

THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST LESSON 1

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INTRODUCTION

“Just as Genesis is the book of beginnings, Revelation is the book of consummation. In it, the divine program of redemption is brought to fruition, and the holy name of God is vindicated before all creation. Although there are numerous prophecies in the Gospels and Epistles, Revelation is the only New Testament book that focuses primarily on prophetic events. Its title means ‘unveiling’ or ‘disclosure.’ Thus, the book is an unveiling of the character and program of God. Penned by John during his exile on the island of Patmos, Revelation centers around visions and symbols of the resurrected Christ, who alone has authority to judge the earth, to make it, and to rule it in righteousness.”

“The title of this book in the Greek text is ‘apokalupsis Ioannou,’ ‘Revelation of John.’ It is also known as the Apocalypse, as transliteration of the word ‘apokalupsis,’ meaning ‘unveiling.’... A better title comes from the first verse: Apokalupsis Iesou Christou, ‘Revelation of Jesus Christ.’...Because of the unified contents of this book, it should not be called Revelations.” Taken from the introduction to the Book of Revelation in the 1989 edition of the Thomas Nelson Reference Bible.

AUTHOR- JOHN, THE BELOVED APOSTLE

“Four times the author identifies himself as John (1:1,4,9; 22:8). Early tradition unanimously identified him as John the apostle, author of the fourth Gospel and three Epistles.” REVELATION, John MacArthur. John was one of the three apostles with the most intimate association with Christ. John and James, his older brother, were the sons of Zebedee and were called the “Sons of Thunder.” (Matt.10:2-4).

After Christ’s ascension, John became one of the pillars in the church at Jerusalem. He ministered with Peter until he went to Ephesus sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem. He was exiled to the small penal island of Patmos by the Romans, but was released after the death of Domitian. He returned to Ephesus where he pastored until his natural death. It is believed it was while at Ephesus that he wrote the Gospel of John, as well as 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John.

DATE WRITTEN

“Revelation was written in the last decade of the first century (about AD 94-96), near the end of Emperor Domitian’s reign (AD 91-96). Although some date it during Nero’s reign (AD54-68), their arguments are unconvincing and conflict with the view of the early church. Writing in the second century, Irenaeus declared that Revelation had been written toward the end of Domitian’s reign. Later writers, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Victorinus (who wrote one of the earliest commentaries on Revelation), Eusebius, and Jerome affirm the Domitian date.” REVELATION, John MacArthur.

GILL'S COMMENTARY on REVELATION

“As for the time of its writing this is not agreed upon on all hands; the place where, seems to be the isle of Patmos, which yet some question. Some think it was written in the times of Claudius Caesar, before the destruction of Jerusalem... But the more commonly received opinion is, that he (John) had this vision there, at the latter end of Domitian's reign-by whom he was there banished, about the year 95, or 96.”

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary on REVELATION says:

TREGELLES well says [New Testament Historic Evidence], "There is no book of the New Testament for which we have such clear, ample, and numerous testimonies in the second century as we have in favor of the Apocalypse. The more closely the witnesses were connected with the apostle John (as was the case with IRENÆUS), the more explicit is their testimony. That doubts should prevail in after ages must have originated either in ignorance of the earlier testimony, or else from some supposed intuition of what an apostle ought to have written. The objections on the ground of internal style can weigh nothing against the actual evidence. It is in vain to argue, a priori, that John could not have written this book when we have the evidence of several competent witnesses that he did write it.”

PLACE AND TIME OF WRITING.--The best authorities among the Fathers state that John was exiled under Domitian (IRENÆUS [Against Heresies, 5; 30]; CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA; EUSEBIUS [Ecclesiastical History, 3.20]). VICTORINUS says that he had to labor in the mines of Patmos. At Domitian's death, A.D. 95, he returned to Ephesus under the Emperor Nerva. Probably it was immediately after his return that he wrote, under divine inspiration, the account of the visions vouchsafed to him in Patmos (Re 1:2,9). However, Re 10:4 seems to imply that he wrote the visions immediately after seeing them. Patmos is one of the Sporades. Its circumference is about thirty miles. "It was fitting that when forbidden to go beyond certain bounds of the earth's lands, he was permitted to penetrate the secrets of heaven" [BEDE, Explanation of the Apocalypse on chap. 1].

“In EUSEBIUS’ Ecclesiastical History, 6.25], mentions John as the author of the Apocalypse, without expressing any doubts as to its authenticity; also, in Commentary on Matthew, [16.6], he quotes Re 1:9, and says, "John seems to have beheld the Apocalypse in the island of Patmos.” Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary

INTERPRETATION

There are four main schools of interpretation of this book. They are:

1. Preterism

Preterism is the teaching of those who view the Book of Revelation as a historical description of first-century events and already fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans. Most Preterists hold that both the second coming of Christ and the resurrection have already taken place.

2. Historical

The historical school holds that Revelation outlines in symbolic form the entire course of church history from the time of the apostles to the end of time. However, some of its leading advocates hold that all of Revelation has been fulfilled. This interpretive method robs Revelation of any meaning for those of the time period to whom it was written.

3. Spiritual or Idealist

This school teaches that Revelation depicts the timeless cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. It allows for no actual historical fulfillment, only the abstract conflict of good and evil, and the final triumph of good.

4. Futurist

The Futurist school teaches that the Book of Revelation relates mainly to things which are to come, except that the first three chapters apply to the seven churches of Asia, but also to the seven eras of church history. The view is historic in the first three chapters only and beginning with the fourth chapter all events will be fulfilled after the rapture of the “Church Age” saints and during the last week of the Seventh Week of Daniel.

Today, this is the method of interpretation that most Christians would use to understand the Book of Revelation. It has been made very popular by The C. I. Scofield Bible which included many of the seven dispensational teachings that were also taught by Clarence Larkin in his *Dispensational Truth* book. It is a distinctive feature of the Futurist system that all the events and eras pictured in chapters 4 to chapter 20 are to take place after the rapture of the present day saints and in the short time space of seven years prior to the 1000 year millenium. This view of Bible prophecy is based on a false interpretation of the seventy weeks of Daniel as set forth in the ninth chapter of Daniel. In that prophecy (9:24-27) it is alleged there is a gap between the 69th week and the 70th week. It is during the time period of the seven years of the 70th week that most of the events of Revelation transpire.

“The divisions within present-day evangelical thought on the Lord’s return may be traced, in their origin, to the writings of a Spanish Jesuit, Francisco Ribera (about 1590). As he attempted to advance the Romanist counter-reformation, Ribera was embarrassed by the persistent Protestant identification of the papacy with the Antichrist. As a counteractive, therefore, to the historical method of prophetic interpretation that was then current, he revived a futuristic interpretation for the Book of Revelation. ...placing all but its opening chapters in the non-imminent future. The Antichrist concept was thus restored to its classical definition as an individual, political ruler (not the pope),...Ribera’s exegesis made the Antichrist’s three-and-a-half year reign of tribulation even less than it had been under Augustine and Aquinas-it was now embellished with a rebuilding of a Jerusalem temple, plus various other Jewish aspects, in addition to the wholly unfulfilled persecution of the church. This futuristic method of interpretation was popularized by Cardinal Bellarmine and became widely accepted within Romanism.” THE IMMINENT APPEARING OF CHRIST, by Professor J. Barton Payne, page 30

Dr. Herman A. Hoyt said, “The theological viewpoint with which one approaches this book will make all the difference in the world what one finds in it.” One of the great disappointments with so many commentaries on the Book of Revelation is that the theological errors of Arminianism and Universal Churchism cloud the interpretations of the writers. I assure the reader, that such are not the views I hold. The lesson of this book is that a sovereign God rules over the universe and everything is working according to His plan. (Eph.1:11)

Before His ascension, the Lord commanded the church at Jerusalem, and all future churches, the solemn responsibility of preaching His gospel to all the world, immersing their converts and constituting them into autonomous churches where they would be taught to become full and faithful followers of all that Christ taught. He promised them that His spiritual presence would be with them until the consummation of the ages.(Matt.28:18-20). This gives us two undeniable truths to hang all prophetic teaching on: [1] the church that Jesus Christ established will be in existence until the consummation of the ages (Matt 16:18; Eph.3:21). [2] Christ will not return until the consummation of the ages. With His ascension in Heaven, the Davidic prophecy was fulfilled, “*Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.*”(Psa.110.1). There He is enthroned in majesty “*expecting*” their subjugation (Heb.10:13) and “*the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*” (I Cor.15). At no moment prior to that universal victory will He come again.

It should be clear then to the honest student of the Scriptures, that there is a two-fold work that must be simultaneously accomplished in the world, before Christ returns.

[1] The conversion of all God’s elect through the ministry of Christ’s churches and [2] the subjugation or liquidation of all Christ’s enemies by the triumphant, omnipotent and sovereign Lord of Lords and King of Kings, until all are judged. “*Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.*”

1 Timothy 6:15-16

The only apparent delay in Christ’s immediate return is the conversion of all His elect, chosen “in Him before the foundations of the world” (Eph.1:4). This is because He “*is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*” (II Pet.3:9). Meanwhile, He is also “*longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:*” (Rom.9:22). While His enemies may sometimes seem to be victorious or sometimes defeated, they are all restrained under His supreme governing power until they all finally fall at His feet, “*that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow in heaven and in earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.*” (Phil.2:10-11).

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

INTRODUCTION	1:1-7
A. TO THE READERS 1:1-3	
B. FROM THE WRITER 1:4-7	
I. FIRST VISION	1:8-3:22
II. SECOND VISION	4:1-6:17
III. THIRD VISION	7:1-8
IV. FOURTH VISION	7:9-17
V. FIFTH VISION	8:1-9:21
VI. SIXTH VISION	10:1-11:19
VII. SEVENTH VISION	12:1-17
VIII. EIGHTH VISION	13:1-18
IX. NINTH VISION	14:1-20
X. TENTH VISION	15:1-16:21
XI. ELEVENTH VISION	17:1-18:24
XII. TWELFTH VISION	19:1-10
XIII. THIRTEENTH VISION	19:11-21
XIV. FOURTEENTH VISION	20:1-15
XV. FIFTEENTH VISION	21:1-22:20
XVI. BENEDICTION AND PRAYER	22:21

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one, verses 1-7

A. TO THE READERS 1:1-3**1. THE SUBJECT- THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST**

John begins by telling his readers what the main theme of this epistle is. It is the “*revelation of Jesus Christ.*” It is a revelation of the work of Christ as the Redeemer of His people and the supreme ruler of the universe. The Greek word translated “revelation” is first used in the New Testament by Simeon to whom the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he should not see death until he had seen “*the Lord’s Christ.*” He was in the Temple when Mary and Joseph brought Christ on the eighth day to be circumcised. He took “him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, “*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten (apokalupsis) the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*” (Luke 2:28-32) This is in fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 60:3 “*the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*”

In His first coming to earth, Jesus Christ was the revealer of God to mankind. John, in his Gospel says that “*the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*”(John 1:14). This describes the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. He was the revelation of the Eternal Godhead to mankind. Paul says in Hebrews 1:1-2 that “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds..*”

Since the beginning to time, God had been revealing Himself to His people through His prophets, by the Holy Spirit. Now, in the last days, which began with the ministry of John the Baptist, God would bring about His final and complete revelation of Himself to mankind by the Holy Spirit by the ministry of Jesus Christ and His apostles. Paul points this out to us in two different letters. In Romans he says, “*Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,*” (16:25) and in Ephesians 3:5 “*Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;*”

2. THE PERSON

The second coming of Jesus Christ is described in the New Testament by three Greek words: *epiphaneia*, “a shining forth”; *apokalupsis*, “uncovering, unveiling”; and *parousia*, “personal presence.” A thorough study of these three Greek words require more time and detail than can be allowed at the present. Suffice it now to say that all three words describe the physical second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the ages.

In this epistle by the Apostle John, the last of the original apostles, writing at the end of the first century, we are given this final and glorious revelation of Jesus Christ. It is to be a revelation of Christ in such a manner that we shall be given an uncovering of His eternal glory. But it must be revealed in terms that finite mortal minds can in some manner gain a small insight to that which mortal minds have never been able to grasp, the Infinite, Eternal, Holy and Omnipotent Jesus Christ, so we have visions and symbols.