

# NT 20 2.04 THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

## The Return of the King *(allusion to Lord of the Rings)*



Prague Castle (jrt)

“The New Jerusalem”

Rev. 1.7 “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Before his death Jesus had proclaimed the event (Mt. 24) and the early church had anticipated the promise. Now as the NT closes, the future is cast in the light of the fulfillment of these affirmations.

Rev. 1.3 The “time is near!” The church is to live with a sense of urgency. Besides, there is a special blessing for all who understand what these proclamations mean. *Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.*

### **BIG IDEA 1: THE DOUBLE PROBLEM**

**First, the blessing is encased in mystery.** The cosmic return of Christ was promised immediately 2000 years ago. That promise was presented with strange cyphers, signs and symbols, shrouded in clouds.

Revelation is a book of images, omens and metaphors. **The message is coded** and hidden in cryptic language. The blessing locked in a secret code of the past. Who can discover its meaning?

**Second is the reason for the code**—John had been banished to the Island of Patmos during a time of empire-wide persecution of the saints. The message had to be put into code so that it might be smuggled to those on the mainland who needed to be strengthened again for the conflict.

But the oppression created the dilemma. Had not Christ defeated the evil one? Then why was the church in retreat? How can Sauron or Lord Voldemort still have such power when they have been unmanned? Why was the church in retreat? Why are God’s people under vicious attack? If the fulfillment of the old covenant has come in Jesus, why are the people of God in such difficulty? Should not the church be on the offensive rather than in hiding? How can such difficulties be called a blessing?

Besides, the expectation was the immediate return of Christ. How can we know it is going to happen at all? Is there a relation between the church’s suffering and the fulfillment of God’s plan?

#### THE ANSWER KEYS TO THE CODE

The first readers had the perspective from which to interpret many of the symbols John uses to refer to events and individuals now lost to our casual observation. Therefore, understanding requires being within their historical and cultural frame of reference as much as possible. They also knew the Old Testament much more completely than modern readers.

### **BIG IDEA 2: THE SUBJECT OF THE REVELATION IS JESUS**

The subject of the Book we call Revelation is contained in its first line. **“The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”** What is this book about? It’s about JESUS. It’s not a road map to the future. It’s about Jesus. Take your eyes off the main idea and confusion abounds. Revelation is like a cut diamond: lots of facets, but one rock. The facets are fascinating, but they are not point.

NOTE: the title is Revelation—singular. A common misunderstanding comes from not using the correct title: this book is NOT “revelations”.

### **BIG IDEA 3: APPLY SOUND PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION**

To understand Revelation, the same principles of interpretation that have guided us through all the rest of Scripture must now be maintained. We must not revert to “gnostic” hidden knowledge or allegorical “fill-in-the-blank” historical-figures guessing games.

- **Scripture interprets Scripture: interpret what is obscure by what is clear.** Revelation 4 & 5 are the core of the message: These scenes around God’s throne clearly show the destiny toward which the providence of God is leading his creation. The Father and the Son are the sole and supreme recipients of worship and obedience. These chapters indeed reveal the full meaning of Jesus Christ. The scene here is determinative of the whole direction of the book.
- **Knowledge of the Old Testament** is crucial.
- **Attention to the central figure of Jesus**, the revelation of whom this book claims to be as he comes to be known in history and in the judgment of history.
- **Historical context:** So, we must inquire into the historic setting and conditions of the first century period of persecution in which John found himself. In addition, the author’s basic

message for his first century audience must be clarified. Therefore, the assumption that there is a hidden message for the people of 1530, 1776 or 2020, would have made Revelation incomprehensible to its first century recipients. If the Beast were Hitler, what good would 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians have gotten from it? Would they even have preserved this book if we fill in the blanks with later historical information?

- **Numbers** Numbers were used by the writers of Scripture more often to convey ideas than to give either sequence or quantity. Even the use of numbers in this book is not for math but for meaning. For example, the seven Spirits of God (Chapter 1)? Does anyone seriously think that John is now introducing 6 more “spirits” to the Godhead?

**The Millennium**—a special case. Millennium speaks of the thousand years reign of Christ in Revelation 20. How do we understand the number? The possible interpretations. See attached chart, p. 12.

- **SHELF RULE:** In addition, the *shelf principle* must be maintained. If any external doctrinal framework is imposed on the text, only violence to the text will result.

#### **BIG IDEA 4: ALREADY BUT NOT YET**

As was true of the Resurrection, the Second Coming is both event and an ongoing reality. While the church maintains rightly the absolute conviction that all of history moves to a consummation moment, it also lives in the continual unfolding awareness that the Christ is constantly breaking into our history with salvation. Things are not as they seem! Do not let any Caesar confuse you! Even now the Lord Jesus Christ is standing at the door! (3.20) and by the throne (5.13).

Those who know this truth have already seen the end. They know the last chapter in every story that will ever be written. In light of that revelation, their perspective on time has changed. His advent is always near. The experience of time has been completely changed for those who believe! “Coming quickly” is their new perception of reality.

#### **BIG IDEA 5: UNIVERSAL AND TRANSCENDENT TRUTH ARE REVEALED**

Though this book is grounded in first century historical events, the themes are transcendent and reach into every age. Recognizing the motifs and topics will unlock the basic message of the book.

- **First**, Jesus Christ is presented, not so much as who he will be, but as who he already is. He is already Lord of Lords and King of Kings. “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” Do not be fooled by the headlines. The future is being cast in terms of his power.
- **Second**, the Revelation is not as concerned with the Kingdom that is to come, as it is with the Reign of Christ that now is already at work and overcoming this world. John hears that long after Rome has passed into oblivion, the CHURCH will be marching forward! The binding of Satan’s power is already being accomplished by the reign of Christ in and through his people (Rev. 20).
- **Third**, no momentary or temporal attack of evil should obscure our vision. The final realities of God are already at work in history, behind history and beyond history. His truth is invincible and eternal.

- **Fourth**, therefore, we must recognize that the many symbols, such as seals, trumpets, bowls of wrath, are rather not about specific historic events or the details of history. They are representations of the terms of spiritual warfare that God’s people face again and again in the battle of darkness and light. They are historic events only as they happened in their first century setting. Their on-going meaning is that they are symptoms of the cosmic warfare being waged behind history, through history and beyond history.

## **BIG IDEA 6: THE VISIONS ARE CONNECTED**

A central theme ties all of the visions together. As the reader recognizes how this basic **theme** is woven into a recurring **pattern**, the reader will discover a “message within a message.”

- **The Theme:** Christ Jesus, crucified, resurrected and ascended NOW stands above all circumstances and eventualities of life with a name that is above every name.
- **The Pattern:** The revelation is constructed to show again and again what happens as the fact of the supremacy of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. As soon as the message is proclaimed, the church may receive even martyrdom and rejoice. Things are not as they seem. The victory of Christ is made all the more certain by the vehemence of the opposition.
- **The Theme and the pattern** occur again and again through all the visions. Therefore, the visions are not to be understood as sequential stepping-stones to interpret subsequent history. Rather they are parallel and/or simultaneous. Like waves on the seashore, they repeat the same theological motifs again and again focusing on various problems.

## **BIG IDEA 7: SPECIFIC LESSONS—THE GREAT REVELATION**

With one foot in present history and the other foot planted in the last decade of the first century, the contemporary reader is now ready to be taken in a time-tunnel into the theological center of history. Standing within the workings of the cosmic drama going on in every century of human life, each vision will introduce the reader to a special dimension of that conflict and to lessons for living.

### ***LESSON ONE: Rev 1***

#### **REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES CHRIST’S FULLNESS FILLS HIS CHURCH**

Christ’s Body still stands in the midst of humanity (Eph 1.22). Christ will always be at work in the midst of his church! As promised, He is with us even to the end of the age. Using the symbol of the menorah, John points to Christ as the source of life and light for the people of God. As candles are made for the night, so the church is the light in dark times. BELIEVERS must understand their situation! **Persecution is a sign of ownership.** The conflicts are their own testimony to the authenticity of the battle in which you are engaged.



Nelson's Bible Maps

## LESSON TWO: –Rev 2-3

### CORRECTLY EVALUATE YOUR POSITION

The Seven Churches had little reason to question the judgment that had fallen on them. Like Israel returning from exile they had eaten sour grapes. The church in every age must recognize the lesson. Much of their persecution is deserved and the discipline is once again for the sake of salvation. First loves had been abandoned (2:4), the faithful caused to stumble (2:14-16), immorality tolerated (2:19-20), faith and practice were dead (3:1-3), and lukewarm faith was fit only to be spit out (3:15-18).

Discipline had fallen for the sake of repentance. The evil hour was actually an opportunity for renewed faith (3:19-22). Nevertheless, the faithful need have no fear! Doors are open that can never be shut! (3:8-12)

## LESSON THREE: Rev 4-7

### THE CHURCH IS **ALREADY** PART OF THE VICTORY WON FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Was Christ's victory on the cross truly final? Did the light really overcome the darkness?  
**Absolutely.**

At a future point in time, the whole of creation will know the total picture (1 Thess.4-5, Matt. 24). However, in the interim, we are to live with the assurance that we already participate in that victory. Though the ultimate consummation is ahead, its reality holds even in this moment.

- Rev. 4.1-11. John is invited to look behind historical event and see the truth. Even as Moses received plans for a place of worship to be set in the center of Israel (Ex. 19), John sees the cosmic plan of worship that is already established at the center of eternal and ultimate reality.
- Rev. 5.1-14. John sees the center, he recognizes that we are already a part of the total victory of God's people. **Twenty-four elders**, the combination of Israel and the Church, already are celebrating the complete victory of the Lamb who with the Father, is worshipped and glorified.
- Rev. 6.1-17. Remember judgment will come in history. The four horsemen have already been set loose and martyrs will fall. Still, God has already counted his own. He knows their number though from the human point of view, they are innumerable.
- (Rev. 7.1-17). The **144,000 and the vast multitude** are two portrayals of those who are to be saved. Their robes have been made white in the blood of the Lamb. Not one will be lost. None can be kept from their rightful place before God's throne. Lift up your heads! We are living A.D. *Anno Domini*.



## **LESSON FOUR: Rev 8-11**

### **LET NOTHING DISMAY OR DERAILED YOU**

The trumpets have sounded! Trumpets were the Old Testament's means to call mankind to recognize a manifestation of God's holiness. At the giving of the law (Ex 19), as Canaan was entered (Josh. 6.5.), at a coronation (1 Kings 1.34) or as a call to worship (Num. 10.1-2), trumpets called God's people to recognize what was at hand and to repent.

- So, God trumpets His call to humanity. In the midst of the systems that support life (Rev 8.7), the sources of greed, power, and lust (Rev 8.8, Jer 51.25, I Jn 2.15-16), the philosophies which nourish human spirits that have turned bitter (Rev. 8.10-11) and the woes of this life (Rev. 8.12-9.30) the cornets of caring and the trumpets of turning call humanity to recognize God's holiness. Do not be dismayed as the trumpets sound around you.
- Rev. 11.1-13. Yes, the prophets who are God's trumpeters may also be slain. The public witness of the church may be silenced but the Church herself can never be obliterated.
- Nero, Domitian, Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Mao Tse-Tung, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Xi Jinping have tried and failed. As Elijah called Ahab to repentance and Moses confronted the apostasy of Egypt, God's truth can be ignored but never defeated. When the final trumpet has sounded the ultimate victory will be undeniable.

## **LESSON FIVE: Rev 12-14**

### **RECOGNIZE THE REALITY OF OPPOSITION**

Make no mistake. **We are in a war!**

The battle has raged from the start and Israel has been under attack from the beginning (Gen 3.12, Is. 50.1, 54, Jer. 4.31) Evil has tried to devour the promise. (Rev. 22.1-4) Yet nothing could stifle the appearance of God's Christ. A **beasthead** was CAPTURED in Bethlehem. (Rev.12.5-17).

- Rev. 12.13-17. However, the Evil One has not quit. Though receiving a deadly setback, Satan has turned his anger on the Church, the Woman or true Israel. John reminds us we must make not mistakes about the nature of the conflict. The battle continues.
- Rev. 13.1-10. Satan has his own system. Apostate political power is the second person of the demonic trinity that uses the governments of the world as a tool of evil (Dan. 7, Rev. 13.2)
- Rev. 13.11-18. The lamb with the voice of the dragon, the third person of the evil trinity, is a counterfeit church that will attempt to seduce the saints. Emperor worship, as personified by Nero and Domitian, is John's case in point. The lure of humanity-worship itself is the oldest but most effective ploy of all. **Beware when someone comes along to save the soul of this world. All-encompassing human government whatever its cloak is never the Kingdom of God.**
- Rev. 13.10, 14.9-12. Be alert for the stakes are high! When the first beast comes to persecute with political power, the church must have endurance and patience. When the second beast brings an apostate church, the saints must have discernment and integrity. Let all be assured. God's own people will receive reward for their steadfastness. Rev. 14.13-20.

## **LESSON SIX: Rev 15-19**

### **REMEMBER, JUDGMENT DOES COME IN HISTORY**

The BELIEVER can rest in the assurance that divine justice is still working in History. Persecution may be for the moment but satisfaction will be eternal. Remember the examples of Assyria, Egypt, Babylon and ancient Israel herself. When justice is slow, it was because God graciously waits to give ample time for humanity to turn in another direction.

- Rev. 16.2-21. When the bowls of wrath are finally poured out, none can say that it was not justified. The judgments going on all the time have come because the blessings of God have been ignored and repudiated.
- Rev. 17.1-6. Evil political power, embodied in the Great Harlot Babylon, the symbol of self-indulgence, hedonism and sensuality, will be crushed. The counterfeit church that exalts greed, avarice, and lust will be smashed. Kings bloated by the fat of their own excesses, seducers impotent from their own seductions, will all taste the bitterness of judgment (Rev. 17.15-18.3).

Babylon=Rome



- Rev. 18.4-8. God's people must keep themselves unstained from the subtle deceits of such crass materialism and base appetites. As in the past, in the present hour of judgment will come again. And at the end of time the final curtain will drop on all such perversions.

**LESSON SEVEN: Rev 19-22**

**BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO ENTERS A FIGHT HE CANNOT WIN  
TO GAIN A CROWN HE CANNOT LOSE**

Rejoice, O people of God! The final battle has already been won! Christ has already absorbed both the attack and the counter-attack of evil. The battle is His not ours. He cannot be defeated.

- Rev. 19.11-20.3. Limits have been set on Satan's reign and control. The evil one already knows well who holds the keys to all final authority. The Dragon's power has been clarified (Col. 2.15, Heb. 2.14, I Jn 3.8). Far from alive and well on earth, Satan is wounded and dying. He is left with only the powers of darkness and deceit.
- Yes, the battle continues and we may become casualties. Yet, even as Pharaoh was lured into the seas, Satan and the hosts of Hell are coming to their Armageddon moment.

- Rev. 20.7-10. In fact, we are now standing in the midst of that final moment. The noises of spiritual strife all around us are the very sounds of the last great battle. According to God's theological time, He is coming quickly!
- Rev. 19.7-10. Our help is always at hand. The difficulties of the moment are symptomatic of our involvement in the most important conflict any human being can enter. Though we may be momentarily defeated, we cannot lose.
- Rev. 20.11-15. Rejoice! The groom is about ready to come once and for all for His bride. All who are warriors in this on-going battle are about to be swept into the great banquet hall for the marriage feast. The fact of the spiritual battle is the guarantee of invitation.

### **BIG IDEA 8: THE DESTINY TRIUMPHS—OUR CHRIST REIGNS**

What has been accomplished by all of these painful struggles?

- Rev. 21.9-10. The New Jerusalem, the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb or the Church of Jesus Christ is being perfected by conflicts. As the Lord of the Church was made perfect through suffering (Heb 6), so are we. All that the abrasions of Satan's warfare can do is to polish and buff the luster God has already given to His creation, the church.
- Rev. 21.15-21. Both the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple had established a guarantee that God's dwelling was with humanity. Now unlimited by geography or race, the New Israel, the Church, has become that Holy of Holies assuring that God's presence is established among us for the rest of eternity.
- The fulfillment of God's Project: Eden restored in the Tree of Life, the New Heaven and the New Earth. Rev 21-22. The new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven ...



- John has seen the astonishing truth. From the little embryo called Church is growing the fullness of Him who fills all with the fullness (Eph. 1.20-23). The pains of the moment are the birth pangs of a salvation that will be cosmic in its final dimensions. The victory is certain. The



Church will endure. **God's will WILL be done; symphony restored and fellowship with God made permanent.**

- Rev. 22.11 Therefore, Believers, hear the final admonition. “Let the righteous still do right and the holy still be holy.” –Rev. 22.11. Wherever you are, whatever the circumstances, *you have been blessed to be a blessing.*

THE DESTINY STILL STANDS:

GOD'S PROJECT IS TO FULFILL HIS PROMISE THROUGH THE PEOPLE HE HAS CALLED, REDEEMED, ADOPTED AND MADE HOLY.

**The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.**

## **BIG IDEA RECAP**

**BIG IDEA 1: THE DOUBLE PROBLEM**

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**BIG IDEA 8: THE DESTINY TRIUMPHS—OUR CHRIST REIGNS**

## Letter of Pliny to Trajan and Trajan's Response

*Pliny to Trajan:*

*It is my custom, Sire, to refer to you in all cases where I am in doubt, for who can better clear up difficulties and inform me? I have never been present at any legal examination of the Christians, and I do not know, therefore, what are the usual penalties passed upon them, or the limits of those penalties, or how searching an inquiry should be made. I have hesitated a great deal in considering whether any distinctions should be drawn according to the ages of the accused; whether the weak should be punished as severely as the more robust, or whether the man who has once been a Christian gained anything by recanting? Again, whether the name of being a Christian, even though otherwise innocent of crime, should be punished, or only the crimes that gather around it?*

*In the meantime, this is the plan which I have adopted in the case of those Christians who have been brought before me. I ask them whether they are Christians, if they say "Yes," then I repeat the question the second time, and also a third -- warning them of the penalties involved; and if they persist, I order them away to prison. For I do not doubt that -- be their admitted crime what it may -- their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy surely ought to be punished.*

*There were others who showed similar mad folly, whom I reserved to be sent to Rome, as they were Roman citizens. Later, as is commonly the case, the mere fact of my entertaining the question led to a multiplying of accusations and a variety of cases were brought before me. An anonymous pamphlet was issued, containing a number of names of alleged Christians. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians and called upon the gods with the usual formula, reciting the words after me, and those who offered incense and wine before your image -- which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, along with the regular statues of the gods -- all such I considered acquitted -- especially as they cursed the name of Christ, which it is said bona fide Christians cannot be induced to do.*

*Still others there were, whose names were supplied by an informer. These first said they were Christians, then denied it, insisting they had been, "but were so no longer"; some of them having "recanted many years ago," and more than one "full twenty years back." These all worshiped your image and the god's statues and cursed the name of Christ.*

*But they declared their guilt or error was simply this -- on a fixed day they used to meet before dawn and recite a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god. So far from binding themselves by oath to commit any crime, they swore to keep from theft, robbery, adultery, breach of faith, and not to deny any trust money deposited with them when called upon to deliver it. This ceremony over, they used to depart and meet again to take food -- but it was of no special character, and entirely harmless. They also had ceased from this practice after the edict I issued -- by which, in accord with your orders, I forbade all secret societies.*

*I then thought it the more needful to get at the facts behind their statements. Therefore I placed two women, called "deaconesses," under torture, but I found only a debased superstition carried to great lengths, so I postponed my examination, and immediately consulted you. This seems a matter worthy of your prompt consideration, especially as so many people are endangered. Many of all ages and both sexes are put in peril of their lives by their accusers; and the process will go on, for the contagion of this superstition has spread not merely through the free towns, but into the villages and farms. Still I think it can be halted and things set right. Beyond any doubt, the temples -- which were nigh deserted -- are beginning again to be thronged with worshipers; the sacred rites, which long have lapsed, are now being renewed, and the food for the sacrificial victims is again finding a sale -- though up to recently it had almost no market. So one can safely infer how vast numbers could be reclaimed, if only there were a chance given for repentance.*

*Trajan to Pliny*

*You have adopted the right course, my dear Pliny, in examining the cases of those cited before you as Christians; for no hard and fast rule can be laid down covering such a wide question. **The Christians are not to be hunted out.** If brought before you, and the offense is proved, they are to be punished, but with this reservation -- if any one denies he is a Christian, and makes it clear he is not, by offering prayer to our gods, then he is to be pardoned on his recantation, no matter how suspicious his past. **As for anonymous pamphlets, they are to be discarded absolutely, whatever crime they may charge, for they are not only a precedent of a very bad type, but they do not accord with the spirit of our age.***

Trajan was Emperor in Rome 98-116 AD

## Millennial Views

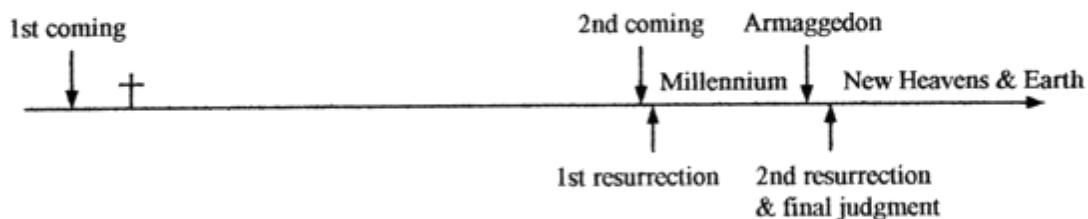
### All agree on

1. Christ's first coming
2. Christ's death, resurrection and ascension
3. Christ will come again
4. The resurrection of the dead for judgment
5. Those not found in the Lamb's book of life are cast into hell (the nature of hell is disputed)
6. The coming new heavens and the new earth

### Disagreements

1. The timing of some events
2. The nature and duration of the millennium

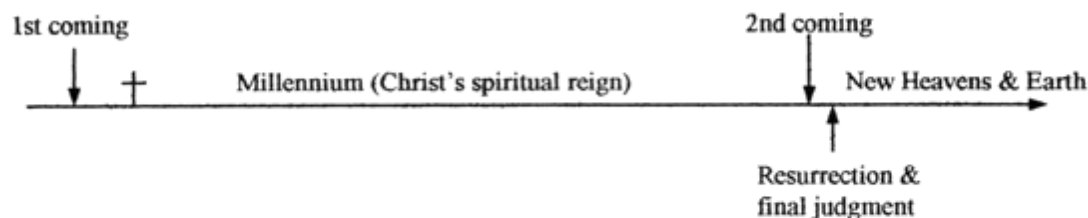
### Historic Premillennialism



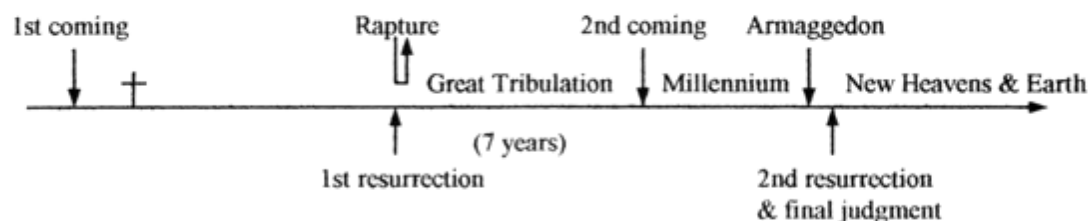
### Postmillennialism



### Amillennialism



### Dispensational Premillennialism



Note: the rapture is a secret coming of Christ in which he takes all Christians to heaven for seven years.

Drew Blankman 3-6-00