

How To Study Revelation

Week 1: Foundations for Understanding

Why we study Revelation

- The reasons to wrestle through Revelation (the Bible's most complicated text)
 - To pursue a deeper relationship with and knowledge of Jesus as our Savior and Lord (Rev 1:1, Rev 22).
 - A blessing is promised for those who read or listen to Revelation (Rev 1:3).
 - It is the culmination of the Biblical arc of creation's redemption to unity with God.
 - To receive hope amid difficult circumstances (Rev 1:8, 5:2-5).
 - To strengthen the Kingdom of God.
- The wrong reasons to study Revelation (though they sometimes feel natural).
 - To decipher the date of the end of the world or the return of Christ (Acts 6:1-11, Matthew 24:36-44).
 - Out of fear-driven theology (fear of missing the rapture, accidentally getting the mark of the beast, or not being able to identify the anti-christ).
 - To use the book as a cipher to unlock secret knowledge in other parts of the Bible.

Authorship and Date (Rev 1:4, 9-11)

- John the Disciple of Jesus
 - The traditional view states that John the Apostle wrote Revelation. This is supported by examining thematic similarities between Revelation and The Gospel of John.
 - Apostolic authorship is the predominant historical viewpoint.
- John the Elder
 - The non-traditional view states that it was not John the Apostle but rather a different man known as John the Elder who wrote Revelation. John the Elder was a leader at the church of Ephesus, the closes of the seven churches to Patmos.
 - The author never claims to be an apostle (Gal 1:1, 1 Peter 1:1).

- “Eugene Peterson rightly points out that in one sense, his identity is clear. In addition to our recognition of John as witness and prophet, Peterson rightly calls him a theologian, poet, and pastor who is ‘God-intoxicated, God-possessed, God-articulate.’”¹
 - Questions of authorship began as early as the third century.
 - 96-96 AD.
 - During the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96).
 - This indicates that the letter is written to churches that lived through the Nero Persecution.

Types of Literature – Hybrid Text

- Apocalyptic Literature
 - Apocalyptic >> Apocalypse >> ἀποκάλυψις (apokolypsis) (Rev 1:1)
 - What does apocalypse mean?
 - Uncover or reveal
 - Apocalypses occur during visions or dreams (altered states of consciousness) and are cosmic glimpses that relate to specific individuals or groups.
 - “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed (apokolypto) from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” – Romans 1:17
 - Other Examples of Apocalyptic Literature
 - The dreams of (or interpreted by) Joseph (Gen 37, 40, 41).
 - Much of the Book of Daniel and Ezekiel
 - Isaiah 6 – Commissioning of Isaiah
 - Acts 9 – Conversion of Saul
 - Understanding Apocalyptic Literature
 - Requires an understanding of the rest of the Bible that precedes it.
 - It uses visions, symbols, numbers, and ancient myths to convey its message. The language of the Literature is primarily pictorial, symbolic language to evoke powerful, emotive language, at times more akin to poetry than to prose.

¹ Gorman, Michael J.. Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation (p. 46). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.

- It is narrative but not always linear.
 - Lends itself to misinterpretation.
 - Conclusion: Revelation is Apocalyptic Literature drawing heavily from other books of the Bible to reveal Jesus as the eternal victor and source of hope for our current circumstances and eternity.
- Prophetic
 - Five different times, Revelation explicitly calls itself a work of prophecy, and it also identifies John's actions as prophecy (Rev 1:3; 10:11; 19:10; 22:6-10, 18, 19).
 - Understanding Prophetic Literature –
 - Two Types of Prophecy
 - Foretelling – bringing enlightenment of events yet to occur (Isaiah 53)
 - Forthtelling – bringing new enlightenment to current circumstances (Jonah 1:1-2)
 - Prophecy and prophetic Literature is speaking words of comfort and/or challenge, on behalf of God, to the people of God first and foremost in their historical situation.
 - Revelation contains both types of prophecy (Rev 2-3, 22).
 - Conclusion: Revelation is a prophetic text written to the churches of the first century to comfort and challenge believers in their specific context and to look ahead to the future hope in the return of Christ. Both prophetic types apply to contemporary believers as we strive to be more like Christ and await his return.
- Circular Letter
 - It was written to the churches (plural) of Asian minor (Rev 1:4, 11).
 - Specific instructions were given that the letter was to be read aloud to assembled Churches (Rev 1:3).
 - “He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says the Churches.” (Rev 2-3).
 - We see an introduction and conclusions similar to other NT epistles (Rev 1:4-5, Gal 1:1-3).
 - Understanding the Circular Letter Genre
 - Much of the NT is made up of Circular Letters (Epistles)
 - They were written to specific and broad audiences (often at the same time).

- They were copied and circulated to different churches within the first century as sources of instruction, encouragement, hope, and personal affection.
 - To be considered for the Canon (Bible), they had to be of apostolic origin or close connection.
- Liturgical Literature (call to worship)
 - Liturgies within the Revelation
 - Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come. . . . You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will, they existed and were created. (Rev 4:8b, 11).
 - Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen (Rev 7:12).
 - Additional (Rev 5:9-12, 11:17-18, 15:2-4).
 - Historical and Contemporary Liturgies (worship)
 - Crown Him With Many Crowns
 - “Crown Him with many Crowns, the lamb upon the throne.” (Rev 5)
 - Handel’s Messiah
 - “Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. (Rev 19:6) The Kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. (Rev 11:1) King of kings and Lord of lords. Hallelujah!” (Rev 19:16).
 - Agnus Dei – Michael W. Smith
 - Alleluia Alleluia
For our Lord God Almighty reigns
Alleluia Alleluia
For our Lord God Almighty reigns
Alleluia Holy Holy
Are You, Lord God Almighty
Worthy is the Lamb
Worthy is the Lamb
You are Holy” (Rev 4-5).
 - Revolution – Kirk Franklin

- “Book of Revelation Chapter 7, verses 16 and 17.
[Yes, sir!] You shall hunger no more, neither shall you
thirst anymore. [Preach Preacher!] For God shall
wipe away [Yes sir!] Ever tear from their eye [Yes sir!]
Get ready! For the Revolution!”
- Conclusion: Revelation is a work of worship to God that gives
instruction and insight on how we can worship God.