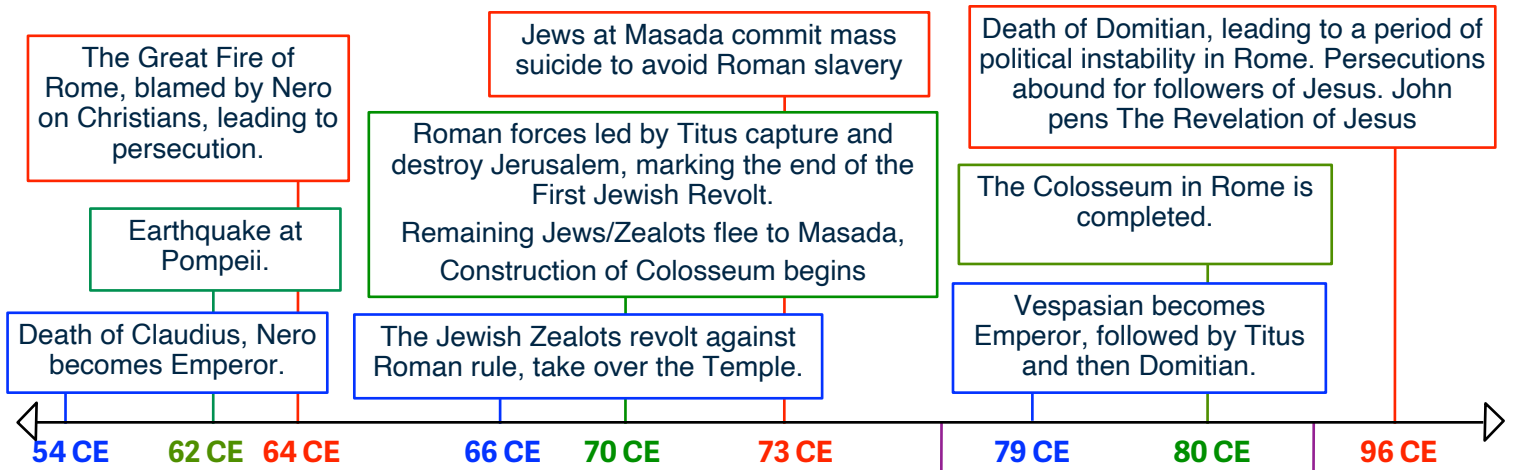


you are there



It is the ninth decade of the 1st century, and we are followers of the Way. The Way, also called Christian in some communities, is a movement with its beginnings in Judaism, following a Jewish prophet named Jesus. We came into faith through the fledgling church founded by followers in Jerusalem. However, 15 years ago

the temple in Jerusalem was over taken by the Zealots. Murder and mayhem were a constant threat to those of us living in Jerusalem. Within a few short years the Romans leveled the Temple (70CE), taking over Judea. Many of us fled to what is now Turkey. Shortly after we left, the last of Jerusalem's Jewish population, hiding from the Romans at Herod's Summer home - Masada, committed mass suicide rather than surrender to Rome.

The Gospel of Jesus is growing, as the message is reaching Jew and Gentile alike. But we are a tiny fraction of the world population. For a couple decades some of us Jesus followers, have been persecuted by the Jewish temple leadership as a heretical sect. Many have been jailed or beaten, and a few even stoned to death. As Gentiles come into the fold, this new sect is looking more like a new religion, especially since the Gentiles don't have to convert to Judaism, nor do they follow the Torah or follow our ancient traditions. As a matter of fact, Rome has allowed Jew to practice our faith because it is our ancient religion. Now, Following the Way looks like a brand new religion, and that has made life miserable for us under Roman rule.

We meet in homes with other Christians. We meet at night because we are working people, and because we are considered strange, unnatural. We call everyone "brother" or "sister," so we are labeled as incestuous, and because we practice the symbolic eating the body and blood of Jesus, we are said to be cannibals.

As Roman citizens, we are expected to demonstrate loyalty to Rome by practicing "piety," participating in the rites of the state religion which has numerous feast days, processions and offerings to Caesar, and to many Roman gods and goddesses throughout the year.^{[2][3]} Our family are tanners by trade, however, we lose customers and cannot participate in local economy if we are openly practicing our faith.

To function in Roman society, one must worship Caesar as divine. "The exclusive sovereignty of Christ clashes with Caesar's claims to his own exclusive sovereignty."¹ Since we do not worship anyone, or anything other than YHWH, we are now seen as belonging to an anti-social, subversive, illicit religion.^{[2][4]} By embracing the faith of the Gospel we have incurred the supposed guilt of an unnatural and unpardonable offense. We are looked upon as having dissolved the sacred ties of custom and education, violated the religious institutions of our country, and presumptuously despised what our fathers have believed as true, or revered as sacred.^[5]

Our refusal to sacrifice to the Roman gods is seen as an act of defiance against the very nature of Rome itself.^[6] The pagans "have thoroughly persuaded themselves that they act rightly and that we are guilty of the greatest impiety."^[7] We are "constantly on the defensive", but cannot practice Roman religion and continue fealty to Jesus the Christ.^[8] Amongst the Romans, "The prejudice has become so instinctive that eventually, mere confession of the name 'Christian' can be sufficient grounds for execution."^[6] In the years since Nero Caesar, stories abound of martyrdom through death by sawing, stoning, crucifixion, burning at the stake, or other forms of torture and capital punishment. Now with the completion of Rome's new colosseum, many Christians have been martyred as part of the new "games."

These are the circumstances of your daily life.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

One more important piece in our historical context is that the early church was expecting Jesus' imminent return. Paul reminds the Thessalonians to continue the work of the Gospel, as many had sold all their belongings and spent their days waiting on a hill for Jesus to descend. His return was foremost in their understanding of Jesus' Gospel message. Whereas they were waiting to escape the Earth, the Revelation of Jesus was meant to remind God's people that the plan for us is not escape from the world, but a redeemed, restored new heaven and earth, with God's kingdom making its home with humanity and nature/creation.

Consider you are living within a culture and government as that of 1st century Rome. Imagine what your daily life is like.

CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

1. How much you depend on fellow Roman citizens for your livelihood.
2. To what extent does your faith life permeate your social life.
3. Behavioral changes you might have to make concerning:
 - your neighbors
 - your economic welfare
 - your pagan friends
4. How your faith might become a point of concern.
5. What your future looks like.
6. Of what, and whom, you might be afraid.
7. How you balance your desire for safety with being a Jesus Follower.
8. What gives you hope for your future.

NOTES:

Δ TIMELESS TALE, OLDER THAN TIME ITSELF

Not Allegorical, but Apocryphal Apocalypse

The book of Revelation, given by Jesus to the church, is a gem of apocryphal literature, and was widely used as literary genre of early writers. Throughout millennia readers have loved fantastical stories of epic journeys and vision quests, of great battles between monsters and men.

More well known are Homer's Iliad & Odyssey, tales of Greek and Roman mythology, portions of the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the entire book of Revelation, Beowulf, The Wizard of Oz, and most importantly, J.R.R. Tolkein's Lord of the Rings.

These stories consist of fundamental human nature and tendencies, where courage and hope are necessary to overcome evil. Whereas many can be read allegorically the themes are timeless. Most find their applicability from the reader's own experience thus carrying meaning within historical events. Most are written without the characters' knowledge of the future, so hope and despair go hand-in-hand throughout the stories.

SOME DEFINITIONS:

Apocryphal: A term that means "to hide away" and refers to writings of unknown authorship or questionable authenticity. Early Christian writers used the term to describe Jewish and Christian writings that were intended for an inner circle.

Eschatological: Study of end times

Esoteric: language intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialized knowledge or interest.

Apocalyptic: A literary genre that includes writings that often discuss the end of the world, cosmic destruction, and otherworldly experiences. Apocalyptic literature is a product of the Judeo-Christian tradition and is characterized by:

- End-of-time events
- Symbolic language (metaphor, simile, and *metonymy)
- Pessimistic view of present age
- Visions and revelations in symbolic form
- Pseudonymous authorship
- Themes, i.e. cosmic dualism, divine judgement, and eschatological hope
- Subversive messages

Numerology plays a significant, critical role in Revelation, especially the numbers 7, 12, 6, and multiples thereof

- a. Seven; 3 (God) +plus+ 4 (World -4 corners) = Seven
 - i. Completeness; inclusion of all
 - ii. God's working within humankind, within world events, within history
- b. Six
 - i. Mankind
 - ii. Relationship (with the Lamb or the Beast)
 - iii. 666 gematria (translating letters to numbers)
 1. Nero Caesar (Nerōn kaisar, Gr.) = 666
 2. Beast (thērion, Gr.) = 666
 3. Mark of the Beast – parody of seal of God
- c. Twelve
 - i. 12 symbolizes perfect government and God's power and authority. For example, Jesus chose 12 apostles to represent the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - ii. 12 represents the foundation of God's divine order. For example, the New Jerusalem has 12 gates, 12 foundations, and 12 angels at the gates.
 - iii. 12 represents totality and the completion of God's purpose. For example, Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons who became the founders of the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - iv. 12 x 12 = 144 The complete number of the Bride of Christ, the Church

The Apocalypse (revealing) of Jesus's message is to the church in the late first century.

The Revelation of Jesus is based on the timeless love of God for creation and humanity, and how evil will stand in the way of God's intentions in every generation. It is the basic story of good vs. evil. The book of Revelation is timeless theology, because history is tragic.

"Revelation is a gift—a work of intense imagination that pulls its reader into a world of sky battles between angels and beasts, build punishments and glorious salvation, Kaleidoscope vision and cosmic song. It is a world in which children are instinctively at home and in which adults, by becoming as children, recapture an elemental involvement in the basic conflicts and struggles that permeate moral existence, and then go on to discover again the soaring adoration and primal affirmations for which God made us." (Eugene Petersen) ¹¹

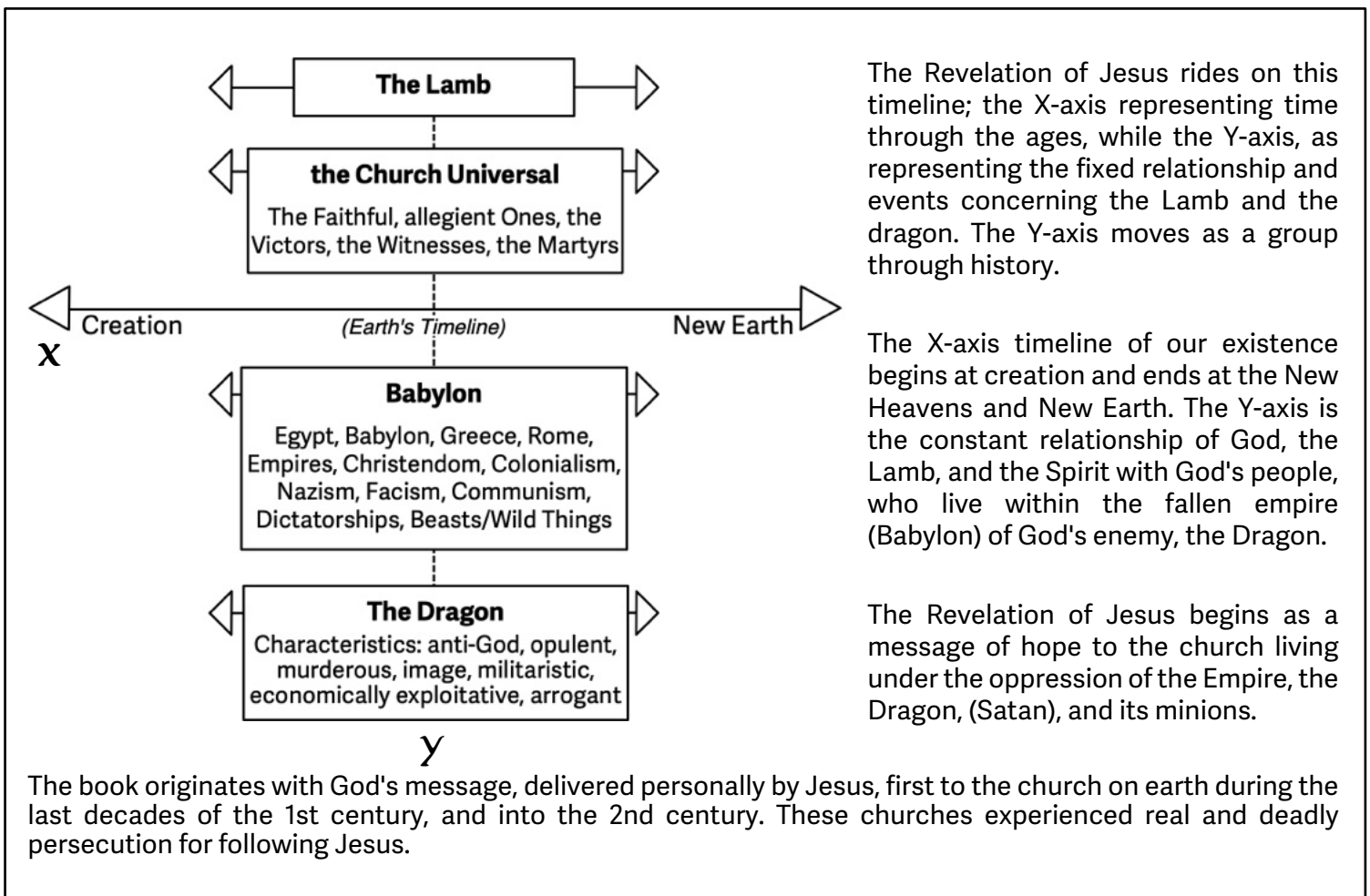
Jesus wants us to be aware of evil's modus operandi so we can recognize it and overcome its powers.

God's System vs. the World's System: The systems of our world have not changed much since creation. (1) Evil's greatest intent is toward power, and the world's systems are built on power, where those with the most wealth and influence are at the top, with the wealthy, powerful movers of commerce. Beneath those are skilled workers and people necessary to perpetuate the existence of the powerful. Lastly, on the bottom are the slaves, the poor, needy, widows, orphans... those where the Spirit of Jesus makes his home. This system is called "Babylon" in the book of Revelation. Babylon has a specific time in Judean history when the Southern Kingdom of Judah is carried away captive to live and serve in Babylon. But in the book of Revelation, Babylon refers to Rome. Babylon can refer to every system on Earth where power is king, i.e. facism, nazism, communism, dictatorships, etc. and where God's people are oppressed. (2) God's system is recognized by Jesus as the Lamb Who Was Slain, and all God's people, followers, the faithful ones.

God's enemy, evil, designated as the Dragon (Satan) in Revelation, is always at odds and at war against the Lamb and his church. As in the timeline below, God and God's people have had to deal with the Dragon and Babylon for time immemorial.

As we move through time, the war between the Lamb and the Dragon continues. Regardless of what is happening throughout generations, the timeless battle between good and evil continues.

Before engaging the fantastical stories of Revelation, let's familiarize ourselves with its cast of characters.



REVELATION CAST OF CHARACTERS

TEAM LAMB^[10]

The Lamb: In the center of the throne room and the center of the action in Revelation. The Lamb is the Lord Jesus Christ, who has many names and attributes, including: Jesus, Messiah, faithful witness, first born from among the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth, loves us, liberates us, Alpha and Omega, who is-who was-who is to come, like a son of man, first and last, living one, holds keys of death and hades. Lion, Lamb, Logos, Light: all of these represent the Lord over all lords and King over all kings. He is the Savior/ Redeemer by his blood.



Jesus, as introduced in chapter one. He stands among the Church, holds the spirits of the churches and their angels. He overcomes not with bloodshed by sword and violence, but by the two-edged sword, the Word, of his Gospel.



GOD ON THE THRONE: The God of Israel, the Father, the sovereign God over all, who orchestrates the events of history toward the new Jerusalem. God's might is matched by God's gracious love. This God will defeat the dragon, banish death, and establish life in New Jerusalem. To God belongs all worship and praise and honor and glory because this God brings salvation through the Lamb. Trinity: Father, Son (Lamb), and Spirit.



The seven spirits: the Seven Spirits are John's language for the Holy Spirit. The number represents perfection or completeness, and it corresponds to the missions of the Spirit.

REVELATION CAST OF CHARACTERS

TEAM LAMB^[10]



THE WOMAN: appears to morph in Revelation 12 from Eve to Israel, to Mary, mother of Jesus, and finally to the church. She is opposed by the dragon, who tries to kill her and the baby boy born to her (Jesus).

She escapes under protection from God. Her offspring is opposed by the dragon.



TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS: They surround the throne, wearing white clothing with gold crowns. The number twenty-four suggests two times twelve, representing Israel and the apostles. Altogether they represent the redeemed people of God in worship of God.

ENVOYS/ANGELS: Abundant in Revelation, they perform missions for God in this world for the redemption of humans.



THE WITNESSES: These represent believers and followers of Jesus in the way of the Lamb. The seven churches are faithful (allegiant) witnesses in life and word to the way of the Lamb and the rule of King Jesus. They suffer for their witness. They are known for their works of goodness and love and kindness. Along with the **MYRIADS:** Those who worship God who are innumerable. Keep in mind that the Christian community was miniscule and easily counted in the 1st century, so the myriads in Revelation are an encouragement to the Church Universal.



REVELATION CAST OF CHARACTERS

TEAM LAMB^[10]



FOUR LIVING THINGS:
They surround the throne, cover their eyes, have six wings, and praise God endlessly. They intercede, and at times guide John through the three times



seven judgments/disciplines. They echo the living creatures of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel's four living things and represent all creation worshipping God.



SEVEN SCROLLS

SEVEN TRUMPETS

SEVEN BOWLS

These represent the three times seven wraths, or plagues. Each vision is a revelation of the same seven righteous judgements upon the earth. God uses these as disciplines to encourage humanity to repent, come out of Babylon and join Team Lamb.

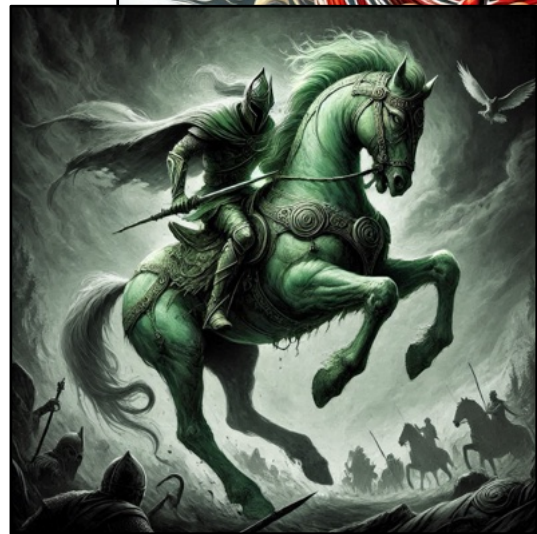


REVELATION CAST OF CHARACTERS

TEAM LAMB^[10]



FOUR HORSES:
white, red, black, and green, are called upon to deliver some of the divine judgments



NEW JERUSALEM: This future, ideal city is the world as God designed it to be. It is inhabited by those who want to dwell in God's presence and with whom God dwells. It is better than the visions of the Greco-Roman visions of society (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero), it fulfills the expectations of Israel's prophets and more, and it takes the old Jerusalem and becomes the heaven-with-us kingdom of God. It represents the time when there will be no more war, poverty, sickness, fear, death, or tears.



REVELATION CAST OF CHARACTERS

TEAM DRAGON^[10]

BABYLON: Its mission is to embody the way of the dragon. Rides on the wild thing. Characterized by royalty, idolatry, opulence, murder, status, arrogance, power, military might, murder, and economic exploitation. Kills those in the way of the Lamb. Gathers under her power the kings of the earth, merchants of the world, and sea captains. Serves as a timeless representation of empire and injustices and idolatries. In John's day, Babylon is Rome. Also known as the great prostitute. A.K.A. **The Whore:** Depicted as Roman goddess of Victory, "Roma," sitting atop seven hills (Rome). Babylon and the Whore are a trope—a metaphor, and image, a figure—for any empire filled with arrogance, oppression violence, immortality, and idolatry.



THE DRAGON: Has a mission of accusation, deceit, death. Chases the woman from Team Lamb, but loses her. Wages war with the woman's children (the church). Battles Michael the angel and loses. Has control of the wild things, significant control with the political powers embodied in Babylon.

Defeated by the Lamb and by the allegiant witnesses. Bound for one thousand years, released, and then destroyed in the lake of fire. Also known as Satan, the devil.

WILD THING #1: A.K.A. Beast from the Sea, its mission is to embody the will of the dragon.

Represents chaos, power, deception, and opposition to the Lamb. Ruler of evil empires. One of the dead-heads of the wild thing is raised from the dead. It is worshiped by humans. Its rule is temporary. Makes up one third of the unholy trinity: dragon, wild thing #1 and #2.

WILD THING #2: A.K.A. Beast from Land. Mission is to embody the will of wild thing #1 and dragon. The sycophant in chief, the propagandist. Disguises itself like the Lamb, acts like the dragon. Forces worship of wild thing #1, does fraudulent miracles, deceives the world. Forces humans to accept the "mark of the wild thing." Its name is its number, 666. 666 Represents chaos, deception, Roman Emperor Nero and many others.

OTHERS: Jezebel and the Nicolaitans/ Nicolaus and Balaam. These are representative names, serving as stereotypes for idolatries and sexual immoralities and false teachings.



DISCUSS: WHAT MAKES YOU WONDER AFTER TAKING IN ALL THIS INFORMATION?

WHO DO THESE CHARACTERS REPRESENT?

LAMB: _____ NEW JERUSALEM: _____

7 SPIRITS: _____ BABYLON: _____

WOMAN: _____ DRAGON: _____

24 ELDERS: _____ WILD THING #1: _____

WITNESSES: _____ WILD THING #2: _____

FOUR LIVING BEINGS: _____

SEVEN SCROLLS/TRUMPETS/BOWLS: _____

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¹¹ (Eugene Petersen "Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination" HarperOne, ©1991)