

Book One in The Critical Analysis Series

THE
ANGEL'S RIDDLE

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

JAMES V. HEAD



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To God be the Glory.

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C O N T E N T S

Preface	xxix
Chapter 1—Study Guide and Overview	1
1.0 Study Guide and Overview	2
1.1 Introduction	3
1.1.1 Bible Documentation Food Chain	5
1.1.2 What Is a Decoding Critical Analysis (CA)?	6
1.1.3 Determine Root Clues for Decoding	6
1.1.4 Populate the Revelation Message with Decoded Clues	7
1.1.5 The Revelation Message to the First Century Christians	7
1.1.6 Summary of Critical Analysis Study Findings	7
1.1.6.1 Context	8
1.1.6.2 Message to the Congregations of the Kingdom of God	9
1.1.6.3 Provide Encouragement to the First Century Christians	10
1.1.6.4 The Kingdom of God Includes all the Faithful From the Old Covenant and the New Covenant	12
1.1.6.5 Satan Will Never Destroy the Kingdom of God (Church)	12
1.1.6.6 Worship God Only	14
1.2 What Is a Decoding Critical Analysis?	14
1.2.1 Summary	14
1.2.2 Examples of How a Critical Analysis Is Applied	14
1.2.3 What’s the Difference Between Decoding and Translation?	15
1.2.3.1 Documentation Food Chain	15
1.2.3.2 Decoding	16
1.2.4 Purpose	17
1.2.5 Basic Elements	17
1.2.6 Iterative Process	18
1.2.7 Determine Codebook	19
1.2.8 Create or Determine Validation/Verification Manual	20
1.2.9 Context	20

1.2.10	Find Root Clues and Related Sub-clues	20
1.2.11	Populate Coded Message With Decoded Elements.....	20
1.2.12	Develop Decoded Message.....	21
1.3	Introduction – The Critical Analysis Used to Decode the Revelation Message	21
1.3.1	Task #1: Start and Sustain CA to Completion	21
1.3.2	Task #2: Initial Effort to Kick Off the CA	21
1.3.3	Task #3: Determine the Codebook Used to Develop the Revelation Message	22
1.3.4	Task #4: Determine the Validation/Verification Manual	22
1.3.5	Task #5: Identify the Coded Elements of the Revelation Message, and Determine Their Significance and Meaning	22
1.3.6	Task #6: Develop the Context of the Revelation Message	23
1.3.7	Task #7: Identify the Secular Context Coded Elements Provided by the Revelation Message.....	23
1.3.8	Task #8: Develop the Final Rules and Tools for Deciphering the Coded Revelation Message Elements	23
1.3.9	Task #9: Develop a Detailed Breakdown of the Revelation Message Into its Parts.....	24
1.3.10	Task #10: Perform a Comparative Analysis on the Revelation Message Material	24
1.3.11	Task #11: From the Clues and Evidence, Decipher the Revelation Message	24
1.3.12	Task #12: Identify and Evaluate the Mainstream Theories, Beliefs, and Doctrines Regarding the Revelation.....	24
1.4	Determine Codebook	25
1.5	Create or Determine Validation/Verification Manual	26
1.5.1	The Gospel as a Systemic Process	26
1.5.2	The Use of the Words – Church, Kingdom, Congregation, and Assembly.....	27
1.6	Context.....	27
1.6.1	Roman History Applicable to the Revelation – Context in Time.....	28
1.6.2	Time Relationships – How Do We Tell the Difference Between a Short and a Long Period of Time?	28
1.7	Root Clues and Related Sub-Root Clues	30
1.7.1	Overview	30
1.7.2	Revelation Clues.....	31

	Root Clue #1: Woman sitting on the many waters and the seven hills/mountains.....	31
	Root Clue #2: The beast with seven heads that are also seven kings.	32
	Root Clue #3: The Great Red Dragon.	32
	Root Clue #4: The ten kings.....	32
	Root Clue #5: Babylon.....	33
	Root Clue #6: The 1,000-year reign and related 1,000- year binding of Satan.	33
	Sub-Root Clue #1: The beast that rose from the sea.	34
	Sub-Root Clue #2: The beast that rose from the earth.....	34
	Sub-Root Clue #3: Mortal wound of the beast from the sea.....	34
	Sub-Root Clue #4: The Mark of the beast.....	34
	Sub-Root Clue #5: Three and one-half years (as used in Revelation 13).....	34
1.7.3	Old Testament Clues.....	35
1.7.4	Secular Clues.....	36
1.7.5	Church vs. Kingdom – Refer to Section 5.2 of Chapter Five for Full Details.....	37
1.8	Identify and Evaluate the Mainstream Theories, Beliefs, and Doctrines Regarding the Revelation Message ...	38
1.8.1	The Mainstream Viewpoints Related to the Revelation.....	39
1.8.2	Conflicts Identified With the NT Message.....	40
1.9	Conclusion.....	41
	Chapter 2—Critical Analysis.....	42
2.0	Introduction.....	43
2.1	Basic Tasks of Bible Study.....	43
2.2	Task #1: Start and Sustain CA to Completion.....	43
2.3	Task #2: Initial Effort to Kick Off the CA.....	44
2.4	Task #3: Determine the Codebook Used to Develop the Revelation Message.....	44
2.5	Task #4: Determine the Validation/Verification Manual.....	45
2.6	Task #5: Identify the Coded Elements of the Revelation Message, and Determine Their Significance and Meaning.....	45
2.7	Task #6: Develop the Context of the Revelation Message.....	45
2.8	Task #7: Identify the Secular Context Coded Elements Provided by the Revelation Message.....	46

2.9	Task #8: Develop the Final Rules and Tools for Deciphering the Coded Revelation Message Elements.....	46
2.10	Task #9: Develop a Detailed Breakdown of the Revelation Message Into Its Parts	46
2.11	Task #10: Perform a Comparative Analysis on the Revelation Message Material	47
2.12	Task #11: From the Clues and Evidence, Decipher the Revelation Message	47
2.13	Task #12: Identify and Evaluate the Mainstream Theories, Beliefs, and Doctrines Regarding the Revelation.....	47
Chapter 3—Critical Analysis Rules and Tools		48
3.0	Critical Analysis Rules and Tools	49
3.1	Introduction	49
3.2	Overview	50
3.3	Basic Principles	50
3.3.1	How Interpretation Fits into Deciphering	51
3.3.2	Critical Analysis Ground Rules.....	52
3.4	Classes of Materials Available to Aid in the Study of Revelation by Priority.....	53
3.4.1	Bible in Original Language (Hebrew and Greek).....	56
3.4.2	Bible in English Language (Word-for-Word Translation)	57
3.4.3	Background Material (Historical/Cultural Works)	57
3.4.4	Primary Study Tools (Concordance, Lexicon, Cross Reference, and Related Materials).....	57
3.4.5	Secondary Study Tools (Commentary, Encyclopedia, etc.)	57
3.5	How Can We Understand Revelation?	57
3.6	Importance of Numbers in Understanding Revelation, or the Rules and Guidelines for the Use of Numbers.....	60
3.6.1	Basic Understanding of Numbers Used in Scripture	63
3.6.1.1	Two = Witness, Confirmation or Strength	64
3.6.1.2	Three = Life, Resurrection, Completeness, God, the Trinity	65
3.6.1.3	Three and One Half = A Broken Seven	66
3.6.1.4	Four = The Entire World, the Earth	67
3.6.1.5	Five = Provision, Fullness, Grace.....	67
3.6.1.6	Six = Man's Incompleteness, Human Will.....	68
3.6.1.7	Seven = Spiritual Perfection, Completeness	69
3.6.1.8	Eight = Renewal or the New Beginning of Something	71
3.6.1.9	Ten = Completeness.....	71

3.6.1.10	Twelve = The 12 Jewish Tribes and the 12 Apostles, Completeness.....	74
3.6.2	The Abuse of Numbers.....	74
3.7	Establish the Context of the Revelation.....	75
Chapter 4—The Codebook.....		77
4.0	Introduction	78
4.1	Key Elements From the OT	79
4.1.1	The Roman Empire and the Kingdom of God	80
4.1.1.1	The Progression of Rome	80
4.1.1.1.1	The Julio-Claudian Dynasty	83
4.1.1.1.2	Augustus Caesar – The First Emperor of The Roman Empire	84
4.1.1.1.3	From Tiberius to Nero	85
4.1.1.1.4	Flavian Dynasty	86
4.1.1.1.4.1	Vespasian.....	86
4.1.1.1.1.2	Titus – Destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple.....	87
4.1.1.1.1.3	Domitian.....	87
4.1.1.2	The Daniel Prophecies Regarding Rome and the Kingdom of God.....	88
4.1.2	God’s Definition of “Many Days” or a “Long Way Off”	94
4.2	Biblical Language Used for the Judgments, Wrath and Destruction of God.....	95
4.2.1	Judgments.....	95
4.2.2	Wrath.....	98
4.2.3	Destruction.....	98
4.3	American Slang.....	98
4.4	Biblical Language Similar to Ours Today.....	100
Chapter 5—The Validation/Verification Manual		102
5.0	Introduction	103
5.1	The Gospel Message of the New Testament That the Revelation Complements.....	103
	Module #1: Jesus was both fully God and fully man:	104
	Module #2: The life of Jesus was an example life for us to follow:.....	104
	Module #3: Plan of Salvation.....	104
	Module #4: Scripture is inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:16-21, and 1 John 4:1-4).....	105

Module #5: Maintenance of the kingdom of God on earth at the congregational level	105
Module #6: Follow God not Man	105
Module #7: The physical death of Jesus:	105
Module #8: The physical resurrection of Jesus and its outcome:	106
Module #9: The resurrection at the end of time:	107
5.2 The Kingdom and Church – Use of Words	108
5.2.1 Introduction	108
5.2.2 Who Are the Followers of Jesus Christ?	108
5.2.2.1 Definition of Church	108
5.2.2.2 Citizens of the Kingdom – Followers of Christ	110
5.2.2.2.1 Definition of the Kingdom of God and Christ	110
5.2.2.2.2 The Nature of the Kingdom	110
5.2.2.2.3 When Was the Kingdom of God Established?	111
Chapter 6—Context of the Revelation	112
6.0 Introduction - Define the Context of the Revelation Message	113
6.1 Context in Time	113
6.1.1 First Century Timeframe	113
6.1.2 How Do We Determine the Time Relationships God Intended for the Revelation?	116
6.1.2.1 God’s Definition of “Many Days Hence”	116
6.1.2.2 The Time Elements of John’s Vision	116
6.2 When Was the Revelation Recorded?	117
General Notes:	
1. The Revelation Was Written During the Reign of Vespasian	121
2. The Three Roman Civil War Kings Precede Vespasian	123
3. The Ten Horns of Revelation 13:1 Are Revealed in Revelation 17.	124
6.2.1 Interim Summary	127
6.2.2 Background Review	128
6.3 The Roman Empire Ruled the World	131
6.3.1 The Romans Acknowledged Many Gods	132
6.3.2 The Roman Emperors Deified Themselves	133
6.3.3 Women Were Second-rate Citizens	133

6.3.4	Slaves Were Viewed As Property Without Recognition of Humanity	133
6.3.5	Christians Were Vilified and Thought of Poorly.....	134
6.3.6	Christians Were Persecuted.....	134
6.4	The Goddess Roma.....	137
6.5	The Seven Hills of Rome.....	138
6.6	Rome Described in the Revelation	139
Chapter 7—Decoding Clues		140
7.0	Introduction	141
7.1	Key Elements.....	141
7.2	Details Leading to Conclusions.....	143
Appendix A – Decoded Key Symbols and Images Database		143
Appendix B – The Angel’s Riddle of the Revelation		143
Appendix C – Clues Database.....		143
Appendix D – The Judgment of Rome.....		143
Appendix E – Message of Comfort and Encouragement.....		143
Appendix F – Database of the Revelation Symbology and Imagery		144
Appendix G – Critical Analysis Process Flow Diagram.....		144
Chapter 8—Mainstream Theories on the Revelation		145
8.0	Introduction	146
8.1	Major Viewpoints	146
8.1.1	Current Systems of Interpretation Used.....	146
8.1.1.1	Preterism.....	148
8.1.1.2	Historicism	150
8.1.1.3	Futurism	151
8.1.1.4	Idealism	152
8.1.1.5	Eclectic	153
8.1.1.6	Allegory.....	153
8.1.2	Revelation Points of Contention in Interpretation.....	154
8.2	Points of Contention in Interpreting the Revelation – True or False?	155
8.2.1	Resurrection and Judgment and the Lordship of Jesus	155
8.2.1.1	Resurrection	156
	John 5:28-30 –.....	156

	2 Peter 3:10-12 –	157
	1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 –	158
	Matthew 24:36-44 –	158
	Matthew 25:13 –	159
	Mark 13:32-37 –	160
	Luke 12:39-40 –	160
	Luke 21:34-36 –	160
	1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 –	161
	Revelation 16:15 –	161
8.2.1.2	Judgment.....	161
	Matthew 25:31-46 –	162
	Acts 17:27-31 –	163
	John 5:22-23 –	164
	John 5:24 –	164
	John 5:30 –	165
	2 Timothy 4:1-2 –	165
8.2.1.3	Lordship of Jesus.....	165
	Acts 10:34-43 –	165
	Romans 14:7-9 –	166
	Luke 1:30-33 –	167
	Ephesians 1:17-23 –	167
	John 18:33-37 –	168
	Colossians 1:15-18 –	168
8.2.1.4	Findings.....	169
8.2.2	The Kingdom/the Church.....	170
	Acts 2:1-4 –	170
	Matthew 4:23 –	171
	Matthew 6:31-34 –	171
	Matthew 16:13-20 –	172
	Acts 2:41-47 –	173
	Matthew 16:27-28 –	173
	Mark 9:1 –	174
	Matthew 26:26-29 –	174
	Luke 24:25-53 –	175
	Acts 10:34-43 –	177
	Mark 14:22-25 –	178
8.2.1.4	Luke 1:30-33 –	179

Acts 8:1-3 –	180
Acts 14:23-28 –	180
Isaiah 9:6-7 –	181
Acts 20:17 –	181
Acts 20:28 –	182
Ephesians 1:17-23 –	182
1 Timothy 3:15-16 –	183
Luke 4:40-44 –	183
Luke 8:1-3 –	184
Luke 8:10 –	185
Luke 9:1-2 –	185
Luke 9:27 –	185
Luke 9:60 –	185
Luke 10:1-12 – The Mission of the Seventy –	186
Luke 11:20 –	187
Luke 12:31-32 –	187
Luke 13:18-21 –	187
Luke 14:15 –	188
Luke 16:16 –	188
Luke 17:20-21 –	188
Luke 18:17 –	189
Luke 19:9-11 –	189
Luke 22:14-18 –	189
1 Corinthians 15:20-28 –	190
Luke 23:50-51 –	191
John 18:33-37 –	191
Acts 8:12 –	192
Acts 14:22 –	192
Acts 28:30-31 –	192
1 Corinthians 6:9-10 –	192
1 Corinthians 15:50-58 –	193
Ephesians 5:5 –	194
Colossians 1:12-18 –	194
Colossians 3:1 – 4	195
1 Thessalonians 2:12 –	195
2 Thessalonians 1:3-12 –	195
2 Timothy 4:1 –	196

	2 Timothy 4:18 –	197
	2 Peter 1:11 –	197
	Revelation 1:9 –	197
8.2.3	The Millennium.....	198
	John 5:22-30 –	198
	Daniel 12:2 –	199
	1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 –	199
	Matthew 16:27-28 –	200
	Mark 9:1 –	200
	Matthew 26:26-29 –	200
	Mark 14:22-25 –	201
	Luke 1:30-33 –	201
	Ephesians 1:17-23 –	202
	Luke 9:1-2 –	203
	Luke 9:27 –	203
	Luke 17:20-21 –	203
	John 18:33-37 –	204
	Acts 14:22 –	205
	2 Thessalonians 1:3-12 –	205
	2 Timothy 4:1 –	206
	John 5:22-30 –	206
	Finally, From John in Revelation.....	207
	Revelation 1:9 –	207
8.2.4	Jesus Is King Now, or He Isn't	209
	Hebrews 1:1-3 –	209
	John 18:33-37 –	210
	Jeremiah 23:5-6 –	210
	Daniel 7:13-14 –	211
	Hebrews 10:11-18 –	211
8.2.5	The Kingdom; Is It a Spiritual Kingdom or a Physical Kingdom?	212
	Romans 8:1 –	212
	Luke 17:20-21 –	212
	John 18:33-37 –	213
	1 Corinthians 15:50-54 –	213
8.2.6	What Was/Is the Nature of the Sacrifice of Jesus?.....	214
8.2.6.1	Did Jesus' Sacrifice End Animal Sacrifice or Not?	214

	Acts 20:28 –	214
	Hebrews 1:1-3 –	214
	Hebrews 10:1-18 -	215
8.2.6.2	Did Jesus’ Sacrifice End the Old Law or Not?	217
	Hebrews 10:8-10 -	217
	Hebrews 10:11-18 -	217
8.2.6.3	Did Jesus End the Levitical Priesthood of Not; Will It Return or Not?	218
	Hebrews 10:8-10	218
	Hebrews 7:11 Beginning –	219
	Need for a New Priesthood.....	219
	Greatness of the New Priest	220
	Hebrews 8	221
	The New Priestly Service	221
	A New Covenant.....	221
	Hebrews 9	222
	The Earthly Sanctuary	222
	Limitations of the Earthly Service	223
	The Heavenly Sanctuary	223
	The Mediator’s Death Necessary	224
	Greatness of Christ’s Sacrifice	224
	Hebrews 10:1-25.....	225
	Animal Sacrifices Insufficient.....	225
	Christ’s Death Fulfills God’s Will.....	225
	Christ’s Death Perfects the Sanctified	226
	Hold Fast Your Confession	227
8.2.7	Who/What is the Anti-Christ?	227
8.2.7.1	From Wikipedia – Beginning Quote	227
8.2.7.1.1	Etymology	228
8.2.7.1.2	History of the Doctrine	228
8.2.7.2	From the Bible	228
	1 John 2:18-23 –	229
	Deceptions of the Last Hour:.....	229
	2 John 1:7-11 –	229
	Beware of Antichrist Deceivers:	229
	1 John 4:1-6 –	230
	2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 –	231

8.2.8	Rapture (Taken from Wikipedia)	232
8.3	Critical Analysis Conclusion	233
Chapter 9—The Decoded Elements of the Revelation		236
9.0	Introduction	237
9.1	Preamble to Revelation: Revelation 1:1-20	238
9.2	Letters to Seven Churches (Congregations): Revelation 2:1-3:22.....	243
9.3	An Open Door: Revelation 4:1-11	244
9.4	The Scroll with Seven Seals: Revelation 5:1-8:1	247
9.4.1	The Giving of the Scroll by Father God to Jesus, the Lamb.....	247
9.4.2	Jesus, the Lamb, Opens the Seals.....	250
9.4.3	The Sealing of the Servants of God	253
9.4.4	The Opening of the Seventh Seal	256
9.5	The Seven Trumpet Blasts: Revelation 8:2-11:19	257
	The First Woe ends with the fifth trumpet	257
	The Second Woe is finished with the sixth trumpet.....	263
9.5.1	The Little Book That John Ate.....	266
9.5.2	John Is Told to Measure the Temple of God With a Reed.....	271
9.5.3	The Two Witnesses of God.....	273
9.6	The Woman, Child, and Dragon: Revelation 12:1-17	281
	The Great Red Dragon Appears	282
9.7	The Two Beasts: Revelation 13:1-18	291
	The Mark of the Beast	301
9.8	Mount Zion: Revelation 14:1-20	303
	Babylon is Fallen	307
9.9	The Seven Last Plagues: Revelation 15:1-16:21	314
	The Symbolic Battle of Armageddon.....	331
	The Third Woe ends with the Seventh Trumpet and the Seventh Vial/Bowl	333
9.10	The Fall of Babylon: Revelation 17:1-19:5	336
9.10.1	An Angel Shows John the Great Whore, Sitting on the Beast From the Sea	338
9.10.2	The Angel's Riddle of the Beasts and the Woman (the Whore/Harlot).....	340
	The Kings of the Earth grieve at the burning/ destruction of Rome	352

	The Merchants of the Earth mourn the destruction of Rome	353
	The Shipmasters and all who made trade by sea mourned the destruction of Rome.....	355
9.11	Marriage of the Lamb: Revelation 19:6-16.....	361
9.12	The Enemies of God Destroyed: Revelation 19:17-20:15	369
	The beast from the sea and the beast from the earth (the false prophet) cast into the lake of fire – the second death.....	371
9.12.1	Locked Away	373
9.12.2	The Faithful Followers of Christ, Victorious Over Rome, Reign With Christ	375
9.12.3	Satan Released to Deceive the Nations – God Vows to Protect His Kingdom.....	379
9.13	New Heaven and Earth: Rev 21:1-22:5	384
	The Angel shows John the Kingdom of God (the church) ...	390
9.14	Conclusion: Revelation 22:6-21	400
	Chapter 10—The Revelation Decoded.....	408
10.0	Introduction	409
	Revelation Chapter 1	410
	Revelation Chapter 2	412
	Revelation Chapter 3	415
	Revelation Chapter 4	418
	Revelation Chapter 5	420
	Revelation Chapter 6	422
	Revelation Chapter 7	424
	Revelation Chapter 8	426
	Revelation Chapter 9	428
	Revelation Chapter 10.....	430
	Revelation Chapter 11.....	432
	Revelation Chapter 12	435
	Revelation Chapter 13	437
	Revelation Chapter 14.....	440
	Revelation Chapter 15.....	443
	Revelation Chapter 16.....	445
	Revelation Chapter 17: The Angel’s Riddle.....	448
	Revelation Chapter 18.....	451

Revelation Chapter 19	454
Revelation Chapter 20	457
Revelation Chapter 21	459
Revelation Chapter 22	462
Chapter 11—Commentary on the Revelation	464
11.0 Introduction	465
11.1 Purpose	465
11.2 Commentary	465
11.3 Revelation by Subject	466
11.3.1 Introduction	466
11.3.2 Importance of the Old Testament in Understanding the Revelation	468
11.3.2.1 The Revelation’s Relationship With the Old Testament	469
11.3.2.2 The Book of Daniel and Its Connection With the Revelation	469
11.3.2.2.1 God Defines With Daniel the Timeframe “Many Days in the Future.”	469
11.3.2.2.2 When Was the Revelation Written?	470
11.3.2.2.3 Daniel’s Prophecies Regarding Rome	471
11.3.2.2.4 The Judgment of Rome	476
11.3.3 Importance of the New Testament in Understanding the Revelation	477
11.3.4 Revelation Decoded by Subject	478
11.3.4.1 The Preamble	479
Rev 1:1-3	479
Rev 1:4-5	480
Rev 1:6	482
Rev 1:7	483
Rev 1:8	484
Rev 1:9-11	484
Rev 1:17-20	489
11.3.4.2 The Seven Churches (Congregations of The Kingdom) – (Revelation 2:1-3:22)	490
11.3.4.2.1 The Letter to Ephesus – The Loveless Church (Congregation)	492
Rev 2:1-7	492

11.3.4.2.2	The Letter to Smyrna – The Persecuted Church (Congregation)	494
	Rev 2:8-11	494
11.3.4.2.3	The Letter to Pergamum – The Compromising Church (Congregation)	495
	Rev 2:12-17	496
11.3.4.2.4	The Letter to Thyatira – The Corrupt Church (Congregation)	497
	Rev 2:18-29	497
11.3.4.2.5	The Letter to Sardis – The Dead Church (Congregation) ...	499
	Rev 3:1-6	499
11.3.4.2.6	The Letter to Philadelphia – The Faithful Church (Congregation)	500
	Rev 3:7-13	501
11.3.4.2.7	The Letter to Laodicea – The Lukewarm Church (Congregation)	502
	Rev 3:14-22	502
11.3.4.3	An Open Door (Revelation 4:1-11)	504
	Rev 4:1	504
	Rev 4:2-3	505
	Rev 4:4	505
	Rev 4:5-6a	507
	Rev 4:6b-8	508
	Rev 4:9-11	511
11.3.4.4	The Scroll With Seven Seals (Revelation 5:1-8:2).....	512
	Rev 5:1	512
	Rev 5:2-5	512
	Rev 5:6-8.....	513
	Rev 5:9-10	514
	Rev 5:11-14.....	514
	Rev 6:1-2	515
	Rev 6:3-4	515
	Rev 6:5-6	516
	Rev 6:7-8.....	516
	Rev 6:9-11	516
	Rev 6:12-17	519
	Rev 7: General Note	520
	Rev 7:1-3	521

	Rev 7:4-8.....	521
	Rev 7:9-12.....	521
	Rev 7:13-17	522
	Rev 8:1-2	522
11.3.4.5	The Seven Trumpet Blasts (Revelation 8:2 – 11:19).....	522
	Rev 8:2-6	522
	Rev 8:7	523
	Rev 8:8-9.....	523
	Rev 8:10-11	524
	Rev 8:12	524
	Rev 8:13	524
	Rev 9:1-2	524
	Rev 9:3-12.....	525
	Rev 9:13-19	525
	Rev 9:20-21	526
	Rev 10.....	526
	Rev 10:1-3	526
	Rev 10:4-7.....	526
	Rev 10:8-11	527
	Rev 11	528
	Rev 11:1-4	528
	Rev 11:5-8.....	529
	Rev 11:9-10	530
	Rev 11:11-14.....	531
	Rev 11:15.....	532
	Rev 11:16-19.....	533
11.3.4.6	The Woman, Child, and Dragon (Revelation 12:1-17)	534
	Rev 12:1-2	535
	Rev 12:3-4	535
	Rev 12:5-6.....	542
	Rev 12:7-9.....	543
	Rev 12:10-11.....	544
	Rev 12:12	544
	Rev 12:13-17.....	544
11.3.4.7	The Two Beasts (Revelation 13:1-18).....	546
	Rev 13:1-2	546
	Rev 13:3	547

	Rev 13:4	549
	Rev 13:5-10	549
	Rev 13:11-12	551
	Rev 13:13-15	552
	Rev 13:16-18	552
11.3.4.8	Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1-20)	552
	Rev 14:1-5	553
	Rev 14:6-7	554
	Rev 14:8	554
	Rev 14:9-12	554
	Rev 14:13-16	555
	Rev 14:17-20	555
11.3.4.9	The Seven Last Plagues (Revelation 15:1-16:21)	555
	Rev 15:1	556
	Rev 15:2-4	556
	Rev 15:5-8	557
	Rev 16:1-2	557
	Rev 16:3	558
	Rev 16:4-7	558
	Rev 16:8-9	559
	Rev 16:10-11	559
	Rev 16:12	559
	Rev 16:13-15	559
	Rev 16:16	560
	Rev 16:17	560
	Rev 16:18-21	561
11.3.4.10	The Fall of Babylon (Revelation 17:1-19:5)	561
	Rev 17:1-2	562
	Rev 17:3-6a	563
	Rev 17:6b-7	563
	Rev 17:8	563
	Rev 17:9-11	564
	Rev 17:12-18	564
	Rev 18:1-2	565
	Rev 18:3	565
	Rev 18:4-5	565
	Rev 18:6-8	566

	Rev 18:9-10	566
	Rev 18:11-17a.....	566
	Rev 18:17b-19.....	566
	Rev 18:20	567
	Rev 18:21-24	567
	Rev 19:1-5	567
11.3.4.11	Marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-16).....	568
	Rev 19:6-10	569
	Rev 19:11-13.....	570
	Rev 19:14-15	570
	Rev 19:16	572
11.3.4.12	The Enemies of God Destroyed (Revelation 19:17 – 20:15).....	572
	Rev 19:17-18.....	572
	Rev 19:19-21	573
	Rev 20:1-3	574
	Rev 20:4	577
	Rev 20:5-6	579
	Rev 20:7-10	580
	Rev 20:11-15.....	581
11.3.4.13	New Heaven and Earth (Revelation 21:1 – 22:5).....	582
	Rev 21:1	583
	Rev 21:2-4.....	584
	Rev 21:5-8.....	584
	Rev 21:9	584
	Rev 21:10-14.....	585
	Rev 21:15-21.....	586
	Rev 21:22-27	586
	Rev 22:1-2	587
	Rev 22:3-5.....	587
11.3.4.14	Conclusion (Revelation 22:6-21).....	588
	Rev 22:6-7.....	588
	Rev 22:8-9.....	589
	Rev 22:10-15	589
	Rev 22:16-17	590
	Rev 22:18-19	590
	Rev 22:20-21	590
Appendix A	—Decoded Key Symbols and Images Database.....	593

Exhibit #1: The seven spirits, which are before His throne	594
Exhibit #2: Tribulation (as used in the Revelation).....	595
Exhibit #3: Kingdom.....	596
Exhibit #4: Candlesticks/Lampstands, seven, golden.....	597
Exhibit #5: Seven Stars.....	599
Exhibit #6: The Synagogue of Satan.	600
Exhibit #7: Ten (10) days.....	601
Exhibit #8: Second death.	602
Exhibit #9: Satan's seat/throne.....	603
Exhibit #10: dwell upon the earth, Them that.....	604
Exhibit #11: New Jerusalem.....	605
Exhibit #12: 24 Elders.....	606
Exhibit #13: Seven Lamps of Fire, the Seven Spirits of God.	607
Exhibit #14: Sea: of water or of Glass.....	608
Exhibit #15: Four beasts (before the throne of God).....	609
Exhibit #16: A White Horse (of the four horsemen) - the first seal.	610
Exhibit #17: A Red Horse (of the four horsemen) - the second seal.....	611
Exhibit #18: A Black Horse (of the four horsemen) - the third seal.....	612
Exhibit #20: 144,000 sealed.....	614
Exhibit #21: Wormwood.....	615
Exhibit #22: A star fallen from heaven - the fifth trumpet.....	616
Exhibit #23: The Little Book (that John ate).....	617
Exhibit #24: Two Witnesses (Two Olive Trees + Two Candlesticks) - also called Two Prophets.....	618
Exhibit #25: The Beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit (Domitian, the eighth king).....	619
Exhibit #26: The Great City (which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also the Lord was crucified).....	620
Exhibit #27: A thousand two hundred and threescore days (1,260 days); or, 42 months, also three and one-half years.....	621
Exhibit #28: Three and one-half days.....	622
Exhibit #29: Woman w/child clothed w/the sun, the moon under her feet, & a crown of 12 stars.	623
Exhibit #30: A great red dragon, having 7 heads and 10 horns, and 7 crowns upon his heads; also the serpent (Rev 12:9).....	625

Exhibit #31: Stars of heaven that were cast down to earth by the dragon.....	626
Exhibit #32: Flood, water from the serpent toward the woman (the kingdom).....	627
Exhibit #33: The Beast from the Sea (also the Beast that ascended from the Bottomless Pit).....	628
Exhibit #34: Those that dwell in heaven.....	629
Exhibit #35: Power over all kindreds, tongues, and nations; or, many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.....	630
Exhibit #36: Beast from the earth (also called the false prophet).....	631
Exhibit #37: Lamb.....	632
Exhibit #38: Mark of the beast.....	633
Exhibit #39: The number of the beast (the number of man, 666).....	634
Exhibit #40: Babylon.....	635
Exhibit #41: The Great Whore/Harlot: that sits on the waters, and the 7 mountains; she is also the woman sitting on the “scarlet colored beast” (the beast from the sea).....	636
Exhibit #42: The riddle of the emperors: Refer to Symbol/Image numbers 42a through 42h for each part of the riddle.	637
Exhibit #42a: The riddle of the emperors: Beast that was.....	638
Exhibit #42b: The riddle of the emperors: Beast that is not.....	639
Exhibit #42c: The riddle of the emperors: The” beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven” shall “ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go to perdition.”.....	640
Exhibit #42d: The riddle of the emperors: The “seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth” and “there are seven kings: five are fallen.....	641
Exhibit #42e: The riddle of the emperors: ...and one is... ..	642
Exhibit #42f: The riddle of the emperors: ...and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.”.....	643
Exhibit #42g: The riddle of the emperors: And “the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.”.....	644
Exhibit #43: Ten horns,.....	645
Exhibit #44: One hour.....	646
Exhibit #45: Armageddon; “the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”.....	647
Exhibit #46: 1,000 years.....	648

Exhibit #47: A little season or a little while.....	651
Exhibit #48: TIME:.....	652
Exhibit #49: Gog and Magog.....	653
Exhibit #50: A new heaven and a new earth.....	654
Appendix B—The Angel’s Riddle of the Revelation	656
1.0 Overview Study:.....	656
How Revelation 11:7, 12:3-17, 13:1-18, 16:13-16, 17:1-18, 18:2, 19:20, and 20:10 are related:.....	656
1.1 Cultural Identification of Rome – The Great Whore.....	656
1.2 Ramifications of the Roman Culture.....	657
1.3 The Civil Government and the Religious Identification of Rome – The Beasts	658
1.4 How the Symbology and Imagery Work Together	660
1.5 The Client Kingdoms of Rome	662
2.0 The Angel’s Riddle	663
3.0 Discussion:.....	666
4.0 Support to the Riddle.....	669
Appendix C—Clues Database.....	673
Preface	673
Root Clue #1: Woman (whore/harlot) sitting on the many waters and the seven hills/mountains	674
Root Clue #2: The beast with seven heads that are also seven kings.....	677
Root Clue #3: The Great Red Dragon	685
Root Clue #4: The ten kings.....	687
Root Clue #5: Babylon	690
Sub-Root Clue #1: The beast that rose from the sea	691
Sub-Root Clue #2: The beast that rose from the earth.....	692
Sub-Root Clue #3: Mortal wound of the beast from the sea – one of its heads suffered a mortal wound.....	694
Sub-Root Clue #4: The Mark of the beast.....	696
Sub-Root Clue #5: Three and one-half years (as used in Rev 13)....	698
Root Clue #6: The 1,000-year reign and related 1,000-year binding of Satan.....	699
Appendix D—The Judgment of Rome	703
The Revelation message that reveals that God has placed a judgment on the Roman Empire.....	703

Appendix E—Message of Comfort and Encouragement 715
 The Revelation message that provides comfort and
 encouragement to the first century Christian community..... 715
Appendix F—Database of the Revelation Symbology and Imagery..... 743
Appendix G—Critical Analysis Process Flow Diagram..... 764
About the Author777
New Releases Coming779

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P R E F A C E

This book holds the results of a Critical Analysis (CA) that was accomplished on the book of Revelation as a decoding effort. The purpose was to decipher the extensive symbology and imagery used by Jesus Christ, through the Apostle John, to communicate with the first century Christian audience. They were enduring a considerable amount of persecution that varied in its intensity throughout the first century from both the Jews and Romans in the early part of the century to primarily the Romans, after the 69 to 70 AD timeframe.

There are basically six major sets of beliefs or theories regarding the Revelation message. They are all vastly different and therefore cannot all be correct. From personal research, I was not able to locate any attempt to accomplish a CA type decoding effort on the book of Revelation (the Revelation). Based on my twenty years of experience in the Department of Defense (DoD) contractual efforts, performing CA successfully, I decided to inflict a CA on the Revelation.

There are several key points that, when recognized and applied to this CA effort, make a significant difference in the understanding of the Revelation message:

- ❖ Recognize that the Revelation was for the first century Christian audience *first*. Once we know what the message was to those beleaguered souls, we can then determine how the message applies to all generations that follow.
- ❖ The Revelation, as part of the New Testament, must be in harmony with the other books of the New Testament, and not in conflict with them. Remember, Jesus taught His Apostles, to include the Apostle John, what ultimately became the writings of the New Testament. The Revelation, also from Jesus, must, by basic logic, not be in conflict with what He taught earlier while still on this earth.
- ❖ To unravel and unpack the Revelation, we must use the Old Testament as a guide. The Revelation and the Old Testament cannot be separated in terms of many prophecies and issues of the Old

Testament that are resolved and revealed in the Revelation, not the least of which are many symbols and images in the Revelation that came directly from the Old Testament, and in particular, the book of Daniel.

- ❖ The use of the number 1,000 in the Revelation message must be understood as a symbolic number as used in the Old Testament, to show a state of affairs.
- ❖ Understanding timeframes is important. What is a long time off and what is a short time? Time is meaningless to God from God's point of view. However, God understands that man lives with time and knows time as it relates to mankind. We must be careful when we see time references that we know how to determine whatever differences there may be in the application of those time references. What is literal and what is symbolic or, what is only an image.
- ❖ We know that the Revelation is coded. We are told as much in Revelation 1:19-20; 17:1-2, 7-18; and 21:9-10. Recognizing this fact is important. There is a difference between decoding a message and translating a message. A coded message can be translated into any number of different languages. However, in whatever language the coded message resides, it is still coded and must be decoded.

My approach for serving up the results of this CA, is to give you a brief overview of the many details first and then provide you an increasing amount of expansion to those details as you go through the document. There is so much to digest, this appeared to be the best way to play it out; rather than just ask you to “open wide” and then open the fire hose on you. This document is not laid out like most commentaries. It is more of a study. You will need to arm yourself with some writing materials for notes and possibly some sticky notes. There is a commentary. It is chapter 11. Before you get to that chapter, you will need all that precedes it. Don't get in a hurry. Your patience will be rewarded.

God Bless.

CHAPTER 1

Study Guide and Overview

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1.0 Study Guide and Overview

This document holds the results of a critical analysis (CA) decoding effort performed on the book of Revelation (the Revelation). The document layout is designed to provide to you, the reader, a vision of the detailed approach applied to the CA, in order to decode the message of the Revelation directed to the first century Christians, the primary audience. If you skipped the Preface, please go to it and read it.

This chapter 1 provides an overview of the effort as well as a study guide for the consumption of the CA results. Before going any further, you need to know that this book is not laid out like most commentaries. It is, in fact, a study. In addition, the findings are all justified with scripture, not the theories or opinions of other, non-biblical sources.

Chapter 11 of this document is a commentary, derived from the results of the CA. This total document, including the appendices, provides you the significant intermediate and final output materials developed from the CA and the basic guidelines used to perform the CA. The intent is for you to eventually get to chapter 11, but to get there in steps. You need to know and understand a sizeable amount of material before you jump into the commentary. The backup materials to the commentary will allow you to understand how the commentary came to be. I have broken all the CA outputs down into groups for your review as you go along, in order for you to develop an understanding of the final results of the CA. There are a large number of intermediary study outputs that have been left out, but summarized in the outputs you will find throughout the document. If all the CA intermediary documentation had been included this document would have been many times its current size. The difficulty with any study of the Revelation boils down to the requirement to look at the book of Revelation as a whole while breaking it down into its parts. That is, the study of its parts in order to decode the Revelation message must be accompanied by a parallel, iterative overview study of the whole book. In addition, the context of the Revelation is very important.

I have used the King James Version (KJV) for this effort. Although there are later translations than the KJV, some have taken liberties in their translation that I did not want to include. For example, Revelation 17:1

tells us the great whore “Sitteth *upon* many waters.” in the KJV. The New International Version (NIV) tells us the great prostitute “Sits *by* many waters.” which changes the meaning significantly as you will see in the CA. You can, of course, compare your favorite translation of the Bible to what I have presented if it will make it easier for you. It would not have mattered which version I could have chosen, it would not be the favorite of everyone.

1.1 Introduction

This CA of the book of Revelation (the Revelation) is the first in a series of critical analysis efforts, whose purpose is to show a systematic analytical approach to Bible study, as well as imparting the information that results from a CA. I fully admit that the Revelation falls into a worst-case category and requires more analysis than possibly any other book in the New Testament (NT). However, when you finish absorbing the material generated and the outcome, I think you can see how variations of this approach can be useful in your Bible study efforts. I, your author, am presenting this document much like writing a letter to you. It is my sincere wish that this document and the series that it is a part of will bring you the peace of God our Father and confidence in Bible study.

I have been a student of the Bible throughout my life, with the Revelation being limited because of the difficulty in making any sense of most of it, and the large volume of documentation available to explain the Revelation that is more confusing than the Revelation itself. While in the Department of Defense (DoD) contract world, I prosecuted a number of significant CAs in my professional career, where, in some cases, life and death decisions depended on the outcome. I decided to inflict a CA on the Revelation just to see how it would turn out. The results, I am certain, you will find interesting.

My strong recommendation to you is to finish reading this Study Guide and Overview (chapter 1), then read the KJV of the Revelation at least once before studying chapters 2 through 10, and before you get into chapter 11. It is human nature to want to go to the end of a document to see how it turned out. Resist this if you can. The chapters that precede chapter 11 will provide you with the classical “what, why, where, when, who, which (in some cases), and the how” that you need in order to understand chapter 11.

Chapter 9 shows you how the outcome of the CA elements, the deciphered symbols and images, fit into the KJV of the Revelation, to make it

understandable. Chapter 10 is the final result in the decoded Revelation message.

In the course of this study and its related CA, I found that the Revelation has been studied, quoted, misquoted, used and abused by many. There are a wide variety of positions that have been taken down through the years and they are all different, vastly different. They cannot all be correct because they are so different.

Possibly, one of the many positions is correct, but which one? If none of the positions are correct, then what does the Revelation say, and to whom, and for what purpose? And how does it apply to us today, if at all? Possibly, is it relevant? Most important, does it matter what we believe regarding the Revelation, or can we just agree to disagree on any of the several points of view, positions, and theories? Remember, they are all different.

First, it must be recognized that the Revelation is a coded message that requires decoding. We know that the Revelation was coded by verses within it that tell us as much; look at these examples:

- ❖ Rev 1:19-20 – Jesus tells John the meaning of the seven stars and the seven candlesticks.
- ❖ Rev 17:1-2 – One of the seven angels tells John he will explain the great whore and her judgment.
- ❖ Rev 17:7-18 – The angel of verses 1-2, now explains to John the mystery of the woman (great whore) and the beast that she is sitting on.
- ❖ Rev 21:9-10 – One of the seven angels explains/shows John the bride, the Lamb's wife.

To decode the message requires a decoding CA. To date, a true CA of the Revelation has not been accomplished. Or, if one has been done, it was either difficult to impossible to locate or never published. This is not to say that some very good commentaries have not been accomplished on the book. There are some that are quite good at supporting their positions. However, in order to determine which commentaries are valid and which are not (in the eyes of critical believers), an approach is needed to garner the truth such that bias is eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level. So, how on earth do we do that? We do it through a well-structured CA. In particular, a decoding CA effort is required.

As you go forward, remember that you are entering a study, not a commentary. Don't let the volume of details necessary to reach the end

goals get you down. Take it slow and easy and keep your Bible, notepad, and writing instrument at the ready.

1.1.1 Bible Documentation Food Chain

In order to provide a perspective on where a decoding CA appears on the documentation food chain, review the following diagram.

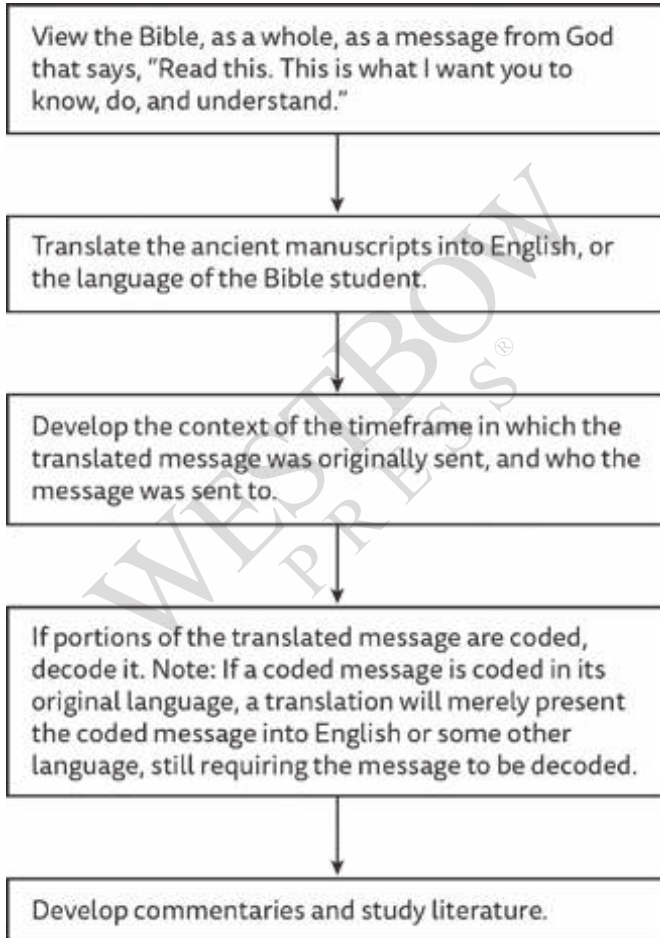


Figure 1-1: Bible Documentation Food Chain

The following brief is provided to assist you in navigating this document. The table of contents presents an outline, and each chapter, starting with this chapter, provides information in progressively more detail. The purpose

for this approach is to help you digest the information in steps, and at the same time it will help you build a relationship in your mind that gives you insight into the CA that was prosecuted to reach my conclusions.

You can use the table of contents to jump around in the document if you wish. However, you will get far more out of this effort if you go through it once as it is laid out. Once you have been through this entire study guide and overview (chapter 1) from start to finish, read the Revelation through and study the chapters that follow. The table of contents then becomes useful for going back to specifics you wish to spend more time on.

The paragraph/section numbering used is to help you, as you take notes, to be able to come back to specific points in the document as you proceed. Notice that the first number of each paragraph/section begins with the chapter number in which it resides.

1.1.2 What Is a Decoding Critical Analysis (CA)?

A decoding CA is an iterative process that seeks to decipher a coded document. The process involves research and analysis of the context surrounding the coded document, analysis of the coded document itself, determining the codebook used, determining if there is a validation/verification (Val/Ver) manual or not, and ultimately determining the clues to allow the coded document to be deciphered. The Val/Ver will be explained later.

1.1.3 Determine Root Clues for Decoding

When we have become familiar with the layout and organization of the Revelation, we need to determine the Root Clues needed to decipher the Revelation message. A careful review of the Revelation reveals that chapter 17 includes some valuable information necessary for us to begin identifying the Root Clues. In fact, chapter 17 of the Revelation is the key to the entire book of Revelation.

A Root Clue is a clue that allows us to determine the meaning of the symbolism and imagery used to create the Revelation. In some cases a Root Clue will provide insight to the discovery of secondary clues that we will call Sub-Root Clues and Sub-clues. There will be further discussion on the Root Clue determination effort in the Step #4, discussion, of section 1.2.6, when you get to it.

The iterative review of the Revelation will also tell us that the Old Testament (OT) contains the symbology and imagery used in the Revelation. Root Clues will come from the Revelation itself, the OT, and secular history. Secular history provides us with context related to the first century Christians' situation regarding the culture, society, religions, government, economy, and etc. There is more discussion when you get to Step #3 of section 1.2.6.

1.1.4 Populate the Revelation Message with Decoded Clues

Once we have accumulated all the clues we need to decipher the Revelation message, we will make a trial replacement of coded symbols and images with the decoded elements. The resultant trial message will allow us to validate the message with the books of the NT to see if we have any disparities. If we have any issues to deal with we will work them out for a final set of decoded elements and a final rendition of the Revelation message. The trial fit effort is shown finalized in chapter 9. The final version of the decoded Revelation message is in chapter 10.

1.1.5 The Revelation Message to the First Century Christians

The ultimate goal of this effort was to create the results found in chapter 10 and chapter 11. How we got there is reflected in the paragraphs/sections that follow. Remember, the Revelation message was for the consumption of the first century Christians, first. How it applies to all subsequent generations (including us) comes next.

1.1.6 Summary of Critical Analysis Study Findings

The Revelation message can be summarized in six parts:

- ❖ Context.
- ❖ Message to the congregations of the kingdom of God (the seven churches of the Roman Province of Asia).
- ❖ Provide encouragement to the first century Christians; God had not forgotten them.
- ❖ The kingdom of God includes all the faithful from the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, and is open to all who will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior and follow Him.

- ❖ Satan will never destroy the kingdom of God (church).
- ❖ Worship God only.

As you go through this CA study, you will see these emerge.

1.1.6.1 Context

Context Information provided by John is broken down and added to selected secular context information found in chapter 6. Below are some excerpts that more or less summarize the context as a whole:

- ❖ The so-called Great Tribulation by some commentaries, I would argue is the persecution experienced by the first century Christians at the hands of the Romans. What else could be any worse than what those poor souls were enduring? (Rev 1:6 and 9)
- ❖ The kingdom of God already existed in the first century, and at the time John recorded the Revelation. (Rev 1:6 and 9)
- ❖ John was on the Isle of Patmos, a Roman penal island, because he witnessed for Christ. (Rev 1:9-10)
- ❖ We know the specific emperors of Rome that were significant to the Revelation message:
 - ◆ Augustus (31 BC - AD 14) — Luke 2:1
 - ◆ Tiberius (14 AD - 37 AD) — Luke 3:1 and John 19:15
 - ◆ Caligula (37 - 41)
 - ◆ Claudius (51-54) — Acts 11:28
 - ◆ Nero (54 - 68) — Acts 25:11 — (Nero beheaded the Apostle Paul)
 - ◆ Vespasian (69 - 79) – Emperor when John recorded the Revelation
 - ◆ Titus (79 - 81) – Before he was emperor (following his father's reign), he was a Roman general. Titus fulfilled the words of Jesus in Matthew 24, when he destroyed the Temple, Jerusalem, and scattered the Jewish Nation.
 - ◆ Domitian (81 - 96) – Ruled twice, 6 months in 69-70 and 81-96
- ❖ We know that the Revelation is a judgment against Rome and that the language used is similar to, but is not specifically depicting, the final judgment:
 - ◆ She is powerful (17:1, 3) – Rome!

- ◆ She is successful (17:4) – Rome!
- ◆ She is arrogant and proud (17:5) – Rome!
- ◆ She sits on seven hills (17:9) – Rome!
- ◆ She rules the world in John's day (17:15, 18) – Rome!
- ◆ She is a terrible persecutor of God's people (17:6; 18:24) – Rome!
- ◆ She is the leading commercial power on earth (18:3; 18:11-19) – Rome!
- ◆ She is supported by a great military force (17:3, 7) – Rome!
- ◆ She is destroyed in part by her own military power and inner strife (17:16-17) – Rome!

Let me give you an example of how important context is. When we read in Matthew 5:41, regarding the act of going the extra mile, it referred to the Roman law that if a Roman soldier told someone to carry his gear, they had to carry that gear for one mile. Jesus told his followers to not only carry the load one mile, carry it two miles to show love for the enemy and to show that Christians are good people and should not be looked upon as some despicable group to be persecuted. This concept applies to us in a different context. We too should show kindness and love to the sinful world we live in, so as to cause the world to take a positive notice of Christ followers. The meaning is applicable in a timeless manner. However, the context is different in that we don't have the Romans telling us today that we must carry a soldier's gear a mile (although there are some Christians living in some countries where it would apply directly).

1.1.6.2 Message to the Congregations of the Kingdom of God

The message to the congregations of God's kingdom was, in short; they were to clean up and maintain their individual assemblies. Jesus would take care of the Romans. Refer to Revelation 2:1 through 3:22 for the following:

- ❖ Do not tolerate evil individuals or evil groups.
- ❖ Test and expose false teachers and do not follow their teachings.
- ❖ Do not grow weary in doing good.
- ❖ Do not abandon their love toward Christ and remember always who He is.
- ❖ We must be faithful to Christ, never worship anyone or anything other than God, even to physical death.
- ❖ There will always be tribulation in some form; it will not last forever.

- ❖ Do not compromise your faith or the direction that Jesus wants His followers to go.
- ❖ Stick to the truth that Jesus taught, stay the course.
- ❖ Do not experiment with sin, to better “understand” it.
- ❖ Jesus will come as often as He needs to, spiritually; He will not return physically until the end of days. And, only Father God knows when.
- ❖ We must work constantly to gain and maintain the seven attributes of the Holy Spirit:
 - ◆ Wisdom.
 - ◆ Understanding.
 - ◆ Counsel.
 - ◆ Might.
 - ◆ Knowledge.
 - ◆ Fear of the Lord.
 - ◆ Godliness.
- ❖ Christians then and now are at war with sin and the purveyors of sin (Satan and his minions), stay the course; do not give in (Refer to Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 2 Timothy 2:3-4; and 1 Thessalonians 5:8).
- ❖ When Jesus opens doors for us to use in the spreading of His message, we must use those doors.
- ❖ We must guard against being lukewarm towards God and His Word, both as individuals and as congregations of His kingdom.
- ❖ We must always strive to be rich in spiritual things.
- ❖ We must set a good example to outsiders both as individuals and as congregations of the kingdom. We do not want to be viewed as hypocritical or sinful.

1.1.6.3 Provide Encouragement to the First Century Christians

The main purpose of the Revelation was to provide encouragement to the first century Christians:

- ❖ God assures them that He will not allow His kingdom to be destroyed by Satan, using the Roman Empire as his weapon of choice. (Rev 19:17 through 20:15)
- ❖ In Rev 1:1-9, they are reminded:

- ◆ Of the greatness of Jesus, His sacrifice on the cross, and His resurrection.
 - ◆ That Jesus has seen their persecution and will come soon spiritually to end it.
 - ◆ That they are a royal priesthood.
 - ◆ That Jesus will come spiritually and soon. And, He did.
- ❖ In Rev 1:11-20, they were told of:
- ◆ Jesus after the cross. How different He is from the sacrificial Lamb He had been. They needed to know that their leader was of a level of greatness far above all other leadership on earth.
 - ◆ Jesus being the first fruit of the victory over death.
 - ◆ Jesus having the keys to hell and death, the Romans did not have such power.
- ❖ In Rev 4:1-11, they were told that:
- ◆ The throne of the world was in heaven, not Rome.
 - ◆ The one “who lives forever and ever” is their God; and Jesus is their King in contrast to the Roman emperors that die, and were created by God.
- ❖ In Rev 6:1-17, Jesus reveals to them that:
- ◆ The Trinity could act from heaven to make things occur in the mortal world.
 - ◆ He has the power over the Romans.
 - ◆ A spiritual war was about to take place that would have physical impact on the world they lived in; and, there would be physical casualties.
 - ◆ If they experienced physical death it would bring them to the safety of heaven and He reminds them that God hears their prayers.
- ❖ In Rev 8:3-13, they are reminded of their ancestors being freed from Egypt.
- ❖ From Rev 6:1 through Rev 16:17, the destruction of the Roman Empire is depicted in thirds: the opening of the seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, and the pouring out of the seven vials/bowls of God's wrath.

- ❖ Rev 17 tells of the return to persecution by Domitian and that it would not last very long.
- ❖ Rev 18:1-19 tells of the fall of Rome.
- ❖ Rev 18:20 tells of the judgment of Rome that caused her fall.
- ❖ Rev 19:6-10 tells of the rejoicing of the extinction of Rome with a marriage feast. The Bride of Christ has been made ready for Christ through the righteousness of the saints. The saints of the kingdom of God in the first century are the first fruits of the kingdom.
- ❖ Rev 19:17 through Rev 20:15 tells of the destruction of the enemies of God and the rejoicing in heaven with those that gave their physical lives to preserve the kingdom.
- ❖ Rev 21:1 through Rev 22:5 tells of a new heaven and new earth brought about by the removal of the Roman Empire from the old heaven and old earth.
- ❖ Rev 22 reminds them that Jesus will come spiritually soon to bring the judgment down on Rome. And He did.

1.1.6.4 The Kingdom of God Includes all the Faithful From the Old Covenant and the New Covenant

The kingdom of God includes all the faithful from the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, and is open to all who will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior and follow Him. The following depict the kingdom of God being inclusive of the followers from both covenants:

- ❖ The woman and child being confronted by the red dragon, Satan (Rev 12:1-17).
- ❖ The 144,000 and Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-20).
- ❖ Marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-16).
- ❖ New heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1 through 22:5).

1.1.6.5 Satan Will Never Destroy the Kingdom of God (Church)

In order to understand the state of affairs of Satan, regarding the judgment against Rome, we must look at Revelation 20:1-10, and in particular grouped as verses 1-3 and 7-10.

Clearly chapter 20 is not dealing with the end of days as the main subject. It mentions how some will be dealt with when the end of days occurs. But,

the main point here is what happens to those that die physically/mortally as a result of the persecution of the Romans and the judgment against Rome.

Verses 1-3 deals with an overview of how God takes Satan out of action while God prosecutes the war against Rome. God is stopping Satan's communications with his mortal army, the nations of the Roman Empire (God will not allow Satan to "deceive" them any longer). God will use them as part of His plan to destroy Rome and He doesn't want Satan interfering. The incarceration for 1,000 years means Satan is out of commission until the defeat of Rome is complete. Additionally, at the time Rome's defeat is complete, so will Satan's defeat be complete using Rome as his weapon against the first century church (kingdom). When Rome has been destroyed, God will release Satan for a "little season" or a "little while." The little while is the time from the defeat of Rome until the end of days. We are living in the "little while" now.

Verses 7-10 picks up where verse 3 left off. Verse 3 was an overview statement regarding Satan. He would be released for a short time. Verse 7 restates verse 3 as an introduction to verses 8-10.

Verses 8-10 tells John, and us, that Satan will not stop attempting to destroy the kingdom of God (the church) for as long as he is free to roam. At this point John is being shown a generic vision of Satan's activities in the future, after the Roman Empire government is gone. John is being told by the vision that Satan will continue to use any nation or group of nations to continually attempt to destroy the church (the kingdom). The Gog and Magog means any and all nations. This is a generic much like we might say today, "any Tom, Dick and Harry." That is, Gog of Magog figuratively depicts whoever happens to be the current enemy of God's people. That is how Gog of Magog was used in Ezekiel 38.

So, in verse 8, Satan will be out to deceive the nations once again. He will gather them from anywhere he can, and they will be many.

Verse 9 says that he will surround the kingdom of God (the church) and continue to attempt to destroy the kingdom of God. However, God's promise to those first century Christians is that He will never allow Satan to destroy the kingdom of God. He will always defend and protect His kingdom.

Verse 10 tells John, and us, that ultimately, Satan will face his own end at the end of days where he will experience his second and final death, along with all the beasts he has used to work his wickedness, that have preceded

him, in the lake of fire. He, and they, will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Verses 7-10, are also saying that God will defend the kingdom (church) against any future Babylon or Rome or Egypt or etc. The reference to Gog and Magog, as we have discussed earlier, means any future assault on the kingdom (church) by anyone.

1.1.6.6 Worship God Only

Refer to Revelation 14:7, 19:10, and 22:8-9. These verses tell us and the first century Christians that the gospel of God is eternal and will be proclaimed to all who dwell on earth; and that all should fear the living God and worship only Him. The deities of Rome and the emperors did not create the universe and all that is within it; God did. Twice an angel rebuked John when John attempted to fall at the feet and worship.

1.2 What Is a Decoding Critical Analysis?

First, we need to do some basics. It isn't necessary to go frustratingly deep into what a CA is, however, you should at least understand the basics. A decoding CA is an iterative process that seeks to decipher a coded document.

1.2.1 Summary

The CA process involves research and analysis of the context surrounding the coded document, analysis of the coded document itself, determining the codebook used, determining if there is a validation/verification manual or not, and ultimately determining the clues to allow the coded document to be deciphered.

1.2.2 Examples of How a Critical Analysis Is Applied

A CA is the investigation and evaluation of the elements associated with:

- ❖ Hardware end item design (aircraft, water vessel, vehicle, computer, etc.).
- ❖ Computer software design.

- ❖ System design made up of hardware and software.
- ❖ Documentation set covering various subjects that might need to be classified.
- ❖ Theory.
- ❖ Coded Intelligence Message or documentation set.
- ❖ Other.

In our case, the effort at hand is a coded document that provides a message.

The CA of any subject must be set up to fit the subject. For example, if a CA is to be done for a piece of hardware, then it is necessary to know what the purpose of the outcome is. If the hardware in question will impact safety of flight, then the CA must address those design factors of that hardware item that will cause flight failure. The end result of the CA in this example is that the design is modified to cause the hardware item to fail in a “fail safe mode” if and when it fails. If you have ever flown, you can appreciate this attention to detail provided by aircraft designers.

If the CA is to be accomplished on a documented theory of some sort then the set up required must address whether the theory is based on sound logic, or not. In our situation we will be dealing with a document coded with symbology and imagery that has something to say, a message. The approach in our case would be somewhat like the efforts used to break codes in World War II or the current day efforts used in our intelligence community, without the heavy lift of computer assistance.

1.2.3 What's the Difference Between Decoding and Translation?

Refer back to the diagram in section 1.1.1, Bible Documentation Food Chain (Figure 1-1), above. The following discussion will provide the insight needed to fully understand the difference between translating material from one language into another language and deciphering coded material.

1.2.3.1 Documentation Food Chain

Note, in Figure 1-1, that the study materials and commentaries are the last elements in the food chain. Decoding and translation precedes the study materials and commentaries. Why is that? Logic would tell us that we cannot create study materials and commentaries until or unless we have the source materials (the Bible, for instance) translated and decoded

(as necessary) first. If you cannot read it in a language you are fluent in, you cannot understand it. If it is coded, you can read it, but you cannot understand it without decoding it first.

In order to provide a perspective of where CA appears on the food chain, consider the following. Manuscripts in ancient Greek, Hebrew, or any ancient language, must be translated into a modern language, in order for the ultimate consumer of the translated material to be able to use it. At the point we, the students and readers, are able to use a Bible in our native language, then it is possible to create related study materials and commentaries or prosecute a CA to decode materials that require decoding, such as the Revelation.

Commentaries accomplished on the various books of the NT are *relatively* straightforward because the text is easy to read and allows us to at least understand the crux of the message. The Revelation is the exception. The Revelation is a coded message. There is a step that must be accomplished prior to attempting to develop a commentary on the Revelation, a decoding effort, a CA. Once the book is decoded and the message to the first century Christian is known, commentaries can then be written to help Bible students understand how the Revelation complements the other books of the NT, *not* be in opposition to those books. Commentaries should be telling us how the message to the first century Christian does or does not apply to us, just as commentaries on the other books convert the context of the first century into a message the rest of us, down through time, can relate to or better understand.

1.2.3.2 Decoding

Commentaries attempt to bring clarity to the Revelation predicated on the assumption that the Revelation is already relatively clear to understand as opposed to the Revelation being a coded message. The commentary development effort is a valid effort on any other book of the NT. However, the Revelation must be decoded first before a useful commentary effort can be accomplished. Commentaries on the other books come closer to universal agreement than commentaries on the Revelation. Again, the fact that the Revelation is coded is what makes the difference.

In order to determine the message of the Revelation to the first century Christians, the primary audience, we must first determine a few things that will allow us to find the clues on which to unravel (decode) the symbology and imagery used in the vision that the Apostle John recorded, from Jesus

Christ. The discussion elements that follow will help us to decode the Revelation.

1.2.4 Purpose

We must constantly keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of this CA, of course, is to determine the message of the Revelation to the *first century Christians*. Then, and only then, do we need to determine what parts of the message apply to us today and beyond.

1.2.5 Basic Elements

The basic elements of a CA consist of ground rules, setting up a systemic process, and analyzing the coded document (in our case) for:

- ❖ Any internal clues.
- ❖ Clues to what the codebook might be.
- ❖ Clues to developing or finding an existing validation/verification manual.
- ❖ Clues for setting up the related context.

The following ground-rules were developed and used to keep the CA on track. Your part in this task is to understand why we needed these ground-rules.

If you are not a Christian, then these ground-rules probably make no sense. If you are an atheist, these ground-rules absolutely make no sense. If you are a Christian, then you will quickly understand the importance of these ground-rules. This entire CA is directed at Christians that want to understand this part of the Bible that has eluded their understanding up to this point in their lives. For example, only a Christian would agree that the Bible scriptures are inspired of God, and that scripture does not disagree with itself. The other ground-rules are necessary to keep us from running off on tangents or violating the basic tenets of a CA. The ground-rules then, are as follows:

- ❖ We agree that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, *all of it*, including the book of Revelation.
- ❖ We agree that scripture does not disagree with itself.
- ❖ We agree to use scripture outside of the book of Revelation to evaluate points of contention regarding the Revelation. That is, we

will adhere to the following direction provided in scripture, about scripture:

- ◆ Used for teaching. [2 Tim 3:16]
 - ◆ Used for reproof. [2 Tim 3:16]
 - ◆ Used for correction. [2 Tim 3:16]
 - ◆ Used for training in righteousness. [2 Tim 3:16]
 - ◆ Scripture is sacred. [2 Tim 3:15]
 - ◆ The use of scripture, by a follower of God, makes that follower complete and equipped for every good work. [2 Tim 3:17]
 - ◆ Scripture is inspired of God. [2 Peter 1:16-21]
 - ◆ Used to test spiritual messages and discover false teachers. [1 John 4:1-4]
-
- ❖ We agree that the OT will be used to decode the Revelation, due to its heavy connection to and use of OT language symbology and imagery (justification for this is shown later).
 - ❖ We agree that if something is stated in the book of Revelation that someone (including ourselves) interprets to mean something in opposition to scripture outside of Revelation, the interpretation is wrong and we must seek a different interpretation; to include, “we don’t know”.
 - ❖ We agree to establish the context of the book of Revelation in terms of the history of the time in which it was written and the circumstances associated with the first century Christians; what the culture was like, timelines, key secular players, etc. We will not let our evaluation and analysis disregard the context in which the book was written.
 - ❖ We agree to first determine what the message was to the first century Christians prior to any effort related to what the message might be to Christians that have come along later in time, to include to our present time and the future.

1.2.6 Iterative Process

The CA is an iterative process that starts with a review of the Revelation to determine the symbols and images used to code the message of the book. The review of the Revelation identifies several steps that are necessary in order to develop the clues used to decipher the coded message.

Step #1: What is the codebook that was used to code the Revelation message? As discussed in section 1.2.7, the codebook is the OT.

Step #2: If there is a validation/verification manual, what is it? The validation/verification manual for decoding efforts is usually developed to keep the decoding effort on course. In our case the NT is the validation/verification manual. That is, the Revelation message must not be in conflict with the NT message, the gospel from Jesus Christ. Remember, Jesus not only provided the teachings to His Apostles, that later made up the NT, to include the Apostle John, but He also provided the Apostle John with the Revelation and its coded message. This step is further discussed in section 1.2.8.

Step #3: Predicated upon who the message was intended for, develop the context of the Revelation message. This entails the development of a timeline and historical context of such subjects as:

- ❖ Government
- ❖ Culture
- ❖ Society
- ❖ Religion(s)
- ❖ Economy
- ❖ Geographic location(s)

This step is further discussed in section 1.2.9.

Step #4: Determine Root Clues needed to decipher the Revelation message. This starts with a specific review of the Revelation to uncover the primary coded elements. From the primary coded elements we develop the Root Clues that in turn allow the development of Sub-Root Clues and Sub-clues. This step is discussed further in section 1.2.10. The Root Clue development helps to unpack the symbology and imagery used in the Revelation.

When you get to section 1.3, it will provide additional detail for the CA iterative process, built upon these four generic steps.

1.2.7 Determine Codebook

The OT was used as the codebook for the Revelation message, simply because the intended audience of the Revelation message was the first century Christians. They were familiar with the OT and would be able to understand the use of the symbols and images drawn from it. There

is also the use of similar descriptions for judgments and punishments in the Revelation as used in the OT. There are over 500 OT passages with a connection to the Revelation. Of the 404 verses in the Revelation, 278 reference the OT. Section 1.4 will provide additional detail.

1.2.8 Create or Determine Validation/Verification Manual

It is very important to recognize that the Revelation message was ultimately given to Christians of the first century that had been brought to Christ by the Apostles or those taught by the Apostles. The gospel taught by the Apostles, to include John, would not be in conflict with the Revelation; nor would the Revelation be in conflict with the gospel, the NT. Section 1.5 will discuss this in more detail.

1.2.9 Context

The context of the Revelation has to do with the circumstances surrounding the Apostle John while he recorded the Revelation, as well as the first century Christians who would ultimately receive the Revelation message. Context includes the culture of the time, the type of government, religions and religious practices, the periods of persecution, and the situation surrounding the first century Christians. Some of the coding is derived from references to the Roman government, culture, religions, and etc. Context is vital to deciphering the Revelation message. Section 1.6 will provide additional detail.

1.2.10 Find Root Clues and Related Sub-clues

Root Clues and their related Sub-clues will, in our effort, be identified in the Revelation itself. In particular, chapter 17 is the starting point for our effort. Section 1.7 expands on this subject.

1.2.11 Populate Coded Message With Decoded Elements

This part of the effort entails a secondary iterative effort that consists of taking clues that we think are valid, and making a trial fit for replacing coded elements in the Revelation coded message. When this effort is complete, a validation/verification effort is accomplished using the NT to identify conflicts. If there are no conflicts, then the decoded elements are used to populate the Revelation, replacing the symbols and images that

were used to code the message. The resultant is a decoded version of the Revelation message. This effort is explained in chapter 9.

1.2.12 Develop Decoded Message

This effort is a follow-on to the effort introduced in section 1.2.11 above. This is the final step in the CA. This is the goal of our effort. The completion of this effort is found in chapter 10, with an overview discussion.

1.3 Introduction – The Critical Analysis Used to Decode the Revelation Message

There are twelve major tasks and their related subtasks. This detail is included to demonstrate the methodology used and the care taken to reach sound results. The tasks introduced below are found on Page #1 of the flow diagram covering the CA process that is found in Appendix G and discussed in chapter 2. The CA process is iterative until new materials and/or the process no longer generates new or modified information.

1.3.1 Task #1: Start and Sustain CA to Completion

This task kicks the CA decoding effort off and also plays the role of continual update and refinement to the CA process as new or modified information and data is uncovered and analyzed. The first step of Task #1 was to provide the flow diagram in Appendix G, along with supporting materials and documentation. It is this task that begins the many readings of the Revelation and adds to the initial materials and supporting documentation.

1.3.2 Task #2: Initial Effort to Kick Off the CA

Task #2 actually starts the iterative process of the CA, using the initial outputs of Task #1. Once the process begins, Task #2, starts to receive updates to the CA from Task #1. Six subtasks make up the task step details of Task #2.

1.3.3 Task #3: Determine the Codebook Used to Develop the Revelation Message

Determining the codebook was one of the most important efforts of the CA. It would have been easy to play off the efforts of others and just declare the OT as the codebook used in the Revelation. However, a CA demands that we have specific information and proof that the OT was the source of the symbology and imagery used in the Revelation. Task #3 is the point in the CA where that effort was accomplished.

1.3.4 Task #4: Determine the Validation/Verification Manual

In some ways this task is similar to Task #3. The CA demands that we provide reasons why we don't need to develop a Validation/Verification Manual; it is because we have the NT to fulfill that requirement. The Task #4 effort provides the information and reasoning behind why the NT is, in fact, the Validation/Verification Manual. Whatever we decipher in the Revelation and put forward as the decoded message of the Revelation cannot be in conflict with the NT books outside of the Revelation. It is for this reason that we must view the Revelation as separate from the NT until we conclude our effort.

1.3.5 Task #5: Identify the Coded Elements of the Revelation Message, and Determine Their Significance and Meaning

The effort of this task is to identify all the symbols and images of the coded message of the Revelation. This is a separate task from developing the Root Clues that will be discussed in some detail. The development of the Root Clues will rely on this task effort for much of its information. An iterative review of the Revelation led to the discovery of 204 coded elements made up of symbology and imagery found in words, phrases, and numbers. Of those coded elements, 50 were found to be key. Refer to chapter 7 and Appendices A, B, C, and F for details.

1.3.6 Task #6: Develop the Context of the Revelation Message

Context is another key element of the CA. Without the context definition there cannot be a CA. We must know what was going on in the Apostle John's day. What the Roman Empire was like in terms of its society, culture, religions, government, and etc. Without a good definition of the context we would never be able to understand "why" the message was necessary, "what" its purpose was, and "how" it applied to the audience of the day. We know from cursory review of history that the "where" was the Roman Empire and John was on the Isle of Patmos, a penal location. We also know from history a rough timeframe for the "when." The information compiled here is necessary to support the decoding effort. Task #6 provides the context.

1.3.7 Task #7: Identify the Secular Context Coded Elements Provided by the Revelation Message

This task depends on Task #6 to provide the details from which to draw out secular elements that fit into our CA. A good example of this is the coinage of John's day. There is a very common coin that has the goddess Roma's image on one side. It shows her sitting or reclining on seven hills, the Seven Hills of Rome. This coin helps to understand the angel's discussion with John in Revelation 17, regarding the woman that John saw in the vision sitting on seven hills. The discussion by the angel in chapter 17, I refer to this as the Angel's Riddle.

1.3.8 Task #8: Develop the Final Rules and Tools for Deciphering the Coded Revelation Message Elements

The Rules and Tools for deciphering a coded message, and in particular the message of the Revelation, are developed from information that is available to the code breaker, regarding usual meanings for standard and near standard symbols and images. The Rules and Tools also contain logic and reasoning statements that have been resolved to aid in the decoding effort. Refer to chapter 3, CA Rules and Tools.

1.3.9 Task #9: Develop a Detailed Breakdown of the Revelation Message Into its Parts

The book of Revelation is arranged in chapters. For our CA, we need the book broken down by subject. This task breaks the Revelation down by subject. This aids in the CA effort by looking at the Revelation message by subject.

1.3.10 Task #10: Perform a Comparative Analysis on the Revelation Message Material

This task defines a summary of the gospel message useful for doing a comparison effort with the six major viewpoints on the Revelation. It also summarizes the six major viewpoints on the Revelation into the major tenets that these six viewpoints promote that conflict with the NT, and apply the deciphered symbols and images to the Revelation message.

1.3.11 Task #11: From the Clues and Evidence, Decipher the Revelation Message

This is where the Root Clues are developed and applied. As the Root Clues are applied the results are fed back into Task #10 for the main purpose of identifying any conflicts with the NT. For the Root Clues, refer to chapter 7 and Appendix C.

1.3.12 Task #12: Identify and Evaluate the Mainstream Theories, Beliefs, and Doctrines Regarding the Revelation

The six major viewpoints of the Revelation are evaluated in this task using, in an iterative process, inputs from the NT gospel summary (Tasks #10 and #11), deciphered elements of the Revelation message as they become available, and the logic from the Root Clue effort. The conflicts that are determined between the NT and the six mainstream viewpoints regarding the Revelation are identified. Refer to chapter 8 for details.

1.4 Determine Codebook

The OT must be used as the main tool for deciphering the Revelation message. It was discovered to absolutely be the codebook for the Revelation. Many Bible scholars confirm this discovery. According to Henry Barclay Swete, there are 46 references to Isaiah, 31 to Daniel, 29 to Ezekiel, 27 to the Psalms, and then Genesis, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Joel, and Zechariah.

There are hundreds of places where John alludes, in one way or another, to the OT Scriptures. Swete mentions that of the 404 verses of the Apocalypse (the Revelation), 278 contain references to the Jewish Scriptures. UBS's Green NT (2d ed.) cites over five hundred OT passages in connection with Revelation. However, the book of Daniel is the area of primary interest to us in our CA.

David Chilton makes a couple of great points –

The Apostle John's symbols are not obscure ravings hatched from a fevered imagination; they are rooted firmly in the Old Testament (and the reason for their seeming obscurity is that very fact: We have trouble understanding them only because we don't know our Bibles).

Thus, the analogy of Scripture (Scripture interprets Scripture) is an important key to unlocking the meaning of passages which we find puzzling. "The book of Revelation depends on the Old Testament much more than does any other New Testament book. This fact alone should warn us that we cannot begin to fathom its meaning apart from a solid grasp of the Bible as a whole ..."

Henry Barclay Swete adds to this –

Commentators disagree as to the exact number of allusions to the Old Testament, but agree to their prevalence throughout.

No book of the New Testament is so thoroughly steeped in the thought and imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Gregory K. Beale tells us that –

The range of OT usage includes the Pentateuch, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Job, and the major and the Minor Prophets. Roughly more than half the references are from the Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and in proportion to its length Daniel yields the most ... Among the allusions to Daniel, the greatest number are from Daniel 7:1.

Because the book of Revelation extends and concludes various themes, problems, and promises, which find their basis in the OT, it is vital that we have a working background knowledge of the OT.

Refer to chapter 4 for a complete discussion.

1.5 Create or Determine Validation/ Verification Manual

Since the NT (outside the Revelation for our CA) is the Word of God and is generally understood regarding most of its subjects, it is imperative that there is no conflict between the deciphered Revelation message and the other books of the NT. It is important that we know the NT (outside the Revelation) in order to know when the deciphered message of the Revelation is in conflict, so we can go back to the drawing board, so to speak. Once more, remember that Jesus gave us the NT outside the Revelation through His Apostles, to include the Apostle John, as well as the Revelation itself. He is part of the Trinity of God. He isn't going to produce a conflict between His Revelation to John and His Gospel to all His Apostles.

1.5.1 The Gospel as a Systemic Process

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a kind of systemic process. The Gospel message is consistent and clear, at least to those that are willing to accept the Gospel without adding other documented "faith" and "belief" elements. I personally feel that it is a mark of hesitancy to accept the Gospel "as is" when religious organizations feel a need to "define" the Gospel to fit *their* "needs." The results usually end up with a document or set of documents related to any of the many denominations, that they follow first. In those organizations the governing documentation is above the Bible and the Bible is to them only a kind of textbook or book of reference in their walk with the Lord. Don't misunderstand me on this. I'm not saying we shouldn't develop study aids and teaching literature in order to better understand the Bible.

However, we must not take the next step that puts that literature in the form of a type of constitution we will use to effectively replace the Bible.

Refer to chapter 5 for more details. I have provided a set of modules of the Gospel from the NT that together make the Gospel message what it is. I understand that there are possibly additional elements that could be added to those in chapter 5. However, chapter 5 contains those that were necessary for our CA.

1.5.2 The Use of the Words – Church, Kingdom, Congregation, and Assembly

Bible translators in the earliest translations did not use the word church at all, ever. What the modern translations refer to, incorrectly, as the church, should be using either assembly or congregation of the kingdom of God or a combination, depending upon the context. Jesus came to establish His kingdom, not a church. We have used the word church for so long, we have come to accept it as correct. Church is a building or place; it is not people. Jesus didn't die to establish a place of worship. He died to establish His kingdom, a collection of His followers. A church (location or facility) does not follow anything. People become followers of Christ.

Refer to section 1.7.5 that follows and to section 5.2 of chapter 5 for more details.

1.6 Context

The context of the Revelation has to do with the circumstances surrounding the Apostle John while he recorded the Revelation, as well as the first century Christians who would ultimately receive the Revelation message.

Context includes the culture of the time, the type of government, religions and religious practices, the periods of persecution, and the situation surrounding the first century Christians. Some of the Revelation message coding included references to the Roman government, culture, religions, and etc. One other ingredient of the context could very well be that the Revelation was coded because the subject matter could have made life even more miserable than it was for the early Christians, if the Romans would have understood that they were the subject of the message. After all, the Revelation, once decoded, points a very disparaging finger at Rome. The Romans would have classified it as a document of insurrection, punishable by death, I suspect. To the unknowing, the Revelation reads like something

from a deranged person to a bunch of equally deranged people. As a matter of fact, the Roman population looked upon the Christian community as a bunch of crazy people.

The in-depth discussion on context is found in chapter 6. When you have gone through this Study Guide and Overview (chapter 1) once, the chapters that follow will better fit into your mental picture of the CA as a whole.

1.6.1 Roman History Applicable to the Revelation – Context in Time

Time context is very important in understanding the Revelation. If we don't know what the first century Christian's situation or circumstances were, we cannot possibly understand the Revelation message to them. Worse, we then cannot determine how that message applies to us. Additionally, we need to know the period of time in which John recorded the message. This helps us tie the message details a bit tighter to the events that were going on while John was exiled on Patmos.

1.6.2 Time Relationships – How Do We Tell the Difference Between a Short and a Long Period of Time?

An example of how the OT, and in particular the book of Daniel, helps us understand timeframe relationships, is the definition of “the time is at hand” from Revelation 22:10, and “a long way off” from Dan 8:26. John was told in Revelation 22:10, to “seal *not* the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.” In the 8th chapter of Daniel, Daniel received a vision in 550 BC that was fulfilled less than 400 years later in 165 BC, after the desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes, when the sanctuary was restored. Daniel was told in Dan 8:26, to seal up the vision because its fulfillment was not for “many days” or a long way off. Logic would tell us that John’s “the time is at hand” is a shorter timeframe than Daniel’s “many days” that amounted to approximately 400 years. So how do some commentators/interpreters argue that the “the time is at hand” in the Revelation is 2,000 years and counting while the “many days” in Daniel is less than 400 years? The decoding manual, the OT, is giving us the definition of time durations. I’m not sure why some ignore this very simple and straightforward time relationship evidence.

It is pertinent at this point to look at how God sees time and how He relates time to mankind. In 2 Peter 3:8, Peter tells us that to God 1,000 years appear as one day and one day as 1,000 years. That is, time has no real meaning to God (God does not literally equate one day to 1,000 years or 1,000 years to a literal one day, the 1,000 is a reflection of a state of affairs, not literal time, time is meaningless to God). However, when God speaks to man he does relate to time as man sees time. Mankind lives in a finite existence, measurable by time. God is consistent in His communications with mankind. Therefore, in Revelation 1:1-3, God is not talking to Himself; God is talking to John, a man. Just like He was talking to Daniel, in Daniel chapter 8, also a man. God told Daniel that roughly 400 years was “many days.” In view of consistency and logic, when God told John “the time is at hand” He meant that “the time is at hand” was less than 400 years.

It is this kind of attention to detail that permits us to decode the Revelation. Remember, God told John four times that the prophecies of the Revelation were to take place soon, as man would define soon:

- ❖ Rev 1:1, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must *shortly come to pass*. [In other translations, “must *soon take place*.”]
- ❖ Rev 1:3, Blessed *is* he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for *the time is at hand*. [In other translations, “*the time is near*.”]
- ❖ Rev 22:6, And he said unto me, These sayings *are* faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which *must shortly be done*.” [In other translations, “must *soon take place*.”]
- ❖ Rev 22:10, And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for *the time is at hand*. [In other translations, “*for the time is near*.”]

These time relationships in the Revelation also help point to the various scriptures in the Revelation that some want to designate as end of days. We will address this in more detail in chapter 6.

To determine when the Revelation was written, we need to know who the emperor was at the time of John's vision. The discussion in chapter 6 will help us sort this out. It is quite lengthy, so be patient as you read through it.