

Short Overview of the Book of Revelation

Introduction

From eternity, God had a plan for the salvation of mankind. This plan was formulated in His mind and was a mystery – something unknown or hidden – until revealed. God purposed or planned that this salvation should be brought forth and made known in the fullness of time (Eph. 1:9-10). Christ being slain provides salvation to the people of every nation. He has provided the acceptable sacrifice, defeated Satan, conquered sin and death, and fulfilled the plan of God. The long-anticipated Messiah has come, and the words of the prophets and the hope of Israel have been fulfilled in Him.

Using symbols, the book of Revelation shows the plan of God, to the Christians of John's day, the way in which the plan began and is being executed. We see Christ at the beginning of the plan with the remainder of the plan taking place.

What John sees is a vision in which symbols are pictures of ideas and all take place in John's vision and not on the earth. Even though some of the visions depict things happening on the earth, everything depicted is in John's vision. It is much like a stage play that depicts things happening apart from the stage. It might even be thought of as though we are reading a book (which Revelation is) showing the eternal plan of God. Even though most of the book describes the judgment brought upon the Roman Empire, nothing described actually happened to it in the way it is described but is symbolic of the eventual demise of the Empire.

Chapters 1 – 4

The scope of Christ's ministry and His present glory are revealed. As King and Priest, He holds the destiny of the churches in His hand as He walks among the congregations. John stood with Jesus among the seven churches of Asia beholding their conditions, problems, and possibilities of victory through their Lord. A door is opened in heaven giving to John, and through his writing, to Christ's persecuted saints, a vision of the throne and the majestic court of the Ruler of the universe. He is strengthened in the assurance that the great God and His victorious Son rule in every realm of creation and that through them he can be victorious under any circumstance and any earthly conflict.

Chapters 5 – 20

In these chapters, the triumph of truth and righteousness for the saints who hold the truth and the defeat and ultimate destruction of Satan along with his followers and helpers is described.

Chapter 5

God is holding a book in his hand closed with seven seals indicating that His plan is unrevealed and unexecuted. The closed seals signify that it was originally purposed in the mind of God. Its contents have been neither made known nor altered. This book symbolizes God's eternal purpose for man's salvation, the grand scheme of redemption. If it remains sealed his purposes are not realized and his plan is not carried out. This sealed book is the key to the book.

The next sections of the book outline the plan of God in two different ways. Both are judgments against the current power, the Roman Empire.

Chapters 6 – 11 provide the first revealing of God's plan.

Chapters 12 – 20 provide the second revealing of God's plan with different details.

Overview of this first section – chapters 6 - 11

Only Christ was worthy to take the sealed book out of God's right hand, loose the seals, and carry out the purpose of God to its consummation. As the seals were opened, we see the gospel being preached, the persecution that follows, the hardship and prejudice against Christians, and their suffering because of the world of unregenerate people. We see the souls of them who had been slain for the word of God wanting their blood avenged. They are told they must wait until all should be killed as they were. Judgment is beginning, but the angels are told to wait until the servants of God are sealed. Seven angels are given trumpets to sound as warnings which are unheeded by the unregenerate people of the earth. Satan takes limited control. Two witnesses (apostles and prophets of the apostolic age) protected by God while they establish the church.

The first revealing of God's plan through its implementation against His enemies is complete.

Overview of this second section – chapters 12 - 20

Two signs are seen in heaven. The first is a woman with child (Christ) waiting to be delivered. The second is a great red dragon (Satan) waiting to devour the child as he is born but he is taken up unto God and unto His throne. Satan is not allowed to defeat the purpose of God by destroying the Christ. Satan then persecutes the woman (the church) but a way has been provided for her deliverance, the protection of God. Incensed by his defeats against Christ and the church, Satan then goes to attack the seed of the woman, which are individual Christians. The dragon rallies two allies through which he seeks to defeat and destroy God's purpose, people and rule. The first ally is a beast coming up out of the sea symbolizing the Roman Empire. The second ally is a beast coming up out of the earth symbolizing the pagan priesthood or emperor worship. The Lamb and His 144,000 victorious saints are seen on Mount Zion. Refusing to deny Christ they have security because the Lamb is in their midst. An angel makes known that the gospel is preached to all nations, but this message goes unheeded. A second angel declares that Babylon (Rome) is fallen. A third angel declares that those who worship the beast will receive the wrath of God and are tormented night and day for ever. Having been given seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, seven angels are told to pour out the bowls into the earth (final judgments). An angel shows John the great harlot (Rome) that sits upon many waters. There is a gathering of the forces of God and Satan at Har-Magedon (Armageddon) for a great decisive spiritual battle between the army of Satan and the forces of God. God has judged the harlot and she is cast into the lake of fire. Christ, the warrior-king, conducts war against the beast of the sea and beast of the earth, and they are cast into the lake of fire. After a thousand years, the gospel age, Satan with new allies surrounds the camp of the saints (God's faithful army) and the beloved city (the church). Fire came down out of heaven and devoured them. Satan, Death and Hades are now cast into the lake of fire. Christ is seen sitting on a great white throne judging the nations.

The second revealing of God's plan through its implementation against His enemies is complete.

Chapter 21 – This chapter portrays the final glory of the church as it comes to rest with God beyond time. John sees the holy city, New Jerusalem, which is the church, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride for the Lamb.

Chapter 22 – The eternal God who had inspired the prophets had likewise sent His angel to show to His true bondservants the things that would “shortly come to pass”. Jesus again says He is coming quickly with his reward to each man. This refers to the reward rendered to good and evil men at any coming of the Lord in judgment (as with the Roman Empire) and also to the reward rendered to each at His final coming. Those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb may enter the new Heavenly city.