

Article of the Month – August 2014

Where is the Church, in Revelation?

By Steef van 't Slot, Ph.D.

God's Jewish and Gentile servants are sealed¹ so that they can be distinguished from other people and not be harmed when the 7th seal inaugurates the seven trumpets.² 'Grass, plant or tree'³ are not to be harmed. They are believers in different stages of spiritual maturity who received God's seal, in contrast to those who do not have His sign on their foreheads.⁴ We see here how picture and reality are interchanged.

The godless did not repent.⁵ This implies that God's people are still around to call them to repentance. People will not believe unless the Gospel is preached to them.⁶ John had to count the worshippers in the Temple and measure it.⁷ The *believer* is the temple of the Holy Spirit as is the *Church*.⁸ He lives in and among them. *Measuring* assesses spiritual maturity and *counting* checks numerical fullness. The servants of God⁹ are still around when their greatest leaders, the two witnesses, accomplish their ministry of 3½ years. How we interpret Revelation, has to do with how we understand its chronology. Although opinions differ, I would like to share the following considerations with you:

The book *cannot* be read as a chronological narrative. 'Earth' and 'heaven chapters' follow one another so rapidly, that deriving chronological or even interpretative consequences from them seems illogical. John 'commuted' continually.

Chapter 1 is *time-bound*, in that the revelation took place at a specific time and place¹⁰ and *time-less*, in that the glorified Lord is the same today as He was then.¹¹

Chapters 2 and 3, written for seven churches in Asia, are *time-bound*. Yet they carry relevant messages for today's Church and may also represent eras of church history. After three 'earth-chapters' two 'heaven-chapters' follow, but what is described in chapters 6-11, whether seen in heaven or on earth, has consequences on earth: God's plan, written on the scroll and opened in heaven, expresses itself on earth in seals, trumpets and bowls.

Chapters 4 and 5 are *time-bound*: John saw what happened in heaven *at that time*,¹² but also some events *at the end of time*.¹³ These portray the accomplishment of God's salvation plan: we now see people from all tribes, tongues, peoples and nations' before God's throne. Finally, John sees some *eternal* realities.¹⁴

¹ Rev. 7

² Rev. 7, 8 & 11

³ 9:4a

⁴ 9:4b

⁵ 9:20,21

⁶ Rom. 10:13-15

⁷ Rev. 11:1

⁸ 1 Cor. 3:16,17; 6:19

⁹ Rev. 7:3

¹⁰ AD 95, at the isle of Patmos

¹¹ Heb. 13:8

¹² Rev. 4:1; 5:1-5

¹³ 5:9,10; 7:9

¹⁴ E.g. 4:2-11; 5:6,11-14

We see church history from beginning to end¹⁵ and then the Millennium of peace.¹⁶ These chapters do not form an uninterrupted chronological train of events; we see the history twice, from different perspectives. The *first* description speaks about the beginning of church history;¹⁷ the *second* about the last days.¹⁸

First Description	Second Description	Similarity
6: 1-11	12: 1- 3	Complete church history
6:12-11:19	12: 4-19:21	Last days of church history
6: 1, 2 White horse, alone	19:11-16 Same, with many	Jesus Christ
7: 1- 9	14: 1- 5	The 144,000 ‘multitude’
11:15-17	19: 4- 9	God’s Kingdom on earth
11:18-19	14:17-18:24; 19: 2, 3,17 – 20:3	Judgment of nations and Babylon; Satan locked up
Church History Parallels in Revelation		

John describes the 7th trumpet as ‘loud’, ‘last’ and as ‘trumpet call’,¹⁹ all related to the resurrection,²⁰ immediately after the death of the last martyrs,²¹ just before Christ’s return.²²

Much happens in a few verses, almost at the same time: the last martyrs are killed and their bodies lie in Jerusalem’s streets for 3½ days²³ like Jesus was killed and lay in the tomb for three days; they are raised from the dead like Jesus was²⁴ and are commanded to ‘come up here’, like Jesus ascended into heaven.²⁵ This is the rapture and it includes the two witnesses and all who are in Christ. After the resurrection the living in Christ will be changed²⁶ and an earthquake follows, like when Jesus rose.²⁷ After meeting Jesus in the air,²⁸ they come back to earth where the Millennial Kingdom will be established²⁹ during which the wedding supper of the Lamb occurs,³⁰ probably after finishing the judgments.³¹

By implication there is no ‘secret coming’ of the Lord for believers only and a later ‘public coming’ for the rest, who had been left behind. The Bible speaks about *the* second coming, not one that is divided into two; otherwise there would be two second comings. Christ comes back to stay, not to ‘snatch us up’ then to return to heaven and let the rest cook. Why would

¹⁵ Chapters 6-19

¹⁶ 20:4

¹⁷ 6:1 – 12:3

¹⁸ 12:4 – 19:21

¹⁹ Compare Rev. 11:15 with Matt. 24:31 (loud), 1 Cor. 15:52 (last) and with 1 Thess. 4:16 (trumpet call)

²⁰ I.e. the *1st* resurrection. Only those who died in Christ are raised (1 Thess. 4:14; Rev. 20:6a). At the *2nd* resurrection (end of the Millennium), all others will be judged at the Great White Throne (20:5,11-15)

²¹ Rev. 11:7,11,12

²² 1 Thess. 4:15; see also Zech. 9:14

²³ Rev. 11:7-9

²⁴ 11:11; Matt. 28:6

²⁵ Acts 1:9

²⁶ 1 Cor. 15:51-53

²⁷ Rev. 11:13; Matt. 28:2

²⁸ 1 Thess. 4:17

²⁹ Rev. 20:4-6

³⁰ 19:1-7. The Bible is silent about venue or time of this Supper. Assumptions lack theological foundation

³¹ 11:18,19

He come, if He were not intending to stay? Did not the ‘man of noble birth go ... to be appointed king and *then to return*’?³²

We cannot conclude anything else than that the Church is around during the whole book of Revelation. The ‘end’ is told twice,³³ including martyrdom of saints, resurrection, rapture, return, victory over Antichrist, judgements, wedding supper and the consummation of the Kingdom. After all, what would be the use of giving this revelation to the Church, if the Church has almost nothing to do with its execution?

³² Luke 19:12 (italics mine)

³³ In Rev. 11 & 19