

1. The author and date: The apostle John from the Isle of Patmos, off the coast of Turkey, around 95 A.D. 1:4,9
 - a. He was there on account of God's Word. Probably this Word since the verb tense is aorist indicating a specific occasion.
 - b. He was there on account of the testimony of Christ.
2. Dates to either during the time of Nero (54-68) or Domitian (81-96).
 - a. Domitian is the only one who significantly advanced emperor worship. He regarded himself as a god and there is some indication that he demanded and enforced worship, but it is not known how he did so.
 - b. Persecution was definitely taking place and John, by the Spirit, foresaw much more on the historical horizon as is mentioned in the letters to the churches. (much like today as we look at the conflict with Islam across the world).
 - c. To exclude Nero's period is possible when it is considered that Smyrna didn't exist during his time (Polycarp). Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in 60, so couldn't have been "rich, and increased with goods."
 - d. Dating the book is difficult because there are definite influences characteristic of Nero (however, a leader may leave an influence for decades on his country, i.e. Reagan/ Clinton).
3. The type of literature: Revelation is commonly regarded as apocalyptic literature—a class of lit. used during the last 2 cent. BC and 1st cent. AD.
 - a. A revelation given by a great celestial being.
 - b. The message is expressed in vivid symbolism, sometimes even bizarre.
 - c. This kind of lit. appears in difficult times communicating that the troubles they are enduring is not the last word—God will intervene in his time and destroy the evil.
 - d. The apocalyptic writers don't see man as overcoming evil, but see God as the only answer and deliverer.
 - e. But there are differences here:
 - i. John calls Revelation a "prophecy". Typical moral considerations are found.
 - ii. Most apocalyptic lit. is presented as authored by some illustrious person of the past—John gives his name.
 - iii. The book is optimistic with Christ reigning, conquering, and establishing his kingdom.
 - iv. Apocalypticists view history from the remote past, John stands firmly in the present and looks to the future.
 - v. Usually the meaning of a vision is explained by an angel, but in Revelation, the angel generally narrates and allows the reader to understand the meaning.
 - vi. Most apocalyptic lit. looks to the coming Messiah introducing a new thing into history. But John says he's already come and introduced the new thing—a resounding victory over sin, death, and the devil.
4. The historical setting
 - a. The enforcement of the cult of emperor worship by Rome brought increasing persecution for Christians who confessed Jesus, instead of Caesar, was Lord.
 - b. Some in the church advocated compromise while others, like John, determined to stand fast.
5. The first recipients
 - a. Jesus Christ. 1:1 God gave this revelation to Jesus to give to the churches.
 - b. God's angel (messenger). 1:1
 - c. The apostle John. 1:1
 - d. The seven churches of Asia minor: 1:4,11
6. The person, message, and work of Jesus Christ are central to the entire book. 1:1

- a. This is not primarily about end times, contrary to popular teaching.
 - b. There are some references to the end, but this revelation was what God wanted the seven churches to know about Christ within their historical setting, for their encouragement, correction, and comfort. What was true about Jesus Christ then is still true today.
 - c. This is a revelation from heaven, into heaven! This is the ultimate heavenly, eternal perspective.
 - d. We must not try to interpret Revelation from what we know on this side of the veil. In my opinion, we'll get it wrong, and import our history and viewpoints into what is revealed. We'll try to interpret a heavenly revelation with earthly accounts.
 - e. Paul received a revelation of heaven and couldn't speak of it. 2 Cor. 12:1-4. He said "words were inexpressible."
 - f. So we'll attempt to interpret what we read from other scriptures of the OT and NT that give us insight from a heavenly, eternal perspective. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we look at things which we cannot see, things which are eternal, instead of temporal things which we can see. 2 Cor. 4:18.
 - g. J.B. Phillips wrote about Revelation, "In this book the translator is carried into another dimension—he has but the slightest foot-hold in the Time-and-space world with which he is familiar. He is carried, not into some never-never land of fancy, but into the Ever-ever land of God's eternal Values and Judgments." *The Book of Revelation*, 1960, p. 9
7. This is the importance of reading and studying Revelation: It is the fulfillment of
- Col. 3:1-4 "Set your mind on things above, not on the things which are on the earth."
 - Could view Revelation as a commentary on Act 14:22: We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." and Matt. 16:18: The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.
 - Revelation could be summarized by John 16:33: "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."
- a. Whatever approach we take to this book it must be understood that its meaning was first and foremost to be understood by the original readers, not future generations.
 - b. The typical historical dispensational approach fails at this point. The original readers would have had no use for such an interpretation, much less have understood it from a western European mindset. They didn't need end times info, they needed real life, here and now, encouragement.
 - i. Leon Morris writes, "The "historical view" does indeed make Revelation meaningful for this generation, at any rate in part. But the early Christians could not have got much out of a book whose concern was basically for later periods. Yet we should surely hold that those to whom it was written had or could have had a satisfying understanding of it." *Revelation*, Tyndale NT Commentaries, 1983, p. 17
 - ii. W.G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 1966, p. 324, wrote, "The Apocalypse is a book of its time, written out of its time and for its time, not for the distant generations of the future or even of the end-time. It is an occasional writing, as much so as are the epistles of the NT, and which, therefore, as a matter of principle should be understood in relation to the history of its time."
 - iii. W. Milligan wrote, "While the Apocalypse thus embraces the whole period of the Christian Dispensation, it sets before us within this period the action of great principles and not special incidents; we are not to look in the Apocalypse for special events, but for an exhibition of the principles which govern the history both of the world and the church." *The Revelation of St. John*, 1886, p. 154

- iv. G.T. Manley urges readers to keep “an open mind to deal with each portion of the book as seen in relation to its context and to other parts of the Scripture.” *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 11.
- v. F.B. Clogg. “The author did not look beyond his own age, but inasmuch as his visions are an expression of truth that all human history is in God’s hands, they have in a sense been fulfilled many times over.” *An Introduction to the NT*, 1940, p. 293.
- vi. A.M. Hunter describes this principle in reading Rev.: “all history is divinely controlled, that this world is the scene of a great conflict between good and evil; that the clue to God’s character and action in history is to be found in Christ ‘the lamb slain from the foundation of the world;’ that in the end of the day God must finally cope with evil and make an end of it; and that Heaven is the most real place of all.” *Interpreting the NT*, 1951, p. 103

8. Please consider this approach to reading and interpreting the Revelation.

- a. Victorinus of Pettau (284-305) commented that Revelation “does not set forth a continuous series of future events, but repeats the same sequences of events under various forms.”
- b. The book was likely not written in one sitting, but a compilation of visions received over a period of years. Often the same truth is presented, except in a different form (ie. seals, trumpets, plagues).
- c. M.E. Boismard: “When the Seer describes a vision, he translates into symbols the ideas suggested by God; he goes on then, by accumulating colors, symbolic numbers etc., without giving a thought to the resulting plastic effect. His purpose is, above all, to translate the ideas received from God, not to describe a coherent vision, an *imaginable* vision. To follow him to the end on the way he has chosen, one must play his game and convert into ideas the symbols he describes without troubling oneself about their incoherence.”

9. Approaches to Revelation

- a. Preterist: The events portrayed had already taken place or were taking place when the book was written or that they were clearly foreseeable at the time of writing.
- b. Futuristic: The events lie in the future and will be fulfilled in the final period of history of this present world (literal 7 yrs of great trib., the rapture, and the millennial reign of Christ).
- c. Church-historical: each event and person represents a specific person or event in history. (ie. second angel=Marcion, 6th angel is symbol for the armies of Islam).
- d. Idealistic: Read like a parable, tenaciously hold to the literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation. Don’t interpret every detail. Symbolic and figurative language must never be pressed beyond the point of comparison (to OT and rest of NT). Read Gen. 15 and Rev. the same way.
 - i. The text itself tells us we are dealing with symbols that stand for something else.
 - ii. Sometimes we’re told exactly what the symbols mean: 7 candlesticks and stars.
 - iii. Sometimes the immediate context makes the symbol clear: the majestic figure with the two-edged sword is clearly Jesus (name never mentioned in the vision).
 - iv. Sometimes the whole context of Rev. makes the symbolism clear: The great dragon is overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of the testimony of God’s people (chapter 12) and the chains that bind Satan in chapter 20 is the preaching of the everlasting gospel concerning the cleansing blood of Christ.
 - v. Sometimes other books of the Bible leave no doubt about the meaning of symbols: Why does the sword come out of the Savior’s mouth instead of his hand? Heb. 4:12 tells us God’s Word is sharper than a two-edged sword and Paul in Eph. 6 calls the word of God a sword.

- vi. This is the real literal interpretation: allow the context to govern the meaning of letters and words. For instance the idea that Rev. 20 says that Christ will reign on this earth with his resurrected believers for exactly a thousand years is foreign to the literal meaning.
- vii. Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”
- viii. Rev. 1:6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. We begin reigning from the time we are born again.
- ix. The context is clear: the thousand years is the period during which our souls live and reign with Christ—the entire period from the conversion of the first member of the NT church until all believers receive their glorified bodies from him who will change our vile bodies into his glorious body.
- x. To say the rapture occurred in 4:1 is to abandon the literal meaning of the text and import a dispensational, millennial view into the text.
- xi. The literal truth is that Revelation is a series of visions and it is literally true that John saw the things he described here, and that the things he saw were symbols which pictured the future history of the church.
- xii. *Read p. 20 of Revelation by Becker.*

10. An overview of the book.

- a. John’s vision of Jesus on the Island of Patmos: 1:1-20
- b. The Seven letters to the seven churches: 2:1-3:22
- c. The vision of the seven seals: 4:1-8:6
- d. The vision of the seven trumpets: 8:7-11:19
- e. The seven visions: 12:1-15:8
- f. The vision of the seven plagues: 16:1-21
- g. The victory over Antichrist: 17:1-19:21
- h. The victory over Satan: 20:1-22:7