

“Introduction To Revelation”

BACKGROUND

1. Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, was written by the Apostle John (according to church tradition) while on the island of Patmos. The book is actually a letter written to seven different churches in Asia (a Roman province now in Turkey).
2. Revelation was probably written around 95 A.D. Jesus resurrection is 65 years in the past and most of the eyewitnesses of his ministry are now dead, yet Jesus has not yet returned. In addition, the emperor of Rome believes he is God incarnate, is addressed as “Our God and Lord,” and compels all Romans to worship him. Those who do not lose their jobs, homes, even their lives. Also, the churches are under attack from false teachers and those ambitiously seeking personal power. The church faces great danger from without and within, and wonders “is God really in control?”

APOCALYPSE OR PROPHECY?

1. The Greek word for “revelation” is *apokalypsis*, meaning “unveiling” or “disclosure.” Revelation falls within a genre of literature called “apocalyptic” (200 BC - 11 AD), which are a revelation to a human intermediary of God’s intervention in history to bring evil to an end through a cosmic struggle between God and Satan. In their writings, apocalyptists use gripping symbolism and images to describe clearly how history would play out from his time to the end. Clearly, Revelation falls into this category.
2. The genre of prophecy (1100-400 BC) also dealt with visions of the end times, but are more concerned with present-day ethics - how people should act within God’s power to resist evil. Prophecy also was more prevalent as oral preaching later written down, were apocalyptic teaching was always written first. Also, the end times were seen as somewhat more distant for the prophets than the apocalyptists.
3. Revelation is both apocalypse and prophecy. It reveals the future, yet it also seeks to motivate people to live a certain way in light of the future. 1:3 explicitly states that believers will be blessed if they read and take to heart the words of Revelation. 22:7 repeats this blessing at the end of the book. Also, John claims to be writing prophecy (1:2-3, 22:18-19). While apocalyptic literature proclaims a future Messiah, John asserts that the Savior has already come and the victory over evil has already been won.

THEMES

God - His character, nature and attributes. Revelation helps us to know, love, trust and obey Him better.

Christ - His identity, work and its results.

Power - Who actually has it, and who only seems to have it.

Evil - Its source, nature, and ultimate destiny.

The Kingdom of God - What it looks like & means, and what will bring it about.

STUDY

1. Repetition is a clue to the ideas an author wants to emphasize. What words and phrases recur often in Revelation?
2. What are your first impressions about John's style of writing? (Does it seem more like a documentary, theater production, cartoon animation, essay? Is it fun or difficult? Why?) What are your impressions about John's tone or mood (optimistic, pessimistic, angry, joyful, fearful, calm, cynical, excited)?
3. What is the "super-theme" of Revelation? What is its over-arching message?