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INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

It is specifically stated in **Revelation 22:10** that the book of Revelation is not a book that is to be sealed - "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near." Yet for the majority of God's people, the book of Revelation is nothing more than secret, sealed up mystery written in symbolic code language that God never really wanted people to figure out. H. A. Ironside in 1920 said, "It is certainly cause for deep regret that to so many Christians, the book of Revelation seems to be what God never intended it to be - a sealed book" (*Revelation*, p. 7).

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #1 – How important is the book of Revelation?

Importance #1 - The book of Revelation is important to the character of God.

- 1) It proves God's absolute sovereignty. He is in control, has not lost control, will take control.
- 2) It proves God's omniscience. Revelation proves God knows all things past, present, future.
- 3) It proves God's omnipotence. In Revelation God's power is full and majestic (**i.e. 6:14**).
- 4) It proves God's perfection. God is a perfect God with a perfect plan.

Importance #2 - The book of Revelation is important to the completion of the Bible.

Genesis is the first book of the Bible which records the commencement of prophecy, and Revelation is the last book of the Bible which records the consummation of prophecy.

This is the last inspired book of the Bible and that makes it very important, because there are many loose ends that need to be tied up if the Bible's predictions are to come true:

- 1) Israel has been promised a peaceful existence in a promised land (i.e. Ezekiel 34:22-31).
- 2) Creation groans for a day of redemption and deliverance (Romans 8:18-22).
- 3) Believers long for the day of the "in Christ" resurrection and the Rapture (I Thess. 4:16-17).
- 4) Christ, God's Messiah, must come and reign on earth as clearly predicted (i.e. Isaiah 11:1-10).

Importance #3 - The book of Revelation is important to the Church of God.

In this book Jesus Christ gives direct messages to His local churches. God places a high and holy priority on the local church. He expects His church to know His future.

Importance #4 - The book of Revelation is important to the life of the Christian.

Revelation is a book that gives the Christian bright hope for the future:

- 1) It gives us confidence in the faithfulness of God to fulfill all of His promises - positive and negative.
- 2) It gives us proper direction for our lives.
- 3) It gives us comfort in trials.
- 4) It gives us a passion for godliness.

(2)

Importance #5 - The book of Revelation is important to the lost world.

Dr. Charles Ryrie writes: “Prophesy is a great tool for the conviction and conversion of unbelievers.”

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #2 – What are the dangerous attitudes specifically connected to the study of the book of Revelation?

Dangerous Attitude #1 - A lack of interest . The real interest lack is one of careful study.

Dangerous Attitude #2 - A wild imagination . Revelation reveals precise things, not imaginative.

Dangerous Attitude #3 - An intellectual pride . People are proud of what they think they know.

Dangerous Attitude #4 - A contented ignorance . Contented that we aren’t supposed to know.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #3 – Who wrote the book of Revelation?

When all is considered, we may assuredly say that **the book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John** .

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); and **5)** John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21; John 21:2). **It is John the Apostle who wrote Revelation.**

This fact may be determined by seven provable evidences:

- 1) The writer of Revelation specifically mentions his name is John. **1:1, 4, 9; 22:8**
- 2) The writer of Revelation was known by the seven Asiatic churches as simply John. **1:4**
- 3) The writer of Revelation was intimately aware of problems and progress in each church .
2:1–3:19
- 4) The writer of Revelation was equated by an angel to an elevated and equal position of prophet which is a foundational gift of the Church. **22:9** / I Cor. 12:28 / Eph. 4:11
- 5) The writer of Revelation had a tremendous knowledge of the O.T. .

It has been observed that over 65 percent of the verses refer to O.T. references. Stephen S. 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 what Swete observed, of the 404 verses in Revelation, “278 allude to the O.T. Scriptures” and he adds that no other N.T. writer “uses the O.T. more than this” (*Revelation An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 40). This all fits John’s background.

(3)

6) The writer of Revelation was exiled to the island of Patmos because of his defense of God's Word. **1:9**

The only person this fits is the Apostle John. Robert Thomas writes: "Early Christian tradition says John was sent here during Domitian's reign over Rome (A.D. 81-96) and was forced to work in the mines. Another tradition adds that when Domitian died, John was permitted to return to Ephesus" (*Revelation 1-7 An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 87). William Barclay quotes Jerome in saying that John was banished to Patmos in the 14th year after Nero and liberated at the death of Domitian (*The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1, p. 41). **This would mean John went to Patmos somewhere near the year A.D. 82 and was released somewhere in A.D. 96.** During this 14 year stay he wrote Revelation.

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

Homer Hailey summarizes data from the Ante-Nicene Fathers (*Revelation*, pp. 20-23).

Justin Martyr (A.D. 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." After citing this, he refers to matters from **Revelation 20**.

Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) says, "John, also the Lord's disciple ... says in the Apocalypse." After saying this he quotes heavily from Revelation.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 153-217) writes, "The apostle John ... returned to Ephesus from the isle of Patmos ... (after) the tyrant's death."

Tertullian (A.D. 145-220) quotes **Revelation 21:2** and says "the apostle John beheld."

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

Hippolytus (A.D. 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 (A.D. 303) who wrote the earliest known commentary on Revelation says concerning Revelation, "and by his voice John gave his testimony in the world ... because he was an apostle."

Eusebius (A.D. 263-339), the famed church historian, who lived and wrote during this era, clearly states 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).

(4)

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).

There is absolutely no doubt that Revelation was written by the Apostle John.

The first person to actually disagree with the authorship of the Apostle John was Dionysius of Alexandria (A.D. 190-264), who said 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. In truth, he admitted he did not understand the book of Revelation and he especially took a strong stand against the 1,000 year millennium (**Revelation 20**). Perhaps this is what really motivated him to deny that Revelation was written by John, but his argument is easily refuted:

- 1) John did not have a secretary to record Revelation - he is on Patmos, writing it himself.
- 2) The content of the book of Revelation is not typical. Revelation is the ultimate inspired book of Biblical prophecy and John records many things in this book that are not the norm.
- 3) There are many similarities between certain things in Revelation and John's other writings:
 - A. Jesus Christ is called “the Word” (ο λογος) only in John's writings - John 1:1 / **Rev. 19:13**.
 - B. Jesus Christ is referred to by John as being the lamb and shepherd - **Rev. 7:17** / John 1:29; 10:1ff.

Dr. Robert Thomas compared the Greek used in John's other writings with Revelation and 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 show and prove that Revelation was “written by the Apostle John” (*Revelation 1-7 An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 11-17).

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #4 – When was the book of Revelation written?

In the course of interpreting Revelation, there have been about three different views suggested for the time of this writing and only two have ever been taken seriously:

Time View #1 - Revelation was written near the end of the reign of Nero around A.D. 68.

(Reason #1) - Because Nero may be identified by the sixth king of **Revelation 17:10**.

If you begin counting Roman emperors in the first century there is - Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero, who is number five. Since it is stated in **17:10** that five have fallen, some assume that Nero's reign had just ended when Revelation was written.

(5)

(Reason #2) - Because Nero may be identified by the number 6-6-6 in **Revelation 13:18**.

In 1831, a scholar named Fritzsche discovered if you take the Hebrew transcription of the name “Nero Caesar” and assign Hebrew numerical values to the name, the sum total is 666.

(Reason #3) - Because of the supposed references to the pre-siege conditions of Jerusalem.

In **Revelation 11:1**, for example, the Temple is standing, which would lead one to conclude that Revelation was being written before A.D. 70 when the Temple was destroyed.

But there are several problems with this date:

Problem #1 - This date does not coincide with the time when the Apostle John was on Patmos.

Problem #2 - There had not been enough time for all the major problems to arise in the seven Asiatic churches in **Revelation 2-3**.

When we compare the condition of the church in Ephesus in Paul’s time (Ephesians; I and II Timothy; Colossians) with the description of the churches in **Revelation 2-3**, it is quite clear that there has been a major deterioration. The time of A.D. 68 does not permit this.

Problem #3 - This dating tends to downplay the prophetic character of the book, trying to make things fit where they will not fit.

Problem #4 - This dating requires some extensive imagination in discovering and drawing certain conclusions such as the number 666.

Problem #5 - There is no real evidence that Nero’s persecution extended beyond Rome. Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* says that Nero confined his persecution to Rome, trying to pin the blame on the Christians for the fire he set in A.D. 64 (Hailey, P. 29).

Time View #2 - Revelation was written during the reign of Vespasian around A.D. 70-80.

This would place the writing around the time that Jerusalem was destroyed. Philip Schaff thinks it was written between Nero’s death (A.D. 68) and the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70). This view has never been taken seriously and there are so few interpreters who hold to this that it does not even demand consideration. Actually there is no evidence that there was any conflict between Vespasian and Christians (*Ibid.* p. 69). It was this very fact that led Dr. Alan Johnson to say, “Only two suggested dates for Revelation have received serious support” (*Revelation*, The Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 12, p. 406).

Time View #3 - Revelation was written during the reign of Domitian around A.D. 90-95.

The great majority of interpreters who have studied the book of Revelation hold to this date for many reasons:

(6)

(Reason #1) - Because there are references and predictions concerning Emperor worship and even though most Roman emperors wanted to be worshipped, most historians agree that Domitian was the first to demand and enforce it (**Rev. 13:4; 16:2**). The concept of worshipping a beast or image clearly fits this time period.

(Reason #2) - Because there are many references concerning the subject of severe persecution which existed in places other than Rome: 1) John exiled (**1:9**); 2) Believers in Smyrna faced imprisonment and death (**2:10**); 3) Antipas had been executed in Pergamum (**2:13**); 4) Martyrdom was wide-spread (**6:9**). This clearly fits the time frame of what was happening during the days of Domitian. He was the emperor who targeted the Church for destruction.

(Reason #3) - Because of the historical testimony of those who lived close to the time when this all happened. Irenaeus (A.D. 185); Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 200); Eusebius (A.D. 300) and Jerome (A.D. 400) all affirm that John wrote Revelation while on Patmos in A.D. 95-96.

(Reason #4) - The problems of the churches which are cited in **Revelation 2-3** had developed over time and were not present in the early days of the church. This lends itself to a later date of writing.

(Reason #5) - There are records that indicate a major earthquake destroyed Laodicea in A.D. 60-61. However, when we read **Revelation 3**, it is quite obvious that Laodicea has been lavishly rebuilt and the church has spiritually deteriorated. All of this fits a later rather than earlier date of writing.

(Reason #6) - Because of what was actually happening to Jews and Christians during the reign of Domitian. A major turning point in the treatment of the Jews occurred during what is known as the Flavian emperors. These Roman Emperors are named from the dynasty from which they came. The Flavian emperors were - Vespasian (A.D. 69-79); Titus (A.D. 79-81) and Domitian (A.D. 81-96).

For the most part, Jews enjoyed great privileges during Flavian time: 1) they were exempt from heathen deity worship; 2) they were exempt from emperor worship; 3) they were exempt from military service; and 4) they were permitted to own property.

All of this changed during the reign of Domitian. He turned against Jews and Christians. He started heavily taxing the Jews and eventually persecuted both Jews and Christians. According to Eusebius, Domitian made up lies about Christians and their doctrine and then would persecute them for things he invented (*The History of the Church*, p. 188). Domitian was a man motivated by an insatiable hunger for military power, because he knew this was the key to his survival and success. He raised military pay for the first time since Augustus, which gained him great favor with Roman soldiers (Michael Grant, *The Twelve Caesars*, pp. 247-248). According to Eusebius, Domitian ordered the execution of Jews and then turned his attention to terminating Christians and the church (*Ibid.*, pp. 124-126).

(7)

Domitian was 30 years old when he came to power and 45 years old when he was murdered by being stabbed first in the groin by Stephanus and then stabbed repeatedly.

Domitian was a satanic bully and was destroying anything connected with God and it was during this time when John wrote Revelation which gave hope that one day Jesus Christ would settle the eternal score.

It was during this reign of Domitian, that John wrote Revelation somewhere near A.D. 95.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #5 – How do we interpret the book of Revelation?

Revelation is clearly a book we are supposed to read, understand and apply (**Rev. 1:3**). Yet no book of the Bible has been the target of as many bizarre interpretations as this book of Revelation.

For example, people read Revelation and see a bunch of numbers and just start making up things about those numbers. We may illustrate this by citing some of the numbers which show up in the book. In **Revelation 7:4** we read 144,000 sealed people, in **12:6** we read about “1,260 days” and in **13:5** we read about “42 months” and in **Revelation 20:1-7** we read about “1,000 years.” Some come to these numbers and just start inventing things and as a result have no idea as to how to interpret them. One person read about the “fallen star from heaven” in **Revelation 9:1** and said it was a reference to Mohammed. Unless we have some way to interpret the book of Revelation, this book will remain a hidden mystery.

A critical point to remember is this - **if the book of Revelation is not interpreted correctly, it will always be misinterpreted. What you do need, to be able to understand Revelation, is a correct and consistent system of interpretation.**

We strongly believe and will prove that there is only one correct system of interpretation. Arno C. Gaebelin, a great Biblical scholar in the early 1900s said, “There is a true interpretation of Revelation ... which opens the Book to our understanding. ... There must be one true interpretation ...” (*The Revelation*, p. 13).

When it comes to the book of Revelation, there have been four methods used to interpret the book:

Method of Interpretation #1 - The preterist method of interpretation.

The word “preterist” comes from a Latin word that means “past.” The preterist method of interpretation limits just about everything in the book of Revelation to the historical context of the first century. This method teaches that all events in the book of Revelation, with the exception of chapters 20-21, are to be interpreted as events that actually happened in the first century when John lived and were all completed by the time of Constantine (A.D. 312) (Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 8).

(8)

(Positive) - On the positive side, this method does attempt to relate everything to the historical situation of the original readers. Many have totally neglected this and lofted the book into their own culture without any thought about 1st century life or context.

(Negative) - On the negative side there are major problems with this method:

1. It almost makes the book meaningless for today's contemporary reader.
2. It denies the prophetic character of the book. It is called a "prophecy," not history. **1:3**
3. It denies the significance of Christ's return, an event for which the entire book anticipates.
4. It fails to explain why some things in the book have not yet happened. **6:12-17; 16:19-21**

J. Vernon McGee said that if you hold to the preterist view you may as well take Revelation out of your Bible because it has no meaning today (*Revelation, Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5, p. 878).

Method of Interpretation #2 - The allegorical or idealist method of interpretation.

The allegorical method of interpretation believes that Revelation is a symbolic picture of the struggle between good and evil in which good ultimately wins. This method of interpretation makes the book of Revelation a symbolic allegory. According to this view, there is nothing in the book that pertains to literal history or literal prophecy and everything is symbolic.

This method promotes the idea that nothing in the book is literal. It is to be viewed through the eyes of what it spiritually teaches, namely there is a great conflict between good and evil and in the end good wins.

(Positive) - On the positive side this method does do some things:

1. It recognizes the major supernatural struggle between good and evil.
2. It emphasizes the fact that God will eventually triumph and win over all evil.
3. It attempts to draw out spiritual principles for believers of all ages to apply.

(Negative) - On the negative side this method leaves much to be desired:

1. It eliminates a historical background, making this the only book in the Bible to be interpreted without any consideration of the background.
2. It fails to accurately understand and interpret the churches of **Revelation 2-3**, which present literal problems that need literal correction.
3. Everything in the book of Revelation may be viewed as a nice Biblical fairytale, in which case, we cannot ever really know what anything means.

Method of Interpretation #3 - The historicist method of interpretation.

This method of interpretation says that Revelation is an inspired forecast and overview of Church history from the time of John until the second coming of Jesus Christ. This view suggests that Revelation tells a continuous story of Church history which will culminate with Christ's return.

(9)

(Positive) - This method does see a connection between Church history and Revelation.

(Negative) - This method is filled with many negatives:

1. This method fails to make a distinction between Israel and the Church, because it views everything in Revelation as belonging to the Church. This cannot be supported from passages such as Revelation **7:4-8; 11:1-2**. It is very dangerous thinking to presume that the Church has replaced Israel (Rom. 11:18).
2. This method demands an allegorical interpretation of all events in the book because one must make all events fit Church history:
 - A. "breaking of the seal" (**Rev. 6**) = fall of Roman Empire
 - B. "Babylon" (**Rev. 17:5**) = Roman Catholicism
 - C. "Beast" (**Rev. 17:8**) = the Pope
 - D. "Days" (**Rev. 11:3**) = years. It denies that 1260 days = 42 months = 3 1/2 years.
Many fundamentalists interpret Revelation with much dangerous allegory.
3. This method cannot specifically identify or agree with which part of Church history Revelation is unfolding. There has never been agreement in over 1,900 years between those who hold to this method. Dr. John Walvoord writes: "At least 50 different systems of interpretation have arisen from the historical view alone" (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 125). Many of the Reformers held to this method and each one has their own contradictory scheme.
4. This method of interpretation destroys encouragement for original readers. If the purpose of Revelation is to tell a story of Church history, then first century believers who were being persecuted were left without much hope. All they had to look forward to was more and more suffering that goes from bad to worse. According to **Revelation 2-3** and **22:16**, this book was designed to make a great deal of sense and bring great hope to the churches; but if all we have is an outline of Church history, there isn't any hope.

Method of Interpretation #4 - The futurist method of interpretation.

This method of interpretation teaches that Revelation is a book written to believers who lived in the first century but many of the events described in the book, specifically **chapters 4-22**, will be fulfilled in the future.

(Positive) - There are many positive contributions this method makes:

1. It allows for a literal interpretation of everything. Dr. Merrill Tenney says, "The more literal interpretation one accepts, the more strongly will he be considered a futurist" (*Interpreting Revelation*, p. 142). It may be observed that "if the words do not mean what they say, then no one can say what they mean."
2. It draws a clear distinction between Israel and the Church. This distinction is in agreement with the whole scheme of Scripture because the entire O.T. focuses on God's program with Israel which is confirmed by the N.T. (Rom. 11:25-27; Acts 15:13-18).

(10)

3. It makes logical and clear sense of the inspired time outline of **Revelation 1:19** - things have seen - **chapter 1**; things which are (present) - **chapters 2-3**; things which shall take place (future) - **chapters 4-22**.
4. It explains why many things cannot be identified in past or present history. **Chapters 4-22** haven't yet occurred nor have they been seen in the world yet.

(Negative) - There are some negative arguments which some have raised against this method:

1. Some claim there is no comfort to first century Christians. **The truth is there is great comfort for the believer realizing the great future victory described in this book.** Peter certainly believed this (II Peter 3:10-14) and so did Paul (Romans 8). Every O.T. Messianic promise was given so Israel might have hope. Every hurting believer longs for the day when our faith will be sight. Before the terrible things occur, we will be raptured.
2. Some claim futurists disagree over when the future events will take place. Some are premillennial others are postmillennial. Some say the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation and some in the middle of the Tribulation and some say at the end of the Tribulation. **It will be seen that disagreements almost always are due to the matter of literal interpretation.**
3. Some argue that John could not have fully known what he was writing since the majority of what he was writing were future events. **The obvious answer to this is that prophecy many times was not fully understood by the writer - i.e. Daniel 12:4,8-9; I Peter 1:10-12.**

The futurist method is by far the best method of interpretation for one main reason - it allows for a literal interpretation of the words of the book and it is the only method that allows God to speak for Himself. Any other method of interpretation demands that finite sinful man be the authority.

When God says something, we need to interpret it literally unless something in the context would indicate otherwise.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #6 – Why did God move John to write Revelation?

(Reason #1) - Because God wanted to reveal His future and final program concerning the Church and Israel. **Revelation 1:19** is an imperative command. God commands this to be written to His Church.

(Reason #2) - Because God wanted to reveal the final glory and triumph of Jesus Christ . **(Revelation 4-22). In the end, Jesus Christ will rule the world.** He will win and will reign. This book proves that God wants us to know that. There are over 300 N.T. references to the fact that Christ is coming again and Revelation is one entire book devoted to that theme.

(Reason #3) - Because God wanted persecuted believers to be encouraged, knowing that Satan and his forces will be defeated **(Revelation 20:10)** and all sorrows and sin will be eliminated **(Revelation 21:4)**.

(11)

(Reason #4) - Because God wanted His people to live godly lives in view of His coming judgment (**Revelation 2-3**). God would much rather reward His people than punish His people.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #7 – What is the practical theme of Revelation?

In view of the prophetic reality that Jesus Christ will majestically return to this earth to judge evil and finish God’s eternal program, it is imperative that the believer in the Church Age understand God’s prophetic program and maintain a proper relationship with Him, even in times of suffering and persecution.

There is tremendous doctrinal and spiritual and emotional stability in precisely knowing the entire inspired prophetic program of God. This is a book that gives us hope and prompts us to look for the rapture of the Church. It promotes evangelism and purity in our lives and the church.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #8 – What is the inspired title of the book?

The inspired title of the book is found in the opening verse, **Revelation 1:1** - “**The Revelation of Jesus Christ.**” It is not “Revelations,” plural nor “the book of Revelations” and it is not “The Revelation of John.” It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #9 – What does the term “revelation” actually mean?

The English word “revelation” comes from the Greek word apokalupsis (αποκαλυψις) which is transliterated into English “apocalypse.” The actual word “revelation” comes from a Latin word “revelatio” which has the same meaning as the Greek word. **The basic meaning of the word is to reveal or uncover something that was previously hidden or unknown** (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 50). This word is the exact opposite of concealing or hiding something.

Revelation is the only N.T. book that belongs to the class of literature known as apocalyptic. In Judaism, there were some books that the Jews classified as apocalyptic literature and, in fact, called the books Apocryphal books, literally the Apocrypha.

The difference between the book of Revelation and all other books people would claim are apocalyptic is that Revelation is inspired by God. The book of Revelation is a book that uncovers and reveals what God wants people to know about the future.

All other apocalyptic writings about the future are mere speculations and inventions of sinful men - whether it is Nostradamus, Mohammed or Joseph Smith. Revelation is a book inspired by God.

(12)

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #10 – Where was John when he wrote Revelation?

It is clearly stated in **Revelation 1:9** that John was “on the island called Patmos.” Patmos is an island 8-10 miles long and about 5-6 miles wide. It is a crescent-shaped island which contained a lot of rocky ground and volcanic hills. It sits in the Aegean Sea, approximately 40-50 miles from Ephesus. The island was used to house Roman prisoners. It was common for political prisoners to be sentenced to Patmos.

William Barclay says that there were quarry mines and the prisoners were forced to work in those mines and it is very possible that John was also forced to work in those mines (*The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1, p. 41).

When Domitian sent the Apostle John to this island rather than killing him, he probably thought that John was so old that he would never survive prison life. But what Domitian did not realize is that this would be the very place where God would permit John to write the book of Revelation.

It is quite clear that you do not have to be in some real special place to do special things for God. You don't have to be in a successful and fancy place to be greatly used by God. Some think they could accomplish big things if they were on the mission field or in some big ministry. John was on a prison island called Patmos and it was here where he wrote the great book of Revelation.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #11 – To whom was the book of Revelation written?

Asia was one of the most prosperous places in the Roman Empire. At the time of Domitian, it had been a Roman province for about 200 years (Hailey, p. 71). The clear testimony of the book states that it was written to the seven churches of Asia (**1:4, 11; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:16**). This book is written to churches in the Church Age and it is written for the church to know. Dr. Gary Cohen said, “The book of Revelation is one of God's great gifts to His church” (*Understanding Revelation*, p. 13). These churches were the only ones outside of Jerusalem and the only places where two apostles spent a great deal of time.

This point would lead us to conclude that God demands that His church know and understand Revelation. Revelation has always been of great comfort and encouragement to Grace Age believers who understand it.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #12 – 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” are found in **chapter 1**.
- 2) Things present = write the things “which are” are found in **chapters 2-3**
- 3) Things future = write the things “which shall take place after these things” are found in **chapters 4-22**. The actual breakdown of things future are:

(13)

- 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 at the Great White Throne Judgment - **chapter 20**
- D. Future things that will take place in the new Jerusalem, new heaven and new earth - **chapters 21-22**

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #13 – How reliable is our text of Revelation?

Although compared to the amount of manuscripts for some of the other N.T. books the numbers are perhaps a little less, we do have an abundance of preserved manuscripts of Revelation:

- 1) There are 4 papyri manuscripts - a scroll made out of papyrus paper (like parchment). Some were up to 35 feet long and had writing on both sides of the paper (**Revelation 5:1**). One of the manuscripts, **p47**, comes from the late 3rd century and contains most of the entire book.
- 2) There are 6 uncial manuscripts - a manuscript written in all capital Greek letters. **Three of the uncial manuscripts were copied very early in Church history** - Codex Sinaiticus (4th century); Codex Alexandrinus (5th century); Codex Ephraemi (5th century) and the first two of these contain the whole book and the third most of it.
- 3) There are 250 miniscule manuscripts - a manuscript written in small case Greek letters. Most of these were copied from the 10th to 16th centuries.

This gives us a total of 260 manuscripts which God preserved throughout history, which clearly enables us to see that Revelation is a precious inspired book that God does want us to have and know.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #14 – What are the principles of interpretation that should be followed when interpreting Revelation?

There are five key hermeneutical principles of interpretation that help to accurately interpret Revelation:

Principle #1 - Things are to be interpreted literally unless something in the language lends itself to a non-literal interpretation. Obviously a text like **Revelation 1:15** lends itself to some comparative figurative symbolic interpretation indicated by the adverb “like.” The principle is, “If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.”

Principle #2 - Things are to be interpreted in view of their own inspired interpretation. If God gives us His literal interpretation, we will stick with that. For example, the seven stars (**1:16**) represent seven angels (**1:20**), and the seven lampstands represent seven churches (**1:20**). Seven heads (**17:7**) represent seven kings (**17:9-10**), and ten horns (**17:7**) represent ten kings (**17:12**). In each of these cases, God gives us His own inspired interpretation.

Principle #3 - Things are to be interpreted in light of Old Testament Scripture. There are many things that are clearly connected to the O.T. For example, in **Revelation 3:7** we read of the “key of David” which immediately connects us to the authority to open and close the doors to sacred things back in the days of Isaiah (Isaiah 22:22). In **11:1** we read of the “Temple” and in **21:12** we have reference to the “twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.” As has already been observed, Henry B. Swete said that of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 contain specific references to the O.T. Jewish Scriptures (*Commentary On Revelation*, p. 140).

The way he actually calculated this was by studying Wescott and Hort’s appendix which listed all of the quotations from the Old Testament. Swete himself listed many of these and drew the following conclusions from Revelation: 1) Quotes in Revelation come from almost every O.T. book; 2) The books that show up most frequently in Revelation are Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel and by far the greatest number of quotes come from the book of Daniel. 3) There are two kinds of O.T. references in Revelation: O.T. words and phrases and allusion to specific texts (*Ibid.*, pp. 140-158).

Principle #4 - Things are to be interpreted in light of the known historical context of the 1st century. We have already seen that the book was written to seven literal churches who literally existed in a real historical setting. There were specific problems and pressures in each church and the historical context becomes critical to understanding this, especially in **chapters 2-3**.

Principle #5 - Things are to be interpreted in view of the immediate grammatical context. Sound principles of grammatical exegesis (draw out exactly what a text says) must not ever be forsaken, especially in a book like Revelation.

For example in **Revelation 7:4** it is specifically stated that the 144,000 are from the twelve tribes of Israel and the following grammatical context makes that very clear. **Revelation 21:4** is often applied to anyone who dies, and yet **Revelation 5:4** and **6:10-11** indicate there is weeping in heaven.

We will always allow the grammatical context to speak for itself.

If we keep these interpretive principles in mind and stick with them, we will have a wonderful, exciting journey through Revelation, and when we are done we will understand precisely what God wants us to know in His book, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”