

# THE SEVEN LETTERS OF REVELATION

Wednesday Night Bible Study

Parisview Baptist Church

Summer 2024

## ***PART 1 - WHAT'S GOING ON?***

### **I. Background**

#### **A. "Revelation"**

- i. Verse 1 - "The revelation of Jesus Christ"
- ii. *Apokalypsis* - "Apocalypse"
  1. Common definition: The end of the world; a great disaster
  2. Actual meaning: An uncovering; a revealing; a revelation
- iii. In the Bible, an apocalypse is when God pulls back the curtain to show somebody what's really going on in the world from a divine perspective
  1. Isaiah had an apocalypse when he was transported into God's temple
  2. Paul had an apocalypse on the road to Damascus
- iv. The book of Revelation is God's pulling back the curtain for John
  1. In Revelation, God pulls back the curtain and gives John a glimpse of King Jesus in all his fullness and glory and judgement and salvation
  2. Revelation is more about revealing Jesus than about revealing a blueprint for the end of time

#### **B. "Apocalyptic" literature**

- i. A writing style - or literary genre - that was produced by Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Christians
- ii. In the Bible, apocalyptic literature is where God pulls back the curtain and, through dreams and visions, gives a prophet a glimpse of what's really going on in the world and even in heaven - and then that prophet shares the divine perspective
- iii. Apocalyptic literature feels strange and fantastic - even though it uses words and images that come from this world, it puts them together in a way that seems out-of-this-world

1. 1:11 - "Write on a scroll what you see..."
  2. Describing what we see is not always an easy thing to do - much less when we're trying to use human words to describe the divine perspective
  3. The goal of apocalyptic literature is to communicate the eternal, limitless understanding of God in a way that our limited human minds can comprehend
  4. Our minds can't understand every detail the way God does - so apocalyptic literature uses *symbolic* words and images to convey the truth into our hearts and souls
- iv. Remember: the goal of Revelation is not for us to come away from reading it with a note-for-note understanding of how and when the world is going to end
1. The goal is for us to come away with an understanding of who Jesus really is - he's the eternal King of kings and Lord of lords
  2. And, for those who put their faith in Jesus and make him the King and Lord of our lives - we should come away with strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
- v. Revelation actually combines three types of literature found in the Bible
1. Apocalyptic
  2. Prophecy - God's word of proclamation addressed to His people
  3. Epistle - a letter addressed to the needs of a specific church

## II. Details

### A. Who is the author?

- i. How does he identify himself?
  1. 1:1, 4, 9, 22:8 - "John"
  2. 1:1 - "his servant" - whose servant?
  3. 1:9 - "your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus" - whose brother?
- ii. Which John?
  1. the author of the book doesn't specify
  2. From the early days of the church, the tradition has been that the author is the apostle John
  3. "Clues" people have used to argue that it might not be the apostle
    - a. 21:14 - "the twelve apostles"
    - b. 22:9 - "your fellow prophets"
    - c. Use of Greek is not as smooth as in Gospel of John
  4. "Clues that it *is* the apostle

- a. Early witnesses - “church fathers” like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who knew people who knew John
  - b. John is apparently well-known by the seven churches
  - c. Jesus as the lamb - John 1:29, 36
  - d. Jesus as the Word - John 1:1, 14; Revelation 19:13
  - e. “Thirsty” - John 7:37; Revelation 22:17
5. Bottom line: we can’t say for sure - but isn’t it sweet to think about John seeing his friend and master, Jesus, there on the island?
6. Below the bottom line: we can’t say for sure who the human author is, but we can say with absolute certainty who the ultimate author is: God
- a. 1:1 - “The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him”
  - b. God the Father gave it to God the Son, and God the Son gave it to John, and John gave it to the seven churches (and us)
  - c. The Son receives what he has from the Father (which is another theme in the Gospel of John)
    - i. John 3:55
    - ii. John 7:16
    - iii. John 5:16-30
    - iv. John 8:25-29

## **B. When did he write it?**

- i. Tradition holds that John wrote the letter sometime during the last decade of the first century
  - 1. Probably around 95 AD
  - 2. Domitian was the emperor of Rome (81-96 AD)
- ii. Some scholars argue for an earlier date, but there’s no firm evidence

## **C. What is the setting?**

- i. 1:9 - “the island of Patmos”
  - 1. Only time it’s mentioned in the Bible
  - 2. Small island in the Aegean Sea, about 60-70 miles SW of Ephesus
  - 3. Rocky and barren - almost no trees
- ii. The location and geography made it a good location for the Romans to send people who were perceived as threats to the order of the empire
  - 1. People like criminals and political prisoners were exiled to Patmos - but it wasn’t necessarily an island prison

2. Exiles were apparently allowed relative freedom to roam the island
    - a. But they had to provide their own food and shelter
    - b. And they were apparently guarded by Roman soldiers
  3. Regardless of the exact situation, Patmos was probably not an easy place to live
- iii. Why was John on the island?
1. We don't know for sure - he doesn't say
  2. But there may be clues in 1:9 - what are they?
  3. I don't think it's too big a stretch to speculate that John had been exiled to Patmos for proclaiming the good news of Jesus

#### **D. To whom is the letter addressed?**

- i. 1:4 - "To the seven churches in the province of Asia"
- ii. Specifically named in 1:11 - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea
- iii. This area was formerly known as Asia Minor and is now in the western part of the nation of Turkey

#### **E. What is the purpose of the letter?**

- i. 1:1 - "The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place"
- ii. 1:3 - "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near"
- iii. The central purpose is to inform the seven churches of where they stand in relation to Jesus - just as he suffered and was victorious, so they will suffer but be victorious
- iv. The churches are being persecuted, and it would be very easy for them to lose faith and turn to the ways of the world and the wisdom of the world as a way of dealing with it - but instead they need to persevere and keep relying on the ways of God and the wisdom of God
- v. The churches need to be reminded to keep their faith and trust in Jesus and his victory - he died and rose again and defeated death, and they can rest in his victory even in the midst of trials and persecution

## *The Seven Churches of Revelation*



# The Seven Churches of Revelation



