

Revelation

Setting

- Date: most likely during the latter part of Domitian's reign, who ruled from 81-96. Most likely written during 94-96, when Domitian intensely persecuted the Christians
- Fits the context of John being exiled to Patmos (1:9)

Addresses

- 7 churches in Asia Minor (Western Turkey today)
- 7 churches listed in a sequence that corresponds to the order of sequence a traveller would make



Literary Genre

1. Apocalyptic literature – common in Jewish sources, eg., Ezekiel, Daniel, Olivet Discourse, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra
 - Extensive use of symbolism, depiction of past, present and future leading up to a decisive intervention of God in judgement and salvation, with the assurance that evil will be triumphed despite the present crisis.

Literary Genre

2. Prophecy (1:3) –
3. events from John's perspective → declaration of what God is doing NOW.
4. Epistle (1:4-5) – letters to 7 churches

Revelation: rooted in events of the days of John – hence interpretation must be understood in light of 1st century Christians in Asia Minor, and not hidden meaning or political events of today

Interpretative Approaches

- Millennial grid – the role of 1000-year period in 20:4-15
 - premillennialists
 - Postmillennialists
 - amillennialists

Interpretative Approaches

- Relationship of rapture and tribulation
 - Pretribulation?
 - Posttribulation?
 - Midtribulation?

Interpretative Approaches

- Historical perspective
 - Futurism: viewing events in Rev 6-19 as still future from John's perspective
 - Preterism: seeing all events as leading to AD70
 - Historicism: progressively fulfilled throughout church history
 - Idealism: events as symbolic of the timeless struggle between good and evil throughout the age

Structure

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapters 2-3: Letters to the 7 churches
- Chapters 4-5: Vision of heavenly praise
- Chapters 6-19: 3 series of 7 judgements portrayed as seals, trumpets, and bowls of God's wrath
- Chapter 20: the millennium
- Chapters 21-22: New heavens and new earth

Flow of Revelation

- 1:1-20: Introduction
 - 1:1-3: Prologue
 - 1:4-8: Greetings and dedication
 - 1:9-20: Events surrounding John and his commission in writing Revelation

Flow of Revelation

- 2:1-3:22: Letters to 7 churches
 - Pattern: address, identification of the speaker (Christ), commendation, criticism, judgement, call to hear, promises to those who are faithful
 - No criticism for 2 churches: Smyrna and Philadelphia
 - No commendation: Sardis, Laodicea

Flow of Revelation

- 2:1-7: Ephesus
 - Resisted false teachers (false prophets, Nicolaitans); even Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, in his letter to Ephesians praised the church as being well taught in the gospel that no unorthodox sect can gain a hearing among her members.
 - Forsaken “first love” – towards whom? God or humanity?

Flow of Revelation

- 2:8-11: Smyrna
 - Persevering despite difficult circumstances
 - Persecution from Jews (even gathering of oil to burn Polycarp on Sabbath)
 - “crown of life” – Smyrna famous for games
 - Polycarp

Flow of Revelation

- 2:12-17: Pergamum
 - Centre of Imperial cult (worship), library (the town gave its name to “parchment” - περγαμηνή), Asklepios (healing of body) → body, mind, spirit
 - Mixing faith with immorality and pagan sacrifices
 - where Satan has its throne – Asklepios?
 - Hidden manna – religious feast?
 - white stone – the stone here is black and slabs of white stones need to be brought in for inscriptions

Flow of Revelation

- 2:18-29: Thyatira
 - Centre of trade
 - Problem: Confusing the Devilish with the Divine
 - Tolerating Jezebel
 - Threat from within the church, unlike Pergamum which is external
 - Time to repent

Flow of Revelation

- 3:1-6: Sardis
 - A church that is alive yet dead
 - “wake up” “come like a thief” - Twice the city has been attacked during the night when the defenders thought they were safe

Flow of Revelation

- 3:7-13: Philadelphia
 - obedient and faithful

Flow of Revelation

- 3:14-22: Laodicea
 - Lukewarm water that is undrinkable and useless.
 - Hot water from nearby Hierapolis (10km)
 - Cold water from Colossae

Flow of Revelation

- 3:14-22: Laodicea
 - “do not need a thing” - The rebuilding of the city after earthquake in 61CE was done without any imperial aid.
 - “Poor, blind and naked” – city was centre for banking, ophthalmology and clothes industry

Flow of Revelation

- 4:1-5:14 – Heavenly Praise – John now caught up to the heavenly throne, shown future events in 6:1. Here, receives a glimpse of the glory and majesty of God
 - 4:1-11 – For God
 - 5:1-14 – For the Lamb

Flow of Revelation

- 6:1-17 – Opening of the 6 seals
- 7:1-17 – Interlude
- 8:1-5 – Opening of the 7th seal
- 8:6-9:21 – Blowing of the 6 trumpets
- 10:1-11:14 – Interlude
- 11:15-19 – Blowing of the 7th trumpet
- 12:1-14:20 – Cosmic conflicts, the beasts, and judgement

Flow of Revelation

- 15:1-16:21 – Pouring of the 7 bowls
- 17:1-18:24 – The Fall of Rome
- 19:1-21 – The return of Christ
- 20:1-15 – The reign of Christ
- 21:1-22:6 – The new heavens and new earth
- 22:7-21 – The promise of the return of Christ

Warnings

- Not to read Revelation in light of current events
- Revelation is NOT all about the end times
- Pay attention to the overall theme of Revelation:
 - The destiny of humanity
 - Our response: to be faithful?