The Book of Revelation

INTRODUCTION – Part 1

Nano Church
August 14, 2016
Outline

- Why study Revelation?
- Influence on the culture
- Extremes to avoid
- Authorship and canonicity
- What type of book is it?
- Symbolism
- Old Testament allusions
- Structure of the book
Revelation 1:1-3 (ESV)

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
Why study Revelation?

- All Scripture has practical value for exhortation, comfort, and training in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:16)
- Revelation is a book permeated by worship and punctuated throughout with songs of praise.
- It promises a blessing to those who read it and are obedient.
- It presents the conclusion of the great drama of redemption begun in the first three chapters of Genesis.
- Revelation is not just about the future. It is also about the past and very much about the present.
The goal of Revelation

“The prophetic visions of Revelation can easily disguise the point that it was written as a letter to the churches, and a letter which is pastoral in nature. The goal of Revelation is to bring encouragement to believers of all ages that God is working out His purposes even in the midst of tragedy, suffering, and apparent Satanic domination. It is the Bible’s battle cry of victory, for in it, more than anywhere else in the NT, is revealed the final victory of God over all the forces of evil. As such, it is an encouragement to God’s people to persevere in the assurance that their final reward is certain and to worship and glorify God despite trials and despite temptations to march to the world’s drumbeat.”

G. K. Beale
Three essential truths

• Jesus will return to earth in bodily form at some point in the future.
• Jesus will judge all humanity.
• God will physically resurrect all humanity at some point in the future.

Christians disagree on what the Bible teaches about when these events will occur.
Influence on the culture

- Terms from Revelation have become part of the cultural vocabulary
  Armageddon, rapture, tribulation, 666, four horsemen, antichrist, apocalypse
- Apocalyptic and doomsday themes abound in motion pictures, music, books, and art.
- “Apocalypse” has become synonymous with destruction and the end of the world.
Extremes to avoid: sensationalism

- Hal Lindsey’s 1970 book had a huge impact on how prophecy is viewed.
- This book has been the single greatest catalyst to bring dispensational premillennialism into the culture in the last forty plus years.
- Lindsey packaged premillennial eschatology in an exciting format that coupled it with current events.
Examples from Lindsey’s end-times views

- The 10 horns of the beast in Rev. 13 represent a 10-nation European alliance. (There were nine nations involved in 1970 and 28 today.)
- The stars falling from the sky in Rev. 6:13 are intercontinental ballistic missiles.
- The locusts in Rev. 9 may be Cobra helicopters.
- The white apocalyptic horseman of Rev. 6 is the European antichrist whom Lindsey believed “to be alive at this very moment.” (1984)
- Based on the Olivet Discourse, the rapture of the church may occur and the great tribulation could start as early as 1988.
Extremes to avoid: neglect (panmillenialism)

- Thinking that the book is generally too bizarre and/or too difficult to understand can lead to avoiding a study of it entirely. After all, it’s all going to pan out in the end.

- An example of a skeptical attitude toward the book is the following definition in *The Devil’s Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce:

  “Revelation, *noun*. A famous book in which St. John the Divine conceals all he knows. The revealing is done by the commentators who know nothing.”
“If the angels in heaven and the Son of God himself do not know God’s timetable for these events, then we must be humble about chronology ourselves. We can be emphatic about the fact that these events will take place, but we should be very humble about the chronological order of these events.”

Dick Woodward

Mini Bible College
Author

• The author identifies himself as John (1:1), a servant of God (1:1) who bears witness to Jesus Christ (1:2) and who is exiled for his faith to the island of Patmos (1:9).
• He was well-known to the churches of Asia.
• He had enough prominence to be considered a threat by the authorities and be sent into exile.
• Many themes associated with the apostle John’s gospel and letters appear in Revelation – Jesus as the Word, light, living water, etc.
• It was believed to have been written by John the apostle by the early church. Especially important is the testimony of Irenaeus in 180 AD since he was a disciple of Polycarp, who personally knew John.
Canonicity

• There is evidence for an early, widespread and consistent reception of Revelation which goes back as far back as Papias (125 AD) and includes Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen and others.

• Objections were later and limited.

• Objections were not driven by historical matters.

• Objections were eventually resolved. It was accepted because it was quoted by the early church fathers as authoritative.
What type of book is it?

- A genre is a category of artistic, musical or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content.
- This is an important question because it influences how one interprets the book.
What type of book is Revelation?

Revelation combines aspects of three types of literature.

- Apocalyptic
  - Name comes from *apokalypsis*, Greek word translated as “revelation” (1:1) and meaning “uncovering” or “revealing.”
- Prophecy
- Letter
Apocalyptic genre

- A specific type of literature that flourished in the biblical world from around 200 BC to 100 AD that would be familiar to John’s readers.
- Characteristics:
  - Often a revelation mediated by heavenly beings (angels).
  - It provides a heavenly perspective on the world situation.
  - Strong presence of symbolism, dreams, and visions.
  - Dualistic – contrast between present age of evil and future age of righteousness.
  - Eschatological focus – deals with end of the world and final judgment
  - Author not usually identified or said to be famous figure from the past.
Revelation as a prophecy

- Since most of his symbols come out of Old Testament prophetic texts, he is writing in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, especially those prophets like Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah who spoke of the end times.
- As a prophet, he is speaking the word of God and expects it to be received with the same authority and seriousness as the OT prophets.
- As a prophet, he speaks to the present in light of what is to come and calls for repentance, faith, and change in those who hear the prophecy and respond to it.
Revelation is also a letter

• Revelation begins as a letter in chapter 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, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

• Revelation has the typical ending of a letter in Rev. 22:8-21.
Revelation as a letter

- New Testament letters are written in response to very specific historical circumstances, problems, or issues.
- Thus, Revelation was written to communicate information that would have been relevant to and understood by its first readers.
- The whole book is a letter, not just the short letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3.
Old Testament allusions in Revelation

• This is one of the defining marks of the book.
• There are no direct quotations from the Old Testament but has more allusions to the OT than all the other NT books combined.
• Ideas and phraseology flow into the text, sometimes combining those from multiple sources.
• Main sources: Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Psalms, Exodus, Jeremiah, Zechariah
• Examples:
  • Four living creatures (Ezek. 1)
  • The son of man (Dan. 7)
  • Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38 and 39)
  • Jezebel, Balaam, lamb of God, Armageddon, tree of life, etc.
Symbolism in Revelation

• Through their often powerful and shocking imagery, symbols evoke emotions and open the eyes of true believers who have grown spiritually inattentive.

• The symbols serve the same function as the parables of Jesus.  
  • Use of “He who has an ear, let him hear” shows this connection.

• Symbolic language may be the most suitable way to communicate the heavenly reality it represents.
Symbolism in Revelation

• One distinguishing characteristic of different methods of interpretation of the book is the understanding of symbols:
  • Primarily literal and secondarily symbolic
  • Primarily symbolic and secondarily literal

• Some of the symbols are explained in the book itself.
  • “I saw seven golden lampstands” (1:12)
  • “. . . and the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (1:20)
Modern examples of symbolism
Numbers in Revelation

- Numbers play a symbolic role in Revelation.

- Examples
  - 7 – completeness, perfection
  - 4 – completeness that is world-wide in scope
  - 6 – imperfection, man, evil
  - 12 – completeness with unity in diversity
  - 1,000 – immenseness
  - 666 – the number of the beast (Rev. 13:18)
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<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>2:1-3:22</td>
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<td>4:1-5:14</td>
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<td>8:1-11:19</td>
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## Structure of Revelation

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<td>Letters to seven churches</td>
<td>Seals, trumpets, witnesses, woman and dragon, beasts, bowls, harlot, Armageddon</td>
<td>Millennium</td>
<td>Dragon destroyed, resurrection, judgment, new heaven and earth</td>
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"Have I got time for a cup of coffee?"
Discussion