

The problem with the dividing-in-three of Revelation

Is there a problem?

It all depends on how you see the book of Revelation.

Let's look at how it is explained by lots of Christians.

They say these three parts have to be read as follows.

Approximately:

1. Chapter 1: What you have seen....
2. Chapter 2 and 3: What is now...
3. Chapter 4 and beyond: What will take place later...

This concept is based on the text in Revelation 1:19
"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later".

The problem arises when Christians explain it in this way that everything what is written after Chapter 3 happens when the church is caught up and will be with the Lord.

The explanation given of this verse comes down to a view that the seven letters were prophetic of seven successive stages of the Christian Church.

In other words, the Laodicean church is the church of the last days. The church who will witness the coming of the Lord. So everything that is written after the letter to Laodicea, will happen when the church is with the Lord.

Emotionally, I have great difficulty if most of Revelation has no relevance to believers. This revelation was given by God to Jesus Christ, who gives this revelation to His servants.

Why? To show what must shortly take place.

John is a servant, as he is called in verse 2, but verse 1 says that this revelation is to show the servants what must soon happen. Servants, plural. These are the brothers of John, the faithful Christians.

These believers are blessed as they read or hear the words of this prophecy.

We are informed by God personally

This revelation speaks to the church and reveals to believers what is important for them to know. We are informed by God personally about the future. Not to do nothing, but to be aware. So we can recognize in which time we live and why we have to go through the things to come.

But there's more.

Revelation 20 speaks of the first resurrection:

"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years"

It is here very clearly spoken about the first resurrection. The second resurrection will be a thousand years later. (see Rev.20:12-13)

What strikes us is that it is being spoken about people who had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, and who participated in the first resurrection. Clearly these are the people who lived during the great tribulation. (The beast and his image are dealt with in chapter 13 of Revelation).

If you believe that aforementioned three-way split is correct, then you probably also believe that the church is raptured into a kind of secret resurrection. A resurrection which is not mentioned in the Bible. (The main arguments mentioned above, with accompanying texts, are treated in the Bible-study about the Signs of the End of Age).

Although the Bible speaks of two resurrections, it is not in the sense as many believe: a secret resurrection and a resurrection for all who lived during the great tribulation. No, the first resurrection is the resurrection in which all believers will be resurrected. "6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." Revelation 20:6.

When is the 'first' resurrection?

We will read some texts which, I think, every believer will agree have a very plain meaning.

1Corinthians 15 "51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed”.

This union with the Lord, that moment when all deceased believers will be resurrected and the living transformed, will occur when the last trumpet sounds.

This will be the first and only resurrection of the believers in Christ.

On that last trumpet, the seventh of Revelation 11, all believers will be united with the Lord. He will take on the Kingship and we, who have part in the first resurrection, will reign with Him as kings and priests. (Revelation 20: 6 and Romans 5:17 and 2Tim 2:12).

Revelation 11 and 20 speak about events that will occur at the time that believers in Christ will be united with Him. That makes it difficult to insist that everything after Chapter 3 takes place after the rapture of the church.

The day of the Lord

John was in the Spirit. How long has it lasted we do not know. All we know is that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. The day that Paul also spoke about when he wrote to the Thessalonians that they should not be worried as if the day of the Lord has already come. He linked the event to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our union with Him. And that is exactly what happens when the day of the Lord comes, and much more. That is what Revelation is about.

To be clear: John was first in the Spirit and then started writing. So it was not that he thought: come, I will write something to the seven churches. It seems, superficially like that when you read 1:4. But it appears from the sequence that these opening words are the result of something that he experienced and what he had to write to the seven churches.

In other words, Chapter 1 is only written after John was already under the inspiration of the Spirit.

While he was in the Spirit, he heard a loud voice behind him: Jesus in a majestic appearance.

Jesus said him to write down what you have seen and send it to the seven churches. (verse 11). And not only what he saw, but Jesus also dictated personal words to each of the seven churches.

Jesus says then: what you have seen, and what is now and what will take place later.

What was it that John had seen?

1. What you have seen ... The day of the Lord (1:11)
2. What is now ... The power and majesty of Jesus (1 12-20), but also the circumstances of the seven churches as there were then.
3. What will take place later ... Everything what would happen after John had the vision, including the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21)

That is the main idea. In addition, he hears what he has to write to the seven named churches.

Revelation 4:1

In the 4th chapter we read a text to which we have to give some attention.

“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this””. Revelation 4:1.

It seems logical to think that the announcement "after this", refers to previous texts. The texts concerning the letters to the church. Still, I think this is not so.

John was still full of the things he had seen. Things that had to do with the Lord's day. But the talking and appearing of the Lord was a great experience too.

John talks about those things when he says in 4: 1, after this ...

Another way of looking at this

It would be good to look at it from another angle. The linguistic side of things.

What words are used in the original text and how they are used in other texts in the Bible.

1. What you have seen

In the context of this chapter it is clear that this refers to what John, in the Spirit, has seen and what the Lord has told him to write in a book which we call Revelation;

2. What is now

"Is" is a conjugation of the verb 'to be'. When we look up texts where the same word is used, we will find what is meant here in Revelation.

Matthew 9:11-13 “When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”

On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn **what**

this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 12:6-8 "I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known **what these words mean**, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath".

Acts 2:12-13 "Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "**What does this mean?**"
Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine. "

Acts 10:17-18 "While Peter was wondering **about the meaning** of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there."

In the above texts each time the verb "to be" is used, it is translated by the words which are printed "bold". When we translate it in Revelation 1:19 in line with the aforementioned texts, then it will look like this "Write the things which you have seen, and what it means, and what will be hereafter."

3. And what will take place later...

In Greek we read for 'take later': meta tauta. This phrase is also found in John 13:7 and 1 Peter 1:11, where it is translated 'later' and 'follow'.

Revelation 1:19 then can also be read as: "Write the things which you have seen, and what it means and what will happen later."

This "later" then refers to what would happen in later times, e.a. The revelation of Jesus Christ and the events associated with that.

So we see that it is clearly along two lines that there is no basis to divide Revelation in three.

Actually, the problem of interpretation in three divisions stems from the unscriptural idea that the church is united with the Lord in a secret rapture.

Revelation is a book that shows us how we need to be prepared. So let's read it so that we, believers, will be prepared for those things that are revealed to us in the book of Revelation.

What has become clear is that there is no reason to assume a division into three parts of the book of

Revelation in a way that almost everything is placed after the rapture of the church.