

# Revelation Articles



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# What Is The Book Of Revelation? #1

We ascertain rather easily that the book of Revelation differs from the other books of the Bible. While the book compares in part to a few Old Testament books, it does not compare with them as a whole. Many ask, "What is the book of Revelation?"

## The Last Book Of The Bible

We respond to the above question by saying, "It is the last book of the Bible." Man placed it at the end of the canon but this is its proper place for several important reasons. First, the **Apocalypse** reviews the entire scope of God's eternal purpose. Though none are quoted, from three to four hundred references are identifiable from Genesis through Malachi. Additionally, through the mind's eye, we can visualize the entire New Testament system. This would not be possible unless all of God's word had been revealed (cf. Revelation 5:1,7).

Second, the **Revelation** pictorially reveals **things which would shortly be fulfilled** (1:1; 22:7). The historical fulfillment of these events would signal the **finishing** of the **mystery of God** declared to **God's servants the prophets** (10:7). The mystery of God concealed in the Old Testament Prophets is now revealed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:3-5; 1 Peter 1:10-12). The last book of the Bible revealed specific historical events which, when carried out, proved the finishing or completion of God's mystery. This demonstrates that the book of Revelation is a very important book and occupies its rightful place in the Bible. A third reason will become apparent later.

## The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

This book is the "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). The expression, "The Revelation," is from the Greek word *apokalupsis*. This is why we sometimes refer it as the Apocalypse. This word means "an uncovering." The book of Revelation, then, is an uncovering or unveiling of some things by

Jesus Christ which were shortly to come to pass. This tells us two things of importance about this book. First, it is different from the other books of the New Testament revealed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus revealed this book to John through His angel (cf. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). It is one of a kind. Second, the book of Revelation contains important clues identifying those historical events. They are prophetically and pictorially portrayed. The book of Revelation does not hide information. It rather reveals important data.

## The Testimony Of Jesus

We may further say that the book of Revelation is the testimony of Jesus. John said he bore "record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw" (1:2). While this statement may well characterize John's teaching through the years, it has special meaning in relationship to this book. The message of Jesus Christ was revealed to John by His angel (1:1). With the message fully revealed to John, Jesus said to him, "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches" (22:16). Later John said, "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (22:20). The Apocalypse, then, is a message from Jesus, who was at God's right hand, through His angel to John and, subsequently, to all of His servants (5:7).

Angels often conveyed messages from Jesus to His servants. We have examples of angels working with the apostles (Acts 5:19-20), Philip (Acts 8:26), Cornelius (Acts 10:3-6,22), Peter (Acts 12:7-11), and Paul (Acts 27:23) to reveal important information and instructions to them. While these angels testified for Jesus, they did not reveal doctrinal truth. The Holy Spirit revealed the truth which makes men free from sin (John 16:13). Angels could reveal nothing that did not harmonize with the truth preached through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians were instructed to

reject all teaching revealed by angels which was not in harmony with that teaching revealed by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 1:6-8). The book of Revelation, though it is the testimony of Jesus revealed by an angel, contains no revelation of new spiritual truth. All spiritual truth was revealed before John wrote the Apocalypse.

## **It Is Prophecy**

John wrote, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy" (1:3). Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (22:7). The angel said to John, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (19:10). Prophecy "signifies the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God" (Vine). Some prophecy, though not all, foretells future history. Jesus instructed John; "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (1:19). The prophecy contained past, present, and future things at the time revealed. Some of those things were to be hereafter (1:19; 4:1). They were shortly "to come to pass" (1:1), or to "be done" (22:6).

The historical events prophetically revealed where signified (1:1) or symbolized unto John. Clues to the application of the message are enveloped in the pictorial scenes. These historical events were about to happen. John said, "for the time is at hand" (1:3; 22:10).

## **A Playground For Speculators**

The prophetic nature of Revelation has made it a playground for speculators. Thousands of books exist theorizing its meaning, and many false doctrines rest upon these theories. All of us have heard amazingly interesting discussions of the Mark of the Beast, The Battle of Armageddon, The Millennial Reign of Christ, The 144,000, The Great Whore, and others. The story changes with each exponent. Knowing the nature of the book and man, God warned lest man fall into this trap. It is written, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of

this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (22:18-19). Unless one is positively sure the Bible supports his conclusions, he would be wise to leave this book alone.

Speculation usually results in contradiction. Theories abound which contradict the rest of the Bible. The theory of Premillennialism, based primarily upon Revelation 20, contradicts almost every book of the Bible. While brethren generally have sought to be careful in their exegesis of the book, seeking to harmonize it with the rest of the Bible, many different views have evolved. All studies of the book should be accompanied by reverence and awe of the Lord who revealed it, and by constant prayer (James 1:5-6). God intended that the book be read, understood, and kept (1:3).

## **Conclusion**

Many brethren fear studying the book of Revelation. Some flinch when the book is mentioned. Others are totally turned off to it. The difficult language of the book with the many confused and contradictory explanations are the reasons. I would like to see this change. Let us awaken to the reality that our Lord Jesus Christ saw fit to give us this book with the promise that blessings come to those who acquaint themselves with it (1:3). I believe our fear of the book has kept us from understanding its marvelous message. 🙏

# What Is The Book Of Revelation? #2

In our first article, we affirmed that the book of Revelation is more than the last book of the Bible. It claims to be the Revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1), the testimony of Jesus (1:2), and prophecy (1:3). Because of its prophetic nature, it has become a playground for speculators. In this article, we will consider additional answers to our question.

## A Restatement Of Previously Revealed Truth

The work of revealing God's truth to mankind was given to the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). The Holy Spirit completed this work long before John saw the Apocalypse (cf. Acts 20:27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 2 Peter 1:3). In fact, the Holy Spirit completely revealed all the truth to the Apostles before any of the New Testament Scriptures were written. (cf. The Development of the New Testament by this author.) If this is true, the book of Revelation contains no revelations of new truth. If all truth was revealed before any of it was written, there was nothing new left to be revealed.

Jesus recognized the completion of the Holy Spirit's work when addressing the seven churches of Asia. While He knew the particular circumstances relating to each church, commending, condemning, and calling for repentance when warranted, He did not reveal His will for right conduct to the churches. He rather instructed each church to "hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). The message of truth was complete. The churches were instructed to appeal to the message revealed by the Spirit as their guide for proper conduct. Some might conclude upon the basis of this premise that a knowledge of the book of Revelation is not essential to salvation. I believe this to be a valid conclusion, but it should not be allowed to obscure our vision of the importance of the Apocalypse. This book contains vital messages for the Christian in every age.

## A Seal Upon The Rest Of The Scriptures

In John's vision of the throne of God, John saw "in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals" (5:1). This is interesting. God had a scroll in His hand that was completely full. It was sealed with seven seals signifying His complete and full approval of the scroll and its content. Jesus Christ, the Lamb found worthy to open the book and loose its seals, came to the right hand of God and received the scroll. All of heaven and earth then bowed before Him in honor and praise of Him.

This is a beautiful picture, but what does it mean? Our understanding of this scene flourishes when viewed in relationship to other scripture. Consider Daniel's vision of the Son of man. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). Ponder what was wrought in Christ when God "raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:20-21). It should be apparent that Revelation 5 gives us a visual picture of the inauguration of Christ as king with all authority at God's right hand.

What are the seals upon the book? Consider the words of Jesus on the night of His betrayal. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). Jesus gave His chosen apostles the words of God during His ministry (John 17:8,14), but He had not given them all of it.

The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus would send from the Father, would complete the revelation of God's word (John 14:16,26; 15:26). Jesus said, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:13-15). Jesus was to receive the entire message from the Father and send the Holy Spirit to complete the task.

This is our picture in Revelation 5. God had the book in His right hand. The book contained the full and complete word of God to man. Jesus received the book from God's right hand and sent the Holy Spirit to reveal it to mankind (5:6). John visualized scriptural teaching taught elsewhere in the Bible (cf. 1 Peter 3:22).

Now that we have determined what the book contains, what are the seals upon it? We must keep in mind that seals upon documents are not the documents themselves. A seal upon a document simply identifies and verifies the authority behind the document. The document is here. What proof is there of its authenticity and genuineness? Seals establish the authority behind the document. In this case, the seals upon the scroll certify that the complete and full word of God is authentic and genuine.

God does not think as humans. His ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). His memorials of memorable events have always been different than man would create. The Passover, the Sabbath, and the Lord's Supper are examples of God's different ways. The seals upon God's word are likewise different. These seals are historical events which had either already happened, were happening, or would happen in the future (1:19). Their fulfillment would place the stamp of God's full and complete approval upon His revealed word as from Him. The historical seals appear in chapters 6-11 of Revelation. They impress upon us that God has sealed His word.

God often used future historical milestones as evidence of the accuracy of His promises. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was to be proof the promised Messiah of the Old Testament scriptures came and accomplished all that God determined (Daniel 9:24-27). Jesus used the same event to establish the fulfillment of all the Old Testament scriptures (Luke 21:22). In this way, fulfillment of the events pictorially portrayed by the seven seals confirm that the full scroll came from God with His complete approval and authority. Again, this is a valid reason for placing the Apocalypse at the end of our scriptures.

### **A Book Of Comfort, Consolation And Security**

The words do not appear in the book and yet comfort, consolation and security permeate the book of Revelation. How comforting to know that blessedness comes to those who study this prophecy, keep the things written within (1:3), and "do his commandments" (22:14). How consoling to know that God invited us to drink freely of the water of life (22:17) and eat of the tree of life (2:7; 22:14). Also, think of the blessings afforded those who overcome. They inherit all things and realize intimate fellowship with God (3:20; 21:7). They have God's promise to be with them (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5-6; Revelation 13:10; 14:13). God promises that, if fellowship with Him results in the death of His saints, they will be blessed, rest from their labors (14:13), continue to live and reign with Christ (20:4), and the second death will have no power over them (20:6). What greater security could we desire?

### **A Masterpiece In Literature**

In this writer's opinion, the book of Revelation is the greatest piece of literature ever penned. It does not mention Old Testament books or quote from them and yet the entire scheme of redemption veiled in mystery throughout the ages pictorially appears. The New Testament order is mentally cast before our eyes as the fulfillment of the

mystery revealed by the prophets. The Apocalypse does not specifically mention the plan of salvation, yet the plan is in operation. This book does not mention the universal church yet it shines in all of its glory. It does not give us the details for acceptable living yet God's people glow in their white robes. What a glorious book! It touches all the bases. Nothing written on the pages of men can compare. It is a masterpiece presentation. 🙏

# Should We Study the Book of Revelation?

The book of Revelation is probably the most neglected book of the Bible. Everywhere we hear how difficult it is to understand. Some think the signs and symbols of the book are impossible to comprehend. Generally, a negative attitude toward its content reigns. Many gospel preachers will not preach from the book. I know of one preacher who would not so much as read or quote a passage from it. Brethren are apprehensive about studying it. Universal confusion, doubt and indifference over its meaning prevail.

Did God give us a book that is impossible to comprehend? Has He, who is infinite in wisdom, given us a challenge we cannot achieve? Is He playing games with us? Has He given us a book which promises “blessedness” to its obedient readers (1:3) without it being possible for them to understand, much less keep? The answer is “NO” on all counts. God anticipated that we could comprehend its messages and keep its instructions or He would not have promised blessedness for attempting it. Perhaps, it is time we believed God’s promise.

## God’s Word Is Purposely Deep

Is the book of Revelation difficult? Oh, yes, in places it is very difficult, but so are the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Do you understand everything in the book of Acts? Many passages in Acts are very difficult to comprehend. What about Romans and Hebrews and the other New Testament books? Are there not difficult passages in all of them, not to mention the books of the Old Testament? There are difficult passages throughout the Bible and we should be thankful for them. This helps us to keep digging so we can continue to understand the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in God’s marvelous storehouse (Colossians 2:2-3). God has arranged His word so that the deeper you dig the greater the treasure. The more you find the more you wish to dig, and the more you dig the more you find. There is

no end to the treasure. The blessedness of spiritual understanding is unlimited. God wants us to dig.

In many respects, the book of Revelation is no different than all other books of the Bible. It does have difficult passages and some are very difficult but some of it is very simple and easily understood. Permitting negative thoughts about the book to kill our initiative and desire to understand the book, may close our eyes to the greatest of all treasures of spiritual understanding. God promises blessedness for hearing His message in the Apocalypse (1:3). Are we to believe God? He says we can profit from its message. Whether or not we are willing to follow His instruction is a measure by which our faith in God is determined. We should study the book of Revelation.

## Discard Denominational Views

God’s people should be ashamed of themselves. If there is a group of people on earth that should understand the book of Revelation it is we who are the people of God. Why should we have to rely upon denominational scholars for our views on John’s Apocalypse? Are they, who do not so much as know the simple plan of salvation, more apt at understanding the mysteries of God’s will than we? Brethren, who would not teach these men’s doctrines on the plan of salvation within the congregation, will readily teach their views on the book of Revelation. In fact, many of the commentaries written by our brethren are nothing more than the best of the denominational commentators adapted for our use. I think it is time we laid the denominational positions aside and dug down deep into God’s storehouse for the truth and for understanding of this marvelous book.

This writer does not oppose commentaries or their use. In fact, I am the author of a commentary on Revelation entitled “The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets.” Naturally, I would like for all of you to read my



commentary on Revelation because I believe it contains the truth about the book of Revelation. However, whether you ever read it or not, you can learn much from John's Apocalypse. You need only to dedicate yourself to reading the Apocalypse over and over again, studying it, and meditating upon it while continuing your studies of both the Old and New Testaments. Commentaries can help in your search for truth, particularly those written by brethren, yet you need to remember that commentaries are written by fallible men who often err. God's word is always the best commentary on every difficult passage and diligent study of it will gradually open the doors to understanding.

### **A Challenge**

This Bible student would like to challenge you to include the book of Revelation in all of your future biblical studies. You owe it to yourself, your brethren, and especially to the Lord to study this part of His word. By failing to study this portion of His word, you rob yourself of God's promised blessing, and you rob God of your faith in Him which He seeks. Why not pledge today to become more concerned about the teaching of the book of Revelation? John's words are still ringing, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein" (Revelation 1:3). 🙏

# Can We Understand the Book of Revelation?

In previous articles, we emphasized our need to study the book of Revelation. If Jesus Christ revealed the Apocalypse amid promises of blessedness to those who “keep those things which are written therein” (Revelation 1:3; 22:7), He intended for us to understand it. Yet, there are those who think it is impossible to understand this marvelous book.

Can we understand the book of Revelation? I think we can, but let us learn early that we must start with what we already understand and build upon it. This will prove to us that we can understand much of the book of Revelation.

## Do You Understand God?

We do not know all there is to learn about God and His Son, Jesus Christ, but, if we have studied the Bible, we have a pretty good picture of both. We understand, do we not, that God rules in heaven on His throne and that Jesus Christ is at His right hand ruling with all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Peter 3:22)? If we understand the teaching of these passages, we can understand John’s picture describing God’s throne. He sees all of heaven and earth bow before God and Jesus Christ, the Lamb, who is at God’s right hand (Revelation 4 & 5). The beasts and the twenty-four elders are more difficult to comprehend but we should not let them detract from our perception of this beautiful scene. You see, we can understand the book of Revelation!

## Do You Understand The Fall of Man?

God provided for man’s spiritual needs from the beginning. He placed the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9). Eating of it would make man immortal (Genesis 3:22). Instead, Satan beguiled Eve. She and Adam ate of the forbidden fruit bringing sin and death

into the world (Romans 5:12). Yet, in the midst of this, God promised man deliverance from Satan’s grasp through the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15). Do you understand what happened here and how that has affected the human race? If so, you will thrill to discern this beautiful picture visualized by John in Revelation 12. Satan is defeated and cast down while salvation becomes a reality to man (Revelation 12:10). Man’s right to the tree of life is restored (Revelation 2:7; 22:2,14). We may not comprehend every detail pictured in these passages but we do understand some of it. You see, we can understand the book of Revelation!

## Do You Understand the Plan of Salvation?

The plan of salvation is not specifically outlined in the book of Revelation, yet we see it at work. Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). Nothing changes in Revelation. “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14). Those who obey God’s commandments are those who belong to Jesus (Revelation 12:17) and have hope (Revelation 14:12-13). You see, we can understand the book of Revelation!

## Do You Understand The Church?

Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18) and He built it (Hebrews 8:2). Men who responded in obedience to the gospel receiving salvation are added to it (Acts 2:38-47). Jesus Christ is its head (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). All who are added are members

of the same church (Ephesians 3:6). Naturally, we are talking about the universal church because there are many local churches identified in the scriptures all believing, teaching, and practicing the same things (2 John 9-11). You understand this!

The book of Revelation also pictures the church. We see the universal church pictured in chapters 21-22 and, regardless of how we view this scene, we have a picture of the church in its universal essence. Chapters 2-3 portray the church in its congregational essence. We do not have problems comprehending these chapters. You see, we can understand the book of Revelation!

### **Many Things Are Pictorially Presented**

One of our chief problems understanding the Apocalypse is our failure to see the picture visualized. Many things, we comprehend otherwise, become obscure when pictorially presented. Here are a few things, of which you probably have a correct biblical understanding, viewed in Revelation pictorially:

1. The fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Revelation 10:7; cf. Daniel 9:24-27; Luke 21:22).
2. The atonement offered for our sins (Revelation 1:5; 5:6,9; 12:10-11; cf. John 1:29; Hebrews 9:11-14).
3. The cleansing of the righteous Old Testament saints (Revelation 6:9; 7:1-4; 14:1-5; cf. Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:15).
4. The beginning and spread of Christianity from Pentecost (Revelation 14:6; cf. Acts 2).
5. The King and His kingdom (Revelation 1:6,9; 5:9-10; 12:10; 19:11-16; cf. Colossians 1:12-14; Hebrews 12:28-29).
6. The Christian's relationship to God (Revelation 7:9-17; 21-22; II Corinthians 6:16-18; Hebrews 12:22-24).
7. The Christian's relationship to civil government (Revelation 13:8,12,15; 14:9-11; 20:4; cf. Acts 4:19; 5:29; Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-15).
8. The judgment and justice of God as He

rules in the affairs of men (Revelation 4-20:3; cf. Daniel 4:17,25,32; 5:21).

9. The resurrection and judgment (Revelation 20:11-15; cf. John 5:28-30; Romans 2:6-11).
10. Reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked (Revelation 14:9-13; 20:4-6,14-15; 21:8; cf. Matthew 25:34,41,46; II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

No doubt you have a good perception of many of these topics. If you do, you can claim that you already understand some of the book of Revelation because all of these subjects to one degree or another appear in the Apocalypse. There is nothing new here. Things learned elsewhere in the Bible concerning these themes often emerge in Revelation in the scenes which unfold. We simply must apply what we learn elsewhere in the scriptures to the setting in the Apocalypse. You see, we can understand the book of Revelation!

### **Eliminating The Negative**

You may be thinking, "I understand, but the book of Revelation is about 'things which must shortly come to pass' and these subjects do not identify those forthcoming events." This is true. Nothing we have discussed in this article identifies those events. We have rather sought to establish the fact that we can understand the book of Revelation. We comprehend that part of the book which identifies with the rest of the scriptures. So, we can understand it! Do not permit your inability to fathom the mystery of those hidden events to cloud your study of this marvelous book. You are cheating yourself of knowledge, and robbing God of your faith. Eliminate the negative attitude and learn the identity of the hidden mystery.

Uncovering the key to understanding the Apocalypse lies (1) in paying attention to John's (not yours or some other man's) explanations of certain details and (2) in learning the teaching of the rest of the scriptures. Any interpretation that ignores John's explanation will be in error, and any interpretation ignoring the rest of the scriptures

will likewise be in error. Since the teaching of the Apocalypse relative to the other topics suggested appear elsewhere in the Bible, perhaps our search for the hidden things should include the rest of the scriptures also.

## **Conclusion**

This article is designed to create within our hearts and minds a desire to know more about the book of Revelation. It is the last book of the Bible and, if it were not important, it would not be a part of the Bible. Since it is important, we have an obligation to treat it like the rest of the scriptures.

This writer believes the book can be clearly understood and should be treated like all other books. We permit scripture to interpret scripture when studying the other books, and we should let the scriptures interpret the Apocalypse. When we permit this to happen, we will learn to make the proper application of the book and find answers to many other biblical questions puzzling us. 🙏

# Clues to Understanding the Apocalypse

In a previous article, a number of things were suggested as helps in deciphering the message of the Book of Revelation. In the beginning of this study, let us be reminded of them: (1) Look for explanations of the signs in the text. Many times John explains the meaning of a portion of a picture. We must not ignore his explanations. They serve as a beginning point around which we can build the rest of the picture. (2) Compare similar pictures found elsewhere in the scriptures. Corresponding pictures often represent the same things. (3) Recognize that some signs are so obvious they need no further identification, i.e., the Lamb of God is clearly understood to be Jesus Christ. (4) Use common sense to decode the rest.

## Solving The Puzzle

If we are alike, you enjoy working puzzles of all sorts. Puzzles challenge our ability to imagine and perceive possibilities not readily recognized. Picture puzzles are especially fascinating. Who has not tried his hand at working one? Those lacking patience do not usually last long, but those who persist are rewarded in many ways. The book of Revelation is a big visionary puzzle with meaning. Only those with patience to prevail reap the reward of understanding. Revelation is a difficult puzzle to solve.

There are some helpful suggestions to working a picture puzzle. (1) Turn all of the pieces face up so you can see them. (2) Put those of the same colors together because they probably go together. (3) Begin by finding the pieces with straight edges and put them together to form the border. Every piece has a place. By putting the border together, you reduce the number of pieces left to choose from. (4) Take a good look at the picture of your puzzle so you will understand the outstanding scenes in relationship to the border. (5) Build each outstanding scene in its proper relationship to the border. This way you are working the easier parts first while

reducing the difficult pieces to the minimum. (6) Make sure each piece fits in its proper place. If you do not, it will disrupt your entire effort. (7) When the colors begin to look alike, take a break, but (8) return again and again until you have placed every piece where it belongs.

## Working the Apocalypse

The mechanics of working picture puzzles is not our interest. What we are really talking about is the book of Revelation. I do not advise anyone to undertake a study of this book until they have a good understanding of the Bible. You especially need to understand the fall of man, the scheme of redemption, and the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments. In other words, lay the pieces on the table face up so you can see them in relationship to each other. The Apocalypse involves all of these things. Unless you know the truth on these matters, you cannot solve this puzzle.

Next, it is important that you identify the things in the Apocalypse you are familiar with. God's word does not contradict itself. The teachings of the rest of the scriptures are reflected in the Apocalypse. Most of us understand chapters 2-3 of Revelation fairly well because we understand the New Testament teaching regarding the local churches. Similarly, the Godhead as pictured elsewhere in the Bible appears in Revelation. Jesus Christ emerges as the Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world as portrayed throughout the Bible. In the beginning, forget about learning the identity of the things being foretold. Concentrate rather upon the things already revealed (1:19).

Look for the border pieces, i.e., that part of the picture unmistakably identified for us by John. As we noted before, no less than three dozen times John clearly establishes what certain parts of his vision means. These serve as anchors around which the rest of the picture hangs. These identified parts put us on

course and keep us there. If we ignore them, we most certainly will go astray in our interpretation of the message. On the other hand, if we are unable to accept John's identifications as given, we most undoubtedly are off course in our explanation of the Apocalypse.

### **Illustrating This Truth**

In many cases, John's identification of the scene is too obvious to ignore. The vision personage described in chapter one (vs.12-18), though not immediately identified, was the Son of God (2:18). This settles it. Jesus Christ is the person visualized in chapter one. Jesus himself explained the mystery of the seven stars in His right hand and the seven golden lampstands. He said, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches" (Rev.1:20). This explanation helps us visualize a picture of Jesus Christ in His relationship to the churches as taught elsewhere in the New Testament.

Many examples of this nature occur. We see "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God" (Rev.4:5). Later we observe the Lamb standing in the midst of the throne of God "having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (Rev.5:6). In these texts, John explains that the seven lamps and seven eyes represent the Holy Spirit. The "seven Spirits" are identified as a part of the Godhead in the book's salutatory remarks (1:4). We must conclude, therefore, that the Holy Spirit appears in His proper relationship to God's throne.

We also observe the four living beings with the twenty-four elders falling down before the Lamb, "having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints" (Rev.5:8). The petitions of God's saints are pictured making their way to God's throne (cf.8:3-4). To view these as anything other than what John proclaims would be an injustice to John and to our

understanding of the message of Revelation.

### **Clues Usually Ignored**

In chapter seven, John "heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (7:4). Brethren usually contend that the 144,000 represent the church, spiritual Israel, and that the tribes, like the number, are symbolic. If this is true, I wonder how John would have worded it if he had intended to identify physical Israel? While it is true, the church is spiritual Israel, it is not true that spiritual Israel has twelve tribes. If so, would someone please inform me of my tribal identity? If they are symbolic, then please inform me what they are symbolic of? On the other hand, suppose John intended to inform us of the sealing of God's servants from under the Old Testament system. What better way than to state it plainly as he did? After all, the rest of the New Testament shows the cleansing of the Old Testament saints (cf.Heb.9:15; 12:22-24). This not only fits the teaching of the rest of the Bible but it is what John said.

In chapter eleven, we observe the dead bodies of God's two witnesses lying "in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (Rev.11:8). The Bible teaches that Jesus died at Jerusalem (cf.Matt.16:21; Mk.10:33; Lk.13:33). To ignore this plain statement in favor of some other glorified explanation testifies that the expositor misunderstands and misapplies this scene.

In chapter thirteen, John identifies the sea beast by a number. He said, "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six" (13:18). Many expositors understand the sea beast represents the Roman Empire. We do not need to know the number of the beast to conclude this. We conclude this from the context. Commentators often view the number 666 as symbolic of imperfection and conclude it applies to the

Roman Empire to show that it does not measure up to God whose number is the perfect 777. To be frank, I could tell that about this beast if John had never confused me with the number. John said, "It is the number of a man." Did he mean it? It has long been recognized that 666 is the number of Nero's name. He was the sixth emperor of Rome and certainly fits the picture painted by John in this chapter. The theories of men do not fit the picture of Nero, however, and John's explanation must be passed over.

## **Conclusion**

Many clues of this nature appear in the Apocalypse. These were mentioned only to illustrate the point. Others are far more noticeable and important. Every statement made by John in his presentation is designed to reveal this mystery to us. All of them are important. None can be passed over, ignored or overlooked. Once the pieces are identified, every piece of this great puzzle will harmoniously fit together. We may miss it in some places, but rest assured from the outset that it all fits and all makes sense. If there are any people on earth who should fathom the mysteries of this book, it is we who are the people of God. Only we can put all of the pieces on the table.☺

# Rightly Dividing the Apocalypse

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Approval before God is dependent upon rightly dividing or “handling aright” (ASV) the word of God. Dealing with God’s word correctly is the predominant thought of this text and rightly dividing it is an important part of handling it right. All of us recognize the importance of properly outlining the books of the Bible. A failure to identify correctly the chief subject matter can lead to the wrong interpretation of a passage.

The book of Revelation, like the other books of the Bible, must be correctly divided. Most commentators recognize the need to divide the chapters into major sections. While these may differ with each commentator, the need to divide it is underscored by the tremendous amount of confusion which results otherwise.

## Suggested Major Divisions

Some students of the Apocalypse divide the book into two major divisions, Chapters 1-11 & 12-22. Homer Hailey uses these divisions of the book calling part one “Conflict And Judgment Within And Without The Church” and part two “War And Victory!” (Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary). Ferrell Jenkins follows this format also calling the first division “Worthy is the Lamb!” and the second division “Saints Victorious!” (Studies in the Book of Revelation). Certainly, dividing the book this way emphasizes what is apparent, the rule of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords and the saints victorious in every conflict.

Others divide the book into four sections, Chapters 1-3, 4-11, 12-22:5, & 22:6-21. Of the more prominent ones who follow this order are Weldon Warnock (Message From Patmos, p. 69) and Foy E. Wallace, Jr. (The Book of Revelation). Wallace designates the four divisions “The Visual Prologue” (1-3), “The Apocalypse of The Conquering Christ” (4-11),

“The Apocalypse of The Victorious Church” (12-22:5) and “The Apocalyptic Epilogue” (22:6-21).

The I.S.B.E., under the title “Revelation of John” by James Orr (Vol. 4, p. 2585), divides the Apocalypse into five divisions. W. Hendriksen’s “More Than Conquerors” caught the attention of many brethren forty to fifty years ago. Hendriksen divided the book into seven divisions. Of this he said, “These seven sections run parallel. Each of them spans the entire dispensation from the first to the second coming of Christ. This period is viewed now from one aspect; then from another” (p. 25). The position is known as “Progressive Parallelism.”

The divisions given to the book differ with varying commentators and may run anywhere from two to fifteen. Jim McGuiggan’s 1976 commentary divides the book into fourteen (14) chapter divisions with no more than three chapters in each division: 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6, 7, 8-9, 10-12, 13, 14-15, 16, 17-18, 19, 20, 21-22 (The Book of Revelation, pages 16-19). McGuiggan’s divisions recognize obvious breaks in the visions though a couple of them may be questioned.

## How to Determine Divisions

Every story told or sermon preached can be outlined to emphasize the chief points and make it more comprehensible for the hearers. Any sermon that cannot be properly outlined probably lacks continuity and clarity. I divided the sermon I preached last Sunday morning into six major points besides the introduction and conclusion. I noticed in the preparation and presentation of the lesson that many of the points were partly repetitious of previous points. Some could have easily said, “You have already made that point.” I had, but it was necessary for me to make it again in order to develop the new point which went beyond the previous one. The fact that repetition took place did not mean that I had failed to outline my lesson correctly. It simply emphasized that



the part repeated was necessary to making the new point.

Forty years ago, I was taught that outlining our material was important to the proper presentation of our thoughts. It is necessary to introduce our subject matter in which we explain to our audience the proposal for the lesson. In other words, we tell our audience what we intend to tell them in the presentation. Then we come to the body of our discussion where we tell them what we are going to tell them. We may have several things to tell them or we may have only one thing to explain to them, but divide it up so they can comprehend it more readily. When we are through telling them what we intended, conclude our remarks by briefly going over again what we have told them. I have generally followed these instructions through the years.

## **General Divisions of Revelation**

It is easy to see that the Apocalypse follows the above format in its development. The book has an introduction, body, and conclusion. There may be some differences of opinion as to where the introduction ends and the body begins but all can see that these three divisions exist. I am of the opinion that the real body of the book begins with chapter 4 where the purpose stated in 1:1 and 19 begin to be addressed (cf.4:1). While this makes the introduction rather long (chapters 1-3), it establishes what was being revealed, who revealed it, whom it was revealed to, and why. The previously stated purpose (1:1, 19) that begins to unfold in chapter 4 was completed by the time we reach 22:6. "The Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done." The rest of the Apocalypse (22:6-21) forms John's conclusion. Chapters 4-22:5 constitute the body of the book. This is the section where John revealed what he was told to reveal to God's servants.

## **The Body of Discussion**

Chapter 4-22:5 constitute a large volume of material. It would be helpful to divide it for

ease of remembrance. We readily see that there are times when the subject material changes. Nearly all commentators agree that a natural division takes place between chapters 11 and 12. It is also observed that while these divisions are very similar and cover the same things, there are some differences. Chapters 4-5 present the throne of God with Jesus Christ coming into authority. Chapter 12 begins with Jesus coming to the throne of God and receiving His power and authority as the Christ (vs.5,10). Chapters 4-11 only go as far as the destruction of a city while chapters 12-22:5 go beyond the destruction of the city all the way to the judgment and beyond (20:11-15). If both sections show the destruction of the same city (the context demands this conclusion), then the two sections are parallel to that point in the presentation.

Dividing chapters 4-11 into one major division within this discussion will assist us in emphasizing its major point, namely, Jesus Christ is King. His rule is established in chapter 5 and, by the time we arrive at the end of this section, He has demonstrated that He is firmly in control (11:15-17).

I believe another major division of the remaining material is warranted. Chapters 12-19:10 take us through the destruction of a city called Babylon the Great. This is the same city destroyed in chapter 11. This section does not end here, however. It continues by picturing the destruction of those agents which brought an end to Babylon and continues all the way to the judgment (20:11-15). This is followed by the appearance of the New Jerusalem. A division should be made here regardless of how we view the New Jerusalem. (1) If we view this glorious city as the righteous in heaven, it is the beginning of a new order and should be considered as different for that reason. (2) If we view New Jerusalem as the glorious church of Christ, it should be considered separately because it is not intrinsically related to the previous divisions of the Apocalypse. This means we divided body of the book into three divisions making a total of five all together.

## Sub-Divisions

The major divisions of the Apocalypse are easily sub-divided. Chapters 4-11 may be divided this way: (1) The throne of God, chapters 4-5; (2) The opening of the first six seals, chapter 6; (3) The first interlude, chapter 7; (4) The sounding of the first six trumpets, chapters 8-9; (5) The second interlude, chapters 10-11:14; and (6) The sounding of the seventh trumpet, chapter 11:15-19. Chapters 12-20 may be divided similarly: (1) The underlying conflict, chapter 12; (2) Satan's Helpers, chapter 13; (3) The Lamb, the three messages and the reapings, chapter 14; (4) The seven bowls of wrath, chapters 15-16; (5) Babylon the Great and her destruction, chapters 17-19:10; (6) The lingering conflict, 19:11-20:10, and (7) The final judgment, 20:11-15.

## Conclusion

For public presentations I divide the book into four sections: (1) Christ among the Churches, 1-3; (2) The Heavenly Apocalypse, 4-11; (3) The Earthly Apocalypse, 12-20; and (4) The New Jerusalem, 21-22. The first and fourth divisions are related because both deal with the people of God. The first division portrays God's people on earth as members of the local churches and the fourth division envisions God's people spiritually as the New Jerusalem (cf. Hebrews 12:22-25). The middle divisions of the book are also related. Both uncover clues to the events shortly to be carried out. The second division (4-11) deals with those things as ordered and directed by the throne of God. The third division (12-20) deals with them as carried out by earthly instruments. They cover the same things from different points of view.

It is not my intention to impose any of these divisions of the book upon you. It is rather my desire to motivate and stimulate your involvement in this neglected part of our Bible. May your study of the Apocalypse be a fruitful one. 🙏

# The Language of the Book of Revelation

Hand a copy of the Apocalypse to anyone for their first reading and they will be completely overwhelmed by it. Even if the person is familiar with the rest of the New Testament, he will be bewildered by this book. It is different. While there are Old Testament books and a few New Testament texts containing similar language, Revelation probably contains more of this kind of language than all the rest put together. What kind of language is this? What purpose does it serve? How do we deal with it, and how do we decipher the message embedded within it?

## Pictorial Language

The language is often called “Apocalyptic.” This term is used to describe the language because the first Greek word in this book is apokalupsis (translated in our English versions as “The Revelation”). The word means “an uncovering, or unveiling” (Thayer). The language is designed to uncover (reveal) “things which must shortly come to pass” (Revelation 1:1). This is its purpose but this does not describe the language. The message of this book was signified (sign-i-fied) to John (1:1). This indicates the abundant use of signs (symbols) in its presentation. Words and phrases are used to signify, symbolize and reveal what is otherwise hidden. We may with accuracy call the language of Revelation sign or symbolic language.

Additionally, we observe John describing various scenes which unfold before the mind’s eye. Various scenes develop, as in a play, creating mental pictures designed to reveal to us the “the things which must shortly come to pass.” Some scenes are detached from the others (cf. 1:10-20; 21:1-22:7). Other scenes change interconnecting from one scene to another (cf. chapters 4-11; 12-20). The scenes change much like a novel, movie or TV show, yet they are interrelated to carry the story line through to the end. For this reason, I like to call the language of the Apocalypse “pictorial,” i.e., “evoking or suggesting a mental image or

picture” (Webster’s New World Dictionary). This was one way the people of John’s day could view a documentary or a movie.

## The Purpose of this Language

There must be some reason John used pictorial language. When asked why He spoke in parables, Jesus responded, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (Matthew 13:11). Jesus uttered many parables which had to be explained before His listeners could grasp the meaning. He used them to reveal truth to His disciples and to hide it from His enemies. The parables also make lasting impressions upon us. Who can forget the parable of the sower once he understands its message? There was purpose behind the parables, and they served their objective well.

The purpose of Revelation was stated early. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass” (Revelation 1:1). Like the parables, the pictorial language of the Apocalypse reveals truth concerning impending historical events. Not everything portrayed in the Apocalypse was future, however, because John was instructed to “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter” (Revelation 1:19). So, there are past, present, and future occurrences visualized in the scenes which unfold.

The Apocalypse also hides its message from those who are not God’s servants. One need not be a genius to conclude that it contains a hidden message. Our first reading revealed this. Yet, this book was written to show God’s servants things that were shortly to be done (1:1; 22:6). They could read, understand, and keep the things written within it (1:3). We may ask, “How could God’s servants in that day read and understand what is so difficult for His servants today?” The answer is rather simple. Those Christians still

possessed spiritual gifts to assist them in understanding (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). By the gifts they could receive revelations and interpretations (1 Corinthians 14:26) by which they could “understand all mysteries” (1 Corinthians 13:2). When we add the fact that the people of John’s day were acquainted with current events, we can see how they could apply the language to their historical setting more readily. In contrast, we have only the various signs and symbols of the book to draw on, yet, we can use them as a starting place in our investigation of the text. By carefully studying similar language found elsewhere in the scriptures, we should be able to uncover the basic message directed to those saints and the lingering one for us today.

Furthermore, the scenes in the Apocalypse make lasting impressions upon us and, once we grasp the central message of the book, it will never leave us. The scenes are so bizarre they fascinate us. They create a desire within us for more information. Understanding becomes a challenge to many and the desire of all. Countless are the attempts to establish the identity of the historical events portrayed but in time their application to the language of the book is proven elusive and false. Only the truth is lasting. Once we find it, an impression is made upon our minds that will last forever.

The purpose of the book of Revelation, then, is to reveal, conceal, and secure. It reveals things shortly to come to pass to God’s servants, conceals them from the enemies of God’s people, and secures them firmly in the minds of those who understand (1:3). One of the great spiritual blessings we receive from this book is some degree of understanding.

### **Dealing with the Language**

Pictorial or sign language is difficult even though we deal with it every day. There are simple and complicated forms. Our road signs are visual signs designed to give us messages. Some signs give us a message to read. Others contain symbols designed to get the message across to us. The signs are not literal, yet they give us messages that are literal. For example, if we see a sign along the

highway with an arrow curving to the left, we know there is a curve in the road bearing to the left. The sign is not the curve but it tells us a literal curve is ahead. All of us have seen “deer crossing” signs. The picture on the sign is not a deer but it warns us that a real deer may be crossing the road ahead. We have many such signs along the highway. In recent years, our road signs have taken on new symbols so illiterate drivers can read them. These signs are meaningless, however, unless we learn from their creators what they stand for.

Most of us are familiar with the language used to communicate with the hearing impaired. Unless we have studied this language and learned what it means, it is useless to us. However, those who understand what each gesture means readily perceive the message spoken by such language. The different movements of the fingers and hands form mental pictures in the mind of a person and the message is received. Pictorial and/or sign language has been with us for a long time. We use it every day. It is time to apply the same rules by which we understand our everyday sign language to the book of Revelation.

### **Deciphering Biblical Sign Language**

The pictorial language used in the Bible works much the same way as the above examples in our modern society. We must learn what the signs mean before we can interpret them. The Bible is our best source for understanding the use of its sign and pictorial language. Here are some suggestions on learning the meaning of the different signs: (1) Look for explanations of the signs in the text. Many times John explains the meaning of a portion of a picture. We must not ignore his explanations. They serve as a beginning point around which we can build the rest of the picture. (2) Compare similar pictures found elsewhere in the scriptures. Corresponding pictures often represent the same things. (3) Recognize that some signs are so obvious they need no further identification, i.e., the

Lamb of God is clearly understood to be Jesus Christ. (4) Use common sense to decode the rest.

The process of learning to understand the language of the Apocalypse will never end. In this way, the book is like the rest of the Bible. No one has totally exhausted the scriptures. There are many things yet to learn, and we will not digest the book of Revelation over night either. Include it in you studies. Take your time. Observe, compare and remember what you learn for future reference. Eventually, you will prevail. You will broaden your understanding of pictorial language, the book of Revelation and the rest of the scriptures.☺

# “Seven” in Revelation

1. Churches -- 1:4,11,20
2. Spirits -- 1:4; 3:1; 5:6
3. Golden candlesticks -- 1:12,13,20; 2:1
4. Stars -- 1:16,20; 2:1; 3:1
5. Lamps -- 4:5
6. Seals -- 5:1,5
7. Horns -- 5:6
8. Eyes -- 5:6
9. Angels -- 8:2,6; 15:1,6,7,8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9
10. Trumpets -- 8:2,6
11. Thunders -- 10:3,4
12. Heads -- 12:3; 13:1; 17:3,7,9
13. Crowns -- 12:3
14. Plagues -- 15:1,6,8; 21:9
15. Golden Vials -- 15:7; 17:1; 21:9
16. Mountains -- 17:9
17. Kings -- 17:10,11
18. Thousands (some might not count this) -- 11:13

# Revelation and the Rest of the Bible

What relationship does the Apocalypse sustain to the rest of the Bible? Does it sustain an intimate, fundamental, essential part of the Bible, or a dangling, loosely attached relationship? Do we interpret the book of Revelation by the rest of the Bible, or do we interpret the rest of the Bible by our view of the Revelation?

Our view of the book dictates the direction we travel in explaining its language. If we see an intimate relationship, we are bound by reason to harmonize the entire book with the rest of the Bible. If we see only a dangling relationship, we are bound only to recognize the obvious ties to the rest of the Bible. This leaves us free to see what we wish in the visions recorded by John.

## Speculators Dangle

Wild, imaginative, speculative theories about the Apocalypse, often illustrated with finesse, are usually built upon the slightest resemblance to passages found elsewhere in the scriptures. The greater details which render the connections impossible are either ignored or glossed over. Ignorant and unsuspecting persons become prey to the proponents of these theories. Once they have established their supposed links, these speculators take the liberty to give any explanation that serves their interests.

Dispensationalist and Premillennialist have had a field day with their theories because of this approach. Revelation is not interpreted in the light of the rest of the Bible. To the contrary, the rest of the scriptures are interpreted in the light of their theories on the Apocalypse. Prophecies thousands of years old with long established fulfillments are revived to give credence to their theories. This has cheapened the Bible until it is no longer read, studied, or revered as it was fifty to one hundred years ago. Theories have replaced the faith that once existed in the Bible as the Word of God. Beware! Any position that interprets the rest of the Bible by its view of the

Apocalypse will lead one into damnation. A few brethren have fallen prey to this philosophy.

## The Correct Position

To the Christian, the correct approach is evident. As Peter said, "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:20-21). The book of Revelation is prophecy (Revelation 1:3; 22:18-19). The prophet, John, received this message through the angel of Jesus Christ (1:1). This book is not John's own private opinion, and we cannot let our private opinions interpret this prophecy. We are warned lest our opinions take away from the prophecy John revealed. "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

With these warnings, we must be careful that our explanations of the Apocalypse do not add to or take away from the prophecy of this book. This demands (1) careful examination of the book for clues to its meaning, (2) respect for John's explanations, and (3) painstaking effort to harmonize the Apocalypse with the rest of the Bible.

Brethren generally seek to follow these guidelines. While we may not always agree with the conclusions reached, we do agree with the effort to harmonize the Apocalypse with the rest of the scriptures. Homer Hailey suggests three helpful rules when studying the book of Revelation: (1) Determine as near as possible the meaning of the book to the people John addressed. (2) Understand the Old Testament scriptures, especially the

prophets. (3) Make sure all interpretations are consistent and harmonious with New Testament teaching (cf. Revelation, Hailey, pages 52-53).

The book of Revelation must be harmonized with the rest of the Bible.

## **The Connection**

Some authorities have estimated that from 300 to 400 references to the Old Testament scriptures can be found in the book of Revelation. None of them are quoted though the connection is clear. New Testament teaching is also reflected in nearly every verse. Why is there such a noticeable use of Old and New Testament teaching? Perhaps it was intended to show the weaving of the testaments together with those things revealed in the Apocalypse that were shortly to be fulfilled. Think about this! There was something revealed in the Old and New Testaments which is brought together for one ultimate and complete fulfillment in things which were shortly to come to pass (1:1). Their fulfillment magnified the divine mind that made them known and established the authenticity of everything God revealed to us. This approach to the book of Revelation renders it meaningful and edifying.

## **No New Doctrine in Revelation**

As we have observed before, there is nothing new in the book of Revelation. Its message was revealed long before the book was written and, in such a way, as to render the message of Revelation false otherwise. Jesus promised to guide His apostles into all truth (John 16:13). This was accomplished by 58 A.D. Paul instructed the Ephesians, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). If the Holy Spirit had not revealed all truth by this time, Paul could not have declared all the counsel of God to the Ephesians. On the other hand, if all truth was revealed by 58 A.D., the book of Revelation contains only that which already existed or it is not a part of the counsel of God. The Hebrew writer also argues for the

complete revelation of truth when he says it "was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Heb.2:3).

Again, Paul said, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). The Galatians were to accept only that teaching which they had already received. Nothing new was to be received from an apostle or an angel. This is interesting! The Apocalypse was revealed to John by an angel after the book of Galatians (Revelation 1:1). Since the Galatians were forbidden to receive new teaching, they could not accept the Revelation if it contained any thing other than what they had already received. So, either John's message was an old one, or John was to be accursed.

Many other passages show the same thing. Even the instruction of Jesus to the seven churches shows the Spirit fulfilled His mission. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The Spirit's work of revealing the counsel of God was complete when John saw the Apocalypse.

## **Conclusion**

In our last article we noted a number of things found elsewhere in the scriptures to which reference is made in the book of Revelation. From Genesis through Jude applications are made in the Apocalypse. All comes together in a most beautiful picture of divine justice. God's redemptive forces are pictured at work in a cruel and wicked world that rejects God's eternal plan and persecutes those who believe and obey it. They must reap the consequences of their behavior. This was foretold in both the Old and New Testaments. John shows that their ultimate and complete fulfillment was at hand. This would magnify the divine mind from whence they came. The fulfillment of the prophecies foretold in the Apocalypse establish its own authenticity and that of the rest of the Bible. 🙏



# Dating the Apocalypse #1

Many of the great discussions about the book of Revelation concern the date of writing. Some think that if we could determine the date of writing, we could determine the subject matter of the book and make application accordingly. In some cases efforts to determine the date of writing take precedence over the substance and application of the book.

In this article, I propose to discuss the importance of dating the books of the Bible and how to approach it with some emphasis upon dating the book of Revelation.

## Importance of Dating

Establishing the dates when Biblical books were written contributes to our overall understanding of their message. By knowing the author, the place and time of his writing, we can imagine the setting with all of the attendant surroundings and comprehend more fully the message of each book. We can cast ourselves into the history of the time and feel the very mood of the age. Through our mind's eye we can project ourselves into the spirit of the era and be partaker of the very same learning experience enjoyed by the original recipients.

## Types of Evidence

In searching for the date when a book of the Bible was written, we must consider both **internal** and **external** evidences. By internal, we mean, evidence contained within the book. Since all scripture is given by inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16,17), internal evidence must be considered as **God breathed**. By external, we mean, evidence found outside the book which contributes in some way to our understanding of the matter. External evidence rests upon the testimony of uninspired men and is, therefore, **man given**. Our greatest effort should concentrate upon internal evidence because it is most reliable. When there is a conflict between internal and external evidences, we

must trust internal evidence (Romans 3:4). We should never believe fallible men above Holy Spirit inspired men. External evidence can contribute to our conclusions but it must be considered only as circumstantial and never as conclusive proof. External evidence must not contradict inspiration.

There are two kinds of internal evidence:

- 1) Evidence found within the book under consideration pinpointing the time of writing, and
- 2) Evidence from within the book which ties the book and time of writing to some other biblical or secular event. In many cases we can determine within reasonable latitude the time and place of a book's composition by considering the internal evidences.

## Some Books Are Dated

Some authors are very kind. They dated their works, at least in general terms, so we will place them in their proper place in history. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah all date their prophecies and writings to the reigns of specified kings. Some authors date portions of their books within the specified period.

The visions of Daniel were dated in relationship to the reigning monarch at the time. They occurred throughout the seventy plus years Daniel was in Babylon. The visions of Ezekiel are dated in relationship to the Babylonian captivity and the first destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (cf. Ezek. 40:1). Neither Daniel nor Ezekiel record their visions in perfect chronological order.

Other authors, including the New Testament writers, were not as kind as those we named. Occasionally, authors recorded events tied to secular historical settings but they did not reveal specific dates identifying the time of their writing. Other techniques are needed to assist with our search.

## Other Useful Procedures

The following list of priorities will help in searching for clues which contribute to dating the more difficult books of the Bible. As you study each book, make notes of these things, then, consider them all as making a contribution, however small, to the project.

- 1) **Seek to establish a relationship between the book, its author and recorded biblical history.** The book of Jonah carries no date, yet recorded biblical history (2 Kings 14:23-27) places Jonah's period of prophecy during the reign of Jeroboam II (790-749 B.C.). This method also proves helpful when considering the writings of Paul and other New Testament writers. The book of Acts is a history of the church from Pentecost (30 A.D.) through the second year of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (63 A.D.). The history centers primarily around the apostle Paul following his conversion in Acts 9. This biblical picture of Paul's journeys contributes to dating most of his epistles.
- 2) **Search for references within each book that tie into the historical setting.** These references may be to a political figure or some other recorded historical setting. Luke's mention of **Gallio**, deputy of Achaia, places Paul in Corinth during the time he was in office (Acts 18:12). Other evidences indicate 1 & 2 Thessalonians were written by Paul while at Corinth. These combinations of facts help establish dates.
- 3) **Observe references which establish the author's present circumstances at the time of writing.** John was on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:9) when he received the Apocalypse. The time of John's writing must correspond to a time in his life that would permit his presence there. Paul was a prisoner when he wrote Ephesians (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), Philippians (1:13-16), Colossians (4:3,10), Philemon (1:1) and 2 Timothy (4:6-18). Any date given for the writing of these books must

take into account the imprisonments of Paul. He expected to see Timothy shortly when he wrote 1 Timothy (3:14), and he instructed Titus to come to him in Nicopolis (3:12). These things must be considered when dating these books.

- 4) **The author's references to his relationship to those addressed in the past and his anticipated relationship for the future must be observed.** Paul's mention in Galatians of his past visits with them coupled with his failure to mention any plans to visit them again could be helpful in dating the book. The mention of previous work among the Philippians and expected future freedom to visit again contributes to the dating process.
- 5) **Search for the author's mention of personal associations both past and present.** These are important factors in dating. Careful examination of all references to Paul's companions, for example, will show that at times some of them were not with him. A book cannot be dated at a time when the named associates of Paul are found in other places. All must harmonize.
- 6) **The availability of an author at the time assigned.** Dates assigned to some books do not harmonize with the author's ability to write at the time. The circumstances surrounding the book must harmonize with the circumstances surrounding the author at the time of writing. The dates for Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians and others are prime examples.
- 7) **The issues addressed in each book must have had time to develop in relationship to history and the author.** The dating of James must take this into account. The gospel had not spread far enough before the death of James, the brother of John, to be composed before his death. The epistle of James was penned after the gospel was preached in all of the regions of the world. It was addressed to the Jews of the dispersion (1:1). This necessitated universal preaching before these Jews could be addressed.

- 8) **The use of language is also a contributing factor.** The author's uses of past, present, and future tenses are helpful in dating. This is especially effective in dating the Gospel of John. Personal pronouns can also be helpful in establishing the author's presence at various places as evident in the book of Acts. Comparing one author's statements to other authors who are more specific in identifying the time element is very beneficial in dating, especially the book of Revelation.
- 9) **The involvement of different authors addressing the same issues is also helpful in dating.** Some books deal with the same questions and problems. This indicates a broad need for attention from many authors. James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Jude deal with false teachers who seem to have the same characteristics. This would indicate the same time period.

Revelation? We believe He does. Stay tuned for more to come.☺

While none of these methods are necessarily conclusive, they become very helpful in reaching valid decisions when dating Bible books. Use them wisely and carefully and I believe you will find them productive.

### **Dating the Apocalypse**

It is readily apparent to the observant student that John does not place a date upon the book of Revelation. To date the Apocalypse, we must rely upon other factors. Unfortunately, few of the above methods contribute to the task. Only #8 makes a solid contribution. There are a number of texts in the Apocalypse with counterparts elsewhere in scripture which identify the subject matter. These texts are so exclusive they preclude more than one application. Since the Apocalypse must predate the things predicted, the date of writing must precede their fulfillment (cf.1:1). Every person interested in understanding the book of Revelation must take this method into consideration.

Does the Lord give clues to the subject matter and the time of writing the book of

# Dating the Apocalypse #2

There are three different time periods advocated by conservative scholars as the possible date for the writing of the Apocalypse. These are found during the reigns of the Roman Emperors (1) Nero (54-68 A.D.), (2) Vespasian (70-79 A.D.), and (3) Domitian (81-96 A.D.).

Students of Revelation search the book for clues to the time of writing. Two texts within the book appear to identify a specific time period. They are subject to interpretation, however, and subsequently become circumstantial. In this brief study, we shall consider these texts, the interpretations placed upon them and the contribution they make to the overall study of Revelation.

## Revelation 17:10

*"There are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come."*

This statement describes the seven headed sea beast that first appears in Revelation 13. In chapter 17, the harlot Babylon rides this beast sitting on the heads which are seven mountains and kings (vs.9,10). The passage describes a time in relationship to the beast and the present, i.e., the time of writing. John appears to identify a kingdom ruled over by seven kings which will continue with an eighth (v.11). The beast has only seven heads for the purpose described but will continue with additional heads following the accomplishing of this purpose.

**Five** of the heads of this kingdom *"are fallen,"* i.e., they are dead. **"One is"** implies one is still living. *"The other is not yet come"* means the seventh head had not ascended to the throne at the time of writing. If this is true, John is telling us something about when this book was written.

It is the opinion of this author and most of our readers that the seven headed beast represents the Roman Empire. It signifies the Roman Empire in the same way Uncle Sam and the Big Bear symbolize the United States

and Russia respectfully.

If the sea beast symbolizes the Roman Empire, one would think the case closed. Surely, we can determine without difficulty this ruler of Rome! The task is not easy, however. Problems do exist. The first ten Roman Emperors were Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian. Many scholars and historians question whether Julius Caesar was the first Emperor of Rome. Even though he was the father of the Roman Empire and ruled it with all of the powers of a king, he did not wear the title and crown. Scholars and historians also question including Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. These never exercised authority over the empire nor were they recognized by the provinces as Emperors. Foy Wallace accepted Julius as the first Emperor of Rome but skipped Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian and Titus in order to count Domitian as the seventh head of the beast (*The Book of Revelation*, p.372). As you see, difficulties abound.

One must conclude that if Julius Caesar is the first Emperor of Rome, the sixth Emperor was Nero (54-68 A.D.). Weldon Warnock readily admits this possibility but rejects it as the solution (*Message from Patmos*, p.89). Warnock recognizes that starting the count with Augustus identifies the reign of Vespasian as the time of writing, a period too early for his conclusions. He thinks the evidence for dating the Apocalypse during the reign of Domitian is too strong and convincing to consider any date except 95 A.D.

David Chilton counts Julius Caesar as the first Emperor of Rome, naming Nero as the ruling Emperor at the time John received the Revelation. Galba is the seventh Emperor (*The Days of Vengeance*, p.436). Chilton's identification of the eighth is obscure and inconsistent.

Jim McGuiggan, Ray Summers and James Moffatt reject Julius as the first Emperor and date the Apocalypse during the reign of Vespasian. Titus, subsequently,

becomes the seventh Emperor. Domitian is counted as the eighth because he was "of the seven." This is interpreted to mean that Domitian was the reincarnation of Nero (cf. *Studies in the Book of Revelation* by Ferrell Jenkins, p.22). None of these explanations place the time of writing the Apocalypse during the reign of Domitian.

Should we count Julius Caesar as the first Emperor of Rome? How can we refuse to count him? He was the father of the Empire. He was dictator for more than four years before his death and none of the Emperors were more imperial than he. His power was so stately that he was offered the title and crown, though he refused it. The people of John's day thought he was the first Emperor. Josephus, the Jewish historian who was contemporary with John, counted Julius as the first. He identified Augustus and Tiberius as the second and third Emperors, and Caligula as the fourth (Ant., 18, 2, 2; 16, 6, 2; 18, 6, 10). Suetonius, a Roman historian of the first and second centuries, begins *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* with Julius as the first. Dio Cassius also counts him as first in his *Roman History*, and the *Sibylline Oracles* (Book 5) calls Julius "the first king." Should not he whose name became the title by which all the Emperors were addressed be recognized as the first? **Caesar** was Julius' last name and it became the title by which all the Emperors were called. There were no Caesars if Julius was not the first. In fact, every Emperor was the extension of Julius. If Julius had not been mercilessly slain by members of the Roman Senate in 44 B.C., returning the reins of government back to that of a triumvirate, there would be no doubt about who was the first Emperor. The beast wounded to death (cf. Rev.13:3) came to life in Augustus. Therefore, the count must begin with Julius.

It is the conviction of this student that Revelation 17:10 pinpoints the time of writing the Apocalypse during the reign of Nero. In my opinion, this is the only conclusion that perfectly harmonizes with all other internal evidences within the book.

## Revelation 13:18

*"Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six."*

John apparently refers to the ancient practice of figuring the number of one's name by adding up the assigned total for each letter in the name. Many ancient languages used alphabetical characters as numerical figures with specific values attached to the letters. The process is known as gematria. When the sum of all the letters in a person's name were counted, it would reveal the number of his name. In this case, the number of the name is given from which we are to draw the name.

The intention of the author was to identify the number of the beast which he says, "*is the number of a man.*" The identification of the man will establish the specific administration in power at the time Revelation was written.

Concerning the identify of this man, Ferrell Jenkins writes, "The general consensus among scholarly commentators is that the numbers refer to Nero Caesar. 'Some take the Latin word Neron and apply numerical equivalents for each letter in such fashion:

N - 50  
E - 6  
R - 500  
O - 60  
N - 50

The final 'N' can be dropped and total would be 616. Others have transliterated the Greek or Latin for Neron Caesar into Hebrew letters and come up with a total of 666. By omitting the final 'n' in Neron the total comes to 616. There is a slight amount of evidence for the 616 reading. The only major manuscript which gives this reading is Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus of the fifth century. However, as early as Irenaeus there was some indication of this reading" (*Studies in the Book of Revelation*, p.22).

If Nero fits the bill, why look for another? Everyone admits that Nero is one of the seven

heads of the sea beast. He also fits the other descriptions in the chapter. He was the first Roman Emperor to "*make war with the saints*" (13:7) and he did die by the sword (13:10). Nero, then, is the obvious **man** identified as the beast about which John wrote in Revelation 13.

Jenkins and others admit that Nero is the one identified by John but they will not admit the obvious; that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Nero. They chose rather to believe the Nero *redivivus* myth which claims that Nero returned in the person of Domitian. How ridiculous to believe the testimony of a myth above that of an inspired apostle.

### **Conclusion**

The passages discussed herein give some support to the Neronian and/or Vespasian dates. Students of the Apocalypse should not ignore what is so plain and obvious. Those who hold to the Domitian date as the time of writing find no comfort in these two texts. There is nothing in these texts to support the latter date.

This author accepts the above passages as proof the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Nero. However, their strength as arguments can only be seen when viewed in the light of all other evidences within the book. When we have completed our presentations of the evidences for dating the Apocalypse, please return to this article and see if it does not fit perfectly into the overall picture. Stay tuned.☺

# Dating the Apocalypse #3

In our last presentation, we considered the evidence within the book of Revelation that appears to pinpoint a time of writing (13:18; 17:10). Many consider the force of these texts conclusive, setting the time of writing during the reign of Emperor Nero. I cautioned, however, that there is enough ambiguity within these verses to consider them only as circumstantial. Their force as arguments for the early dating of the Apocalypse (64-68 A.D.) becomes apparent when compared to all other evidence for the early dating of the book.

In this treatise, we shall continue our search for evidence which will contribute to a reasonable conclusion in the study of this great issue. We will now look at the evidence within the book thought to tie the book and time of writing to some other biblical or secular event. This is a valid approach, and one used by nearly every student of the Apocalypse in dating the book.

## Internal Evidence for the Late Date (95-96 A.D.)

While the most convincing case for the late date is external evidence, there are some texts thought to lend weight to the late date. Homer Hailey contends the internal evidence is of *equal strength* with the external for the late dating.<sup>1</sup> We beg to differ and feel that the course of this study will demonstrate this point.

The strongest case for the late date from internal evidence may be summed up under three headings: (1) Empire-wide Roman persecution, (2) Empire and Emperor worship, and (3) the age of the seven churches of Asia. As we consider these arguments for the late date, let us also look at the flaws within them.

### ***Empire-wide Roman Persecution***

Throughout the book of Revelation saints suffer from persecution. *"The souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held"* are under the altar (6:9). Later John saw *"the souls of them that*

*were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God"* living and reigning with Christ (20:4). These were all martyred for their allegiance to the Lord. In the Apocalypse, the saints suffer at the hands of their persecutors but in the end God has His day in court. Judgment is passed and the persecutors punished.

Who is responsible for this persecution and how widespread is it? It is apparent that some of the persecution is the result of a failure on the part of saints to *"worship the beast and his image"* (20:4). The beast worshipped is the sea beast of chapter 13 (vs.1-8) and symbolizes the Roman Empire. The earth beast serves the sea beast causing all, except those whose names are in the book of life, to worship the beast and his image (13:8,11-18). The sea beast had power to make war with the saints (13:7) which means the Roman Empire persecuted the saints. This was a present reality at the time Revelation was written. In describing the ten horns on the sea beast, John says, *"These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful"* (17:14). While the sea beast already made war with the saints, it would evolve into a larger conflict in which the Lamb and His followers prevail. The conflict develops and the sea beast (Roman Empire) and the false prophet (the religions that served the empire) are destroyed (19:11-21). Without a doubt, an extensive Roman persecution of Christians is portrayed in the Apocalypse.

Babylon the Great also is a great persecutor of saints (17:6; 18:20,24) and God *"avenged the blood of His servants at her hand"* (19:2). Most contemporary commentators view Babylon as Rome and the persecution as an extension of that inflicted by the sea beast. By taking this position, all the persecutions against the saints are viewed as Roman.

It is evident from the first three chapters of the Apocalypse that persecution against the

saints was in progress. Jews persecuted the saints at Smyrna and Philadelphia (2:9; 3:9). The saints at Pergamos suffered the loss of Antipas who was martyred for his faith in the Lord (2:13). The source of this persecution is unidentified. John (and others) suffered tribulation while writing the Apocalypse indicating an ongoing persecution (1:9). Additional persecution from an unnamed source was in the making and expected soon (2:10; 3:10). This future persecution was not identified in chapters 1-3, yet we are able to recognize it as Roman from the clues given in the rest of the Apocalypse.

Upon the basis of this reasoning, many conclude the Apocalypse pictures a Roman persecution of saints extensive enough to affect the entire Roman world. Since no Roman persecution of this magnitude took place before the end of the first century, they deduct that the Apocalypse was not written prior to the end of Domitian's reign (95-96 A.D.). Many also contend, though uninformed, that Domitian instigated a persecution against the saints so severe that he filled the empire with their blood.<sup>2</sup> Careful students of the Apocalypse are learning better, however.<sup>3</sup> Many who hold to the late date understand that evidence for a Domitian persecution is missing. While still holding to a Domitian date, they project the persecutions foretold to the reign of Trajan (98-117 A.D.) and beyond.<sup>4</sup> There is unquestionable evidence of empire-wide persecution during Trajan's reign and extending for about 200 years thereafter. Since the events unveiled were to "*shortly come to pass*", John wrote near the time when these things occurred, therefore, the late date.

### **The Argument Examined**

Is this argument valid? Does it prove that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian about 95-96 A.D.? The argument is valid only if all the premises are true. If the Roman persecution is the only persecution symbolized in the Apocalypse, then, the argument is valid. However, there is another persecutor identified in Revelation. There can be no doubts about their identify because

Jesus calls them by name. He said, they "*say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan*" (2:9). Of this persecutor, Jesus promised His saints at Philadelphia, "*I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee*" (3:9). Since the Jews are still a prime persecutor of saints when John wrote, this promise of punishment upon the Jews was yet future. If so, then we must consider the possibility that God's punishment of the Jews is also a part of the Apocalypse.

We cannot doubt that a Roman persecution of the saints is portrayed in Revelation. It is there, and must be recognized in its proper place, but we must also consider that another persecutor existed. If this is true, and it is, we must view God's dealing with the Roman persecutors as secondary to His dealing with the Jewish persecutors whom He punished first. It is this student's conviction that the Apocalypse portrays God's wrath being poured upon both the Jewish and Roman persecutors of His people. To identify one of the persecutors as Rome and apply all promise of vengeance against Rome does a great disservice to the book of Revelation and our understanding its message. The Roman persecutors are rewarded but so are the Jewish.

### ***Empire & Emperor Worship***

John deals extensively with empire and emperor worship in the Revelation (13:12-15; 14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4), and many contend that this practice did not become widespread until the days of Domitian (81-96 A.D.). Though proof is missing, many commentators insist that it was under Domitian that the death penalty was issued to those who refused to bow in worship of the emperor. Believing that Christians died at the hand of Domitian for their refusal to acknowledge his diety, many maintain the Apocalypse was penned during his reign just prior to this onslaught.

### **The Argument Examined**

This argument ignores historical fact and



assumes other things as true which cannot be proven. Rome was worshipped as an entity called **Dea Roma** as early as 195 B.C. and temples were erected to worship the deified emperors beginning with Julius. Throughout Asia temples were erected to Augustus and Tiberius before the ministry of Jesus began. All temples within the borders of the empire admitted Caesar's image among the temple gods for public worship. The only temple failing to welcome an image of Caesar was the temple in Jerusalem. In 40 A.D. Caligula, the fourth emperor, sent an army to Palestine for the purpose of placing his image in the temple at Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> He was murdered before the task was accomplished and the attempt abandoned. So, emperor worship existed long before the reign of Domitian.

Furthermore, the claim that Domitian instigated the death penalty as state policy upon Christians for refusing to bow to his deity is totally without foundation. This practice was clearly in operation by the middle of the second century A.D. but there is no evidence it was a state law as early as Domitian's reign. On this point, Elmer T. Merrill said, "It should be further observed that neither in Suetonius, nor in Dio, nor in any other of the pagan writers who touch upon the subject, is there the slightest intimation that Domitian's bloody jealousy was directed against any but the leading aristocrats whom he supposed he had reason to fear, or that it ravaged at all outside the narrow circle of the Court and the Parliament."<sup>6</sup> The argument based upon empire and emperor worship is weak to say the least.

### ***The Age of the Churches***

Many commentators place confidence in their contention that the seven churches of Asia needed time to develop as described in chapter 2 & 3 and, therefore, assert that the late date is essential. Hailey makes this his main argument from internal evidence for the late dating of the Apocalypse.<sup>7</sup>

It is argued that Ephesus was not old enough to have "*lost her first love*," to have a conflict over false apostles and the Nicolaitans

for an early writing of Revelation. Smyrna supposedly started in 64 A.D., and was therefore too young to have reached its perfection at an early date. (This conclusion rests on a statement by Polycarp [69-156 A.D.]. He was a bishop in the church at Smyrna in later years). In short, we are told that these churches needed decades to reach their present states of perfection or imperfection as portrayed.

### **The Argument Examined**

Were decades necessary for the conditions described in chapters 2 & 3 to develop? The answer is "**NO**." Why would it take decades for one congregation to reach imperfection and the same amount of time for another congregation to reach perfection? Which comes first, perfection or imperfection? Common sense teaches that congregations as individuals may be in a state of perfection at one time and in a state of imperfection a short time later. In fact, in a very short time a congregation may make a complete turn around. It happens all of the time and it doesn't take decades to do it. The church at Ephesus was in deep trouble when Paul wrote Timothy in 64 A.D. (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3-6, 19-20; 2 Timothy 2:17-18). Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to correct the wrongs. Smyrna may have started in 64 A.D., no one really knows, but was she too young to have reached perfection? Think about it! Was Ephesus perfect before she left her first or original love? If so, Ephesus grew imperfect with age and that would argue for a young church at Smyrna that had not left her original love and was still perfect. Both common sense and experience teach that the conditions of churches are not determined by their age but by their loyalty and commitment to the Lord. The argument based upon the age of the churches is useless and meaningless.<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Other arguments for the late dating of the Apocalypse based upon internal evidence exist, but these appear to be the strongest. It

should be readily apparent that none of these arguments have a tie with scripture. They are rather the association of internal texts with external historical happenings. The argument on the age of the churches rests entirely upon supposition. This student of Revelation is not aware of any serious argument for the late date that depends upon a tie of internal evidence to other biblical texts. In our next offering, we will examine the internal evidence used to support the early date.☹

1. Hailey, *Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary*, page 27, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979
2. Summers, Ray, *Worthy is the Lamb*, page 83, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1951
3. See the exchange between Ferrell Jenkins and Arthur M. Ogden on this subject carried in the June and July, 1989 issues of *Searching the Scriptures* (Volume XXX, Numbers 6 and 7). You may purchase a copy of this exchange for \$ 1.95 from Ferrell Jenkins, 9211 Hollyridge Place, Tampa, FL 33637.
4. Collins, Adela Yarbro, *Crisis & Catharsis*, page 56, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1984
5. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18, 8, 1-9; 19, 1 & 2
6. Elmer T. Merrell, *Essays In Early Christian History*, page 150
7. Hailey, pages 32-34
8. For further discussion of the arguments for the late date based upon internal evidences, see *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets* by the author.

# Dating the Apocalypse #4

A thorough study of the internal evidence for the early dating of the Apocalypse requires much more time and space than our study of the late date. This is because the most forceful case for the early date is internal evidence and there is an abundance of it. Unlike the evidence presented for a late dating of the book, the internal evidence for the early date ties in with other biblical texts. In other words, numerous passages within the Apocalypse have scriptural counterparts which **demand** identical recognition and establish the subject matter of the texts. Subsequently they establish the time of writing. Their number is too great to consider all of them, so, we must confine our studies to the more prominent ones.

## Our Use of the Internal Evidence

In this study we shall consider texts from within the Apocalypse which either identify a specific subject under discussion or which ties in with other biblical texts which are specific. We shall divide these texts into three categories: (1) Texts which conclusively identify with the desolation of the nation of Israel and the destruction of their capital city, Jerusalem. (2) Texts which are not conclusive but which lend strong support to this conclusion, and (3) texts which clearly support this conclusion but which are broader in perspective. In this article, we shall study two texts which we believe conclusively establish the desolation of the nation of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem as the primary focus of the Apocalypse.

### Revelation 11:1-13

In Revelation 11:1-13, John was instructed to *"measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months"* (11:1,2).

God's two witnesses, who identify with Moses and Elijah, continue to prophesy until they are killed. *"And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city,... where also our Lord was crucified"* (11:8). Later, a tenth part of the city falls and the seventh angel sounds his trumpet (11:13,15).

One need not be a genius to understand that Jerusalem is under consideration here. The temple of God and the altar are in the holy city. Jerusalem and new Jerusalem are the only **holy** cities identified in the scriptures (cf. Nehemiah 11:1,18; Isaiah 52:1; Daniel 9:24; Matthew 4:5; Revelation 21:1,10). This city is also *"the great city... where also our Lord was crucified"* (11:8). Jerusalem is identified in scripture as a **great** city (Jeremiah 22:8) and, furthermore, Jesus was crucified there (cf. Matthew 16:21; 20:17,18; Luke 13:33,34; 18:31-33).

The Apocalypse reveals **things which were shortly to come to pass**. John saw Jerusalem being destroyed. Unless John uses the destruction of Jerusalem to symbolize a city other than the one identified, Jerusalem's destruction was still future. Therefore, the book of Revelation was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Those holding to later dates cannot accept this obvious conclusion. To do so would frustrate their view of the Revelation. They contend that, since the Apocalypse is a book of signs and symbols, John would not have used such indisputable language to portray Jerusalem. Somehow they perceive that such clear language cannot be symbolic.

At times while travelling I observe huge billboards advertising restaurants showing how they appear. Now I understand the difference between a sign and a restaurant. The billboard is not a restaurant but it may picture or symbolize the place where you can purchase a good meal. This is what John was doing. He saw a vision of Jerusalem's destruction. He identified the city for us in no uncertain terms. The vision was not the literal destruction but it pictured how the destruction of Jerusalem

would take place. The destruction of Jerusalem as related by Josephus fully fits the scene recorded by John. I believe this text proves conclusively that the primary events **shortly to come to pass** center around the desolation of the nation of Israel and the destruction Jerusalem. The book of Revelation was written before these predicted things came to pass, therefore, the early date.

## Revelation 10:7

*"But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets."*

The mighty angel said this during the interlude following the blowing of the sixth trumpet. He declared that when the seventh and final angel sounded the mystery of God declared to His servants the prophets would be finished or completed. Only the Old Testament prophets are identified as God's servants the prophets (cf. 2 Kings 9:7; 17:13,23; 21:10; 24:2; Ezra 9:11; Jer.7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezek.38:17; Dan.9:6,10; Amos 3:7; Zech.1:6).<sup>1</sup> The mystery of God declared to them are those prophecies relating to God's plan of salvation formulated before the foundation of the world but revealed to us in these last times (Romans 16:25,26; 1 Corinthians 2:7-13; Ephesians 3:1-11).<sup>2</sup> The mystery of God would be finished, fulfilled, accomplished and/or completed before the seventh angel sounded. As Hailey points out, the statement points to the completion of God's plan.<sup>3</sup> The seventh angel's sounding would be a sign that the mystery of God revealed through the Old Testament prophets was complete.

The significance of this statement comes to light when compared to other biblical texts which teach the same things. First, consider Daniel 9:24-27. Daniel prayed to God, confessing the sins of Israel and asking God to *"cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate"* (9:17). Jerusalem at this time was a pile of ruins from Babylon's destruction of her in 586 B.C. God's reply came in verses

24-27. **Seventy weeks** were determined for Israel and the **holy city** *"to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy"* (9:24).

The meaning of the seventy weeks is not necessary for this study. Suffice it to say that it represents the total time needed to accomplish the six things outlined to be completed. One of them is the **sealing up the vision and prophecy**. By the end of the 70th week Daniel's vision and prophecy (all prophecy) would be sealed -- **not completed but sealed**. The coming of the Messiah, His death, the making of an end of sins, the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, etc., established the truthfulness of all prophecy. They also establish the fact that the prophecies were being fulfilled (cf. Acts 3:18, 20-21; 13:26-29,40-41).

As Daniel's prophecy continued, it showed that rebuilt Jerusalem would again be destroyed (9:26,27). Since this destruction of Jerusalem was to follow the completion of the six things promised, it would serve as proof that God fulfilled all that He promised in the vision and prophecy (all prophecy). Jerusalem was destroyed again in 70 A.D. by the Romans, establishing that all things promised through **God's servants the prophets** were fulfilled or completed. Now, if Daniel's statement means that all prophecy would be completed by the destruction of Jerusalem, then the mystery of God had to be completed at the same time as indicated in Revelation 10:7. The sounding of the seventh trumpeting angel corresponds to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Revelation 11:15). It is interesting to note that **God's servants the prophets** were rewarded with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:18). Daniel 9:24-27 and Revelation 10:7 are identical on this point, therefore, the Apocalypse was written before the events symbolized by the seventh trumpeting angel took place, i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem.

Add to this Luke 21:22. While discussing the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said,

"These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22). The only things written to be fulfilled at the time Jesus spoke were the Old Testament scriptures. The New Testament scriptures did not exist at this time. Therefore, the prophecies of God's servants the prophets are included in this statement. The days of vengeance against Jerusalem finished or completed the mystery of God declared to His servants the prophets.

The final destruction of Jerusalem came in 70 A.D. God's purposes and plans were all in place by this time. Nothing remained to be done. The sounding of the seventh angel (Revelation 11:15), then, symbolizes the final step in the fall of the nation of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke 21:22, along with Daniel 9:24-27, teaches the same thing as Revelation 10:7. Since these texts were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, Revelation 10:7 must also be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, the Apocalypse existed before the destruction of Jerusalem.

## Summary

In summation, our line of argumentation shows that John identified Jerusalem picturing her destruction in Revelation 11. A complete study of the chapter reveals total harmony between John's vision, biblical prophecy and historical reality. Our study also uncovered a statement in Revelation 10:7 identical in teaching to Daniel 9:24-27 and Luke 21:22. Some have said that the comparisons are too remarkable to be true. My response is the opposite. Their likeness is too extraordinary not to be true.

1. Homer Hailey, *Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary*, page 246, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979
2. *Ibid*, page 245
3. *Ibid*, page 246

What shall we do? Shall we continue to wallow in confusion and indecision or shall we accept the obvious, believe God and find understanding? Hopefully we will accept the latter. If we do, we will quickly realize that the Apocalypse identifies two persecutors of God's people both of whom reap God's judgment. When we realize this, our appreciation for the book of Revelation will grow. In our next study we shall consider more conclusive evidence. ☺

# Dating the Apocalypse #5

The present focus of this study centers on the internal evidence for the early dating of the Apocalypse. In our last presentation we dealt with Revelation 10:7 and 11:1-13 as conclusive proof that the book of Revelation's primary theme is the desolation of the nation of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. Since the Apocalypse was written prior to the actual happening of the events foretold, it must have been written before 70 A.D. As we continue this study, observe two more texts which we feel are also conclusive proof for the early dating of the book of Revelation.

## Revelation 7:14

*"He said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*

One of the elders asked John, *"What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?"* (7:13). John responded, *"Sir, thou knowest."* Then, the elder identified them as those *"which came out of the great tribulation."*

The KJV does not include the definite article *"the"* in the translation. Most other translations including NKJ and interlinears (Marshall & Berry) include the definite article. This changes the meaning drastically. There is a vast difference in talking about great tribulation and *"the"* great tribulation. To illustrate, consider the difference in "great depression" and "the great depression." Great depression could be any period of recession but to us "the great depression" was the recession of the late 1920's. So, when the elder identified this period of tribulation as *"the great"* one, he is specifying a distinctive period. When we identify this specific period, we will recognize a definite point in history. Old and New Testament passages foretold this period of great tribulation. Observe how recognizable this epoch is.

## Identifying The Great Tribulation

*"Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it"* (Jeremiah 30:7). Written six hundred years before Christ, Jeremiah's prophecy foretold *"Jacob's trouble"*, a day so great that none would be like it. We know this period of trouble followed Pentecost because it would happen when the people *"serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them"* (30:9). Contextually, this period of trouble follows the return of the Jews from the captivities and the beginning of the reign of Christ.

Daniel wrote, *"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book"* (Daniel 12:1). This prophecy of a future period of unprecedented trouble upon Israel came near the end of the Babylonian captivity. The captivity was itself an extraordinary period of tribulation for Israel (538 B.C.). This future tribulation upon God's holy people was many years in the future when foretold by Daniel. The prophecy was *"closed up and sealed till the time of the end"* (12:4,9,13). Daniel desired to know when the time of the end would be (12:8). God gave one clue. A period of 1290 days (approximately 3 1/2 years) would exist between the setting up of *"the abomination that maketh desolate"* and *"the daily sacrifice"* being taken away.

Some terrible periods of suffering came upon the Jews during the inter-Testamental period but none of them were severe enough to eclipse the captivities. This forecast period of trouble would come much later and overshadow all previous periods of suffering by the nation of Israel.

## Jesus Identifies It

In speaking of the events to surround the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said, "*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be*" (Matthew 24:21). It is evident Jesus was talking about what would befall the nation of Israel. His statement parallels the prophecy of Daniel. Jesus made the connection Himself; "*When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains*" (24:15,16). Jesus explained Daniel's prophecy. Both Daniel and Jesus foretold a period of suffering upon the Jews. This period of tribulation would come in connection with the fall of Israel as a nation. This period of trouble took place during the years of 66-70 A.D. and ended in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah, Daniel and Jesus all foretold this period of unprecedented tribulation coming upon Israel. Nothing ever compared to it before or would compare to it again. It was so great that it earned the designation "*the great tribulation.*" Some question this conclusion but to do so is to question God's word. No other tribulation upon earth can compare when we consider all of the details. This was God's wrath poured out upon His holy nation in which he caused them to suffer for their rejection of Him and His son. He brought them to a sudden and complete end in a blood bath of which there is no comparison.

## Conclusion

Since Revelation 7:14 identifies victorious saints coming out of "*the great tribulation,*" the substance of the Revelation must center around the desolation of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. Otherwise, it is not "*the great tribulation.*" There are no if, and, or buts about it. These passages identify the same period of time or Jesus is talking out of both sides of His mouth. Are you ready to accuse Him of that? Since the Apocalypse was

written before the things it foretold, it was written before "*the great tribulation.*" This period of tribulation began in earnest in 66 A.D.

## Revelation 18:24

*"In her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."*

This statement comes in response to the destruction of Babylon the Great. John gave a number of clues to the identity of Babylon many of which typify numerous cities.<sup>1</sup> John's statement is specific however, having only one application. It conclusively identifies Jerusalem as Babylon the Great.

Remember, the Apocalypse is the revelation of Jesus Christ by His angel unto John (1:1). Everything said by Jesus through His angel must harmonize with and never contradict what He has said at other times. This is significant because Jesus delivered the same message during His personal ministry and identified the object of His message. The blood of prophets, saints, and all slain upon the earth are to be accounted for. Observe the message Jesus uttered during His personal ministry.

Just days prior to Jesus' crucifixion and in response to a suggestion from the Pharisees that Herod would kill Him, Jesus said, "*For it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem*" (Luke 13:33). If a prophet could not perish outside Jerusalem, how could any other city be held responsible for their deaths? Was Jesus whistling Dixie? Did He say what He meant and mean what He said? Jesus further said, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!*" (13:34). There can be no other explanation. Jerusalem, and Jerusalem alone, was responsible for the deaths of the prophets. If this is true, Babylon can only symbolize Jerusalem.

Identifying Babylon with Rome or any

other city demands proof that they were responsible for the deaths of prophets. Who can name even one prophet of either Old or New Testament variety that Rome was solely responsible for their death? The fact is, Rome was never responsible for the deaths of prophets. Jerusalem alone carried this responsibility. Jesus said, *"Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation"* (Luke 11:49,50). Note carefully; the blood of *"ALL the prophets ... from the foundation of the world"* was required of that generation. God avenged the blood of His prophets upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D. There is no proof that prophecy continued after 70 A.D., therefore, neither Rome nor any other city could be held responsible for their deaths. Jerusalem, and Jerusalem alone, was held responsible for *"the blood of ALL the prophets."*

Again, Jesus said, *"I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth"* (Matthew 23:34,35). Not only was Jerusalem held responsible for the deaths of the prophets but also of the apostles (cf. Luke 11:49) and indeed *"ALL the righteous blood shed upon the earth."* It is interesting to note that Babylon was destroyed to avenge all of these. John wrote, *"Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her... And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth"* (Revelation 18:20,24).

The message Jesus delivered during His personal ministry (cf. Matthew 23:34-38; Luke 11:45-51; 13:33-35) is the same identical message delivered to John by the angel. Both are from the mouth of the Lord. Did Jesus speak out of both sides of His mouth? Did He punish two cities for the same thing, one that deserved it and the other which did not? Jerusalem was the city of God and deserved this punishment because she knew better than to do as she did, but Rome was not the city of God and knew no better. Before we accuse Jesus falsely, should we not consider the possibility that He spoke the same message both times?

## Conclusion

We have discussed four passages from Revelation which tie in with other Biblical texts identifying the substance of the Apocalypse as centering upon the desolation of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. I believe these **conclusively** prove that the book of Revelation was written before the things foretold, namely, the destruction of Jerusalem. You are free to disagree if you wish but, if you do, would you be kind enough to point out the error in this reasoning? If these arguments are in error, they should be easily exposed.

In the next article, we will discuss Revelation texts which clearly support these conclusions.☺

1. For a discussion of the characteristics of Babylon the Great which fully identify her, see *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, 2nd edition, Appendix C, p. 435



# Dating the Apocalypse #6

Our last two articles examined texts within the Apocalypse which **conclusively** prove that the primary events foretold in Revelation center around the desolation of the nation of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. Many other texts from within the book support this conclusion. In this study, we shall consider texts which are not conclusive but lend strong support to our conclusion. A third group of texts broader in perspective clearly supports our findings but will not be covered in our studies.

## Supportive Texts

**Revelation 1:7** is parallel to Matthew 24:30. Some consider it a quotation. The details are the same. The language is almost identical. Both texts depict a coming in divine judgment (cf. *Commentary on Revelation* by Homer Hailey, p.102). Jesus' statement in Matthew referred to His coming in the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Matthew 24:34). Its appearance in the Apocalypse supports our conclusion.

**Revelation 1:12-17** parallels Daniel's visions of the Son of Man (Daniel 7:9,13-14; 10:2-21). Daniel saw the Son of man and His involvement in what would befall Daniel's people (Israel) in the latter days. The events foretold were many days in the future when revealed to Daniel. John saw the Son of man presented in like fashion instructing him to write about the **things which would shortly come to pass** (Revelation 1:1,19). The time was at hand (Revelation 1:3). The picture supports our conclusion.

**Revelation 6:12-13** parallels Matthew 24:29-32, Mark 13:24-29, and Luke 21:25-31. These texts record Jesus' discourse on the destruction of Jerusalem. The language is comparable even to the discussion of the fig tree. How can we overlook the obvious? This too supports our conclusion.

**Revelation 6:15-16** *"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."* Hosea used the same kind of language to describe the future punishment of Samaria who represented Israel (Hosea 10:8,9). Isaiah used it to describe the punishment of Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:10-22). Jesus also used this language to warn the Jews of the coming plague upon Jerusalem (Luke 23:28-31). Again, this supports our conclusion.

**Revelation 11:18** With the sounding of the seventh trumpet a city fell demonstrating the rule of God and Christ (Revelation 11:15). In this action God avenged the blood of His servants the prophets. Only the Old Testament prophets are called *"God's servants the prophets"* (cf. Hailey, p.246). What occurred here is what Jesus promised in Matthew 23:34-39, Luke 11:49-51, and 13:33-35. This follows the demise of the city where our Lord was crucified (11:8), confirming the Jerusalem connection.

**Revelation 12:14** *"Time, and times, and half a time"* is an expression used two other times in scripture (Daniel 7:25; 12:7). In both instances, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was in view. The expression means three and one half years, the length of the Roman-Jewish War which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem. This further supports our conclusion.

**Revelation 14:19-20** The vine of the earth was gathered and cast into the winepress of the wrath of God. The **vine of the earth** was the nation of Israel (Psalms 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7). The passage portrays the fruit of this vine gathered into a winepress for the

extraction of blood. This is the precise picture when the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for Passover in 70 A.D. and were surrounded by the Roman armies.

**Revelation 15:1** Seven angels with the **seven last plagues** appear to pour the wrath of God upon those who "*shed the blood of saints and prophets*" (Revelation 16:6). Since Jerusalem was responsible for the deaths of **all** the prophets, Jerusalem is the recipient of this wrath. This is the wrath God promised Israel if she rebelled against Him (Leviticus 26:15-46).

**Revelation 17:4** Babylon was decked in purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones and pearls. Jeremiah pictured Jerusalem adorning herself this way hundreds of years previous to the Apocalypse (Jeremiah 4:20). Our conclusion has scriptural support.

**Revelation 17:5** Babylon's forehead signified what she was, a harlot. The prophets of old portrayed Jerusalem as a harlot. Jeremiah goes so far as to proclaim her having a "*whore's forehead*" (Jeremiah 3:1-3). This certainly supports our conclusion.

**Revelation 18:4** A voice from heaven calls for God's people to come out of Babylon the Great lest they be partakers of her sins and receive her plagues. This corresponds perfectly with the instructions given by Jesus to His disciples to leave Jerusalem when they saw the proper sign (Matthew 24:15,16; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20-22). This fully supports our conclusion.

**Revelation 18:12-13** The merchandise mentioned in these two verses are products found in Jerusalem most of which were in the temple. Verse 13 is interesting because all of the products mentioned through "*sheep*" were a part of the temple service (cf. Exodus 30; 1 Chronicles 9:29; 29:1-5; 2 Chronicles 2 & 3). Further support for our conclusion.

**Revelation 19:7-9** The marriage supper of the Lamb continued following the destruction

of Babylon the Great. This is the identical picture presented in parable by Jesus (Matthew 22:2-14). In the parable, the king (God) sent his armies to destroy those murderers (Jews), who refused the invitation to the marriage, and burned up their city (Jerusalem). This again is supportive of our conclusion.

**Revelation 19:11-15** The king of Kings wore a vesture dipped in blood. He tread the winepress of the wrath of God. What was in the winepress? (cf. Revelation 14:19,20 above.) Answer: The fruit of the "*vine of the earth*," the nation of Israel. Jesus carried out this judgment upon Israel (Matthew 24:30; cf. Luke 21:24,27). This supports our conclusion.

## Observation

A likeness between the book of Revelation and the Old Testament prophets is apparent to all serious Bible students. This is especially true when considering the book of Daniel. The Apocalypse is the New Testament counterpart to Daniel. Without doubt, Daniel addressed Israel's future all the way to the end of the nation in 70 A.D. Such chapters as 7, 9, 12 stand out in forecasting the ultimate end of Israel as a nation. That end came in 70 A.D.

When Daniel received his prophecy, he was told that the time was not for many days (Daniel 8:26; 10:14). In Daniel 9:24-27, a long period of several centuries was forecast before the final destruction of Jerusalem would come. In chapter 12, Daniel inquired as to when the judgment foretold would come to pass. God answered, "*for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end*" (Daniel 12:9; cf. 12:13).

John's message was urgent. The prophecy was to "*shortly come to pass*" and "*the time is at hand*" (Revelation 1:1,3; 22:10). Daniel's prophecy was more than 500 years future when he wrote. It was yet for many days while it was at hand when John wrote. If John wrote the Apocalypse between 65 and 68 A.D., indeed, the destruction of Jerusalem was at hand. Jerusalem was destroyed in late

summer, 70 A.D.

It is also interesting to note that John spends two chapters discussing New Jerusalem. Why? It was the natural thing to do. Since the bulk of this book leans toward developing the destruction of old Jerusalem, it is only fitting to discuss the emergence of new Jerusalem which God promised centuries before. The new Jerusalem represents the New Testament order which replaced the old. From this point of view, the new Jerusalem takes on added significance and glory.

## Summary

In these last three articles, I have labored to show that the internal evidence of the book of Revelation ties in with the rest of the Bible. Four arguments were made to prove conclusively that the book of Revelation centers around the desolation of the nation of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. This article was designed to show that the entire substance of the Apocalypse supports our conclusions.

If this line of reasoning is valid, we have conclusively proven what the book of Revelation is about and when it was written. I have been making these arguments for seventeen years and to date I have not had one person to deal forthrightly with the arguments. They are either true or false! If they are false would some one **please** prove them false.

A recent statement affirmed that the explanation of the Apocalypse centers around the identity of Babylon the Great. I agree. Suppose we give some time and attention to what the **Bible** says about it. I will state it again briefly and simply. In Babylon was found the blood of **saints, apostles, prophets, and all that were slain upon the earth** (Revelation 17:6; 18:20,24). Jesus said, "*it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem*" (Luke 13:33). He also said that Jerusalem would be held responsible for the "*blood of all the prophets*" (Luke 11:50), yea "*all the righteous blood shed upon the earth*" (Matthew 23:35). A prophet could not perish out of Jerusalem who was to be held responsible for the blood

of **all** the prophets and **all** the righteous blood shed upon the earth. How, then, could Babylon the Great symbolize any other city other than Jerusalem without making a **liar** and **false prophet** out of Jesus? I challenge you, who ever you are, to either answer the argument or accept it as the answer to the book of Revelation.

Some say this is just my opinion. I deny it. I must accept what Jesus said in the above passages by faith. Do you accept them as a matter of faith? If not, why not? If so, please answer how you can believe them and still believe Babylon the Great is Rome or any other entity? Sectarians have as much right to ignore Biblical statements concerning baptism as we do to ignore Jesus' emphatic statements concerning the city responsible for the deaths of the **prophets**. Is it opinion to believe Jesus' words? If so, then everything you believe is simply a matter of opinion.

## Conclusion

I believe our approach to the dating of the Apocalypse is valid scriptural reasoning. If it is not, I must confess that I do not know how to reason scripturally. This means I have never seen a valid scriptural argument, would not recognize one if I saw it, and could not make one if my life depended upon it. You are hereby challenged to study it carefully and prayerfully to refute and expose it if fallacious, or accept it if true. God is your judge. 🙏

# The Babylon = Rome Theory #1

All of us must admit that we do not know when the book of Revelation was written. I have presented the case for the early dating of the Apocalypse but I cannot prove **exactly when** this marvelous book was written. Someone recently said, "The important issue in understanding the book of Revelation is not the date... The real issue is not so much when the book was written but what was it all about?" I agree, which explains the approach taken in my previous articles. If we can establish what this book is about, we can go a long way in finding the answers to the book. I personally think we ought to thrash it out until we get to the bottom of it. It is attainable. I gladly make my contribution even if proven wrong in the end. I hope all who read this presentation will accept the same challenge.

In previous articles, I presented evidence from the Apocalypse tying it to other Biblical sources demanding identical recognition. If our reasoning was correct, we accurately connected the Revelation to the desolation of the nation of Israel and the destruction of their capital city, Jerusalem. This would argue that the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. I contend that Babylon the Great symbolizes Jerusalem and that her destruction portrays the destruction of Jerusalem which was approaching when John wrote.

Others contend for the Babylon = Rome theory. Some very strong arguments support this view. Let us give due consideration to these arguments before closing this part of our studies.

## Babylon Sits On The Seven Heads

One of the strongest arguments for the Babylon = Rome view is found in Revelation 17:9. John writes, "*And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth*" (Revelation 17:9). Many contend that the seven mountains correspond with the seven hills of Rome identifying the royal city which

governed and controlled the Roman Empire. On the surface this argument looks reasonable but it is based entirely upon supposition and assumption.

Men read this text and immediately assert that John said **hills**. Then it is claimed that "*every body understood what was meant when talking about the seven hills of Rome in a first century context.*" Where do we get the right to change the word **mountains** to **hills**? Mountains are not hills. The scriptures make a distinction (cf. Luke 3:5; 23:30). Even those who argue this recognize the difference. Recently, a lecturer who argued this, later said, "Jerusalem was up in the mountains and they (the horses, AMO) don't work too good up there. When we talk about the mountains of Jerusalem, they were really mountains and Rome we are talking about hills for the most part." So, you see, he knew the difference. When we have to change the word of God to fit our theories we are treading on dangerous grounds.

I too have argued that the seven heads identify with Rome (cf. *Avenging*, pages 280, 331). My reasons are simple, reasonable and contextually sound. I reached this conclusion without consideration of the harlot. You see, the seven heads are on the sea beast which represents the Roman Empire (cf. Revelation 13:1-3). The heads are seven "*mountains*" and "*kings*" (Revelation 17:9,10). John was not identifying geographic location. I think he used mountains in the symbolic sense of **governments** as used in the Old Testament. The king of Babylon was a **destroying mountain** and would become a **burnt mountain** (Jeremiah 51:25; cf. Isaiah 2:2,3). Each Roman king had his own government or administration. There were seven administrations under Rome's first seven kings. These were the seven mountains with their kings. The seat of government for these kings and their administrations was Rome. The seven heads, therefore, symbolize the power structure which controlled the Empire from Rome.

This is how I backed into the position that the seven mountains symbolized Rome. The heads were a part of the beast and not a part of the harlot. Babylon simply sat (or was carried by the beast) upon the seven heads which identified the kings of the Empire ruling from Rome.

Some have said, "it would not make sense for Jerusalem to set upon the heads. If it were Jerusalem, it would make more sense if she sat upon the back or on the tail." Absolutely not! To symbolize Jerusalem, Babylon had to sit on the heads. Here is why. The harlot was *carried* by the beast. The word *carried* means "to carry a burden." (*Thayer*, pages 98,99). The beast (Roman Empire) carried the harlot as a burden. Only the heads would carry Jerusalem. The rest of the Empire would not. Josephus is full of it. The peoples of the Empire resented the Jews getting special treatment because of their religion. So, they persecuted them in efforts to bring them into compliance. The Jews through Jerusalem's power structure constantly appealed to the Caesars and the Senate for protection of their religious rights. Decrees were passed down protecting the Jews and their religion. It was the governments of the Roman Empire which protected and granted their rights and in that sense *carried them as a burden* (cf. *Josephus, Ant.*, 14, 10). If the Roman kings and their administrations had not supported the Jews, the peoples of the empire would have turned upon them long before 70 A.D. So, you see, there is a reason why the harlot (Jerusalem) is portrayed as sitting on the heads. This was the proper place for her because it portrays reality.

Again, the harlot is not the beast or any part of the beast. She was simply carried by the beast. In order to clearly evaluate John's picture, let me ask a simple question. Was Rome any part of the Roman Empire (the beast)? Is it not true that Rome existed long before the Empire was born and was always the essential ingredient of the Empire? Yet, in John's presentation, the harlot is not on the beast when it first appears (Revelation 13) and she is not on the beast when it is destroyed (Revelation 19). Rome, therefore, was not Babylon the Great because Rome was a part

of the Roman Empire from beginning to end. John's picture of Babylon fits Jerusalem perfectly.

## Babylon Reigned Over Kings

Perhaps the strongest argument for the Babylon = Rome theory is based upon Revelation 17:18. "*And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*" It is contended that this settles the matter since Rome was the one and only city that ruled over the kings of the earth. Therefore Babylon had to equal Rome.

It is my contention that Jerusalem and Jerusalem alone fulfills this text. Note carefully that Babylon ruled as a *city*. This is where men ignore what John said. *Babylon ruled as a city!* Note carefully that this is **a city** reigning over the kings of the earth. It is not kings reigning over other kings, but *a city* reigning. Did Rome reign as a city over kings? No, a 1000 times. *Did Rome reign as a city over her own kings?* Was it not the other way around? Kings ruled Rome! Indeed, that is the way it was. Rome never ruled as a city but Jerusalem did and we do not have to go out of the scriptures to prove it. We can explain how Jerusalem reigned as a city but we cannot explain how Rome reigned as a city over the kings of the earth. We can only explain how Rome ruled through the sovereignty of kings. Did Rome rule the Caesars? The fact is that Rome as a city ruled no one. Jerusalem ruled through her power and influence as the city of the great King. Actually, through her power politics, Jerusalem even exercised dominion over the Roman kings. Read Josephus, he is full of it. We have to be blind not to see how it worked.

My position that Jerusalem reigned with a sovereignty that was above that of kings has been questioned by some. I realize that the natural understanding of the text in our English translations suggests the idea of "exercising authority over." The only reason I offered the other explanation was that Vine suggested it (cf. *Avenging*, page 333). He said the words used here were "suggestive of a distinction between the sovereignty of mystic Babylon and that of ordinary sovereigns" (*Vine*, Vol.3,

p.269). I have no reason to believe that Vine thought Babylon was Jerusalem, but he suggested that the rule of Babylon was different from that of kings. Was the rule of Rome different from that of kings or was the rule of Rome that of her sovereign kings? We know the answer. Jerusalem ruled as the city of the great king but her rule was not that of kings. Her power and rule came from the fact that she was the one and only Holy City in the world of that day. She truly ruled as a city.

The word translated *over* in this text means *over or above*. I have no problem with our present translations but the passage may be saying that Babylon had a sovereignty that was *above*, i.e., greater, superior, or higher than that of earthly kings. I take this view of the passage because it is the best way to understand the sovereignty of a city. Let me also add, that whether Jerusalem was occupied by foreign powers had nothing to do with this kind of rule. Jerusalem ruled as a city even while lying in ruins (Daniel 6:10; cf. 2 Chronicles 6:36-38; Psalms 137).

## Conclusion

I can say without fear of contradiction that Jerusalem reigned as a city over the kings of the earth. The **BIBLE** proves this. Some think that these two above arguments *clearly* identify Babylon as Rome but they do not come close to it. These arguments are neither conclusive nor convincing.

Some are wondering what drives us to find another explanation other than the *clearly Babylon = Rome* explanation. The reason is very simply. **Rome does not fit the picture**. There is no fulfillment of the things forecast for Babylon if she is Rome. Think about this seriously, friends. If Babylon is Rome, there is yet to be a destruction. This denies the "*at hand*" fulfillment foretold. No, Babylon cannot be Rome because Babylon was to be destroyed by the sea beast which represents the Roman Empire and it **never happened**. The Roman Empire was destroyed nearly 1500 years ago while Rome, *the Eternal City*, has never been destroyed. There is no way you can shake it and come up with a

fulfillment. A failure to have a fulfillment of the destruction of Babylon the Great, per the Babylon = Rome theory, seriously questions the integrity of both Jesus and John as prophets of God. Let us remember the warnings of Revelation 22:18,19.

Further, Rome does not fit the picture because it ignores John's chronological order. In Revelation 14, the fall of Babylon precedes the warning against the worship of the beast and his image (Revelation 14:8,9). In Revelation 17-19, the fall of Babylon precedes the destruction of the sea beast and the false prophet. Chronological order is essential since John revealed things that were shortly to come to pass (Revelation 1:1). Prophecy is history revealed before it happens, therefore, it must have chronological order. If Babylon symbolizes Rome, John's order is wrong because any fall of Rome argued must follow the worship of the beast and his image. Christianity's conflict with the Roman Empire was over before the city of Rome was ever threatened. Since Rome has never been destroyed as described by Babylon's fall, the fall of the Roman Empire preceded any prescribed fall of Rome. I am sorry about Rome because it does not fit John's picture.

When we consider Jerusalem as the city symbolized by Rome, we have no problem with chronological order. The everlasting gospel was preached to all men, Jerusalem fell and Christianity's conflict with the Roman Empire developed precisely as pictured in Revelation 14:6-11. Again, Babylon fell in Revelation 17-18 followed by Christianity's confrontation with the Roman Empire and the religions which served the Empire. Jerusalem's fall fits the chronological order. Rome does not.

Our next article will continue our study of the Babylon = Rome theory. 🍷

# The Babylon = Rome Theory #2

In our last article, we began a discussion of the Babylon = Rome theory. In this study, we will discuss several other arguments often made to establish the theory.

## Babylon's Attire

It is maintained that, "Babylon's adornment fits Rome best because the colors of purple and scarlet portray her as a Royal and Harlot city." This may be correct but it does not prove Babylon is Rome. Jerusalem was described in this fashion in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 4:30). The tabernacle and temple were made with these things (Exodus 25-26; 35-39; 2 Chronicles 2). God was Israel's king and the Temple's location in Jerusalem made it the Royal city. Though Jerusalem turned harlot (Isaiah 1:21), she was still decked in her attire.

## Babylon Sat Upon Many Waters

The argument is made that, "Babylon symbolized Rome because she sat closer to the sea than Jerusalem." This explanation ignores what John said. John explained that the *"many waters"* were *"peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues"* (Revelation 17:15). To ignore John's explanation in favor of our own is to create an unscriptural characteristic. John was not talking about literal waters! He was talking about people from the nations.

## Babylon, the Great Commercial Power

Some contend that, "Babylon must be Rome because she was **THE** world famous market and consumer of all the products mentioned and was known world wide for this." You would think from these assertions that Babylon was the world's greatest market and consumer in that day. Where did this idea come from? John did not say that. All he said

was that this great market would be shut down.

The advocates of the Babylon = Rome theory like to talk about how small Jerusalem was compared to Rome and other cities. They say that Jerusalem with a population of 120,000 or less could not compare to these much larger cities and that it would be unreasonable to think that Jerusalem was Babylon the Great.

Jerusalem was small when compared to Rome, Alexandria, Ephesus, Antioch and others. All these cities had many more inhabitants than Jerusalem but, all of them together, did not have the tourist trade Jerusalem had. Three times a year Jerusalem's loyal subjects were commanded to go up to Jerusalem to worship. Josephus indicates that some years as many as 3,000,000 people came to Jerusalem just for one of those feasts. Think about that! They went three times a year by commandment! On top of that there were other feasts and memorial days established by the Jews for which they journeyed to Jerusalem. Did they carry all of their needed provisions with them? Of course not. The business community of Jerusalem provided for these things.

Today, many of our large cities get into bidding wars for conventions. A convention of 10,000 means millions of dollars. Think about three a year with 3,000,000! Josephus tells us there was enough grain stored in Jerusalem to have fed the millions caught in the city for several years but one of the rebels burned it (*Josephus, Wars, 5, 1, 4*). How did it get there? Surely many merchants were involved.

Furthermore, while Jerusalem's local population was small, every Jew considered himself a citizen of Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 48:1,2). It has been estimated that 12 to 14 million Jews lived in the world of that day and most of them made such a claim. This means that Jerusalem's citizenry reached out into all the communities of the world. There was no city in the world like it. Of this, Titus, Jerusalem's destroyer, said, the Romans

"permitted you to live, either by yourselves, or among others, as it should please you: and, what is our chief favor of all, we have given you leave to gather up that tribute which is paid to God... till at length you became richer than we ourselves" (*Josephus, Wars, 6, 6, 2*). So, while Jerusalem's local population was small, her spiritual citizenry was world wide.

## Babylon as a Sea Trading Power

It is often asserted that, "Babylon was predominately a sea trading power." Where did anyone get that idea? Sure, the shipmasters, ships and sailors are mentioned in association with how Babylon got many of her products but there is nothing in the text that warrants the word **predominate**. John does not describe Babylon as the world's greatest sea trading power. John simply points out that those who depended upon the sea for trade with Babylon lost that market.

It is reasoned that, "Jerusalem sat up in the mountains and was land-locked and any thing they got from the sea had to be hauled over land." So what? The fact is, Jerusalem depended upon the sea. Solomon opened up the seas for trade nearly 1000 years B.C. (1 Kings 9:26-28; 2 Chronicles 8:18; 9:21, cf. 2 Chronicles 2:16; Ezra 3:7). Josephus also points out that Jerusalem depended upon the sea for trade (*Wars, 3, 3, 6*). While I would not contend for a moment that Jerusalem was the world's greatest sea trader, she did get products from far by way of the sea. None of us know the extent of that trade. All John said was that Babylon as a market for sea trade would be shut down. He said nothing about her being the world's greatest sea trading power. This has simply been asserted as if it were fact. To assert something into a text in Revelation that is not there is dangerous, friends! (Revelation 22:18,19).

## The Merchandise

It is contended that, "The merchandise found in Babylon was especially appropriate for Rome." Yes, and for nearly every city on earth. All of these things were found in

Jerusalem and this is admitted by those who advocate the Babylon = Rome theory. They even admit that slaves were found there. John was not measuring how much or many of these things existed in Babylon but was pointing out that as a market for these things Babylon would cease to exist. Permit me to remind you that Rome has never been shut down.

## The Great City

It is asserted that, "It was appropriate for Rome to be called *the great city* but not Jerusalem." This is a big assertion because Jerusalem is identified in the scriptures as a great city while Rome is not (cf. Jeremiah 22:8; Revelation 11:8). This does not mean that Rome was not a great city, it was, but it does mean that God recognized Jerusalem as a great city whether we do or not. Furthermore, the great city is mentioned nine times in the Apocalypse and one time John identifies her as the city "*where our Lord was crucified*" (Revelation 11:8). Surely no one thinks Jesus was crucified in Rome!

## Saints Rejoice at Babylon' Fall

It has been argued that, "Since saints rejoiced over the fall of Babylon, she could not be Jerusalem because in the Old Testament the saints always wept when Jerusalem was punished." Of all the arguments I have heard for Babylon's identity, this is the weakest. Indeed, the people **living** in Jerusalem wept when she was destroyed. Jesus even indicated they would weep in 70 A.D. (Luke 23:28-30).

So, what is wrong with the argument? In the Apocalypse, those told to *rejoice* were martyred (dead) saints. They were martyred for their faith by Babylon the Great (cf. Revelation 6:9-11; 17:6; 18:20,24). They were promised vengeance and when it came they could rejoice. They did not die in vain. There was plenty of reason for the *apostles* and *prophets* to rejoice at the fall of Jerusalem. Jesus held Jerusalem responsible for the deaths of both apostles and prophets.



We can prove this by the scriptures. *Can you prove by the scriptures that Rome was responsible for the deaths of any apostles or prophets?* If you hold to the Rome theory, you are duty bound to prove that Rome was responsible for the deaths of at least two apostles and two prophets?

## Babylon's Apostasy Not Mentioned

It is contended that, "The absence of any references to Babylon's idolatry or of her having turned away from God is proof that Babylon is not Jerusalem." Evidently these people have not read Revelation 17. Babylon is a whore and *"The Mother of Harlots, and Abominations of the Earth"* (Revelation 17:1,5). Why is she a harlot? Harlots are not born. They are made by the practice of whoredom when they **turn away** from what is morally right.

Babylon is also portrayed as the mother of Harlots. The harlots are the children of the mother harlot. Both, Isaiah and Ezekiel, picture Judah and Jerusalem as the mother of harlots (Isaiah 57:3-12; Ezekiel 16). Paul says, *"Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children."* The priests and the rulers in Jerusalem departed from the Lord and lead the people into spiritual whoredom. The Old Testament is full of Israel's abandonment of God for idols. The gods with whom they committed whoredom were called **abominations** (Deuteronomy 29:17; 32:16; Ezekiel 5:1-11). So, reference is made to Babylon's (Jerusalem's) apostasy and idolatry.

## Babylon's Old Testament Connection

It is suggested that, "Many of the statements made in chapter 18 are taken from Old Testament descriptions of pagan cities and therefore could not be descriptions of Jerusalem." While arguing this, they admit that some of the descriptions do come from judgment passages upon Jerusalem. By admitting this, they defeat their whole argument. If the description drawn from Old Testament references to pagan cities proves

Babylon is not Jerusalem, then those descriptions derived from references to judgment upon Jerusalem proves that Babylon is not Rome either. This point is pointless.

## Jerusalem View Misses Point

I recently heard a lecturer contend that one of the reasons for accepting the Babylon = Rome view is, "The Babylon = Jerusalem view ultimately misses the point." Nothing that was said on this point was worth mentioning because the point missed was the lecturer's own personal evaluation of the book. He formulated his view of the book and then decided that if another view does not support his view then it misses the point. It might miss that person's point, but missing the truth is another thing. Whatever the point is in Revelation must be determined by scripture and not by someone's think so's. Incidentally, I believe the Babylon = Rome view misses the main point. I think it misses many points but that is from my point of view and does nothing toward proving the Babylon = Jerusalem view.

## Conclusion

In concluding this part of our studies in the Apocalypse, let me remind you who hold to the Babylon = Rome theory that there are three things you must contend with.

- 1) Jesus said, *"It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem"* (Luke 13:33). He also held that generation responsible for *"the blood of all the prophets"* (Luke 11:50). Since the blood of prophets was found in Babylon (Revelation 18:24), you must explain how Rome could be destroyed to avenge the blood of the prophets without questioning the veracity of Jesus.
- 2) God avenged the blood of apostles and prophets on Babylon (Revelation 18:20). Since you contend that Babylon symbolizes Rome, you are required to prove that Rome was responsible for the deaths of at least two apostles and two

prophets. Can you prove this?

- 3) Babylon was to be destroyed, wiped out, never to exist again. You are responsible to prove that Rome was destroyed according to your view. There is much talk about the fall of Rome but no one can explain when it took place. Physically, nothing has ever happened to Rome! It is still the "eternal city"! It has **never** been destroyed! There is no fulfillment of John's prophecy if Babylon = Rome! 🤖

# Why The Seven Churches of Asia?

One question always stands out when studying the Apocalypse. "Why did the Lord choose to address the seven churches of Asia?" This question is asked regardless of the position taken on the book of Revelation. What is the answer? It is not within our ability to answer for the Lord the reasons for His actions. Whatever His reasons, they are sound. We can accept them without question.

Due to arguing the Babylon = Jerusalem view, I have been asked this question repeatedly. I suppose those who ask it feel that it shows my position untenable. Usually the question reads, "If the book of Revelation is about the destruction of Jerusalem, why was it addressed to the seven churches of Asia? Would not your position make more sense if the book had been addressed to the church in Jerusalem or to those in Judea?"

## My Response

First, you will recall that God revealed a message concerning Jerusalem's previous destruction (586 B.C.) to a prophet and a people far removed from the place where the events were to occur. The people were the captive Israelites in Babylon; the prophet was Ezekiel, and the design of the message was to convince those captives that the destruction of Jerusalem was from God. A need to inform His people in exile of His judgment being carried out upon Jerusalem was as needful for them as it was for those still living in Judea. The people in exile were partly responsible for this judgment and needed to understand why it was coming upon their beloved city. The message of the Revelation served the same purpose for Christians outside Judea. Since Christianity grew out of the root and stock of Israel, it is only reasonable that they should know why this judgment was being carried out upon Jerusalem.

Second, the period of tribulation preceding the destruction of Jerusalem was expected to

affect the Jews throughout the world. Jews lived in nearly every city of the world. Asia Minor was a stronghold of the Jews. Furthermore, many of the Jews of Asia were Christians. They would be affected by it and needed to prepare for it (cf. Jas.5:7-11; 1 Pet.7,12-19). The Revelation also warned of trying times coming upon the earth (Rev.3:10), prepared Christians to endure, and gave them incentives necessary for victory.

Finally, we should not overlook the fact that the seven churches represented congregations everywhere. The message, then, was not for Christians in Asia alone, but for Christians the world over. From this standpoint, the message of the Apocalypse became a general message for all the churches existing at that time.

These constitute some good reasons why the Lord addressed the seven churches of Asia in the Apocalypse. However, we need to understand that these constitute my opinions why the book of Revelation was written to the churches in Asia and not the Lord's stated reasons. His reasons may differ greatly from mine and your's.

## Some Meat For The Gander

You have heard the expression, "What is meat for the goose is also meat for the gander." In other words, what applies to me also applies to you. If I must answer the question from my point of viewing the Revelation, then, you must answer the same question. The question needs an answer from the Babylon = Rome view as it does from the Babylon = Jerusalem view. Here is your question: "If the book of Revelation is about the destruction of Rome, why was it addressed to the seven churches of Asia? Would not your position make more sense if the book had been addressed to the churches in Rome or to those in Italy?"

Asia sustained as much relationship geographically to Jerusalem as it did to Rome. Distance wise, Asia was closer to Jerusalem than to Rome. Access to Jerusalem by way of land was much less complicated than access to Rome and access by way of sea was more direct to Jerusalem than to Rome. From a geographical standpoint we must ask, "If the Apocalypse is primarily about the destruction of Rome, why was it written to the churches of Asia?"

Perhaps some have reasoned that Asia sustained strong ties with Rome politically while it sustained none with Jerusalem. No doubt this is true but what does this have to do with the writing of a New Testament book? Christianity sustained no special political ties to Rome while it did sustain a special religious tie to Jerusalem. The ties of the churches were much closer to Jerusalem than to Rome because Christianity began at Jerusalem and was an outgrowth of the Jewish system as God decreed.

The main reason I have heard through the years why the Apocalypse was addressed to the seven churches of Asia has been the presence of Emperor Worship in that region. There is little doubt that Emperor Worship existed in Asia or that the churches were faced with it early on. In Revelation, Christians are warned lest they be guilty of it. Those who practiced it would suffer the consequences of it (Rev.14:9-11; 19:20). Those who did not worship the beast and his image would be blessed (Rev.16:2; 20:4). The promises of blessings and curses were designed to encourage Christians to remain loyal to the Lord and win the victory in the conflict which would follow the destruction of Babylon the Great (Rev.17:14). Yes, the Apocalypse was written to warn the Christians against worshiping the Emperor, but that conflict did not develop in the book until after Babylon was destroyed (Rev.19:11-21). History teaches that the conflict between Christianity and the Roman state disappeared before any supposed destruction of Rome. For this reason Babylon cannot symbolize Rome. This answer

to our question does not fit.

## **Another Question Is In Order**

The book of Revelation is not the only book of the New Testament directed to this region and in particular the province of Asia. Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Philemon, first and second Peter address churches and individuals living in the province of Asia. Add to these, Galatians, James, Jude, first, second, and third John, written to the Christians residing in this region, and you have more than half of the New Testament books addressed to churches and individuals in Asia Minor. So, perhaps our question should be broader than first asked. Maybe we should ask, "Why are more than half the New Testament books addressed to the Christians living in Asia Minor?" Any answer given in response to our first question should take into account this second question.

## **Asia And Christianity**

Perhaps it would be helpful to discuss Asia in relationship to Christianity. From the beginning, the people of Asia were involved in Christianity. Jews from Asia heard Peter preach on Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Possibly some of them were converted. The people of Asia were well represented in Jerusalem. A synagogue existed to which a contingency of Asia Jews belonged (Acts 6:9). They had a part in the charges which resulted in the stoning of Stephen. Later, Paul was forbidden to preach in Asia by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6) but went to Ephesus, the capital of Asia, for three years on his third Missionary Journey (Acts 20:31). Luke said, "All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). How many churches existed in Asia is not known but there were a number (1 Cor. 16:19; Revelation 1:4, 11). Besides the seven churches listed in the Apocalypse, there were churches at Colosse and Hierapolis. There are more churches listed by name in Asia than any other Roman province. Nearly one-third of the churches listed by name in the New Testament

are from the province of Asia. This Roman province was a strong hold for New Testament Christianity.

## The Dispersion

The thing that contributed heavily to the evangelization of Asia Minor was the Dispersion of the Jews into this region. The Assyrian and Babylonian captivities separated the Israelites from their homeland and most of them never returned. This opened the door for them to scatter throughout the world. The successors of Alexander the Great encouraged immigration into their territories. They also encouraged the mingling of the nationalities. Many of the Jews no doubt took their liberty and went into different regions of the world. During the reign of Antiochus the Great of Syria (223-187 BC), 2000 Jewish families were moved from Mesopotamia and Babylon and settled in Phrygia and Lydia (Jos, Ant, 12, 3, 4). Over the next 200 plus years, the Jewish population of Asia Minor grew into the millions.

Devout Jews in these regions held on to their faith and were loyal to their religion. Philo, an intellectual Jew from Alexandria, Egypt who lived during the time of Christ, told of the ties of the Jews to Jerusalem. He said, "In this way Jerusalem became the capital not only of Judea, but of many other lands, on account of the colonies which it sent out from time to time into the bordering districts of Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Coele-Syria, and into the more distant regions of Pamphylia, Cilicia, the greater part of Asia Minor as far as Bithynia and the remotest corners of Pontus" (Philo, Leg ad Caium, 36; cf. ISBE, Vol. 2, p. 855). By the middle of the 2nd century BC, the Sibylline Oracles spoke concerning the Jewish people, "Every land and every sea is full of thee" (3, 271; cf. ISBE, Vol. 2, p. 855). Of the fifteen nationalities listed as represented on Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11), five were from Asia Minor. Asia and Asia Minor were full of devout Jews.

The loyal Jews in Asia Minor became a

target of Christianity. The attention given to this region by the New Testament writers suggests the degree of success attained there. While there is no way of knowing, it is possible more Christians resided in Asia Minor by the time our New Testament Scriptures were completed than any other region in the world. If this is true, and the evidence seems to support this conclusion, it would explain why so many of our NT scriptures were directed toward this region. In particular it explains why the book of Revelation addressed them.

## Conclusion

Our original question does not seem to be so difficult when we have taken into consideration all of these things. If the largest concentration of Christians shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch and then to Asia, it would provide ample reason for the Apocalypse to address the churches of Asia. These churches were filled with Jews who needed to know that God's promised judgment against Jerusalem and the Jewish nation was about to find fulfillment. Needless to say, other NT writers also warn of this coming judgment. ☞

# Will Christ Reign For 1000 Years On The Earth?

The doctrine advocating the return of Jesus Christ to earth to establish an earthly kingdom over which He will reign for 1000 years from Jerusalem is known as Premillennialism. It is one of the most popular religious doctrines of our day. It is a doctrine in which many denominational churches hold common bond as a large percentage hold to the doctrine. At any hour one might tune his radio to hear a premillennial preacher expounding upon "the signs of the times" - the imminent return of the Lord. The doctrine rests primarily upon the misunderstanding and misapplication of Revelation 20:1-7.

Will Christ reign on earth? Premillennialists cry "yes" but we respond with a resounding "no." Our reasons are twofold:

First, God never promised an earthly reign! It is true that prophecy after prophecy of the promised Messiah were interpreted by materialistic thinking Jews to mean that the Christ would rule the world upon David's earthly throne (cf. Jn.6:14,15; 7:27,40-44; 12:33,34), but the Jews totally misunderstood the prophecies. This is obvious when we consider that all prophecies concerning the Messiah necessarily had to be fulfilled in Jesus (Lk.24:44; cf. Mk.14:49; Lk.24:25-27). The inspired record affirms that all those prophecies were fulfilled in and by Him (Acts 3:18-26; 13:26-37). If this is true and He did not reign on earth, then it is apparent that an earthly reign was not promised. Add to this the declaration of Jesus that the destruction of Jerusalem, which was to take place during the lifetime of the generation living when He spoke (Lk.21:32), would constitute "days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Lk.21:22); you have the formula which demands that everything God promised in the Old Testament be fulfilled totally by 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed. If an earthly kingdom was contemplated according to Old Testament prophecy, then that kingdom had to be established no later than 70 A.D.

Since an earthly reign of Christ was not in evidence by that day, it is apparent that none was intended. The fact is, God never promised an earthly reign!

Second, the Scriptures precluded an earthly reign! The Scriptures not only do not promise an earthly reign, they teach that Christ will not reign on the earth. Consider the following:

- 1) God decreed that no descendant of Coniah (Jeconiah or Jehoichin) "shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer.22:28-30). Since Jesus is a descendant of Jeconiah through Salathiel (Matt.1:12; Lk.3:27), His throne must therefore be somewhere other than Judah, or His kingdom will fail. This excludes an earthly reign of Christ from Jerusalem.
- 2) According to prophecy, the Branch of David (Jer.33:15-18) would be "a priest upon his throne" (Zech.6:12,13). Jesus is the Branch of David (Rev.5:5; 22:16) and a priest upon His throne (Heb.6:20; 7:1), yet He cannot be a priest on earth (Heb.8:4). Therefore, His reign as King cannot be on the earth!
- 3) The Jews readily admitted that Christ would be "The son of David" (Matt.22:42). So, Jesus cast them a dilemma. "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his Son?" (Matt.22:43-45; cf. Psa.110:1). The Jews could not answer because they did not understand the true nature of the kingdom. Yet Peter explained its meaning on Pentecost (30 A.D.) when he said that Jesus was raised from the dead to sit on David's throne at the right hand of God where He rules as Lord and

Christ (Acts 2:29-36). David, Jesus and Peter understood that the reign of Christ would be in heaven at God's right hand. Since Jesus is to reign at the right hand of God till the end (1 Cor.15:24-26), there can be no earthly reign of Christ!

### **Revelation 20:1-7**

(Please read the text). For centuries this passage has been used to support the various theories of millennialism. The reasons are apparent. A period of 1000 years is mentioned six times. Satan is bound for 1000 years (v.2) that he should deceive the nations no more until the 1000 years (v.3) are fulfilled. During this 1000 years (v.4), souls lived and reigned with Christ, while the rest of the dead lived not again until the 1000 years (v.5) were finished. Those who have a part in the first resurrection shall reign with Christ the 1000 years (v.6), and when the 1000 years (v.7) are over Satan will be loosed from his prison to deceive the nations once more. The passage is perplexing and challenging.

### **Premillennial Assumptions**

According to premillennialists, the millennium will be ushered in by (1) the second coming of Christ. The living saints will then be (2) raptured and the dead saints (3) bodily resurrected to meet Him in the air. Then, after the (4) marriage of Christ to His bride (the church) and a concurrent period of seven years of tribulation, He will return to earth to (5) reign on the literal throne of David in (6) Jerusalem for (7) 1000 years. If you have read the text, you realize that this passage mentions only the 1000 years. It does not mention or hint at the second coming of Christ, the rapture, a bodily resurrection, Christ on earth, Christ reigning on earth, the throne of David or Jerusalem. All of this has been assumed by premillennialists. There has never been a doctrine more void of proof than premillennialism. We should understand that, since the Scriptures preclude an earthly reign of Christ, any interpretation of Revelation 20 that calls for an earthly reign is in error.

### **Analysis Of Revelation 20:1-7**

It is one thing to expose premillennialism's erroneous use of Revelation 20 and quite another to give a satisfactory, harmonious, scriptural explanation of the passage. To be successful in understanding this text, we must bear in mind that we are dealing with an apocalypse in which truth relative to "things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev.1:1; cf.1:19; 4:1; 22:6) were signified to John (1:1). We must remember that what is said must be viewed in relationship to the context of the apocalypse. If we do this, we shall find understanding.

### **The Binding Of Satan**

The first three verses of Revelation 20 depict the binding of Satan. He is chained, cast into the bottomless pit and restrained from deceiving the nations until 1000 years are fulfilled. It is essential that we understand the reason for his binding because this is not to be understood as the total restraining of all his power and influence in the world. Satan is bound only "that he should deceive the nations no more."

In the Apocalypse Satan is pictured deceiving the nations as he calls forth the "sea" and "land" beasts (13:1,11). Satan gave each his power (13:2,11). Together these gather forces for the battle of the great day of God Almighty (16:13,14). They war against the Lamb and His armies (13:7; 17:14; 19:19). The beasts represent the Roman Empire and the false religions which served the empire; both served Satan's designs. Satan deceived them into warring against God and His people. In the Apocalypse they are finally defeated and cast into the lake of fire (19:20), signalling the end of the Roman Empire. The scenes of chapter 20 continue the presentation as Satan is bound "that he should deceive the nations no more," as he deceived them in the days of Rome's glory, until the 1000 years are finished.

## The Dead Reign With Christ

Following the binding of Satan, John views the realm of the dead (hades) to see righteous souls living and reigning with Christ the 1000 years, i.e., the period of Satan's incarceration. John saw those to whom judgment was given sitting upon thrones and he saw the souls of saints martyred because of their faith as they continued to live and reign with Christ after their death.

The scene before us reminds one of Jesus' description of the hades realm when He pictured the rich man in torment while righteous Lazarus was comforted in Abraham's bosom (Lk.16:19-31). The only difference in the two scenes is that Jesus reveals the Old Testament view of hades as it existed prior to Christ's atonement for the sins of the world and the subsequent redemption of the righteous, while John described hades as it was to exist hundreds of years after the atonement was offered. When John views hades the righteous dead are living and reigning with Christ. They had begun their life and reign with Christ on earth (Rev.1:6; 5:10). All Christians reign in life by Jesus Christ (Rom.5:21; 1 Cor.4:8); this life and reign with Christ continues after death (2 Tim.2:12). Paul said, "To be absent from the body" is "to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor.5:6-8; cf.Phil.1:23).

### The First Resurrection

"The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (v.5). This identifies the other side of hades, the unrighteous dead. They do not live or reign with anyone. The second death, which is the lake of fire (20:14,15; 21:8), still holds power over them (v.6). Since there is a second death there must be a first. What is the first death? It is physical death by which every person (Heb.9:27) is separated from life and the source of life, God. No one escapes the first death. The unrighteous dead in the torments of hades are separated from life and from God, the source of life, and shall remain in this dead state until the bodily (1 Cor.15:52-54) or

second resurrection (20:12). However, on the other side of the "great gulf" the righteous dead have been raised to continued life with God as righteous souls in paradise where they live and reign with Christ the 1000 years, or until the time of Satan's imprisonment is complete. This is the first resurrection! On such who have part in it, the second death has no power (v.6).

How marvellous are the assurances of God! Just think how comforting these words were to those being threatened with death (cf.13:15). The promise that physical death would not interrupt their life and reign with Christ would have been most rewarding. Evidently our ancient brethren accepted these assurances, girded their loins and died holding firmly to their faith. How comforting these same assurances should be to us today if we should likewise be called upon to die for our faith.

Other explanations of these verses have been given by brethren but are fraught with difficulties. This explanation is scriptural, free of textual problems and most satisfying.

### Conclusion

Will Christ reign for 1000 years on the earth? No, but Jesus is reigning now. He has been reigning for 1950 years, and the book of Revelation presents Him as reigning. Jesus said of Himself, "I am the root and the offspring of David" (22:16); "he that hath the key of David" (3:7). John saw Him as "the Root of David" (5:5) appear at the right hand of God (5:7) with the atonement (5:6) for the redemption of mankind (5:9). He assumed the authority of heaven at the right hand of God when He received the completely sealed book (5:7). All of heaven (5:8-12) and earth were subjected to Him (5:13,14), "and he shall reign for ever and ever" (11:15). Salvation, strength, the kingdom of God and the power of His Christ is come (12:10), and men are redeemed with His blood and reign on the earth (1:6; 5:10). When death comes to the saints, they are resurrected as souls in paradise where they continue to live and reign with Christ the 1000 years, or to the end of time, "and they shall reign for ever and ever" (22:5).☞