

>>> Introduction <<<<

AUTHOR

- 1) The early church fathers — including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus — uniformly identified this John as the apostle of the same name, the one who abandoned his father's fishing nets to follow Jesus.
- 2) There have been a few scholars through the years that have taken exception to that assessment.
- 3) These exceptions are mainly based on style differences between John's gospel and letters, and Revelation.
- 4) To me personally, these would be easily explained due to the nature of the writings if nothing else.
 - a) If one only thinks of the contrast in what the writings are, Revelation is not like a letter that one would sit down and prepare to send to the receiver.
 - b) And it is truly not like a gospel – a well thought out narrative about Jesus and his ministry.
 - c) It is instead a describing of events and scenes in a vision related in a non-real-world setting.
 - i) Apocalyptic style.
 - ii) Apocalyptic literature is a genre of prophetic writing that developed in post-Exilic Jewish culture and was popular among early Christians. (~200 BC to 350 AD)
 - d) Even the letters to the seven churches were dictated and are from Jesus – not John.
- 5) Additionally, when one looks carefully, there are no reasonable alternatives for the writer and therefore, no real reason for doubt.

SETTING and DATE

SETTING

- 1) We don't have to guess or research where Revelation was written.
- 2) The text itself clearly names the location in vs. 9 of the first chapter as the island of Patmos:

Rev 1:9 (NIV)

9 I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus.

- 3) Patmos:
 - a) About 34 miles off the southwest coast of Asia Minor (coast of present-day Turkey)
 - b) Only 7.5 miles long and 4.3 miles wide.
 - c) Inhabited since approx. 3000 BC.
 - d) Part of a large group of small islands in the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece.
 - e) Very rugged terrain
- 4) As he states, John had been exiled to that barren and rocky island because he had fearlessly proclaimed the gospel.

Revelation – NOTES – 2021

- 5) John had been banished to Patmos as the Roman authorities continued moving against the church.
- 6) Threatened by John's powerful ministry, they viewed John as a dangerous leader of the Christian religion.
- 7) During this exile, while John was separated from his Christian brothers and sisters, the risen Jesus appeared to him in a spectacular vision.

DATE

- 8) Although the island of Patmos where John is, is identified in the text, the exact date is not.
- 9) There are two schools of thought on this:
- 10) Some believe that Revelation was written during Nero's reign, between the years A.D. 54 and 68, the time of Nero's greatest persecution of the Christians.
- 11) The best argument for this date is that the apostle John may have written the description of the New Jerusalem (21) before the destruction of the old city in A.D. 70.
- 12) Another explanation for an early date is that the number 666 works as a possible cryptic reference to Nero.
- 13) When the words "Nero Caesar" are transcribed into Hebrew, the numeric value of the Hebrew letters can be calculated as 666.
- 14) Another argument is that the persecution that Nero instigated against Christians could be coincidental with the persecution in the book of Revelation.
- 15) In context however, these are not really viable arguments.
- 16) In the last analysis, the evidence seems to support the early church tradition that the apostle John wrote Revelation around A.D. 90-95.
- 17) This would place the writing during the reign of the emperor Domitian.
- 18) The early church father Irenaeus made this case.
- 19) Modern scholars agree with Irenaeus.
- 20) Scholars also believe that sometime after writing Revelation, John was released from Patmos.
- 21) He then he returned to Ephesus, where he had been ministering before his exile.
- 22) Several years later, around A.D. 100, John died.
- 23) This progression of events tracks well with the evidence in Revelation itself.
 - a) The writer described himself as a brother and companion of the believers in Ephesus and nearby cities (1:9-11) — an appropriate statement for a leader of the Ephesian church.
 - b) The letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor in chapters 2 and 3 speak of a spiritual decline — something that certainly could have occurred during the forty or so years after their founding.
 - c) In chapter 3 vs. 17, the church of Laodicea is described as rich.
 - d) Since the city was completely destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60-61, it would have been difficult to say this of Laodicea much before A.D. 90.

TO WHOM WRITTEN

Revelation – NOTES – 2021

- 1) The churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea and believers everywhere.
- 2) These seven churches were located in what today is southwestern Turkey.
- 3) Reliable historical sources from the second century A.D. describe the apostle John as ministering in Ephesus around A.D. 70-100. This solidifies the primary destination as the churches the writing was addressing.

CONTENT DESCRIPTION

- 1) As to the content, primarily, we must take John's opening statement as a true indicator of the purpose of the book.

Rev 1:1 (NIV)

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

- 2) Isaiah 53 describes the Christ that we saw as our savior in the gospels. Here is an excerpt

Isa 53:2-6 (NIV)

- 3) Instead of this savior Jesus, in Revelation, we will see Jesus the King – God of the Universe – Conqueror of all evil.
- 4) The book, especially chapters 4 and beyond, is Apocalyptic in style.
- 5) Apocalyptic literature is a genre of prophetic writing that developed in post-Exilic Jewish culture and was popular among early Christians. (~200 BC to 350 AD)
- 6) The Greek word from which we get the word apocalypse means "revelation", "an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling". Wikipedia
- 7) Unfortunately, because of the description of the complete and final destruction of the world described in Revelation, the word Apocalypse has also taken on that meaning.
- 8) One commentator, Joseph Seiss, titled his commentary on the Revelation, Apocalypse rather than Revelation because he felt strongly that the word needed to be clarified and placed in proper perspective.
- 9) The book of Revelation, as with other apocalyptic works, contains mysterious imagery, numerology, cosmic journeys, supernatural beings, and strange beasts.
- 10) This type of literature attempts to describe invisible, supernatural events in human terms.

11) At this point it is important to note that in order to understand the symbols in Revelation, we will consider their meaning to the first-century readers and not impose contemporary events and people on the text.

- 12) Apocalyptic writers never intended for the symbols to be interpreted as literal photographs of the future.
- 13) Instead, they wanted their graphic and disturbing images to symbolize events, beings, or traits in the supernatural realm.

Revelation – NOTES – 2021

- 14) For example, 1:16 describes Christ as having a sharp, double-edged sword in his mouth.
- By comparing this image to Heb 4:12-13 (which describes the Word of God as a double-edged sword that penetrates the soul and judges every thought), it becomes clear that this sword is a symbol for Christ's words.
 - Christ's words are so full of truth that they can cleanly separate good from evil, truth from falsehood.
 - Christ with his words of truth will be the ultimate Judge of all people.
- 15) Symbols may also be context sensitive.
- Example the sword we were just discussing when it is mentioned in 6:1-8 which is a different context, it means destruction.
- 16) That being said, again referring to the list of symbols that I gave out at the start, we will most likely add symbols to and perhaps add contextual meanings to some that are already there.

Approaches to the Study of Revelation

- 17) There are 4 prevalent ways one can enter into a study of Revelation. These are:
- The PRETERIST approach.
 - The HISTORICAL approach.
 - The IDEALIST approach.
 - The FUTURIST approach.
- 18) **The preterist approach** – ("preterist" means "past action"). This view assumes that Revelation simply describes events confined to the apostle John's day.
- This approach views Revelation not as future, predictive prophecy, but as a historical record of events in the first-century Roman Empire.
 - Those taking the preterist approach strongly support the earlier date for the writing of AD 54 to 68.
- 19) **The historicist approach** – views Revelation as a record of church history from apostolic times until the present.
- Many of the Reformers — Luther, Calvin, and others — interpreted Revelation in the historicist manner.
 - They understood this mysterious book as a prophetic survey of church history.
 - Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202) was the first person to interpret Revelation this way; he considered that the book's prophesies to be the events of Western history from the early church until his own time.
 - In this approach, each one of the seven churches in Rev 2-3 represents a certain stage of church history, from the early church to the church of the Middle Ages to, perhaps, even the modern-day church.
 - According to this view, therefore, the Beast of Revelation would represent a specific person or institution in history.
 - Like the preterist approach, the historicist view ignores Revelation's own claims to be a prophecy.

- g) This becomes a perspective issue – looking at things (fitting them if you will) as history is NOT prophesy!
- h) It also robs the book of any meaning for those first-century believers to whom it was addressed.
- i) The historicist view doesn't enjoy much favor today because there hasn't been any agreement on the specific historical events that Revelation describes.
- j) Historicist interpreters often resort to allegorizing the text in order to find various historical events they believe it depicts such as:
 - i) The fall of Rome to the barbarians
 - ii) The rise of the Roman Catholic Church
 - iii) The advent of Islam and even the French Revolution.

k) One comment I read says –

“Because the book of Revelation is categorized as apocalyptic literature and contains numerous symbols, it undergoes a great deal of abuse due to allegorical interpretation.”

l) A commentator by the name of Zuck offers the following description of allegorizing:

Allegorizing is searching for a hidden or secret meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated in reality to the more obvious meaning of a text. In other words, the literal reading is a sort of code, which needs to be deciphered to determine the more significant and hidden meaning. In this approach the literal is superficial, the allegorical is the true meaning.

- m) Not surprisingly, such a subjective, arbitrary, and whimsical approach has given rise to a myriad of conflicting interpretations of the actual historical events in Revelation.
- n) If my understanding of this view is correct, one thing I find especially disturbing about it is the writing must be dynamic.
 - i) In other words, as history unfolds, the meaning of things in the book must change to meet them – to me, this can NOT be considered prophesy.

20) ***The Idealist (symbolic) Approach*** – sees Revelation as depicting a timeless struggle between good and evil that is therefore, played out in every age.

- a) According to this view Revelation is neither a historical record nor a predictive prophecy.
- b) Like the first two views, the idealist or “symbolic” view ignores Revelation's claims to be a prophecy.
- c) Those who take this approach believe that through symbols, Revelation presents timeless truths that were relevant to the original readers and are relevant to readers today.
- d) Proponents of the idealist (symbolic) perspective assert that Revelation's fundamental message can be understood by everyone — a person born in the Roman Empire in the first

century, someone living in New Zealand in the nineteenth century, or someone living in America today.

- e) An extreme symbolic approach would spiritualize the entire book, asserting that Revelation predicts no specific historical events.
- f) It also, if carried to its logical conclusion, severs Revelation from any connection with actual events – past or future.
- g) The book is thus reduced to a collection of myths designed to convey spiritual truth.

21) ***The Futurist Approach*** – in this approach, the book actually consists of two parts:

- a) Chapters 1 thru 3 being an introduction to the context and the words of the Savior to the Churches of Asia.
- b) Then, chapters 4-22 see the predictions of people and events in the future.
- c) However, I think it is important (as we will see) to realize that even though the subject is different, in the two sections, the goal of the writing remains the same.

Rev 1:1-2 (AMP)

1 [THIS IS] the revelation of Jesus Christ [His unveiling of the divine mysteries]. God gave it to Him to disclose and make known to His bond servants certain things which must shortly and speedily come to pass in their entirety. And He sent and communicated it through His angel (messenger) to His bond servant John,

2 Who has testified to and vouched for all that he saw [in his visions], the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. AMP

- d) Only the futurist approach allows Revelation to be interpreted following the same literal, grammatical-historical interpretive method.
- e) This is the method by which non-prophetic portions of Scripture are interpreted.
- f) As previously noted, proponents of the other three approaches are frequently forced to resort to allegorizing or spiritualizing the text to sustain their interpretations.
- g) The futurist approach, in contrast to the other three, does full justice to Revelation's claim to be a prophecy.
- h) Typically, futurists insist that the key to interpreting Revelation can be found in the description of the sealed scroll, which only the Lamb, Jesus, is worthy to open.
- i) Each time the Lamb opens one of the seven seals of the scroll, the earth experiences a cataclysmic event.
- j) Thus, futurists believe that the descriptions of famine, war, and devastation in the central chapters of Revelation depict the final days of human history.
- k) According to this view, the Beast of Rev 13 is the Antichrist, who will appear in the end times to deceive people.

Revelation – NOTES – 2021

- 22) One thing that always leads to a problem in studying and interpreting the book of Revelation is the need to answer the unanswered question – when will Jesus return? – when will this all end?
- 23) If that is the answer we are seeking in our study, (which it is not) we will not find it!
- 24) Only the FUTURIST approach allows Revelation to stand as is and backup the true answer! And that is ... WE DO NOT KNOW!
- 25) The answer to that question has already been given – Jesus himself gave the answer in His response to his disciple's question in Matthew 24:3

Matt 24:3-4 (NASU)

3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" NASU

- 26) The discourse between vs. 4 and vs. 36 is basically a mini version (CliffsNotes) -Revelation.
- 27) Jesus ends the discourse with the true answer:

Matt 24:32-36 (NASU)

32 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; 33 so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 34 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. ***NASU***

28) The last statement is the true answer!

- 29) One of the major causes of confusion regarding Jesus' discourse in Mathew is the word GENERATION in vs. 34.
- 30) One commentary explained it this way.

This is one of the hardest verses in the gospels to interpret. Various views exist for what generation means. (1) Some take it as meaning "race" and thus as an assurance that the Jewish race (nation) will not pass away. But it is very questionable that the Greek term genea can have this meaning. Two other options are possible. (2) Generation might mean "this type of generation" and refer to the generation of wicked humanity. Then the point is that humanity will not perish, because God will redeem it. Or (3) generation may refer to "the generation that sees the signs of the end" (v. 30), who will also see the end itself. In other words, once the movement to the return of Christ starts, all the events connected with it happen very quickly, in rapid succession.

Revelation – NOTES – 2021

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31) John MacArthur states the definition clearly:

This generation refers to the generation living during the end time. The signs of Matthew 24-25 will be experienced within one generation, the generation living when Christ returns.

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32) One final word regarding interpretation. In any outside study you do, you will likely run across the word eschatology.

33) The Oxford English Dictionary defines eschatology as "the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind"

34) Again, turning to MacArthur,

Some who study Revelation do so seeking evidence to support their own (often bizarre or sensational) eschatological views. But they miss the point. Revelation is a rich source of truth about eschatology; in fact, it contains more details about the end times than any other book of the Bible. Revelation portrays Christ's ultimate triumph over Satan, depicts the final political setup of the world system, and describes the career of the most powerful dictator in human history, the final Antichrist. It also mentions the Rapture of the church (3:10), and describes the seven-year time of Tribulation, including the three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation (7:14; cf. Matt 24:21), the second coming of Christ, the climactic battle of human history (Armageddon), the thousand-year earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ, the final judgment of unrepentant sinners (the Great White Throne judgment), and the final state of the wicked in hell (the lake of fire) and the redeemed in the new heaven and new earth.

But the book of Revelation is preeminently the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). It describes Him by many titles and affirms the full deity of Jesus Christ. He possesses the attributes and prerogatives of God. (reference handout)

Far from being the mysterious, incomprehensible book many imagine it to be, Revelation's purpose is to reveal truth, not to obscure it. That fact is evident in its title, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1), primarily in His second coming glory.

(from The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Copyright © Moody Press and John MacArthur, Jr., 1983-2005.)

35) In studying Revelation, we will take the futurist approach.

36) We will take this straightforward view and accept what the text says.

37) It is nearly impossible to consider all the interpretive options offered by people holding the other views, so we will not try to work through that maze of options.

38) Rather, we will take the book as it comes in the normal fashion of language.

Revelation – NOTES – 2021

- 39) Anything other than the futurist approach leaves the meaning of the book to human ingenuity and opinion.
- 40) The futurist approach takes the book's meaning as God gave it.
- 41) In our study we will make every effort NOT to focus so much on the timetable of the events or the details of John's imagery.
- 42) We will try to concentrate on the main message — the infinite love, power, and justice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

43) OBJECTIVES

- a) Come to a better and clearer picture of our Savior and Lord.
- b) Come to a better understanding of the book overall
 - i) The symbology
 - ii) The purpose
 - iii) Properly frame the book – removing the often-unnecessary speculation about the times things will take or have taken place.
- c) Most importantly – we will try to make this study about what God wants us to know from what he has given to John.

44) MULTIPLE EXPLANATIONS

- a) We will run into situation throughout our study where the meaning of a passage is debatable.
- b) There may be 2 or 3 explanations for what the particular passage means.
- c) In these cases, I will make every attempt to explain the different explanations and where possible, I will give the reasoning behind the choice.
- d) Unfortunately, it will be up to you as to which one you consider to be the right one.
- e) One thing I am reasonably sure of is that none of these are “eternal” life threatening.
- f) Simply put, they are interesting to think about and try to decide on but they will not affect our salvation and the final outcome of God’s plan.

45) QUESTIONS

- a) We will still have discussion however, due to the nature of the content,
 - i) Most questions will be more along the lines of how we understand what is being said.
 - ii) Less along the lines of how what we are studying impacts our lives
- b) Also be fielding more questions from you to try to help us all understand the content better.
 - i) I may not always have the answer
 - ii) If not, I will attempt to get one and come back with it the following week.