

THE VICTORY OF CHRIST & HIS PEOPLE!

A Study of Revelation



Intro: The book of Revelation may be the most misunderstood and misinterpreted of all the books in the Bible. Part of the confusion is due to the way the book is written, using symbols to convey spiritual truths (more on this later). Adding to the confusion is the way men have treated the letter throughout the years, attempting to fit current events into the book's many signs in order to forecast when the Lord will return.

Some are hesitant to study Revelation, thinking it too hard to understand. However, this is not true. While the images and symbols in which the message of Revelation is couched might sometimes be difficult to understand, the message of Revelation is quite plain and simple...Christ is victorious and so are they who are with Him! The aim of our study is to see the importance of this message for the original audience, and for us.

Basics

Author:

1. The author of Revelation is revealed three times in the first chapter as being John, vss. 1, 4, 9.
2. Although some have questioned this, the evidence is overwhelmingly in favor that the author is the apostle John.
 - a. Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165), "There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation," and then he goes on to quote heavily from the book of Revelation.
 - b. Irenaeus (~ A.D. 180) who had been taught by Polycarp, a disciple of John, "John, also the Lord's disciple...says in the Apocalypse," and then quotes profusely from the book.
3. Of course the true author is Jesus (1.1). John just wrote it down in words.

Audience

4. Noted as the seven churches that are in Asia (1.4). These are listed in 1.11 as Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.
5. The listing of these seven churches, all in western Turkey, is significant for a couple of reasons:
 - a. We see the symbolism that will be prevalent throughout the book. There were other congregations in Asia (Colossae for instance), but the number 7 has significance in this letter, standing for something whole and complete. Thus, the 7 churches of Asia would seem to stand for all of God's people.
 - b. The location of these churches in Asia is significant in dating the letter, as this indicates the persecution of God's people was great in this area.

Place

1. John states in 1.9 that he was on the island of Patmos when he received this revelation from the angel of the Lord. "A rocky and bare island in that part of the Aegean called the Icarian Sea, about twenty miles south of Samos, and about twenty-four west of the coast of West Asia...On account of its isolation the island was used, under the Roman empire, as a place of banishment..." (CBTEL, Vol. 7, Pages 766-7).
2. Thus, it is likely that John was on Patmos because of persecution, even as he refers to himself as a "fellow partaker in the tribulation," (1.9).

Time

1. Determining the time of John's writing is one of the most important factors in interpreting the letter. Most will agree that the setting must have been during a period of intense Roman persecution. So, the reigns of two Roman emperors would seem to fit: Nero (AD 54-68) and Domitian (AD 81-96). Most that favor an early date during the reign of Nero believe the book foretells the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Those favoring the late date during Domitian's reign hold that the book speaks of God's judgment on the Roman Empire. Note: While these interpretations vary regarding which earthly kingdom was going to be destroyed, the message of Christ being victorious still remains.
2. I hold that the late date during Domitian's reign fits best. First, the weight of external evidence favors this as early writers attributed John's work to this time period (most notably Irenaeus). Furthermore, internal evidence in the book favors the reign of Domitian:
 - a. The letter is addressed to the seven churches of Asia, indicating a widespread persecution, 2.10, 13; 3.10. Nero's persecution of Christians seems to have been limited to the immediate area of Rome, while Domitian's persecution was more widespread.
 - b. The church at Ephesus is rebuked in 2.4. However, when Paul wrote them in ~AD 62, the church was sound (Eph. 1.15-16). Seems unlikely that they would have left their first love in such a short time.
 - c. Revelation addresses emperor worship, 13.7, 11-8. Nero persecuted Christians because he made them a scapegoat for the fire in Rome, not because they refused to worship him. Domitian did demand emperor worship.
 - d. Those favoring the early date equate Jerusalem with the great city of Babylon in ch. 17-9. Jerusalem would not have fit this description. Jerusalem was not even the greatest city in Palestine (Caesarea was) and thus to compare it to mighty Babylon seems a stretch. Rome, as the center of the world empire, fits the description better.

Why So Much Confusion?

The Letter's Apocalyptic Style

1. The word translated "revelation" in 1.1 is the Greek word *apokalupsis*, i.e. "the Apocalypse"
2. The style of Revelation is different from any other book of the New Testament, but is the same as many passages found in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and many of the writings of the inter-testamental period. Mark 13, Matt. 24, and Luke 21 are also "apocalyptic" in their style.

3. Distinctive features of apocalyptic writing:
 - a. Written in an hour of need. "When trials and persecution were the most sever, the light of apocalyptic hope burned brightest...Daniel and Ezekiel wrote during the Babylonian exile to comfort the chosen people in their faithfulness, and to prepare them for trials even down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and finally to the time of the Roman Empire. The book of Revelation was written when God's Saints were being severely tried in the crucible called Rome. It served to reveal God's power to overcome all enemies and His disposition toward His afflicted ones," (Jenkins, Ferrell. The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation. Pages 35-6).
 - b. Drew on the old and applied it to the new. "An understanding of apocalyptic begins with the recognition that it is 'essentially the re-adaptation of the ideas and aspirations of earlier days to a new situation'," (Ibid).
 - c. Esoteric in character. Reveals secrets.
 - d. Symbolic in language.

Different Ways Of Interpreting

1. The style of the letter makes it difficult to understand, but when coupled with the various ways it is interpreted, it's little wonder many conclude they cannot understand Revelation.
2. What follows are the 4 main ways people interpret the letter. Understand, there are myriads shades of each interpretation, but generally speaking most interpretations fit into one of these categories.
 - a. The Historical Approach: Revelation Surveys The Whole Of Church History. This view seeks to fit historical events into the visions of Revelation. This view was popularized by the Protestant Reformers who viewed the Pope as the Beast of Revelation 13.
 - b. The Preterist Approach: Fulfillment is in the Past, Shortly After the Time of Writing. While I agree with the basic approach here, there are problems with some preterist approaches. While the visions of Revelation were to "soon take place" (1.1) there is still place for a future fulfillment of passages like chapters 21-22. Also, some have adopted a doctrine known as Realized Eschatology which sees the fulfillment of every prophecy and sign as fulfilled in Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. There are too many problems with this doctrine to list here.
 - c. The Futurist Approach: Everything After Chapter Three Awaits Fulfillment in the Future. The most popular approach in the Christian world, which awaits a future and often times literal fulfillment of these visions.
 - d. The Spiritual Approach: No Single Fulfillment; Only Transcendent Principles and Recurrent Themes. Sees the letter as allegorical without any true fulfillment on earth.

Keys That Will Clear Up Some Of The Confusion

1. Don't assume a "judgment" passage means THE final judgment.
 - a. For instance, when we read in 1.7 that "He is coming with the clouds" our minds jump to Christ's second coming and the judging of the world.
 - b. However, if we keep in mind the apocalyptic style of the book, we will see that the language is similar to several Old Testament passages where God

- came in judgment on a nation. See Isa. 19.1; Ezek. 30.3; cf. Matt. 24.24-30.
- c. Thus, this language has fitting application to the Lord coming in judgment against a nation (Rome in this case), and doesn't necessarily point to the final judgment.
2. Allow the text to give indications on how to interpret the text. In fact, two keys are given in the first verse of the letter!
 - a. "the things which must soon take place". Note also "the time is near" in 1.3. This letter was written with a message for the original audience, foretelling events that would soon begin to be fulfilled. Interpretations that see events taking place several hundred years in the future do not fit!
 - b. "He sent and communicated it". The word translated as "communicated" in the NASB means, "to give a sign" and is given as "signified" in the NKJV. So, the very first verse indicates that the letter is given in signs and should not be taken literally.

Outline Of This Study:

1. Chapters 1-3: Christ Urges His People To Overcome (*February*)
2. Chapters 4-5: A Glimpse Into Heaven (*March*)
3. Chapters 6-11: Though The Outlook Looks Bleak On Earth, Christ & His People Will Overcome
 - a. The 7 Seals (*April*)
 - b. Trumpets 1-6 (*May*)
 - c. The Little Book, 2 Witnesses & Trumpet 7 (*June*)
4. Chapters 12-22: Though The Spiritual Battle Looks Bleak, Christ & His People Are Victorious
 - a. Combatants In The Spiritual Struggle (*July*)
 - b. The Lamb's Victory Proclaimed (*August*)
 - c. 7 Bowls Of Wrath (*September*)
 - d. Babylon Is Fallen! (*October*)
 - e. Victory Over The Beasts & The Dragon (*November*)
 - f. The New Jerusalem (*December*)