

# AN INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

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## A. THE GENERAL NATURE OF REVELATION

1. The book of Revelation is both intriguing and mysterious. With the employment of symbols and imagery, the letter of John is one of the most fascinating books in the bible. It has also been the source of many erroneous teachings. The charismatic movement is largely to blame for this type of dogmatic approach and application of the book to the contemporary culture.
2. What makes Revelation unique from the other New Testament letters? Well, I believe the book is distinctive in three primary ways.
  - a. First, Revelation is more literary than doctrinal. However, this does not mean the book lacks doctrinal and foundational truth. We learn about the Trinity, Satan and the conclusion of the world through reading the letter. By saying the book is more literary I simply mean that John places more emphasis on symbols, signs and future events than do the other New Testament letters.
  - b. Second, the subject matter is different. The New Testament writings teach about the Kingdom of God and the supremacy of Christ. Although letters like 1 & 2 Thessalonians do teach about the Second Advent of Christ, they do not go into detail about how these future events will take place nor do they employ heavy symbolism resembling the Apostle John. Therefore, the main focus in Revelation is eschatological in nature. Eschatological events are those events which refer to the return of Christ, the end times and the final state of God's redemptive plan for mankind.
  - c. Third, the methodology in presenting the literature is exclusive to John's letter. So, why did God use such a method that makes the book complicated to understand? I believe there are two primary reasons for the symbolic nature of the letter.
    1. Language and imagery were not strange to the first century readers. It is essential for the modern reader to become familiar with the prophetic books such as Daniel and Ezekiel. These books are closely joined to the book of Revelation. Understanding the content of these two letters will greatly aid

today's audience when reading Revelation. Furthermore, the reader must also become acquainted with apocalyptic literature of the first century. Forms and imagery were widely used in the first century when John was given the vision.

2. The employment of symbolism demonstrates the supremacy of God. The book of Revelation is a testament to God's control over the entire universe and the fate of mankind. Simply put – God has a plan and will bring that plan to fulfillment. Man, through the study of Revelation, can only make generalizations concerning the signs and wonders contained in the letter. Therefore, while it is imperative that we study the book; we must be willing to acknowledge our inability to fully understand the book of Revelation.

## B. DATE & AUTHORSHIP

### 1. Date of Writing

- a. The early date (AD 68 or 69).

This is one of two commonly held dates for the writing of Revelation. Those who hold to this view believe the letter was written shortly after the reign of Nero (AD 54-68).



Island of Patmos

1. The myth known as “Nero Redivivus” fueled this early dating of the book. The myth believed that a new reincarnated Nero would rise and be the new evil genius of the Roman Empire.
2. The *Muratorian Fragments* and the *Monarchian Prologues* also added weight to the argument for the early dating of Revelation. These documents were circulated among the churches with the claim that Paul wrote to the seven churches rather than John. This view claims that Paul copied John's style of writing for some unknown reason when writing to the churches. However, given what scholars know today about the differences in linguistic style between Paul and John, this is highly unlikely and should be rejected.

- b. The commonly held date (AD 96). This date is supported by the historian Irenaeus who stated that John saw the revelation at the close of the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96). However, in view of conflicting evidence with the annals of this period, it is best to be flexible on the date of writing. My own personal view is that the book was written somewhere around AD 97-99.

## 2. Authorship of the Letter

### a. The Apostle John, the son of Zebedee?

1. Many of the early Christian scholars such as Martin Luther and C.F. Moule believed that John could not have written the letter. Luther regarded the book as neither apostolic nor prophetic. He said the book should be thrown into the river. However, it should be noted here that later in his life, Luther reversed his decision and considered the book part of the New Testament Cannon.
2. The major argument of these early scholars centers on the linguistics of the



Martin Luther

book. Moule maintains that the language differs greatly from the other Johannine writings. Moule teaches that few can now believe that the John of the Apocalypse is the same as the author of what are commonly called the Johannine epistles (1, 2 & 3 John). Furthermore, these scholars believe that unlike the other epistles attributed to John, the writings of Revelation are barbaric in nature.

- b. Problematic view: There are three specific reasons for rejecting the above arguments.
  1. The author of Revelation identifies himself as John three times in the letter (c.f. 1:4, 9; 22:8).
  2. The writer declares that he is a prophet for God, *“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see I a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea”* (Rev. 10-11). It was for this very reason that John was sent into exile on the island of Patmos.

3. Denying the prophetic utterances and authorship of the Apostle John undermines the major force of the letter. The book of Revelation can only be properly understood through the lens of prophecy. Therefore, any attempt to thwart the prophetic sayings is to remove the Spirit from which it was written.

## C. APPROACHES TOWARD REVELATION

### 1. The Futurist View

- a. This view holds, with the exception of Chapters 1 through 3, all the visions in Revelation relate to a period immediately preceding and following the Second Advent of Christ at the end of the age.
- b. Therefore, the seals, trumpets and bowls refer to events still in the future. The majority of theologians hold to this view. This understanding also maintains the historical accuracy of the prophetic visions of the Apostle John. This is my own personal view.



The 144,000 in Revelation 14:1-5

### 2. The Historical View

- a. Theologians in this camp focus on history. The approach started with Joachim of Floris, a monastic who claimed to have received on Easter night a special vision from God.
- b. According to Floris, God revealed his plans to him for the ages. In his scheme, the book was a prophecy of the events of western history from the time of the Apostles until Joachim's own time.
- c. This view interprets Babylon not only as a pagan Rome, but also as papal Rome. The central theme being that the anti-Christ and Babylon are connected to the Roman Papacy. The view has been accepted by Martin Luther, John Calvin and other reformers of the early church movement.

### 3. The Preterist View

- a. The main contents of Chapters 4-22 are viewed as describing the events that occurred during John's lifetime.
- b. This understanding is held by the majority of liberal scholars today. The Beast of Chapter 13 refers to imperial Rome and the imperial priesthood.
- c. Thus, Revelation was written to a church under intense persecution from Rome and is encouraged to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.



Location of the 7 Churches of Revelation

### 4. The Idealist View

- a. Here, scholars understand Revelation as being poetical, symbolic and spiritual in nature. In general, the idealist view is marked by its refusal to identify any of the images with specific future events.
- b. For this very reason, scholars have called this approach the "spiritual view." Everything contained in the book is spiritual, not eschatological. This understanding teaches that Revelation is an ongoing struggle between good and evil. In short, throw out all prophetic meaning from the letter, and then you will find true meaning.

## D. THE PURPOSE OF REVELATION

### 1. Reveal Future Events

- a. The purpose of the book of Revelation is to reveal events that will take place immediately before, during and following the Second Coming of Christ. In accordance with this purpose, John devotes most of his revelation to future events in Chapters 4-18.

- b. The Second Advent of Christ is given the most explicit portrayal found anywhere in the bible in Chapter 19. This is followed by the millennial reign of Christ described in Chapter 20. The eternal state of things as revealed in Chapters 21-22.

## 2. Fulfill Prophecy

- a. Therefore, the purpose is not only to reveal future events, but to complete the prophetic theme presented earlier in the prophecies of the Old Testament and the prophecies of Christ, particularly those found in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew Chapters 24-25.



Plain of Esdraelon or Megiddo  
Armageddon takes place here

- b. The fulfillment of biblical prophecy provides the Christian with security in the accuracy and authority of God's word. It provides hope for the future when Christ will reign once again over his people and bring destruction on those who have rejected him as Savior and Lord!