

The Revelation of Jesus Christ. The plan of eternity

Introduction



The book of Revelation is the most controversial book in the Bible. Revelation has caused major divisions between denominations, churches and families. What makes this book so controversial? A promise of blessing is made in the very first chapter of the book to those who read and hear the words of this prophecy. The book has 404 verses, and according some scholars half of those verse have an Old Testament reference.

The book of Revelation is a letter revealed to man named John, who was on the Island of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor. He was persecuted because of his testimony of Jesus Christ. The letter was to seven churches located in the mainland cities of; Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

What is the meaning of this letter? Should the words be taken literally or are they symbolic? Did the letter concern events just in the day of John or did it include events in the future? Was John, the Apostle John or another John? Does this letter refer to Israel or to the church? These are just a few of the many questions raised by those who have studied this book.

Who wrote the book of Revelation?

From the letter, we know the person who wrote the contents, was named John. (Rev: 1:1, 4, 9; 21:2:22:8) Prior to the third century, there was no dispute of apostolic authorship. The bishop of Alexandria, Dionysius (200-265 A.D.), was the first to raise questions about the apostle John being the author. He claimed based on the writing style and the lack of an apostolic claim in the book, John the Elder (Presbyter) was the author not John the apostle. Dionysius, who studied under Origen, also denied the teaching of a literal Millennium. The teaching on the Millennium was based on a literal



reading of the book of Revelation (Revelation 20:1-7). The Alexandrian school taught scriptural symbolism and allegorical interpretation, rejecting a literal Millennium interpretation of Revelation. By questioning the John the Apostles authorship of the book, their amillennial view had greater credibility.

The early church attributed authorship to the apostle John. Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.) quotes John the Apostle that Jesus Christ would dwell in Jerusalem one thousand years.¹ Irenaeus (120-200 A.D.) is quoted in every chapter of Revelation. Tertullian (155-220 A.D.) also quotes from almost every chapter of Revelation and attributes John the Apostle as author. Hippolytus (170-235 A.D.) also attributed Revelation to John, he quotes Revelation chapter 17 and 18 a great deal. Clement of Alexandria (150-211 A.D.) and Origen (185-254 A.D.) also attribute John the Apostle as the author of

Revelation. Ignatius (30-108 A.D.) writes regarding John the Apostle,

And why such facts as the following: Peter was crucified; Paul and James were slain with the sword; John was banished to Patmos; Stephen was stoned to death by the Jews who killed the Lord? But, [in truth,] none of these sufferings were in vain; for the Lord was really crucified by the ungodly.²

The evidence against John the Apostle being the author is minimal, largely based on grammatical and writing style differences with the John's Gospel.

¹ Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho", Chap. 80, Ante-Nicene Fathers, I,239.

² Ignatius, Epistle of Ignatius to the Tarsians, Chapter 3

The Revelation of Jesus Christ. The plan of eternity

When was the book of Revelation written?

The other issue regarding Revelation is the date of the book. External tradition places the time of Revelation to the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), brother of Titus, son of Vespasian. Clement of Alexandria reports John returned to Ephesus after the death of Domitian, referred to as the “tyrant”.



Domitian
brother of Titus

the Apostle John. For when, on the tyrant's death, he returned to Ephesus from the isle of Patmos, he went away, being invited, to the contiguous territories of the nations, here to appoint bishops, there to set in order whole Churches, there to ordain such as were marked out by the Spirit.³

Eusebius (A.D. 300-340) the father of church history writes in his *Ecclesiastical History* about the connection between John the Apostle and Domitian.

It is said that in this persecution the apostle and evangelist John, who was still alive, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos in consequence of his testimony to the divine word. Irenaeus, in the fifth book of his work *Against Heresies*, where he discusses the number of the name of Antichrist which is given in the so-called *Apocalypse of John*, speaks as follows concerning him: a “If it were necessary for his name to be proclaimed openly at the present time, it would have been declared by him who saw the revelation. For it was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian.”⁴

Since Domitian died in A.D. 96, the date attributed to the book of Revelation coincides with this date. Some bible commentators attribute Revelation date prior to A.D. 70. The main proponents of an early date, interpret Revelation as historical book written symbolically with events having past (*Preterist*). The early date view is argued largely from a quote attributed to Papius that John the Apostle was martyred before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

What are the different views of the book of Revelation?

There are four main views in attempting to interpret the book of Revelation, *Symbolic*, *Preterist*, *Historical*, and *Futuristic*. Each view approaches the book from a different perspective. There are two considerations in these views of Revelation.

First, is the book of Revelation symbolic or literal? Do the words mean what they say in a literal sense or do they imply another meaning. For example, does Israel mean Israel or does Israel mean the church?

Second and related to the first is the theological view of the church. These two views, *Covenant* and *Dispensational*, view the church as compared to Israel in two different ways.

Covenant theology views the church as the replacement of Israel in God's covenant relationship. The church therefore becomes the “New Israel” in scripture. Therefore, Old Testament verses referring to Israel in prophecy applied to the Church, the “New Israel”. The premise of *Covenant theology* is God has one covenant, the covenant of grace, from Adam's fall, God promised salvation through the Messiah. This promise, first administered through Israel, now is administered by the Church, which includes believing Israel.

Dispensational theology views the church and Israel as two distinct groups with separate dispensations. The word dispensation means administration. *Dispensational theology*, understands verses applied to Israel to mean literal Israel as opposed to symbolic Israel, the church. The church in the current age, has the role of dispensing or administering salvation to this age by proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. Prior to the church, we were under the dispensation of the Law, administered or dispensed by Israel.

³ Clement of Alexandria, Ante Nicene fathers, Who is the rich man that shall be saved? XLII

⁴ Eusebius, “Ecclesiastical History” III, Chapter 18, The Fathers of the Church

The Revelation of Jesus Christ. The plan of eternity

Symbolic or allegorical approach

Symbolic: The history of this view can be traced to the Alexandrian School of Theology, represented by Origen, which regarded the book of Revelation as one great allegory going beyond natural symbolism. The symbolic view was motivated by anti-millennium view which taught a literal millennium reign of Christ on earth. The Alexandrian school claimed the true "Spiritual" Interpretation as opposed to the literalism.

This method of interpretation finds principles and powers that work themselves out in history rather than actual historical events in symbolic language. The book of Revelation represents the struggle between the righteous and wicked; the City of God verses the City of Satan.

Preterist

Preterist (Past) Interpretation: This method of interpretation regards the book of Revelation as applying specifically to the problems and persecutions of the early church existing at the time of its writing. The symbolic expressions in the book represent devices to encourage the church through its suffering under the Roman Empire, and to prevent the book from being understood by those who are not believers. Nero for example is seen as Antichrist.

The Preterist views Revelation date of writing prior to A.D. 70, when the Jewish Temple was destroyed. The abomination of desolation and the destruction of Jerusalem referred to by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24:15 are mostly fulfilled in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

Preterism views the Church as the "New Israel" and thereby fulfilling verses applied to Israel in scripture.

Preterist need to be distinguished from Hyper-Preterist. This view holds the Second Coming and the Rapture being fulfilled prior to A.D. 70. This view is considered heretical even by Preterists, because it denies the physical return of Christ.

Historical

Historic Interpretation: This approach views events described in Revelation as symbolic and represent chronological sequences of historical events from the time of its writing until the coming of Christ and the establishment of His eternal kingdom. References to the Babylon and the Beast are associated with the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. Other symbols such are viewed as referring to Islamic and Napoleonic wars. The historical approach like the Preterists substitute the church for Israel in verses referring to national Israel.

Futurist

Futurist Interpretation: This approach views Revelation as a prophecy regarding the future. The futurist approach views scripture from a literal perspective. Words mean what they say unless otherwise defined within the context of scripture.

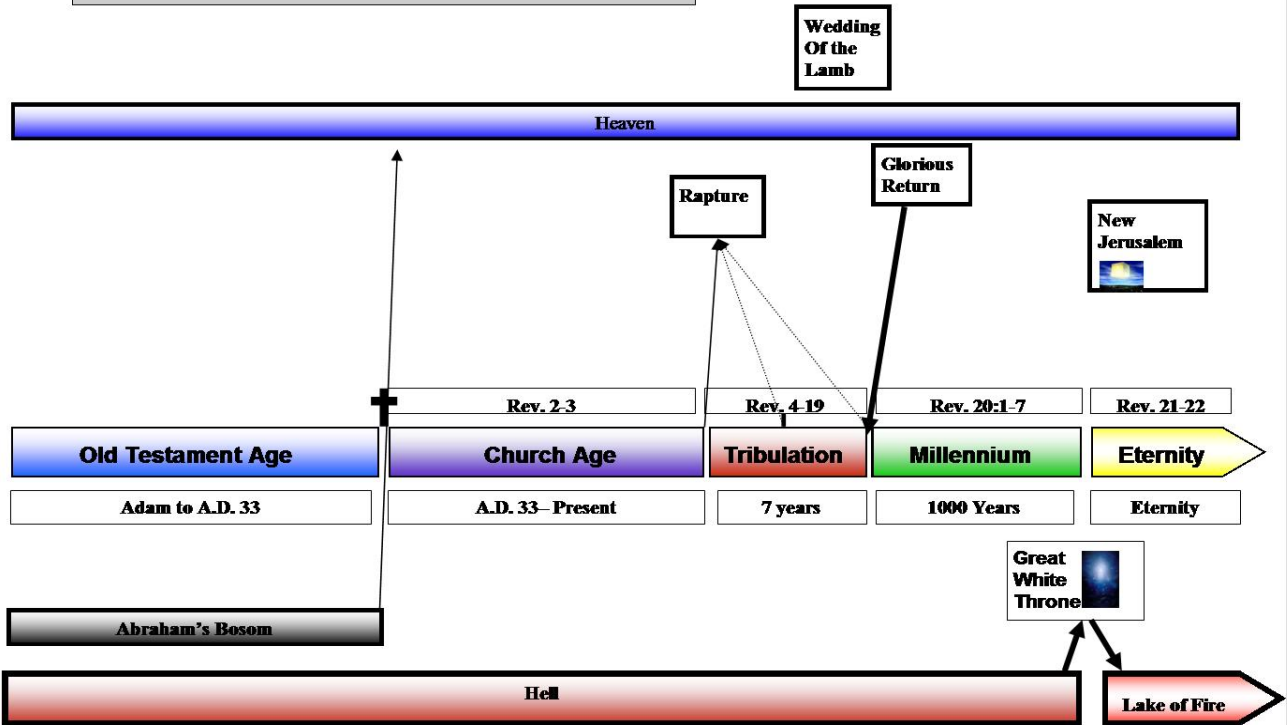
The book Revelation reveals the details of end time events from chapter 4 until the end of the book. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the Church age, and chapters 4 to 19 deal with the tribulation period, followed by a literal one thousand year period, the Millennium (Revelation 20:1-7). Since the futurist view looks to a future Millennium, the view is Pre-millennial.

The futurist view holds to a dispensational understanding of scripture, allowing for the distinction of Israel and the church in God's end time program.

The following is a view of Revelation from a futurist approach. The Futurist approach is the most in keeping with a literal understanding of Bible. God's promises to the descendents of Jacob, literal Israel, are affirmed in the futurist approach. With the Preterist and Historic views the Church must replace Israel and the promises of God are negated.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: The plan of eternity

Overview of the book of Revelation



Revelation Glossary	
Millennium	The Millennium is a literal one-thousand-year period, when Jesus Christ will reign as king on Earth. During this period, the saints, Old and New Testament will reign and rule with Christ over the earth. Creation will be at peace, and the earth will prosper. (See Revelation 20:1-7, Matthew 19:28-29, Isaiah 2:1-4, Isaiah 11:6-9)
Pre-millennial	The belief we are in a period prior to the Millennium. Those who view the Bible as literal and Revelation as "Futurist" have this view.
A-millennial	The letter "A" before a word negates the meaning, hence this view denies a literal millennium. This view holds the Millennium referred to in Revelation as symbolic.
Post-millennial	This view sees the current age as having past the Millennium. We are therefore living in a post-millennium age.
Rapture	Derived from the Latin word <i>rapio</i> meaning, "Caught up". The "Rapture" teaches Christ will descend from Heaven, and call those who know Him into Heaven. Those who are alive will be transformed into their resurrected body, at the same time; the dead in Christ will also receive their resurrection bodies in the twinkling of an eye. (1 Thess 4:15-17, 1 Cor. 15:52) This is part of the First Resurrection.
Tribulation	A period preceding the return of Christ, where suffering on earth will be unequalled in the history of the world according to Christ. The period is seven-years, divided into three parts, a first half, mid-point and a last half. (Matthew 24:15-22, Daniel 12:1, Jeremiah 30:7, Daniel 9:27)
Pre-tribulation rapture	The view before the seven year tribulation, those who know Christ will be raptured or caught up to be with Christ and return with him at the Second

The Revelation of Jesus Christ. The plan of eternity

	Coming.
Mid-tribulation rapture	The view that at the mid-point of the Tribulation period Christ will descend from heaven and call those who know him into heaven.
Post-tribulation rapture	The view that immediately following the tribulation period, Christ will catch up his church and then return with them in his second coming. Matthew 24:29
Abomination of Desolation	The act of desolating the Jewish Temple. Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167 B.C.) desecrated the Jewish Temple and installed an image of Zeus resembling himself. According to Christ, in the end times a similar event will take place in the Third Temple. The Antichrist will commit the same act of Antiochus IV, declaring his deity, demand worship.(Yet to be rebuilt) (Daniel 8:12, Daniel 9:24-27, Daniel 11:31, 12:11, Matthew 24:15, Revelation 11)
Antichrist	The final earthly king who will oppose Christ and attempt to finally destroy the Jewish people. He will be killed at the Second Coming, along with the False prophet who proclaimed his glories. He along with the False Prophet will be the first two occupants of the Lake of Fire. (Daniel 7:11,23-26, Daniel 9:27, 2 Thes. 2:4, Revelation 13:1-8)
False Prophet	An end times spiritual leader who along with the Antichrist, the Beast, deceive those who dwell on earth. He performs miracles calling Fire down from heaven and instructing the people on the earth to worship the Antichrist. He along with the Antichrist are the first two occupants of the lake of Fire. (Revelation 13:11-17, 19:20)
Armageddon	Literally in Hebrew "Hills of Megiddo", a location to the north of Jerusalem where the final battle on Earth will take place. The nations will be gathered to battle Christ who will descend from Heaven and destroy the last earthly powers. (Revelation 16:16, 19:19-21)
Eschatology	The study of "Last Times"
Dispensational Theology	The view of distinct administrations of Grace by Israel and the Church, the Church age is the present age, where the church has responsibility of administering the gospel of Grace to the world. In the past and during the tribulation period, Israel will administer the gospel of Grace to the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2, Romans 11:25,
Covenant Theology	The view God has one covenant with man, the Covenant of Grace. This covenant starts at Adam and is fulfilled in Christ who died for the sins of all humanity. In this view, the Church has replaced Israel, and is the "New Israel" which incorporates both believing Jew and Gentile.
Glorious Return	Distinct from the rapture, the Glorious Second Coming is the visible glorious return, as opposed to the catching up of the saints. Christ returns to the earth with His glory accompanied by the angels (Matthew 24:30, 25:30)
Seal Judgments	The judgments on the earth, following the opening of the seven seals on the scroll given to the "Lion of the tribe of Judah", these events occur in the first half of the tribulation period. One quarter of the earth's population dies in the first four seals opened.
Trumpet Judgments	The seven Trumpet judgments of Revelation in the first half of the tribulation prior following the seal judgments ending at the mid-point of the tribulation period. One third of the earth's remaining population is killed in the 6 th trumpet judgment.
Bowl Judgments	The final judgments in the book of Revelation, leading to the return of Christ.