

## UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

### AN OUTLINE OF THE LITERARY FORM OF REVELATION

The symbols of the Book of Revelation are all rooted in material rich in imagery from the Old Testament such as historical events, persons, feasts, the tabernacle/temple and its services etc. In order to understand the meaning of any symbol, its Old Testament roots must first be examined. The Book of Revelation is like a play for the theater, consisting of SEVEN ACTS, with each ACT having SEVEN SCENES. Each ACT is introduced by a SCENE from the sanctuary or temple. Take special note of the contrasts between the righteous and the wicked in SCENE 6 of each of the Seven Acts.

#### I. The Title of the Apocalypse (1:1-3)

- A. The infallible succession of the gift of prophecy (1:1-2)
- B. The first (of seven) covenant seal (1:3)

#### II. Salutation to the Seven Churches (1:4-6)

- A. Opening benediction: invocation to the Trinity (1:4-5a)
- B. Doxology (1:5b-6)

#### III. Prologue (1:7,8) Two Voices

- A. First Voice (herald): announcement of the Star and theme of the Drama (1:7)
- B. Second voice (Lord God): the imprimatur of the living God given as "Sponsor" of the action throughout (1:8)

#### IV. ACT I: THE CHURCH ON EARTH (1:9-3:22)

- A. **The Sanctuary Setting:** The Church's High Priest in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (1:9-20).

- B. The letters to the seven churches (2:1-3:22)

- **SCENE 1:** (1) The Passionless Church (Laodecia) (2:1-7)
- **SCENE 2:** (2) The Persecuted Church (Smyrna) (2:8-11)
- **SCENE 3:** (3) The Tolerant Church (Pergamum) (2:12-17)
- **SCENE 4:** The Compromising Church (Thyatira) (2:18-29)
  - (4) You tolerate Jezebel (2:20)
  - (5) Jezebel is given "time" to repent (2:21)
  - (6) Jezebel will be thrown on a sickbed (2:22)
  - (7) Finally Jezebel's daughters will be smitten dead (2:23)

- **SCENE 5:** The Dead Church (Sardis) (3:1-6)
  - **SCENE 6:** The Missionary Church (Philadelphia) (3:7-13)
    - a. The view of the wicked: They bow down at your feet (3:9)
    - b. The view of the righteous: Kept from the hour of trial (3:10)
  - **SCENE 7:** The Arrogant Church (Laodicea) (3:14-22)
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## V. ACT II: THE CHURCH FACES JUDGMENT (4:1-8:1)

### A. The Sanctuary Setting: A view through the "open door" into the Most holy place.

The throne of God (4:1-8a); a song of praise from the witnesses of both heaven and earth (4:8b-11); the sealed book and the Lion/Lamb (5:1-7); hymns (5:8-14).

The Eschatological Covenant Lawsuit.

Call to the witnesses to give ear to the proceedings

The witnesses from earth: the twenty-four priests (4:4)

The witnesses from heaven: the four cherubim-seraphim (4:6b-8)

Introduction of the case at issue by the Divine Judge and Prosecutor (5:1-7)

A recital of the benevolent acts of the suzerain (5:8-14)

### B. The opening of the seven seals (6:1-8:1)

The judgement indictment: the appearance of four horses (6:1-8)

- **SCENE 1:** (1) The rider on the white horse who inflicts the white judgment of victorious conquest (6:1-2)
- **SCENE 2:** (2) The rider on the red horse who inflicts the red judgment of slaughter (6:3-4)
- **SCENE 3:** (3) The rider on the black horse who inflicts the black judgment of famine (6:5-6)
- **SCENE 4:** (4) The rider on the pale horse who inflicts the judgment of death (6:7-8)
  - (5) The rider also brings the judgment of slaughter
  - (6) The rider also brings the judgment of famine
  - (7) The rider also brings his companion the Grave (6:8)
- **SCENE 5:** The cry of the martyrs: "How long must we wait for the final retribution?" (6:9-11)
 

The judgment sentence: The release of the four judgment horses (6:12-7:17)
- **SCENE 6:** The final eschatological events (6:12-7:17)
  - a. The view of the wicked: cosmic catastrophes accompany the wrath of the Lamb (6:12-17)
  - b. The view of the righteous: a sealing of the living saints (7:1-8). The release of the judgment verdict brings to view an innumerable multitude who are clothed in white robes of victory (7:9-17).  
After the judgment is finished (8:1) A new creation
- **SCENE 7:** Silence in heaven (8:1)

## VI. ACT III: THE EXODUS OF ISRAEL FROM BABYLON (8:7-11:18)

A. The Sanctuary Setting: The seven sanctuary trumpets (8:2); (1) the first view of the mediating altar of incense (8:3-4); (2) the second view when the mediating work of the altar has ceased (8:5-6)

B. The sounding of the seven trumpets (8:7-11:18) Plagues of mercy and warning upon the "great city" Babylon to prepare the way for the Exodus-movement (8:7-9:21)

- **SCENE 1:** (1) A scourge upon the earth of hail and fire (8:7)
  - **SCENE 2:** (2) A scourge upon the sea - a burning mountain sinks (8:8-9)
  - **SCENE 3:** (3) A scourge upon the rivers and fountains of water - a star falls from heaven to earth as a polluting agent (8:10-11)
  - **SCENE 4:** (4) A scourge upon the sun - heavenly bodies are partially darkened (8:12)  
(5) A woe to follow in the fifth trumpet  
(6) A woe to follow in the sixth trumpet  
(7) A woe to follow in the seventh trumpet (8:13)  
The "ninth plague" of darkness (9:1-12)
  - **SCENE 5** (woe 1) A scourge of darkness - the falling star descends to the pit of the abyss; a plague of locust results. The locust have tails like scorpions. The saints place the sealing mark over their Goshen homes (9:1-12).  
The "tenth plague" of death or deliverance (9:13-11:14)
  - **SCENE 6** (woe 2): A scourge upon the great river Euphrates - the four angels appear (9:13-11:14)
    - a. The view of the wicked: The unbinding of the four angels. An underworld army of two hundred million horsemen come forth. They are girded with the weapons of the Lake of Fire & they bring death in their wake (9:13-21).
    - b. The view of the righteous: They are in an Exodus-movement. They are led by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The Archangel gives the little book at the end of prophetic time. The period of bondage in the "great city" Babylon had been three and a half times (times of the Gentiles). God's two witnesses, in the spirit of Elijah and Moses, lead Israel out from Egypt, which forms the first tenth part of the city Babylon (10:1-11:14).
  - **SCENE 7** (woe 3): The mystery of God is finished (10:7); Christ goes forth to claim His everlasting Kingdom (11:15-18).
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## VII. ACT IV: THE SALVATION OF JERUSALEM (11:19-15:4)

A. The Sanctuary Setting: The Ark of God's Covenant becomes visible (11:19)

B. The showing of seven pageants (12:1-15:4)

- **SCENE 1:** The wilderness experience of the pure woman (chapter 12)
  - (1) A celestial woman pregnant with a male child (12:1-2)
  - (2) A celestial, seven-headed dragon, descends to earth (12:3-4)
  - (3) Christ ascends to heaven; the woman flees to wilderness (12:5-6)

- (4) The dragon turns his anger against the woman in the wilderness (12:7-17) \
- **SCENE 2:** The wounded beast with seven heads arising from sea (13:1-10)  
(5) Babylon arises from the sea (13:1-10)
  - **SCENE 3:** Support is given to Babylon by the beast arising from the earth (13:11-18)  
(6) The false Elijah makes an image to the beast who has been wounded (13:11-18)
  - **SCENE 4:** The fate of the saved: the Lamb with the 144,000 upon Mount Zion (14:1-5)  
(7) The judgment sentence upon the true Elijah (14:1-5)
  - **SCENE 5:** The challenging cry preparatory for conflict (14:6-13)
    - a. The challenge for the wicked. Announcement of doom to Babylon. The angel sounding with the gospel message is joined by a second and then a third angel who swell the sounding cry; the latter two proclaim an ever deepening punishment for a Babylon who rejects the gospel proclamation (14:6-11)
    - b. The challenge for the righteous. The second covenant seal (a special resurrection for the saints who die during the sounding-cry of the three angels) (14:12-13)
  - **SCENE 6:** The harvest of the saved (14:14-20)
    - a. The view of the righteous: The grain-field, ripened by the former and latter rain, is harvested by the Son of Man on a white cloud (14:14-16)
    - b. The view of the wicked: The ripe vintage-harvest is thrown into the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God. The wine-press is trod outside the great city Jerusalem; blood fills the length of the Holy Land (14:17-20)
  - **SCENE 7:** The saved upon the sea of glass; they sing the victory song of Moses and the Lamb (14:1-4)
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## VIII. ACT V: THE FINAL EXODUS FROM A WORLD IN AGONY (15:5-16:21)

A. The Sanctuary Setting: The Shekinah fills the Sanctuary with glory; no one can enter the temple; the censer-bowl is removed from off the altar of incense (15:5-16:1)

B. The pouring out of the seven censer-bowls (16:2-21)

Judgment-plagues upon a fallen Babylon; the saints move through the wilderness toward the Red Sea (16:2-11)

- **SCENE 1:** (1) A scourge upon the earth - boils on men (16:2)
- **SCENE 2:** (2) A scourge upon the sea - blood (16:3)
- **SCENE 3:** (3) A scourge upon rivers and fountains of waters - blood (16:4-7)  
(4) The angel of water cries approval (16:5-6)  
(5) The altar cries approval (16:7)
- **SCENE 4:** (6) A scourge upon the sun - burning heat (16:8-9)  
(7) The wicked cry a curse against God (16:9)  
Darkness intervenes to save Israel from Pharaoh's hosts (16:10-11)

- **SCENE 5:** A scourge of darkness upon the throne of the beast (16:10-11)  
The Red Sea delivers Israel but destroys her enemies (16:12-16)
  - **SCENE 6:** A scourge upon the great river Euphrates - the parting of the waters (16:12-16)
    - a. The view of the wicked: Babylon is breached; demoniac spirits take control (16:12-14)
    - b. The view of the righteous: The third covenant seal (the announced second advent of Christ). The saints assemble at Megiddo for the final battle of the Holy Land (16:15,16)
  - **SCENE 7:** "It is done" - the atmosphere is consumed; Babylon falls to the conquering kings from the east (16:17-21)
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## IX. ACT VI: THE DOOM OF BABYLON (17:1-20:3)

- A. The Sanctuary Setting: An angel issuing from the Sanctuary which no man can enter (17:1-2)
  - B. The unfolding of the seven plagues (17:3-20:3)
    - **SCENE 1:** The wilderness experience of the harlot (17:3-5)
      - (1) An underworld harlot pregnant with the blood of the saints (17:3-6) \
    - **SCENE 2:** The wounded beast with seven heads (17:6-18)
      - (2) An underworld, seven-headed dragon, ascends to earth (17:7-18)
    - **SCENE 3:** Support is taken away from Babylon (18:1-19:10)
      - (3) Christ descends to earth; the harlot flees to the wilderness (18:1-3) (the fourth Archangel)
      - (4) God turns His anger against the harlot-queen Jezebel who rules over the earth (18:4-8)
      - (5) Babylon sinks into the sea (18:9-24)
      - (6) The true Elijah makes an image to the Lamb who has been wounded; the fourth covenant seal (invitation to the marri supper) (19:1-10)
    - **SCENE 4:** The fate of the wicked: smitten by the "rod of iron" (19:11-16)
      - (7) The judgment-sentence against the false Elijah (by the Living Word of God on a white horse) (19:11-16)
    - **SCENE 5:** The challenging cry preparatory for conflict; the battle taunt by the angel standing in the sun (19:17-18)
    - **SCENE 6:** The destruction of the lost (19:19-21)
      - a. The view of the wicked: The armies of the beast gather to fight the battle of Megiddo against the Word of God on the white horse (19:19)
      - b. The view of the righteous: Victory over the beast and the false Elijah who are cast into the Lake of Fire (19:20-21)
    - **SCENE 7:** The defeated foe thrown bound back into the abyss (20:1-3)
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## X. ACT VII: THE CHURCH IN HE MILLENNIUM (20:4-22:5)

A. The Sanctuary Setting: The church enthroned with Christ (20:4-6). The church, now reigning with Christ, is privileged to observe from the stage itself the final stages of the Acts. It is the fifth covenant seal (the first resurrection) that gathers all Israel upon the stage (20:4). Following a millennium of rule, Satan and his hosts are loosed from the abyss and the battle of Megiddo is continued until all the wicked are cast into the Lake of Fire (20:7-10)

B. The fulfilling of God's sevenfold plan (20:11-22:5)

- **SCENE 1:** (1) The old heaven and the old earth pass away (20:11)
- **SCENE 2:** (2) The last Judgment - the sentence is meted out upon the resurrected dead (20:12-15)
- **SCENE 3:** (3) The new heaven and new earth - no more sea (21:1)
- **SCENE 4:** (4) The New Jerusalem adorned as a Bride (21:2-8)
  - (5) A great voice from the throne accepts the Bride (21:3-4)
  - (6) The voice again speaks, announcing a new creation (21:5a)
  - (7) The command to write: the stipulations on who will be welcomed as guests to the eschatological wedding (21:5b-8)
- **SCENE 5:** Measuring the great city Jerusalem (21:9-21)
- **SCENE 6:** The city's illumination (21:22-27)
  - a. The view of the righteous: In God's presence there is no night (21:22-26)
  - b. The view of the wicked: Forever excluded from Jerusalem (21:27)
- **SCENE 7:** The city's source of life (22:1-5)

## XI. EPILOGUE: IMPRIMATURS ON THE BOOK (22:6-20)

A. The infallible succession of the gift of prophecy (22:6)

B. The sixth covenant seal (22:7)

C. The imprimatur is that of the living God (22:8-9)

D. Closing instruction by Gabriel (22:10-15) Christ is quoted

(1) The distinction drawn (22:10-11)

(2) The Star and theme of the Drama (22:12-13)

(3) Reward for the righteous: the seventh covenant seal (22:14)

(4) Reward for the wicked: excluded from the Kingdom (22:15)

E. THE INVITATION GIVEN BY MICHAEL (22:16-20)

## XII. CLOSING BENEDICTION (22:21)