

Revelation

1) Background

a) Author

- i) John wrote as directed, but it was given by God (Rev. 1:1-2)

b) Date

- i) The prevalent view is that it was written around 94-96 AD, near the end of the reign of Domitian.

(1) Irenaeus is a source used by many who favor the 94-96 AD time of writing. Some acknowledge the ambiguity of what Irenaeus wrote.

(a) I (Marshal Taylor) checked the Greek text preserved by Eusebius and it is ambiguous. The part about "being seen" could be translated in three ways:

(i) Option #1

For it, that is the vision, was seen not very long ago, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.

(ii) Option #2

For it, that is the written book, was seen not very long ago, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.

(iii) Option #3

For he, that is the Apostle John, was seen no very long ago, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.

(iv) So which is it? I have no idea. I just think that it's interesting that the classic Patristic text for proof that John wrote the Apocalypse around A.D. 95 is ambiguous.

(b) Those who hold to the "late date," have Revelation written during the time of Domitian Caesar (AD 95-96). This date is determined by the following statement by Irenaeus (AD 130 to AD 202), as quoted by Eusebius, the church historian, in AD 325: "We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign."

(i) There are things about this statement that need to be noted. First, Irenaeus did not witness this. He referred to Polycarp (who supposedly knew the apostle John). Secondly, the key part — "it is not long since it was seen" — is ambiguous. According to Irenaeus recollection, Polycarp saw "it" sometime in AD 95-96,

during the last part Domitian's reign. Thirdly, we do not know if the "it" Polycarp was referring to was John, the visions he saw, the name of anti-christ, or the book itself and we do not know if he meant that the book was written at that time or not.

Furthermore, it comes to us through three people separated by three centuries. Simply put, this is hear-say.

(ii) This statement, even with all of this uncertainty, is the **only evidence** used to support the "late date" theory. It has been accepted by generations of people without really questioning it or examining it in light of the book itself. The late date has been passed on to us in the same way it was passed on to Eusebius, "...it [was] handed down by tradition..." Tradition is not the way to interpret Scripture.

(c) It appears that Irenaeus' statements, as they were understood, shaped the opinions of Eusebius and Jerome on this question, and this view was passed on to later authors and authorities. It is my belief that it is not good scholarship to accept a dubious statement from the Bishop of Lyons that was orally transmitted to him when he was a young man. This does not appear to be adequate and compelling evidence to cause a person to set aside the overwhelming weight of evidence, both external and internal to the book of Revelation itself, as proof that the Revelation was written during the AD 95 window.

ii) William Albright contends for an earlier date, such as 69 to 79 AD

iii) Jim McGuiggan makes a case for an earlier date, as follows:

(1) Rev. 17:7-14 [7](#) But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. [8](#) The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. [9](#) This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; [10](#) they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. [11](#) As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. [12](#) And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together

with the beast. **13** These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. **14** They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

(2) Rev. 17:10 - they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.

(a) Seven Kings (Roman Emperors)

(i) Five of whom have fallen

1. August – 17 BC to 14 AD (natural death)
2. Tiberius – 14 to 37 AD (natural death)
3. Caligula – 37 to 41 AD (murdered by soldiers)
4. Claudius – 41 to 54 AD (poisoned)
5. Nero – 54 to 68 AD (suicide)

(ii) one is,

6. Vespasian – 69 to 79 AD (natural death)
 - a. Revelation written during this time (one is)

(iii) the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.

7. Titus – 79 to 81 AD (natural death)

(iv) an eighth but it belongs to the seven

8. Domitian – 81 to 96 AD (murdered)

(v) Not counted among seven kings (3 emperors in 1.5 years)

1. Galba – 68 to 69 AD (lynched by soldiers)
2. Vitellius – 69 to 69 AD (lynched by soldiers)
3. Otho – 69 to 69 AD (suicide)
4. Julius Sabinus (Gallic Empire) 70 to 70 AD (executed 79 AD)

(b) Note that Julius Caesar (July 100 BC – 15 March 44 BC) was not an emperor of Rome. He was never so named by the Roman Senate, and his position was assumed by himself without any action by the Roman Senate.

c) Location

i) On the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9)

- (1) I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.



(2)

- ii) Patmos has been called a deserted island which was probably a Roman penitentiary, rocky, and unfit for anything else. That may not be true.
 - iii) It was a small island in the Aegean sea about 50 miles southwest of Ephesus.
 - iv) It was a stopping point for ships sailing from Rome to Ephesus or Smyrna, and it was a stopping point for ships returning to Rome from Ephesus or Smyrna.
 - v) There is external mention of a church on Patmos
 - (1) Laurentius's father-in-law, Myron, offers the Apostle lodging in his house, and soon Myron's house became the first church on the island. St. John healed Apollonides, Myron's son, who was possessed with the devil, and this miracle led to the conversion of both Chrysispe, Myron's daughter, and her husband, the Roman governor (Meinardus 1979:7). (Otto Friedrich August Meinardus was a German Coptologist and pastor (1925–2005) who wrote numerous books and articles about Coptic Christianity in Egypt.)
 - (2)
- d) Audience
- i) Specifically addressed to seven churches in Asia (Rev. 1:4), with a message for Christians then and now.
- 2) Style of Literature
- a) Part apocalyptic literature, part prophecy, part epistle
 - i) Apocalyptic Literature
 - (1) The revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1).

(2) Revelation in Greek is ἀποκάλυψις (apokalupsis) - an unveiling, a revelation, coming from a combination of two Greek words meaning *away cover* – an uncovering.

(a) Anything which was unknown in the past but has now been revealed

(3) Most of Revelation is apocalyptic writing, especially chapters 4-19.

(4) Apocalyptic literature uses signs and symbols extensively.

(a) Often to veil its message to outside readers.

ii) Prophecy

(1) Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy ... (Rev. 1:3).

(2) Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book (Rev. 22:7).

(3) A prophet declares the mind (message) of God, which sometimes predicts the future (foretelling) – and more commonly, *speaks forth* His message for a particular situation. A prophet, then, is someone inspired by God to *foretell* or *tell-forth* (*forthtell*) the Word of God.

iii) Epistle

(1) Revelation 1:4 begins a typical greeting for an epistle (Rev. 1:4-8).

b) Prophecy and letters are familiar to most, but apocalyptic may seem very strange.

i) In modern times, apocalypse has become a synonym for doom and destruction, but that was not the original connotation in John's writing.

ii) Apocalyptic is not to be confused with Apocrypha, which means hidden. Apocrypha is the term given to various uninspired documents written between 200 BC and 100 AD.

(1) Compare use in other N.T. writings:

(a) Romans 2:5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. *Greek for revealed is apokalypseōs.*

(b) Romans 16:25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ... *Greek for revelation is apokalupsis.*

- (c) 1 Peter 1:7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. *Greek for revelation is **apokalypsei**.*
- (d) Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. *Greek for revelation is **apokalypsis**.*
- (2) Apocalyptic literature flourished from about 200 BC to 100 AD. The symbols are not ordinary symbols and may seem strange and grotesque to us, but to people of that time, they were not considered strange or unusual. Apocalyptic language can be found in parts of Ezekiel and much of Daniel, and to a lesser extent in Isaiah, Joel, and Zechariah.
- (a) Gen. 37:9-11 - **9** Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” **10** But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” **11** And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.
- (i) Jacob seemed to have no trouble with the symbols of Joseph’s dream.
- (ii) Without knowing the rest of the story and Jacob’s rebuke, I doubt that I could interpret the symbols.
- (b) Daniel 7:15-16 - **15** “As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. **16** I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things.”
- (i) With God’s help, Daniel had interpreted dreams for Nebuchadnezzar.
- (ii) But the interpretation of this dream caused him to ask one who was standing in the presence of the Ancient of Days.
- (c) Number 12:1-9 - **5** And the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and**

Miriam, and they both came forward. 6 And he said, “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. 7 Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” 9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed.

- (3) Why was the apocalyptic approach used?
 - (a) To conceal the message from political officials.
 - (b) To reveal the message to those who understood the symbols being used.
 - (c) Trying to do the impossible – describe the intervention of God in the affairs of men.
 - (d) Trying to describe the indescribable, say the unsayable.
- (4) The message of Revelation is to assure first-century Christians that they would be victorious, the devil loses, and their oppressor, the Roman Empire, would eventually fall, without the Roman government understanding the message.

3) Approaches of Interpretation

a) Three essential keys to interpreting Revelation

- i) The book had to have meaning when it was written.
 - (1) To suffering Christians, there should be comfort and encouragement toward faithfulness.
 - (2) Ask this question: “What meaning did it have for the persecuted Christians of the first century?”
- ii) The book has to have meaning now.
 - (1) Also ask: “If Revelation is interpreted according to a particular approach, what meaning does it have for those of us living today?”
- iii) The interpretation should be in harmony with other New Testament writings.

b) Four Basic Approaches

i) The Futurist Approach

- (1) The view that most of the Book of Revelation describes events which were in the distant future at the time of writing.

- (a) Even today, most of Revelation describes events still in the future.
- (2) The 1,000 years of Revelation 20 is taken to be a literal 1,000 years.
 - (a) Believe that Jesus will return before the 1,000 years – hence the name “premillennialism”.
 - (b) Believe Jesus will reign in the city of Jerusalem for 1,000 years when he returns.
- (3) There are variations of details, but some common elements include:
 - (a) Jesus came to establish an earthly kingdom, but because the Jews rejected him, he postponed the kingdom and established the church instead.
 - (b) The “church age” is a temporary measure until Jesus returns to establish an earthly kingdom.
 - (c) Before the 1,000-year reign, there will be seven years of tribulation and a rapture of believers will occur at some time during that seven years.
 - (d) At the end of 1,000 years Satan will be loosed for a “little season”, and then the Judgment will occur and eternity will begin.
 - (e) Premillennialism outlines the Book of Revelation as follows:
 - (i) Chapters 1-3: events that have occur during the 2,000 years of the existence of the church.
 - (ii) Chapters 4-19: give details of the seven-year period of tribulation.
 - (iii) Chapter 20: the 1,000-year reign, the “little season”, and the Day of Judgment.
 - (iv) Chapters 21-22: give details of heaven where the righteous will live eternally.
- (4) Strengths of the Futurist Approach
 - (a) They generally preach “Repent! Jesus is coming soon!”
 - (b) A *claimed* strength is that they take the book of Revelation literally.
- (5) Weaknesses of the Futurist Approach
 - (a) Inconsistent with the statement made by John that the events described were to come to pass soon.
 - (b) Little or no message for the persecuted Christians of the first century.
 - (c) Deprecates the church which Jesus purchased with his own blood.

- (d) Requires a reinterpretation of many scriptures to agree with the literal interpretation of Revelation.
- (e) Discounts the interpretation of symbols explained to John by angels throughout the book.

ii) The Continuous-Historical Approach

- (1) The view that the Book of Revelation gives a detailed blueprint of history, especially the history of the church, from the first century to the end of the world.
- (2) A view formerly held by most Protestant commentators.
- (3) Many symbols were interpreted to apply to Roman Catholicism and the pope.
- (4) Strengths of the Continuous-Historical Approach
 - (a) Has appealed to those who oppose Catholicism.
 - (b) It has a message for today: “The whole of history is under control of God.”
- (5) Weaknesses of the Continuous- Historical Approach
 - (a) Leads to speculation in relating historical events to various sections of Revelation.
 - (i) Protestants use this approach to apply mostly to Catholicism and the pope.
 - (ii) Catholics use this approach to apply to Martin Luther and the reformers.
 - (b) It is often used in attempts to calculate when Jesus will return.
 - (i) There are records of forty-six predictions to date, none of which has occurred.
 - (ii) There are at least six predictions of dates within the next 40 years.
 - (c) It has little or no message for the persecuted Christians of the first century since it claims that most of Revelation tells of events far-removed from the first century.

iii) The Preterist Approach

- (1) “Preterist” comes for a latin word meaning “beyond” or “past”. Therefore, most of the book tells what happened in the early church – in our past.
- (2) Strengths of the Preterist Approach

- (a) It is rooted in the historical situation of the first century.
- (b) It had a strong message for Christians in the first century.
 - (i) Rome may look invincible, but God is still in control and you will be vindicated.
- (c) It seems to harmonize Revelation with the rest of the New Testament rather than violate or reinterpret scripture.
- (d) It does not have to be revised from time to time to match current events in world history.
- (3) Weaknesses of the Preterist Approach
 - (a) In applying everything specifically, it leaves a very limited message for Christians today.
 - (b) It seems to ignore obvious teaching in Revelation on the end times, or “last things”.

iv) The Symbolic Approach

- (1) The view that the Book of Revelation is speaking symbolically about the conflict between good and evil in *every* age, a conflict in which good will ultimately triumph
- (2) Strengths of the Symbolic Approach
 - (a) It avoids the speculation of application to specific time, place, and people.
 - (b) It has a message for every time, first century through the present time: “The Lord reigns! Be strong in the Lord! His cause will triumph!”
- (3) Weaknesses of the Symbolic Approach
 - (a) Lack of emphasis on the spiritual and political situation of the time when Revelation was written.
 - (b) May not address the specific historical references which are in the book, especially in Chapter 17.

v) The “Select-Wisely” Approach

- (1) Tries to select the best aspects of the several different approaches.

c) Which Approach is Best?

- i) Recognize that all of the various approaches seem to have one basic conclusion: “If we remain faithful to God, we will triumph with Him!”
- ii) A “Select-Wisely” combination of Preterist and Symbolic views will serve well.

- iii) Avoid the wild speculation and predictions of the unpredictable which are found in some approaches.

4) Signs and Symbols

- a) The Book of Revelation conveys most of its message through symbols, which must be interpreted.
 - i) As a general rule, a passage of scripture is to be taken as literal unless:
 - (1) It involves an impossibility or absurdity
 - (2) It involves a contradiction or inconsistency
 - (3) It involves an immoral conclusion
 - (4) The context demands a figurative use
 - (5) The inspired writer says a figure of speech is involved
 - (6) Common sense tells us that figurative language is being used.
 - ii) Revelation, presented in pictorial form, reverses the general rule, and one must assume that symbols are to be taken figuratively unless there is good reason to regard them as literal.
- b) In many instances, other scripture will help us to understand the symbols.
 - i) Some symbols will be explained within Revelation.
 - ii) More than 400 references to the Old Testament can be found in Revelation.
 - iii) A table of symbols and their explanation will be included at the end of this introduction.

5) The Message of Revelation

- a) The theme of Revelation is *victory*.
 - i) Some form of the word *victory* is found 17 times in the 22 chapters.

2:7, 11, 17, 26	12:11
3:5, 12, 21 (2)	13:17
5:5	15:2
6:2 (2)	17:14
11:7	21:7

- b) The Three-Part Message of Revelation
 - i) The conflict between good and evil.
 - ii) The apparent defeat of good.
 - iii) The ultimate victory of good.

iv) The Holy Spirit repeated this message over and over, at least seven times in the Book of Revelation.

(1) With each recurrence, the same period and the same events are presented from a different aspect.

6) Outline of the Book of Revelation

a) Christ in the midst of the seven churches (1-3).

i) The vision of Christ walking in the midst of the lampstands, the seven churches.

ii) Letters to the seven churches.

(1) Show conflict between good and evil.

(2) Evil is apparently winning.

(3) Promises to those who remain faithful.

(4) Punishment for the wicked and reward for the faithful.

b) The book with the seven seals (4-7).

i) The throne scene in 4-5.

(1) Sets the stage for the rest of the book.

(a) God is in control, not Rome.

ii) Four seals, four riders reveal the conflict between good and evil.

iii) Martyrs beneath the altar who are not being avenged.

(1) It appears that evil has triumphed.

iv) A great catastrophe occurs, but God's servants are protected with a seal.

v) Finally, God's servants are picture in heaven – good has triumphed.

c) The sounding of the seven trumpets (8-11).

i) Six trumpets proclaim the trouble that plagues the earth. (8:2-9:21)

ii) What prompted the world to persecute the saints.

iii) The Word, with its bittersweet message. (10:1-11)

iv) Two witnesses (11:1-13)

(1) Conflict, apparent defeat, and ultimate victory.

(2) Triumph. (11:14-19)

d) The introduction of the enemies of the church (12-14).

i) The great red dragon, identified as Satan. (12:9)

ii) When Satan cannot destroy Jesus, he makes war with the saints.

(1) Conflict of good and evil. (12:17)

iii) Two of Satan's coworkers

(1) The sea beast, afterward called "the beast". (13:1-10, 14:9)

- (a) Makes war with the saints and overcomes them (13:7).
- (2) The land beast, afterward call “the false prophet”. (13:11-18, 16:13)
- iv) The apparent defeat of good.
- v) A succession of visions from the mountaintop of the triumph of good and the punishment of evil.
- e) The seven bowls of wrath (15-16).
- f) The destruction of most of the enemies of the church (17-19).
- g) The destruction of the dragon, followed by the new heaven and earth (20-22).

Jesus in Revelation

Verse	Description	Where else?
1:5	The faithful witness	
1:5	The firstborn of the dead	
1:5	The ruler of the kings of the earth	
1:13, 14:14	One like a son of man	
1:17, 2:8, 22:13	The first and the last (Alpha and Omega)	
1:18	The living one	
2:1	The One who holds the seven stars	
2:1	The One who walks among the seven lampstands	
2:12	The One who has the sharp, two-edged sword	
2:18	The Son of God	
2:23	He who searches the minds and hearts	
3:1	He who has the seven Spirits of God and seven stars	
3:7	He who is holy	
3:7	He who is true	
3:7	He who has the key of David	
3:14	The Amen	
3:14	The faithful and true witness	
3:14	The Beginning of the creation of God	
5:5	The Lion of the tribe of Judah	
5:5, 22:16	The Root of David	
5:12	The Lamb that was slain	
7:17	Shepherd	
12:5	A son, a male child	
19:11	Faithful and True	
19:13	The Word of God	
19:16, 17:14	King of kings and Lord of lords	
21:6, 22:13	The Alpha and the Omega	
21:6, 22:13	The beginning and the end	
22:16	The bright morning star	

Common Symbols Used in Revelation

Verse	Symbol	Verse	Explanation
1:12	7 golden lampstands	1:20	the seven churches
1:16	7 stars	1:20	the angels of the seven churches
1:4	7 spirits who are before His throne		the Holy Spirit (no other spirit of any kind is ever grouped with the Father and the Son)
1:16 2:12 19:15	Sharp two-edged sword	Heb 4:12	The Word of God
1:10 4:1	Loud voice like a trumpet		Call for attention
4:4	24 thrones, elders		
4:6	4 living creatures		
4:10	Cast their crowns before ...		
5:8	Golden bowls of incense	5:8	Prayers of the saints
6:2	1 st seal; white horse, rider		
6:4	2 nd seal; bright red horse, rider		
6:5	3 rd seal; black horse, rider		