

Eschatology: The Book of Revelation (Chapters 1-5)

When Was Revelation Written?

Most modern scholars believe that Revelation was written around AD 95. Obviously, if Revelation was written after AD 70, then the book could not be a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem. However, this late dating of Revelation is a modern change, going back to the middle of the nineteenth century. For most of history, the church has held that Revelation was written in the AD 60's.

The arguments concerning the date of Revelation are very technical, on both sides. Nevertheless, there is one fairly obvious point in favor of a pre-AD 70 date. Revelation tells us when the book was written.

Revelation 17:10

This verse is referring to seven kings, who are emperors of Rome. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has yet to come. This means that five have died. The sixth is currently reigning. The seventh is not yet ruling. Claudius was the fifth emperor of Rome, and he died in AD 54. Nero was the sixth emperor, and he reigned from AD 54-68. The book of Revelation was written during his Nero's reign.

Kenneth Gentry has written an entire book, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, defending a pre-AD 70 dating of the book of Revelation. He compiles a ton of evidence that many find convincing. At the end of the day, neither side can absolutely prove when Revelation was written. It is best to keep an open mind, to study the contents of the book, and to see what the book points us toward. As we will see throughout this study and especially this morning, the content of Revelation itself not only fits in a pre-AD 70 time period, but it only fits in a pre-AD 70 time period.

Revelation 1 (Introduction)

1:1-3 Introduction and Benediction

Revelation 1:1-3

- a) Revelation is about Jesus Christ; he is the interpretive center.
- b) The time texts lay the foundation for how we interpret this book.
- c) Revelation is signified, full of symbols, just like OT prophecy.
- d) Blessing is promised for those who read and obey.

1:4-8 Greeting to the Seven Churches

Revelation 1:4-6

- a) John is recording this letter specifically for the seven churches that are in Asia minor. The entire letter is for their benefit. Along with the time texts, this points us toward a first century fulfillment.
- b) Jesus has ascended and is ruler over the kings on earth.
- c) Jesus has made us kings and priests.

Revelation 1:7-8

- a) "He is coming with clouds" is not a reference to the second coming, nor is this a personal coming. This is OT language for a coming in judgment (cf. Isaiah 19:1). Jesus will come in the sense that he will send his agents to do his bidding.

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- b) "Every eye will see" does not mean that everyone on the earth will see Jesus physically coming. "Seeing" often refers to cognitive perception, to understanding. Everyone will hear about the destruction of Jerusalem, and then they will understand that Jesus has come in judgment.
- c) This is the theme of Revelation. Jesus has ascended, and he is going to prove that he has ascended by coming in judgment on Jerusalem. Jesus talks about coming frequently (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20). Do not confuse this coming in judgment with the second coming.

1:9-20 The Vision of the Son of Man

Revelation 1:9

The great tribulation had already started. Nero began to persecute the church in AD 64. Revelation was likely written around then.

Revelation 1:10-11

The message of Revelation is relevant for these seven churches in the first century.

Revelation 1:12-18

This is a description of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, which matches descriptions in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, and Daniel 7 & 10.

Revelation 1:19-20

The seven golden lampstands are symbols of the seven churches. The seven stars are symbols of the angels (messengers; possibly pastors) over each of the seven church.

Revelation 2-3 (Letters to the Seven Churches)

In chapters 2-3, Jesus has a special message for each of the seven churches before giving them the general message contained in chapters 4-22.

The Letter to Ephesus

Revelation 2:1-7

The Ephesian church has left its first love. If they do not repent, then Jesus threatens to "come to you quickly." This would be a coming in judgment, to "remove your lampstand." Remember, lampstands are symbols of the churches. Jesus will come in judgment and destroy the church as Ephesus.

The Letter to Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11

The church at Smyrna is already in tribulation because they are being persecuted by some claiming to be Jews. Jesus says they are not Jews. That is, these persecutors are ethnic Jews, but because they are not spiritual Jews, Jesus calls them "a synagogue of Satan." Again, this points to a pre-AD 70 writing of Revelation, as there was no Jewish persecution of the church after AD 70.

The Letter to Pergamos

Revelation 2:12-17

Jesus again threatens judgment against the church at Pergamos: "I will come to you quickly." This "coming" is fought with the "sword of My mouth," which is the word of God. In other words, if

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Pergamos does not expel the doctrine of Balaam, then Jesus will send men to preach the word and replace the cowardly leaders of Pergamos.

The Letter to Thyatira

Revelation 2: 18-29

To the church at Thyatira, Jesus says, "hold fast what you have till I come." This is not a reference to the second coming, but to Jesus coming in judgment upon Jezebel and her children. When Jezebel and her children die, this will relieve Thyatira from their inner turmoil. However, they have to hold fast what they have until the Lord comes to them.

The Letter to Sardis

Revelation 3: 1-6

Again, Jesus promises a visit: "I will come upon you as a thief." Again, this is not the second coming. This is a coming in judgment upon the church at Sardis in the first century if they do not repent.

The Letter to Philadelphia

Revelation 3: 7-13

The church in Philadelphia is also being persecuted by those who claim to be Jews, but are not. These are ethnic Jews, but they are not true Jews, that is, spiritual Jews. Their synagogue belongs to Satan.

Jesus speaks about "the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world." Here, "world" is *oikoumene*, which means the inhabited world" or "the known world," which was common parlance for the Roman empire.

Specifically, this was "to test those who dwell on the earth." The word for earth is the most common word for "land," which is a reference to the land of Israel. In other words, Jesus is about to bring tribulation upon the Roman empire, and specifically upon the land of Israel. This can only refer to what was about to happen in AD 70.

Again, Jesus says "Behold, I am coming quickly!" When Jesus comes to judge Jerusalem, he will also judge the churches, removing those that are unfaithful and rewarding those who are faithful. This is going to happen quickly.

The Letter to Laodicea

Revelation 3: 14-22

The church at Laodicea is wealthy and lukewarm. Jesus threatens to vomit them out of his mouth. This time, Jesus is wanting to visit the church in a good way. He wants to dine with them.

Summary of Chapters 2-3

Notice how each of the seven letters contains a reference to Jesus coming, yet none of these are the second coming or personal, bodily comings of Christ. He comes for blessing or for cursing, using agents to accomplish his will. The letters to the seven churches are in the form of a chiasm.

- A) Ephesus – loveless
- B) Smyrna – persecuted
- C) Pergamos – compromising
- D) Thyatira – corrupt
- C) Sardis – dead
- B) Philadelphia – faithful
- A) Laodicea – lukewarm

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Ephesus and Laodicea are both lax. Smyrna and Philadelphia are both faithful. Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis represent a progression of churches that tolerate error: compromise, corruption, death.

Revelation 4 (Heavenly Worship)

Chapter four gives us a glorious picture of heavenly worship.

Revelation 4:1

Revelation 4-22 is a description of things that take place next.

Revelation 4:2-3

This is a description of God the Father on his throne in heaven.

Revelation 4:4-5

Twenty-four elders are sitting around the throne. These are twenty-four king/priests who are ruling with God.

Revelation 4:6-8

These four living creatures with six wings are the seraphim that guard the throne of God. The description of heavenly worship parallels Isaiah 6.

Revelation 4:9-11

The twenty-four elders cast their crowns before the Father; this matches the twenty-four actions by angels in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 5 (The Scroll and the Lamb)

Chapter five continues the description begun in chapter four.

Revelation 5:1-4

A scroll with seven seals is brought forth, but no one is found worthy to open and read it.

Revelation 5:5-7

The Lamb is obviously referring to Jesus, who comes and takes the scroll.

Revelation 5:8-10

Again, Jesus has made us kings and priests, and we reign with him on earth.

Revelation 5:11-14

Besides the twenty-four elders and the four seraphim, there are a lot of angels: "ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands." Obviously, these numbers are not precise but are given to us so that we will understand that there are a ton of angels present.

So, Jesus takes the scroll (5:7), and he is about to take off the seven seals and read the scroll. The rest of the book of Revelation (6:1-22:5) are a description of the breaking of the seals and what results.