

# Introduction to Revelation

## I. The importance of Revelation

- A. 1:3 - Blessed is he who reads. Comfort can be found in the book
- B. Jesus is central to every section of the book
- C. It is the climax of the Bible
- D. Shows the rest of the story ... the children of God are victorious
- E. Will prevent you from being vulnerable to wild speculation

## II. Revelation in Church History

- A. 2nd Century - Montanus and the Montanus movement
  - 1. Wanted to restore the fervor of the Spirit (proto-charismatic?)
  - 2. End was near, New Jerusalem to come at Pepuza
  - 3. Based many teachings on Revelation
  - 4. Result - Revelation became a disputed book from then well into the 4th century
- B. Luther perplexed by it
  - 1. Included it in his German Canon
  - 2. Claimed it was theologically inadequate
- C. Zwingli refused to base any Christian teaching on Revelation
- D. Calvin
  - 1. Said nothing and wrote nothing about Revelation (Passover)
  - 2. Produced commentaries on 26 New Testament books
- E. Modern times
  - 1. Many Protestant denominations use next to no readings from Revelation in their lectionaries and liturgy
  - 2. Greek Orthodox Church omits Revelation all together in liturgy
- F. ON THE OTHER HAND
  - 1. Some early Church fathers claimed Revelation to be a book of substance
  - 2. Among them were Irenaus (2nd century) and Augustine

## III. The Apocalyptic Genre in which Revelation is written in

- A. Apocalypse - "Revealing"
- B. A genre of literature in both Old Testament times and New Testament times
  - 1. Various Old Testament passages are apocalyptic (eg. Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, Jeremiah, Isaiah have sections)
  - 2. The apocalyptic genre flourished during the Intertestamental period
- C. The Apocalyptic Genre is not isolated to Revelation
  - 1. It was common from about second century B.C.E on
  - 2. Non canonical Jewish Apocalypses include
 

a. 1 Enoch	164 B.C.E
b. Jubilees	150 B.C.E
c. Sibylline Oracles, Book 3	150 B.C.E
d. Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs	120 B.C.E
e. Psalms of Solomon	48 B.C.E
f. Assumption of Moses	6-30 C.E.
g. Apocalypse of Moses	68 C.E.
h. Testament of Abraham	85 C.E.
i. 2 Enoch (or secrets of Enoch)	85 C.E.
j. Sibylline Oracles, Book 4	80 C.E.
k. 2 Esdras (4 Ezra) 3-14	90 C.E.
l. 2 Baruch (Apocalypse of Baruch)	98 C.E.
m. 3 Baruch	150 C.E.

- n. Sibylline Oracles, Book 5 150 C.E.
- o. Writings from Qumran 200 B.C.E. - 66 C.E.
  - Commentaries of Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk
  - Zephaniah, and Psalm 37
  - War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness
  - Midrash on the Last Days
  - Description of the New Jerusalem
  - An Angelic Liturgy
  - Prayer of Nabonidus and a Pseudo-Daniel Apocalypse
  - Genesis Apocryphon
- 3. A few examples of some of the more popular Christian apocalypses
  - a. Shepherd of Hermas
  - b. Apocalypse of Peter
  - c. Book of Elchasai
- 4. So the language of Revelation would have already been familiar to the readers

#### IV. The characteristics of Apocalyptic writing

- A. It is an answer to crisis of faith
  - 1. Dt 28:1-14 - God has promised to bless his people
  - 2. Dt 28:15ff - God will punish unfaithfulness
  - 3. So if you are punished because of unfaithfulness, no problem
  - 4. Crisis - What happens when you are persecuted *because* of your faithfulness?
    - a. Is God not faithful after all?
    - b. Maybe God is not powerful enough?
  - 5. Apocalyptic writings written to comfort the faithful afflicted
    - a. Gave meaning to the suffering of the faithful
    - b. Gave the faithful suffering a vision of hope
- B. It uses the language of Conflict
  - 1. Intense despair for the present, but great hope for the future.
  - 2. Victory for the righteous and judgment for the wicked
- C. Visions - Chief means of communicating the message
- D. Use of vivid symbols, dreams, and numbers
- E. Pictures many angels, demons, and celestial beings in the progress of the story with a dramatic element
  - a. History is not just a chain of arbitrary events
  - b. Behind the scenes are conflicts between good and evil angelic beings
- F. Typically, the symbols are only meaningful and therefore interpretable by the ones who receive it. (Symbols are meaningful to a culture and time)
  - a. This is not meant to be mysterious
  - b. Example: If you see a political cartoon with an Elephant and a Donkey in a boxing ring with boxing gloves, what does that mean to you?

#### V. Setting of Revelation

- A. Written by John (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8)
  - 1. There is some dispute as to whether this is John the Apostle or some other John
    - a. He does not identify himself as an apostle
    - b. But he does not do so in other of his writings either
  - 2. Some believe that John the elder and John the Apostle were two different people
- B. Date: Around 94-96 A.D., During the Reign of Domitian
  - 1. Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) wrote that John saw the vision toward the

end of Domitian's reign

2. Eusebius wrote that John was exiled by Domitian to Patmos
3. Jewish and Christian literature AFTER 70 A.D. typically used "Babylon" as a symbol for Rome because it had destroyed Jerusalem as Babylon did
4. Though Nero persecuted Christians, it was localized. But Domitian's persecution appears to have been universal

C. Location:

1. The Isle of Patmos where John was exiled (1:9)
2. In island of 4 x 8 miles 50 miles Southwest of Ephesus

D. Recipients: 7 Churches of Asia

1. Not the continent, but the Romans province
2. There were more than 7 in Asia (Acts 20:6-7; Col. 1:2; 4:16)
  - a. Troas
  - b. Colossae
  - c. Laodicea

VI. Occasion: Severe Persecution

A. Christians refused Emperor Worship (a once a year thing)

1. Domitian required all decrees to begin with "Our Lord & God Domitian commands . . ."
2. Background of Emperor worship
  - a. Idea of divinity of rulers not a new idea
    - Very common in the East
    - In Egypt, the Pharaoh seen as Son of Ra
    - Babylonian kings though of as divine
    - Canaanites saw kings as divine
    - Jews, on the other hand, only saw king as "adopted" by Yahweh as a son of God, not as divinity (Ps 2:7; 89:26-27; 2 Sam 7:14)
  - b. Alexander the Great
    - Historian found in this period that confidence in local gods was waning and more confidence was placed in a universal ruler as a symbol of a universal god
    - That ruler was Alexander the Great - He capitalized on this to bring loyalty and unity to his dominion
    - His successors in the east continued with this
    - In Palestine, it was Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan 8:9-11,25; 11:36)
  - c. When world empire shifted to Rome, the idea of a divine ruler already had a long history
  - d. Julius Caesar hailed as divine after his death
  - e. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum had temples to Caesar
3. In 1st Century, emperor worship was sporadic
  - a. Nero 54-68, Vespasian 69-79, Titus 79-81 - Did not discourage it, but did not actively promote it either
  - b. Tiberius 14-37 and Claudius 41-54 Discouraged it
  - c. Gaius (Caligula) 37-41 - Took his own divinity seriously
    - Insisted on being treated as a god
    - Ordered statues of deities replaced with his head
    - Ordered a statue of himself be placed in the temple in Jerusalem
    - Died before order could be carried out
  - d. Domitian 81-96
    - Demanded to be worshipped
    - All official decrees to begin, "Your lord god commands"

- Required people to say, "All hail to our lord (kurios)
- Had people put to death for booing his team at the games, they disrespected his divinity
- Emperor worship not a big deal among general public
  - Like pledging allegiance to the flag
  - It a civic duty
  - Caesar is Lord became a test of loyalty
- Engaged in extensive persecution of Christians
- 4. Because Christian's refused to declare Caesar as lord, they were seen as unpatriotic at best, and guilty of treason at worst
- B. Christianity seen as an illegitimate religion
  1. Romans respected "old" religions
    - a. Judaism not seen as an "old" religion to most people
    - b. Josephus wrote antiquities to refute this idea
  2. Christianity was a brand-new religion
    - a. Judaism had the blessing of Rome, it was a legal religion
    - b. Christianity was seen as a sect of Judaism, like Pharisees
    - c. After 70- A.D. the rift between Judaism and Christianity widened, and Christianity no longer a legal religion
  3. Unlike other religions, Christianity had no images, no temples, but met mysteriously in homes
- C. Christians excluded themselves from most civic and social activities
  1. Religion was a part of daily Roman life
  1. Most civic activities involved patronage to a local deity
  2. Trade guilds usually involved honoring a deity
  3. Even banquets, weddings, etc. involved honoring gods
- D. Christians were accused of various practices
  1. Orgies - Love Feasts
  2. Cannibalism - Closed communion
  3. Treason -
    - a. Refusal to declare Caesar is Lord once a year
      - Rome's religious policy was tolerant
      - Could worship whatever god you wanted, as long as you did your civic duty and worshipped Caesar once a year
    - b. Refusal to go to war.
      - Part of the oath of initiation included service to idols
      - Wearing of idolatrous insignia on uniforms
  4. Atheism (as were the Jews)
    - a. Did not participate in festivals to the traditional gods
    - b. Imageless worship
    - c. Christians claimed other gods were no gods at all
      - Most in ancient world were henotheists
      - Each nation or area had their gods
      - When you traveled, you honored their deities
- E. Christians were usually the poor and outcast of society
- F. Isolation
  1. Jews suffered much of the same types of misunderstandings as the Christians
    - a. But there were Jewish communities in all the cities
    - b. There were Jewish trade guilds, vendors, etc.
    - c. Initially, Christians were a part of that
  2. Jewish Christians became isolated, they were no longer welcome in the Synagogues and no longer considered Jews by Jews
  3. Gentile Christians suffered isolation from family and friends as well
- G. Biblical Examples of what Christians suffered - Heb 10:34; 12:4; 1 Pet 4:14,

16; 5:9

## VII. Background on Rome

- A. Worldwide empire
- B. Pax-Romana - "Roman Peace"
  - 1. Many thankful when Rome took over. Rome restored order
  - 2. Travel & trade prospered due to Roman peace
  - 3. Christians were seen as a threat to the Roman peace
- C. As time progressed, Rome grew more and more lax morally
  - 1. Divorce was rampant
  - 2. Sexual immorality was rampant
  - 3. Children at times sold into slavery because they were a burden
- D. Religious climate
  - 1. Rome was actually tolerant of most religions
  - 2. All Rome required from the time of Domitian was a declaration of the divinity of Caesar "Caesar is Lord" once a year, then you could worship whatever God you want
  - 3. Those who refused faced consequences by the authorities
    - a. They may be beheaded
    - b. They may be exiled
    - c. They may have all their property confiscated
- E. Period of Instability of Rome
  - 1. During later first century, there were many wars Rome was involved in
    - a. 62 C.E. - Parthians at Eastern border (Rome defeated)
    - b. 68 C.E. - In Gaul to put down a rebellion
    - c. 69 C.E. - Against the Germanic Tribes
    - d. 66-70 - Judea
  - 2. Change in Rulers
    - a. Nero (bankrupted Rome) Died in 68
    - b. Followed by 3 emperors in 2 years
    - c. He was last of Julian Emperors
    - d. Vespasian first of the Flavian Emperors
  - 3. Early 90's were general famines around the world
  - 4. Any perceived threat against stability of Rome taken seriously

## VIII. Purpose of Revelation: To comfort the church in its struggle against evil

- A. The church will ultimately be triumphant
- B. Evil will ultimately be destroyed

## IX. Genre of Revelation

- A. Apocalyptic (1:1)
- B. Prophecy
  - 1. Can misunderstand - Most think of prophecy as mere prediction
  - 2. Hebrew understanding of prophecy
    - a. Eg: Exod 4:11-16; 7:1 - Aaron a "prophet" for Moses
      - A prophet is a spokesperson, a messenger Amos 3:7
    - b. A prophet interprets history
      - Either before the fact or after the fact
      - Eg
        - Isaiah 45:1 - Explanation of Cyrus
        - Joel 1:4ff - Explanation of a locust plague
        - Hagg 1:7-11 - Explanation of a drought
- C. Epistle (1:4)
  - 1. A letter is occasional
    - a. Not a collection of general ideas or principles
    - b. It is specific letter to a specific people

2. Not written directly to the public at large
  - a. Have to engage in a little more interpretive work
  - b. Similar to reading an epistle of Paul
  - c. We will misunderstand if we read it as written directly to us
3. This is why we have spent so much time on background material

## X. Symbols and Numbers

### A. Numbers:

- 1 - Unity
- 2 - Strength or companionship
- 3 - Deity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)
- 3 1/2 - (half of 7) Incompleteness with a future hope for completion
- 4 - The creation, the world (four corners of the earth)
- 5 - (half of 10) Limited human strength or completeness
- 6 - (7-1) Imperfection or Evil
- 7 - Perfection, sacred completeness, salvation (7 days of creation)
- 10 - Fullness or completeness (of power or rule). Man's completeness
- 12 - Religious completeness (or "organized religion")
- 24 - (12x2) Religious perfection intensified
- 40 - (4x10) - Completeness on a human level
- 144 - (12x12) Religious completeness intensified
- 666 - Evil intensified, raised to the third degree
- 1000 - (10x10x10) Completeness intensified - God's completeness, completeness raised to the third degree.
- 144,000 - Religious Completeness intensified

### B. Symbols

1. Mount Megiddo (Armageddon) - Struggle between good and Evil
2. Beast - A political or religious power or institution hostile to God
3. Dragon - Satan
4. Earth - A world order or system
5. Eyes - Knowledge
6. Horns - Power, usually of Kings
7. Lamb - Christ
8. Lamps - Truth
9. Mountains - Kingdoms
10. Throne - Authority

## XI. Methods of Interpretation

### A. Futurist -

#### 1. Explanation

- a. Highly literalistic interpretations
  - Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem (chapter 11)
  - Literal 1000 year reign of Christ
  - A personal Anti-Christ (chapter 13)
- b. Events in Revelation precede coming of Jesus immediately
- c. Chap 1-3 applicable to John's time, 4-22 in the future
- d. Because of literal interpretation, the things have not happened yet and therefore it is all still to happen in the future
- e. Some specifics:
  - Jewish rejection, church begun as temporary measure
  - Chap 1-3 tell of the 2000 years of the church so far
  - Jews will one day accept Christ
  - Rapture (Rev 4-5) and Tribulation (7 years) (Rev 6-19)
  - Jesus' 1000 year reign on earth (Rev 20)
  - A little season - Satan's last effort but defeated (Rev 20)
  - Judgment (Rev 20)

- Eternity (Rev 21-22)

## 2. Objections

- a. It ignores the obvious symbolism of the apocalyptic genre
- b. No message to those facing persecution
- c. It was obviously meant for early Christians
  - Rev. 1:1 - Was to take place soon (compare to 2 Tim 4:9)
  - Rev 22:6 - Do not seal up the words, the time is near
- d. The church was a part of God's eternal plan (Eph 3:10,11,21), not a secondary and temporary measure

## B. Historical

### 1. Explanation

- a. Especially compatible with the Protestant Reformers
- b. Holds that the events in the book of Revelation are a systematic progression of the first century to the end of the world
- c. Prophecies in detail the Apostasy of the Roman Catholic church
- d. Examples
  - Chap 7 - Third Trumpet - Invasion by Attila the Hun
  - Chap 10 - Great Angels announces the Reformation
    - The little book is the Bible
    - 7 Thunders are the anathemas against the Reformation by the Pope
  - Chap 11 - The measuring of the Temple is the determining of what constituted the real church during the Reformation
    - The two witnesses were those who testified against the errors of the Roman Catholic Church

### 2. Objections

- a. Out of touch with early Christians
- b. Gives undue importance to Roman Catholic Church,
- c. This view limits God's interest to Western Europe
- d. Has led to false calculations of times which have been consistently wrong

## C. Idealist

### 1. Explanation

- a. Does not apply to any particular historical setting
- b. Highlights the forces of good and evil which underlie events in every age
- c. This method is favored by those who want practical application

### 2. Objections

- a. While it is the "least dangerous" of approaches, it ignores obvious historical references
- b. It was written to a specific people at a specific time

## D. Preterist

### 1. Explanation

- a. Meaning: Past, or beyond
- b. A earlier form of this, Postmillennialism, received its heyday during the 18th & 19th centuries
- c. It is the opposite of the Futurist view. Most if not all of the events had already come to pass just before 70 A.D.
- d. Many of the vision not meant to be consecutive
- e. One conclusion is the 70 A.D. theory
- f. Revelation could be outlined as follows:
  - Chap 1: John's vision of the Risen Christ
  - Chap 2-3: Situation of early Jewish Christianity
  - Chap 4-5: Heavenly scene of Christ's Reign
  - Chaps 6-18: Parallel Judgments on Jerusalem

- Chap 19: The Coming of Christ to Complete the Judgment of Jerusalem
- Chaps 20-22: Christ's Rule on Earth

2. Objections:

- a. No relevance for today
- b. Ignores the passages that seemingly point to the future such as the second coming of Christ and judgment day

E. Historical Prophetic View

1. Explanation

- a. Should be interrelated as another book of the Bible
  - Written primarily for first century Christians
  - Book has application for Christians for all time
- b. It is historical in that it should be understood in its historical setting
- c. It is prophetic in that the principles are to be applied to Christians at all times in every place.

XII. We will proceed from a Historical Prophetic View



## Non-Canonical Jewish Apocalypses

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| a. 1 Enoch                               | 164 B.C.E            |
| b. Jubilees                              | 150 B.C.E            |
| c. Sibylline Oracles, Book 3             | 150 B.C.E            |
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| e. Psalms of Solomon                     | 48 B.C.E             |
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| l. 2 Baruch (Apocalypse of Baruch)       | 98 C.E.              |
| m. 3 Baruch                              | 150 C.E.             |
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| o. Writings from Qumran                  | 200 B.C.E. - 66 C.E. |
- Commentaries of Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Nahum,  
    Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Psalm 37
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