

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION – PART 1

Revelation chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

God's promise:

Revelation 1:3, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”

Overview of Revelation, courtesy of The Bible Project:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/revelation/#overview>

1. AUTHORSHIP

Jesus (1:4)

John: the prophet (22:9)

... who the early church (largely) understood to be John the Evangelist (different style of Greek, but common themes e.g. Jesus as Lamb and as Word; witnessing)

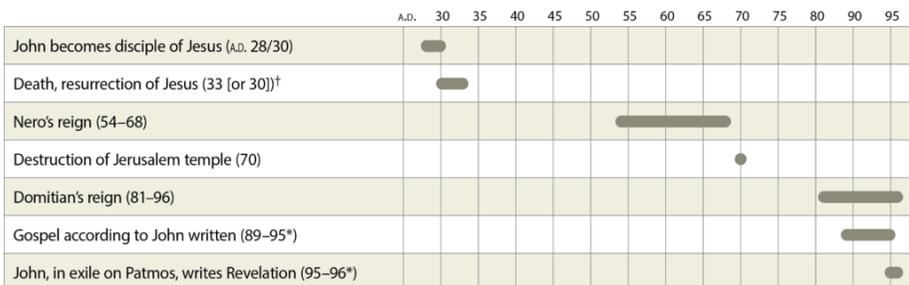
2. DATE

Irenaeus: “John received the Revelation almost in our own time, toward the end of the reign of Domitian” (*Against Heresies* 5.30.3) – i.e. mid-90s.

OR

During the reign of Nero (AD54-68), since no mention is made of the destruction of Jerusalem Temple as being a past event; it occurred in AD70.

“Assuming this later date, events relating to Nero’s reign and Jerusalem’s destruction, both of which would now have been in the past, are woven into John’s visions as portents and prototypes of present pressures and coming traumas in the world’s assault on Christ’s church.” *ESV Study Bible*



* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion, pp. 1809–1810

3. GENRE: WHAT SORT OF BOOK IS REVELATION?

(a) “The revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1) / apocalyptic

“Revelation” = *apokalypsis* = unveiling of unseen heavenly or future realities
Probably referring to Daniel 2 (verses 22, 28, 29, 47), where the LXX uses the same word to speak of the Lord unveiling a spiritual meaning to Daniel.

Revelation – like parts of Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah – contains “apocalyptic literature.”

- ➔ Visions of God’s *heavenly rule* (not necessarily about the End – so don’t assume automatically that Revelation is about the End).
- ➔ Often uses symbolism (so allow the OT to interpret the symbols; don’t assume a literal interpretation).

(b) “this prophecy” (1:3)

A “prophecy” (1:3, 22:7,10,18-19)... given by God to John who passes on whatever he sees or hears (1:11,19)

Not only description of events... but also calls God’s people to faithfulness, repentance and perseverance = John is a classic prophet in the OT tradition

Knows that all the oracles of the OT prophets are about to be finally fulfilled = the last of the prophets.

(c) “John to the seven churches that are in Asia” (1:4)

Specific recipients... standard beginning and ending for a NT letter... to seven selected Asian churches

(See map – from ESV Study Bible)

Genre: an interim conclusion

Revelation = *an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter.*



4. HOW SHOULD WE STUDY REVELATION?

(a) Understand the Old Testament connections

** get a Bible with decent marginal cross references **

(b) Let the Bible interpret Revelation's symbolism

(c) Understand Revelation's structure and patterns

(d) Work hard... and pray

Follow Revelation's us clear interpretive comments (See 1:20, 4:5, 5:6,8, 7:13-14, 11:3-4, 14:3-4, 16:13-14, 17:9,10,11,12,15,16,18, 19:8, 20:4-5,14).

"mystery" (1:20, 17:5,7)... "spiritually" (11:8) = we need God to reveal meaning.

"wisdom" is needed (13:18, 17:9).

See 2 Timothy 2:7, "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything."

5. WHAT WILL REVELATION TEACH US?

Maybe not what we want!... certainly not a futurology!

3 main theological messages (G.K. Beale – see "Help me teach the Bible: Revelation"
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/revelation/#teaching-preaching>)

(a) Willingness to suffer for Christ is the key to victory

14:4, "It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes."

The Lion... is the slain Lamb (5:5,6)... who conquered through the Cross... and so too with us... in "the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus."

(b) The sovereignty of God in human history

High... and deeply personal. The Lord is in control... even of Satan, evil and pain... at the heart of it all = the ruling throne of God (chs 4-5)

(c) The new creation as fulfilment of biblical prophecy

RESOURCES ON REVELATION

- *ESV Study Bible*: notes and introduction [NB. The introduction is available online at The Gospel Coalition website: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/revelation/#overview>]
- John Richardson, *Revelation Unwrapped* (82 page booklet)
- G.K.Beale, "Help me teach the Bible: Revelation" (1 hour interview with Nancy Guthrie – tips for Bibleteachers – at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/revelation/#teaching-preaching>)
- Leon Morris, *Revelation* (256 pages; Tyndale New Testament Commentary series)
- G.K. Beale, *The book of Revelation: a shorter exegetical commentary* (NB. Beale's "shorter" commentary is still 500 pages.... but it's smaller than his 1,300 page classic!)