

New Testament Survey
(Part Thirteen: Revelation)

I. Title: Taken from 1:1: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John.”

II. Author:

- A. The author identifies himself as John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8).
- B. He was believed to have been John the apostle by the early church.
- C. Similarity in style and vocabulary of Revelation with his Gospel and other letters also points to John the apostle.

III. Interpretation:

- A. “Any estimate of the contribution of Revelation to our understanding of Christ and the gospel demands some decision about the basic intent and subject matter of the book. What do John’s visions refer to? What are we to learn from them? As Gerhard Maier says after his survey of interpretations, Revelation has been ‘the exercise field of hermeneutics par excellence.’ We may categorize the majority of interpretations under the usual four headings.”
- B. Four interpretations:
 - 1. “*The preterist approach.* This approach, also called the ‘contemporary-historical’ . . . is the most common today. It insists that the visions of John grow out of and describe events in John’s own day. The symbols in the visions all refer to people, countries, and events in the world of that day, and John’s purpose is to show his readers how God is about to bring judgment on that world that is oppressing them, and so deliver them into his eternal kingdom.”
 - 2. “*The historical approach.* Several movements in the Middle Ages grew up in the conviction that the millennium was about to dawn. To buttress their beliefs, they found in the Revelation a sketch of history from the time of Christ to their own day. This approach . . . was popular with the Reformers also, enabling them to identify the beast in the Revelation with the papacy.”
 - 3. “*The futurist approach.* A consistently futurist . . . approach holds that everything in the Revelation from chapter 4 to the end finds its fulfillment in the very last days of human history. The view is also held in a more moderate form, according to which some of the events in these chapters – particularly the earlier ones – take place in history before the end.”
 - 4. “*The idealist approach.* Some scholars are convinced that we are on the wrong track altogether in trying to identify the events portrayed in John’s visions. The symbolism is designed, they argue, to help us understand God’s person and ways with the world in a general way, not to enable us to map out a course of events. Revelation, then, teaches us ‘the action of great principles and not special incidents’” (Carson 482-483).

III. Date and Occasion: (Preterist View)

- 1. Audience:

- a. “When interpreting any book of the Bible, it is important to understand the audience to which it was originally directed. The concern of the evangelical interpreter is to understand the grammar of a passage in light of its historic context, not despite that context. There are at least three factors in Revelation that emphasize the original audience and their circumstances. These are strongly supportive of a preterist position. When these are combined with the matter of the *expectation* of Revelation, the preterist approach becomes justified on the basis of sound hermeneutical principle.”
 - b. “First, in Revelation John was writing to particular, historic, individual churches that existed in his day. Revelation 1:4 provides a common epistolary opening: ‘John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come.’” In verse 11, he specifically names the seven churches to whom he writes: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. We know these cities as historical cities containing actual churches.”
 - c. “In Revelation 2 and 3, these seven churches are addressed with individual exhortations and warnings. Interestingly, a number of the historical, geographical, and political allusions contained in the letters show that John did, in fact, have in view the specific churches addressed.”
 - d. “Second, we learn that John wrote to those churches in order to be *understood*. The first sentence of John’s work has become the title of the work. And from that title we know John fully intended that his work be a ‘revelation.’ The Greek word for ‘revelation’ is *apokalupsis*, which means an ‘opening up, uncovering.’ John intended his book to be an opening up of divine truth for his original audience.”
 - e. “Furthermore, in Revelation 1:3 we read: ‘Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it for the time is near.’ The members of the churches to whom Revelation was addressed are expected to read, *understand*, and keep the directives in Revelation. Revelation calls upon each church to give careful, spiritual attention to its words.”
 - f. “Third, in Revelation John notes that he and *the seven churches have already entered ‘the tribulation’*, which is a major prophetic expectation of the book (cf. Rev. 7:14: ‘I John, who also am your brother, and companion in the tribulation’ (Rev. 1 :9a). In Revelation 2 and 3, there are allusions to greater problems brewing on the world scene.”
 - g. “John is clearly writing to particular historical churches about their current grave circumstances. The original audience factor cannot be overlooked; the message of Revelation must be relevant to them” (Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 408-409).
2. Expectation.
- a. “As mentioned in Chapter 8, one of the most obvious, yet most overlooked features of Revelation is John’s expectancy. The expectation of the occurrence of the events of Revelation is urgent and impending. The ‘time is at hand’; the events ‘must shortly come to pass.’ This temporal expectation is strategically placed: it appears three times in the opening, introductory chapter (Rev. 1:1, 3, 19) and four times in the final, concluding chapter (Rev. 22:6, 7, 12, 20). Its appearance in both of these chapters is significant because these bracket the highly wrought symbolism of the prophetic body of the book which is contained in the section from Revelation 4:1 through 22:6. These portions of Revelation in which the time indicators are embedded are generally of a more historical than prophetic character.”

- b. “With the particularity of the audience emphasized in conjunction with his message of the imminent expectation of occurrence of the events, I do not see how a preterism of some sort can be escaped. Nevertheless, there are those who do attempt to escape such logic.”
 - c. “Some commentators, such as John Walvoord, understand these terms as indicating that whenever the events do start coming to pass, they will occur with *great speed*, following one upon the other with great rapidity. Others, such as Robert Mounce, view them as indicating that such events as John prophesied are *always imminent*. That is, the events are always ready to occur, though they may not actually occur until thousands of years later. Still others, such as Leon Morris, see John’s references as a measure of *God’s time, not man’s*. That is, John is saying that these events will come to pass ‘shortly’ from God’s perspective. But, then, we must remember that ‘a day with the Lord is as a thousand years’ (2 Pet. 3:8).”
 - d. “But are these attempts capable of overthrowing our evidence? We must remember that John was writing to historical churches existing in his own day. He and they had *already* entered the earliest stages of “the tribulation” (Rev. 1:9a). It would be a cruel mockery of their circumstances for John to tell them that when help comes, it will come with swiftness – even though it may not come until two or three thousand years later. Or tell them that the events are always imminent – even though the readers of his letter may never experience them. Or that God will send help soon – according to the way the Eternal God measures time: just a few days, or perhaps millennia.”
 - e. “In addition, each of these approaches is destroyed by the very fact that John repeats and varies his terms as if to dispel any confusion. Think of it: If these words in these verses do not indicate that John expected the events to occur soon, *what words could John have used to express such?* How could he have said it more plainly?” (Gentry 409-411).
3. Date: “The date of the writing of the Book of Revelation is certainly pre-A.D. 70, and probably as early as A.D. 65-66. I will not rehearse here the argument for this ‘early date’ (as opposed to A.D. 95-96), because I have dealt with this in depth in another place. Suffice it to say that when John writes, the Temple is still standing in Jerusalem (Rev. 11:1-8) and the sixth emperor of Rome (Nero) is still ruling (Rev. 17:9-10). We do need to keep this in mind because a large portion of the prophecies in Revelation find fulfillment in the era leading up to the destruction of the Temple, as I will show” (Gentry 411).

IV. Purpose.

A. Theme.

1. “The theme of Revelation is set forth in Revelation 1:7: “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.” This theme is easily applicable to Christ’s judgment-coming on first-century Israel. This cloud-coming of Christ in judgment is reminiscent of Old Testament cloud-comings of God in judgment upon ancient historical people and nations. God ‘comes’ upon Israel’s enemies in general (Psa. 18:7-15; 104:3), upon Egypt (Isa. 19:1), upon disobedient Israel in the Old Testament (Joel 2:1, 2), and so forth. It is not necessary that it refer to His final, Second Advental coming to end history. This is so for the following reasons.”

- a. “The coming will be *witnessed* by ‘those who pierced him.’ The clear testimony of the New Testament record is that of the guilt of the Jews of the first century in killing Christ.”
 - b. “The reference to those who pierced him is reinforced by the designation of the *mourners*. They are called ‘all the tribes of the earth.’ Here the ‘earth’ (*ge*) should most probably be translated ‘land,’ i.e. the Promised Land (see discussion below). The idea of the ‘tribes’ in Revelation is of Israel’s Twelve Tribes (Rev. 7:1ff). Whenever ‘tribes’ is applied beyond Israel, the application adds the notion of ‘every tongue and kindred.’ Furthermore, the focus of this ‘tribulation’ (Rev. 1:9; 7:14) is said by Christ to be Judea (Matt. 24:16, 21).”
 - c. “This coming is expected by an inspired writer as occurring *soon*. The Second Advent has not occurred yet, while over 1,900 years have transpired since the time in which this coming was expected ‘quickly’ (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20).”
2. “In regard to the Jews, the Jewish War with Rome from A.D. 67 to 70 brought about the deaths of tens of thousands of the Jews in Judea, and the enslavement of thousands upon thousands more. The Jewish historian Josephus, who was an eyewitness, records that 1,100,000 Jews perished in the siege of Jerusalem, though this figure is disputed. J. L. von Mosheim, the great ecclesiastical historian, wrote that ‘throughout the whole history of the human race, we meet with but few, if any, instances of slaughter and devastation at all to be compared with this.’”
 3. “But as awful as the Jewish loss of life was, the utter devastation of Jerusalem, the final destruction of the Temple, and the conclusive cessation of the sacrificial system were lamented even more. The *covenantal significance* of the loss of the Temple stands as the most dramatic outcome of the War. Hence, any Jewish calamity after A.D. 70 would pale in comparison to the redemptive-historical significance of the loss of the Temple.”
 4. “So then, the expectation of a judgment-coming of Christ in the first century is easily explicable in terms of the biblical and historical record. Thus, the point remains: John clearly expected the imminent occurrence of the events of Revelation” (Gentry 411-413).

B. Primary Focus.

1. “One of the most common terms of significance in Revelation is the Greek word *ge*. It occurs eighty-two times in the twenty-two chapters of Revelation. This word may be translated in two ways: (1) ‘earth’ (indicating the entire globe) or (2) ‘land’ (referring to a particular portion of the earth, such as the Promised Land). It would seem that the overwhelming majority of occurrences of this term in the context of Revelation would suggest its reference as being to ‘the Land,’ i.e., the famous and beloved Promised Land. The reasons justifying such a translation are as follows:”
2. “The very Jewish nature of Revelation suggests the plausibility of such a translation. The lexical and syntactical peculiarities of Revelation are extremely Hebraic. Furthermore, the first occurrence of the term appears in the theme verse in Revelation 1:7 and must mean the Promised Land (see previous argument). In addition, it is used later in ways strongly suggestive of a Palestinian reference. It is sometimes set against the ‘world’ (Rev. 3:10) or ‘every nation’ (Rev. 11:9, 10; 13:7, 8; 14:6). In Revelation 7, the devastation on the ‘land’ awaits the sealing of 144,000 Jews representing all twelve tribes (cf. Rev. 14:3)” (Gentry 413-414).