

Harkrider

Harkrider, Robert: "Truth Commentaries: Revelation"
Guardian of Truth Foundation, Bowling Green, KY

Haskell

Haskell, Stephen N: "The Seer of Patmos"
Signs of the Times Publishing Association Ltd, Warburton, Victoria, Australia.

Hendriksen

Hendriksen, W: "More than Conquerors"
Tyndale Press, London

Humble

Humble, Bill & Fair, Ian: "The Seven Churches of Asia"
Gospel Advocate Co, Nashville, TN. ISBN: 0-89225-457-2

McGuiggan

McGuiggan, Jim: "The Book of Revelation"
Montex Publishing Co, Lubbock, Tx.

Mounce

Mounce, Robert H: "The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Revelation"
Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, MI. ISBN: 0-8028-2537-0

Pack

Pack, Frank: "Revelation"
Sweet Publishing Co, Austin, Texas. ISBN: 0-8028-2537-0

Roberts

Roberts, J.W: "The Revelation to John" The Living Word Commentary
R. B. Sweet Co.; Inc. Austin, Tx

Rogers

Rogers, Richard: "Hallelujah Anyway!: A Study on the Book of Revelation"
Sunset School of Preaching, Lubbock, Tx.

Summers

Summers, Ray: "Worthy is the Lamb"
Broadman Press, Nashville, TN. ISBN: 0-8054-1314-6

Wallace

Wallace, For E. Jnr: "The Book of Revelation"
Foy E. Wallace Jr Publications, Fort Worth, Tx.

Weinrich

Weinrick, William C: "Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament XII: Revelation"
InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, ILL. ISBN: 10-0-8308-1497-3

Wilson

Wilson, Mark: "Charts on the Book of Revelation: Literary, Historical, and Theological Perspectives"
Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. ISBN: 978-0-8254-3939-1

- 4:1-5:14 *A Vision of the Heavenly Throne*
- 6:1-8:5 *The Opening of the Seven Seals*
- 8:6-11:19 *Preliminary (Temporal) Judgements on the Empire*
 - 8:6-9:21 *The Judgement of the Seven Trumpets*
 - 10:1-11:19 *The Two Interlude Visions*
- 12:1-14:20 *Conflict between the Church and the Evil Powers*
 - 12:1-17 *War in Heaven and its Aftermath*
 - 13:1-18 *The Beasts out of the Sea and the Earth*
 - 14:1-20 *Outcome of the Holy War: Vindication and Judgement*
- 15:1-16:21 *The Seven Bowls: God’s Judgement against “Babylon”*
 - 15:1-8 *The Prelude*
 - 16:1-21 *Babylon is Judged*
- 17:1-22:21 *The (Original) Tale of Two Cities*
 - 17:1-19:10 *God Judges the Harlot for Economic Oppression*
 - 19:11-20:15 *The Last Battle*
 - 21:1-22:11 *The New Jerusalem: The Bride of the Lamb*
 - 22:12-21 *Epilogue*

Selected Bibliography

The following references will be used and quoted during the studies. The full reference of the books are quoted here, and only the abbreviated title and page number quoted in the studies.

Allphin

Allphin, N.W.: “Visions Unveiled – or – Revelation Explained”
Star Bible Publications Inc., Fort Worth, Tx. ISBN: 0-933672-89-6

Barnett

Barnett, Paul: “Apocalypse Now and Then: Reading Revelation Today”
Aquila Press, Sydney South, NSW, Australia. ISBN: 1-875861-41-6

Bewes

Bewes, Richard: “The Lamb Wins!: A guided tour through The Book of Revelation”
Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britian. ISBN: 1-85792-597-1

Cogdill

Cogdill, Roy E: “The New Testament: Book by Book – A 26 Lesson Outline series covering the entire New Testament”
Cogdill Foundation Publications, Marion Ind. 46952

Eusebius

“The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus”
Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI 49516 ISBN 0-8010-3306-3

Fee & Stuart

Gordon D Fee & Douglas Stuart: “How to Read the Bible Book by Book”
Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 49530 ISBN 0-310-21118-2

Gundry

Gundry, Stanley N & Pate, C. Marvin: “Four Views on the Book of Revelation”
Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. ISBN: 0-310-21080-1

Hailey

Hailey, Homer: “Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary”
Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI. ISBN: 0-8010-4201-1

Study of Revelation (Revised 2010) by Graeme Offer

© Graeme Offer 2009

Study 1: Introduction to Revelation

Introduction

The problem of sin, and the consequential separation of man from God is introduced in the first few pages of the Bible. Throughout the Bible we are led on a journey that develops God's relationship with man, and man developing a faithful relationship with God. Along the pathway, there are many twists and turns, and many snares.

In Revelation we are brought to the conclusion of the whole matter. God wins, and God will triumph over everything that comes along on the journey. It is a powerful conclusion to the Biblical story!

Body of the Study

The Recipients of the Letter

The Author of the Letter

Persecution: Backdrop to the Letter

Date and Occasion of the Letter

The style of the letter

Interpretation of the letter

Outline of the letter

Selected Bibliography

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the first three chapters in a single sitting, and a few days later read chapter 1 again.

Read the notes as a review of the study

Notes for study 1: Introduction to Revelation

The Bible introduces the problem of sin and the consequential separation of man from God in the first few pages. Throughout the rest of the Bible we are led on a journey of God's relationship with man, and man developing a faithful relationship with Him. Along the pathway, there are many twists and turns, and many snares.

Revelation brings the whole matter to a conclusion. God wins, and He will triumph over everything that comes along on the journey. It is a powerful conclusion to the Biblical story!

The Recipients of the Letter

The letter is specifically addressed to *The seven churches of Asia*, and John then goes on to list and describe them for us. Each of these churches has unique characteristics, although similar characteristics can be found in churches everywhere. Consequently, the message is relevant to all churches in every age and in every place.

The churches are addressed beginning with Ephesus (the fourth largest city in the world at that time, and the logical place to start a journey of the area), and then proceeds in a clockwise journey around Asia Minor.

The Author of the Letter

Authorship of the letter is attributed to the apostle John, the brother of James, and son of Zebedee, although we are not told in the letter which John wrote it, and whether it was an otherwise unknown prophet named John, "the elder" named John who lived at Ephesus, or the apostle John.

Internal evidence. The writer claims to be "John" four times in the letter (1:1; 1:4; 1:9; 22:8), and further claims to be a "prophet" (1:3; 22:7; 22:10; 22:18; 22:19).

The style of writing is different to any other book in the New Testament, so we cannot draw comparison from those writings to help us understand who the author might have been.

External evidence for the apostle John is exceptionally strong.

Justin Martyr (AD 110-165) says "There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation" (*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, LXXXI). He then goes on to refer to the thousand years, the resurrection and the judgement of Revelation 20.

Irenaeus (120-202) met the ancient Polycarp in his old age. Polycarp was himself a disciple of John. Irenaeus says "But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I saw in my early youth, for he tarried on earth a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true." (*Against Heresies*, III, 3)].

Irenaeus says about John "...the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles." (*Against Heresies*, III, 4). He says "...John, also the Lord's disciple ... says in the Apocalypse..." (*Against Heresies*, IV, 20,11).

Trajan was Roman Emperor from AD 98 – 117, so we know that John lived at least until AD 98.

Jerome (AD 340–420) says "John, the Apostle whom Jesus most loved, the son of Zebedee and brother of James ...wrote also one Epistle which begins as follows 'That which was from the beginning, that we declare unto you.' " He adds "In the fourteenth year then after Nero, Domitian

having raised a second persecution, he was banished to the island of Patmos, and wrote the *Apocalypse*, on which Justin Martyr and Irenaeus afterwards wrote commentaries. But Domitian having been put to death and his acts, on account of his excessive cruelty, having been annulled by the senate, he returned to Ephesus under Nerva Pertinax and continuing there until the time of the emperor Trajan, founded and built churches throughout all Asia, and, worn out by old age, died in the sixty-eighth year after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city" (Jerome, *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, p. 364-5).

So, we can start to piece together some events from John's life. Traditionally, he remained in Jerusalem until Jesus' mother Mary died (Jn 19:26-27), although other traditions say that Mary came to Ephesus (to live with John) late in her life, and died there.

- John moved to Ephesus later in his life, and was sent to exile on Patmos in AD 82 (14 years after Nero died in AD 68)
- He lived on Patmos, and wrote Revelation, returning to Ephesus in AD 96, after the death of Domitian (Emperor from AD 81-96).
- He continued to live in Ephesus, but travelled around Asia until he died around AD 100 (since we don't know exactly when the Lord died – traditionally AD 33)¹ This is consistent with his death during Trajan's reign.

Origen created a catalogue of Canonical books around AD 220 (or only about 100 years after the death of John), and of John's letters he says: "*What shall we say of him who reclined upon the breast of Jesus, I mean John? who has left one gospel, in which he confesses that he could write so many that the whole world could not contain them. He also wrote the Apocalypse, commanded as he was, to conceal, and not to write the voices of the seven thunders. He has also left an epistle consisting of very few lines; suppose, also, that a second and third is from him, for not all agree that they are genuine, but both together do not contain a hundred lines.*"²

So, we can see that by the early second century the authenticity and authorship of Revelation was strongly accepted, with the apostle John being regarded as the author.

Persecution: Backdrop to the Letter

Emperor worship was flourishing in the Roman Empire at the end of the first century, and particularly so in the province of Asia. The church would soon find itself in conflict with the Roman government.

Persecution of Christians sprang up under Nero, who used them as a scapegoat when he himself had been accused of starting the fire of Rome (although he was not in Rome at the time). This consequently resulted in the execution of Paul and Peter just a few weeks before Nero himself died. But the persecution didn't end there.

The persecution intensified under a succession of Roman Emperors until Constantine ordered a period of religious tolerance in AD 312, making a period of persecution that lasted for around 250 years, at various degrees of intensity. In many cases, Christians were tortured and put to death for refusing to worship the Emperor, and refusing to renounce Jesus as Lord.

¹ For a discussion on dates in the New Testament, see my notes on Acts, p. 2

² Eusebius, p. 246 (Origen's writings have been lost, but his catalogue has been preserved in Eusebius' writings)

An outline of the Roman Emperors will be helpful in understanding the persecution, and is adapted from Harkrider³.

Caesars Who Ruled The Roman Empire		
Caesars	Dates Ruled	Description
Julio-Claudian Line		
Julius Caesar, Dictator	48-44 B.C.	Deified after his death
Octavian (“Augustus”)	27B.C. – A.D. 14	1 st Emperor Senate approved
Tiberius	A.D. 14-37	Ruling when Christ died
Caligula	A.D. 37-41	
Claudius	A.D. 41-54	
Nero	A.D. 54-68	1 st persecutor of Christians
Galba	June 68- January 69	Senate confirmed
Otho	January 69- April 69	Senate confirmed
Vitellius	April 69- December 69	Senate confirmed
Flavian Line		
Vespasian	December 69- June 79	
Titus	A.D. 79- 81	Completed fall of Jerusalem
Domitian	A.D. 81- 96	2 nd persecutor of Christians
Nerva	A.D. 96- 98	
Trajan	A.D. 98- 117	Persecuted Christians
Aelius Hadrian	A.D. 117- 138	
Antoninus Pius	A.D. 138- 161	
Marcus Aurelius	A.D. 161- 180	Persecuted Christians
Commodus	A.D. 180- 192	Persecuted Christians
Pertinax	A.D. 193	
Didus Julianus	A.D. 193	
Severan Line		
Septimus Severus	A.D. 193-211	Persecuted Christians
Caracalla	A.D. 211- 217	Persecuted Christians
Macrinus	A.D. 217- 218	
Elagabalus	A.D. 218- 222	
Alexander	A.D. 222- 235	

³ Harkrider, pp. xxix - xxxi

Period of Decline		
Caesars	Dates Ruled	Description
Maximinus I	A.D. 235- 238	Persecuted Christians
Decius	A.D. 249- 251	Persecuted Christians
Valerian (Co-ruler)	A.D. 253- 260	Persecuted Christians
Gallienus (Co-ruler 7 yrs)	A.D. 253- 268	Persecuted Christians
Aurelian	A.D. 270- 275	
Diocletian (Co-ruler)	A.D. 284- 305	The worst period of persecution
Maximian (Co-ruler)	A.D. 286- 305	The worst period of persecution
Galerius (Co-ruler)	A.D. 305- 311	The worst period of persecution
Maximinus II (Co-ruler)	A.D. 305- 313	The worst period of persecution
Constantine	A.D. 306- 337	Ordered religious toleration

A discussion on the characteristics of many of the Roman Emperors can be found in Hailey⁴, and in material produced by Fred Miller www.moellerhaus.com

Date and Occasion of the Letter

Occasion:

The letter was written at a time when the Romans were demanding Emperor worship, and which would result in persecution to those who refused. This put the christians on a collision course with the government, and the situation was likely to get worse before it got better.

John was instructed to write the letter “*to conceal*” (according to Origen) but the word *Revelation* comes from the Greek word *Apokalupsis* (apocalypse) which means “an uncovering, a laying bare, making naked” (Thayer⁵). These descriptions might seem in conflict, Hailey says⁶:

The book uncovers or unveils through symbols, signs, imagery, and visions the impending persecution facing the church. It seeks to prepare the people for persecution by the revelation which God gave to Jesus Christ to show unto His servants. This apocalyptic method prevents the enemies of God from understanding the message, while making it known to His people. Even so, we must admit that there is much in the book which remains veiled to us.

Date:

There has been much dispute over the date of Revelation, and the date is significant to our understanding of the book. An early date (prior to AD 70) would lead to a conclusion that the book is dealing with the preparation for the persecution associated with the destruction of

⁴ Hailey, pp. 59-90

⁵ Thayer, Joseph Henry: “The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament” Hendrickson Publishers Peabody Massachusetts; ISBN 0-913573-24-8 p.62

⁶ Hailey, p. 18

Jerusalem. A later date would suggest that it is dealing with something else altogether – the persecution that arose by the Roman Empire against Christians everywhere.

Consequently, two dates are usually proposed – either around the time of Nero’s death (AD 67) – or during Domitian’s reign (AD 91-96).

Wallace⁷ argues extensively for an early date, and dismisses the external reference from Irenaeus, because we only have it because it is quoted by Eusebius, and the quote can be legitimately constructed in a number of ways⁸.

Some arguments for a late date spring from the discussion around the Ephesian church. In Paul’s letter to the church, it is praised, but in John’s letter Rev 2 it is condemned). However, I believe that this perception comes from a mis-understanding of Paul’s letter, which is written as a call to faithfulness in view of the apostasy that he had predicted in Acts 20:30 would come about. That such a decline might have happened by AD 67 is not surprising. For a longer discussion on this, refer to my studies on Ephesians (study 9) and Pastoral Epistles (study 6). I am *not* advocating an early date for the letter, only that the Ephesian letter doesn’t preclude it.

As discussed under “Authorship” we conclude from the external evidence that the letter was written during John’s exile on Patmos (AD 82-96), which should remove all doubt about earlier writings. One final thought on the context for the date. If it were around 67 AD and the tribulation that John has in mind therefore is turned towards the destruction of Jerusalem (beginning in AD 67 and concluding in AD 70), then why would John write about it to the *Seven churches in Asia*? It is of little relevance to them, and would miss the mark for those in Jerusalem for whom it had major importance. In conclusion, a late date of writing is accepted.

The style of the letter

The letter is written in a style of writing which is named after it – apocalyptic writing. The style is not unique to Revelation, and can be found in other books in the Bible (parts of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, and Isaiah). It can also be found in a few shorter sections of the New Testament (Matt 24, and some sections of the Thessalonian letters for example). Further, it is also found in many of the non-canonical writings (1st & 2nd Enoch, Assumption of Moses, the Apocalypse of Peter for example – and there are many others.)

Whilst most of the New Testament teaches in clear thoughts and instruction, with this style of writing, the ideas are presented in images and pictures in which the reader is “transported” into a different world.

One interesting view of the book (from my friend Ron Graham’s video series “Revelation – the Book”) is that there were many instances in the New Testament where people saw *visions*. But we are left in total bewilderment as to what the visions might have been like (unless we looked at similar occurrences from the Old Testament). But, through the explanation of the visions in Revelation, we are transported to “see” the visions that John saw. We might not understand all of the things that they mean, but we can understand *what they were like*.

Interpretation of the letter

There are four “classic” views of Revelation, which is to say that there are four main ways that we can look at the writing:

1. **The Futurist** view is that the book reveals the events that will unwind before the second coming of the Lord. This view is particularly popular with those who hold a “millennial” view – that Jesus will return and establish His “Millennial Kingdom” here on earth, where He

⁷ Wallace, pp. 14-46

⁸ Wallace, p. 25

will sit and rule on David's throne for a thousand years, after which the final judgement will take place. There are several problems with this view, three of them being,

- What relevance would such writings have to the first century christians who were suffering persecution?
 - The specific situations addressed to the churches in the first three chapters don't fit and are inconsistent with this view of the book,
 - How would we know when the time was approaching? (Although those who hold this view argue that the events described are rolled out before our eyes). The problem is, that it calls for speculation as to whether the things that we observe are the things that John describes in the visions.
2. **The Preterist** view (past view) is that the book was written specifically for the time of the readers, and that the prophecies were fulfilled during and around that time. Many who take this view of the book favour an early date for the writing. There are various views within this position.
3. **The Continuous Historical** view is that the book predicts the things that will come to pass over time, beginning from the churches in the time of John, through to the end of time. Like the futurist view, there are several problems with this view:
- What relevance would such writings have to the first century christians who were suffering persecution?
 - There is a strong tendency of those who hold this position to interpret the prophecies and visions in the context of events known to them – usually the history of Western civilisation! One problem is the relevance that this might have to struggling christians in other societies. It leads to great speculation as to what the visions and prophecies actually mean.
4. **The Philosophy of History** view is that the book shows symbols that represent forces at work, rather than specific historical events. Such forces are good and evil, sin and righteousness in a battle and conflict. Whilst this view has much merit, it can divorce the book from the specific historical context into which it was written.

There is some validity in all four views (and we must not throw the baby out with the bathwater in dismissing them). It is possible to take a view of the book that considers *some* of all four views, and looks at the letter from a number of facets. One thing that we must learn about scripture (and one of the things that makes scripture *scripture*, is that there is not just one interpretation, and that several interpretations can all be valid at the same time! An example to illustrate this is the prophecy made by Caiaphas the High Priest "...*It is better that one man die than that all the people perish...*" (Jn 11:49). What Caiaphas meant was that it was better to get rid of Jesus (whom they viewed as a troublemaker) and preserve the Jewish nation. But, *it was also true* that through the death of one man (Jesus), we are all saved from perishing eternally. Both views are true at the same time, and such a view is true of much of scripture.

Outline of the letter

The following outline is adapted from Fee & Stuart⁹

- 1:1-8 *Prologue*
- 1:9-3:22 *Second Theme: Sin and Forgiveness*
- 2:3-11 *The Historical Setting*
- 4:1-8:5 *Introductory Visions: The Scene in Heaven and on Earth*

⁹ Fee & Stuart, p. 430-436