

Principles to Follow when Trying to Understand the Book of Revelation

1. The book of Revelation consists of seven sections. Each section comprises a vision of John. They are parallel in nature and each spans the entire time frame from the first to the second coming of Christ.
2. The seven sections of the book are arranged in an order that moves towards the climactic end. The final judgment is first announced then introduced and finally described. Similarly the New Heaven and Earth are described more fully in the final section than in those which precede it. This means that while the visions all cover the same time frame there is a development within them toward the
3. The visions of the book need to be interpreted according to that individual vision and the details within the vision must be understood in harmony with the central thought of the vision. We should ask two questions. 1. What is the entire picture of the vision? 2. What is its predominant idea?
4. The seals, trumpets, bowls of wrath and similar symbols refer not to specific events, particular happenings, or details of history, but to principles—of human conduct and of divine moral government—that are operating throughout the history of the world. This means rather than considering each trumpet, bowl, etc. to represent a single event, they represent categories of events (illness, drought, famine, weather, etc.)
5. The key to the interpretations of the visions come primarily from the scriptures and specifically the Old Testament. If we want to understand what something means we should start by looking for that thing in other places in scripture.
6. The book of Revelation is grounded in first century reality and should be evaluated based on conditions which prevailed in that time rather than in our time.
7. The book is THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. It is rooted in and has as its source the mind and reality of God. It is not from John, it is through John from God. As such it serves God's purpose which is to encourage Christians to persevere in their commitment to Christ in the face of suffering and persecution. The purpose of the book is NOT to show us the future, exactly what will happen and when it will happen. Nor is the purpose to allow us to figure out exactly how God will bring the end times about.

NOTE: These principles are based on principles derived by William Hendricksen in his commentary on Revelation—"More Than Conquerors"