

# THE BIBLE'S LAST BOOK SINGS!

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The Book of Revelation--properly, "Apocalypse to John"--for short, "Revelation" or "The Apocalypse"--is easier to abuse (i.e., misinterpret) than to use (i.e., understand & apply). It's by a Christian charismatic ("I was in the Spirit," 1.10), an itinerant prophet (1.3; 22.7,9,10,17,19), whose visionful sermon is to be read in public worship. Worship: Rev.4-5 is the earliest description of Christian worship, which has always included the singing of hymns (five of which are in these two chapters). So....

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....in this Thinksheet I **propose** to see/show how recent American hymnals sing Revelation. The hymnals, in order of publication, are PH (Pilgrim Hymnal/58), UCH (United Church Hymnal/74), TUMH (The United Methodist Hymnal/89), TPH (The Presbyterian Hymnal/90), TNCH (The New Century Hymnal/95), & CH (Chalice Hymnal/95).

1 Every one except PH has a scripture index, though the range is from a hymn based on a Rev. text all the way down to a hymn that contains only one reference/allusion to Rev. (Thorny work, I found in preparing for teaching a course titled "Great Hymns Based on Bible Texts" [#2672].) As for PH, I identified 5 Rev.-hymns & (by cross-charting from the other hymnals) picked up 13 more.

2 Total hymns, 62; on Rev.1, 9 hymns; on Rev.21-22, 20 hymns. My charting has all the details, but right now I'm interested in your seeing which hymns are related to which of the three divisions of the **time-frame** of 1.19, which gives the general outline of the book:

I "what you have seen" 1.9-20  
II "what is" 2.1-3.22  
III "what is to take place after this" 4.1-22.5

Here are the hymns:

I  
Come, thou Almighty King; O morning star, how fair & bright; Of the Father's love begotten; Lo, he comes with clouds descending; Jesus Christ is risen today; You, living Christ, our eyes behold; Rejoice, the Lord is King; Savior God above; Jesus shall reign.

II  
Rejoice, the Lord is King; Somebody's knocking at your door.

III  
Crown him with many crowns; O holy city, seen of John; Glorious things of thee are spoken; Holy, holy, holy; Holy, holy, holy, Lord; Blessing & honor; Ye servants of God; All hail the power; Sleepers, wake; Christ, thou art the sure; I want to be ready; Let all mortal flesh keep silence; Hail, thou once despised Jesus; See the morning sun ascending; This is the feast of victory; My Lord, what a morning; Fix me, Jesus; Here, O my Lord; For the healing of the nations; I want to be ready; Soon & very soon; This is a day of new beginnings; Shall we gather at the river; Canticle of hope; Come, all of you; Holy, holy, holy, holy, Holy; Holy God, we praise your name; Christ the Lord is risen again; Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!; O God of every nation; He is King of kings; O Lord, you gave your servant John; This is the good news; Thou art worthy; Oh, I will praise; Come, we who love the Lord; The God of Abraham praise; Christ Jesus, please be by our side; God is truly with us; Unite & join your cheerful songs; Come, let us join with faithful souls; What wondrous love is this; O saints in splendor sing; Lift high the cross; Behold the host all robed in light; O what their joy & glory must be; You shall prophesy, all my people; My hope is built on nothing less; Go forth, O people of God; Guide me, O thou great Jehovah; Jesus, keep me near the cross; Where cross the crowded ways of life.

3 Next, let's look at **chapter 1** seriatim (the numbers on the left being the verses). You probably don't have all six hymnals at hand, but I've given all the references & hope you have at least one of them. **Process:** Please, as you proceed throughout the chapter, study the parallel hymns, asking yourself *How does this hymn reflect this verse (or verses)?*

4-6	Savior God above	TNCH 602
4b-8	Jesus shall reign	PH 202; TNCH 300
5-6	Jesus Christ is risen today	PH 187; TPH 123
7	Lo, he comes with clouds descending	TUMH 718; TPH 6

8	Come, thou Almighty King	PH 246; UCH 15
8	Of the Father's love begotten	PH 111; UCH 72; TPH 309
13-15	You, living Christ, our eyes behold	TPH 156
18	Rejoice, the Lord is King	PH 204; TPH 155; CH 699
	(TNCH 303, but not in scripture index)	
19	O morning star, how fair & bright	PH 145; UCH 112; TPH 69

4 To get into Rev.1, we must pass through several doors, each with its own key. Door #1 is labeled "**Cosmos**": Jn. the Revelator's way of seeing reality is vastly different from the way we were taught in America's nonreligious/postreligious schools. Door #2 is "**Social World**": the conventional-wisdom glue holding our society together is of a formula at wide variance from the Roman Empire's glue & the glues of its subject peoples. Door #3 is "**Social Situation**": for our Christian faith, we have not been exiled as Jn. was (v.9), ministering to fellow-persecutees (same v.: "I share with you in Jesus the persecution"). Before the imaginal language of Rev. wrinkles your brow, use your own empathetic imagination as a skeleton key to pass through the three doors. Gradually you'll be given, if you persist, each door's particular key.

5 H.Rich.Niebuhr gives us help on Door #1. In his THE RESPONSIBLE SELF (H&R/63), he says that human beings live their lives in response to how they see reality. This twin-focus ellipse matches my definition of a religion as "a way of seeing, & living in, the world." (1) One may see reality as **indifferent**, as America's Darwin-corrupted public education teaches. On a recent PBS/TV series titled "A Glorious Accident," eminent scientists/philosophers asserted that we can't answer the big questions either macroscopic or microscopic, but (illogically!) assumed that the universe is indifferent, humanity being an "accident"! When Oliver Sacks said that on many matters mystery would be a better word than ignorance, "for example, the Trinity," his compeers reacted with momentary shocked silence. You recognize that Oliver Sacks just might have the key to Revelation's door #1, but the others don't have even so much as a clue. Another great Jew, federal judge Jack B. Weinstein, also showed humility about his ignorance of the mysteries of Revelation: on the stand "for almost an hour I expounded the Bible's last book, the judge delighting me with his eager and close questioning" (p.84 of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT). While we ourselves are indifferent to mystery, we are in no position to conclude that the universe is indifferent.

Or (2) one may see reality as **hostile**, as paranoids (among others) do. Whereas the first view is that nobody's in charge, this second is that the demons are, arranging that "life is one damned thing after another." While I believe that ultimate reality ("God") is benevolent, I give it to the #2s that malevolence is not limited to our species; it's a characteristic of that proximate reality which the Bible (e.g., Ro.8.38) calls "principalities and powers." You can't get in Revelation's first door if you think that evil has no cosmic dimension. **Exercise:** Read through Revelation & record all references to transhuman hostility.

Or (3) one may see reality as **requiring appeasement**. All the sacrificial systems of all the world's religions yesterday & today, including the Bible's, so see reality. Not so, much of mainline Protestantism, whose bowdlerized hymns substitute "love" for "blood" when the reference is to Jesus' benefit to us (in traditional sacrificial language, his "atonement"). **Exercise:** Yes, check out Revelation for all references to the human need for appeasement of reality (e.g., Jesus as "Lamb").

Or (4) one may see reality as "**friend**," as in Tillich's spiritual-experience sequence "God as unknown, God as enemy, God as friend." Long before Tillich, this Pollyanna view led Darwin to conclude for atheism. Au contraire, the Bible's God is indifferent to the self-regarding demands of the unrighteous, hostile to his enemies (his hostility being the flipside of his holiness), appeased by his own efforts (supremely in Jesus' Cross) + sinners' repentance (as in Jn. Newton's "'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, / and grace my fears relieved"), & befriends all who submit to his obedience ("You are my friends if you do what I command you," Jn.15.14). The Bible's most abused words are "God is love" (in the Jn. letters). **Exercise:** In what words does God's friendliness appear in Revelation?

"The responsible self" begins with the responding self. Revelation teaches embattled Christians--& are we not included, though not persecuted now?--how to respond.