

Lesson One
Introduction to Revelation & Apocalyptic Writing
Title and Purpose (1:1-8)

Introduction to Revelation & Apocalyptic Writing

The word revelation is “apokalypsis,” which means to reveal or unveil. Revelation is a prophetic unveiling of what is soon to come (1:1). Revelation is written in a unique genre of literature called apocalyptic writing. Apocalyptic writing uses visions, symbols, and cataclysmic upheaval to describe the great and terrible time of the End.

Apocalyptic Codes of Revelation

| Number | Code | Animal | Code | Color | Code |
|-----------|----------------|---------|--------------|------------|----------|
| 12 | Wholeness | Frog | Evil | White | Purity |
| 10 | Completeness | Eagle | Messenger | Red | Warfare |
| 7 | Divinity | Beast | Antichrist | Pail Green | Death |
| 6 | Evil | Locust | Demon | Dark Green | Life |
| 4 | World | Lamb | Jesus | Gold | Worth |
| 3 | Union | Serpent | Satan | Black | Scarcity |
| 2 | Witness | Horse | Swift Action | Bronze | Strength |
| 1 | Unity | Lion | Sovereign | Scarlet | Sin |
| Fractions | Incompleteness | Dragon | Devil | | |

Background

Author: John the Disciple. Tradition indicates that John lived into old age in Ephesus.

Location: The visions of Revelation were given to John while exiled on the Island of Patmos. Patmos was a small island 60 miles off the coast of Ephesus and was a barren island for political prisoners of Rome.

Date: Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in the second century, indicated that John wrote toward the end of the reign of Domitian, around A.D. 96.

Schools of Interpretation

Preterist View. Revelation described events in the first century and was fulfilled in the first century. There are two principle problems with this position. First, the persecutions under Nero and Domitian were local and not universal like that described in Revelation. Second, Jesus did not return!

Symbolic View. Revelation is not intended to convey historical events but lessons and principles for Christian living. The difficulty with this interpretation is that while Revelation utilizes a great number of symbols, it claims to reveal “things which must soon take place” (1:1).

Prophetic View. Revelation was written to describe what is going to occur in history during the End Times. It utilizes symbolic terms for literal historic events. Revelation claims to be a prophecy (1:3; 22:10). Like all biblical prophecies its message relates to people of all times while its specific historical events are to be fulfilled either in the immediate or distant future. Revelation is a unique style of prophecy called apocalyptic.

Title and Purpose (1:1-8)

1:1. This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, not John. Jesus is the center and the victor of Revelation.

- The phrase “must soon take place” does not necessarily suggest that everything in Revelation is to take place soon. Chapters 2-3 describes events that occurred in John’s day and chapters 4-6 describes events that began in John’s day. Jews thought of history in two ages, the present evil age and the golden age to come. Jesus inaugurated began the Last Days. The Last Days began with the first coming of Messiah (I John 2:18).
- Angels play a prominent role in Revelation. They enact many of God’s judgments and they serve as guides to John.

1:2. John assures the readers of the veracity of the book. John received this as the “word of God” and through the “testimony of Jesus Christ.”

1:3. Revelation would have been read publicly in the churches. Here is a promise of blessing for those who read and hear this prophecy.

1:4-5a. John gives a salutation to the seven historic churches of Asia Minor. Revelation is addressed in letter form, which is unique to apocalyptic writing. There is no basis to suggest these seven churches represent seven periods of church history. Let’s draw on our symbolic number codes of Revelation. Seven represents divinity. Churches belong to God and His son Jesus Christ.

1:5b-6. John offers a doxology. Despite persecution, Believers are loved and have a mission as a kingdom of priests.

1:7. John makes sure the purpose of Revelation clearly known. Jesus is coming in the clouds and every eye will see him. History will be consummated! Revelation does not record or imply a secret rapture of Christians. There is no such event. Believers and unbelievers will see Him, “even those who pierced him.” Jesus will return bodily.

1:8. John establishes the foundation for the Revelation of Jesus. Jesus is Lord of all human history. Jesus is the first and the last, the beginning and the end. We can have confidence in the visions and prophecies because of the personhood of Jesus Christ!