

New Testament Survey

Revelation

I. Attestation and Authorship¹

A. External

1. There are possible traces of the use of Revelation in Barnabas, Ignatius, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.
2. Justyn Martyr speaks of the Apostle John as writing “that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem.”
3. Irenaeus quotes almost verbally Revelation 1:12-16; 5:6; and 19:11-17 in *Against Heresies* (IV.xx.11) and ascribes the words to John. In the same work he says that John saw the Apocalypse towards the end of Domitian’s reign (V.xxx.3).
4. Tertullian writes, “The Apostle John” beheld the city come down out of heaven (Revelation 21:10-23) in *Against Marcion* (III.xxv).
5. In *Scorpiace* (chapter 12), Tertullian quotes from a number of the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3 and summarizes the blessings to the overcomers.
6. Hippolytus (a disciple of Irenaeus), quotes chapters 17 and 18 almost word for word and assigns them to the Apostle John in his work *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* (sections 36-42).
7. Clement of Alexandria tells us of the Apostle John who returns to Ephesus after his time on the Isle of Patmos. He also quotes 6:9, 11 in the *Instructor* (II.xi).
8. Origin, in *De Principiis* (I.ii.10) writes, “Listen to the manner in which John speaks in the Apocalypse,” and then quotes from 1:8. In his work, *Against Celsus*, he refers to the seven thunders in 10:4 and the eating of the book in 10:9 (VI.vi), and to the prayers of the saints in 8:3-4 (VIII.xvii).
9. The Muratorian Fragment says, “Among Apocalypses, we receive only those of John and Peter, though some of our friends do not wish this (the Apocalypse of Peter?) to be read in the Church.”

B. Internal Evidence

1. The writer calls himself John four times (Revelation 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8).
2. No great grammatical irregularities occur in the book that would cause us to deny the authorship of John.

C. Critical Objections - Authorship

¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), p p. 317-320.

1. The Alogoi, a group which denied the deity of Christ and the Trinity, rejected Revelation on the grounds that it was written by Cerentian Gnostics.
2. Dionysius of Alexandria laid the foundations for the modern views on the authorship of Revelation. He approached the book with a strong Amillennial viewpoint, examined the text, and ascribed it to a different John.
3. Eusebius appears to be indifferent, sometimes ascribing the book to John and at other times not.
4. Luther, Zwingli, and Erasmus rejected Revelation as non-apostolic.
5. Some use the phrase “servant of Christ” (Revelation 1:1) and “brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus” (Revelation 1:9) as denying the Apostolic authorship. They contend that if the real author was John, then he would have said so and not veiled his identity.

D. Critical Objections - Linguistic and Grammatical

1. There are differences in vocabulary between Revelation and the other books authored by John. However, this can be more easily explained in terms of the subject matter than in a denial of Johannine authorship.
2. The writer of Revelation appears disjointed. In other words, he is carried from vision to vision apparently writing down immediately what he saw. This is in distinction to the ordered writing of John elsewhere in his Gospel. However, many of the grammatical irregularities in Revelation appear in other classical Greek works.

II. Background and Destination²

- A. John arrived in Ephesus in the year A.D. 69-70. He appears to have taken charge of several other churches in the area, most notably Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Laodicea, Philadelphia, and Sardis.
- B. According to Eusebius, John was imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos in the fifteenth year of Domitian’s reign (A.D. 95-96). He returned from Patmos at the beginning of the reign of Nerva (A.D. 96-97).
- C. John is told to write Revelation immediately to the seven churches over which he ministered (Revelation 1:4, 10, 11; 2-3). However, it was also intended for other neighboring churches and to churches as a whole. In fact, the blessing of Revelation 1:3 is pronounced upon all who read and understand the book.

III. Occasion and Date³

- A. John was personally told to write the book by Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:10-13). This is the only time in the New Testament a writer gives this as his reason for writing a letter.

² Thiessen, pp. 320-321.

³ Thiessen, pp. 321-322.

- B. Christ addresses the message of the book to the messengers of the seven churches. No doubt this is in response to the spiritual needs within these churches.
- C. There are two main dates assigned to Revelation:
 - 1. Westcott, Lightfoot, Hort, Salmon, and others say it was written about A.D. 68-69. They get this from the interpretation of the seven kings in Revelation 17-18, and in the fact that the Greek appears inferior to that of the Gospel of John, which would indicate John was still learning Greek when he wrote Revelation. Some also do manipulations on the number 666 and Nero's name to support this idea as well.
 - 2. Alford, Swete, Milligan, Orr, Moffatt, and Zahn all hold to the date A.D. 95-96. This fits in with Eusebius' historical account of John's ministry.

IV. Purpose and Plan⁴

- A. To show believers the things which must shortly come to pass (Revelation 1:1).
- B. To reveal the Person and Word of Christ.
- C. To serve as the conclusion of God's revelation to man.
- D. To show that God ultimately wins.

V. A Basic Outline⁵

- A. Introduction - Revelation 1:1-11.
- B. The Self-Revelation of Christ - Revelation 1:12-20.
 - 1. The Place of Christ - 1:12-13.
 - 2. The Characteristics of Christ - 1:13-16.
 - 3. The Message of Christ - 1:17-20.
- C. Christ and the Church - Revelation 2-3.
 - 1. The Church in Ephesus - 2:1-7.
 - 2. The Church in Smyrna - 2:8-11.
 - 3. The Church in Pergamum - 2:12-17.
 - 4. The Church in Thyatira - 2:18-29.
 - 5. The Church in Sardis - 3:1-6.
 - 6. The Church in Philadelphia - 3:7-13.
 - 7. The Church in Laodicea - 3:14-22.
- D. Christ and the Great Tribulation - Revelation 4-19.

⁴ Thiessen, pp. 327-328.

⁵ Thiessen, pp. 328-329.

1. The Preparations in Heaven - 4-5.
 2. The Opening of the Six Seals - 6.
 3. The First Parenthesis - 7.
 4. The Opening of the Seventh Seal - 8:1.
 5. The Sounding of the Six Trumpets - 8:2-9:21.
 6. The Second Parenthesis - 10:1-11:14.
 7. The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet - 11:15-18.
 8. The Third Parenthesis - 11:19-14:20.
 9. The Pouring Out of the Seven Bowls of Wrath - 15-16.
 10. The Judgment of Babylon - 17-18.
 11. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb - 19:1-10.
 12. The Public Appearing of Christ and His Own - 19:11-21.
- E. Christ and the Millennial Reign - Revelation 20.
1. The Binding of Satan - 20:1-3.
 2. The Millennial Reign - 20:4-6.
 3. The Loosing and Final Doom of Satan - 20:7-10.
 4. The Judgment of the Great White Throne - 20:11-15.
- F. Christ and the Eternal State - Revelation 21:1-22:21.
1. The New Realms: The New Heaven, the New Earth, the New Jerusalem - 21:1-2.
 2. The Blessedness of the New Realm - 21:3-6a.
 3. The Invitation to the New Realm - 21:6b-7.
 4. The Portion of those Excluded from the New Realm - 21:8.
 5. The Description of the New Jerusalem - 21:9-22:5.
 6. Conclusion - 22:6-21.

VI. Chapters To Remember

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| Revelation 2-3 | The Seven Churches |
| Revelation 5-6 | The Six Seals |
| Revelation 12 | The Dragon |

Revelation 13	The Beast and False Prophet
Revelation 19	The Revelation of Christ
Revelation 20	The Millennium and Final Judgment
Revelation 21-22	The New Heaven and New Earth

VII. Points and Peculiarities

- A. Revelation has been approached four major ways in regards to its interpretation:⁶
1. The Preterist View - Revelation has already been historically fulfilled, mainly in the destruction of Jerusalem.
 2. The Spiritual View - Revelation is to be understood and interpreted allegorically. In other words, there is no real 1,000 year reign, but an allegorical reign of Christ through his Church.
 3. The Continuous-Historical View - Revelation covers all of church history from the New Testament times to the end. This view identifies the Pope as Antichrist, and sometimes identifies each of the seven churches as representing an era of church history, starting with Ephesus and winding up with Laodicea.
 4. The Futuristic View - Revelation has not yet been fulfilled but will be at a future time. This is most closely in line with the grammatical-historical approach to Biblical interpretation.
- B. Revelation is centered around a series of visions by John.
- C. There is no Devil in the first two chapters of the Bible, and there is no Devil in the last two.
- D. Between the sixth and seventh seal, bowl, and trumpet, there is an interim time given for men to repent.
- E. Revelation is not completely chronological. In fact, many of the visions span significant periods of time. For example, the Vision of the War in Heaven in chapter 12 covers most of human history, and the vision of Ecclesiastical and Economic Babylon cover all seven years of the Tribulation.
- F. At least four ways have been offered as to the interpretation of the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3:
1. Literal View - the messages were given directly to seven literal churches and were meant for them alone.
 2. Historical View - the messages were given to seven literal churches and were directly applicable to them, but the messages also give an historical sketch of the Church Age from Christ to his Revelation.
 3. Typical View - the messages were given to seven literal churches and were directly applicable to them, but the messages also applies to churches of

⁶ Thiessen, pp. 323-327.

all ages in that most churches exhibit characteristics unique to one of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3.

4. Futurist View - the messages are typical of seven kinds of churches that will enter the Tribulation.

VIII. A Closer Look

- A. The Vision of the Glorified Son and the Messages to the Seven Churches - Revelation 1:10-3:22.
- B. The Vision of God's Throne - Revelation 4:1-11.
- C. The Vision of the Sealed Book - Revelation 5.
- D. The Vision of the Six Seals - Revelation 6.
- E. The Vision of the Sealing of the 144,000 - Revelation 7:1-8.
- F. The Vision of the Numberless Multitude - Revelation 7:9-17.
- G. The Vision of the Seventh Seal - Revelation 8:1.
- H. The Vision of the First Six Trumpets - Revelation 8:2-9:21.
- I. The Vision of the Little Book - Revelation 10:1-11.
- J. The Vision of the Two Witnesses - Revelation 11:1-14.
- K. The Vision of the Seventh Trumpet - Revelation 11:15-19.
- L. The Vision of the War in Heaven - Revelation 12.
- M. The Vision of the Beast - Revelation 13:1-10.
- N. The Vision of the False Prophet - Revelation 13:11-18.
- O. The Vision of the Triumphant 144,000 - Revelation 14:1-5.
- P. The Vision of the Three Angels - Revelation 14:6-13.
- Q. The Vision of the Reaping of Earth - Revelation 14:14-20.
- R. The Vision of the Angels with Seven Bowls - Revelation 15:1-8.
- S. The Vision of the Seven Bowls - Revelation 15:9-21.
- T. The Vision of Ecclesiastical Babylon - Revelation 17.
- U. The Vision of Economic Babylon - Revelation 18.
- V. The Vision of the Bride of Christ - Revelation 19:1-10.
- W. The Vision of the Return of Christ - Revelation 19:11-21.
- X. The Vision of the Binding of Satan - Revelation 20:1-6.
- Y. The Vision of the Destruction of Satan - Revelation 20:7-10.

- Z. The Vision of the Great White Throne - Revelation 20:11-15.
- AA. The Vision of the New Heaven and Earth - Revelation 21:1-8.
- BB. The Vision of the New Jerusalem - Revelation 21:9-22:5.
- CC. The Vision of the Invitation of Christ and His Bride - Revelation 22:6-21.