from the spring of the water of life to the one who is thirsty. (Rev 21:1-6)*

### 3.3.1 What does "new" mean?

The original Greek word for "new" is "kainos". The best translation would be "refreshing" or "redeeming". However, it does not necessarily mean brand new. The best explanation would be a refreshing of the fallen world a reform of a present earth. Thus, the New Jerusalem does not mean the collapse or disappearance of the world, which is what a lot of people believe. It means the restoration of the whole creation. This would be in line with the Old Testament and the other parts of the bible: He restores the lost paradise through the death of Jesus Christ, where people can live in freedom and peace.

### 3.3.2 When will the New Jerusalem come down?

In the original, the word "coming" is written in present tense. The new Jerusalem is also not one coming it is continuously coming down. Also, the New Jerusalem is not 1373 miles in length and width as it is written in the bible<sup>11</sup>. Jerusalem is a symbol for the restored creation. Babylon is the symbol for a civilization that man built up without God and that will be destroyed. But it is not meant to be the physical Jerusalem or the physical Babylon.

### 3.3.3 Who is the bride?

Vishal Mangalwadi once stated that Revelation is not about the question of when Jesus is coming back. Rather, it is about when the bride will stand up and take her position. The bride is the church who gets ready for the wedding. The wedding will be the final destruction of evil. Now is the time for Christians to take on their role as kings and priests and start to renew and refresh his kingdom. Even when there are still evil forces to hinder them, they have the authority to overcome them. The next question that arises is the following: when is the bride ready so that the bridegroom can come?

### 3.3.4 What does "God is amongst us" mean?

God will dwell in their midst. He now builds his tabernacle. It was written that Jesus would dwell amongst us and that something new was built: It is the tabernacle, which will be with them all time. It is like in the Old Testament: He will be with us now and it will not be like it was before. This most probably means the Holy Spirit living within us. God is in our midst and we are his temple. But the Holy Spirit is not yet fully here. One day it will be within us fully and it remain forever. But this statement does not just apply to the future.

### 3.3.5 What has happened?

It has happened. The same phrase that Jesus used when he was on the cross: it has happened, it is done and I make all things new. In the original text, the word "it is done" is written in the second perfect tense. This means that this is already

---

<sup>11</sup> The city was square: its length was the same as its width. He measured the city with his rod, and it was about 1,374 miles long. Its length, width, and height were the same. He also measured its wall. According to the human measurement that the angel was using, it was 252 feet. (Rev 21:16–17)

happened.

### 3.3.6 But why do we need healing in the new city?

We should see this image from two different viewpoints. On the one hand, the city is already here and the doors are open for the nations. The water brings healing to all the nations continuously. Jerusalem is continuously coming down. On the other hand, evil is still here and the nations need healing. It is his kingdom that will appear more and more. His kingdom is growing like the mustard seed. It is not an image solely for the future; it is also for today.

Therefore, the kingdom of God is here but not fully here. We are living in a tension. The kingdom is here but evil is still amongst us. Thus, Christians are waiting for the demise of the devil but are also living as kings of victory in the world. Therefore, Christianity is not just relevant for the future it is relevant for our present time.

## 3.4 What does "the sky vanished and is rolled up" mean?

*When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. **Then** the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev 6:12–17)*

The same image of the collapse of the cosmos appears a few times in the Old Testament. They describe the horrible day when God will judge the people. God punishes them but then he restores them again. Heaven and the earth were still there. It is obvious that this image in the Old Testament describes the horrible pain of the people in a symbolic way but not the end of the universe. This imagery is used not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. The Israelites understood the meaning of this and waited for the Messiah. They thought that he will come and restore Israel again. They didn't think of the collapse of the universe. To them, it was clear that these images were symbolic.

*For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. (Isa 13:10–11)*

*I will drench the land even to the mountains with your flowing blood, and the ravines will be full of you. When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. (Eze 32:6–7)*

*The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel. (Joe 3:15–16)*

It is best to understand Revelation symbolically. Revelation is a way to describe the horrible things that happen in the fallen world. To read it in a literal manner would neither be in line with the Jewish understanding nor with the context of the whole Bible<sup>12</sup>.

## 4 Conclusion

The last book of the bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is often misunderstood. It did not receive a lot of attention before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But suddenly during the enlightenment there was a lot of speculation about this book. Later, many books were inspired by Revelation and many films were made. Now, a lot of people have assumptions about this book that are based on these fictional interpretations of Revelation rather than on the Bible itself.

The concept of the Millennium was often a controversial issue. A lot of people looked forward to this Millennium or the return of Jesus. The longing for such a coming Millennium was especially strong during the times when the church was persecuted. However, when the church was well established, this topic disappeared.

But what does the book really say? It is a book with a lot of imagery and symbols to help the church understand the spiritual fight that is going on in the world. It shows not only the difficult fight in the present world. It also points to the overcoming of

---

<sup>12</sup> "Mat\_24:29, Luk\_21:25, Act\_2:20

evil. Christians don't need to wait for victory. They can have it in their daily lives. It is therefore a book full of hope. People should not give up when hard times are coming because in the end God will win. It will be worthwhile to resist and to keep going because nothing will be in vain.

The book tells us about how God will win his lost paradise back. His perfect creation that got lost through the fall. Through the death of Jesus Christ, he has made us kings and priests to rule over the world. Through us he will now reign over the world. This is the new Revelation of this book. Christians don't have to wait for Jesus to come back. They are part of this whole process. He made us kings and priests to rule forever. Of course, people will still die and evil is present in the world. But his kingdom will be built through Christians who live as kings and priests.

People who speculate about the collapse of the world do not have any hope anymore for the present world. Others, who look forward to the Millennium, will not have hope for the present world either. But to understand that the Millennium means the building up of God's kingdom gives people hope. It motivates the Church to invest in and take care of the world, just as the reformers did. They became relevant and changed the world. They had answers for the problems in the world. They reformed the world and didn't wait for a new world. They understood the tension between good and the evil and were able to bring hope to this world.

A good analogy to the message of Revelation is the film "Lord of the Rings". The little Hobbits had hardly any chance against the immense evil. But in the end, they won even if it did not look like it would be possible. The tension of the film illustrates the tension in Revelation very well. The churches might look very weak but they will win in the end. The Hobbits won because they were chosen to overcome just as the church. Christians will not win because they are strong. They will win because they are chosen.

In conclusion, Revelation is not a book that deals with Jesus coming back. It's about the bride standing up and taking her position in the world.

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." (Rev 11:15)<sup>13</sup>*

---

<sup>13</sup> The end song from the Messiah (Friedrich Händel)