



# LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

May 7th 2017 — Part I



“Revelation & the Purging of the Christian Imagination”

## Introductory Considerations

Information & Imagery:

“Revelation” in a world saturated with information and images.

Rom. 12:2a— *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...*

⇒ The renewal of our minds involves both \_\_\_\_\_ (information) and \_\_\_\_\_ (imagery) from God’s Word what is ultimately true of ourselves and the world around us.

More than any other New Testament book, Revelation is concerned with us “seeing” what is true.

## What is the Book of Revelation?

1. It is intended as a letter for the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. It is the culmination of the biblical \_\_\_\_\_.
3. It is the \_\_\_\_\_ of biblical prophecy.

## Making sense of Revelation

There are three significant verses in Revelation 1 which are the interpretive keys to the entire book.

1. Revelation 1:19 — *Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.*

⇒ This verse provides the outline for the book: The Past (Rev. 1), The Present (Rev. 2-3), and the Future (Rev. 4-22)

2. Revelation 1:1-2 — <sup>1</sup>*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,* <sup>2</sup>*who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.*

⇒ This verse serves to explain how this revelation has come to John and therefore to the churches.

**σημαίνω (sēmainō)** — “To make known...to signify.”

- This word is the verbal form of the word that we translate as “sign” or “miracle.” This term is highly significant in John’s Gospel where seven “signs” serve to communicate the truth of Jesus’ identity.
- It is helpful for us to understand then that this revelation has come to John in symbolic language.

John is informing us from the beginning of the book that much of what we are going to read is going to involve \_\_\_\_\_ that will need to be interpreted.

## The Purpose of Revelation's Symbolic Imagery:

"Revelation [has a] capacity to create a symbolic world which its readers can enter and thereby have their perception of the world in which they live transformed. To appreciate the importance of this we should remember that Revelation's readers in the great cities in the province of Asia were constantly confronted with powerful images of the Roman vision of the world. Civic and religious architecture, iconography, statues, rituals and festivals, even the visual wonder of cleverly engineered 'miracles' in the temples—all provided powerful visual impressions of Roman imperial power and of the splendor of pagan religion. In this context, Revelation provides a set of Christian prophetic counter-images which impress upon its readers a different vision of the world...The visual power of the book effects a kind of purging of the Christian imagination, refurbishing it with alternative visions of how the world is and will be."

— Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*

## The Interpretive Key to Revelation's Imagery: The \_\_\_\_\_

- While there are few if any direct OT quotations within Revelation, biblical scholars have pointed out that there are nearly 500 allusions to the OT spread throughout the book.

## Applying Images of the Future in the Present:

- While the imagery of Revelation (particularly 4-22) deals with real events in the future, the images which John uses to describe the world system, the persecution of believers, our Enemy, and our Savior help us to properly assess things in the present.

## Significant Imagery in Revelation

### The Sovereign Rule of God: The Throne (Rev. 4:1-11)

OT Background: Isa. 6:1-7; Ezek. 1-2

Ps. 11:4 — *The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.*

### The Adversary of God and His People: The Dragon (Rev. 12:1-17)

OT Background: Gen. 3:15; Ps. 89:8-10; Isa. 51:9-11; Ezek. 29:1-5

Isa. 27:1 — *In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.*

### The World System: Beast (Rev. 13:1-10) / Prostitute (Rev. 17:1-6)

OT Background: [Beast] Dan. 7:1-28 [Prostitute] Jer. 51:7, 13

Dan. 7:17 — *'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.'*

Nah. 3:4 — *And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms.*

### The Risen Christ: The Lion & the Lamb (Rev. 5:1-10)

OT Background: Gen. 49:9-10; Num. 24:17; Exod. 12:5;

Isa. 53:7 — *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*