INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

The Author and the Theme of Revelation
Author: The author of Revelation identifies himself simply as John (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8).

Theme: The title of the book of Revelation indicates that the main theme of the book is the unveiling or the revealing of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the main focus of the book and he is the key that unlocks its true meaning. Revelation begins and concluded with Jesus. The Second Coming of Jesus is the climax of the book. It is the ultimate goal towards which the narrative of the book of Revelation is pointing. Another major theme is the importance of perseverance. The book calls Christians to persevere through hardships and persecution.

Differences Between the Gospel of John and Book of Revelation
Most scholars today question whether Revelation was indeed written by John the disciple. The argument is that the grammar of the book of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel is very different. In the Gospel the grammar is very accurate, while the Greek of Revelation is infected with many grammatical irregularities. Also, there are differences in style and theological content.

The differences in style and theological content of the two books is due to the fact that Revelation is an apocalyptic book, full of images and symbols, while Gospel of John is a straightforward record of Jesus' life.

One explanation for the irregularities in grammar is that John was a Palestinian Jew, and Greek was not his native language. It is possible that he wrote the Gospel of John in Ephesus with the assistance of a secretary and an editor who revised and polished the language. We know that Paul and Peter used secretarial and editorial assistance. John wrote the book of Revelation by himself as a prisoner on the island of Patmos, where he was obviously deprived of such assistance.

Despite the differences of these two books there are lots of similarities in the content
1. Of all NT books only the Gospel of John and Revelation call Jesus "the Word of God" (John 1:1-14 and Revelation 19:13).
2. Both refer to Jesus as the Lamb (John 1:29,36 and Rev. 5:6-8).
4. These are the only two books where the verb "tabernacle" is found (John 1:14 and Rev. 7:15).
5. Both books are founded on the word of testimony or witness (John 21:24 and Rev. 1:2).
6. Revelation invites "Let the one who thirsts come" (Rev. 22:17), and the gospel of John declares, "If any man is thirsty, let him come" (John 7:37).

The Place and the Date of Writing
John wrote Revelation while on Patmos (Rev. 1:9), a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea. It served as a labor camp to which Roman authorities sent offenders. The book was written during the reign of Roman Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Early Christian writers, including Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp, who was the disciple of John, held that the book of Revelation was written during the time of Domitian.

Purpose of the Book of Revelation
The book of Revelation was originally written as a letter to the seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia (Rev. 1:4). Christ commissioned John to write these words into a scroll and send them to the seven churches (Rev. 1:11). This was a circular letter that went from one church to another, starting from Ephesus to Laodicea. The messages were not written separately to each church. The seven messages were a part of the whole letter of Revelation.

The primary focus of Revelation was to help the first-century Christians in the Roman province of Asia with their conditions and problems. These also apply to Christians in any era, including to us today.

External Problems
1. Pagan opposition and accusations because not participating in social activities and pagan festivals characterized by immoral practices and eating food offered to idols. One of the prominent ones was the Imperial cult of worship to the emperor.
2. Conflict with the Jews.
   - The opposition from these two groups brought persecution upon Christians.

Internal Problems
2. Sexual immorality.
3. Theological Controversies.
   - All of the above led to spiritual decline.

Confronted with the growing hostility from Rome and the Jews, as well as the invading heresy and increasing apostasy within the church, the Christians in Asia were concerned about their own identity and existence. What would the future bring to the church? The book of Revelation was intended to provide the answer. It declares that although the situation in the world seems threatening and hostile to God's people, God in Christ is indeed still the master of history.

Old Testament Sources
John drew symbols almost entirely from the Old Testament. It has been demonstrated by many scholars that out of 404 verses of Revelation, 278 contain allusions or references, direct or indirect, to the Old Testament.

Example of a Parallel

Example of an Allusion
Rev. 4-5 alludes to the coronation of Israelite king from Deut. 17:18-20, 2 Kings 11:12

Threefold Structure of Revelation
Revelation divides into three main parts, with prologue and epilogue. Each of these major three divisions opens with an introductory vision of Christ. Each introductory section portrays Christ in a unique role. These portrayals of Christ seem to be the key to understanding the remaining part of each vision, and it defines its respective theme and content.

1. Prologue (Rev. 1:1-8)
2. Messages to the Seven Churches (Rev. 1:9-3:22) – First Century Setting
Vision of Christ walking among the seven lampstands as the High Priest (Rev. 1:9-20). He is pictured here as fulfilling the covenant promise given to ancient Israel in Lev. 26:12 "I will also walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." Here Christ is walking among the Churches.

3. Opening of the Sealed Scroll (Rev. 4-11) – Historical Section
The introductory vision of Jesus Christ (chaps. 4-5). Jesus as the celestial Ruler reigning with his Father on his throne. He is in charge of the history of this world.

4. Contents of the Sealed Scroll (Rev. 12-22:5) – Eschatological Section
Introductory vision: Christ as Warrior; Jesus as the end-time commander in chief of the heavenly army – Michael (Ch. 12). This section is the disclosure of a part of the sealed scroll of Rev. 5. This part introduces the great conflict between Christ and Satan.

5. Epilogue (Rev. 22:5-21)

The Prologue and epilogue are parallel to each other
"To show to his servants" (Rev. 1:1 and 22:6)
"The things which must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1 and 22:6)
"Jesus sends his angels" (Rev. 1:1 and 22:6,16)
“Blessed is the one who keeps…” (Rev. 1:3 and 22:7)
“The words of the prophecy" (Rev. 1:3 and 22:7)
“The time is near" (Rev. 1:3 and 22:10)
“The seven churches” (Rev. 1:4 and 22:16)
“The Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 1:8 and 22:13).

Four Methods of Interpretation of the Book of Revelation

1. PRETERIST APPROACH
From Latin “preter” meaning “past.” John wrote his book exclusively for his time. Revelation addresses the situation of the Christian church in the Roman province of Asia in the 1st century A.D. The book does not contain any predictive prophecy. Its purpose was rather to provide hope and encouragement for the church facing impending persecution by imperial Rome in John’s day.

2. IDEALIST APPROACH
This method does not see any historical significance of John’s vision. The book contains a symbolic description of the ongoing struggle between good and evil, which cannot be applied to any historical time period or place. The symbols of the book do not refer to any specific events in history. The stress is on timeless ethical truth and principles that apply to believers at any place and time in history, rather than historical occurrences.

3. FUTURIST APPROACH
Futurism places the entire significance of Revelation in the future. This method maintains that chapters 4-22 in particular are prophecies of future events – even from our today’s perspective – to take place just prior to and after the Second Coming. The book is relevant exclusively for the
last generation of Christians living in the time of the end. Futurism takes a very literal approach to the language and symbols of Revelation.

4. HISTORICIST APPROACH
Revelation provides in a symbolic presentation the prophetic outline of the future course of history from the apostolic times until the time of the end. The book of Revelation itself points to historicism as the most appropriate and the only valid approach to prophetic interpretation. Historicism sees the events predicted in Revelation as taking place both in the past and the future as well as in the centuries that lie between. Historicism takes a symbolic approach to the language and symbols of Revelation. The events predicted are themselves literal and real, however they are portrayed in symbolic presentations.

Principles of Interpretation of the Book of Revelation

1. The book of Revelation is a divine revelation. The opening verses of Revelation point to the divine origin of the book (Rev. 1:1–3). The messages of Revelation are not a product of John’s fertile imagination but were shown to him in vision by God.

2. Revelation is a book for the church. The book of Revelation was intended by its author to be read in a church setting (Rev. 1:3). It was meant to be understood by those who read it and lead them into a closer relationship with Christ. Biblical prophecy is not given to satisfy a sheer curiosity about the future. The study of the prophecies of Revelation should stimulate God’s people to reach others for Christ.

3. Focus should be on the text. In interpreting Revelation, one must be faithful to the Word in allowing the text to speak, rather than imposing a theology or agenda upon the text.

4. The Bible is the best interpreter of Revelation. The symbolic presentations of Revelation must be explained and clarified primarily from the Bible, according to the intent and purpose of the inspired writer, and the meaning the book conveyed to the readers to whom it was originally addressed.

5. Christ is the center of all prophecy. The book of Revelation was written from the perspective of Christ. Its symbols and images should have their focus on Christ. Nothing else should dominate one’s exposition and interpretation of the prophesies of Revelation, neither history nor sheer curiosity about the future.

6. The book of Revelation has a symbolic nature. Revelation is apocalyptic or prophetic literature pointing to the future in symbolic language. In order to derive a meaningful interpretation from the book, it is necessary to determine, as much as we can, how the original recipients would have understood those symbols and images.

The book of Revelation should be approached with a presupposition that the scenes and actions portrayed there are symbolic or figurative in nature, unless the context clearly indicates that a literal meaning is intended.
REVELATION 1

V1. The word "Revelation" comes from a Greek word "Apocalypse" which is a compound word consisting of "apo" (away from), and "kalupsis" (a veiling or a covering). Thus "apocalypse" means "an unveiling or uncovering."

The expression "Jesus Christ" can be interpreted in two ways: Revelation of Jesus Christ, or revelation about Jesus Christ. Grammatically either is possible. The context favors the first one, because Jesus receives the revelation and conveys it to John. God is the real author of the book (Rev. 1:1).

"The things, which must soon take place". This phrase echoes Daniel 2:28 and Jesus' discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:6, Mark 13:7). The word "must" denotes sure fulfillment of the events not a necessity of the events.

"He made it known" or "He signified" comes from a Greek word "semaino" which means, "to show by a sign or a symbol." This shows the figurative nature of the language of Revelation. The future events John saw in visions were real; however, they were shown to him in figurative or symbolic presentations. God chose the symbols. John simply recorded the things he saw in the visions.

V2. "The Word of God" in the OT functions as a technical expression for the message that the prophets received from God (Jer. 1:2; Hos. 1:1, Zech. 1:1, Joel 1:1). Sometimes this phrase is supplemented with the phrase "which I saw" (Isa. 2:1; Mic. 1:1). The same is here in Revelation.

"The testimony of Jesus Christ" is explained in Rev. 19:10. The testimony of Jesus Christ is the Spirit of prophecy.

V3. The word "blessed" is the same as in Matthew 5, where we have the blessings. This word can be translated as "happy." In the NT this word means more than just happiness, it refers to the deep inner joy of those who have long awaited the salvation promised by God and who now begin to experience its fulfillment.

V4. Seven churches are the ones in Asia Minor. This is a literal number, but it can be understood as symbolical number as well. Number seven represents completeness, so John allows seven churches to represent God's people in all places, for all time until the Second Coming of Jesus.

"Grace and peace." It is a common greeting formula used by Paul and Peter (Rom. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:2). It combines a Greek word "charis" which means "grace" and the Hebrew word "shalom" which means “peace”. We need grace because we have no merit (Rom. 3:23), and we need peace because we are angry with God (Rom 8:7) and with each other (James 1:19-20).

“The One who is and who was and who is coming.” This is a reference to the God of the Old Testament. In Exodus 3:14, God identified himself to Moses as “I am who I am.”
"Seven Spirits." Multiplicity of the spirits in Revelation; Rev. 3:1, Rev. 4:5 "seven torches of fire"; Rev. 5:6 "seven eyes sent out into all the earth." This imagery is taken from the Old Testament. In Isa. 11:2 we have the seven designations of the Spirit of the Lord. In Zech. 4:2 the prophet saw seven lights. In Zech. 4:10 it says that the seven lights are the "eyes of the Lord, which range through the earth". These refer to the activity of the Holy Spirit in Zech. 4:6.

John uses Zechariah's images to portray the Holy Spirit in his sevenfold fullness. Number seven symbolically stands for divine fullness and perfection. Seven Spirits refer to the fullness and universality of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

V5. "The faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." All three expressions are taken from Ps. 89:27, 37, and refer to Jesus Christ. This is a Psalm based on Davidic covenant from 2 Samuel 7:8-16.

The "witness" is taken from Greek word "martyr." This word means "the one who witnessed unto death.' This is what Jesus did.

"The first-born from the dead." This phrase is used by Paul in Colossians 1:18. This phrase suggests that by virtue of resurrection, Jesus occupies the first place of honor and supremacy and has highest authority over the earth. It means preeminence rather than being born first.

Ex. 4:22 says that Jacob is the first-born, but he was the second after Esau. David is referred to as God's first-born (Psalm 89:27), even though he wasn't. When Jesus is referred as first-born it is used in the sense of his importance and preeminence.

V6. “Made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (Rev. 5:9b–10; 20:6). This is the status that the redeemed have in Christ as a result of their redemption from sin. The designation of a kingdom of priests is drawn from the Old Testament. God delivered Israel from Egypt and promised through Moses that they would be his own possession and chosen people among the nations. Israel was to be God’s kingdom of priests in the world (Exod. 19:5–6).

In the New Testament, the titles and privileges offered to ancient Israel are now the possession of Christians as the true Israel (1 Pet. 2:9–10). As with Israel in the Exodus, so the New Testament people of God are always loved by Christ and released from the bondage of sin and made kings and priests to God.

V7. Having described who Jesus is and what he has done, John directs his readers’ attention to what Jesus will do: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.” This solemn statement announces the climax of the book of Revelation. The literal and personal return of Christ to this earth is the event toward which all else moves in the book. His coming will mark the end of this world’s history and the beginning of the eternal kingdom.

The phrase “he is coming” refers to the future event as a present reality. Elsewhere in the book of Revelation, the Second Coming is mentioned in the present tense – ”I am coming” (Rev. 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20) – as it is already occurring, rather than in the predictive future, “I will come.” This denotes both the certainty of the Second Coming and its imminence.
The certainty of Jesus’ return is confirmed with the words “Yes, amen.” In Greek it is nai and amēn. (Nai is the Greek word of affirmation, and amēn is the Hebrew.) When combined, the two words express an emphatic affirmation: “Yes, indeed.” A similar thought appears at the end of the book: “‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (22:20).

"Clouds" are angels who escort Him (Dan. 7:13; Mt. 16:27; 1Thes. 4:17).

“Every eye will see him.” It is a literal, visible coming. It is not a secret coming (1Thes. 4:17; Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:11).

"Even those who pierced Him." In Mt. 26:64 Jesus says to those who accused Him that they will see Him coming on the clouds of heaven, so they will probably be resurrected before Jesus comes to see Him. Most likely this refers to those who were directly involved in the crucifixion of Jesus.

V8. "Alpha and Omega" are the first and last letters in Greek Alphabet.

Eternal God, Isaiah 43:10. Later in Revelation this phrase is interpreted as "the beginning and the end" (Rev. 21:6), and as "the first and the last" (Rev. 22:13). These are used to describe Jesus.

V9. Gives us the name of the author, John, and the place of writing, Patmos. He was there because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. This is taken from Rev. 1:2.

V10. "The Lord's Day." This is a very disputable phrase. There are two suggestions to what this phrase could mean:

1. **Sunday**, the first day of the week. Some people argue that this phrase the Lord's Day is used in regards to Sunday because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, the first day. The first conclusive evidence of the usage of this phrase "the Lord's Day" with reference to Sunday comes from the latter part of the second century in the apocryphal work "The Gospel of Peter." The first Church father to use the term “The Lord's Day" with reference to Sunday was Clement of Alexandria (AD 190). This is almost a century after Revelation was written. So, John could not use this phrase referring to Sunday. Nowhere in the Bible Sunday is referred as the Lord's Day. It is called "the first day of the week."

2. **Saturday (Sabbath)**, the seventh day of the week. This is the explanation according to the Bible. The Bible calls the seventh day as "my holy day" and "the holy day of the Lord" (Isa. 58:13). Three Gospels quote Jesus saying, "The Son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt. 12:8; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 6:5). The Sabbath is a sign of God's Lordship (Ezek. 20:12).

While in vision, John hears behind him a “**loud voice as of a trumpet.**” This phrase designates the Old Testament divine manifestation. The trumpet-like voice uttered the Ten Commandments from Sinai (Exod. 19:16). In the New Testament, the sound of the trumpet announces the appearance of Christ on the clouds (Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). In other words, the trumpet-like sound denotes the presence of God who speaks.
LESSON 1

Rev. 1:12-18 describes the first vision of the book of Revelation. After hearing the trumpet-like voice, John encounters the resurrected Christ, glorified and triumphant, whose appearance is given in a symbolic presentation. This section has a lot of similarities to Dan 7:13-14; Daniel 10:5-12, and Ezekiel 1:26-28. This passage is clearly talking about Jesus.

V12. The seven golden lampstands are explained in verse 20, they are the seven churches. Jesus is among the seven churches. This is a promise that Jesus will always be present with his church.

V13. “In the midst of the seven lampstands,” John sees "One like the son of man." The title is taken from Dan. 7:13-14. In Mark 13:26 Jesus applied the passage from Daniel 7:13 to himself. This was the favorite title of Jesus in the gospel of Mark.

Jesus is seen among the seven lampstands. According to Revelation 2:1, the glorified Christ is walking among the seven lampstands. This scene evokes, first of all, God’s promise given to ancient Israel to walk among Israel (Lev. 26:11–12). Now, we see Christ fulfilling that promise in a symbolic walk among the lampstands. The same God who walked with Old Testament Israel now walks in Christ with his New Testament people.

The scene also evokes the priests officiating services in the Old Testament tabernacle. The priests would trim and refill the lamps that were still burning, and also remove the wick and old oil from the lamps, which had gone out, supplying them with fresh oil and relighting them. Here in Revelation 1, Christ is portrayed as ministering to the churches in the role of the Old Testament priests. He ministers to them wearing a robe reaching to the feet and girded with a golden girdle.

V14. "A robe reaching to the feet." The Greek word describing this robe is "poderes," which literally means "reaching to the feet." This is the robe of High Priest in OT (Ex. 28:4, 31). On the other hand, this dress is the dress of the kings in Israel (1Sam. 18:4; 24:5). This portrayal emphasizes the priestly as well as the royal character of the glorified Christ.

Christ’s hair was “white as wool.” This description appears in Daniel 7:9 for the Ancient of Days, which is the title of God in Daniel. In the ancient world, white and gray hair symbolized wisdom and aged experience (Job 15:10; Prov. 20:29) as well as dignity (Prov. 16:31).

"His eyes as flame of fire." This image is taken from Zech. 4:10. We find also this description in the message to the church in Thyatira (Rev. 2:18). Also, in Rev. 19:12 Jesus appears in the vision as a victorious conquer coming to judge his enemies having eyes like flames of fire. This most likely signifies his ability and right to both rule and judge. Also, eyes are a symbol of knowledge, which means that nothing remains hidden from the penetrating eyes of Christ.

V15. "His feet were like burnished bronze, as refined in a furnace." This imagery is drawn from Daniel 10:6. This description of Christ's feet is most likely to add to the magnificence and strength of the portrayal.

"Voice was like the sound of many waters." This description is drawn from Ezekiel 43:2 where the prophet describes the voice of God like "the sound of many waters."
**V16. "He had in His right hand seven stars."** The seven stars are the seven angels according to Rev. 1:20. In Daniel 12:3, God's faithful people are associated with stars. In Malachi 2:7 and 3:1 the priests and messengers of God's people are referred to as angels. This idea appears in NT as well in Matt. 11:10. The context here suggests that the angels stand for the leaders of the church.

"**Double-edged sword.**" The imagery is drawn from Isa. 49:2. In Ps. 149:6 the double-edged sword is used to execute judgment upon the wicked. Hebrews 4:12 the two-edged sword is the Word of God. In Revelation 19:13, Jesus' name is "Word of God" as He gets in the battle with the enemies of God.

**V17. "I am the first and the last."** This mirrors the statement in Isaiah’s account of the God of the covenant: “I am the first and the last, and there is no God apart from Me” (44:6; 41:4; 48:12). In using this Old Testament description of God, Jesus is identifying himself as none other than the Old Testament Yahweh of the covenant.

**V18. "Keys of death and Hades."** This is the power of Jesus to keep people from second death (Rev. 20:1; Rev. 20:14). Jesus gave these keys to his friends (Mt. 16:19) to open heaven for sinners by telling of His forgiveness and grace. This key was promised in a Messianic passage in Isaiah 22:22. In Greek, Hades was referred to as a place, the realm of underworld and the kingdom of death, and also as a person. Hades here represents the grave.

This statement would have reminded the Christians of John’s day of the Hellenistic goddess Hekate, popularly called “the beginning and the end” and “the key bearer” holding the keys to the gates of heaven and Hades. Here Christ’s authority surpasses the authority of Hekate as well as that of every other natural or supernatural authority. By his death and resurrection Jesus conquered death and the grave and now he holds the keys (the power) to resurrect us one day.

**V19. This verse tells us the theme of the book of Revelation.** In Rev. 4:1, John is invited in vision to see the things which would “take place after these things,” namely, after the seven messages to the churches (chaps. 2-3). This suggests that “the things which are” refer to the messages to the seven churches. “The things which are about to take place after these things” refer to the events to take place in the future from John’s perspective (after the 1st century AD, Rev. 4-22).

The primary purpose of the prophecies of Revelation is not to inform us about the future but to draw us closer to Christ. It is not to inform us about the final events but rather to assure us about the presence of Jesus Christ with his people during the history and final events.

**V20. Jesus explains that the “seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches.”** As explained before, these are most likely the leaders of each church. The “seven golden lampstands” are the seven churches. One interesting point is found in the beginning of the verse where Jesus says that the seven stars are “in his right hand.” This means that Jesus guides, supports, protects, and upholds the leaders of the churches.