

BRMC Sermon Series

Who is Worthy of our Worship? (The book of Revelation)

Jan-Apr 2025

FAQs

1. What is the title of this book of the Bible?

- a) The title is “Revelation” or “Apocalypse”. It comes from the opening words in Rev 1.1, which state “The apocalypse of Jesus Christ...”
- b) Apocalypse means “to uncover”. Apocalypse is a Greek word, which denotes an uncovering or an un-hiding. Hence, a revealing of something – a revelation.
- c) Apocalypse does not originally mean “worldwide destruction” or “catastrophic devastation” or “doomsday”. However, the word has come to evolve this nuance in the English language.
- d) The book’s title is not Revelations (plural), but Revelation (singular). It is not about multiple visions, but about the uncovering of true reality in Jesus Christ.
- e) Some Bibles give the book’s name as “The Apocalypse of St John”. This is to differentiate it from other non-canonical (non-biblical) apocalyptic texts that were in circulation in the first- and second-centuries A.D. E.g Apocalypse of Moses, Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Baruch.
- f) Highly recommended: watch this BibleProject video about apocalyptic literature at <https://youtu.be/UNDX4tUdj1Y>.

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Note: “apocalypse/ apocalyptic” (noun/adjective) is not the same as “apocrypha / apocryphal” (noun/adjective). The former means to uncover or to reveal. The latter means to hide away or to keep private. The English word “cryptic” shares the same root as the latter, but not the former.

2. What type of Biblical book is this?

Revelation is a triple-genre piece of writing. This is partly why it is difficult to fully understand.

- a) Apocalyptic genre (see also FAQ #1)
 - Apocalyptic writing flourished in the Eastern Mediterranean, roughly between 250 B.C. and 250 A.D.
 - Characteristics of the apocalyptic genre include:
 - Unveils divine mysteries or an unseen reality, via symbolic visions, dreams, or heavenly journeys
 - The visions are often highly dramatic and cataclysmic
 - There is frequently an eschatological (end-times) emphasis
 - Sometimes, a heavenly figure is present as a guide-interpretor

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Rather, Revelation is a call for a response of faith in and by every generation. Its topics and themes will also not be entirely unfamiliar or distant from the lived situations of its first recipients.*”

- Often make connection between heavenly-and-earthly realities, as well as present-and-future realities
- Often showcase the sovereignty and cosmic power of God
- Apart from the book of Revelation, portions of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Matthew display characteristics of the apocalyptic genre.
- We modern readers are quite unfamiliar with the apocalyptic genre. Thus, we should make the effort to read these other apocalyptic passages in the Bible, so as to get a better grasp of the symbolism and meaning of the book of Revelation.

b) Letter genre

- A good portion of the New Testament books is this genre. These could be letters to an individual (Titus, Philemon), to a single church community (Corinthians, Galatians) or to group of churches (1 Peter, James).
- Revelation is a letter in the final category. It is not seven letters, but one letter meant to be read and circulated among a wide audience in different church communities.
 - Rev 1.4 “John to the seven churches...”
 - Rev 1.11 “Write in a book/scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches...”
 - Rev 2.7, 2.11, 2.17, etc “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the *churches* (plural).”

c) Prophetic genre

- Revelation describes itself as prophecy:
 - Rev 1.3 “Blessed is the one reading, and the ones hearing, the words of this prophecy...”
 - Rev 22.7, 10, 18, 19 “...the words of prophecy of this book/scroll”
- Prophecy is never entirely about the future.
- Prophecy in the Bible has elements of both foretelling (describing blessings or punishments, in the future) and forth-telling (calling God’s people to repentance or to action, in the present).
- To learn more about the Biblical genre of prophecy, refer to a previous sermon titled *Presence, Glory, Peace* (19 Nov 2023), available at BRMC’s YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/Cjgm12BM02Q>.

d) Implications of the triple-genre of Revelation

- While Revelation comprises many heavenly visions and has a clear end-times emphasis (*characteristic of apocalyptic, prophetic*), it is not merely a prediction of the distant future, nor is it relevant only for the so-called final generation.
- Rather, Revelation is a call for a response of faith in and by every generation. Its topics and themes will also not be entirely unfamiliar or distant from the lived situations of its first recipients (*characteristic of prophetic, letter*).

3. What is the point of this Biblical book?

a) Revelation touches on many themes. Given its multi-dimensional nature, it is difficult – and perhaps unhelpfully reductionistic – to identify the one “main point” of this precious multifaceted gem of Scripture. Some of Revelation’s major themes include:

- The cosmic and universal sovereignty and power of God, who creates and renews his Creation.
- This sovereign God is not disinterested in his Creation, but is deeply involved and personally active in human affairs, including in the death and resurrection of the Lamb.
- A call to faithfulness and worship by God’s people, even amid great trouble and persecution.
- The certainty of judgment for those who do not give worship to the King.
- The certainty of victory, the defeat of evil, and fruitfully abundant life for followers of the Lamb.

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In our present sermon series, we choose to approach Revelation through the lens of the question: “Who is Worthy of our Worship?”

b) Numerous themes and threads can be fruitfully traced and emphasised in Revelation. In our present sermon series, we choose to approach Revelation through the lens of the question: **“Who is Worthy of our Worship?”** As a church community, we will together:

- Appreciate how worship is singing, but also more than just singing
- Grow in adoration of our God, the slain and risen Lamb, who is worthy of worship (chs.4-5)
- Be encouraged toward faithful worship, especially in times of trial or difficulty, pain or disappointment (ch.6-7)
- Be on guard against the various false gods which intensely compete for our worship (chs.12-13, 17-18)
- Embrace worship as both the deep response of each individual, and the common cry of a vast multitude
- Be stirred in the recognition that humanity is made for profound relationship, delight, and worship of our Creator
- Be moved to join in God’s mission on earth, grasping the spirit behind John Piper’s famous saying: “Missions exists because worship doesn’t”

4. How is this Biblical book relevant today?

See [FAQ #2](#) and [#3](#).

5. Revelation feels complicated and confusing. Is there an outline or structure that can help me grasp this book?

a) Revelation is neither a narrative account, nor an expository article, nor a structured dissertation. We should not expect the book to have a straightforward linear structure in the first place. See [FAQ #1](#) & [#2](#).

b) Instead, we observe several broad segments, as marked by repeated phrases, namely:

- Opening (1.1-3)
“... to show his servants what must soon take place ... Blessed is the one who...” (1.1-3)
 - Circular letter to seven churches (1.4-3.22)
“John to the seven churches...” (1.4)
 - Revelation of things in Heaven and on Earth (chs. 4-16)
“Come, I will show you what will must take place after this... I was in the Spirit...” (4.1-2)
 - i. The heavenly throne room (chs.4-5)
 - ii. Seven seals (6.1-8.5)
 - iii. Seven trumpets (8.6-11.19)
 - iv. The Dragon, Beast, and Lamb (12.1-15.4)
 - v. Seven bowls (15.5-16.21)
 - Revelation of judgment on the evil city (17.1-20.15)
“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore... he carried me away in the Spirit...” (17.1-3)
 - Revelation of the heavenly city (21.1-22.5)
“Come, I will show you the bride... in the Spirit he carried me away...” (21.9-10)
 - Closing (22.6-22.21)
“... to show his servants what must soon take place ... Blessed is the one who...” (22.6-7)
- c) We recommend viewing the BibleProject outline of Revelation at <https://youtu.be/5nvVVcYD-0w> and <https://youtu.be/QpnIrbq2bKo>.

6. Should Revelation be understood literally-realistically or metaphorically-figuratively?

- a) A foundational principle is: *we should read any piece of communication as its author intended for it to be read, i.e. according to its genre.*

As an example: a poet does not intend his poem to be read like a news article, but to be read as a piece that is packed with symbol and metaphor. In the same vein, historical narrative is intended by its author to be read literally and not figuratively. To read without reference to a text’s genre, is to insult the author and to do violence to the text. That is why genre is so critical (see [FAQ #2](#)).

- i. Being in the *apocalyptic* genre, Revelation is inherently full of symbols. Many of these symbols are explicitly and directly identified within the text itself (e.g. Rev 1.20, 7.13-14, 12.9, 19.8; also 5.5 & 22.16 on “root of David”, etc). These are important interpretations given within the piece of writing itself.
- ii. As noted in [FAQ #2](#), there exist other portions of *apocalyptic* genre in the Bible. When reading Revelation, one must become familiar with these other portions of apocalyptic writings (e.g. in Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, etc). This allows for identification of possible shared imagery and symbolism. Doing so also helps to develop a holistic reading of all of Scripture.
- iii. Since the book of Revelation also falls in the genres of *prophecy* and *letter*, readers must also bear in mind the historical situation of the first-hearers of this book. This means doing some background reading on the circumstances facing Christians in

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2. Bear in mind how symbols function.
3. The clearer parts of Scripture shed light on the more obscure parts.
4. Be humble.

Asia Minor (where the seven churches are located), in the late 1st- and early-2nd century A.D.

- b) *Bear in mind how symbols function.* Symbols, metaphors, and other figurative language function as signposts. Symbols do not exist for themselves, but point to a deeper reality.
- i. Some symbols are imagined, fantastical, or exaggerated. For instance, a Lamb with seven eyes (Rev 5.6), a beast with ten horns and seven heads (13.1), a woman clothed with the sun (12.1).
 - ii. Other symbols are tangible and familiar to our ordinary human experience: an open door (4.1), a throne (4.2), a millstone cast into the sea (18.21). These too are symbols, because they do not stand alone but point to a deeper significance. The open door is not just an entrance gate, but signifies uninhibited access across a threshold into a different zone. The throne is not just a chair, but speaks of power and authority. The thrown millstone is not simply a discarding of agricultural equipment, but represents a dramatic and violent action that is audible and visible from afar.
 - iii. Whether fantastical or familiar, a symbol itself is not the point, but points to something deeper.
- c) *The clearer parts of Scripture shed light on the more obscure parts.*
- i. Certain portions of the Bible are inherently harder to understand (2 Peter 3.16). However, there are many, many portions of Scripture that are easily grasped. These latter portions help us make sense of the former.
 - ii. For instance, the Lamb is not explicitly identified as Jesus within the book of Revelation itself. Thus, based solely on Revelation alone, it is unclear who or what this Lamb actually symbolises. However, other Biblical passages such as John 1.29, Acts 8.32-35, 1 Peter 1.18-19 allow the reader to grasp with clarity that the Lamb is in fact a symbol for Jesus Christ, the one who died as an atoning sacrifice for the world and who was raised again to life.
- d) *Be humble.*
- i. Remember that Revelation is one of the more difficult books in the Bible. Even as one applies the above principles, there will still remain some portions and details in the book of Revelation that are not 100% clear. And this is ok. The big-picture themes of Revelation are clear. We do not need to nail down every last detail or answer every last question, in order to be blessed by reading and hearing this book of the Bible (Rev 1.3).
 - ii. As we read and learn from Revelation together, let us hold fast and hold firm to the many things which are clear, as we read the book holistically with the rest of Scripture.
 - iii. And for those parts of Revelation which remain only partially clear, let us not be dogmatic about particular interpretations or specific details, but rather continue to study, pray, and learn together in humility.

7. What are potential dangers in reading the book of Revelation? A.k.a. What are some bad ways to approach the book of Revelation?

- a) Not reading in accordance with Revelation's three-fold genre (see [FAQ #2](#)). One mishears and does injustice to the text, if one reads Revelation as being only a prediction of future events without concern for its genre of prophecy and letter.

- b) Thinking that one needs an answer to every last detail of the text, in order to make sense of the book of Revelation as a whole. God has given sufficient clarity of the big-picture themes of Revelation (see [FAQ #3](#)) for it to remain relevant for Christians in every generation.
- c) Over-confidence in speculative interpretations. Some portions of Revelation are self-interpreting, while others are not so clear (see [FAQ #6](#)). On the less-than-clear parts – yes, we can and should make attempts at interpretation. However, we must do this with humility instead of dogmatism.
- d) Approaching Revelation as though it is all about doom-and-gloom. Responding to Revelation primarily in fear, rather than in faith (see [FAQ #8](#)).
- e) Attempting to use Revelation as a calendar to calculate end-time events (see [FAQ #9](#)).

8. Why is Revelation so scary?

While certain portions of Revelation feel scary, the book as a whole in fact presents a message of resilient hope and faithful worship. The very opening words of the book (Rev 1.3) state forthrightly – it is a blessing to read and hear this book.

- a) Revelation makes clear that God has already won the victory, for he is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning the End. Revelation does not speak of a struggle for dominance between good and evil, between God and the devil. Rather, Revelation paints a picture of that already-won victory of God coming into all its fullness. To learn more about the Now-and-Not-Yet nature of God’s Kingdom, refer to a previous sermon (18 Feb 2024), available at BRMC’s YouTube channel <https://youtu.be/CyhwLHj-m5U>.
- b) Revelation does contain many images of divine judgement, including war, famine, plagues, earthquake, cosmic disruptions, etc. They are precisely depicting events or situations of extreme distress. It is natural that these feel scary or frightening. Revelation shakes readers out of their comfort zones, and show the seriousness and reality of God’s judgement.
- c) In addition to divine judgment, Revelation also speaks of persecution of the saints (i.e., the people of God). These are not examples of God punishing his own people, far from it. Instead, these are reminders that Christians of every generation will encounter hostility simply because we follow Jesus. Revelation encourages us to embrace this reality and to prepare ourselves to live faithfully and worship faithfully, regardless.

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9. Are we living in the last days?

- a) The Bible is crystal-clear that we are already living in the end-times or the last-days (Hebrews 1.2, 1 Corinthians 10.11, 1 Peter 1.20, 1 John 2.18). Jesus Christ, in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, has already inaugurated the end-times or last-days.
- b) Scripture is also unequivocal that no one will know the exact day or time of Jesus’ return (Matthew 24.36, Mark 13.32, Acts 1.7).
- c) So, instead of calculating the future, we are to simply be ready, to watch and wait faithfully for the coming of Christ (Revelation 16.15, Matthew 24.42-44, Mark 13.33).

10. I have other questions...

There is, sadly, a fair amount of material out there on the book of Revelation, that can be contentious, one-sided, or just plain dodgy. Beware of what you read. We shared some trustworthy links in the various FAQs above. Here is some additional reliable material.

In 2020, Dr Tan Kim Huat (the Chen Su Lan Professor of New Testament at Trinity Theological College) conducted a four-part Equip Seminar series on the book of Revelation. Here are some specific highlights that you will find helpful:

a) Equip Seminar part 1 https://youtu.be/pjuWPD_eOC4?si=c21VjBhzeUxAOO6B

- 7.16-13.59 Scholarly models: Preterist, Idealist, Futurist
- 14.00-35.49 Listening Well to the book of Revelation
- 1.34.00-1.40.26 Connection with OT prophecy (Daniel)

b) Equip Seminar part 2 <https://youtu.be/5ZPTSz3oTtI?si=v-5giAuWbCM3BxUY>

- 6.13-18.37 The 7 churches don't represent particular periods in history.
- 1.15.56-1.18.58 The 4 Living Creatures and Connection with OT (Ezekiel)
- 1.21.05-1.32.55 The 7 Spirits of God and Connection with OT (Zechariah)
- 1.33.10-1.38.40 Worship of God

c) Equip Seminar part 3 <https://youtu.be/W5gXuhECYUY?si=21SyNwsdecsMtYRE>

- 4.23-28.10 The structure of the sets of 7 judgments
- 28.11-35.55 The 4 Horsemen
- 56.30-1.00.51 Armageddon
- 1.05.25-1.19.57 The 144000
- 1.21.05-1.24.18 The 2 Witnesses
- 1.24.19-1.51.45 The Beast and the number 666
- 2.23.50-2.24.52 The Dragon has already been defeated

d) Equip Seminar part 4 https://youtu.be/n7e7nWO4IFA?si=Zqgue4s3_sf0-L8n

- 1.08.40-1.39.00 Views on the Millennium and Rapture
- 2.09.57-2.23.00 The Beast and the Mark of the Beast

e) If you would like to dive even deeper, we recommend the following books. These are from *Counterpoints* series by Zondervan publishing house, in which Bible scholars and theologians present and engage with multiple viewpoints with openness and humility (see [FAQ #6](#) and [#7](#))

- *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*
- *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*
- *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-tribulation, Pre-wrath, or Post-tribulation*

f) If you want to go deeper still, here are some more-accessible commentaries.

- Craig Keener, *Revelation* (NIV Application Commentary series)
- Thomas Schreiner, *Revelation* (ESV Expository Commentary series)

- Ian Paul, *Revelation* (Tyndale NT Commentary series)
- Gordon Fee, *Revelation* (New Covenant Commentary series)

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