

The Church of the Servant King

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Prophecy Series

(Proph 21A_Introduction to Revelation)

Author – It is nearly universally agreed by orthodox scholars that the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation. The opening verses of the book state that John wrote it (1:1, 4, 9 cf. 22:8). Probably more than any other New Testament book, the book of Revelation experienced wide distribution and early recognition as accepted Scripture. No question even arose regarding the identity of the author until the 3rd Century A.D. when Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria and student of Origen (died ca. A.D. 264) objected to its apostolic authorship because he was opposed to the “Chiliasts” (Latin for one thousand or millennium) who advocated a literal, earthly reign of Jesus Christ based upon Revelation 20:1-6. In the 4th Century A.D., Athanasius of Alexandria promoted its apostolic origins and it was largely accepted as divinely inspired until the Reformation period. Martin Luther was offended by its contents (e.g. the overuse of symbols and visions in his opinion and his view that Jesus Christ was not taught in the book) and resurrected questions of its apostolic origins. Nevertheless, the strong arguments in favor of its apostolic origins won out in the end.

Date – Early church tradition (e.g. the early church fathers Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius and Irenaeus) indicates that the Apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos during Domitian’s reign. These early church leaders wrote that John was allowed to return to Ephesus once the Emperor died. Domitian died in A.D. 96. This is the majority view.

There is one alternative view that indicates that the book was written at an early date shortly after the reign of Nero (A.D. 54-68) and the proponents of this view cite references made in Christian literature written in the 2nd – 4th Centuries that Paul wrote to seven churches following the pattern of John’s example in Revelation.¹ However, this view is weakened by the fact that leaders within the Christian community during the first two centuries following the death of Christ attributed the authorship to John the Apostle.

Source of Material in Revelation – John states that he received the Revelation (*apokalupsis* – Gr. Αποκάλυψις) from Jesus Christ through an angelic agent or mediator (1:1). Even though most of the details of the revelation were new to John, there are many parallels which we will note to Jesus’ teaching in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21) as well as a foundation rooted in many passages from the Old Testament. (Some have estimated that 278 of the 404 verses of Revelation contain references to the Old Testament).² As we have observed in some of our previous studies within our Prophecy series, there are many references in various Old Testament Scriptures to some of the same events described in Revelation.

Interpretive Traditions – There are several interpretive views of chapters 2-3 and chapters 4-22 of the book of Revelation – two distinct sections of the book. I will introduce these views (to include the view we will adopt) once we get to each of those sections in our study.

¹ Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, electronic version, 1989-1998).

² Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2nd Ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1907), cxxxv, cited in Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Revelation,” www.soniclight.com. In addition, the United Bible Society’s Greek New Testament, 2nd edition, pp. 897-920 listed over 500 Old Testament passages.

The Preface (Rev 1:1-3)

1:1 THE Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.³

The word “*revelation*” is the Greek word *apokalupsis* (Gr. Αποκάλυψις) and literally means an “unveiling.” It is as if God lifted away the time-space veil that obscured John’s vision of the future and allowed him glimpses of what would eventually unfold. Note that it is Jesus Who gave the revelation (to John through the angel) which He had received from the Father. I consider this to be an important point to note especially when compared to Jesus’ response to the questions of the disciples that is found in Acts 1:6-7.

So when they had come together, they were asking Him saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “**It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.**” (Acts 1:6-7)

These passages (Rev 1:1; Acts 1:7) seem to highlight the fact that Jesus was prohibited from disclosing future things of which He was omnisciently aware until such a time as permitted by the heavenly Father. Other passages which seem to support this conclusion include Matthew 11:27; John 1:18; 5:19-23; 12:49 and 17:8.

Note that the revelation was given to be shown to “*His bondservants*.” Nominal believers, i.e. believers who are not fully devoted followers of Christ, are not addressed in this book. In other words, it is addressed to those who are sold out, yielded followers of Christ. (John used the title “bond-servant” or “slave” as did some of the other apostles – Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1; Jas 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1; Jude 1).

“*The things which must shortly take place*” – The Greek word *tachos* (Gr. τάχος) can also be translated “speedily.” It carries the idea that once the events that are prophesied do begin to occur, they will occur in relative rapid sequence. So, from John’s perspective, the events mentioned in this prophecy were imminent, i.e. that the events prophesied represent the fulfillment of all prophecy given by God and once they began to occur, they would occur in short order. This is closely related to the imminency of the Rapture, since the Rapture of the Body of Christ precedes the prophesied events of this book. Also, it is interesting that in verse 3, the word *kairos* (Gr. καιρος) is used (i.e. “the time is near”) since *kairos* refers to a period of time versus a point in time.

“*He communicated by His angel*” – Jesus communicated this revelation to an angel (possibly Gabriel? – cf. Dan 8:16; 9:21-22; Lu 1:26-31) who then passed it on to John. This is the first of approximately 67 references to angels in this book.

“*...who [John] bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ...*” – The “*word of God*” is God the Father’s word to Jesus Christ. The “*testimony of Jesus Christ*” is Jesus’ word to John.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

The Salutation (1:4-8)

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, 6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen. 8 **"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.** (Rev 1:4-8)

"John to the seven churches that are in Asia..." – We will observe different interpretive views related to these seven churches when we get to chapter 2 in our study; however, for now, we will just note that these are seven churches in Asia (modern day western Turkey).

"Grace to you and peace" – This was a common salutation in many of the letters we see in the New Testament. Believers shared in a common salvation that was provided via God's grace gift of His Own Son's sacrificial death and the knowledge that their eternal destiny was secure provided great peace.

"...from Him who is and who was and who is to come..." – I believe this to be a reference to Jesus Christ since it is only He who meets all of these conditions. Some interpret this to be a reference to God the Father since Jesus Christ is specifically mentioned in verse 5; however, I tend to see verses 4-6 as descriptions of the same Person of the Godhead. This phrase occurs nowhere else in the Bible except the book of Revelation (4:8; 11:17; 16:5).

"...and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne..." – This is probably a reference to the seven messengers ("angels") who will deliver messages to each of the seven churches in Asia (chaps. 2-3).

"...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" – These are all descriptions of Jesus. He is the faithful witness in regard to the revelation disclosed to the Apostle John. He is the first-born of the dead in regard to His resurrection which culminated His past ministry. In the future, he will rule over the kings of the earth during the Messianic Kingdom. There is strong allusion to Psalm 89 in this phrase and it probably is designed to demonstrate the fact that Jesus will fulfill the promises made to David in 2 Samuel 7.

"...and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father..." – By our acceptance through faith in the gift of God's provision, we are individual priests before God and part of a corporate kingdom (cf. 5:10; 20:6; 1 Pet 2:5, 9).

10 "And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." (Rev 5:10)

6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Rev 20:6)

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:5)

9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:9)

Faithful believers of the Body of Christ will have the privilege of reigning with Christ during the millennial, Messianic Kingdom (2 Tim 2:12a). However, few to no details are provided about the specifics of this co-regency. Furthermore, no details are provided about the place of the believer within the present age who is unfaithful other than the fact that rewards will be denied (2 Tim 2:11-13).

11 It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; 12 If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Tim 2:11-13)

"BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him" – Jesus will return to the earth in similar fashion as He ascended into heaven (cf. Acts 1:9-11). Every person who is alive at His second coming will see Him (Matt 24:30). *"Those who pierced Him"* is probably a reference to unbelieving Jews who at His 2nd Coming are representative of the Jews who rejected Him prior to His crucifixion (Zech 12:10, 12, 14 cf. Jn 19:37); however, it could be a general reference to Jesus' enemies, i.e. *"all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him."*

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; 11 and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11)

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. (Matt 24:30)

10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born. 11 "In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 "And the land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; 13 the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; 14 all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves. (Zech 12:10-14)

This is not a description of the Rapture for the Rapture is an instantaneous event. As we shall examine in more detail in future studies, the 2nd Advent is attended by a series of events leading up to and following its occurrence.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." – Jesus is the beginning since all things were created by Him (Col 1:16). He sustains creation and He is to come again.