

## INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION TO JOHN

### A. Authorship

1. The author of the Revelation to John is the apostle John.
  - a. Internal support
    - 1) 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,*
    - 2) 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.*
    - 3) Revelation 22:8, *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,*
    - 4) H. D. M. Spence notes in verse 2, *identifying himself with the writer of the Fourth Gospel and the first of the Johannine Epistles.*
    - 5) Internal support may be seen in common ideas and common theology as well as terminology. Logos is a common term in Johannine literature (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13); Lamb as a description of Christ is also found in John's writings.
    - 6) John Walvoord, *There is really no solid evidence against accepting John the Apostle as the author, and there is much that confirms it. In fact, it may be argued that the reference to John without further identification would presume a familiarity on the part of the readers which would make naming him unnecessary.*
  - b. External support
    - 1) The earliest witness is Justin Martyr (ca. 150AD). In his *Dialogue with Trypho* he says, *Moreover, a man among us named John, one of Christ's apostles, received a revelation and foretold that the followers of Christ would dwell in Jerusalem for a thousand years.*
    - 2) Additional support centers on second and early third century witnesses which include Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*), Tertullian (*Against Praxeas XVII*), Origen (*De Principiis*), and Hippolytus.
    - 3) Church Council support included Nicea (325-240AD), Hippo (393AD), Carthage (397AD) and Carthage (419AD).
    - 4) John Walvoord, *Practically all scholars today who accept the divine inspiration of the Book of Revelation also accept John the Apostle as its author.*
2. Some disputes concerning authorship
  - a. Objections to Johannine authorship arose in the third century.
  - b. John Walvoord, *The arguments for rejecting the apostolic authorship stem largely from the theological climate of the third century. At that time the Alexandrian School of Theology, including Dionysius, opposed the doctrine of the millennial kingdom which is plainly taught in chapter 20 with its reference to the thousand years. An attack by them on the authorship of John tended to weaken the force of this prophecy.*
  - c. Stanley Toussaint, *The largest objection to Johannine authorship is the style of writing. It must be conceded, differences do exist . . . A number of similarities exists between the Apocalypse and the other writings of John.*
3. John's background
  - a. One of the two sons of Zebedee, the brother of James.
  - b. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved, John 21:20, 24).
  - c. James and John were nicknamed the Sons of thunder, Mark 3:17.
  - d. He had been a follower of John the Baptist.
  - e. John wrote the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John and the Book of Revelation.

### B. Place and date of writing

1. According to Revelation 1:9, John wrote the Apocalypse on Patmos, an island off the coast of Asia Minor.
2. Three dates have been suggested for the Apocalypse: in the reign of Claudius (41-54AD); Nero (54-68AD); or Domitian (d. 96AD).
3. According to Epiphanius (310/320-403AD), John wrote the Apocalypse during the reign of Claudius. Such an early date conflicts with the historical setting since the churches of Asia had not been founded at that time. Also, the conflict between Rome and Christianity had not escalated to the level evident in the book. Merrill Tenney states, *It is possible that Epiphanius was referring to Nero, who also was named Claudius.*
4. Support for a dating during the reign of Nero centers on a quotation from Papias (d. 163AD) who stated that John the Apostle was martyred before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The accuracy of his statement has been challenged by Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius who place the date in A.D. 95 or 96. Historical evidence tends to support the belief that John did not gain authority in the churches of Asia until a time after the destruction of the Temple.

5. The date with the strongest support is that which rests at the end of the reign of Domitian. This date allows for the growth and decline of the churches of Asia Minor. The book was written during a time of great persecution which fits this period. Domitian banished men to places of exile, but Nero did not. Also, early church history supports a dating during the reign of Domitian.

#### C. Recipients and Occasion

1. The book is addressed to the seven churches of Asia (1:4). There were other Christian communities in the area. John must have had a specific reason for specifying these particular churches. Donald Guthrie states:
2. Donald Guthrie, *W. M. Ramsay supposed that the choice of churches was governed by the great circular road which linked them all and which, therefore, provided a convenient network for the distribution of the letters throughout the whole province. The order of mention would then represent the route which the messenger took in delivering the book.*
3. The seven churches may also have been those specifically under John's care and which were of special concern to him. Yet, the relevance of this book is for all churches
4. Wide distribution beyond the seven churches took place.
5. The reign of Domitian was one of terrible persecution for those who did not submit to emperor worship. The occasion for writing the Apocalypse centers on believers in need of encouragement during persecution by the assurance of the ultimate victory in Jesus Christ.

#### D. Interpretation

1. There are basically four approaches to the book which look at the time the prophecies were fulfilled.
2. An overview of each approach.
  - a. The preterist school
    - 1) Chapters 1-3 deal with historic churches.
    - 2) Chapters 4-19 are symbolic of contemporary conditions.
    - 3) Chapters 5-11 view the victory of the church over Judaism.
    - 4) Chapter 12-19 see victory over the Roman state, A.D. 312.
    - 5) Chapters 20-22 have to be symbolic of heaven and victory.
  - b. The idealist school
    - 1) Chapters 1-3 deal with historic churches.
    - 2) Chapters 4-22 are symbolic of the conflict of good and evil with the eventual victory of good.
  - c. The historicist school
    - 1) Chapters 1-3 are seen as historical churches.
    - 2) Chapters 4-19 are subjectively viewed as symbolic of events of history: fall of Rome, the papacy, the Reformation, etc. Chapters 20-22 speak of the final judgment and the eternal state but tend to deny a literal future Millennium and other literal future events.
  - d. The futurist school
    - 1) Chapters 1-3 deal with historic churches and/or seven stages of church history.
    - 2) Chapters 4-22 are seen as unfulfilled and include future tribulation, the second coming of Christ, the Millennial kingdom, judgments, and the eternal state.
    - 3) The approach taken in this study of Revelation will be from this perspective.

#### E. Purpose

1. On the basis of the revelation of God to John, believers are exhorted to Godly living and encouraged to stand firm in present and coming persecutions.
2. Exhortation and encouragement is combined with the apocalyptic nature of the book. Therefore, the purpose of the book must also be seen as a revelation of future events concerning the return of Christ and the completion of the present age.
3. John Walvoord puts these thoughts together succinctly, *Specific knowledge and anticipation of God's future program is an incentive to holy living and commitment to Christ.*

## AN OUTLINED ARGUMENT OF THE REVELATION TO JOHN

### A. Introduction

1. The outline to be followed is derived from 1:19, *Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.* Chapter 1 deals with the past. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the present (from the perspective of the writer). Chapters 4-22 deal with the future.
2. The development of the book with relation to the seals, trumpets, and bowls will be understood as a telescopic arrangement. Therefore, the seventh seal introduces the trumpets and the seventh trumpet introduces the bowls. The seven bowls equal the seventh trumpet and the seven trumpets equal the seventh seal.

### B. The Argument

#### 1. The Things Past (1:1-20)

##### a. Introduction (1:1-8)

The importance of this book is evident in the opening verses. The Revelation is from Jesus Christ to the apostle John who is to record what he will see. A blessing is promised all who read the book. The book is addressed to seven churches in Asia whom John begins to encourage in 1:4-8. The purpose of encouragement in the face of persecution is evident in the introduction as John reminds the readers of Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, 1:5, who will one day return for his own, 1:7.

##### b. The vision (1:9-20)

The entire book is placed in context by John in this section as he gives the location of the vision, instructions concerning the vision, a description of the revelation, and a brief interpretation of the revelation. This section takes the book which is in apocalyptic form and gives it firm exegetical roots. The reader becomes privy to information which unlocks the interpretation and purpose of the Revelation.

##### 1) The instruction (1:9-11)

John again acknowledges his authorship and associates with the readers on the basis of patient endurance. Again, one is impressed by the book's intention to encourage believers undergoing persecution. The authority of the book is based on the command of God to record the visions. The reader is to understand that what is recorded is important and especially for him.

##### 2) The revelation (1:12-16)

John was impressed by the revelation of Jesus Christ who closely associates Himself to the seven churches. Again, one is made aware of the importance of the forthcoming visions. A proper response should be expected since the message is so closely tied to our Lord.

##### 3) The interpretation (1:17-20)

Basic information is given which enables the reader to understand the chronological framework of the book and the identity of those included in the visions.

#### 2. The Things Present (2:1-3:22)

The Revelation was relevant in the day of John as well as today. This section contains seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. They follow a pattern which includes a description of each church by the Lord, a descriptive title of the Lord, a commendation, a criticism, a warning, an exhortation, and a promise. The term "overcomer" is found in each letter and reveals again the purpose of the book, exhortation to godly living in the face of persecution. Believers may stand firm on the basis of specific promises and the future hope of the return of Christ.

##### a. The letter to the church at Ephesus (2:1-7)

The church at Ephesus is told of the authority of Christ over the churches. On the basis of Christ's authority, the church is exhorted to repent and do the deeds which she had first done. One senses that the vitality of a spiritual relationship is in continued fellowship and service.

b. The letter to the church at Smyrna (2:8-11)

This church is given a vision of the eternity of Christ and his conquest of death. The church at Smyrna is a suffering church and may take heart in the Lord who has conquered all.

c. The letter to the church at Pergamum (2:12-17)

Our Lord stands firmly opposed to false teaching and believers must not permit false doctrine to stand within the church. Again, the character of the Lord determines appropriate behavior.

d. The letter to the church at Thyatira (2:18-29)

Our Lord has eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished brass--He is holy. The church is to be holy, set apart, from immorality. Toleration of immorality and idolatry must not be permitted.

e. The letter to the church at Sardis (3:1-6)

The seven spirits of God probably refers to the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual life to the believer. Those in Sardis are said to be dead--spiritually. They need to return to a spiritual walk enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

f. The letter to the church at Philadelphia (3:7-13)

Jesus Christ is faithful and able to accomplish His will. This church has endured suffering and has been faithful to Jesus Christ. The Lord will keep them from an unbearable time of testing, the tribulation. Endurance during persecution must be based on our Lord's promise to keep us from that which we can not endure.

g. The letter to the church at Laodicea (3:14-22)

The sovereignty of Jesus Christ is emphasized and stands against the complacent attitude of the church at Laodicea. The church was willing to seek the things of the world rather than the things of Christ. Such an attitude indicates a misunderstanding of Christ's sovereign authority.

h. Note

These letters are written to specific churches during the time of John. Each had peculiar characteristics which have been evidenced in churches from that time to today. Regardless of the situation, Christ is sufficient to deal with the difficulty and make every believer an *overcomer*.

3. The Things Future (4:1-22:21)

In chapters 2 and 3, individual churches are given promises on which they are to stand firm in the faith. Now, believers are exhorted through hope which is strengthened by a revelation of the future which shows that Jesus Christ will ultimately rule all creation. Believers may confidently live for Christ in the present because we know what the future holds. The rest of the book reveals the details of the future. In 4:1-18:24, one is presented with a picture of events leading up to the second coming of Christ, the tribulation period. In 19:1-20:15, John deals with the return of Christ and the millennial kingdom. Finally, chapters 21 and 22 present a view of the eternal state, the New heaven and earth, and the New Jerusalem.

a. The tribulation period (4:1-18:24)

Most of the book deals with the time prior to the return of Christ. The physical and spiritual difficulties encountered by believers in the church age pale in comparison to the events preceding the second coming of our Lord. The magnitude of spiritual warfare becomes more evident. A clear view of God's character may also be seen as He deals with sin on earth and in the heavenlies. This period prior to Christ's return is a time of increasing turmoil climaxing in the earthly reign of Christ.

1) Introduction: the vision of heaven (4:1-5:14)

This section gives a proper perspective of God the Father and God the Son. The throne in heaven pictures the majesty of God. The vision should naturally instill in the reader a sense of reverence and awe. The vision of the Lamb reveals the Son of God as the one who has authority to execute the judgments about to be unleashed upon the earth. Jesus Christ is qualified to loose the scroll of God's judgments. He is savior and sovereign. Therefore, the judgments to be unleashed upon the earth are righteous acts of God upon an unbelieving world.

2) The seven seal judgments (6:1-8:1)

Chapters 4 and 5 introduce the scroll with its seven seals. These judgments reveal God as He who judges sin. These judgments may be centered in the first half of the tribulation since following judgments are intensified. A telescopic view of the judgments is assumed based on the organization of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. In this section, seals 1 through 6 are followed by a parenthesis which precedes the seventh seal. The seventh seal is actually an introduction of the trumpet judgments.

a) Seals 1-6 (6:1-17)

Seals 1-6 reveal the devastating judgment of God on the sinful world. Each seal seems to be an escalation of an unbelievable destruction of the world and its inhabitants. This is a picture of the hour of testing which believers are promised to be excluded. A description of these events must bring hope to believers but fear to unbelievers. An appropriate question is asked in 6:17, *Who can stand?* The proper response is no one. The hope of the believer rests in the fact that he will be removed. Believers are overcomers.

b) Parenthesis: the saved of the tribulation (7:1-17)

This interlude gives another response to the question, *Who can stand?* John gives a vision of the sealed company of 144,000 from the sons of Israel and of the great multitude from every nation emerging from the great tribulation. In the midst of the devastating events of the great tribulation, God graciously calls people to Himself as they turn to the Savior.

c) The seventh seal (8:1)

This seal introduces the trumpet judgments of 8:2-11:19. The new judgments increase in severity and draw the world ever closer to the return of Christ.

3) The seven trumpet judgments (8:2-11:19)

These judgments are most probably centered in the second half of the tribulation if not beginning it. These judgments also increase in intensity with the last three trumpets called "woes" because of the extreme suffering caused by them.

a) Trumpets 1-6 (8:2-9:21)

Trumpets 5 and 6 are also called *woes* and are given more detailed explanation. Trumpet 5 speaks of a star which is probably Satan cast out of heaven. The increase of satanic activity results in severe torment for those on the earth. Trumpet 6 relates to the final military battle mentioned in 16:12-16. Although the destruction is acknowledged as coming from God, men still refuse to repent. God's righteous judgment is evidenced in the lives of those who continue to worship demons and live immoral lives.

b) Parenthesis: the little book and the two witnesses (10:1-11:14)

In this parenthesis, a little book is presented to John to eat which tasted sweet and bitter. The hope for believers is contrasted to the despair experienced by unbelievers. The tribulation is about complete and Christ will soon establish the millennial kingdom. The parenthetical section continues in 11:1-14 with a description of the two witnesses. These men have divine power to share God's message to the remnant of Israel and to work miracles. Opportunity is again given to trust Christ but men are hardened to the truth of God.

c) The seventh trumpet (11:15-19)

The sounding of the seventh trumpet announces the establishment of the millennial kingdom. The seventh trumpet introduces and includes the seven bowl judgments which are introduced in chapter 15.

4) Explanatory prophecies (12:1-14:20)

This section is another parenthesis in which those who play important parts in the tribulation are introduced. The people include a woman representing Israel (12:1-2); the red dragon with seven heads and 10 horns, representing Satan (12:3-4); the male child representing Christ (12:5-6); the archangel Michael (12:7-12); the offspring of the woman (12:13-17); the beast out of the sea (13:2-10); and the beast out of the earth (13:11-18).

a) The great sign (12:1-13:1)

This sign deals with the struggles of the nation Israel during the tribulation. The woman, Israel, is attacked by the red dragon, Satan. Satan attempts to destroy the male child, Christ. Also, this section notes the battle in heaven in which Satan is cast down to the earth. The central role of Israel in the end times events is evident in this parenthetical section.

b) The beasts (13:2-18)

The work of Satan in the last days is now carried out by his emissaries, the beast out of the sea (13:2-10) and the beast out of the earth (13:11-18). The beast out of the sea, the future world dictator, is aided by the beast out of the earth, the false prophet. The false prophet comes out of Israel and heads a religious system devoted to worship of the Gentile world ruler.

c) The judgment by the Lamb (14:1-20)

This section contrasts the activity of Christ to the activity of Satan. Despite the power of the satanic world system, the Lord preserves a remnant (14:1-5). Angels announce that judgment has come with the defeat of Babylon and the condemnation of the worshipers of the beast. The Lord is now pictured as a reaper who harvests the world in judgment.

5) The seven bowl judgments (15:1-16:21)

The seven bowl judgments which were introduced by the seventh trumpet in chapter 11, are now about to take place. These seven bowls are an expansion of the seventh trumpet. These judgments are poured out rapidly just prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom. Again, it is noted that despite the severity of the bowl judgments, men refused to repent (16:11). The final bowl judgment concludes the devastation on the earth and prepares the way for Christ's second coming to be seen in chapter 19.

6) The destruction of Babylon (17:1-18:24)

In 17:1-18, the destruction of the harlot, the religious system, is foretold. The harlot is identified in 17:5, as Babylon the Great, which is destroyed by God (17:15-18). This event will occur at the midpoint of the tribulation period. It will be replaced by worship of the world ruler, Satan's replacement for Christ. Chapter 18 deals with the destruction of political Babylon which will occur at the end of the tribulation period. Announcement of judgment is made in 18:1-3, and the cause for judgment is given in 18:4-14. Walvoord speaks of the great mourning which arises because of her destruction:

*The woman in chapter 17 was associated with the political power but was not the political power itself, and her destruction apparently brought no mourning from the earth. By contrast the destruction of Babylon in chapter 18 brings loud lamentation from the earth's political and economic powers.*

This chapter completes the destruction of the Gentile world ruler and the second coming of Christ is at hand.

b. The millennial kingdom (19:1-20:15)

The victory of Christ is almost complete. There is rejoicing in heaven, *because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her* (19:2). The exhortation to believers to stand fast in the face of persecution is confirmed at this time. The cataclysmic destruction upon the earth is the righteous judgment of God. He is the judge of sinners and the avenger of the righteous.

The basis for a one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth is seen in chapter 20. Promises made to the nation of Israel will be fulfilled. Then, the final defeat of Satan will take place with the beginning of the eternal state.

1) The preparation for the millennium (19:1-20:3)

Praise for Christ's victory is recorded in 19:1-10. Note is also made that the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb. The hope of believers has taken place. Jesus Christ reigns and believers will reign with Him. The importance of Christ's victory is seen in the concluding statement of verse 10, *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Walvoord states, This means that prophecy at its very heart is designed to unfold the beauty and loveliness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ . . . Christ is not only the major theme of the Scriptures but also the central theme of prophecy. Jesus Christ is our only hope of being overcomers. As prophecy is unfolded, believers have the encouragement that God is sovereignly in control and more than able to bring us through every situation.*

The return of Jesus Christ to the earth is revealed in 19:11-16. Jesus Christ is the King of King and the Lord of Lords. The fulfillment of prophecy concerning His second coming is complete. He returns with authority and power to make everyone submit to Him. The call to the "great supper" in 19:17-18, is an acknowledgment of Christ's victory over the beast and his armies. In vv. 19-20, the beast and the false prophet are captured and will be thrown alive into the lake of fire. At that time, Satan will be bound and placed into the abyss for a thousand years. The events of chapter 20 follow chronologically the events of chapter 19. The reign of Christ on earth will be literal and last one thousand years. The unconditional promises to the nation Israel will be fulfilled during the millennial kingdom.

2) The millennial reign of Christ (20:4-6)

The one thousand year reign of Christ on earth is preceded by several events: the second coming of Christ; the beast and the false prophet thrown into the fiery lake; the armies destroyed; Satan bound in the abyss; the thrones of judgment introduced; and the martyred dead of the tribulation resurrected.

A belief in a literal reign of Christ on the earth for one thousand years is supported by John's emphasis of the time frame in this section. The reign of Christ on the earth is future even as the prophecies of Revelation are future.

3) The events following the millennium (20:7-15)

At the end of Christ's thousand year reign, Satan is loosed and he makes a final attempt to defeat Christ. Many will follow Satan who lived during the Millennium and his final defeat will occur. At that time, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire for eternal punishment. Eternal punishment is hard to comprehend but it should be proper motivation for reaching others with the gospel of Christ.

The great white throne judgment occurs next. This is a judgment of those who have not trusted Christ. In 20:11-13, the resurrection and judgment of the wicked dead occurs. As God righteously brought judgment on the earth during the tribulation, He also judges righteously. As Satan was cast into the lake of fire, so will those outside of Christ. Again, punishment is eternal. The book of Revelation has been full of contrasts. Believers are to be kept from tribulation but un-believers will experience terrible suffering. Believers receive an eternal kingdom with Christ but unbelievers receive eternal punishment in the lake of fire. Our hope in Christ must be a burden which must be shared with a world headed straight for the horrors of the Apocalypse.

c. The eternal state: the new heaven and earth, New Jerusalem and the River of Life (21:1-22:5)

Following the one thousand year reign of Christ, is the eternal state. This is a totally new creation, That which was marred by the fall is no more.

According to 21:1, the first heaven and earth passed away and there is no longer any sea. Little is known about the new heaven and earth except that it is the home of all who are saved. More detail is given to New Jerusalem which is in the new earth. It will come down from heaven and will be the home of God and the Lamb. The New Jerusalem will be the temple of God and the throne of God will be there. The redeemed will serve God in the New Jerusalem. We will forever be in the presence of God. Our sufficiency will be in Him. A proper motivation for serving God faithfully in the face of persecution is the blessed hope of being with Him in eternity.

d. Conclusion (22:6-21)

John concludes the book of Revelation by emphasizing its authenticity. The promises in the book are only as sure as the One who stands behind them. It is again affirmed that it is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1) The authentication (22:6-9)

The book of Revelation is from the Lord. John received the privilege of writing them down. Since the first chapter, John has emphasized that the visions were from the Lord. Our basis for taking heart in these revelations during persecution is the fact that they are true--truly from the Alpha and Omega.

2) The affirmation (22:10-16)

The author again identifies Himself as Jesus Christ and emphasizes the relevancy of the book. Proper conduct is stressed which is a means of determining one's future in Christ's kingdom.

3) The invitation (22:17)

Jesus openly invites those who read the book to come to Him. Payment has already been made but one must be willing to accept His invitation.

4) The warning (22:18-19)

The importance of this book is evident by the warning against tampering with its contents. The Word of God is crucial and must be properly taught.

5) The promise (22:20)

A promise of Christ's soon return is made.

6) The benediction (22:21)

The book appropriately closes with the word grace. As believers read of God's future plans of judgment, we can only rest in God's grace. Our deliverance from the wrath to come is based only in the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

The book of Revelation is an exhortation to believers to stand firm in the faith despite persecution or possibly the enticements of the world. The judgment of God on the world system will be sure and complete. The sufficiency of God in keeping us to Himself is underscored by the future He has in store for us. It is so easy to lose sight of the future because of the difficulties of the present. Our hope must continually rest in God's revealed Word which is ever true. The book of Revelation is of course a study in future events but with a view toward its impact on the daily lives of believers.

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