

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today, we will study the book of REVELATION - INTRODUCTION - part 1. We will learn about the method of interpreting the book of Revelation.

### **POINT 1. THE CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACH AND THE REDUPLICATION APPROACH.**

The book of Revelation is a direct revelation of God *revealing God's view of human history on earth*. Therefore, Christians may not speculate or fantasise with regard to the contents of the book of Revelation. They must make every effort to understand God's intended meaning. The book is written in *apocalyptic language*. Chapter 1:1 uses the word *apocalypse*, which means God's *revelation*, revealing something, which man cannot know otherwise. God makes use of visions, signs, symbols and numbers to reveal his mind and purposes to us.

There are two basic ways of viewing the book of Revelation: The *chronological* and the *reduplication* approach.

#### **First. The chronological approach to interpreting the book.**

This approach stresses that the visions in the book of revelation were meant to be kept end to end and the book should be read as a time-table of future history. They hold that the book is a linear development from past to present to future. They view all the future historic events as through a telescope. They interpret chapter 1:19, "Write *what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later*" as follows: Chapter 1 deals with what John had seen in *the past*, chapter 2-3 deals with matters in *the present*, and chapter 4-22 deals with matters that are all in *the future*, not meaning *John's* future, but *our* future. This approach also interprets the symbols and numbers *literally*. And finally, this approach often *adds* materials concerning Israel and the Jews into the various parts of the book of Revelation. This view has some serious flaws:

One. Christ himself determines the last days. The last days are not limited to a few years of events in chronological order just before the second coming of Christ, but consists of the whole period from *Christ's* first coming to his second coming and are determined throughout this period by *Christ!* The end or *the last days* (eschatology) of the whole world-history *begins and ends with the Person of Christ* (1:17; 22:13).

Two. Repeated events indicate that the chronological approach is flawed. The book *repeats* certain events. For example, the wicked nations are said to be destroyed in chapter 16:12-21, but reappear and are destroyed in chapter 19:17-21 and reappear again and are destroyed in chapter 20:7-10. Revelation does not describe three chronological battles, but one and the same battle (14:14; 19:19; 20:8), namely, the battle of Armageddon. The repeated sections are thus *parallel* to one another.

Three. Chapter 4-22 contain events past, present and future. Christ instructs John to record the visions concerning conditions during the time of John as well as conditions and events in world history that will come to pass "after this", that is, that would happen throughout the entire future from the time of John to the second coming of Christ! Revelation does not exclusively interpret past events that took place in the first century between 60-90 A.D. and are therefore no longer applicable. It also does not exclusively interpret future events that *not yet applicable* to us today. Chapter 1:1 and 22:6 say that the visions in the book of Revelation "*must soon take place*". And chapter 1:3 says, "Blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because *the time is near*." Therefore, the view that Revelation 4-22 *only reveals future events that will take place just before the second coming of Christ* is in conflict with what the book of Revelation itself says.

Four. The visions in the book are not seen in chronological order. The seven parallel parts of the book already show that the first vision of each part is chronologically before the last vision of the previous part. For example, Revelation 12:1-6 is chronologically before Revelation 11:7-19.

Five. The tenses used in the book. Grammatically, John uses the futuristic aorist tense to describe future events as if they have already taken place, so sure was he in his mind that they would happen! He also uses the proleptic future tense that expresses anticipated future events as existing before they actually do, in order to express the absolute certainty of the victory of Christ in the present as well as in the future. It is clear that the book of Revelation does not intend to give a linear chronological history of future events, but rather repeated visions of principles operating in world-history between the first and second coming of Christ.

#### **Second. The reduplication approach to interpreting the book.**

This approach stresses that the materials in the book are arranged in both a *parallel* as well as a *progressive* way. The book contains repetitions with differences and looks at the history of the whole world from different points of view.

They view all the events in world-history from the first to the second coming of Christ as through a kaleidoscope, that is, looking at the same last days, but each time from a different point of view. A different principle operating in world-history is highlighted in each of the seven parallel parts of the book. Both the Old Testament book of Daniel and the New Testament book of Revelation are characterised by this parallel and progressive revelation of history! This view is very much recommended.

## **POINT 2. THE BOOK SPANS THE WHOLE PERIOD FROM THE FIRST TO THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST.**

Revelation 1:5-7 speaks of both Christ's first coming to free us from our sins by his blood and of Christ's second coming when every eye will see him. By reading through the book and especially noticing the reduplications, we will see that the book is divided into *seven parallel parts* and each part describes the whole New Testament period from the first to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Note that each of the seven parts of the book of Revelation *begins* with the first coming of Christ, is characterised by a *long main period* followed by a *short period* of violent persecution and *ends* with the final judgement day.

### **Part 1 of Revelation consists of chapters 1-3.**

The period *begins* with a description of Christ, who was resurrected from death (1:5,18), reigning as Ruler over all the kings of the earth (1:5) and standing amidst the first historical churches (1:12-13). The *long main period* is characterised by Christ's seven letters to these churches. The number 'seven' is a symbol of completeness and every letter ends with Christ commanding all the churches in the world to hear what the Spirit says to them (2:7 etc.). Thus the seven churches represent the entire Christian Church from the first coming of Christ throughout the full span of its existence to the very end of the world. Each individual church is a type, not of one period in church history, but rather of conditions that are constantly repeated in the actual life of the various churches in the world. Revelation 3:10 alludes to a *very short period* of terrible persecution. Each letter *ends* with a promise to those who overcome, that they will have a share in the final glory at the end of world-history. Conclusion: Revelation 1-3 spans the entire period from the first to the second coming of Christ.

### **Part 2 of Revelation consists of chapters 4-7.**

The period *begins* with a vision of the enthronement of Christ, just after his death on the cross (5:6,9,12) and just before he takes the scroll sealed with seven seals from the hand of God. The *long main period* is characterised by the opening of the first five seals, which represent five principles operating during this period. The 1<sup>st</sup> seal represents Christ going out into the world to conquer with the gospel. The 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> seals represent persecution, oppression and suffering, which follow wherever the gospel is preached throughout the main period. The 5<sup>th</sup> seal represents the Church triumphant in heaven waiting for God's time to end this suffering on earth and alludes to a *very short period* of persecution. The period *ends* with the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal, which introduces the final judgement day, describing its impression on unbelievers (6:12-17) and the blessing of believers thereafter (7:9-17). Conclusion: Revelation 4-7 spans the entire period from the first to the second coming of Christ.

### **Part 3 of Revelation consists of chapters 8-11.**

The period *begins* with the measuring of the temple, which represents establishing the Christian Church at the first coming of Christ (11:1). The *long main period* is characterised by the protection of the Christian Church while the rest is trampled underfoot, and by the two witnesses who represent the Christian Church proclaiming the gospel in the world. This main period is symbolically 42 months or 1260 days long (11:2-3). After the two witnesses have completed their task of witnessing, a *very short period* of symbolically 3½ days of severe persecution follows (11:7-10). The period *ends* with the resurrection of the dead (11:11-14) and the sounding of the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet that introduces the final judgement day and the kingdom of God in its final form (11:15-19). Thus, a long period of gospel proclamation is followed by a very short period of severe persecution immediately before the final judgement day. Conclusion: Revelation 8-11 spans the entire period from the first to the second coming of Christ.

### **Part 4 of Revelation consists of chapters 12-14.**

The period *begins* with the birth and ascension of Christ into heaven (12:5). The *long main period* is characterised by the protection of the woman, which represents the Christian Church, against the attacks of Satan and his helpers, the two beasts. This main period is symbolically 1260 days or "a time, times and half a time" or 42 months long (12:6,14; 13:5). Thereafter, for a *very short period*, the two beasts are given power to overcome the Christian Church, to have authority over the whole non-Christian world and to exercise an enormous economic oppression (13:7-10,15-18). The period *ends* with the announcement of the final judgement day (14:6-7) and the second coming of Christ in order to harvest the earth (14:14-16). Thus, this part consists of a long period of the protection of the Christian Church, followed

by a period of severe persecution immediately before the final judgement day. Conclusion: Revelation 12-14 spans the entire period from the first to the second coming of Christ.

### **Part 5 of Revelation consists of chapters 15-16.**

Part 5 *begins* as part 4 with “a great and wondrous sign in heaven” (15:1; 12:1) and thus evidently also at the first coming of Christ. The same forces of evil operating in part 5 operate also in part 4, namely the dragon, the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth or false prophet (16:13 and 12:3; 14:1,11) and thus the period of part 5 is evidently parallel to the period of part 4. The seven bowls of part 5 affect the same areas as the seven trumpets of part 3 do: The 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet and bowl affect the land, the 2<sup>nd</sup> affect the sea, the 3<sup>rd</sup> affect the water-sources, the 4<sup>th</sup> affect the sun, the 5<sup>th</sup> affect the Abyss or throne of the beast, the 6<sup>th</sup> affect the Euphrates River and the 7<sup>th</sup> introduces the final judgement day (16:1-21 and 8:7 to 11:19) and thus the period of part 5 is evidently parallel to the period of part 3. The *long main period* is characterised by the outpouring of the first five bowls of God’s wrath, but the emphasis is especially on the outpouring of God’s wrath just before his second coming. The *very short period* of persecution is characterised by the outpouring of the 6<sup>th</sup> bowl, which issues in the last great battle, called Armageddon. (16:12-16). The *end* is characterised by the outpouring of the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl, which issues in the destruction of the old earth (16:17-21). Conclusion: Revelation 15-16 spans the entire period from the first to the second coming of Christ.

### **Part 6 of Revelation consists of chapters 17-19.**

The period *begins* with a symbolic picture of the woman on the beast, called Babylon, the great prostitute. She operates during the same period the beast in part 4 operates and is only brought to ruin (17:16-17) during the reign of the eighth or final manifestation of the beast just before he himself goes to his destruction (17:9-11). Thus, part 6 is evidently parallel to part 4. The *long main period* is characterised by the influence of the great prostitute in world-history. The last three parts of the book of Revelation picture in different visions God’s judgement of his enemies. Just as part 5 pictures God’s judgement of all the people who worship the beast, part 6 pictures God’s judgement of Satan’s three helpers, the great prostitute called Babylon, the beast and the false prophet, and part 7 pictures God’s judgement of Satan. These three parts are *parallel*, because they all end with the final battle of Armageddon, called “THE battle” (16:14; 19:19 and 20:8). The *very short period* of persecution is characterised by the beast in his manifestation as the eighth king who together with ten other kings makes war against Christ and Christians (17:10-18). The period *ends* with the fall of Babylon (ch. 18), the last great battle, in which the beast, the false prophet and the godless kings and their armies are destroyed (19:17-21) and the second coming of Christ on his white horse to judge (19:11-16). Conclusion: Revelation 17-19 spans the entire period from the first to the second coming of Christ.

### **Part 7 of Revelation consists of chapters 20-22.**

The relationship between chapter 19 and 20 is similar to that of chapter 11 and 12. Scripture best interprets Scripture. Chapter 11:18 announces the final judgement day at the second coming of Christ, while chapter 12:5 depicts the birth, ascension and enthronement of Christ at his first coming. Likewise, chapter 19:19 depicts the end of history just before the second coming of Christ, while chapter 20:1 returns to the beginning of this present period to the first coming of Christ, when Christ bound Satan. The comparison between chapter 11-14 on the one hand and chapter 20 on the other hand makes the parallel even more clear:

One. The period *begins* when Satan is defeated in heaven. In connection with Christ’s ascension and enthronement in heaven, Satan is hurled out of heaven onto the earth. But even on earth he is bound, curbed, restricted, so that he cannot destroy the woman (12:5 to 13:1). This is clearly depicted as *a defeat*, because as an accuser (slanderer), Satan’s abusive mouth was shut up in heaven (12:9-10; Jn 8:44b) and as a slayer of Christians, Satan was shut off on earth (12:12:13 to 13:1; Jn 8:44a). According to chapter 13:1, Satan stands on the shore of the sea, which symbolises that he is stuck on the shoreline of God’s decrees. His evil power and influence has clearly been curtailed on earth! Chapter 20 pictures this curtailment of Satan’s power as *a binding* of Satan, so that his power over the nations is curbed and the gospel can be preached to all the nations (20:1-3)(Mt 12:29).

Two. The *long main period* of the gospel age. Chapter 11-13 picture the Church militant on earth as two witnesses. The Church has a long period of power and witness-bearing (11:2-6; Mt 24:14), out of Satan’s reach, that is, Satan’s influence on earth is curbed (12:14). Chapter 20:4-6 pictures the Church triumphant in heaven, that is, the Christians who have already completed their witness-bearing on earth and now live and reign with Christ in heaven symbolically for 1000 years (20:4-6). What is very clear is that the 1000 years does not follow, but *precede* the second coming of Christ and the final judgement day!

Three. The *very short period* of severe persecution. Chapter 11:7-10 and 13:7 shows that the Christian Church is persecuted terribly and her witnessing is silenced. Chapter 20 pictures this as the release of Satan, in order to marshal the godless and wicked nations against the Christian Church (20:7-10). This short period is described as THE battle (of Armageddon, 16:16; Mt 24:21-26).

Four. The *end* is at the second coming. According to chapter 11:15-19, immediately after this short period of persecution follows the one and only second coming of Christ unto judgement (Mt 24:27-31). Chapter 20 also pictures the final judgement day (Mt 25:31-46) immediately after the battle of Armageddon (20:11-15).

Thus, the period *begins* with the binding of Satan, that is the curbing or restraining of his power (20:1), which happened during the first coming of Christ (Mt 12:29; Lk 10:18; Jn 12:31-32; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8). The *long main period* is characterised on the one hand by Satan's inability to deceive the nations on earth (20:1-3) and on the other hand by the souls of Christians, who have not received the mark of the beast, reigning with Christ in heaven. This main period is symbolically 1000 years long (20:4-7). The *very short period* of persecution is characterised by the release of Satan and the last great battle, in which Satan and the godless nations are destroyed (20:7-10). The period *ends* with a description of the final judgement day (20:11-15) and thereafter a description of the new heaven and the new earth (ch. 21-22). Thus, this part consists of a long period of the restraint of Satan's power on earth during which time the departed Christians reign with Christ in heaven, followed by a period in which Satan is released and manifests his power and deception of the godless nations immediately before the final judgement day.

Conclusion: Revelation 20 spans the entire period from the first to the second coming of Christ. The view, that the book of Revelation *describes history from beginning to end in consecutive order*, is in conflict with what the book of Revelation itself says. The book of Revelation itself shows that it covers several times the whole New Testament period from the first to the second coming of Jesus Christ. According to chapter 1:19, the book of Revelation contains: first: what was already a fact since the first coming of Christ till the time of its writing; second: what would happen throughout the following centuries between the first and second coming of Christ; and third: what would happen just before the second coming of Christ. Therefore, the book of Revelation *was* a book of encouragement for Christians in the first century and throughout all centuries thereafter, *is* an encouragement for Christians living today and *will be* an encouragement for Christians until the second coming of Christ! That is why chapter 1:3 says that throughout the centuries everyone who reads or hears the book of Revelation and takes to heart what is written in it, is blessed (1:3)!

#### **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read Revelation 8-16. Next week we will continue to introduce Revelation.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".