

## The Book of Revelation Study Notes: 1

### The Author of The Revelation

- The author was most likely the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, brother of James, and author of the gospel of John and three epistles.
- Some deny John's authorship on the basis of Rev. 1:3; 19:10; 22:9 where the author depicts himself as a prophet and not an apostle.
- **Revelation 21:14:** *And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*
- Some follow church historian Papias who speaks of the author as "John the Elder" (2 John 1; 3 John 1), perhaps pointing to someone other than John the apostle.
- The apostle John's authorship, however, is supported by the author's knowledge of Asia Minor. Also, John in Asia toward the end of his life.
- Justin Martyr (165 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (220 A.D.), Hippolytus (236 A.D.), and Origen (254 A.D.), all support John's apostolic authorship.

### The Early Date for Revelation

Around 64-68 A.D., during Nero's reign

- The Syriac New Testament (ca. 2nd century A.D.) says the book was written during the reign of Nero.
- The Muratorian Fragment (170-190 A.D.) and the Monarchian Prologues (250-350 A.D.) claim that Paul wrote to seven churches following the pattern of John's example in Revelation, placing the book of Revelation even before some of the Pauline epistles in the early to mid 60s.

### The Later Date for Revelation

Around 95-96 A.D., during Domitian's reign.

- Irenaeus who lived in the late 2nd century A.D. says Revelation was written toward the end of Domitian's reign (81-96 A.D.).

### *Scholars Divided*

Preterists opt for early date, Revelation written during reigns of Nero or Vespasian.

Futurists usually opt for later date, asserting only Domitian's (not Nero's) persecution was empire wide.

### The Epistolary Character of Revelation

The Book of Revelation has definite epistolary characteristics.

- **Revelation 1:4:** *John to the seven churches that 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;*
- **Revelation 1:11:** *Write in a book what you see, 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.*

- **Revelation 22:21:** *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*

Epistles were sent to seven specific churches in Asia (Rev 2-3), thus it is important to learn about the intended recipients. Revelation is tied to actual churches in 60s, or in the 80s-90s.

### **The Prophetic Character of Revelation**

John, the author, assumes the ministry of a prophet.

- **Revelation 1:3:** *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*
- **Revelation 22:7:** *And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.*
- **Revelation 22:9-10:** *And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God." <sup>10</sup> And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.*
- **Revelation 22:18-19:** *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city...written in this book.*
- **1 Corinthians 14:3:** *One who prophesies...for edification, exhortation, consolation.*

John does not promote his apostolic credentials, but assumes a prophetic role.

### **The Apocalyptic Character of Revelation**

Apocalyptic literature grew in the absence of prophets (200 B.C.-200 A.D)

Apocalyptic writers looked to the future when God would again speak authoritatively and intercede on Israel's behalf.

- *Apocalypses*, meaning "an uncovering," "unveiling," not conceal.
- Used highly symbolic language in depicting Israel's struggle against evil.
- Persons, national entities portrayed as animals, cities depicted as women.
- Political upheavals depicted as natural and cosmic disruptions, etc.
- Numbers mathematical value, conveying cryptic meanings.
- Used famous figures (e.g., Solomon, Moses, etc.) as predicting the future.

Apocalypticism prevailed in times of persecution. The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic, so, is it primarily for Israel?

### ***Four Approaches To Interpreting The Book of Revelation***

#### **The Preterist Approach**

The book refers to events fulfilled in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. to encourage the original readers, the Palestinian church.

The symbolic aspects refer to the Roman Empire and events related to the fall of Jerusalem (ca. 67-70 A.D.). Its primary value is historical, but it is also didactic, teaching faithfulness to God in the midst of trials.

### **The Historicist Approach**

Gives a panoramic view of church history, prophesying such events as the rise of Roman Catholicism, Islam, the Protestant Reformation, world wars, etc., ending with Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, consummation.

Historicists see Rev. 2-3 as depicting specific eras in church history, thus it is dispensational. Its value is historical, prophetic.

### **The Futurist Approach**

Apart from Rev 1-3, the book depicts future events which will happen after the rapture, but before the second coming of Christ.

Its primary value is for people living during the tribulation period, but it also affirms the sovereignty of God over all history.

### **The Idealist Approach**

Revelation does not relate to any specific historical time. It's purpose is to comfort readers by showing the principle that God and his good will ultimately triumph over evil.

Revelation is applicable to any age. This view is generally associated with a-millennialism.

## ***Historical Development of the Four Approaches***

### **The Early Church Through the Middle Ages (2<sup>nd</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> Century)**

- Western-Ante-Nicene Fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, etc.) interpreted Revelation as literal, futurist.
- Post-Nicene Fathers (Augustine, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, etc.) promoted "spiritual" allegorical interpretation, which prevailed.

### **The Reformation Era (16<sup>th</sup> Century – 19<sup>th</sup> Century)**

- Martin Luther (c. 1500) embraced historicism, seeing the Revelation as a prophetic survey of church history.
- Luther saw the papal office as the anti-Christ. His approach was adopted by most protestants well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), a Jesuit apologist, promoted a futuristic view, defending against protestant "anti-papal" interpretations.

### **The Modern Era, (20<sup>th</sup> Century through Today)**

- Most protestants rejected futurism seeing it as a RCC apologetic against Protestantism.
- Protestants accepted Historicism, believing the church would lead the way to the establishment of the millennial kingdom. However, WWI put an end to such optimism.
- J.N. Darby (Plymouth Brethren) was the first to promote futurism, from a protestant dispensational theology.
- With the rise of German liberalism some main-line protestants favored a non-literal literary-dramatic interpretation.

## ***The Contemporary Landscape of Revelation Interpretation***

The historicist approach held great sway in the 17-19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Matthew Henry, John Wesley, etc.), but beginning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through today it has been generally discarded.

The Preterist approach, is still very much accepted today (James Snowden, David Chilton, Kenneth Gentry).

The futurist approach has become the most accepted among evangelicals and made more popular by Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

The idealist, spiritual approach is also popular among those who see Revelation as drama rather than depicting actual future historical events. Advocates include J. G. Eichhorn, W. Hendrickson.

### ***Common Sense Interpretation***

Best to not see the four approaches as mutually exclusive:

- In favor of a Preterist approach, the book was written to 7 churches in Asia, 1:4. Its purpose was to uncover "things which must shortly come to pass," 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10.
- Daniel 8:26, says "seal up" the vision, "for it refers to many days in the future". John, however, was told, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand," 22:10. How could this be, if Revelation refers to a distant future? This is a problem with the "futurist only" approach. It places its primary fulfillment years into the future with no significance for the original recipients.
- Still, the book is prophetic, which means it also looks forward to events in the distant future (e.g., Isaiah 7:10-17; cf. Matt. 1:23).
- In favor of the *idealist* approach, Revelation does stress perennial truths like, human alienation, good vs. evil, worship of God, sure judgment, etc.

Here we opt for a cautious "futuristic-eclectic" approach.

### ***Revelation and the Use of the Old and New Testament***

The Book of Revelation does not contain OT quotations. However, it does contain many allusions and echoes to OT and NT: (e.g. Isaiah, 79; Daniel, 53; Ezekiel, 48; Psalms, 43; Exodus, 27; Jeremiah, 22; Zachariah, 15; Amos, 9; Joel, 8).

Revelation echoes the Exodus, the Babylonian Captivity, the life of Jesus:

- **Rev 11:8:** And their dead bodies *will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.*
- **Rev 15:3:** and they sang song of Moses the bond-servant of God and song of the Lamb...
- **Rev 20:9:** And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.
- **Rev 11:8:** where also their Lord was crucified.
- Twenty-six references to Christ as "the Lamb" echoing John 1:9; 1 Peter 1:19.

### ***Parallelism in Revelation***

Futurists see chaps. 4-11 paralleled in chaps. 12-19.

Idealists see 7 parallels: chaps. 1-3; 4-7; 8-11; 12-14; 15-16; 17-19; 20-22

Some see the same battle described in 16:14; 19:19; 20:8,

Possible Parallels between “Trumpet” and “Bowl” judgments:

- 1<sup>st</sup> judgments affect the earth, 8:7; 16:2
- 2<sup>nd</sup> judgments affect the sea, 8:8; 16:3
- 3<sup>rd</sup> judgments affect rivers, 8:10; 16:4
- 4<sup>th</sup> judgments affect heavenly bodies, 8:12; 16:8
- 5<sup>th</sup> judgments affect people, 9:1; 16:10
- 6<sup>th</sup> judgments affect the Euphrates River, 9:13; 16:12
- 7<sup>th</sup> judgments signal the end of the judgments, 11:15; 16:17

**Point:** we should be tentative, rather than dogmatic in interpretation.

### **Revelation: Purpose, Key Concept, and Structure**

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK: stated at the beginning and end (cf. 1:1,3; 22:10,16): *“To reveal the things which must shortly come to pass.”*

KEY VERSE: *“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”* (Revelation 17:14)

THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK: Rev. 1:19

- What you see, Chap. 1: The vision of the exalted Christ
- What is, Chas. 2-3: The letters to the seven churches
- What hereafter, Chas. 4-22: The vision of judgment and ultimate victory of the Lamb.

***The End***