

AN INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction to the Study:

1. The book of Revelation is probably one of the most neglected books in the Bible.
 - a. Many are intimidated by it, thinking that it cannot be understood (cf. Eph. 3:3-5; 5:17; 2 Pet. 3:15-16; etc.).
 - b. Many are confused by it, due to its unique style and nature (cf. Daniel; Ezekiel; etc.).
 - c. Many are disturbed by it, due to the many errors and false doctrines that have been taught concerning it.
 - d. Usually, we will study Matthew – Jude (or Revelation 1 – 3) and then start back at the beginning.
 2. Yet, the message of the book is clear and simple to understand.
 - a. This does not mean all will agree on the meaning of every detail – *why one horse is red and another is white, etc.*
 - b. This does not mean we will understand fully every detail – *can be said of any book of the Bible (Acts 2:38 – gift of the Holy Spirit; etc.)*.
 3. We must remember that this book is “the revelation of Jesus Christ” – just like the rest of the New Testament.
 - a. The word “revelation” means, “a disclosure; an unveiling; laying bare, manifestation; a disclosure of truth.”
 - b. This word is found 17 other times in the New Testament (Luke 2:32; Rom. 2:5; 8:19; 16:25; 1 Cor. 1:7; 14:6, 26; 2 Cor. 12:1, 7; Gal. 1:12; 2:2; Eph. 1:17; 3:3; 2 Thes. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13).
 - c. It always refers to something being made known or revealed.
 - i. The Greek word is *apokalupsis* (αποκαλυψις), from which we get our word “apocalypse.”
 - ii. Yet, we tend to think of “the apocalypse” as the destruction of the world!
 - iii. In fact, it is the making known of God’s will concerning the spiritual conflict between the church and the world.
 - d. Compare to parables – revealed and concealed...
 4. However, there is room for differences of opinion in many areas – except two.
 - a. Our understanding of the book of Revelation must not contradict the plain teaching of other Scriptures.
 - b. If a symbol is given an explanation in the text, we must be dogmatic about its interpretation (cf. 1:12, 16, 20).
 5. We must not neglect the book of Revelation.
 - a. We will miss the promised blessing (1:3).
 - b. We will miss important knowledge about Jesus and the church.
 - c. We will miss the culmination of the Bible.
 - d. We will miss the comfort, encouragement and hope provided in this book.
 - e. We will miss the understanding that will help us teach others.
- I. Author
- A. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1).
 - B. It is the revelation of God the Father (1:1).
 - C. It is the revelation of the Holy Spirit (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).
 - D. It was penned by the Apostle John, brother of James.

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Revelation 1:1-3

1. There are many similarities with John's other writings.
2. He was accepted as the author by a majority of the church fathers.

II. Location

- A. The vision was received and, apparently, the writing was done on the island of Patmos (1:9).
- B. It seems that Patmos served as a prison settlement for the Romans.
 1. It was a small, rocky island about 4 miles wide by 8 miles long.
 2. It was located about 50 miles southwest of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea.
- C. William Ramsey that "exile was preceded by scourging, it was marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, and worse under the last of military overseers."

III. Date

- A. The book was written during a time of severe persecution of the church.
- B. There are two dates suggested that fit the situation recorded in Revelation.
- C. During the 60's, the church was persecuted by Nero.
 1. It was a limited and smaller persecution.
 2. Ephesus was a strong, faithful congregation in the 60's.
 3. Yet, some claim that Nero's name = 666.
- D. During the 90's, the church was persecuted by Domitian.
 1. His persecution was more severe and spread throughout the Roman Empire.
 2. Yet, some argue, there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem.
- E. Whatever date is correct, the message of the book remains the same.
- F. However, it seems that the evidence better supports the later date – sometime around AD 95.

IV. Audience

- A. The book was addressed to the seven churches of Asia (1:4).
 1. These congregations were located in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.
 2. This was not the continent Asia, but the region known as Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).
- B. It was written to them, in their culture, for their time.
 1. We must not forget to ask what these things meant to the original audience.
 2. This does not mean that there is no application for us today (cf. Romans or Corinthians).
 3. But, imagine if Paul had written the Galatians a letter that had nothing to do with them but concerned men 2,000 years in the future!
 4. Furthermore, why would Christians in the first century need to know about the American Civil War, World War II, the Korean War or the War on Terror?
- C. It was written concerning "things which must shortly come to pass" (1:1; 22:10).
 1. "Shortly" (cf. Luke 18:8; Acts 12:6-7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom. 16:20)

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2. It means “quickly, with haste, in a brief time, with speed.”
- D. It was written with the understanding that the “time was at hand” (1:3).
 1. “At hand” (cf. Matt. 24:32-33; 26:18; Luke 19:11; John 2:13; 3:23; 6:4, 19, 23; 7:2; Heb. 8:13)
 2. It means “near, nigh, close, imminent, soon to come to pass.”
- E. It was written to be understood, especially by those in the first century.
 1. They did not need miraculous abilities to understand it.
 2. Yet, they understood the words and customs of the times in which they lived (cf. Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 11; John 13; etc.).
- F. It was written to Christians who were undergoing terrible persecution because of their faith (cf. 1:4, 6-9 – *God had not forgotten them!*).
 1. They were facing tribulation and death (1:9; 2:10, 13; 6:9-10; 12:17; 13:7).
 2. The Greek word for “war” is found 15 times in the 22 chapters of Revelation.
 3. Yet, the book was also written to encourage them on to victory – the word “overcome” is found 17 times in these 22 chapters.
 4. Theme: Revelation 17:14
 5. There is a war between good and evil (the church and the world), but God and those who stand with Him will win!

V. Style

- A. The style of this book is known as Apocalyptic – a revealing of that which is veiled or hidden.
 1. The purpose was not to hide or cover up the message.
 2. Instead, it was to reveal it with vivid imagery, signs and symbols.
- B. One of the keys to understanding apocalyptic literature is to recognize that it is symbolic, using signs and imagery to illustrate its message.
 1. Naturally, these symbols must be interpreted by the reader.
 2. To do this correctly, one must rely first upon the book itself.
 3. Then, one must allow other Scripture to aid one’s interpretation.
 4. Common sense and context are also essential!
 5. J. W. Roberts wrote: “It appears that the wise thing to do in interpreting symbols is to follow the proper method of interpreting parables – find the central truth which is being portrayed and let the details fit in the most natural way.”
- C. This kind of writing originated with the Old Testament prophets, namely Isaiah (24 – 27; 33 – 35), Daniel (2, 7, 8), Ezekiel (2:8ff; 38 – 39), Joel (3:9-17), and Zechariah (12 – 14).
- D. In the New Testament, Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; and 2 Thessalonians 2 are considered apocalyptic.
- E. A few notes about Jewish apocalyptic literature:
 1. Following the close of inspiration with the book of Malachi, God did not speak to man directly until John the Baptizer.
 2. During those 400 “silent years,” the Jewish nation faced serious difficulties and threats (prophesied by Daniel).
 3. Thus, they began to write apocalyptic books – not by inspiration.
 - a. These books included the Book of Enoch, the Secrets of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Baruch, and the Book of Ezra IV.
 - b. These books were not inspired of God.

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- c. In fact, they were written in the first century AD, some dealing with the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem.
- 4. These books were written in symbols to keep their persecutors from understanding the true message intended.
- 5. These writings always had historical significance.
- 6. They included visions and symbolism.
- 7. There was an element of prediction.
- F. The book of Revelation is also a book of prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19).
- G. Finally, this book is also an epistle (1:4).

VI. Approaches to Study

- A. There are several approaches that men take when studying the book of Revelation.
- B. The Futurist Approach
 - 1. The book was written about events immediately preceding the return of Jesus.
 - 2. Thus, it had little meaning for John's generation but much teaching for our generation.
 - 3. This is the view taken by Premillennialists.
 - a. Church Age (1 – 3)
 - b. Rapture & Tribulation (4 – 19)
 - c. Millennium (20)
 - d. Eternity (21 – 22)
- C. The Continuous-Historical Approach
 - 1. The book reveals the history of the world from the first century until the return of Jesus.
 - 2. This view is the most popular in Protestant groups who are not Premillennial.
 - 3. It is highly subjective and very speculative.
- D. The Preterist Approach
 - 1. The book refers to "that which is past" – things fulfilled in the early history of the church.
 - a. Some say by AD 312 and the time of Constantine.
 - b. Some say by AD 70 and destruction of Jerusalem.
 - 2. To many who hold this view, chapters 21 and 22 refer to the church and not to Heaven.
- E. The Symbolic (Idealist, Spiritual) Approach
 - 1. The book simply deals with the ongoing struggle between good and evil.
 - 2. There is no need to interpret symbols or understand historical background as long as one gets the general meaning of the book.
- F. The Contextual Approach
 - 1. Asks, "What did it mean to the original audience?"
 - 2. Asks, "How does it apply in principle to the church today?"

VII. Overview of the Book

- A. Historical Background
 - 1. The city of Rome was built on seven hills in the year 753 BC.
 - 2. It became a republic in 509 BC.

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3. Julius Caesar was the first dictator of Rome and is usually credited with starting the Roman Empire.
 4. Augustus Caesar (Octavian) became the first emperor of Rome in 27 BC.
 - a. See Galatians 4:4
 - b. Brought a widespread peace
 - c. Helped spread the use of Greek as a common language
 - d. Ruled when Jesus was born (Luke 2:1)
 5. Tiberius Caesar ruled during the life of Jesus and the establishment of the church (Luke 3:1).
 6. Claudius Caesar ruled from AD 41 – 54 and is mentioned in Acts 11:28 and 18:2.
 7. Nero Caesar ruled from AD 54 – 68 and was ruler when Paul appealed to Rome (Acts 25:10-12). *{This began the first true persecution of the church.}*
 8. Flavius Vespasian ruled from AD 69 – 79 and was ruler when Jerusalem was destroyed (AD 70).
 9. Titus, son of Vespasian, ruled from AD 79 – 81.
 - a. He was responsible for the attack against Jerusalem in AD 70.
 - b. During his reign the city of Pompeii was destroyed by a volcanic eruption.
 10. Domitian ruled from AD 81 – 96 and demanded to be worshipped as “Lord and God.”
 - a. He created images of himself to be placed throughout the empire.
 - b. Once every year, citizens were to appear “before Domitian’s magistrates to say ‘Caesar is Lord.’”
 - c. They were to offer a pinch of incense in worship to Caesar.
 - d. To refuse to do this was considered treason.
 - e. Domitian severely persecuted Christians throughout the Roman Empire.
 11. Following his assassination in AD 96, Rome began its great decline and fall.
- B. Chapter Outline
1. Chapters 1 – 3 - Christ addresses John and the seven churches
 2. Chapters 4 – 7 - God’s heavenly throne and the book with 7 seals
 3. Chapters 8 – 11 - The sounding of the 7 trumpets
 4. Chapters 12 – 14 - The woman’s son VS. the Dragon
 5. Chapters 15 – 16 - The seven angels with seven plagues
 6. Chapters 17 – 19 - Defeat of the harlot, beast and false prophet
 7. Chapters 20 – 22 - Judgment, victory and reward
- C. Key Verses (1:18; 2:10; 3:21; 4:1; 5:12; 12:11; 14:13; 22:14)