

### Introduction to Revelation and Chapters 1-3

<b>The Title</b>	The title “Revelation” means “an unveiling” and/or “a disclosure.” It’s also known as <i>John’s Apocalypse</i> , which is another way of saying “Revelation.” The idea behind both is that the book deals with unveiling that which is covered by pulling the lid off of it.
<b>Where It Belongs in Biblical Literature</b>	There are four major works in the Scriptures that fit the category of Apocalyptic Literature in the sense of “unveiling that which is covered:” Daniel, Joel, Zechariah and Revelation. However, there are several “apocalyptic” passages within books of the Bible that are not apocalyptic as a whole. Jesus’ Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25; Paul’s discussion of the Man of Lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; and Isaiah 24-27 and 33.
<b>A Most Important Emphasis in the Book</b>	The Book of Revelation is framed by John as Jesus’ message to the churches referenced in chapters 1-3. All of the “unveiling” that occurs after chapter 3 was for “the church.” We often lose sight of that when we parse the particulars of the book in an effort to determine how the “End Times” will unfold. We cannot and must not separate the church from the apocalyptic visions.
<b>Layered Approach to Prophetic Elements</b>	One of the most difficult aspects of reading apocalyptic literature is how to interpret it, obviously. Look no further than Jesus’ Olivet Discourse. The “abomination that causes desolation” Jesus predicted would fall upon Jerusalem had immediate fulfillment in the Roman Era (70 AD). However, it’s in your Bible for a reason. There are, in my view, layers of fulfillment. Though many would disagree, I think that’s the best way to read Apocalyptic Literature. Daniel, for example, predicted an “abomination that causes desolation.” It happened with the Greeks. Jesus did too and it happened with the Romans. One will occur again in the future.
<b>Layered Approach to the Church Elements</b>	Similarly, in the messages to the churches in chapters 1-3, there is a tone of <u>immediate</u> implication and application to the original audience. Yet, there is something about the tone of the messaging that seems to suggest elements of how the church will look throughout the centuries. That, to me, is what makes Apocalyptic Literature fascinating. It’s like working on a difficult puzzle. You make progress. You see the picture. Yet, you never seem to quite finish.
<b>The Major Theme</b>	To those who overcome, I will give . . .
<b>Outline of Chs. 1-3</b>	Chapter 1 contains a greeting, doxology and a vision of Jesus that is the basis for everything that unfolds in the subsequent chapters of the book. John wants us to know this message is the Lord’s message. Chapters 2-3 are entirely devoted to Jesus’ message to 7 lampstands (churches). They are both specific to these churches in Asia Minor (mainly Turkey) and representative (to every church).

### Chapter 1: The Introduction and Vision That Sets the Stage for Everything Else

1. **This Message is from Jesus:** *The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near (1:1-2)*
2. **To a Specific Group:** *To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits<sup>[a]</sup> before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. (1:4-5)*
3. **With a Specific Author:** *<sup>12</sup> I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man,<sup>[d]</sup> dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sunshining in all its brilliance. <sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades (1:12-18).*
4. **With Specific Symbolism:** *The seven stars are the angels<sup>[a]</sup> of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (1:20).*

### Chapters 2-3: Jesus’ Message to 7 Churches

#### 1. Ephesus

- **Immediate**

- (1) **Positive:** *<sup>2</sup> I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. <sup>3</sup> You have persevered and have endured*

hardships for my name, and have not grown weary...<sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (2:2-3, 6)

- Nicolaitans – “They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading to a life of self-indulgence” (Clement of Alexandra).

(2) Negative: <sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. (2:4)

- **Layered – The First Period of Church History**

(1) *From the Resurrection to the Death of the Apostles*

(2) Ephesus was a desirable location and a leading city of the Roman Empire. It was the gateway to Asia. It was also home to the Temple of Diana, the goddess of fertility.

(3) During this period in church history, the early Christians received the Gospel of Christ in its purity under the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, as in Ephesus, this period descended in a wandering away from their first love.

## 2. Smyrna

- **Immediate – (Only Positive)** - <sup>9</sup> I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup> Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown (2:9-10).

- **Layered – The Second Period of Church History**

(1) The Age of the Martyrs

(2) Roman Emperors like Nero, Claudius, and Diocletian persecuted Christians during this period.

(3) Martyrs were plentiful (Polycarp of Smyrna [a disciple of John]; Ignatius of Antioch; Justin Martyr)

## 3. Pergamum

- **Immediate**

(1) **Positive** - <sup>13</sup> I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives (2:13)

(2) **Negative** - <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (2:14-15)

- **Layered – The Third Period of Church History**

(1) Begin when Constantine declared the Roman Empire to be Christian.

(2) Notice the emphasis on Antipas. This time period marked the “marriage” of the church to the state. It produced a church that many came into without having a genuine conversion experience. The result, was a muddled faith, particularly among the clergy.

## 4. Thyatira

- **Immediate**

(1) **Positive** - <sup>19</sup> I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. (2:19)

(2) **Negative** - <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. (2:20)

- **Layered – The Fourth Period of Church History**

(1) The Dark Ages

(2) Gospel grows dim during this period. False ideas become more prevalent, which seduced the church into sin.

## 5. Sardis

- **Immediate**

(1) I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God (3:1-2)

- **Layered – The Fifth Period of Church History**

(1) Sardis means “escaping ones” or “those who come out.”

(2) It adequately describes the Reformation churches, led by Martin Luther nailing his 95 Thesis to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany.

## 6. Philadelphia

- **Immediate**

(1) <sup>8</sup> *I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup> I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. (3:8-9)*

- **Layered – The Sixth Period of Church History**

- (1) Plenty of fruit came from the Protestant Reformation, including the birth of Protestantism, Missions, etc.
- (2) Also a time where true church vs imposter church can be clearly seen (faith alone vs faith plus something else)

## 7. Laodicea

- **Immediate**

(1) <sup>15</sup> *I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see (3:15-18)*

- **Layered – Present Church Context**

- (1) Marked by carnality and love of the world, though confessing Jesus.

### Options

- Can take the layers to represent periods as set forth above, which culminate with Laodicean “luke-warmness” before the final events.
- Can take the layers to represent things which are true of the church in general.
- I’m somewhere in between these two. I definitely see a progression in the messages. Yet, I do think there are elements in these which apply to all churches of every age.
- There are definitely layers. That’s the main thing to see here.