

“THE REVELATION OF JOHN, II.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 1:1-8

Introduction

Revelation obviously is the last book of the NT and the last book of the Bible. Some have called it the capstone of the Bible, that last stone that completes the structure. This is Jesus' final word to His Church. Believe it or not this is a very practical book written to Christians in churches like ours going through hard times like many Christians all over the world today. This book holds out the hope that despite the ups and downs of human history, Jesus Christ is in control and His church will triumph in the end.

This book is to be taken to heart. Not just to tickle our interests but to change our hearts.

We began last week with a general introduction to apocalyptic writing. Tonight we will address specific introductory questions such as who wrote the book, to whom was it written and why?

Who wrote Revelation?

Four times in Revelation the name John is given as the author, three times in chapter one and once in chapter 22. He is apparently known by the churches as a brother, a partner in their suffering, as a fellow servant of the church and of Jesus Christ and a prophet.

Revelation 1:9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 22:8-9 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, 9 but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

The earliest tradition in the early church according to the testimonies of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian say the apostle John was the author. Later scholars doubted it because the writing style and Greek are so different from the Gospel of John.

Revelation is a completely different genre of literature and so it makes sense that the language and style would be very different. RC Sproul has written lots of doctrinal books and he has also written a novel or two. John Piper has written lots of doctrinal books but he has also written a fair amount of poetry.

The author is most likely the beloved apostle John, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, one of the sons of thunder, the disciple whom Jesus loved, one of the select three that Jesus called out to be a special witness of His suffering and glory.

He is the last living disciple of Jesus and he writes the last book of the Bible.

He was very well versed in the OT and was very familiar with the churches of Asia Minor, he may have been a leader among them.

The island of Patmos lies about forty miles SE of Ephesus off the coast of Turkey in the Aegean Sea. It was used by the Roman government as a penal colony. There were ore mines there where the prisoners were forced into hard labor. Banishment or exile was common punishment for a number of crimes.

To whom is it written?

Last week we said that Revelation is a prophecy that is written in apocalyptic style. But it is also a letter and it's also written in the form or style of a letter.

This is a circular letter meant to be passed among the churches and read aloud in worship in one sitting. There was only one copy to start with, plus not everyone one was literate so it was read aloud. We are talking about an hour and a half to read it straight through. It is a good exercise for us to read the letters of the NT in one sitting to get a feel for how the first Christians heard them.

It is written specifically to the seven churches of Asia Minor, meaning the western most part of the peninsula we call Turkey. We will study those seven churches in much more detail when we get to chapter two and three, I will take a sermon for each one. John lists them in an order that starts with Ephesus and then circles north, east and south, the way one might travel to visit each of them.

Revelation is for God's servants, God's people, for believers like you and me. It is written to the church. Not to Jews only or Israel only as some suggest.

When it says "John to the seven churches of Asia" we should also read between the lines "Jesus Christ to all the churches of every time and place."

Why was it written?

First, it was written because of the grace of God. It is a most gracious thing that we have a God who delights in revealing Himself to us. He grants us generous glimpses of His glory and grace. We are not left in the dark. This is given to strengthen our faith. As John says in verse three, this book is given to be a blessing to all who read.

Verse one gives the simplest reason. This is God's revelation of Jesus Christ given to Jesus to give to us which He did through an angel to John concerning the things to come and the great judgment and salvation yet to be revealed. It is a revelation of the nature and character of God, of His justice and His mercy. This book is not about fantasy but about reality. It tells the truth about what is going to happen in the world.

Second, it was written to a church suffering persecution and conflict, to give courage and patience to the early church in the Roman Empire.

Remember the culture of Rome had not yet been influenced by the Gospel, it was still thoroughly pagan and immoral.

Most place the time of writing to the later part of the reign of Domitian (81-96AD). Let me give you just a glimpse of the sort of person emperor Domitian was and many of the other Roman Caesars.

Domitian was a moral disaster. He went through several wives, left his brother to die of an illness, seduced his own niece and then forced her into an abortion that killed her, killed some people who made jokes about him, and demanded that people call him "Lord and God" or "Caesar is God."

The growing practice of emperor worship meant increased pressure to choose between Caesar or Christ. And it may have been this pressure that resulted in John being exiled to the Roman hard labor camp on the island of Patmos.

Every age in the church has a similar test of every Christian's true allegiance. Money or Christ; personal pleasure or Christ; my way or God's way; live for self or die to self; self or others; rebellion or submission.

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Revelation, like the book of Job, is meant to help us develop a solid Biblical theology of suffering and of God's sovereignty. When severe trials come the Health and Wealth Gospel will be exposed as the fraud and sham it is.

How is Revelation written? What is its structure or outline?

There are several simple ways to outline Revelation to help us follow the flow and understand what's being said.

First, it follows the structure of a simple letter. It begins with an brief introductory prologue (1:1-3) then an opening greeting and doxology (1:4-8). Then we have the main body of the

letter which goes from 1:9 to 22:5. The letter ends with a conclusion (22:6-20) and a final one verse salutation (22:21).

Second, the outline for the main body of the letter can also be stated very simply, as it's found in 1:19:

Revelation 1:19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

Chapter 1 contains the things he saw (past).

Chapters 2 and 3 contain the things that are (present).

Chapters 4 to the end contain the things that shall be (future).

Third, there is another hint at the structure of Revelation found in John's repetition of the phrase "I was in the Spirit" that marks the beginning of major sections of the main body of the letter.

Beginning in 1:9-10 John recounts how Jesus appeared to Him in glory and what Jesus told him to tell the churches (2:1-3:22).

Revelation 1:9-10 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard* behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches

Then at the beginning of chapter four John says he was in the Spirit again and sees into the heavenly throne room.

Revelation 4:1-2 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "*Come up here, and I will show you* what must take place after this." 2 *At once I was in the Spirit*, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

In this extended section from Revelation 4 to 16 John describes many things including scrolls, seven angels with seven trumpets, and the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and the seven bowls of God's wrath.

Then in chapter 17 John says he was in the Spirit again and tells what he saw:

Revelation 17:1-3 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "*Come, I will show you* the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." 3 And *he carried me away*

in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

From chapter 17 to 21 he describes all he saw and heard in the wilderness and in heaven concerning a harlot called Babylon, and how Jesus sets up His kingdom, with a new heaven and a new earth.

Then in chapter 21 he is taken in the Spirit to a high mountain and has the final vision of the Bride, the wife of the Lamb and the new Jerusalem.

Revelation 21:9-10 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “*Come, I will show you* the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And *he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain*, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God

For a more detailed and complex outline we can follow all the sevens. Revelation is full of sevens.

Seven churches, 2-3.

Seven seals, 4-7.

Seven trumpets, 8-11.

Seven symbolic figures, 12-14.

Seven bowls, 15-16.

Seven messages of judgment, 17-20.

Seven new things, 21-22.

Why all the sevens? As the English liked their poetry in a certain meter and the French in another meter, so the cadence of God seems to be in sevens. From creation on God through history and religion seems to favor seven, the number of completeness or perfection. Since Revelation is about the end of all things, having visions of completeness certainly makes sense.

I point these outlines out to show that there is a flow and order to Revelation. In the midst of all the confusion and chaos and fantastic scenes, the book is going somewhere and it makes sense. You can study the book and organize its content. There is hope for us as we make this journey through this book.

Revelation 1:1-3, Prologue.

First notice the progression of the revelation and the emphasis on its divine authority.

From God to Jesus to an angel to John to the churches. From the beginning Revelation is a God-centered book.

Soon. These are the last days, this is the final hour. Whether it's another decade or another millennia is irrelevant. Contrasted with the time of Daniel's prophecy, this is soon.

The NT makes clear we are living in the last days.

Revelation 1:4-8.

But what does the *seven spirits* mean? Is it a reference to the Holy Spirit in His essence or completeness; or to the seven churches as one complete church; or to the presence of the Holy Spirit in each of those churches; or to the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2)?

Notice John's greeting. Where do grace and peace come from? Grace and peace come from God, from the Trinity, from the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The reference to the seven spirits before the throne is a reference to the Holy Spirit. John never uses the word Holy Spirit in Revelation, but only the phrase seven Spirits.

The phrase may describe the sevenfold completeness or perfection of the Holy Spirit. There are not seven Holy Spirits.

Next, John gives a doxology to Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus should include regular doxology, regular bursts of praise, thanksgiving, gratitude.

Verse 5 starts with a description of Jesus as prophet, priest and king.

Jesus is the faithful witness (prophet).

As the firstborn from the dead, Jesus sets the foundation for the promised resurrection of believers as the minister of the sacrifice and of forgiveness and redemption (priest). There is hope of victory, God will apply the same victory He gave to Jesus to us.

Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth (king).

He says we will be as priests having access to God.

The themes of worship and praise are all through Revelation. Everything about God and what He does is cause for worship. Worship expresses not just our gratitude, but our allegiance to God, it announces whose side we are on.

Worship is at its heart a subversive act, it declares our superior allegiance to God and not to the state.

Worship acknowledges who God is and that we know who He is. Worship also anticipates and longs for the day when we will worship not just in spirit but in His presence.

Application and conclusion.

We don't yet face persecution like many Christians in the world and certainly not like the Christians of the first century. But while we are not under physical threat, there is an increasing persecution for our faith.

We are increasingly called or viewed as narrow-minded, intolerant, arrogant, bigoted, self-righteous, thinking we are better than everyone else. People think religion in general and Christianity in particular are what's wrong with our world.

So while we are not yet exiled or killed, we still need reminders of who God is and what God is doing in the world and why we should still love Him and follow Him and worship Him. God is great and good and most worthy of praise.

Whatever your Christianity may cost you, even if it costs you your life, though He slay me yet will I praise Him. Though the whole world be against you, if God is for us, who can be against us?

The church may feel powerless in the face of rising immorality and hostility from the culture and state. But she is still in the hands of an all-powerful God who is in control of the final outcome.

This book means to change you and call you to obedience. Don't remain as you are as we come to this book. Blessed are those who read and hear and keep what is written here.