

Apocalyptic Eyes

Long Beach Alliance Church • September 2nd, 2012 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**And behold, I am coming quickly.
Blessed is he who heeds the words of
the prophecy of this book.**

~Revelation 22:7 (NASB)

1) Who Wrote Revelation? Can We Trust Him?

- A) The author of Revelation identifies himself as Jesus Christ's "bond-servant John" (Revelation 1:1 also 1:4, 9, 22:8). Like today, simply identifying an author by such a common name as "John," leaves open a wealth of possibilities.
- B) To keep it simple, there are three genuine possibilities for Revelation's authorship: First, it was John the Apostle, author of the Gospel of John and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Second, it was another John (John the Elder?), a famous inner-circle disciple of Jesus with sufficient fame amongst readers to not question authorship. Third, it could have a pseudonymous author who used the name "John."
- C) The first option is usually offered because Apocalyptic literature (we'll talk more about that later) was often from pseudonymous authors. However, the early church treated the Scriptures very differently, and would not have accepted the book without some sort of clear apostolic authority and validation. This option is easy to dismiss.
- D) The second option is almost universally supported on two grounds. First, since the author never calls himself an apostle, there is reason to believe that he is not an apostle.

Second, the language and theology of Revelation are very different than the language and theology of the Gospel of John and 1st-3rd John, thus the authors must be different.

- E) In reality, the theology of other writings by John and Revelation have numerous strong similarities. The language (Greek usage) differences are almost certainly due to the differing conventions of the Apocalyptic genre of Revelation, and are certainly unnecessarily overblown. That the author doesn't identify himself as an apostle is only probable for a person who everyone knew was an apostle.
- F) Thus, John the Apostle was the most likely author of Revelation, which is almost universally asserted by early church writings from around the 150's. These "church fathers" were likely firsthand associates of John, and as such, are considered particularly reliable sources. In conclusion, I feel reasonably confident in John the Apostle's authorship and apostolic authority for Revelation.*

2) When Was Revelation Written? Is The Date Significant?

- A) The date of Revelation is significant because locating the historical context of the book assists the reader in the most appropriate approach for interpreting Revelation.
- B) Generally, two dates are entertained for Revelation. There is an early-date view (near 65 A.D.), and there is a late-date view (near 95 A.D.).
- C) The early-date view sees Revelation as focused on persecutions which happened under Nero, drawing support by noting that the Jerusalem Temple (Revelation 11:1-2) is still in place, indicating a date prior to 70 A.D. when the Temple was destroyed. Further, this view is supported by an enumeration of the "seven kings" of Rome (Revelation 17:9-11), arriving at Nero as the current king (emperor). The early-date view is the minority perspective.

* There are numerous good discussions of this topic, but one I preferred which is concise, balanced, and insightful is from *An Introduction to the New Testament* by D.A. Carson & Douglas Moo, pgs. 700-707 (the Introduction to Revelation section, 697-725).

- D) The late-date view sees Revelation as focused on persecutions which had selectively happened (Revelation 1:9, 2:3, 9, 13, 3:8) but were going to ramp up significantly under Domitian (6:9, 13:1-18, 17:6, 18:24, 19:2, 20:4). Emperor worship (13:4, 15-16, 14:9-11, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4) is a big issue in Revelation, but Domitian was the first Caesar to demand worship while he was still living. Finally, the late-date is universally supported by early church writers.
- E) Since books of the Bible never had dates attached to them (like current postal marks or dates at the top of letters), dating of a book is pretty difficult. Revelation is no different, but a later date is preferred for both internal evidence (the text) and external evidence (church history).

3) Revelation Is Really Weird! Why Is It Written So Strangely?

- A) Unlike any other book in the Bible, Revelation is written primarily in an Apocalyptic literary style. As noted last week, when reading from Apocalyptic genre literature, the most important thing to remember is to interpret the text symbolically, unless the text gives you good reason to interpret it literally. This is critically important!
- B) As shocking as this may sound, Revelation is not some sort of movie-like rendition of what John experienced in his Revelation visions. John chose a commonly understood Jewish-Christian genre (Apocalypse), rooted in OT allusions, symbols and language to convey the message of Revelation.
- C) However, we don't just make-up what the allusions, symbols, and language mean and apply our own spin on Revelation. We will allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, mining the jewels of OT Apocalyptic to discover significance.
- D) John purposely wrote Revelation as an Apocalypse, a narrative genre which utilizes pregnant symbolic language to describe visions which reveal earthly realities from a divine perspective which lead to the conquering of God over an age of sin and evil in both heaven and on earth through Jesus Christ and on behalf of His faithful saints.

4) Aren't There Lots Of Ways To Approach Revelation?

- A) There are five major approaches (with some variation) for interpreting the allusions, symbols, and language of Revelation. Let's take an overview...
- B) The first view is the Preterist (contemporaneous history) view. This approach contends that the events of Revelation were fulfilled during and immediately following the time period in which John wrote. All the allusions, symbols, and language are details of John's contemporary world.
- C) The second view is the Idealist (transcendent history) view. This approach contends that the events of Revelation are designed to help us understand God, and are not about the past or future. All the allusions, symbols, and language are not about specific times or events, but general principles.
- D) The third view is the Historical (universal history) view. This approach contends that the events of Revelation are always cyclically happening throughout history. All the allusions, symbols, and language are about all times in all places.
- E) The fourth view is the Futurist (future history) view. This approach contends that the events of Revelation are almost universally about the future. All the allusions, symbols, and language regard the future, with identical original meaning.
- F) The fifth view is the Eclectic (was/is/will be history) view. This approach contends that the events of Revelation about to occur amongst the seven churches (1:4), are also typical of all and final persecution. The allusions, symbols, and language refer to both past/contemporary/future events.
- G) We will be (perhaps obviously by this point) taking the final approach, a type of "both/and" approach. We want to understand the original context as a springboard for how this impacts our "eschatology" (study of the completion of all things). In this sense, we are rooted in the past, engaged in the present, with a view toward the future. Not just any future, but our future -- as God has designed it!