

Message #1

Various Texts

In the Spring of 1984, I was given the assignment to teach the book of Revelation at the Grand Rapids School of the Bible and Music in the upcoming fall semester. I had the summer to prepare, so I went to work on dissecting the book. It was a two hour course, which meant I had 30 hours to take the students through Revelation. I divided the book up by verses. I took the total number of verses and divided by 30, which told me exactly where I would need to be every class period. I poured through the Greek Text and English Text, I got my hands on all of the quality commentaries money could buy and I listened to the tape ministry of Believer's Chapel and Bill McRea, who had expounded Revelation.

Here we are now, some 37 years later, and I have taught Revelation some 10-15 times. The last time we taught it here in this church was in 2013. But as we approach Revelation again, there are three things that are different:

- 1) I have actually been to Turkey and Greece and have seen places named in the book.
I have been to Ephesus, Smyrna, Thyatira, Philadelphia, Laodicea and Patmos (Greece).
- 2) I have been through more books of the Bible, which has confirmed and cemented that our interpretation is spot on and accurate. When you go through all the books of the Bible, as we have, the way we interpret Revelation is reinforced and the only thing that makes sense of Scripture. No prophecy of Scripture is by one's own interpretation (I Pet. 1:20). All Biblical Prophecy has a Holy Spirit produced unity to it.
- 3) We are now closer than ever to the actual predicted events in Revelation. It is clear the clouds are forming for the Great Tribulation. (Civil unrest (6:4); worldwide pestilence (6:8); Government mandates (13:16-17); Moral depravity (9:21; 18:9); Lawlessness (9:21)

Now to introduce the book we would like to ask and answer six basic introductory questions:

QUESTION #1 – Why study Revelation?

We cite seven reasons for studying Revelation:

Reason #1 - Revelation is one of only 66 inspired books that God has given to man.

Revelation is an inspired book of the Bible that may be established by five key evidences:

- 1) Number of Greek manuscripts - over 300. Seven papyrus (p47 has nine chapters; p115 has 12 chapters); 12 uncial (3 complete from 4th Century); 290 miniscule. **Very Reliable!**
- 2) Acceptance into church canon listings - Muratorian (AD 170) - oldest known list of NT books; Cheltenham (AD 360) - compiled in North Africa; Athanasius (AD 367) - Alexandria, Egypt.
- 3) Expositions and quotations by Church Leaders - Hermas (AD115); Papias (AD 130); Irenaeus (AD 130); Justin Martyr (AD 150); Clement of Alexandria (AD 150); Tertullian (AD 150); Origen (AD 185); Eusebius (AD 325); Jerome (AD 340); Augustine (AD 400). They either taught it, quoted it or said it was an inspired book.
- 4) Early Translations - Old Latin Translation in AD 200 includes Revelation.
- 5) Church Council meetings said it was inspired book - Nicea (AD 325); Hippo (AD 393); Carthage (AD 397); Carthage (AD 419).

Reason #2 - Revelation is important to the character of God.

What this book of Revelation clearly reveals is that God is a sovereign God over everything. **God is the sovereign God who is in control and has not lost control and one day will take control.** God knows all, sees all and controls all. He is all powerful and His power will be on full display in Revelation. Just as God used His sovereign power to create the world, He will use His sovereign power to destroy the world and then create a new world and Revelation tells that story.

Reason #3 - Revelation is important to the majesty and Deity of Jesus Christ.

In Revelation, Jesus Christ is seen in all of His Divine Glory. When Jesus Christ came to this earth the first time, He did not look like He was God. When He is seen in Revelation, He is seen as the Majestic God and He is worshipped as the Second Member of the Godhead (1:17; 5:12-12; 19:16). Those people and those religions that minimize or deny the true identity of Jesus Christ will burn forever when they face Him, and they will face Him in Revelation.

Reason #4 - Revelation is the only book that promises a blessing to the one who reads it hears it and understands it and applies it. **1:3**

Do not miss this point. Revelation is a book specifically written to be read, heard, taught and understood in churches (Rev. 1:11; 22:16). This point could not be any clearer. Revelation is given to God's people in the Church Age and promises to be a blessing to them if they take the book seriously. This is a book for churches (**1:4, 11; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:16**).

This is so important to see because many of God's people actually believe that the book of Revelation is not a book we are supposed to understand. In Revelation 22:10, the text says, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book for the time is near."

Yet, in many churches the book of Revelation is a sealed up mystery written in some secret, symbolic code language that God never intended people to understand. The very opening of the book states that it will give a blessing to the one who does understand it.

Reason #5 - Revelation is extremely important to the completion of several things in the Bible.

Genesis is the first book of the Bible that gives us the commencement of prophecy and Revelation is the last book of the Bible which gives us the conclusion of prophecy.

In between Genesis and Revelation are many predictions of things that have not happened yet. There are things predicted in the Bible that quite frankly haven't yet occurred. There are some loose ends that need to be resolved:

(Loose End #1) - Israel is promised a peaceful, prosperous existence in her Promised Land with all of her enemies eliminated (Isaiah 41:8-16; Ezekiel 34:22-31). This is predicted in many passages. This obviously has never happened yet.

(Loose End #2) - The Church is promised an in Christ resurrection and a Rapture to be caught up in the air to meet our loved ones and be with the Lord (I Thess. 4:16-17). This is predicted and that hasn't happened.

(Loose End #3) - All creation groans for a day when there is no more pain, sorrow and death. This is predicted (Romans 8:18-22). That hasn't happened yet.

(Loose End #4) - Jesus Christ is predicted to reign as king over the entire earth and that hasn't happened yet (i.e. Is. 11:1-10; Zechariah 14:4, 9).

These are just a few of the many things that have been predicted in the Bible that have not occurred yet. Revelation is the book that says every one of these things will come true. The totality of every promise ever made in the other books of the Bible comes true in Revelation.

Reason #6 - Revelation is extremely important to the theme of future judgment.

The judgment of God is extremely important theme to His righteous character; to His righteous justice; to His righteous people and to His punishment of evil and sin. As we go through the Bible, we discover that there are at least nine different judgments predicted to occur:

- 1) There is the Rapture of the Church that will separate all believers from unbelievers as a prelude to the Great Tribulation (I Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 4:1).
- 2) There is the Bema Seat judgment of a believer for rewards or loss of rewards (II Cor. 5:10; I Cor. 3:11-15).
- 3) There is the Great Tribulation wrath judgment against the entire world (Rev. 6:17).
- 4) There is a judgment of Gentile nations after the Great Tribulation (Matt. 25:32-41).
- 5) There is a judgment of Israel after the Great Tribulation (Ez. 20:33-38).
- 6) There is a judgment of the Antichrist and false prophet at end of Tribulation (Rev. 19:20).
- 7) There are two judgments against Satan: 1) End of Tribulation; 2) End of Millennium (Rev. 20:2-3; 20:10).
- 8) There is a final judgment of all evil angels after the 1,000 year Millennium (Jude 6).
- 9) There is a final judgment of all unbelievers of all ages - The Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

None of these judgments have occurred yet. The book of Revelation is significant for every one of these judgments.

Reason #7- Revelation will impact your life.

If you are a believer, this book will give you stability, confidence and poise in a troubled world. This book will comfort you that things are not out of control but right on schedule.

This book will give you a desire to be godly. Prophecy does have a purifying effect (I John 3:2-3).

If you are not a believer, this book will scare you and it should. As Dr. Charles Ryrie said, “Prophecy is a great tool for the conviction and conversion of unbelievers” (*Final Countdown*, p. 12).

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote Revelation?

The book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John.

We may offer seven proofs or evidences that the Apostle John wrote Revelation:

Proof #1 - The writer of Revelation specifically identifies himself by the name John.
1:1, 4, 9; 22:8

In the N.T. there are five men named John:

- 1) John the Baptist (John 1:6)
- 2) John the father of the Apostle Peter (John 1:42; 21:15-17)
- 3) John the High Priest (Acts 4:6)
- 4) John Mark (Acts 12:12)
- 5) John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee (Matt.4:21; John 21:2)

It is John the Apostle who wrote Revelation.

Proof #2 - The writer of Revelation was known to the Asiatic churches as simply John. **1:4**

When we were in Ephesus, we were taken to a church outside the city where the guide said this is where John the Apostle was buried. He was so well-known by the churches in Asia, they still give tours to show you where he lived and was buried.

Proof #3 - The writer of Revelation was very aware of the problems and progress of each Church. **2:1-3:19**

Again, that fits John the Apostle, who actually lived in Ephesus in the final years of his life.

Proof #4 - The writer of Revelation is elevated by an angel to the level of a prophet, which is a foundational gift of the church as the Apostle John (**22:9**/I Cor. 12:28/Eph. 4:11).

Proof #5 - The writer of Revelation had a tremendous knowledge of the Old Testament.

It has been observed that over 65% of the verses in Revelation refer to O.T. references. Stephen Smalley writes: “Revelation contains more references to the Old Testament than any other document in the New Testament” (*The Revelation to John*, p. 9). Robert Thomas concluded that of the 404 verses in Revelation, “278 allude to the OT Scriptures.” And he adds that no other NT writer “uses the OT more than this” (*Revelation An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 40).

Grant Osborne cites Moyise, who says there are 122 references from Isaiah; 97 from Psalms; 83 from Ezekiel; 82 from Pentateuch; 74 from Daniel; 73 from Minor Prophets and 48 from Jeremiah (*Revelation*, p. 25).

The Apostle John had a house in Jerusalem (John 19:27) and would have the Old Testament background in the Old Testament and the Holy Spirit would have used that in Revelation.

Proof #6 - The writer of Revelation was exiled to the island of Patmos because of his defense of God's word.

The only person this can be is the Apostle John. When we went to Patmos, which was a 4 ½ hour boat ride from Turkey to the Greek Island, we were met at the dock by a Greek tour guide who stressed this was the island of John the Apostle. He took us by car to a cave where he said the Apostle John actually wrote Revelation. So to this day, the Apostle John is still honored as the one who was on Patmos.

According to those there and early church history, the Apostle John was on that island of Patmos during the reign of the emperor Domitian (AD 81-AD 96). William Barclay quotes Jerome in saying that John was banished to the island of Patmos in the 14th year after Nero and liberated at the death of Domitian (*The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1, p. 41).

That would mean that the Apostle John was sent to Patmos around the year AD 82 and was released near the year AD 96. **During this 14 year gap of time on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John wrote Revelation.**

Proof #7 - The writer of Revelation is identified as the Apostle John by the writers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

The early writers and commentators on the book of Revelation clearly say the book was written by the Apostle John. Homer Hailey gives a capsule form summary of this in his commentary on *Revelation* (pp. 20-23):

Justin Martyr (AD 110-165) - He actually lived in Ephesus for a time. He wrote: "There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation." After making this statement, it refers to matters from Revelation 20.

Irenaeus (AD 120-202) - He was born in Smyrna. "John, also the Lord's disciple...says in the Apocalypse." Then he quotes heavily from Revelation.

Clement of Alexandria (AD 153-217) - He taught at a school in Egypt. "The apostle John...returned to Ephesus from the isle of Patmos...*after* the tyrant's death."

Tertullian (AD 145-220) quotes Revelation 21:2 and says, "the apostle John beheld."

Origen (AD 185-254) - "According to John, God is light...Listen to the manner in which John speaks in the Apocalypse."

Hippolytus (AD 170-236) quotes Revelation 17-18 and says, "Tell me, blessed John, apostle and disciple of the Lord, what did you see and hear concerning Babylon."

Victorinus (AD 303) - he wrote the earliest known Latin commentary on Revelation says, "and by his voice John gave his testimony in the world...because he is an apostle."

Eusebius (AD 263-339), the meticulous church historian, clearly says the Apostle John wrote Revelation from Patmos. "There is ample evidence that at that time (*Domitian's persecution*) the apostle...John was still alive, and because of his testimony to the word of God was sentenced to confinement on the island of Patmos. Writing about the number of the name given to antichrist in what is called the Revelation of John, Irenaeus has this to say about John..." (*The History of the Church*, p. 125).

Dr. John Walvoord said, "Practically all scholars today who accept the divine inspiration of the Book of Revelation also accept John the Apostle as its author" (*Revelation, The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 925).

The first person to actually disagree with the authorship of the Apostle John was a man named Dionysius of Alexandria (AD 190-264). He said that he didn't think that Revelation was written by the Apostle John because the Greek was so different in style, thought and grammar compared to John's other writings. He admitted he did not understand the book of Revelation. By his own admission he allegorized the book and took a strong stand against a literal interpretation. For example, he said the 1,000 year millennium, which is stressed multiple times in Revelation 20, does not really mean 1,000 years. So this prompted him to conclude that Revelation was not written by the Apostle John, but by some other person named John.

Dr. Robert Thomas did extensive work in comparing the Greek used in John's other writings with Revelation and he concluded that the Vocabulary, including the use of verbs, adverbs, nouns and adjectives, and the syntax, with its development of independent and subordinate clauses and the style used in various phrases and the concepts which are presented concerning subjects like God and Jesus Christ, all prove that Revelation was in fact "written by the Apostle John" (*Revelation 1-7 An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 11-17).

Jesus Christ is called "the word" only in John's writings - John 1:1/Rev. 19:13.

Jesus Christ is identified as being "the lamb" in John's writings - John 1:29/Rev. 5:8, 12.

Jesus Christ is identified as being "the shepherd" in John's writings - John 10:11/Rev. 7:17.

The book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John.

QUESTION #3 – When did the Apostle John write Revelation?

There have been six possible dates suggested for when John wrote Revelation:

- 1) It was written during the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54).
- 2) It was written during the reign of Nero (AD 54-68).
- 3) It was written during the reign of Vespasian (AD 69-79).
- 4) It was written during the reign of Titus (AD 79-81).
- 5) It was written during the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96).
- 6) It was written during the reign of Trajan (AD 98-117).

Of the possibilities, two of the dates have been seriously considered:

- 1) It was written during the days of Nero (AD 54-68).
- 2) It was written during the days of Domitian (AD 81-96).

Of the two dates, the one that may be logically proved is that it was written during the days of the Emperor Domitian in around AD 95.

This may be determined as accurate based on three main evidences:

1. There are many references concerning severe persecution existing against believers that existed in more than just Rome - John exiled (1:9); Smyrna believers face imprisonment and death (2:10); Antipas had been executed in Pergamum (2:13). This fits Domitian.
2. The external evidence from commentators place the date during the days of Domitian. Irenaeus (AD 185); Clement of Alexandria (AD 200); Eusebius (AD 300); Jerome (AD 400) all confirm that John wrote toward the end of Domitian's reign which places the date AD 95-96.
3. The problems in churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3 took some time to develop, which does not support the early date pertaining to Nero, but the late date pertaining to Domitian.

Based on this we conclude that the Apostle John wrote Revelation somewhere around AD 95 during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian.

QUESTION #4 – What is the theme of Revelation?

God is the Almighty, Sovereign God, the beginning and ending of everything, the Alpha and Omega of everything.

The theme of Revelation is not too difficult to decipher: **God wants His churches to know that He is sovereign over everything past, present and future and everything He promised in His word He will literally fulfill concerning Israel, the nations, the church, Satan, sin and judgment; and His Son Jesus Christ will literally come back to this earth and take over the world and then after every prophecy has been fulfilled, He will create a New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem.**

Grant Osborne, in his commentary, said it this way: “It seems clear that the primary theme of the book is the sovereignty of God” (*Revelation*, p. 31). Buist Fanning adds, “It (*Revelation*) is filled with powerful images of God’s glory, power, holiness and sovereignty” (*Revelation*, p. 567).

Now this theme that is presented in the book of Revelation is designed to get people in the church to give God and His Son the honor and worship that they deserve.

QUESTION #5 – What is the inspired outline of Revelation?

The inspired outline of Revelation is found in Revelation 1:19:

- 1) Things past - write the things “which you have seen” = **chapter 1**.
- 2) Things present - write the things “which are” = **chapters 2-3**.
- 3) Things future - write the things “which shall take place after these things” = **chapters 4-22**.
 - A. Future things that will take place in heaven - **chapters 4-5**.
 - B. Future things that will take place in the Great Tribulation - **Chapters 6-19**.
 - C. Future things that will take place in the 1,000 year Millennium - **Chapter 20**.
 - D. Future things that will take place at the Great White Throne Judgment - **Chapter 20**.
 - E. Future things that will take place in the New Jerusalem, New Heaven and New Earth- **Chapters 21-22**.

QUESTION #6 – What are the principles of interpretation that must be followed if we are to come to an accurate interpretation of Revelation?

People do bizarre things with the book of Revelation and come up with bizarre views and the reason for this is the lack of sound, sane, systematic hermeneutics (Bible Interpretation Methods).

To rightly divide and properly interpret Revelation, there are five key principles that must be followed:

Principle #1 - Things must be interpreted literally unless something in the language lends itself to a non-literal interpretation.

For example, in Revelation 20:1-7 we have a repetition of the number 1,000 years repeated six times (vrs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). We interpret that number literally. 1,000 years means 1,000 years. In a case such as Revelation 1:15 that says, “His feet were **like**” or “His voice was **like**” we conclude that this is something figurative that is designed to communicate a literal point. A very simple principle of Bible interpretation is “If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.”

Principle #2 - Things in Revelation must be interpreted in view of God’s own inspired interpretation.

If God gives us His own inspired interpretation, we will stick with that. For example:

- 1) Seven stars (1:16) represent seven angels (1:20).
- 2) Seven lampstands represent seven churches (1:20).
- 3) Seven heads (17:7) represent seven kings (17:9-10).
- 4) Ten horns (17:7) represent ten kings (17:12).

God often gives us His own inspired interpretation of symbolic things and when He does, we stick with that.

Principle #3 - Things in Revelation must be interpreted in view of Old Testament Scriptures.

There are many references in Revelation to things that are found in the Old Testament.

For example, in Revelation 3:7 we read of a “key of David.” That immediately connects us to Isaiah, who speaks of this Davidic key and the authority to open and close the doors to sacred things (Is. 22:22).

In Revelation 11:1 we read of a measurement of “the Temple of God.” The Temple being measured is clearly something seen in the Old Testament in chapters like II Chronicles 3 and Ezekiel 40. So to understand what is happening, we will need to understand things from the Old Testament.

Principle #4 - Things in Revelation must be interpreted in view of the known historical context of the first century.

For example, in Revelation 2-3, there were seven literal churches in seven literal cities. To understand the messages to each of the churches in those cities, we need to understand something about the historical context.

We will give one example here. In the church of Laodicea, it is stated that “I am rich and have become wealthy” (Rev. 3:17). This was literally, historically true. This was a very wealthy city and this was a very wealthy church. Even the ruins today show that. So this was written to a real church in a real historical setting.

Principle #5 - Things in Revelation must be interpreted in view of the immediate grammatical context.

Sound principles of exegetical and grammatical interpretation principles must never be ignored in the interpretation of Revelation.

In **Revelation 6:8**, it is stated that there is a death and Hades rider of an ashen horse whose goal it is to kill. The grammatical context is when the Lamb breaks open the judgment seals (6:1) and this is seal number four.

For example, in **Revelation 7:4** it is specifically stated that 144,000 are from the twelve tribes of Israel and the grammatical context makes that clear.

In **Revelation 20:2** the text says Satan is bound for 1,000 years and in **Revelation 20:7** the text says Satan is released. The grammatical context clearly establishes what is happening between these two episodes. Obviously this has not happened yet.

By keeping these principles in mind, we will be able to accurately interpret the book of Revelation.