

# The Gospel in Revelation

But this prelude of hope offers us much encouragement. In spite of all opposition, God’s church will be victorious. By standing on God’s Word and remaining clothed with Christ’s righteousness, it will receive the kingdom crown.

### An Interlude of the 144,000

This prelude of hope in Revelation 12 is followed by an interlude of hope in Revelation 14. And it comes at just the right time, as the close of Revelation 13 warns against a false system of “worship” and the “mark of the beast.” A worldwide boycott has been issued against all those who do not receive the “mark” or “worship the beast.” This includes a death decree (Revelation 13:15-16). In this context John is transported in vision to “mount Sion” (the “heavenly Jerusalem”), where he is shown those who faithfully follow the Lamb, symbolized by the 144,000 (Revelation 14:1, 4; Hebrews 12:22). They follow Jesus and His Word and are not defiled with “women” (churches that are unfaithful to God’s Word). This message of hope tells us that God has a people who follow Jesus, though the entire world is deceived and coerced by earthly powers enforcing false worship. Revelation 12-14 concludes the fourth section of Revelation and marks the halfway point. The message of hope here is summed up this way: Jesus has a victorious church that stands on His Word, is clothed with His righteousness, and follows where He leads, no matter what.

### The Prelude to the Plagues

Our next prelude of hope is found in the section comprising Revelation 15-17. This entire section is filled with plagues and judgments. Yet before we are shown these judgments, even as they are announced in Revelation 15:1, we find another prelude of hope. Verses 2-4 paint a picture of a people who will not be affected by these plagues. Not only have they gotten the victory over the beast, his image, his mark and his name, but they also sing a song of deliverance:

“And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvelous *are* thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true *are* thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For *Thou* only *art* holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest” (Revelation 15:3-4). The message of this prelude of hope is that God is great and marvelous—He can deliver from the power of the beast all who are willing and protect us from the consequences of evil.

### The Prelude to Babylon’s Fall

This next prelude is found in the sixth section of Revelation, which describes the fall of the power of Babylon, a symbol of an end-time power and its economic system. This sixth section takes in Revelation 18 and 19, describing the final economic collapse of the world. But before the collapse takes place, an angel or messenger heralds a “great power” (Revelation 18:1), culminating the messages of three previous angels that call God’s people out of Babylon (Revelation 14:6-12; 18:4). So powerful is this fourth angel’s proclamation that the entire earth is illumined with the light

of his glory (Revelation 18:1). This powerful message offers assurance. Everyone will have the opportunity to see the light of God’s truth before Babylon falls and the end comes.

### An Epilogue of Hope

This section of Revelation closes with an epilogue of hope. Chapter 19:1-10 does not interrupt the sequence of events concerning Babylon’s fall as previous interludes have done. Instead it adds a short section at the end of Babylon’s fall, describing the jubilation of God’s servants for His “righteous judgments” concerning Babylon. The main point of this epilogue is that God now reigns. Be glad and rejoice! A day is coming when all evil will be finally judged as evil! In that day a union will be consummated between God and His people followed by the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9).

### The Prelude to Satan’s Final Attacks

The seventh section of Revelation offers two glimpses of the battle that Satan and his deceived followers will launch against the Lamb. The first battle takes place at the second coming of Christ and the second one follows at the end of the 1,000 years (Revelation 19:19; 20:8). This section is again preceded by a prelude of hope that upholds Jesus as the Faithful and True, making war in righteousness (Revelation 19:11). The vision of Christ in this and following verses present Him as fully able to conquer all our foes (Revelation 19:11-21).

### The Prelude of the New Heaven

The final and eighth section of Revelation also opens with a prelude of hope, although it hardly seems needed. We might say, concerning this final prelude, that it precedes descriptions so fantastic that they seem hardly conceivable in the present state of this planet. So God sets the stage:

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1).

The hope of this last vision is that this present earth—tired, worn out, and marred by the curse of sin—will one day be made new. Its vast, barren wastelands will be laden with life and all of nature will speak of God’s love.

### Epilogue

The closing section of Revelation, found in chapter 22, is an earnest appeal from God to all who have ears to hear. God is our best friend. He longs for us to accept Him as Creator and Redeemer and to be in His everlasting kingdom. After presenting a brief picture of the tree of life and its promise of a never-ending eternity with healing for all, we find these words of beautiful entreaty from God: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

So let’s go!

# Preludes of Hope

## Overview

Revelation. Eight sections, 22 chapters, with an intro and a close. So how hard can it be to understand this last book of the Bible? That depends on who you ask. It’s definitely not for the faint of heart—or is it? Many have found the book of Revelation intellectually stimulating; fewer, perhaps, have found it hopeful. But if you look at its gospel theme, rather than its apocalyptic message, you might find yourself preferring this book to one of the gospels. This is because the book of revelation is actually the “revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is *about* Jesus, not just *from* Jesus. The focus of its pages is the gospel of salvation, not the identity of the beast.

To prove this point consider this quick overview. In it we will take a brief look at the eight major sections of Revelation to see if they do indeed contain a gospel theme. It shouldn’t take you more than 10-15 minutes. Ready? Let’s go.

### The Prelude to the Churches

Chapter 1 is where we start our gospel journey in the book of Revelation. The vision of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 follows the first “prelude of hope.” This prelude is found in 1:12-20 with a description of Jesus Christ, the “Son of Man,” in the middle of “seven candlesticks” or “lampstands” (Revelation 1:13, KJV, NKJV). Revelation 1:20 explains what these candlesticks represent:

“ . . . the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20).

According to this verse the candlesticks represent the churches—not buildings, but people. For that is what *church* means, “a gathering of called-out ones.” The church is the *ekklesia* or “assembly”—not the place where people assemble, but the assembled ones themselves.

Therefore this final verse (1:20) of the introductory chapter of

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Revelation has a powerful message intended to give us hope as we move through every vision, and especially this first one. The message is that Christ, the Son of Man, is in the midst of His called-out ones, His assembly. The reason this is such a powerful message can be seen as we move into the condition of God’s church as it is highlighted through the ages by the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3. Historically we understand that these seven churches take in all of God’s people from the apostolic church down to the close, or the finishing up, of this world’s history (the number *seven* represents “completion or finishing” Genesis 2:1-3). So the message of this prelude of hope is:

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NIV).

The promise of Christ here is reiterated in the vision of Jesus among the churches. God is with us to the end, in spite of our imperfections. This message, spoken first by Jesus to His disciples and then illustrated in the first vision of Revelation, brings us multiplied hope as we realize the condition of the churches. With a few exceptions here and there, God’s people are pictured from beginning to end as fallen and self-deceived (Revelation 2:5; 3:17). Yet, in spite of our failures, Jesus pictures Himself in the midst of the churches. This is the essence of the good news about God. He is love. He does not change, and therefore we have life and hope (Malachi 3:6). The heavenly Physician stays with His patients in spite of their condition, as He did with His erring disciples while on this earth. We may leave Him, but He will not leave us. Now take a quick look at the seals.

## The Prelude to the Seals

Following the seven churches the book of Revelation delivers the message of the seven seals. Again we see the number seven as a symbol of completeness. In fact, there are seven sets of seven in the book of Revelation. They are:

- 1) the seven churches
- 2) the seven seals
- 3) the seven trumpets
- 4) the seven thunders
- 5) the seven angels with messages
- 6) the seven kings
- 7) the seven last plagues.

The number seven reminds us that this book offers a complete message of gospel hope, in addition to a message about prophecy. And this gospel message is found in the prelude to the seals, as well as the prelude to the churches.

The seals actually begin in chapter 4 where we find John in vision again. This time he sees God’s throne “set” in heaven (Revelation 4:2). The throne of God is a representation of His government. As with earthly rulers, the principles of His government reflect His character—who He is. The Bible says that God is love, as seen in both His justice and mercy, but this truth is not clearly seen by millions who suffer on this planet.

Chapter 5 moves us into the reality of how God’s character and throne have been vindicated. Jesus is pictured as a “Lamb” that was “slain,” which points to the cross where God’s love was fully revealed and the principles of mercy and justice were reconciled. This chapter points to the cross as the fullest revelation of God’s love and saving power. In giving His life to redeem us, Jesus accomplished something no man in heaven or earth could do (Revelation 5:3, 6). The message here is one of hope that transcends our hopelessness, and victory in our failure: We cannot, but Jesus can. He has “prevailed” where we have failed (Revelation 5:5).

## An Interlude of Hope

Following this we find the four horses of Revelation on which we will spend more time in a later study. And as we move through the messages symbolized by the horses, just before we arrive at the vision of the trumpets, we find another message of hope. This gospel focus is found in the middle of the seven-seals vision and so I have called it, not a prelude of hope, but rather an “interlude of hope.” Revelation 7 is a short break in the sequence of the seals. The entire chapter is dedicated to answer a question posed at the very end of time when Jesus returns: “Who shall be able to stand [before the throne of God and before the Lamb]?” (Revelation 6:17).

This is one of the most important questions ever uttered by human lips and it moves the very foundations of heaven to give answer. We know this because without proceeding to finish explaining the final seventh seal (which is only one verse in length), God puts the seals on hold and dedicates the entirety of chapter 7 to answer this vital question.

The answer leads to one of the most profound and misunderstood chapters in all of Revelation. Misunderstood because the imagery of the twelve tribes of Israel sealed and saved has been construed as a literal number of 144,000 people. Profound in that the multitude of sealed Christians who do finally stand before the throne and the Lamb so surpasses the literal number 144,000 that no man can number them (Revelation 7:9). The message of this interlude adds much hope to what we have already understood: Jesus will have so great a multitude saved in heaven that we will not be able to number them all.

## The Prelude to the Trumpets

Now we move into the messages of the seven trumpets, which, like the seals, take us through four chapters, Revelation 8 through 11. Also like the seals, the trumpets’ messages offer both a prelude of hope and an interlude of hope. The prelude is found in Revelation 8:3-4. Here we find a picture of heavenly intercession, symbolized by an angel offering incense with the prayers of the saints. The incense represents the perfect righteousness of Christ. The fact that it is mingled with the prayers of the “saints” declares a fundamental gospel truth—that it doesn’t matter how saintly we human beings may be, only the merits of Christ can save us. Every saint, however good or faulty we appear, must rely *only* on the merits of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. The picture of intercession here is one of

the most powerful in all of Scripture and adds a wonderful message to what we have seen so far: The doing and dying of Jesus gives to every person all the merit needed for salvation.

## A Second Interlude of Hope

Revelation 10 offers a second break or interlude, this time to the messages of the trumpets. In this interlude John hears a message from a “little book” that is “open” in the hand of a “mighty angel” (Revelation 10:1-2). Described as the “seven thunders,” there is evidence that this message points to the once-sealed book of Daniel as the place of its origin. The message of the seven thunders leads us directly to Daniel 9 and a prophecy of the Messiah who was to accomplish seven tasks, according to Daniel 9:24:

- 1) finish transgression
- 2) make an end of sins
- 3) make reconciliation for iniquity
- 4) bring in everlasting righteousness
- 5) seal up the vision
- 6) seal up the prophecy
- 7) and anoint the Most Holy.

This interlude of hope, which builds upon the prelude of hope in Revelation 8:3-4, confirms the Messiah as the One who has accomplished our salvation. Jesus is our only merit to salvation because He alone has taken care of every aspect of sin and has brought us His everlasting righteousness. The summation of the Revelation we now have looks like this:

Jesus is with us in spite of our fallenness and self-deception.

Jesus has vindicated God’s government and prevailed where we have failed.

Jesus will save so great a multitude for heaven that we will not be able to number them all.

Jesus’ life and sacrifice are our only merit for salvation.

Jesus has taken care of every aspect of sin and has brought us His everlasting righteousness.

## The Prelude of the Woman

Our next prelude of hope is found in the opening verse of Revelation 12. It is a “great wonder” or “sign” of a “woman.” A woman in the Bible represents a church—a harlot represents an unfaithful church, and a pure woman, like the one pictured here, represents God’s faithful church (Revelation 17:4-5; 2 Corinthians 11:2). This woman symbolizes God’s church “clothed with the sun,” which represents the righteousness of Christ (Malachi 4:2). The moon upon which she stands is symbolic of the Word of God reflecting its lesser light from Jesus. Her crown represents her victory over the dragon and twelve is the number used in the Bible to represent God’s kingdom (1 Corinthians 9:25; Revelation 21:12, 14). Within Revelation 12-14, the woman is persecuted, pursued and threatened with death.