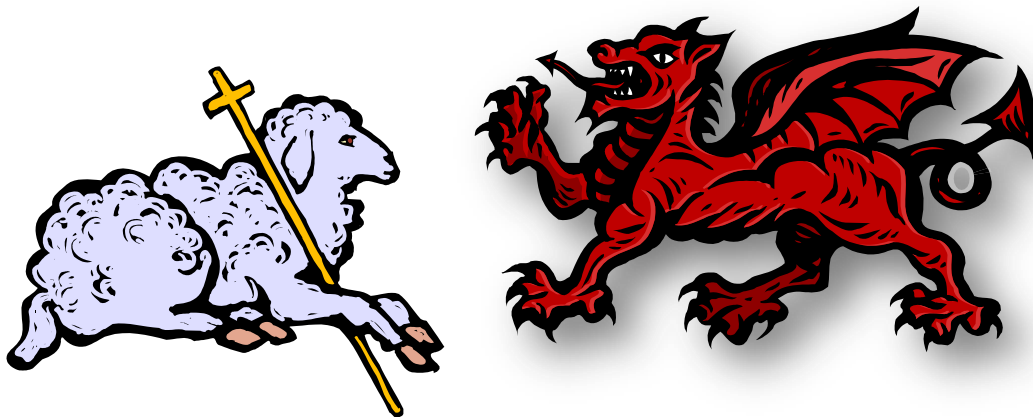


Introduction to
The Book of Revelation



“Then I saw a Lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by four living creatures and the elders...”

What is the book of Revelation?

The book of Revelation is one of the Bible's more famous books. Sadly, it is famous for all the wrong reasons. It is a rich source for endless speculation about the end of the world and for Hollywood movie makers. This is because of the type of literature that is found in this book. It is written in highly symbolic language and the images it portrays are out of this world. No wonder people find this book fascinating. But really what is this book all about?

Type of literature.

Whenever we read any kind of writing, the type of literature determines how we interpret its contents. For example we can tell the difference between a science textbook and a history textbook. We read those two things very differently. Likewise it is important for us to know what kind of literature we are dealing with in the Book of Revelation. Firstly, it is a letter written by John the Apostle to Christians suffering under the rule of the Roman empire. In other words it has a specific audience in mind. But the style that John uses to write this letter uses symbolic language and very 'out of this world' kind of images. It is a style which we are not familiar with but is found in some Old Testament books of the Bible (e.g. Daniel, Ezekiel). It is called Apocalyptic writing.

Interpreting this kind of literature can be tricky because we have to know what these symbols mean. This is hard because not all the symbols are explained by the writer. So we have to rely on other places for explanation of these symbols. One such place is the Bible itself. Here we employ a method "called scripture interprets scripture". In other words, if a symbol is not explained by the author we go to other parts of the Bible to see if the same symbol has been used. It may not be a 100 per cent accurate but it is better than just guessing. The mistakes we often make are attaching our own 21st century meaning to these symbols. This is a wrong methodology.

However, do not be discouraged even though you cannot explain every single detail or image in this book. It is not intended to be an exact road map to historical events but meant to provide Christians with a hope that will help them

endure suffering and persecution. This is how the Book of Revelation is meant to be read.

The scope of The Focus Bible study series.

In our Bible study series, we will try to cover the entire Book of Revelation in 8 sessions. This may sound like a lot of material to get through but we are only aiming to get ourselves familiar with the general feel of the book and to weed out some false thinking about the book. We won't look at all the tiny details and examine every symbol but rather pause at certain points to look at some symbols in more detail. Don't feel frustrated if you find that we are going at a fast pace and covering lots of material quickly and only looking at some in detail. If you have questions about certain parts of the book then feel free to ask your group so that you can discuss it.

Try reading the whole book on your own, after that I suggest that you watch the movie called the Book of Revelation (on Youtube).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VP6FpljKGA>

For Non Believers

Non-Believers also benefit from reading the book of Revelation. Firstly you can see for yourselves what the Bible actually says rather than just relying on Hollywood or other people's opinion about the end times. It is important to form your own opinion based on your own reading of the Bible. The things you read might surprise you and even challenge some of your ideas about Christians. Try to keep an open mind and understand what the Bible says about the end times before drawing your own conclusion. (Christians would do well to listen to this too).

It is important to realise that reading the Bible especially a book like the Book of Revelation does not require a special insight or a special key to unlock its secrets but rather it is a letter written by a real person to real people about the hope they have because they have trusted in Jesus Christ. To unlock its meaning only requires a little hard work and research and it's message is accessible to anyone who willing to look and listen to what it says.

As you read the Book of Revelation, the key question to ask is "What effect does Christ's return have on me?" To give you an idea of the overall structure of the book look at the diagram provided.

THE STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

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INTRODUCTION

