

REVELATION: *Behold I Come Quickly*

The Lion and the Lamb

Revelation belongs to a class of biblical writings known as apocalyptic. It is the only one of its kind in the New Testament. Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah are apocalyptic writings in the Old Testament. This type of literature has the following characteristics:

- (1) There is an extensive use of symbols and visions.
- (2) God's people are portrayed as suffering unjustly.
- (3) Its contents includes future events.
- (4) God is always seen saving His people at the end of time.

AUTHOR: The writer gives his name as John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). We believe this John to be the same one who wrote the Gospel and the three Epistles. Tradition identifies him as John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee. Justin Martyr, a disciple of Polycarp, wrote about A.D. 140-160 that John the Apostle was the author of Revelation. This is strong early testimony for the authorship since Polycarp was himself a disciple of John. Justin's information came from the man who knew the facts personally. It appears that the second century tradition unanimously favored John the Apostle as the author. Some of the grammatical and syntactical differences between Revelation and the other books attributed to John can be explained by the fact that John was living under unusual circumstances in exile on the island of Patmos. There was no one there to help John polish and smooth his Greek grammar. It was an urgent message that John had to communicate to the churches in Asia Minor who were undergoing persecution for their faith. Apparently, John wrote as the visions appeared to him, and without delay. On the other hand, the Gospel and epistles were written in a time when John had more leisure and with possible help of a secretary. Far less convincing is the hypothesis that another John, called "the elder," wrote these books.

DATE: Clearly from the contents of the book this is a time when Christians were being severely persecuted by the Roman government. Believers were being pressured to recant their faith and believe in the cult of emperor worship. The only date that fits all of the conditions during the time of Revelation is A.D. 95 or 96. It was a time of great persecution for Christians. They were being crucified, burned alive as torches, thrown to lions, and forced to kill one another as gladiators. There were three cycles of persecution during the second half of the first century. Nero's was the first, in the middle sixties. Domitian's was the second, between A.D. 84 and 96, and Trajan's was the last, in the late nineties. The Roman emperor, Domitian (A.D. 81-96), had claimed divinity and demanded that his subjects worship him. When the Christians refused, they were accused of disloyalty to the state. Many were tortured and slain. Others were imprisoned. Many had their faith severely tested. Earlier dates, i.e. A.D. 67-68 during Nero's reign, do not provide the kind of background reflected in this book. Moreover, all attempts to show that John the Apostle died earlier than A.D. 96 have failed.

PLACE OF WRITING: John was being held prisoner on the island of Patmos, 35 miles off the coast of Asia Minor when he received these visions of the resurrected and exalted Christ (1:9).

RECIPIENTS: The first readers of Revelation were the "seven churches of Asia" (1:4). Thirty years earlier these were vibrant healthy churches that had received letters from Peter and Paul.

PURPOSE: The book of Revelation was written to give encouragement and assurance to persecuted and troubled Christians. It answered haunting questions like, where is Christ, and what is going to happen to the churches? This book encourages believers to take a strong stand amid persecution and warns them against turning away from Christ. It is also a clear clarion warning to unbelievers of the coming judgment of God on sin and unbelief. The exhortation to Christians is to "shape up."

THEME: This is the unveiling of the character and work of Jesus Christ in the present and the future (1:1). Christ is the center of the entire book. At the opening chapter He is seen in His risen glory (chap. 1) directing His church (chaps.

2-3). He is the slain and risen lamb of God to whom all worship is directed (chaps. 4-5). The wrath of the Lamb upon the earth during the period of tribulation (chaps. 6-19), and the return of Christ to this earth (19:11- 21), His reign of a thousand years (chap. 20) and the worship of Him in the new heaven and new earth (chaps. 21-22) is dramatically portrayed. The message of Revelation is one of victory. Jesus Christ is in control of all that is happening in this universe. The church will triumph through Him. Time as we know it will end and Christ will come and the final stages of the kingdom will be unveiled. This is a central truth in Revelation.

KEY VERSE: 1:7. The book opens and closes with phrases and ideas centered around the words of Jesus, "I am coming soon" (1:1-8; 22:12-21).

KEY WORDS: lamb (29 times) and throne (44 times). The sacrificial lamb of God and the sovereignty of God dominates the letter.

OUTLINE: An excellent outline of the book is indicated in 1:19. "What you have seen" (1:9-20), "what is now" (2:1-3:22), and "what will take place later" (4:1-22:5).

MILLENNIUM: The millennial reign of Christ provides an opportunity for Christ to openly manifest His kingdom in world history. The millennium will provide an actual demonstration of the truthfulness of the divine witness borne by Christ and His followers during their life on earth. It will be a time of the fulfillment of all God's covenant promises to His people.

Christ is now reigning as Lord and King, but His reign is veiled, unseen, and unrecognized by the world. The glory that is now His is known only by people of faith. The millennial kingdom will be the age of the manifestation of Christ's glory. It will be the time when the sovereignty—which He now possesses but does not openly manifest and which He will turn over to the Father in the age to come—will be displayed in the world. The Scriptures encourage us to believe that on this earth, where He was rejected and crucified, Jesus will ultimately receive universal and joyful recognition as Lord and King. Here will be the obvious proof of the messianic kingdom and proof of the divine truthfulness of the word given to the believer and the testimony of the "true witness," Jesus Christ.

The millennium will be a display of personal righteousness. It is not enough for Christ to rule in the hearts of saints. Christ's rule must also be manifested in the transformation of political and social processes as we now know them.

INTERPRETATION: The best approach to this beautiful book is through its internal structure. The people who read it for the first time it must have been sufficiently plain for them to comprehend its main message, even though details would have to be studied and absorbed gradually. The question is how would they have understood it? Revelation does not have to be "a frustrating puzzle" or "the happy hunting ground of fanatics."

Title: Introduction to Revelation

Series: A Look at the Book

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