

Revelation

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bondservants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John...”

(Rev 1:1). So begins the book of Revelation, one of the most intriguing and controversial books of the Bible. It fires the imagination and inspires us toward greater faithfulness in service to God.

The author is identified as John, and traditionally this is understood as the apostle John. One of questions, and this affects how one might interpret the book, has to do with when the book was written. Some hold to an early date, which places the book prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, making Nero the main Emperor of the time. Many who hold to this date would argue that the beast in Revelation is Jerusalem and the destruction described in the book relates to Jerusalem’s destruction that would happen very soon. On the other hand, there is strong tradition and support for the idea that John wrote Revelation late in the first century to deal with the Roman persecutions, especially under Domitian. In this, the beast is Rome and God would bring down destruction on the Roman Empire. What is more important to the message of Revelation,



regardless of its exact date, is understanding that God will defeat any enemies against Christ and His people. This was written at a time when emperor worship was starting to be enforced, and

Christians would be severely tested.

Revelation was written to seven churches of Asia. The number “seven” likely represents the greater concept of complete and perfect. Many numbers carry special significance in a book of symbols. The Lord addressed these congregations, both praising and rebuking them as was appropriate to their situation. In every case, He was urging their faithfulness to Him, even though some would be persecuted severely because of their stand. “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life,” He told the church at Smyrna (2:10). This didn’t mean just to be faithful until they grew old and died. It meant to be faithful even if it cost their lives. The reward would be worth it. Faithfulness to the Lord, even in the midst of severe persecution and trial, was critical for these Christians being challenged in their faith.

Revelation is a book filled with symbols and figures. The first verse tips us off on this, given that the word used (communicated) is the word for “signified.” This special type of writing,

often referred to as apocalyptic, appeals to readers who might have the background to understand what the figures meant; but those who didn't know would not have a clue about the meaning. It was an appropriate style during a time of persecution when the Christians could read it and be encouraged, but others would not get it.

Revelation pulls heavily from the Old Testament, particularly from Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, all of which also contain many symbols and figures. For example, we can see echoes of the four horsemen from Zechariah 6. We see shadows of the beast imagery from Daniel. We see Ezekiel's powerful influence in the descriptions of the fall of Babylon, the harlot. The Old Testament is strong in the book of Revelation, and this background would have helped knowledgeable Christians better understand what God was communicating to them.

An argument can be made that chapters 1-11 parallel chapters 12-22. Chapters 1-11 demonstrate the earthly conflict, while chapters 12-22 provide the deeper, spiritual struggle that was really going on (see Ferrell Jenkins' *Studies in the Book of Revelation*). Regardless of how all the specifics are understood, the message of Revelation is the triumph of God's people. There would be persecuting forces to come against the people of God, and many would lose their lives. Yet God is sitting on His throne in heaven, Jesus is fighting for His people, and in the end, God's people win the battle. No matter what others may try to do to thwart the work

of God's people, God will fight for His own, and His own will always come out as victors.

Christians need to be impressed with the fact that God is on His throne and worthy is the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, to be praised:

“And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.’” (Rev 4:10-11)

We know who wins the battle. If we will submit ourselves to the King of kings, we will be a part of this victory!

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city” (22:14).

Doy Moyer