

The Book Of REVELATION

INTRODUCTION

The name of the book. It is definitely not "The Revelation of St. John the Divine" (AV). Better is "The Revelation of John." Best is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (cf. 1:1).

Authorship. The author of the book is John, the son of Zebedee, author of the Gospel of John and I, II, and III John (cf. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). Donald Guthrie (*New Testament Introduction*, p. 933) has stated: "... There are few books in the New Testament with stronger early attestation." Apostolic authorship was questioned by Dionysius, Eusebius of Caesarea, the Council of Laodicea (ca. A.D. 360), and the Peshitta Version (early fifth century).

1. *Arguments for apostolic authorship are:*

a. *External evidence.* Those who witnessed to belief in apostolic authorship in the second and early third centuries were Justin, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, and Hippolytus.

b. *Internal evidence.*

(1). He was known by the name John to the seven churches of Asia, and knew the activities of each church.

(2). He writes with authority, expecting the churches to accept what he has written as a message from God.

(3). His book, belonging to the style of apocalypse, is different from the noncanonical Jewish types. It is not attributed to an ancient worthy like Enoch or Baruch.

(4). The writer is conscious of divine inspiration (1:1, 11, 19; 10:10; 22:6-9, 18ff.).

(5). Similarities of thought indicate a close relationship between the Apocalypse, the Gospel of John, and I, II, and III John. The affinities are seen in common ideas, theology, and wording (cf. Jn 1:1 with Rev 19:13; Jn 4:10-14ff.; Jn 7:38 with Rev 7:17; 21:6; 22:17; Jn 10:1ff. with Rev 7:17; Jn 4:21 with Rev 21:22). There is a marked use of antithesis in both books, e.g., the power of God and the power of the world; light and darkness; truth and falsehood.

2. *Arguments against apostolic authorship (pro John the Elder) are:*

a. *Linguistic differences.* No one denies there are differences in language between the Revelation and the other works of John. Explanations have been given to account for these:

(1). There was an interval of a score of years between the gospel and the Revelation. However, different grammatical constructions appear by choice.

(2). Revelation differs from the gospel because as prophecy it follows Old Testament patterns.

(3). There is no proof for the use of amanuenses. Guthrie (op. cit., p. 942): "It should be noted, incidentally, that in spite of linguistic and grammatical differences the Apocalypse has a closer affinity to the Greek of the other Johannine books than to any other New Testament books."

b. *There are no apostolic claims.* Since John's apostleship was not disputed (unlike Paul), there was no need to stress his office.

c. *Non-johannine features.* The doctrines of God, Christ, the Spirit, and future things are said to be different from the gospel. Differences do not indicate incompatibility. There is progress in doctrine and necessary additions to doctrine already revealed.

d. *The conflicting traditions of the apostle's death.* One holds that death occurred in his old age at Ephesus and another earlier at the time of martyrdom of James (Acts 12). The first is the stronger and more reliable tradition.

As to authorship by a John the Elder, there is no solid evidence that such a person ever lived. The view that the author was John the prophet is no more tenable than the position just given.

Place and date of writing. Patmos, where the Apostle John was exiled for the faith (1:9). Patmos, a small rocky island in the Mediterranean Sea, is about thirty-five miles southwest of Miletus. During the time of the Roman Empire, it was used as a place of banishment. Because of John's exile here, the island was esteemed during subsequent times, although it was depopulated by pirates.

The date of the book is ca. A.D. 95/96 in the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian, which is the most generally accepted view. Most authorities feel the background of persecutions (1:9; 2:10, 13; 3:10; 6:9; 18:24) best fits the reign of Domitian (A.D. 51-96). The date in the reign of Nero (A.D. 37-68) has little to commend it.

Canonicity. A canonical book is one which carries divine authority and is normative for Christian belief and behavior. Revelation was early considered as part of the canon, but not all were persuaded. Justin, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus, Tertullian, among others, accepted the book as the work of the Apostle John. On the other hand, the Eastern Church expressed doubts on the question and did not accord the Revelation canonicity until the fourth century. Luther, Zwingli, and Erasmus did consider it apostolic; Calvin did not address the question. But in the light of uniform ancient tradition, the book must be accorded canonical status (H. C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 318-319).

Destination. The indicated destination of the book, as given in chapters 1-3, was certain churches in Asia, specifically, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. But unquestionably, it was intended for other churches of that day and the church universal of all ages. The promise of blessing (1:3) cannot be restricted.

Place in the canon. It is in every sense of the word the capstone of the Bible, and its significance cannot be overestimated. It is indeed the grand consummation of all God's earthly and heavenly plans and the supreme vindication of Christ's person and work.

Use of the Old Testament. The Apostle John,

steeped in Old Testament truth, drew his concepts and symbols from Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah, as well as Exodus, Jeremiah, and Joel (D. Guthrie, op. cit., pp. 964-967). Although the apocalypse does not quote directly, its four hundred four verses contain about five hundred fifty references to the Old Testament (B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *Greek New Testament*, pp. 184ff.).

Interpretation. There are four main interpretive approaches to the book:

1. The Historical Method. This view claims the book covers the entire history of the church, picturing the antagonism of the forces of evil in the world against the church.

2. The Praeterist. This approach sees the greater part of the prophecies as fulfilled in the past, especially in the confrontation of the church with the Roman Empire. The victory of the church is foretold and assured.

3. The Spiritual. This method of interpretation holds that the book manifests the ultimate and permanent triumph of truth over error.

4. The Futurist Approach. This approach maintains that from chapter 4 on all is predictive (1:3, 19).

Purpose of the book. The book exhibits a threefold purpose:

1. To encourage believers. In the times of the Roman persecutions of the early church this book aimed to assure believers of the final victory of Christ.

2. To enlarge upon and add to the Old Testament. This book explained prophetic truth, especially in the area of the consummation of human history.

3. To present Christ as He enters His purchased possession. The Revelation is a vivid unveiling of the Lord Jesus Christ throughout creation.

Style of the book. It is a message in symbolic language; e.g., "signified," i.e., conveyed the message by sins (1:1). The book can only be properly understood in light of the scores of symbols and figures from the Old Testament.

Characteristics. The book is an apocalypse, i.e., an unveiling or disclosure. This type of literature is found in Isaiah 24-27, 65, 66; Joel 2:1-11, 28-32; Zechariah 9-14; and especially in Daniel. There are certain general characteristics of apocalypse which distinguish this literature from prophecy in general. Prophecy and apocalyptic differ as to content. The predictive element in prophecy is more prominent in apocalyptic, covers longer periods of time, and is more comprehensive in its view of the world. Both

prophecy and apocalypse tell of the coming of the Messiah, but in the latter it has a broader reference. In prophecy, the rule of Messiah is mainly related to Israel; in apocalypse, it is seen in relation to the dominant powers of the world (cf. Dan 7:13, 14; Rev 11:15). The prophet as a preacher of righteousness used prediction as a guarantee of his divine mission or as a display of the natural result of rebellion against God. The apocalypticist assigns great importance to prediction.

Prophecy and apocalyptic differ as to form. Prophecy uses visions; but they are implied, rather than described. In apocalyptic the vision is the vehicle whereby the prediction is presented. In prophetic visions the symbols used are natural, e.g., the bones of Ezekiel 37. The visions of apocalyptic are arbitrary, e.g., the horns of the goat of Daniel 8. They have no basis in nature. Whereas the prophets wrote in a style that bordered on poetry, the apocalypticists always used prose.

Theme. The glorious theme of the book is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as He enters upon His purchased possession. Specifically, He is revealed in representative chapters as follows:

1. Ch. 1—The medium of God's revelation (vss. 1, 5).
2. Ch. 2—The coming Ruler of the nations (vs. 27).
3. Ch. 5—The Lion of the tribe of Judah (vs. 5)—The slain Lamb (vs. 6).
4. Ch. 7—The Lamb the Shepherd (vs. 17).
5. Ch. 14—The Lamb on Mount Zion (vs. 1).
6. Ch. 18—The Judge of Babylon (vs. 8).
7. Ch. 19—The Bridegroom (vss. 7-9)—King of Kings and Lord of Lords (vs. 16).
8. Ch. 20—The Reigning Christ (vss. 4-6).
9. Ch. 21—The Alpha and the Omega (vs. 6).
10. Ch. 22—The Root and Offspring of David, the Morning Star (vs. 16).

Critical questions. See under *Place and date of writing and Authorship.*

Plan of the book (1:19).

1. The things John saw (ch. 1).
2. The things which are (chs. 2-3).
3. The things which shall occur after these things (chs. 4-22; cf. Dan 9:27).
 - a. Tribulation Period (chs. 4-19).
 - b. Millennial reign (ch. 20).
 - c. Eternal glory (chs. 21-22).

OUTLINE

I. The Vision of the Risen Christ. 1:1-20.

A. The Introduction. 1:1-3.

1. Title of the book. 1:1.
2. Means of communication. 1:1-2.
3. The promised blessing. 1:3.
4. Messages to the seven churches. 1:4-8.
 - a. Salutation from the triune God. 1:4-6.
 - b. The visible return of Christ. 1:7.
 - c. The Author of the messages. 1:8.

B. The Vision on Patmos. 1:9-20.

1. The recipient of the vision. 1:9.
2. The place of the vision. 1:9.
3. The Revealer of the vision. 1:10.
4. The destination of the message. 1:11.
5. The content of the vision. 1:12-16.
 - a. The seven golden candlesticks. 1:12.
 - b. The Son of Man. 1:13.
 - c. His head, hair, and eyes. 1:14.
 - d. His feet and voice. 1:15.

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