



# IMAGERY IN REVELATION

## PURGING THE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION



### Introduction

- In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, the critic Neil Postman writes the following:  
"Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities and commercials."
- The imagery that surrounds us is intended to present a particular vision of what is true, good, and beautiful. Often, that vision is in direct conflict with what God says about these things. The danger of the world presenting to Christians imagery that is intended to intimidate, discourage, or deceive is nothing new. Throughout the history of the church, believers have found in God's Word (and the book of Revelation in particular) the means by which to be guarded and equipped to live faithfully in difficult times.

**Key Point:** The imagery found within the book of Revelation functions to help us see the \_\_\_\_\_ world differently in light of the \_\_\_\_\_ judgment and redemption that God will ultimately accomplish.

### Making Sense of Revelation

1. Revelation was written by the apostle \_\_\_\_\_ during a period of exile on the island of Patmos.

Rev. 1:4a—<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches that are in Asia...

⇒ "The beloved disciple" had been one of men closest to Jesus during His earthly life. The book was likely composed between 95-98 AD, meaning that it was written towards the end of John's life.

2. Revelation is addressed to seven \_\_\_\_\_ in Asia Minor.

Rev. 1:10-11—<sup>10</sup>I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup>saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

⇒ These churches are representative of the holy catholic (universal) church, demonstrating the importance of the book's content for all believers at all times.

3. The message of Revelation was intended to encourage Christians to endure under \_\_\_\_\_.

Rev. 1:9—<sup>9</sup>I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

⇒ As the Christian faith spread throughout the Roman world, believers found themselves experiencing various forms of hostility from the surrounding pagan culture as well as seasons of active persecution.

"...the broader religious and cultural resistance to their exclusive faith in only one true God and one Lord would leave the churches that John addressed feeling vulnerable and threatened by greater persecution that could break out at any time, and this is what John fears for them as well."  
— Buist Fanning, *Revelation* (ECNT)

⇒ John the apostle was the perfect person to receive the revelation of Jesus Christ and to write to persecuted believers because he had also \_\_\_\_\_ as a witness of Jesus Christ just as the Lord had told him that he would (Matt. 20:22).

4. Revelation's message is presented primarily through \_\_\_\_\_ imagery.

Rev. 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.

σημαίνω (*sēmainō*) — "To make known...to signify." This term is the verbal form of the noun (*sēmeion*) translated as "sign." This term is used throughout John's gospel where seven "signs" serve to identify Jesus as the Christ.

⇒ At the very beginning of the book, John is informing us that much of the revelation that he received has come in the form of imagery which will need to be \_\_\_\_\_ but which is also significant in and of itself.

"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*

## Interpreting & Applying the Imagery in Revelation

- We must consider the imagery in light of the \_\_\_\_\_ if it is to be properly interpreted.
  - ⇒ 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.
- We must consider the present in light of the imagery that describes the future if we are to properly \_\_\_\_\_ the message of the book.
  - ⇒ 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

### 1. The Risen Lord Jesus — “*The \_\_\_\_\_ & the \_\_\_\_\_*”

Rev. 5:5—And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” OT Background: Gen. 49:9-10; Num. 24:17

Rev. 5:6—And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. OT Background: Exod. 12:5; Isa. 53:7

**Key Point:** The one who carries out the \_\_\_\_\_ of God, offers the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.

### 2. The Sovereign Rule of God — “*The \_\_\_\_\_*”

Rev. 4:2-3—<sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

Rev. 22:3—No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. OT Background: Isa. 6:1-7; Ezek. 1-2; Psa. 11:4

**Key Point:** God remains sovereign over the events on earth even in times of great \_\_\_\_\_.

### 3. The True Nature of the World System — “*The \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_, & the \_\_\_\_\_*”

Rev. 13:1-2—<sup>1</sup> And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. <sup>2</sup> And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. OT Background: Dan. 7:1-28; Gen. 3:15; Isa. 27:1

Rev. 17:1-2—<sup>1</sup> Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, <sup>2</sup> with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” OT Background: Nah. 3:4

**Key Point:** God's people must recognize the potential dangers of the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ aspects of the world system.

### 4. The Lord Jesus' Faithful Witnesses — “*The Ones Who \_\_\_\_\_*”

Rev. 2:11—He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

Rev. 15:2-3a—<sup>2</sup> And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. <sup>3</sup> And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb... OT Background: Exod. 15:1-21

**Key Point:** The saints of the Lamb overcome the world even in death because He has won the \_\_\_\_\_ for them.

### 5. The True Nature of Reality — “*\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_*”

Rev. 1:20—As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Rev. 22:10, 22—<sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God...<sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

**Key Point:** The saints must be reminded of the \_\_\_\_\_ dimension of our existence so as not to become discouraged in the midst of trials and tribulations.

## Concluding Thought

“Revelation has persistently inspired the whole church's vision of God and his purpose for history and the...future, perhaps especially in its liturgy, hymns, and art. It has been the book of both martyrs and of visionaries: the two groups which have so often saved the church from betraying its witness in compromised conformity to the world. It has been a recurrent source of prophetic critique both of the church itself and of the state of society.”

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