



## How the First-Century, Asia Minor, Jewish Christians Understood the Book of Revelation

*Abbreviations:* FCAM JC – First-Century, Asia Minor, Jewish Christians; RE – Roman Empire; FW – Faithful Witness

### Book of Revelation – 2. Overview – a. Four Statements

The book of Revelation or John's Apocalypse (Unveiling) is a promise of blessing with the purpose of comforting and challenging the FCAM JCs (see legend above) whom John pastored. It is the announcement and promotion of the gracious salvation of Yahweh's Kingdom of Shalom meant for those who follow Yeshua (Jesus), the Slaughtered Lamb. In it, God's Kingdom collides with the kingdom of chaos and darkness, and we learn what it means to live as His Faithful Witnesses (FW) in this world.

#### Four Statements about the Book of Revelation

1. **It is a present prophecy.** It is a forthtelling, not a foretelling. It is not a prediction of the future. When we understand its application to its original audience, we can then apply it to our lives today and stay protected from speculation.
2. **It made sense to the first people who heard and read it.** They may not have liked it in the same way we may not welcome its challenge, but its meaning was readily accessible.
3. **It gives an exalted view of Yeshua** which was radical in the first century. Messiah, the Slaughtered Lamb, is on the throne with God. Yeshua is Israel's Messiah for the entire world!
4. **It is Apocalyptic literature.** Therefore, we must understand this unique genre of literature that was pioneered by the first-century Jewish community. God used this genre to communicate the ultimate victory of His kingdom in a world of brokenness and suffering. It is *resistance literature* against the ruling class and was meant to subvert power structures and declare that evil would not go unchecked.

The Greek *Apocalypso* means *to unveil, to lift the lid, or to uncover as a surprise*. Apocalyptic writing is the most dramatic way to capture an audience's attention and to burn its message into the hearts of the people, because it draws them into an experience of the senses, like a surround-sound theatre. It uses striking images that have three traits: *Constant, fluid and repurposed* (example: a woman can represent a bride or a prostitute), and *transformed* for the author's own use.

These images fall into three types:

- *Icons* – Signs that represent what they signify (such as a trashcan icon on a computer) It is what it says. Example: Yeshua is described as *like* a Son of Man, a human;
- *Indexes* – Signs that tells you something as it is changing or being affected (such as a weathervane). Example: The elders bowing down represent worship;
- *Symbols* – Signs that have been given an agreed-upon meaning by a group of users; (such as our traffic colors red, green, and yellow; we all know what they mean.) Example: A double-edged sword represents God's word healing and judging; stars represent angelic beings; and numbers mean more than their numerical values.

The writing does not give a *doom and gloom* message. **In the first century, the defining event of deliverance that transformed all of time had already taken place in the death and resurrection of Yeshua. They understood – The Hope of the World had come! His coming is the apocalyptic surprise – the mystery of God revealed!**

Historical events are described with their apocalyptic, cosmic, unseen perspective. As an example, Revelation 12 is an account of Yeshua’s birth from Matthew 2 based on the language and imagery of Psalm 2. Compare the two passages: the **setting**, **characters and descriptions**, storyline, message, and **purpose**. Why did Matthew tell this story of the killing of the infants? Why does Revelation tell the story? Let’s take a look:

#### *Revelation 12:1-5*

<sup>1</sup>A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; <sup>2</sup>and she was pregnant and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. <sup>3</sup>Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven crowns. <sup>4</sup>And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and hurled them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her Child. <sup>5</sup>And she gave birth to a Son, a male, who is going to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her Child was caught up to God and to His throne. <sup>6</sup>Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for 1,260 days.

#### *Matthew 2:16-18*

<sup>16</sup>Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent men and killed all the boys who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. <sup>17</sup>Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: <sup>8</sup>“A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; And she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.”

#### *Observations*

- Both authors, John and Matthew, use Scripture – Revelation 12 uses Psalm 2 and Isaiah 27.
- We see Messiah vs. the Serpent; King Yeshua as the rightful heir; King Herod as the dead king.
- The woman represents the people of God or Israel through whom the Messiah came.

Read these passages and make comparisons. Are there other Scripture verses that may correlate?

	Revelation 12:1-5	Matthew 2:16-18	Psalm 2	Isaiah 27
Setting				
Characters/ Descriptions				
Storyline				
Message				
Purpose				