

Background

The book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John. (4 times in the book he identifies himself as the author – (1:1, 4, 9 & 22:8)

He also wrote the Gospel of John and three other letters in the N/T which we call 1, 2, & 3 John.

John had a very close relationship with Jesus and has been described as the disciple whom Jesus loved. (5 times John referred to himself this way)

John took over the Pastoral work in Ephesus about 70A.D. This included the Churches in the surrounding area. These are the 7 Churches mentioned in Revelation. These were real Churches at the time.

At the time there was a lot of real persecution amongst Christians, similar to the things that are happening today in Muslim countries.

The Roman emperor Nero started persecuting the Christians and later Domitian became emperor and intensified it. He has been described as a “cold blooded murderer” the worst person you will ever find in the pages of history.

It was Domitian who sent John to the island of Patmos.

Patmos is a small rocky island, 10 miles long and 6 miles wide. It is situated in the Aegean Sea.
(power-point map)

There was a prison camp there where the prisoners laboured in the mines.

It was on this isolated spot that John received the visions that make up the book that we call “Revelation”

(He wrote it about 95 A.D.)

Character of the Book.

The book of Revelation for many Christians and Pastors is a very difficult book to understand. It is also a controversial book where Christians differ in their interpretation. This often influences Pastors not to teach from the book and therefore many congregations have not had it taught from the beginning to the end. There are four main interpretations or ways of seeing the book of Revelation.

1. Preterits' Approach. It comes from the Latin word meaning “past”.

They do not see Revelation as a future prophecy but as a historical record of events in the first century Roman Empire. It is very difficult to justify this approach, especially in Chapters 6-19.

2. Historical View. This is the view that sees Revelation as a record of Church history from N/T times to the present day. Scholars have tried to identify actual situations in history and measure them alongside the book. This view also ignores the fact that the actual book claims to be prophetic.

3. The idealist/Spiritual/Symbolic These students abandon the idea of prophecy completely and use Revelation as a symbolic presentation of the conflict between Jesus and Satan and good and evil.

4. Futurist View This is the view that interprets Revelation as Prophecy.

Chapters 6 – 22 describes events that will happen on earth and in heaven after the Church is raptured.

Only this approach allows the book of Revelation to be interpreted in the literal, grammatical, historical and hermeneutical way that we understand the rest of the Bible. All other ways of looking at Revelation require a different approach than the way that we understand the rest of the Bible.

This is why I take the futurist approach. It is the way that best fits in to the way we see the Bible as a whole. Apart from all that, when the Bible says that the book is a prophecy, I expect it to be just that, prophetic in nature.

I am going to highlight 7 things about Revelation that will give you a little picture about the book. The headings will be on the screen.

1. It is a book with Jesus Christ in the centre

We discover that in the first few words of the book.

(Read v.1&2)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John,² who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

So Jesus Christ is central to the book of Revelation. The book describes Jesus Christ through titles given to Him. There are over 50 of them.

However, let us look at just a few in chapter one. In verse 5 Jesus is described as the “faithful witness” “the first born from the dead” “ruler of the kings of the earth” In v. 8 He is described as the Alpha & Omega (beginning and end) and in verse 18 He is described as the “living one”

If you wanted to put Jesus into an outline of the book it could be done like this.

In Chapters 1 He is the risen Priest King.

In Chapters 2-3 He examines the Churches.

In Chapters 4-5 He receives worship and praise.

In Chapters 6-19 He judges the world and returns in Glory.

In Chapters 20-22 He reigns in Glory and Power.

So the book is all about Jesus

2. It is a book based on the Old Testament Scriptures

It is impossible to understand the book without referring to the scriptures in the O/T.

Out of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 contain references to the O/T. So nearly 75% of the book refers to the O/T.

Therefore, we do need a clear understanding of the books in the O/T that John refers to the most.

These are the Psalms, Daniel, Zechariah, Genesis, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Joel.

As we study Revelation we are not going to do it in isolation from the rest of Bible. We will sometimes refer back to the O/T books.

3. It is a Prophetic Book.

I am going to read three verses that highlight the prophetic nature of the book. I am quoting from the N.K.J. version of the Bible.

(There are others: 19:10, 22:10,18-19)

- a) Chapter 1:3 -“ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy.....
- b) Chapter 10:11 “And he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues (languages), and kings.
- c) Chapter 22:7 “ Behold I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”
(We are promised a blessing if we keep the words of the prophecy of the book.)

4. It is a book that contains Symbols & Numbers

It is not a symbolic book, but it is a book that contains symbols and numbers.

Sometimes the book uses signs and symbols to convey its message.

Some are explained (1:20,4:5) and some are not explained. (4:4, 11:3) Some are explained by referring to O/T parallels.

I will read one of these verses. Rev. 2: v. 7

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

What is the tree of life? Well let us turn back to Genesis 2:9 & 3:22.

Genesis 2:9

⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life *was* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 3:22

²² Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—

This symbolism would be clear to the first century Christians but would not make any sense to the Roman persecutors.

We must keep in mind that symbols speak of reality. In the same way that a flag speaks of the existence of a nation.

(Power point of a Japanese flag)

As well as symbols, numbers do occur often in the book. There is a series of 7's. 7 Churches, 7 seals, 7 Trumpets, 7 Vials, 7 Lampstands etc.

The number 12 appears a lot and multiples of 12 also appear in the book.

12 stars, 12 gates, 12 foundations.

5. Revelation is a sympathetic book

Throughout this book we can see the suffering of God's people and the compassion of heaven for the people of God on this earth.

The Church in Smyrna will face imprisonment. (2:10)

Souls under the altar cry for God's judgement. (6:9-10)

The great harlot (prostitute) has drunk the blood of the saints. (17:6)

In spite of all this, God will judge the world and save His people.

6. Revelation is a Climatic Book

Revelation is the climax of the Bible and shows the fulfilment of the plan and purpose of God.

7. Revelation is a book that is going to bless you

Rev. 1:3

³ Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

Rev. 22:7

⁷ “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

If you know and love Jesus Christ you are in for a blessing. However, if you don't yet know Him you will be in for a hard time and maybe you will be persuaded to Realise Repent and receive Jesus Christ as your own personal saviour.