

Introduction to

The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band...



Lesson 10

Wednesday, Oct 4, 2017

*** For Lesson 10 we will cover nearly the entire handout. For Lesson 11 we will cover the remainder - as well as chapter 1 on a separate question sheet. During the first class we will cover the information for the questions at the end of this handout; but we will not go over the questions until the second class as a review. This is a LOT of reading for Lesson 10, but it will make it far easier to understand the book as we study it! ***



Modern Patmos

I. Author, Location of Writing

Read Rev 1:1-10.

1. Who wrote the book?
2. From 1:9, where was he?

John was the last living apostle. Patmos was a rocky island used as a working prison, it is thought he was exiled there to work its mines.

II. Overview of Book

This Revelation given to John takes on **three**

distinct parts. **(1:19)** *Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.*

- A. The things John has **already seen**.

When John describes Christ among the lamp stands (1:11-18), he describes the things he has just **seen**.

- B. The conditions of the **present time**.

When he writes about the condition of the churches (Chapters 2-3), he describes the things which **are**. (This will help us consider the state of our church.)

- C. The **future** events that will happen. Finally we read in (4:1) *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show you things which **must take place after this**.*

For the rest of the book John describes the things **which will take place after this**. When the door of heaven is then opened John sees, in a vision, the mighty throne of God and all creation in heaven and earth paying homage to Him. (This will help us to better understand the God we worship.) John also sees one like unto a lamb taking a sealed book from the hand of Him who sat upon the throne. ***This book contains the things which must shortly come to pass.***

- a) John begins to cry because no one is worthy to open the book and reveal its content. But the lion from the tribe of Judah opens the book. Horsemen come forth and we see souls under the altar crying for their death to be avenged. When these seals are broken there will be terrors of judgment, servants of God will receive a seal upon their foreheads and a great white-robed multitude stands before God.
- b) This just *begins* the action found within this book. We will read about a radiant woman arrayed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and twelve stars upon her brow. She gives birth to a man-child, whom the devil is waiting to devour. When she flees into the wilderness, we are given a picture of a great conflict between Michael's heavenly forces and the devil's diabolical army. (This all helps us understand why Satan is persecuting the church today.) In this conflict the devil is cast down to the earth and stands on the seashore, and suddenly out of the sea a terrible beast arises.
- c) This beast, having power from Satan, wages war with the woman and her seed, after which another beast arises out of the earth. (These beasts help us understand how Satan uses governments and religion to battle the Saints.) We get to view the glorious Lamb of God and a host of 144,000 of his people on Mt. Zion.
- d) Bowls of wrath are poured out upon the earth, followed by plagues of death and

destruction. A great harlot appears trying to seduce the inhabitants of the earth, but she is judged and destroyed. The beast, the false prophet, and Satan are finally defeated and cast into the lake of fire.

- e) We are then shown the final judgment, the new heaven and the new earth, and the followers dwelling with God.

The whole scene is majestic. But *can we understand its teaching and its mystery? Or is the message locked away forever? Readers are given the answer!: **Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it . . .*** (Rev. 1:3).

III. How Can We Understand Revelation?

In order to understand its teaching, we must first learn some things about the book and the time in which it was written. We need to understand its use of symbolism, and what these symbols and signs would have meant to those who first received the book. (Remember — a symbol *MUST* have had meaning to the original reader.) This is why we must understand *when* & *to whom* a symbolic book was originally written. We must also be willing to recognize that there might be some symbols that we cannot fully understand today. Therefore we cannot become dogmatic about the meaning of obscure symbols if the meaning is not clear.

- A.** We can't take a position on the book that is inconsistent with its stated intent. For instance, it covers things that were to shortly to come to pass (see Rev 1:1, 3 !!). Therefore, we cannot make the contents of the book applicable *only* to events thousands of years removed from those to whom the book was written.
- B.** Also we can't interpret the book of Revelation, or any part of it, in a way that contradicts another passage of Scripture. That is, symbolism should never be interpreted in a way that contradicts a non-symbolic passage; if it does — then our understanding of the symbols is *wrong*.

Background: Date

The **DATE THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN** is usually the least important matter in understanding a book of the Bible, but it becomes key to interpreting the book of Revelation properly. This is because the date of writing determines which approach of study or interpretation you take. While many dates have been ascribed to the Revelation, there are generally two dates thought to be the date of its writing: termed the "**EARLY DATE**" of 64-68 A.D., during the reign of **Nero**; or the "**LATER DATE**" of 91-96 A.D., during the reign of **Domitian**.

- A.** If the early date is chosen one interprets the book to apply to the judgment of God upon the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., fulfilling the prophecies of Jesus in **Matthew 24, Mark 13** and **Luke 17**. The persecution seen would be coming from the Jews. In contrast, those choosing the later date understand the book to apply to the judgment of God upon the Roman empire, and the persecution of Christians by Rome.
- B.** While **evidence** can be cited for both dates, the weight of evidence tips *heavily* with the later date (95-96 AD). It is not the purpose of this study to give all arguments supporting each date. (If you wish to read the evidence believed to support the early date there are several commentaries you might consult, including "*The Book Of Revelation*," By **Foy E. Wallace, Jr.** and "*The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*," By **Arthur M. Ogden**.) The argument for an early date is based on some assumptions. **THE EARLY DATE ASSUMES:**

(1) The Temple in Jerusalem Was Still Standing. Rev. 11:1 *Then I was given a reed like a*

- measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.* While the context suggests that “*temple*” be understood figuratively, those taking this viewpoint take it literally, even though in the same text the “*reed*” and the “*two witnesses*” are figurative.
- (2) **It also assumes the number 666, given in chapter 13, could only refer to Nero.** This is done by assuming that the number 666 is a “cryptograph” for **Nero Caesar**. This totally ignores the symbolic use of numbers in Apocalyptic literature, and makes it a *literal* interpretation of the meaning of the number.
- (3) **It further assumes that persecution of Christians under Nero was religious.** There is no question that there was intense persecution of disciples under Nero, but that persecution was political instead of religious. **Tacitus**, a Roman historian during the reign of Nero, said that persecution was directed toward Christians because they were “*a class hated for their abominations...*” The persecution portrayed in Revelation clearly has religious motivations.
- (4) **the early date also ignores that the persecution under Nero was localized.** Revelation shows a *widespread* persecution throughout the empire (including the churches of Asia!). This did NOT occur under Nero, but *did* under Domitian as well as after him.

C. **The best evidence** for the book of Revelation supports a later date. This evidence includes:

- (1) **External Writers.** These are almost unanimous in attributing a late date to the Revelation. Here are two examples:
- a) **Irenaeus (120-202 A.D.)** Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who knew the apostle John personally. Irenaeus wrote of John receiving the vision of Revelation: “*For that was seen not very long since, but almost in our own day, toward the end of Domitian's reign.*”
- b) **Victorinus** (In his commentary on Revelation in 303 AD) said in commenting on **10:11**, “*When John said these things he was in the isle of Patmos, condemned to the labor of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse.*” Also, in his comments on **Rev. 17:10** **Victorinus** wrote: “*The time must be understood in which the written Apocalypse was published, since then reigned Caesar Domitian; but before him had been Titus his brother, and Vespasian, Otho, Vitellius, and Galba. These are the five who have fallen. One remains, under whom the Apocalypse was written — Domitian, to wit.*”
- (2) Also, the **Evidence from Within** the book suggests a date later than 68 A.D. For example:
- a) **The general condition of the churches does not fit an earlier date.** **Ephesus** had apostatized: Ephesians was written around 61 AD — could this have happened in just 3-7 years? **Laodicea** had nothing good said about it in the Revelation. Yet in **Col. 4:13**, written around 61 AD, *For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea.* This passage suggests an active and praiseworthy group of disciples in Laodicea in 62 or 63 A.D.
- b) **The persecution of Revelation was universal (not localized to Rome) and religious in nature.** The beast that comes out of the earth in 13:11 is later identified as “*The False Prophet*” (16:13; 19:20), which identifies him with false religion, emperor worship, and paganism. This beast (**False religion**) was backed

by the first beast (13:12; 14:11), **The Roman Empire**. Emperor worship and the tie of government to religion did *not* occur during Nero's time (60's), and was not truly in effect until the time of Domitian (90's).

- (3) **Old Testament prophecy** supports the date of 95-96 AD, especially the prophecies found in the book of Daniel. Four visions of Daniel show the contrast between the kingdoms of men and the kingdom of God. Those four visions also show how God rules over the kingdoms of men. The following comparison of similarities between the books of Daniel and Revelation was adapted from Robert Harkrider:

Daniel's Vision Foretells Events Described in Revelation		
Daniel	Symbols	Revelation
7:7	A beast with 10 horns	13:1
7:23	The beast is a world kingdom	13:7
7:21	Prevailed in war with the saints	13:7
7:25	Power limited to a: Time, times and half a time (3 ½ years) 42 months 1260 days	12:14 11:2; 13:5 11:3; 12:6
7:18, 22, 27	The kingdom of God stands "Saints possess the kingdom" "They overcame"	12:11
7:11	The beast is defeated	19:20

These symbols do not fit the Jews and their persecution of Christians; but they do fit Rome. Also, the vision of Daniel 2 shows successive world kingdoms, with God's eternal kingdom established during the 4th world kingdom. This clearly was Rome as the focus, not the Jews. And, as noted, universal Roman persecution didn't occur until the 90's.

- D. Therefore, in this class, the later date will be used and applications to the persecution that existed under the Emperor Domitian will be made. From Rome's point of view it was political confrontation, but from the Christian's point of view it was strictly religious.**

Background: Roman

To understand the book, it will be helpful to know some of the conditions of the Roman Empire at the close of the first century. Early in the church's history Rome often was an ally of the church; Paul on more than one occasion had sought protection by the Roman authorities. Now, however, Rome was not only the center of wealth and government, but it had become the center of religion, and had become an enemy of the church.

- A. Rome was near the height of her greatness when the book of Revelation was written. Her boundaries extended from the British Isles to the African desert, and from the Atlantic

Ocean to the mighty Euphrates River. The city of Rome is pictured in (17:1) *as the great harlot who sits on many waters.*

- (1) The Roman Empire had many people and cultures. These *many waters* are identified in 17:15 *The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.*
 - (2) Because of the size and extent of the Roman empire, it seemed that Rome was the **WHOLE WORLD** to the people of that day.
- B. The Roman economy was filled with overwhelming and inconceivable wealth at this time. Rome had been built on *conquest* and *commerce*. This commerce is reflected in **18:11-14** *And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. And the fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all.*
- * See on-line supplementary notes for further background on Rome's economy!
- C. **The church was despised by Rome**, not because it preached virtues, but because it preached **Jesus as King** and because Christians refused to **acknowledge Caesar as god**. For a time official Roman policy tolerated Christianity as it did all of the other religions practiced by those whom it had conquered.
- (1) ***This changed, however, when Domitian encouraged worship of himself as lord and god.*** This would show openly that the "worshiper" was loyal to Rome. Refusal to do so was considered as sacrilege and treason. Yearly the Roman authorities demanded that each one come before an image of **Domitian** and burn a pinch of incense and declare: "**Caesar is Lord.**" This was something the Christian could not do. To the Christian this was blasphemy; to Rome it was treason not to do so. **The battle lines were drawn and the authorities began to persecute Christians relentlessly.**

Theme & Purpose of the Revelation

The grand theme of Revelation is that of war and conflict between good and evil, resulting in victory for the righteous and defeat of the wicked — **Christ WILL BE VICTORIOUS!**

- A. The reader should remember that there was severe persecution of the Christians by the Roman authorities. Christians were the forces of good and righteousness pictured in the book. Roman authorities were the evil and wicked forces of the book.
- B. John also shows us who was *behind* this great struggle. Rome was powered by **Satan**, while the Christians find as their ally **God** and the **Lamb**. **Therefore, the book reveals that the battle is actually between the Devil and the Christ, but it is being carried out by the Christian and the Roman authorities.**
 - (1) The conflict is spiritual and not just military, and the central message is that ***Christ and His saints will be victorious.*** These Christians are told to continue to be faithful in this struggle, because they and their cause will be victorious. Satan and Rome will eventually be defeated.

- (2) The book of Revelation is designed to *encourage Christians to be faithful in the face of all opposition and persecution*, regardless of how dreadful the onslaught might be. **God will be victorious; God is in control.** This message is a timeless message. Believers in every generation need to remember that the victory is **assured**. God will be victorious, just remain faithful. **Rev. 2:10** *Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*
- (3) Something helpful AND necessary to understanding the book is always being mindful of **what the book meant to those to whom John initially wrote (The seven churches of Asia Minor)**. Never place an interpretation on the book that overlooks an immediate application. This would involve:
- Understanding the conditions under which those Christians lived.
 - Remembering the spiritual needs of that time.

SYMBOLISM

The book of Revelation is called an **Apocalyptic Book**. The name **REVELATION** comes from the Greek: *apokalupsis* {ap-ok-al'-oop-sis}; Meaning, "*disclosure: - appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation.*"

- A. **Apocalyptic Prophecy:** This type of literature is quite different from other books of prophecy. While all prophesy is predictive, *Apocalyptic writings always looked to the time that God would intervene in the affairs of this world on behalf of His people.*
- Apocalyptic literature flourished during a time of crisis when an enemy threatened the existence of the people of God.
 - There are other books of the Bible that are Apocalyptic in style:
 - Daniel
 - Ezekiel
 - Zechariah
- B. This type of literature is **highly figurative**. One reason for the figurative nature of Apocalyptic literature was to assure that the enemies who were threatening the lives of God's people would not understand the message. The book of Revelation even tells us that it is written in symbolic language. **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.* (NKJV)
- The root word of "signified" is "sign" – a symbol !

Revelation was written during the days of the strong Roman Empire while they were persecuting Christians. The book would inform the Christians what was happening, and what **WOULD** happen in the end, and thus encourage them to persevere. They were told in symbolic form that the ultimate victory over Roman persecution was with those serving Christ.

Relationship to Old Testament: It has been calculated that in Revelation there are between 260 to 400 *references* to the Old Testament — yet there is not a single *quotation* from it! Most of the imagery that is used in the book of Revelation is taken from the Old Testament. This fact can be both helpful and confusing.

- HELPFUL** because when we become familiar with the O.T. usage we better understand

its use in Revelation.

- (2) **CONFUSING** because this has led some to conclude that where these figures are used in Revelation, they refer to the same events as in the O.T. **This is not so!** The words might be used *symbolically* with the same *general* meaning but the *specific events* are completely different. For example
- Zechariah** prophesied during the Persian rule and dealt with what God would do at *that* time.
 - Daniel** prophesied while the people were in Babylonian captivity, anticipating a return to their homeland – but had a view to their future.
 - Revelation** was delivered during the rule of Rome, anticipating that the saints would be victorious in Christ.

C. **How Do We Interpret Symbolism?**

- Consistency** — The first thing we must do is be **consistent** in how we interpret symbolism. We cannot make *part* of it representative and *other parts* literal. This is a common mistake. (For example, Premillennialists will make the beast of Rev 13 *symbolic*, but then insist that the 42 months is a *literal* 3 ½ years — making the 42 a literal number, rather than this also being *symbolic*.) We cannot pick and choose — it is a symbolic vision or it is not symbolic. **Think, “Is this literal, or symbolic?”**
- Historical Context** — Understanding to *whom* the book was written, and what was happening in *their* history at that point in time, is also critical. The writings would have to have meaning to the *original* recipient, as well as to us. **Think “How would this have been understood by the original reader?”**
- Theme of Book** — Try to understand what the major overall theme of the book is, and keep this in mind when interpreting difficult passages. **Think “How does this relate to the overall message of the book?”**
- Bible Teaching** — The meaning that you assign to a prophetic passage *must be in harmony with the rest of Bible teaching*. If a teaching on a difficult passage contradicts other passages in the Bible, the teaching cannot be correct! **Think “Does this fit the overall theme of the Bible, and harmonize with all other Bible teaching?”**

- D. **Numbers** play an *important* part in the symbolism of the book of Revelation (as they do in non-inspired Jewish apocalyptic literature). They are used to indicate literal quantity **AS WELL AS** to represent ideas. Therefore, care must be taken when interpreting numbers in Revelation. In this book the numbers **3, 4, 7, 10, 12** and their multiples have the most significance. Consider the following use of numbers in the book.

Number	Meaning	Illustration
1	Unity	John 17:20-21; Rev. 17:12
2	Strength	Rev. 11:3-12 (Two is better than one)
3	Whole or complete The “Divine Number”	Peter’s denial; Temptations of Jesus; Paul’s prayer for thorn’s removal; Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
4	Cosmic / “World Number”	Four corners of earth; Four winds

Number	Meaning	Illustration
5	Incomplete / Short time (1/2 of 10)	Locusts will hurt men for five months (Rev. 9:5, 10)
6	Sinister (like our 13); falls short	Symbolizes evil, or falls short, or doesn't measure up
7	Perfect; complete in every way; represents "the whole"	Perhaps the most important number in Revelation. Seven - churches; spirits; lampstands, seals, etc.
10	Fullness, complete	Like our "zillion." (Rev. 2:10; Rev. 5:11; Rev. 12:3)
12	Religion	Old & New Testaments (12 tribes, apostles). This would be true of its multiples (144,000)
3 ½	One-half of perfect; Incomplete	Rev. 11:9, 3, 2. Synonymous with 3 ½ is "Time, times and ½ time." Or 42 months, or 1,260 days <i>Always associated with hardship!</i>

- E. **Other Symbols Used in Revelation.** There are many other symbols used in Revelation. When attempting to understand the symbolism, avoid the temptation to explain every detail of a symbol. **The symbol as a whole expresses an idea.** Try to "see" the idea in mind. *(For example, the harlot of Rev 17 is described as "clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup ..." This represents an overall picture. Every detail of her description, such as the precious stones or the pearls, does not necessarily have a specific individual meaning.)* **Remember this as we look at other symbols — such as the beast with ten horns and seven heads!**

Interpretations

There are many widely different interpretations of the book are many and varied. However, there are **FOUR** primary views that are followed by the religious community. * If you want to explore these, see the on-line supplemental intro material.

The **proper interpretation** would seem to be:

- It has in view things pertaining to the original reader
- It does contain some history
- Most of it has already happened
- but there are some events yet to come (e.g., the judgment, the final reward/punishment of all)
- some of the events that we must understand spiritually.
- The general principle, that God's cause will ALWAYS triumph over Satan's forces, applies today.

Therefore, we will need to consider the following thoughts as we approach our study:

1. What did the book mean to those Christians who originally received it?

2. What were the conditions of THAT time?
3. What were their Spiritual Needs?
4. Be consistent with the rest of the New Testament

Questions

1. *Why* was John on Patmos (1:9)?
2. The bulk of the book discusses which of the 3 parts of John's vision (1:19)?
3. **** KEY- Remember this! **** According to 1:1 & 3 *why* was this revelation given, and *when* would these things happen?
4. Why is it important to know the date Revelation was written?
5.
 - a. What date seems most reasonable for when the book was written?
 - b. Therefore, in the book of Revelation what does "Babylon" represent?
6. Which of the four world kingdoms from the book of Daniel is the focus of discussion in the book of Revelation?
7. How could this kingdom be the "whole world"?
8. How would you describe the morality, and the economic status, of this kingdom when John wrote the book of Revelation?
9. Who was the Emperor of this kingdom when John wrote the book?
10. What did the Emperor demand of citizens in order to show their loyalty to him & the government?
11.
 - a. Who was the *actual* power behind this kingdom's persecution of Christians?
 - b. Who was the *actual* power of the Christians in this struggle?

12. How would you describe the theme of the book of Revelation? (Hint: It's similar to the theme of Daniel).
13. The book of Revelation is an "Apocalyptic" book. How does this kind of book differ from other biblical books?
14. From where does much of the imagery in the book of Revelation come? How can this help us to understand Revelation?
15. Numbers play an important part of all Apocalyptic books, and Revelation is no exception. How would you describe the way that **7**, **10**, and **12** are used in the book?