

The End

Introduction to Revelation

*“Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”*

Psalm 2:10-12

Introduction

The book of Revelation, for many, is a mystifying book full of impossible to understand illustrations about things that have happened, will happen, or some combination of both.

Q: What makes the study of Revelation so difficult?

The goal of our study of Revelation is not to answer every question that will arise from the text, but rather to be better equipped to find those answers/explanations as students.

Methodology of Study

Due to the nature of Revelation, the method of study will be textual, but not chapter-by-chapter. As apocalyptic (meaning: hidden) literature, Revelation is full of symbols and illustrations. These symbols and illustrations are incredibly difficult to decipher, **unless** we:

- 1) Understand the cultural context of the writing and
- 2) Understand the Old Testament context of the writing.

The author, the Apostle John, draws from a number of Old Testament writings including, but not limited to:

Genesis

Ezekiel

Daniel

Isaiah

Zephaniah

As well as from other apocalyptic extrabiblical literature like the books of Enoch.

This being the case, the planned method of study is to spend time looking specifically at words, phrases, and illustrations, how these things are used within the Old Testament, and why John brings them into this writing.

Some of the concepts we will study include:

“Conquers”

Every tribe/nation gathered together

Throne of God

“Testimony”

“New heavens, new earth”

“Seal”

Descriptions of God/Jesus

The number “7”

Understanding how these concepts fit into their Old Testament texts, helps us to understand how they fit into the cultural context of John’s writing, which in turn helps us to be able to properly apply Revelation to our present Christian lives.

Revelation Not Revelations

It may seem nitpicky, but it is actually fairly important to understand that the book of **Revelation depicts a singular, coherent, and connected vision** and not a plurality of visions.

This is clear in the writing of the book. For example:

“Near” only shows up twice in the book of Revelation, once at the beginning and once at the end of the book (1:3; 22:10). This tiny word forms bookends for us with the in-between talking about what is going to come to pass.

“Prophecy” is mentioned a couple of times at the end of the book (22:18, 19). This word is singular, showing us that this book is one singular prophecy.

A large chunk of the book depicts events of the “7 seals” (6-8a) then “7 trumpets” (8b-11) then “7 bowls” (15-16). The 7 bowls come out of the 7th trumpet (11:19; 16:1; “temple” connection), and the 7 trumpets result from the 7th seal (8:1-2). The ending of these 3 sets of 7 is also similar, indicating a continuous, building flow of thought, not a series of disconnected apocalyptic ideas.

Alongside seeing Revelation as a singular, flow of thought, we should also see it, due to its constant references to Old Testament prophecy, as the fuller and final culmination of the biblical story.

Date of Writing Debate

When it comes to the date of the writing of Revelation, there is a good bit of debate. There are generally two camps when it comes to the dating time frame (and then subcategories of debate from there):

Early date – Revelation was written somewhere around AD 68-69 (during reign of Nero) and depicts the fall of the temple in Jerusalem or

Late date – Revelation was written somewhere closer to AD 90-100 (during the reign of Domitian) and depicts the fall of the Roman Empire.

Each choice has with it some fairly solid evidence (depending on how symbols are interpreted), but also have their own issues.

In Defense of the Early Date

A temple exists in the description of Revelation 11 that sounds like a reference to the temple of God in Jerusalem ("holy city"; 11:2). Reference is made to the place "where their Lord was crucified" (11:8). Since the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, this might be evidence towards an early date.

Revelation deals with seeming tension between Jews and Christians (2:9; 3:9). Tension, that can be argued, was less of a problem after the destruction of the temple.

Some will argue that Revelation 17:10 speaks of five kings that have fallen, one that is, and one who is coming. Nero is the sixth recognized emperor of Rome. Alternatively, others interpret this to be kingdoms (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and number 6, Rome).

Some point to the phrasing at the end of the book of Revelation: "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near" (22:10). This is a reference back to Daniel when he is told to twice "seal the book until the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4, 9). The ending chapters of Daniels writing makes it clear that what he has seen won't come to pass for some time. Daniel then is told to seal up the books for the time that their warnings become relevant.

This argument is pretty compelling when you realize that the events Daniel is discussing, namely the defeat of the Media-Persian Empire at the hands of the Greek Empire happens in about 331 BC (some 200 years after they began in 559 BC).

If this is so far away that Daniel needs to "seal up the book" then why is John told "not" to seal up the words for the fall of the Roman Empire (an event that historians suggest happens in AD 476, some 300+ years after John wrote the book).

Given the two options, it's a reasonable argument to suggest that "the time is near" has reference to what will happen a year or so from the writing (writing at AD 68-69 to the destruction of the temple in AD 70) instead of something that will happen over 300+ years from the writing (writing at AD 90-100 to the fall of the Roman Empire in AD 476).

In Defense of the Late Date

Some saw Domitian as a "second Nero" (according to a legend that Nero would return after his death) and argue that he is the beast with the mortal wound that was healed (13:11-12).

Some argue that persecution wasn't really faced by churches in Asia minor during Nero's reign (local persecution in Rome), and that it wasn't until Domitian's reign when widespread persecution spread throughout the whole of the empire. The counter argument is that there could have been local persecutions all throughout.

Some argue that the churches during the reign of Nero were too young to be in spiritual decline (see Ephesus in 2:4, Sardis in 3:1-2, and Laodicea in 3:15-17). This case will also be made for the group called the Nicolaitans (2:6, 15) (i.e., enough time had not passed for this kind of faction to form).

Several church fathers claimed that Domitian was emperor when John wrote Revelation.

Does it Matter?

While the dating you choose will affect how you interpret these symbols, either dating ultimately points to the same conclusion: that the righteousness of God will bring to an end the unrighteousness of the world, that the chaos that sin has brought to the creation will be undone, that those who have aligned themselves to God will be brought into perfect relationship with Him, and that all of these events will be accomplished because of the cross of Jesus.

Summary

Revelation is ultimately a book that shows the triumph of God over evil. In its pages we see the end of sin and its corruption by God through Jesus. We see creation reclaimed and peace achieved. We see the end of the work of God in Jesus and His church, the restoring of the world to an uncorrupted state. We see ourselves in the way God intended, His holy image-bearers, dwelling in the garden of God in full relationship with Him. Revelation shows us not **AN** end, but **THE** end of the story, and how we must live in the present, knowing how it will all end in the future.

Take Home

Read Revelation 1

Q: What passages (Old Testament and/or New Testament) provide similar descriptions of Jesus? (NOTE: this could be a large chunk of text, or just a similarity in phrase).