

Wednesday Teaching Series
Revelation 1:1-3
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The Book of Revelation
Lesson #1-Introduction to the Book (Part I)

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“Attempting to understand the Book of Revelation presents special challenges unique to its case. This is due to the fact that, among the New Testament writings, Revelation is unique in its genre, its purpose, and its method of communicating its message. It would be naïve to assume that one can do justice to the interpretation of this book without responsibly dealing with some of the special interpretive conclusions that only apply uniquely to it. The original readers probably instinctively took these things into consideration, but our cultural distance from them renders it necessary to look at the difficulties deliberately and to consider them as “introductory issues.””

I. What Manner of Book is Revelation?

A. An epistle to a particular group of Christians, aiming to address their specific needs at the time it was written.

1. Traditional opening and closing of an epistle.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:4-6 NKJV

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Revelation 22:20-21 NKJV

*Resembles Pauline epistles as well as James, Peter and Jude.

2. Designed for a particular audience.

Saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

Revelation 1:11 NKJV

- a. Must first seek to discover how it applied to and would have been understood by initial readers.
- b. Secondly, we transfer truths to our own modern circumstances.

NOTE: This is how we responsibly interpret other letters.

- B. Revelation also differs greatly from other letters in the New Testament which make interpretation more challenging

1. Unlike other biblical letters, Revelation is prophecy.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near. Revelation 1:3 NKJV

"Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Revelation 22:7 NKJV

And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. Revelation 22:10 NKJV

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. Revelation 22:18-19 NKJV

- a. Other letters contain prophecy.
- b. Revelation calls itself a prophecy.
- c. Purpose of prophecy:

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. 1 Corinthians 14:3 NKJV

- d. Forthtelling the word (present) foretelling for future:
 - o Chapter 2 and 3: Letters dictated by Jesus to the churches.
 - o Chapter 4-22: Prominent with predictive prophecy.
2. Revelation was written as apocalyptic literature. (Popular in John's time but rather obscure today).

NOTE: The "Revelation" of Jesus Christ; "apocalypsis"; Revelation

- a. Popular genre among the Jews and Christians that revealed mysteries about heaven, earthly humankind, God, angels, demons, etc.
- b. No other New Testament book is apocalyptic but between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. (Enoch, Apocalypse of Baruk, Book of Jubilees, Assumption of Moses, Psalms of Solomon, Testament of Twelve Patriarchs, Sibylline Oracles, etc.)
- c. Common features of Apocalyptic writing:
 - o Angels appear commonly as tour guides and/or interpreters.
 - o Written during a time of persecution, "tracts for hard times."

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:9 NKJV

"I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. Revelation 2:13 NKJV

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10 NKJV

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Revelation 3:10 NKJV

- o Martyrdom and suffering are common themes.
- o Vivid imagery and symbolism that depict conflict between good and evil.

NOTE: Failure to see this creates outlandish interpretations. Normally the rule is "literal unless absurd." Good rule for general literature; opposite in apocalyptic literature.

(Animals depict personal and natural entities; lamb, dragon, beasts, monster, mutant locusts, cities seen as the harlot and bride, names given like Babylon and Sodom, Egypt and Jerusalem.

- o Numbers may convey concepts more than merely count units.

e.s. (7)

"The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. Deuteronomy 28:7 NKJV

"The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth. Deuteronomy 28:25-26 NKJV

The words of the LORD are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times. Psalms 12:6 NKJV

Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous judgments. Psalms 119:164 NKJV

For a righteous man may fall seven times And rise again, But the wicked shall fall by calamity. Proverbs 24:16 NKJV

(7 Churches, seals, trumpets, bowls, thunders, beatitudes)

- o See also fractions, multiples of 12
- o 1,000 years

For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night. Psalms 90:4 NKJV

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 2 Peter 3:8-9 NKJV

A long time.

- Contrast “10 days” (2:10); “one hour” (17:12) a little while (20:3), short time.
 - A righteous remnant emerges.
 - Predicts the breaking in of God into the situation.
- d. Distinctives from other apocalyptic writings:
1. Claims to be inspired as prophecy.
 2. Identifies true name of author rather than pseudonyms (Enoch, Solomon).
 3. Actually predicts the future (Enoch/Solomon; write like in a different time).
 4. As opposed to other apocalypse, not generally pessimistic; the lamb overcomes.
 5. Moral urgency by Revelation; call to repent.

II. Who is the Author?

- A. Earliest proposal; John, son of Zebedee (see 1:1, 4; 21:2; 22:8) (Justin Martyr-165; Irenaeus-180; Clement of Alexander-215; Tertullian-220).
- B. Later proposals: Dionysius and Eusebius-325; “Presbyter John”.
1. Greek style and grammar of Revelation is inferior to Gospel of John.
 2. A.T. Robertson-“grammatical laxities”-Charles, a grammar of its own.
- C. Conclusions:
1. Acts 4:13 says that John was “unschooled” possibly incapable of cultural Greek and that the Gospels and Epistles; may have had a secretary, not available on the island of Patmos.
 2. Who else was so well known in the early church to say “John?”
 3. Many concepts and expressions common to John are also in Revelation (logos, lamb of God, water of life, him that thirsts, “alethia” for truth; nine times in John; four times in 1 John; ten times in Revelation and only five times the rest of the New Testament; Satan cast out, overcoming the world).

III. Date and Historical Setting

A. A time of persecution and trial for the recipient churches

1. To encourage them
2. even if death came; they could overcome

B. Imperial persecutions of Roman emperors

NOTE: 10 persecuted Christians, only 2 in John's lifetime

1. Nero; 54-68
2. Domitian; 81-96

C. Arguments for early date (Nero's reign)

1. Existence of temple in Jerusalem (11:1-2) and the tension between the church and its enemies (2:9; 3:9) both changed when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.

NOTE: Temple of chapter 11 is part of a symbolic vision and need not to be visible at time of the writing.

2. Cryptic passage of Revelation 17:10

There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. Revelation 17:10 NKJV

NOTE: Some see as kingdoms (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome) But Nero was actually 6th Roman Emperor; and Domitian was associated with him.

D. Arguments for later date (Domitian's reign)

1. Allusion to emperor worship in chapter 13 and reference to "mortal head wound that healed" well-known superstition that Nero would return to conquer Rome.
 - a. Emperor worship not until Domitian
 - b. Domitian seen as "second Nero"
2. Nero's persecution never went beyond Rome itself and some of these churches are beyond Rome (still could have experienced local persecution).

3. The spiritual decline of the church is so significant (left first love, lukewarm) would suggest a considerable amount of time to have passed.
4. Sardis may not have existed until after 67 A.D.; too late for Nero's reign (see Polycarp statement).
5. Several external sources (Irenaeus, Eusebius, Clement).

IV. Structural Parallelism in Revelation

NOTE: This issue deals with the organization of the chapter of Revelation.

- o Must they be strictly chronological
- o "And then I saw" is John's sequence of seeing visions not necessarily implying the order the events would take place.

A. Some parallelism is evident (regardless of approach)

NOTE: Some doubling back to cover some material.

1. Some futurist (see 4-11; 12-19) as two descriptions of the same.
2. Some taking spiritual approach; see 7 parallel segments (1-3; 4-7; 8-11; 12-14; 15 and 16; 17-19; 20-22 with each section containing a reference to Christ's coming.

B. Book of Daniel (Old Testament apocalyptic) has parallelism (see Daniel 2 and 7; 4 kingdoms, metals and beasts)

C. In Revelation some evidence:

1. 3 passages depict battles (16:14; 19:19; 20:8).
2. 3-1/2 years mentioned five times (11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5)
3. 2 Parallel passages in chapter 12 (see 12:6; 12:13-17)

D. Implications:

1. Millennium (20) must follow 2nd coming (19)
2. But if it is double-back 20:1-3; may be the beginning of the Gospel age which would speak to amillennialism; Satan bound.

E. Indications that Revelation is not in chronological order:

1. Beasts persecute 2 witnesses in 11:1, 2; before rising to power in 13:1.
2. Babylon is fallen (14:8) but not yet fallen in 17:1-5; 18:21.
3. Parallelism of trumpet and bowl judgments.

1. First of each affects the earth:

The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. Revelation 8:7 NKJV

So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Revelation 16:2 NKJV

2. Second of each affects the sea:

Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. Revelation 8:8 NKJV

Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died. Revelation 16:3 NKJV

3. Third of each affects the rivers:

Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. Revelation 8:10 NKJV

Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Revelation 16:4 NKJV

4. Fourth of each affects the heavenly bodies (8:12; 16:8)
5. Fifth of each affects man (9:1; 16:10)
6. Sixth of each affects Euphrates (9:13; 16:12)
7. Seventh of each is the end (11:15; 16:17)

F. Parallelism does not undercut position, just begs for care in dogmatic chronological interpretation.

V. Revelation's use of the rest of Scripture

Example: 2 witnesses of chapter 11 echo Zechariah 4:3-14.

- A. Images from the Exodus (plagues, evil power that persecutes God's people, deliverance through the blood, to be tabernacle and furnishings).
- B. Images from captivity and exile in Babylon
 - 1. Siege of city (20:9) images of fall in Jewish captivity.
 - 2. Drying up of the Euphrates (16:12). Babylon falls to Medes and Persians in 539 B.C.
- C. Images from the Life of Christ
 - 1. Death, resurrection and victory over Satan.
 - 2. 12:5 probably referenced his birth and ascension.
 - 3. 2 witnesses for 3-1/2 years mirror the ministry of Christ.
 - a. Slain in Jerusalem
 - b. Rise of after 3-1/2 days
 - c. Ascend
- D. Christ is not predicting these events (already occurred) but highlighting the similarity in principle of events he is predicting to those of the past.