

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

By Lane Casteix

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Introduction

The Book of the Revelation (singular) is appropriately placed at the end of the Bible as the last book of the Bible. The Gospels at the other end of the New Testament reveal the Messiah and His life during His First advent, including all He did by way of dealing with the judgment of sin by taking our sins upon Himself in our place and establishing the divine system of Eternal Life, which is granted to every believer, calling the believer to a Holy Lifestyle and demonstrating how through the use of our Eternal Lives we may have victory over sin, enjoying a supernatural lifestyle dependent on God's guidance and enablement, with the calling to full-time Christian service those saved and, in the process, facilitating and supporting the means of that service through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ test drove the spiritual life, proved it worked, and left it here for us to use during the formerly hidden "musterion" or mystery of the Church Age.

Revelation is the other end of the spectrum. It closes the New Testament and is the climax of the many threads of prophecy running through both the Old and New Testament, bringing them to a conclusion.

Properly called "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" it reveals more graphically than any other book the Second Coming of Christ and the years following that event. The Book of Daniel describes in detail the period from Daniel's time to Christ's first coming and speaks briefly of the Tribulation and Christ's rule on earth. But Revelation amplifies the great end-time events with many additional details, culminating in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Revelation in the Greek is *apokalypsis* which we transliterate as "apocalypse". The word means uncovering, revealing, or disclosure and refers to the revealing of things not formerly known. It is the only apocalyptic book in the Bible, although other books do have prophecy in them that relates to that in the Book of the Revelation.

Authorship

In the opening verses it is plainly stated the author is John. Some argue that it was another John who wrote Revelation, even John Mark. John never officially identifies himself as “the Apostle,” but in spite of arguments to the contrary, the style is in agreement with that found in the Gospel of John and his three epistles. Conservative Christians have almost unanimously agreed that the author of Revelation is the Apostle John. Practically all scholars today who accept the divine inspiration of the Book of Revelation also accept John the Apostle as its author. However, Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli questioned the Johannine authorship because it teaches a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ. More on that point later...

The Dating of Revelation

Most evangelical scholars agree that Revelation was written about AD 95 or 96. This is based on accounts of the early church fathers that the Apostle John had been exiled on Patmos Island during the reign of Domitian who died in AD 96. John was then allowed to return to Ephesus. There is some “discussion” about when John wrote Revelation, and much of this “discussion” is driven by some who have a need for Revelation to be written at an earlier date than that generally ascribed to this book.

Inspiration and Canonicity

Because its style differs from that of other New Testament books, acceptance of Revelation by early Christians was delayed by a rising opposition to premillennialism. The doctrine of the literal 1,000-year reign of Christ (Millennium) was rejected by some church leaders in the third and fourth centuries. The evidence, however, shows that orthodox theologians readily accepted the book as genuinely inspired, including Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Eusebius, Apollonius, and Theophilus, the bishop of Antioch. By the beginning of the third century the book was widely quoted as Scripture.

Revelation was one of the last books to be formerly included in the canon of Scripture. One reason for this was the opposition of the chiliasm of Revelation 20. That refers to the idea of a literal 1000 year millennium. Jewish Scripture and tradition holds that the Reign of the Son of David and the Kingdom has no end, thus the 1000 years spoken of in Rev 20 was seen as in conflict with that. In truth the reign of the Son of David and

the Kingdom is without end, but it has two phases and the first is 1000 years long, in which some are still in corruptible human bodies, followed by the destruction of the heavens and the earth and the creation of the New Heaven and New Earth, then followed by the continuation of the Kingdom in an eternal state with all involved in resurrection bodies.

Style

Like the Old Testament Books of Daniel and Ezekiel, Revelation uses symbolic and apocalyptic forms of revelation extensively. The fact that symbols must be interpreted has led to many diverse interpretations. In most cases, however, the meaning of the symbolic revelation is found by comparing it with previous prophetic and apocalyptic revelation in the Old Testament. During the course of this study we will do that, look back to OT books for support of what is found in Revelation. Mostly that will be Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, also some NT writings such as Matthew.

This has led many interpreters to view the Book of Revelation as presenting realistic predictions of the future. Daniel speaks of some of the events that we will see in Revelation. Daniel's prophecies, those that have come to pass, were so accurate in detail that some believed Daniel was an after-the-fact historical account of these events written in the second century.

Interpretation

Revelation has been approached from a number of interpretive approaches.

The allegorical or non-literal approach.

This form of interpretation was offered by the Alexandrian school of theology in the third and fourth centuries. It regards the entire Bible as an extensive allegory to be interpreted in a non-literal sense. The allegorical interpretation of the Bible was later restricted largely to prophecy about the Millennium by Augustine (354-430), who interpreted Revelation as a chronicle of the spiritual conflict between God and Satan being fulfilled in the present Church Age.

A liberal variation of this in modern times considers Revelation simply as a symbolic presentation of the concept of God's ultimate victory. There is no question that the Bible sometimes uses figurative language, and the use of

metaphors is far from uncommon. Evangelicals generally lean towards a literal interpretation of Scripture but understand we will encounter figurative language and metaphors

The preterist approach.

A more respected approach is known as the preterist view, which regards Revelation as a symbolic picture of early church conflicts which have been fulfilled. This view denies the future predictive quality of most of the Book of Revelation. Preterists generally take the position that the events in Revelation are not literal and are mainly figurative, often exaggerations of actual events. They believe most of the events seen in Revelation have already come to past and were fulfilled in the events that took place at the fall of Jerusalem and the final conquest of Israel by the Romans in AD 70.

One main argument for this position is John did not mention the Fall of Jerusalem as a historical event, but rather was seen as future. They conclude that John was speaking of the events of AD 70 in his prophecies in Revelation as yet future to the time of writing. The absence of mention of a historical Fall of Jerusalem proves nothing.

Papias, an early church father, asserted that John the Apostle was martyred before AD 70, therefore Revelation must have been written about AD 68 or 69. Well, guess which bunch grabs hold of that earlier date? Yes, the preterists because it helps support their position that John was really talking about the events surrounding the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the later persecution of the Church. A number of mainline religions either fully hold to the preterist position or some portion of it. Among them Roman Catholicism as well as some Protestant denominations.

The historical approach.

A popular view stemming from the Middle Ages is the historical approach, which views Revelation as a symbolic picture of the total church history of the present Age between Christ's first and second comings. This view was advanced by Luther, Isaac Newton, Elliott, and many expositors of the postmillennial school of interpretation and has attained respectability in recent centuries. Its principal problem is that seldom do two interpreters interpret a given passage as referring to the same event. Each interpreter tends to find its fulfillment in his generation. The preceding methods of interpretation tend to deny a literal future Millennium and also literal future events in the Book of Revelation.

The futuristic approach.

The futuristic approach has been adopted by conservative scholars, usually premillenarians, who state that chapters 4-22 deal with events that are yet future to today. The content of Revelation 4-18 describes the last seven years preceding the second coming of Christ and particularly emphasizes the last three and one-half years before His coming. Objections to this view usually stem from theological positions opposed to premillennialism.

The futuristic interpretation, however, is demanding of the expositor, as it requires him to reduce to tangible prophetic events the symbolic presentations which characterize the book. In other words, paint mental pictures of future events. That is risky business! But it does allow a more literal interpretation of the events seen in the book. As part of this we ought to consider the various theological positions that are held by some of these groups.

Regarding the Rapture of the Church we have:

We will look at this subject in more detail later in this study.

- **Pre-Trib** - believe the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation begins
- **Mid-Trib** - believe the Rapture occurs about half way through the Tribulation and before the second half, which is called the “Great Tribulation”. This bunch agrees that the Church is not appointed to wrath (1 Thes 5:9 “For God did not appoint us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”), but argues the “wrath” part of the Tribulation really doesn’t begin until the second half. They equate the Seventh Trumpet of Revelation, which they believe begins the really bad stuff, with the “last trumpet” of 1 Cor 15:51 “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” Most evangelical expositors believe that is a stretch and a weak argument against stronger contrary arguments.
- **Post-Trib** - believe the Rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation right before the Second Advent, that believers do endure wrath as testing and demonstrating their witness, then we go up, meet the Lord in the clouds on His way to Earth, and immediately come back.

Regarding the Millennium

- **Amillennialists** — believe there is no 1000 year reign of Christ. The six references to 1000 years in Revelation 20 is figurative language, and John really means, by that exact number, an undetermined and indefinite period of time. They believe we are NOW in the millennium and our job is to spread the Gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth and when all have been converted Christ will return. They might also be called Post-Millennialists.
- **Pre-Millennialists** — believe there is a literal 1000 year reign of Christ and the Second Advent is at the end of the Tribulation and just before the beginning of the Millennium. After the 1000 year Millennium the Kingdom shifts to eternity with the destruction of the old Heavens and Earth and the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth.

Evangelicals, especially those with a dispensational bent, generally position themselves as Pre-Trib/Pre-Mil. We believe the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation, and the Second Advent is at the end of the Tribulation just before the beginning of a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth. We will look at this subject in more detail later.

Symbolism

One popular reason given for the symbolism in Revelation is that it was necessary to hide its true nature in opposition to the Roman Emperors during the persecutions of Domitian. Some argue it is an allusion to extra-biblical apocalyptic literature. More likely the symbols used were John's attempts to describe, in the limited context of a first century man, 21st century or later events and the things he saw in his visions.

It is generally agreed that much of the symbolism of Revelation is outside the ability of any man not actually witnessing the events to fully understand them. The closer to the events the more likely you will be able to grasp what they may be speaking about. And if you are experiencing them, what John saw will be very clear to you. It is sometimes argued that much of Revelation is actually written for those who must endure it. This is not to say all of it is outside our current ability to understand it, but quite possibly some of it is. For example the "locusts" of Revelation 9:7-10.

Rev 9:7 The shape of the locusts was "like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. 8 They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth

were like lions' teeth. 9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. 10 They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months.

Is John describing what we know as a modern attack helicopter? Or is he describing something future to our time that we have never seen, some future machine, or even some mutation of animal life, or literal locust?

Theology

Few books of the Bible provide a more complete theology than does the book of the Revelation.

Christology - this is the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It deals with the revealing of God's judgment on fallen man, His plan for the final redemption of mankind, the Second Coming of Christ, and our ultimate destiny as believers. This book contributes more to the doctrine of God than any other book. God is presented in all the majesty of the Jehovah of the Old Testament - Holy, true, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal with emphasis on the righteousness of God and His divine judgment of sin. Though there are references to the Father and the Holy Spirit, the central revelation concerns Jesus Christ. Many allusions are made to His human origins, the tribe of Judah, Son of David, His humiliation as the slain lamb. Always Christ is depicted as triumphant over death and eternal and worthy of adoration

Angelology

No other book in the Bible speaks more of angels than Revelation. They are the principle vehicles for communication and the pouring out of judgments. We see a sharp contrast between the elect angels and the fallen angels, or demons.

Soteriology

The redemptive purpose of God is constantly in view.

Purpose

The purpose of the Book of Revelation is to reveal events which will take place immediately before, during, and following the Second Coming of Christ. In keeping with this purpose, the book devotes most of its revelation to this subject in chapters 4-18. The Second Coming itself is

given the most graphic portrayal anywhere in the Bible in chapter 19, followed by the millennial reign of Christ described in chapter 20. The eternal state is revealed in chapters 21-22. So the obvious purpose of the book is to complete the prophetic theme presented earlier in the prophecies of the Old Testament and the prophecies of Christ, especially in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25). Along with the predictive character of the Book of Revelation is extensive revelation in almost every important area of theology. Many verses suggest practical applications of prophetic truths to a Christian's life. Specific knowledge and anticipation of God's future program are incentives to holy living and commitment to Christ.

Application

Chapters 2-3 are especially important for they consist of messages to seven local churches, which many expositors believe represent the entire Church Age. The pointed message of Christ to each of these churches is the capstone to New Testament Epistles dealing with the practical life of those committed to the Christian faith. On the one hand, believers are exhorted to holy living, and on the other hand, unbelievers are warned of judgments to come. The book provides solid evidence that the righteous God will ultimately deal with human sin and bring to consummation the salvation of those who have trusted in Christ. A day of reckoning when every knee will bow to Christ (Phil. 2:10) is inevitable in the divine program. Because of its broad revelation of events to come, as well as its pointed exhortation to righteousness, the book pronounces blessing on those "who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (Rev. 1:3).

Introduction and Benediction

With that background in mind, we will now get into our detailed verse-by-verse study of the Book of the Revelation. John begins his introduction....

Rev 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 3 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.

As mentioned, the word "Revelation" is the Greek *apokalypsis* which means to unveil, disclose, reveal or expose. In this case John indicates it the revealing of Jesus Christ. "John" is John the apostle, even though he never actually identifies himself as "the apostle" but rather as seen in verse 2 as "His servant". The word generally is used of a slave. It is not unusual that he would use the servant title instead of "apostle". Paul, James, and Peter all use the same term. The purpose of the revelation is given in verse 1 "God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place."

This revelation is clearly intended for dissemination to others identified as "His servants," which is the same word that John used to describe himself as a servant. What is implied is these visions are for those who have a committed spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ led and empowered by the Spirit of God. I read this to mean those who are in a position to fully grasp the true message here. A casual uncommitted or nominal Christian will be left largely in the dark about what all this means.

What is to be revealed are "things which must shortly take place." The words translated "shortly" is *tachos /takh·os/*, which means that the action will be sudden and fast when it comes, not necessarily that it will occur immediately. *Tachos* is where we get our English word "tachometer," which measures engine RPMs. Once the end-time events begin, they will occur in rapid succession.

"He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John". The Greek word for "signified" is one that refers to signs or symbols, to make known by signs or symbols, and generally means to communicate. The ESV translates it "make known". In John's case, he was given visions of these events.

Verse 1 says, "He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John". The word transliterated "angel" is *angelos* which really means messenger. The messenger, or angel, is not here identified, but Gabriel has been suggested as the most likely candidate.

Rev 1:2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

John was told to make known the message, and he faithfully recorded what he saw and was told to record. Jesus Christ is given as the source of the message, “the testimony of Jesus Christ”.

Rev 1:3 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.

The prologue concludes with a blessing on -

- All who read
- All who hear
- All who keep

“...And keep those things.” No other book of the Bible contains this statement in verse 3. The word translated “keep” implies taking it to heart and holding onto it, using it. It is not only a blessing for those who read and hear the message but also to those obedient to the message.

“For the time is near....” The word translated “time” is not our usual word for time *kronos* but is *kairos* /*kahee-ros*/, which refers to a period of time. It is “near” in the sense that it is imminent and that it can happen suddenly.

It is most important to observe that the book was primarily intended to give a practical lesson to those who read and heed its contents.

Greeting the Seven Churches

Rev 1:4 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,

The message given through John is addressed to “the seven churches which are in Asia”. These seven churches are in the western end of the Roman province of Asia or what we would call “Asia Minor” and the Romans called “Proconsular Asia”. All seven churches are in modern day Turkey.

The words “grace and peace” concisely summarize both a Christian’s standing before God and his experience. “Grace” speaks of God’s attitude

toward believers; “peace” speaks both of their standing with God and their experience of divine peace (Love, joy, peace... fruit of the Spirit).

“Him who is and who was and who is to come” speaks of the eternal nature of our Lord - past present and future.

“And from the seven Spirits who are before His throne” probably refers to the Holy Spirit though it is a bit unusual. Seven speaks of completeness or perfection. We see this reference used again in Revelation 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.

Rev 1:5 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.

These messages are from Jesus Christ identified by six attributes:

1. The faithful witness. — The source of revelation and One to be trusted.
2. The firstborn from the dead — better translated “firstborn of the dead,” referring to His resurrection. The first to be resurrected from the dead (Col 1:16). Christ was the first to experience resurrection, and the Church will follow in that order.
3. Ruler over kings of the earth. — This is in the sense that Jesus Christ controls history and raises up kings and brings them down. It is yet to be fully fulfilled in the Millennium when Jesus Christ will not only have that power and use it, but He will be formally recognized as King of Kings.
4. Him who loved us. — God so loved the world It is in the present tense - keeps on loving us.
5. And washed us from our sins in His own blood. — Out of that love flowed the potential for redemption for those who would receive the free gift of salvation.
6. Made us kings and priests to His God and father. And those He delivered from the bondage of sin He made “kings and priests” to God. Our rulership is subject to future manifestation in the Kingdom (Millennium). Our priesthood is active right now.

Rev 1:7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

The believer is exhorted to look — behold — He is coming. In the Greek this is future action but viewed as so certain it is already accomplished. Though the literal executioners and rejectors of Christ are now dead and will not be resurrected until after the Millennium, the godly remnant of Israel “will look on [Him], the One they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10). This godly remnant will represent the nation. This is a reference to His Second Advent.

Rev 1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and speaks of His eternal nature, the one who is, was, and will come. The Almighty is a term reserved for God.

Vision of the Son of Man

Rev 1:9 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.

John identifies himself a third time, but this time as “your brother and companion in tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ”. His suffering has come as a result of his testimony for Jesus Christ. He says he is on the island of Patmos, “for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”. Patmos is a small island in the Aegean Sea southwest of Ephesus and between Asia Minor and Greece. According to several early church fathers (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius), John was sent to this island as a prisoner following his effective pastorate at Ephesus. Victorinus, the first commentator on the Book of Revelation, stated that John worked as a prisoner in the mines on this small island. When the Emperor Domitian died in AD 96, his successor Nerva let John return to Ephesus. During John’s bleak days on Patmos, God gave him the tremendous revelation embodied in this final book of the Bible.

Note his reference to “patience,” which is the same Greek word James uses.

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

The word in the Greek refers to steadfastness or steadiness under fire. This steadfastness produces believers who are “perfect and complete, lacking nothing” — spiritually mature. God used this time to mature John even further and prepare him to receive this revelation.

What do we have?

John the Apostle receives information which will be in the form of visions, and evidently there was more than one given and over a period of time. As we see them we will sometimes see John’s reaction, which often seems traumatic. He is going to receive instructions to write to seven churches in Asia Minor. He will then be given specific information about future events.

So far we have seen John establishing his credentials as the author chosen to receive this information. We have also seen Jesus Christ establishing His authority as God and specifically as the Righteous Judge who is about to bring judgment down on the world. One very interesting note seen is verse 3 “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it.” No other book of the Bible says something like that. We should also note how the book ends.

Rev 22:18 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.

Obviously, God takes this book very seriously. Why did He see fit to put these statements in there? Some believe the first, the beatitude, is an encouragement for believers to study the book. It was until recently one of the least studied books of the Bible. Yes, it promises blessing for those

who hear, read, and obey during the Tribulation, but the beatitude does not limit itself to just those believers. We all can be blessed by this book if for no other reason than it brings to a conclusion all the great themes of Scripture. We get to see the end of God's Plan, why and how God is doing what He is doing. He will ultimately deal with sin, the final judgment on all unbelievers, and Jesus Christ will reclaim and restore all that Adam lost in the Fall and present it in complete perfection back to its rightful owner, God.

We have the privilege of being allowed to see the culmination of that in advance of it happening. And that, my beloved, should be a great blessing that is comforting and uplifting to us. Yes, we walk by faith and not by sight, but God knows it encourages us to also see His plan in action all the way to its conclusion.

Pastor Bil Gebhardt puts it this way, "I have read the end of the book, and we win!"