

REVELATION

Introduction

Author. The text explicitly states that the author was John (1:1, 4; 22:8) who was exiled on the isle of Patmos (1:9). From early on in the second century the church fathers believed that this was indeed the son of Zebedee. The author was a Jew who was a church leader and familiar with the seven churches of Asia minor. No other person so fits the profile of the author.

Date. Revelation seems to have been written when Christians were entering a time of persecution. The latter part of Domitian's reign (81-96 A. D.) around 95 A. D. is most likely.

Occasion. Because Rome was beginning to enforce the cult of Emperor worship, those faithful Christians who refused, were facing increasing hostility. John, himself, had been exile for his missionary activities (1:9), Antipas had been martyred (2:13), and the church at Smyrna was warned about coming opposition (2:10). During this time some had advocated compromise (2:14-15, 20), a philosophy which had to be addressed. Thus, it would seem that part of John's purpose may have been to encourage the faithful to stand against compromise as a beacon light as the apostolic age was closing.

More importantly however, there may have been confusion about the delayed coming of Christ and the status of his program in this age. Paul evidently expected the rapture and the Day of the Lord to have occurred in his day (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and by the end of Peter's life many were scoffing at the coming of Christ, (2 Peter 3:3-4). Beyond this, the book of Hebrews, which represented a new stage in the progress of revelation may have caused confusion on the part of some. For the first time in history new revelation was given which displaced previous revelation. Never before had any revelation set Moses aside. But with the advent of the book of Hebrews and the clear dissolution of the Old Covenant and its Jewish trappings, many may have wondered what God's commitment was to his promises to Israel. If the Law was gone, would the promises of the prophets be the next to go? Had God given up on his promises Israel? The book of Revelation in a powerful way establishes that God will keep his promises to the nation of Israel as stated in the Old Testament. With myriads of allusions to the Old Testament, only one conversant with that testament can really understand Revelation. In short it is a wonderful confirmation of God's intentions for Israel. In addition, however, it clearly affirms the place of the Church in God's program for the present as well. Although reference to the Church is missing in chapters 4-19, Revelation 21-22 make it clear that in the end, God's program with Israel and the Church will be wonderfully combined as one people of God.

One final theme which is consonant and coincident with what has been stated so far is the disclosure of the person of Jesus Christ. As the first verse of the book states, "[This is] The revelation of [about] Jesus Christ . . ." Throughout the book the readers are informed about the person and working of the premiere figure of both history and prophecy. Who is Jesus Christ? Was He a defeated martyr. Was He an idealistic philosopher? Was He simply a helpless or at least pacifistic leader who died at the hands of the Roman government? These answers are all answered forcefully by the one who on earth knew Him best, the last living apostle, John. This Jesus who is called the Christ is One who will come again just as He promised, and as it was prophesied about Him, to fully crush the head of the evil one and regain the rule lost so long ago. This one is revealed, not as one riding lowly and humble on a donkey (Zech 9:9) but as a Conquering warrior mounted on a white horse.

Message Statement. *The re-establishment of God's kingdom rule over the earth will fulfill God's promises in the Old Testament and will include the Church.*

Argument

- 1A THE INTRODUCTION 1:1-8
In typical literary style the author and recipients are identified in the introduction along with a short statement of purpose and praise. The author, John, writes to seven historical churches located in Asia minor. His stated purpose is to inform the reader of future things (1:1). The main event of the future to which the writer immediately looks forward is the coming of Jesus (1:7) which he identifies as a fulfillment of the hopes of the Jewish prophets (Daniel 7:13; Zechariah 12:10). John offers a blessing to the readers from both the Father and the Son and closes the introduction with praise, once again, involving both the Father and the Son. At the outset, then, John acknowledges the churches as the currently valid expression of God's program while at the same time affirming that the future holds the fulfillment of the hopes of his people Israel.
- 1B "THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE SEEN:" JOHN'S COMMISSION 1:9-20
John's commission to write his message clearly accepts the validity of the New Testament dispensation. John records that his vision occurs on "the Lord's day" (1:10), a likely reference to the day of worship of the Church. The apostle is instructed to send the book to the seven churches and they clearly are the focus of the vision (1:12-16). The vision of Jesus walking among the lampstands shows his constant observation and involvement with the seven churches. The divine outline for the book then follows as John is instructed to write what he has seen 1:9-20, his commission; what is 2:1--3:22, God's program for the present; and, what will be 4:1--22:5, God's program for the future.
- 1C "THE THINGS WHICH ARE:" GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE PRESENT 2:1-3:22
This, the second major section of the book, deals with seven historical churches which are evidently characteristic of churches throughout this age. A common literary structure binds this section together: an introduction, identification of Jesus, commendation of the Church, condemnation of the Church, exhortation and promise. The absence of one of these elements is certainly significant. Each of the messages is tailored for their respective church. References to local trades, geography and history individualize each message.
- The overall thrust of this section is to affirm God's program through the Church for this dispensation. Clearly it is the Church which commands his concern and care at this stage in history. Therefore its absence from the tribulation seems to be conspicuous.
- 1B The Message to Ephesus 2:1-7
Ephesus was a church which was unblemished in doctrine. The Savior's rebuke for them involved the loss of their first love.
- 2B The Message to Smyrna, 2:8-11

Smyrna was a church which endured the purifying powers of persecution. Polycarp, the most famous of the early martyrs was of the church at Smyrna. Apparently, because of this, the Lord had no words of condemnation for this church.

- 3B The Message to Pergamum 2:12-17
Pergamum was a church of doctrinal compromise. They evidently held to heretical doctrines or at least tolerated those who did. A certain amount of involvement in pagan festivals evidently occurred as well.
- 4B The Message to Thyatira 2:18-29
Thyatira was a city noted for its many trade guilds. Perhaps because of this a certain false and female teacher led the church into a compromise with paganism associated with the various trades of the city.
- 5B The Message to Sardis 3:1-6
Along with Laodicea, Sardis was the only church to have been commended for nothing. Just a few were left in the church who had not been involved in sin.
- 6B The Message to Philadelphia 3:7-13
The message to Philadelphia has a decidedly Jewish slant. Nearly every reference to the church has its roots in the Old Testament. It may be that this church had very few Gentile converts.
- 7B The Message to Laodicea 3:14-22
Laodicea, as Sardis, merited no commendation from the Lord. The church which considers itself to be wealthy is encouraged to seek true wealth from God in spiritual riches.
- 1D "THE THINGS WHICH SHALL TAKE PLACE AFTER THESE THINGS:" GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE 4:1-22:5
The correlation of the phrase "What must take place after these things" in 1:19 and 4:1 identifies this as the third and final, major section of the book. This section is divided into four parts: 1) introduction, 4-5; 2) tribulation, 6-19; 3) millennium, 20; and 4) eternal state, 21-22.
- 1B Introduction to and Basis for God's Future Program 4:1--5:14
These two chapters both introduce and lay the foundation for not only the tribulation period but also God's program afterwards. They are based upon, and actually expand, the scene of Daniel 7:9-14. Just as the Son of Man approached the Ancient of Days who was seated on the throne, so also here, Jesus approaches the Father on his throne. The Son of Man then received a lasting kingdom and dominion from the Ancient of Days which replaced all secular powers. And, in chapter five Jesus received a scroll which signified his reception of power and dominion. Thus, all that is about to be revealed is based upon, and fulfills, the promises of Daniel 7.
- 1C The setting in heaven 4:1-11
The setting in heaven involves a convening of the heavenly counsel with God the Father presiding. He is pictured, in terms which seem to exhaust human language, in glory. Both human and angelic attendants surround the throne and worship the Father.
- 2C The scroll in heaven 5:1-14
The focus of this chapter concerns the scroll which Jesus receives from the Father. The form of the scroll seems to be that of a title deed. It is sealed with seven seals, each of which must be opened for the owner to take possession of the property. The importance of the scroll is seen by John's response when it appeared as though no one would open it. The worthiness of Jesus to open the book is rooted in his cross work (5:9). Thus Jesus' reception of the scroll symbolizes his repossession of the rule of the earth which was lost in Eden (Hebrews 2:8).
- 2B The Tribulation Period 6:1--19:21
These fourteen chapters comprise the major portion of the book. The seven year period of Daniel's 70th week is covered here in unprecedented detail. With all the attention given to the Church in chapters two and three and the mention of the Church in twenty-one, its absence in this section is conspicuous. On the other hand, the attention given to Israel (see chapters 7, 11, 12 and 14 especially) is significant. Myriads of Old Testament prophecies from Isaiah to Joel to Malachi, which foretell God's special dealing with His people, Israel, to turn them to Him, are explained and fulfilled in this section.

- 1C An overview 6:1--10:11
It appears to this writer that this section is the first of two basic views of the tribulation. This conclusion is based upon two lines of reasoning: first, the seals and trumpets (found in chapters six and eight and nine, respectively) appear to be arranged in a chronological order and to lead up to the very end of the tribulation period. Second, the phrase in 10:11 "you must prophesy *again* concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings," seems to intimate that John is being prepared for a second view of the tribulation period. These chapters contain two chronological sections involving the seal and trumpet judgments and two interludes which are chronologically unrelated to the context.
- 1D The Seal Judgments 6:1-17
The seal judgments occur as the lamb opens each of the seven seals of the scroll which he received in chapter five. Thus, the judgments are prerequisite to the Lamb's opening the scroll and assuming full possession of the earth. The form of the seals, like that of the trumpets, involves two groupings of judgments, four and then three. The relationship of the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments is debated; however, this writer views the seven bowls as the seventh trumpet and the seven trumpets as the seventh seal. Based upon a correlation with the chronology of Matthew 24 it would appear that the seals are spread out in the first half of the tribulation.
- 2D Interlude: the redeemed of the tribulation 7:1-17
The last verse of the previous section raises a question, ". . . the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?" (6:17), to which this chapter is the answer. The verses explain the sovereign work of God in saving and sealing his people from the destruction of the tribulation. The two groups discussed here are 144,000 Jewish believers (7:1-8); and the multitude of Gentiles (7:9-17). The 144,000 are saved and sealed from harm so that they bear a constant witness to God throughout the period. The Gentiles, on the other hand, are saved but not necessarily preserved from martyrdom. Their numbers, however, stand as a powerful testimony to the saving grace of God which is present during the tribulation.
- 3D The six trumpet judgments 8:1-9:21
The trumpet judgments are introduced with the opening of the seventh seal which is attended by silence in heaven. The reason for the silence presumably is the shock of the heavenly host upon seeing not the final single seal judgment but rather another seven judgments which are worse than the first. In 8:3-5 the prayers of the saints introduced under the figure of incense which arises to the throne of God. The comforting implication seems to be that as horrible as the judgments may be, they are exactly what is necessary for God to answer the prayers of righteous saints down through the ages of "Thy Kingdom come!" The final verses of this section (9:20-21) records the sad result that, "The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent . . ." God's clear intention in all of these judgments is not simply to punish but to correct and to bring to repentance all of those who would reject Him.
- As with the seals, the trumpet judgments are grouped in two divisions of four and then three. The first four judgments are alike in that they all involve an attack upon some physical or geographical aspect of the earth or heaven. The last three trumpet judgments more directly affect people and are all called "woes." The fifth judgment of horrible locust creatures (9:1-12) involves supernatural critters of devastating ability to inflict pain upon only unbelievers. The next judgment (9:13-21), however, features creatures which have the additional ability to inflict not only pain, but also death.
- 4D Interlude: The little scroll 10:1-11
A huge angel descends from heaven clothed in a cloud and a rainbow with a little scroll in his hand. This scroll is different from the one in chapter five as it contains a message which, like Ezekiel's scroll, is both bitter and sweet. The purpose of this vision and chapter seems to be to conclude the first overview of the book (1C) and to prepare the writer and reader for a second view. As God has outlined the tribulation period and has now come to its chronological end (10:7), it is a bittersweet time. The message that the kingdom will soon be established is a sweet one; the message that more judgments are yet to be revealed and must be accomplished is a bitter one. Because after the destruction of the tribulation period God will not bring great

judgment on the world again, the angel is clothed in a rainbow.

- 2C A second view 11:1--19:21
Having covered the tribulation period from beginning to end once, this section covers the same period from a more topical perspective. It introduces several of the major actors in the drama: Israel, Satan, the two witnesses, the Antichrist and his false prophet and the coming Savior/King, Jesus Christ.
- 1D Interlude: The two witnesses 11:1-19
These two witnesses who serve to herald the truth of the Gospel for the first half of the tribulation period are able to perform miracles like those of Moses and Elijah. They are the mainstay of God's witness to the world while they are alive on the earth (11:4; cf. Zechariah 4:3-14). They are killed by the Antichrist at the halfway point of the tribulation. Then, after three days, in miraculous power and in obvious emulation of God's approving work of Calvary, God will resuscitate the two witnesses from the dead and cause them to ascend into heaven. It is probably from the witness of these two that the 144,000 are brought to salvation.
- 2D Seventh trumpet 11:15-19
Chronological flow is very difficult to determine in this book, but it seems as though when the seventh trumpet sounds that the establishment of the kingdom is imminent (12:15). This section looks forward to that time of ushering in international righteousness and also of justice for the wicked. It is perhaps this latter thought which ties this section (2D) to its context (1D).
- 3D Interlude: The woman and the dragon 12:1-17
This section highlights the roles of two of the key players in the conflict: Israel and Satan. The first six verses give an historical overview of the conflict between Satan and the seed of the woman from Satan's original rebellion up through the end of the tribulation. The rest of the chapter deals with a particularly critical point in the conflict: Satan's expulsion from heaven at the midpoint of the tribulation. This event causes rejoicing in heaven as another battle in the war with Satan is won, yet it also is a cause for concern for earth dwellers because of Satan's wrath *because he knows that his time is short* (12:12).
- 4D Interlude: The unholy alliance 13:1-18
After the discussion above (3D) about the conflict between Israel and Satan, the subject turns to the human instruments of Satan on the earth during the tribulation period. Those two instruments are the beast out of the sea, (13:1b-10), i.e., the Antichrist, and the beast out of the earth, (13:11-18), i.e., his false prophet. The dragon (13:1a) in this chapter is, of course, Satan himself.
- The Antichrist is presented here as the epitome and sum of all Gentile world powers which are opposed to God. It is the interpretation of this writer that this chapter along with 17:8 describes the death of the Antichrist, his resuscitation and his universal reign in supernatural power during the second half of the tribulation (13:5-8).
- The beast out of the earth is less ostentatious than the first beast. His goal is to focus glory on the Antichrist. The summarization of the section (13:18) seems to indicate that these three, the dragon, the Antichrist and the false prophet comprise a counterfeit and a finite trinity.
- 5D Interlude: Various announcements 14:1-20
This interlude involves both good news and news of greater horror. The positive news concerns the survival and the testimony of the 144,000 witnesses. The second portion of news involves three angels who announce their messages for all the world to hear. The message to be understood is that the ones who really receive God's favor will not be those who save their lives but who lose them for His sake (14:13).
- 6D The bowl judgments 15:1--16:21
These two chapters describe the climactic bowl judgments. While these bear resemblance to many of the seal and trumpet judgments, the bowls are generally more

intense, if not total, in their destruction. These bowls come in answer to the prayers of tribulation martyrs. The only judgment which stands out from the rest is the sixth which actually has no inherently destructive action but contributes to the greatest destructive event of all, Armageddon. The actual point of the trumpet is to supernaturally deceive and allure all kings of the earth to the battleground of Armageddon.

- 7D Interlude: Two kinds of worldwide opposition destroyed 17:1--18:24
This interlude is again unrelated chronologically to its context. It records the destruction of the two main fronts of worldwide opposition: religious apostasy and commercialism. The first form of opposition, religious Babylon contributes to the rise of Antichrist and seems to be the main source of persecution against God's people in the first half of the tribulation. At the midpoint, however, Antichrist and his coalition will destroy her after she has outlived her usefulness.

The second form of worldwide opposition (appropriately named Babylon) is commercial. At the destruction of the capital city of commercialism the merchants of the sea mourn because of their loss of profit. This secular system was also an important platform for persecution of God's people, "In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints . . ." (18:24).

- 8D The Second coming of Christ 19:1-21
The second coming of Christ is the climax to the tribulation period. The chapter begins with praise in anticipation of his coming, then describes his advent and finally covers the destruction of enemy forces which have congregated at Armageddon. The beast and false prophet are immediately thrown in to the lake of fire while the rest are simply killed (19:21).

- 3B The Millennium 20:1-15
This chapter flows chronologically covering the 1000 years of the millennial kingdom. The first recorded event is the binding of Satan followed by the resurrection of tribulation saints. Towards the end of the period Satan is loosed for a short time when he will once again incite world wide rebellion demonstrating that even in a perfect environment the sinful nature will erupt and oppose God. Satan is then summarily disposed of in the lake of fire.

- 4B The Eternal State 21:1-22:5
The focus of this section is the descent of the New Jerusalem to the earth. It represents the dwelling place of the redeemed and the redeemed as it settles on the earth. Thus heaven on earth will be a reality and God will finally dwell with man. No temple will be there because God himself will dwell with man. The city itself is a perfect melding of God's people in the Old Testament and in the New, "On the gates were written the names of the twelve *tribes of Israel*. . . . The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the *twelve apostles of the Lamb*" (21:12, 14). Thus, the two programs which have been separate will be perfectly united in eternity. This is a fitting conclusion which seems to reflect well the message of the book. The delights of the New Jerusalem involve fullness of life and certainly, eternal life. The tree of life, from the garden of Eden will be found in the New Jerusalem to fulfill its original purpose. Finally, God's design for Adam and Eve will be fully realized.

- 1E EPILOGUE 22:7-21
The final words of the book serve to comfort, warn and bless God's people. The invitation to come is given to those who are still far from God, which is followed by a warning not to tamper with the words of the book. The book closes on the promise that Jesus will come soon.

