

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Revelation

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

1. **Authorship:** The author of Revelation is the apostle John (Rev. 1:1). His authorship was affirmed by many church fathers in the second and third centuries (e.g., Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Melito, Theophilus of Antioch, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, the Muratorian Canon, and others.). Guthrie notes, "So strong is this evidence that it is difficult to believe that they all made a mistake in confusing the John of the Apocalypse with John the apostle" (Guthrie, 933). It's assumed that much like James, John was so well known by the seven churches he addressed in Asia that he didn't need to include other biographical details. John was the apostle who lived in Ephesus and oversaw many of these ministries within a hundred-mile radius. In addition, Beale argues for John's authorship based on internal factors. He states, "Internally, many of the themes associated with John's Gospel and letters – Jesus as the Word, the Lamb and the Shepherd, manna, living water, life and light, conquering, keeping the word and the commands of God, and others – also appear in Revelation" (Beale, 465).
2. **Date:** In Revelation 1:9, John mentions that he was writing from "*the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*" Patmos was an island off the coast of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. While there, in a cave, he received a vision (revelation, apocalypse) from Jesus and wrote it down for the churches. The early church father Irenaeus reported that John wrote Revelation "*towards the end of Domitian's reign,*" which spanned AD 81-96 (*Hist. eccl. 3:23.1-2, 5*). Therefore, Revelation was most likely written in the late AD 90s, when John was nearing the end of his life.
3. **Audience:** Toward the end of the first century, the original readers of Revelation faced two serious struggles. From this inside, they had become lazy and careless, tolerating sin and false teaching, and were divided, dysfunctional, and not focused on their mission. From the outside, these churches were under the constant threat of deadly persecution. Many were discouraged, wondering if following Jesus was worth the effort, or if God was really in control. Some of these believers had been put to the test in public: either worship Caesar and deny Jesus; or worship Jesus and be put to death. Therefore, many were doubtful and discouraged.
4. **Genre:** The book of Revelation was written in three different genres (i.e., literary styles): apocalyptic, prophecy, and epistle. The "apocalyptic" genre combines prophecy with symbolic visions and narratives (e.g., the appearance of heavenly visitors, frightening enemies, depictions of the end of the world, etc.). Hill notes that the word "apocalyptic" was coined from the book

of Revelation (Gk. "apokalypsis," unveiling/revealing/to make visible), since a discovery of a number of Jewish and early Christian works have the same characteristics (Kruger, 520).

5. **Purpose:** For centuries, scholars have proposed different purposes for Revelation.
 - a. **Preterist:** Revelation was primarily written for the church in the late first century as a response to deadly persecution from Rome. Therefore, this view holds that Revelation is a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, where the symbols in the book exclusively refer to people or institutions in the first century (Beale, 466). According to Charles Hill, "These interpreters tend to view Revelation as primarily a political document, a fiery protest against the violent imperialism of first-century Rome, written to fortify Christians of that day for the possibility of greater oppression" (Kruger, 518).
 - b. **Futurist:** Revelation is mainly about the final seven years of world history, leading up to the time of Jesus' return and the final judgment. In other words, the book was written for those living in these final years, to give them assurance of Christ's victory. It's important to note that many believed they were living in these final years at the end of the first century.
 - c. **Idealist:** Revelation was written to give believers instruction and hope throughout history until the second coming of Jesus. Beale explains, "The entire book is a symbolic presentation of the battle between good and evil. The seals, bowls, and trumpets speak repeatedly to the actual events of human history in every age and give believers of all ages an exhortation to remain faithful in the face of suffering" (Beale, 467). Therefore, as Hill notes, "It seems best to view Revelation as oriented not primary to the past or to the future, though it is vitally linked to both, but to the present life of the church – to the entire span of the time between the first and second comings of Jesus...the books purpose is not only to assure us that Christ is certainly '*coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him,*' but also to assure us that in the meantime, Jesus Christ is '*ruler of kings on earth*' (1:5), in whatever time or place we live. Revelation delivers to the distressed churches of Asia Minor and to the church in all ages, the triumphant assurance that behind the scenes of history and despite the vicissitudes of history, the kingdom of God is in power, and Jesus Christ the King of all kings is on his Father's throne executing his sovereign judgment over the world" (Kruger, 518-19).
6. **Biblical Theology:** There is no coincidence that Revelation contains numerous references, themes, and imagery from the Old Testament. We find pictures from Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, and others. For example, in the first vision, Jesus appears as the glorified Son of Man from Daniel 7:19-14, showing that Jesus has dominion over all peoples, nations, and languages, as prophesied in that passage (Hill, 524). We also see a connection between the ten plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-12) and the seals, trumpets, and bowls of God's judgment in Revelation. The ten plagues and the seals/trumpets/bowls are prophetic patterns of God's judgment on the evil world system. Just as Pharaoh's heart was hardened, so will the hearts of those who face God's judgement throughout history.

Charles Hill summarizes, "Revelation presents to God's people the grand conclusion, the tying-up of the great drama of salvation begun in the first three chapters of the Bible. It reveals how the seed of the woman crushes the head of the Serpent and completes the new creation. Its canonical order as the last book of our Bible, then is entirely appropriate. Genesis and Revelation are not only literally but also thematically the bookends of the Bible" (Kruger, 516).

7. Structure

- a. **Preface** (1:1-3) – John introduces himself and explains that God has given him a revelation to share. He proclaims a blessing on all who *"read aloud the words of this prophecy...and those who hear...and who keep what is written in it"* (1:3).
- b. **The Seven Letters** (1:4-3:22) – The first major section contains Jesus' words to seven churches. Jesus commands John, *"Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea"* (3:11). While these were seven historical churches in John's care, the number seven is symbolic to refer to all churches throughout history. It's important not to miss the imagery. Jesus is standing in royal glory in the midst of the lampstands (churches), indicating that he is ruling over them and the world. In other words, Jesus is in total control of all that's taking place in the world (1:12-17). It should be noted that while two churches received positive words, the other five received words of rebuke and judgment. These words relate to issues churches face throughout history.
 - **Philadelphia** (3:8) – *"I know that you have little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."*
 - **Ephesus** (2:4-5) – *"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand."*
 - **Laodicea** (3:15-16) – *"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."*
- c. **The Visions** (4:1:22:9)
 - **God is on the Throne** (4-5): The first vision is from the throne room of heaven, where God is being continuously worshiped by heavenly creatures. God brings out a scroll that is sealed with seven seals, which represents his complete redemptive plan for human history, including the salvation of believers, judgement of sinners, and restoration of the earth. An angel asks who is worthy to open the scroll (5:2). In other words, who can fulfill the will of God and complete these tasks. The only one *"worthy"* is Jesus, *"the Lion of*

- the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David*" (5:5). This vision is intended to remind readers that God is in full control of history and Jesus is the only one able to save, judge, and restore. This scene sets the stage because everything else that takes place depends on these truths.
- **Seals/Trumpets/Bowls (6-16)** – These symbols represent the judgments of God throughout history. There are seven of each, with the seventh item opening up the next symbol (e.g., the seventh seal brings forth the seven trumpets). The symbols of judgment grow in intensity. Hamilton observes that from God's throne "come flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder" (4:5). The same description is given at the seventh seal, trumpet, and bowl, indicating that these judgments are coming from God (Hamilton, 23). God's judgment flows throughout human history.
 - **The Woman and the Dragon (12)** – Inserted in the middle of the judgments is the story of a ferocious "*red dragon*," who rebelled against God and "*swept down to the earth a third of the stars of heaven*" (12:3). The dragon represents Satan and his demons. However, we also see a "*woman who was about to give birth*" to "*one who is to rule all the nations*" (12:4-5) The dragon tries to devour the child, but the woman flees to safety in the wilderness (12:6). It's clear that this is a symbol retelling of God sending Jesus into the world, resisting all attempts of Satan to destroy him. The dragon is defeated and Jesus is victorious.
 - **The Antichrist and False Prophet (13)** – John is shown a vision of the false trinity: the devil, antichrist (beast, 666), and false prophet. This group is opposed to God and mock his nature, even performing a false resurrection. They will deceive "*everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain*" (13:8).
 - **The Final Judgment (18-20)** – These chapters describe God's judgment against "*Babylon*," "*the Beast*," "*the great prostitute*," and all unbelievers. The result of wickedness and unbelief is eternity in the "*lake of fire that burns with sulfur*" (19:20).
 - **The New Heavens and New Earth (21-22)** – The visions conclude with Jesus establishing a "*new heaven and new earth*" (21:1). These details show a re-creation of the Garden of Eden (many repeated symbols), where the world has been fully restored and believers are with God forever.
- d. **Final Exhortations (22:10-21)** – In this final section, John records Jesus' words about how he is coming soon, along with the blessings of reading this book and the judgments of changing it.