

REVELATION

Introductory Matters

The Message of Revelation

Contrary to popular belief, the message of the book of Revelation is not scary or confusing. In utter contrast, the message is one of comfort and encouragement to beleaguered believers. Be strong in the faith! Take courage and persevere! Things are not as they seem! It may appear that the forces of evil are triumphant on every side, but that is not true. God remains in control of His universe and all that takes place within it. Past, present, and future are in His hands alone. Do not despair. With the eyes of faith, look behind the deceiving facade of things as they appear to be and see things as they truly are. With the din of desperate battle raging all around us, listen with the ears of faith to the “*distant triumph song*” already resounding in the halls of heaven and rejoice, for the evil foe has already been defeated. Christ has won the victory and, through faith in Him, that victory is yours!

The Importance of the OT for understanding the Book of Revelation

- Isaiah 6 is the foundational vision for later visionary revelation. Here we see YHWH enthroned; the visible representation of YHWH, namely Christ.
- Ezekiel is foundational – written in 593 B.C., shortly before the destruction of the first Temple. Ch. 1 is the throne vision, which shows YHWH enthroned, etc. There is much in Ezekiel that is the basis for the imagery in Revelation. Ezekiel, like John, receives the call and is given several visions.
- Daniel 7-12 – written in a time of crisis, like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation – “One like a Son of Man.” Daniel has a heavy influence on the Jewish Apocalyptic literature that would be written in the first couple of centuries A.D. 1st century Jews read Daniel and Ezekiel a lot and were familiar with their contents. The “Son of Man” that is so prominent in Daniel is foundational for the Christology of Revelation. However, what is so amazing about Revelation is that we see the slain Lamb on the Throne. We would expect to see the mighty Son of Man depicted in Revelation 4 and 5, but we see, instead, the Lamb that had been slaughtered.
- Zechariah 1-3 shows Satan as the accuser and is foundational for understanding how Satan is depicted in Revelation.
- Because of these powerful OT visions, there was a great interest among Jews in the heavenly throne room, which we see in the Jewish Apocalyptic literature. When the earthly Temple is gone, the reality of the heavenly Temple is still there. In fact, the earthly Tabernacle/Temple is a copy of the heavenly reality.

Jewish Apocalyptic Literature

- Why were Jews writing this kind of material, following in the tradition of Daniel, Ezekiel, etc.? Because, as 1 Maccabees tells us, there was no prophetic voice in the land. This shows why the Jews were so excited when John the Baptist showed up. The fact that so much of this literature was written shows that there was great trauma going on in the land and the people needed hope. They were looking toward the heavenly reality, because things were so bad on earth, and to the End Times, when God would make all things right.
- Some of the Jews who wrote these texts may have indeed had the experiences they wrote about. We know from psychology that people can work themselves up into such an emotional frenzy that they believe they are seeing visions, etc. However, most of the writers

used OT books, such as Daniel, Ezekiel, etc., as a launching pad to write their stories and develop their own theology as to what the heavenly realm looks like and the End Times would be.

- 1 Enoch 37-71 is one of the most important texts for our understanding of the importance of Jewish Messianic expectations. The Jews were longing for the enthroned YHWH, the enthroned Son of Man, the Messiah, to come.
- When we look at the Apocalyptic literature in the OT and the Jewish Apocalyptic literature of the 1st century A.D. and then read Revelation, we notice that Revelation is not just some sort of strange genre of literature that just pops out of the blue. 1st century Jews were at home with this kind of genre – Revelation was their kind of book. 1st century Jews were extremely interested in Ezekiel and Daniel.
- Up until the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., this was the literature of the day. After the Temple is destroyed, we see the Jews redefining themselves and their literature is directed more towards laws to govern their earthly lives – how should they live day by day, etc. Their hopes had been dashed and they began to focus on what to do in this life, rather than on the heavenly reality and coming of the Messiah, etc. There is also a Jewish mysticism that arises.

Author of Revelation

- The author of the Book of Revelation tells us four times that his name is “John” (Rev. 1:1,4,9; 22:8). The Greek name “*Ioannes*” is a form of the Hebrew name “*Yohanan*” which means “*Yahweh is gracious!*” The name was relatively common among the Jews of the first century. The fact that John considered it unnecessary to further identify himself indicates that he was a well known figure among the churches of Asia Minor who could safely assume that his audience would recognize him and acknowledge the authority of that which he wrote. It is the overwhelming testimony of the fathers of the early church that St. John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee and brother of James, the author of the fourth Gospel and three epistles in the New Testament bearing his name, was the author of the Book of Revelation.
- Tradition indicates that St. John spent the last years of his life in the Greek city of Ephesus, on the western coast of the Roman Province of Asia. It is conjectured that John, seeing the fulfillment of the signs Jesus warned His disciples about (see Matt. 24), fled Jerusalem before it was destroyed and arrived in the Ephesus in the year 69 or 70 A.D. The fathers further indicate that John was later banished from the city to the nearby island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Domitian who reigned from 81-96 A.D. St. Jerome reports:
“In the fourteenth year then after Nero, Domitian having raised a second persecution, John was banished to the island of Patmos, and wrote the Apocalypse on which Justin Martyr and Irenaeus later wrote commentaries. But Domitian having been put to death, and his acts, on account of his excessive cruelty, having been annulled by the senate, he returned to Ephesus under Nerva Pertinax and continuing there until the time of the emperor Trajan, founded and built churches throughout all Asia, and, worn out by old age, died in the sixty-ninth year after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city.”
- This, of course, conforms with the testimony of the text itself, which indicates that at the time when the Revelation came to John he was “*on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus*” (Rev. 1:9).

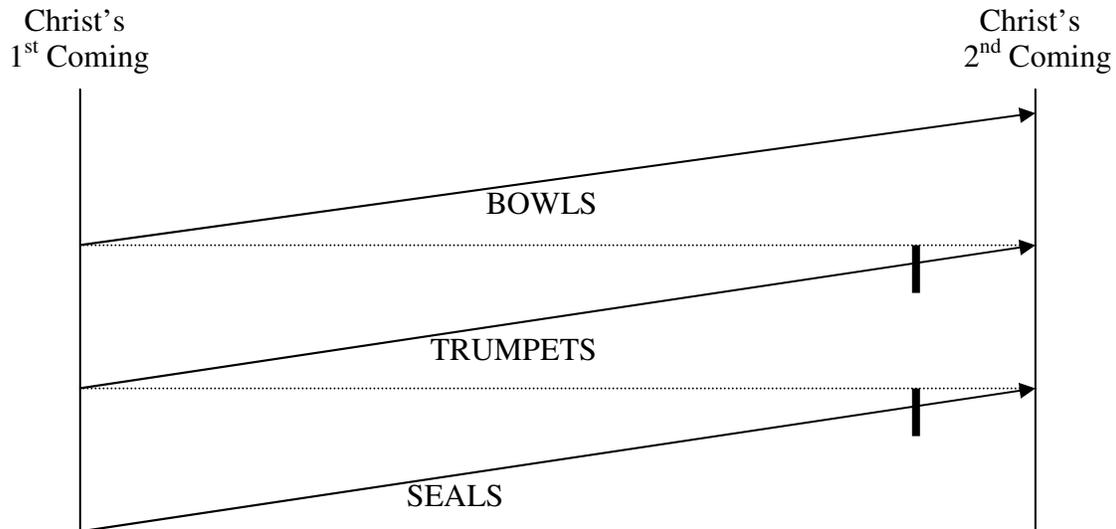
- Besides the overwhelming testimony of the early church fathers, the style of writing in Revelation is so similar to that of the fourth Gospel and three epistles bearing John's name in the New Testament that there can be no doubt all were written by the same author.

Date of Revelation

- Traditional dating is around 95 A.D., at the end of Domitian's reign.
- Some modern day scholars believe that an earlier date of c. 68 A.D. is more probable. Their main argument is the fact that John makes no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in Revelation. Therefore, they conclude, he must have written this book before these events took place in 70 A.D.
- This "argument from silence" does not hold much water and we will stick to the overwhelming evidence that John wrote this book around 95 A.D. Not only is the evidence overwhelmingly in favor of the later date, but the fact that John makes no mention of Temple worship still occurring at the time of his writing this book adds further weight to a late date.

The Outline/Structure of Revelation

- We should see the book of Revelation as one continuous vision (1:9-22:9) with a prologue (1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-21). There are numerous scenes within this one vision:
 - The Prologue (1:1-8)*
 - The Vision(s) Given to John (1:9-22:9)*
 - The Vision of the Son of Man and the Seven Letters (1:9-3:22)*
 - The Vision of the Throne (4:1-5:14) and the Sevenfold Pattern (6:1-16:21)*
 - The Vision of Babylon the Harlot (17:1-19:10)*
 - The Vision of Final Judgment (19:11-21:8)*
 - The Vision of the New Jerusalem as the Bride (21:9-22:9)*
 - The Epilogue (22:6-21)*
- In any Apocalypse, the most important scene is the heavenly throne room. Revelation is no exception. Chapters 4 and 5 make up the central scene in the book that helps us interpret the rest of the scenes. If you miss this scene, you cannot understand the rest of the scenes! Chapters 4 and 5 are not just one scene among the many, but THE KEY SCENE! They depict the eternal, heavenly reality that we believers participate in. While the blood and guts are laid out in the rest of the visions, this heavenly reality continuously exists and provides Christians the assurance that theirs is the victory through Christ amidst the suffering in the world. This is Christian politics, which shows that while all earthly political powers come and go, the heavenly reality, the true power, always exists.
- The Seven Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls
 - These depict the reality between Christ's First and Second Comings
 - They are broad portraits of what goes on in the world in every generation as we march towards the end. They do not depict any particular events that take place in human history. These show that while these things happen in the world, God is in control. It is the Lamb who opens the seals.
 - We see an escalation in these sevenfold visions. We also notice that there is an interlude that takes place at the end of the Seals and Trumpets, but not at the end of the Bowls. Things will get worse and worse as the End approaches.



Revelation is a Political Document

- Revelation asks the question, “Which πόλις (city) do you belong to? Babylon or the heavenly Jerusalem?” (cf. chs. 17 and 21) Throughout the Apocalypse, we see that there are really two realities of people in the world: 1) those who belong to Babylon, the devil’s kingdom, i.e., non-believers; 2) Those who belong to the heavenly Jerusalem, Christ’s kingdom, i.e., believers. There is no middle ground.
- Revelation is written to comfort and assure believers that they belong to the heavenly Jerusalem; that in the midst of the trouble, turmoil, and suffering in the world, theirs is a victorious reality, which the world cannot destroy.

Revelation shows the reality of sin and evil in the world

- Far from shying away from the sin and evil that will exist in this world until Christ returns, Revelation depicts this reality with vivid imagery (cf. chs. 12 and 13). The message throughout is clear: This world is fallen and Satan is thrusting his evil throughout, but Christians share in the victory of Christ over sin, the world, and the devil.

John is a Prophet

- The author of Revelation, John, is a prophet, in line with the OT prophets that came before him. A biblical prophet talks about all of reality – past, present, and future reality. Thus, Revelation is a message that addresses past, present, and future reality, not just the future as some believe.

The Nature of an Apocalypse

- An apocalypse is an unveiling of divine mystery, not just a prophecy of the future. Eschatology deals with the future alone. Revelation is an Apocalypse, not just an eschatological book.
- An apocalypse employs figurative and symbolic language to convey its message. Apocalyptic literature is never to be read or interpreted literally. Instead, the symbolic and vivid imagery employed must be understood if one is to come to a literal understanding of the message. Anyone who claims otherwise clearly does not understand this genre of literature.