

The Book of Revelation

Introduction

As most of my readers will already undoubtedly know and understand, I have been at this for more than 30 years on one front or another. Now I am absolutely convinced that we are indeed into the biblical end times... within ten years of the final seven year period that Daniel spoke of in his 70th week. I will, over time, give definitive biblical proof of such a controversial statement.

And let me just head it off at the pass, so to speak, before rumors abound in what is actually NOT Christianity as was in the time of the Christ or the Apostles. I am NO prophet. That would be someone that God is personally talking to and sending out to give a message of dire warning. I am here gleaning what I can from diligent study and prayer over the Scriptures and forming GOD-GIVEN logical conclusions based on analysis. No “hocus pocus” here. If you are one of those inclined, as Paul predicted in 2 Timothy 4:3, to NOT endure sound doctrine, then this isn’t the place for you. You will need to go find some of those Gnostic style preachers, we might call them Baptists today, or some Benny Hinn, or Tim LaHay types. I don’t mean to offend, but the truth is the truth. Christianity of today does not resemble in almost any way the Christianity of the Apostle’s time.

But with that said, absolutely no end time study or discussion can be complete, or even taken seriously, without at least a very cursory mention of the book of Revelation... even secular news organizations, both serious and ridiculous (That would be The Corbett Report and The Highwire and then CNN and MSN, respectively.) political proponents mention references to biblical end time events these days. It’s a thing. I guess.

Well, I too, want to dive into the book of Revelation. So let’s do it.

The book of Revelation is attributed to the Apostle John. There is some scholarly debate on this particular point. There are some “peculiarities” between this book and the Gospel of John in the actual Greek text and style that might allude to different authors. I do admit that, but I don’t really care. As with Paul and the book of Hebrews, John had a different type of message to a different group of people. It could be just that simple. So if you are one of those who like to argue in favor, or not in favor, of any author of any book in the bible, you won’t get too much from me. Some people have written volumes from one point of view or the other. I say, @\$*! I do not care. The books of the bible harmonize with correct interpretation and understanding, period. So before I go too far off on a tangent, let’s correct this heading now.

By way of introduction, I first would like to establish some ground rules for studying Bible prophecy. First off we have to agree that the original Scriptures are infallible, and that harmony in the Scriptures is a must, and can be found by following some basic **Rules of Interpretation:**

1. Do not violate the Greek and Hebrew grammar.
2. Interpret within the historical setting of the day (historical context, & culture).
3. Interpret Scripture progressively (new revelation about a topic always compliments and builds on older revelation, never contradicting it).
4. Reject all doctrines that defy sound logic (reject mutually exclusive ideas).
Example: the Catholic doctrine of Hypostatic Union or the two natures theory.
5. Agreement with God’s nature (God never acts contrary to His revealed nature).
Example: Calvinism
6. Literal meaning has priority over non-literal interpretation. (This is the objective as opposed to the subjective approach.)

7. Trace the history of Christian doctrines. (See how, when, and why doctrines came into the picture. If they came in at any time after the Apostles, they are doctrines of men, and should be rejected as part of the “Gospel”.)

The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation around 95-96 AD under the reign of Domitian. He was most likely the youngest of the Apostles, older brother of James. John seemed to be chosen for a special task. He had a special relationship with the Christ, Jesus. He was always included in a still smaller group, Peter, James, and John that seemed to have a more deliberate direction than the rest of the Twelve. Jesus entrusted the care of His own widowed mother to John upon His “death bed”, (John 19:25-27). John lived well into his 90’s, and died about 100 AD, 70 yrs. after crucifixion. Jesus made a statement about John’s long life in John 21:17-24 that seemed to show that John was a part of Jesus’ bigger plan.

John’s main emphasis in his Gospel as well as his Epistles is carried into the book of Revelation... that being, who Jesus really is. He is the “Logos,” the “only-begotten Son,” and the “Messenger of Jehovah, of Yahveh.”

All of the other Apostles were dead. Now false teachers, false apostles, and false prophets were invading the assemblies and leading many away from the real doctrines that Jesus had left for the Apostles to get out to the world.

John took over the care of assemblies established by Paul. John’s writings provide eyewitness support for Paul’s theology concerning the true Jesus. John was entrusted by Peter and Paul to close out the NT Canon. With Jerusalem destroyed, the capitol of Christianity, John had become the last “eyewitness” to whom the assemblies could appeal for clarification on doctrine.

John spent his last decades living in Ephesus, and personally disciplined several younger men until his death. Polycarp, whom John ordained as pastor in the assembly at Smyrna, Papias, Ignatius of Antioch, Paul’s original home assembly.

During his last decade, John was arrested, tortured (but survived), and was then banished to Patmos by Domitian where he saw his visions. He was released after Domitian’s death, and returned to Ephesus, and died a few years later.

Probably the most relevant issue concerning the book of Revelation today is whether or not it has any significance for us now at this point in time. Is the second coming of Jesus Christ, which is what Revelation is pointing to, a past event, which many believe? Those who take this point of view are called Preterists, and believe that all prophecy has already taken place and Jesus has already come. Or what if the Second Coming isn’t anywhere near, but rather some distant event, in which case, the book of Revelation has no significant value to us today. What if Christ’s coming is still thousands of years away? How does that help us understand the present?

According to all the evidence, His coming is not that far away. I want to discuss and investigate why His second coming is not so far off now. There are many theories. We have to examine them in order to discover which is correct. We are told repeatedly in the Bible to “watch”. What are we to watch for? The answer is simple, the signs of His coming. That is why we have prophecy, to give us an understanding of when and how things are going to happen, to let us know that God is in control, and to serve as a reinforcement to our faith.

When Jesus said something would happen in the distant future, and it comes to pass exactly how and when He told us it would, that strengthens our faith in order to allow us to continue on even though we may be persecuted for that faith. And we **will** have trials and tribulations:

Matthew 24:9 NKJV - "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

Matthew 24:13 NKJV - "But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

John 16:33 NKJV - "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Acts 14:22 NKJV - strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Romans 5:3 NKJV - And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

2 Thessalonians 1:4 NKJV - so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV - Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Revelation 7:14 NKJV - And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Christians will suffer persecutions and have tribulations in these last days. There are so many in today's church that will not accept this simple biblical fact. They absolutely cling to many false doctrines because of this fact. They fear. But with correct understanding of the Bible, and obeying Christ's commandments, true Christians will be protected through these rough times. Not all will escape them. The Apostles did not escape persecution or tribulation. The Old Testament prophets didn't escape persecution or tribulation. Why do modern Christians believe they are any better than those in the past who were closest to Jesus and His Father?

The Bible predicts, and the early church understood, that the earth would go for 6,000 years and Christ would return at the end of that time. I want to first show you some of the quotes from the earliest Christian writers that support this point of view. It's called Chiliasm, Greek for a thousand. Then we will get into the Bible and see how the Bible supports it. I don't believe they just pulled this theory out of thin air.

We have the New Testament, which tells us what went on among the Apostles and so forth. But the "church" didn't just disappear after Christ and the Apostles. Christians were writing a lot of material at the time. There are a lot of extra-biblical writings from the time of Christ up to 325 A.D. that have survived.

Let me point out that this material is not authoritative like the Bible. I could write something, and that would be something that a Christian wrote, that doesn't make it true. But what makes these quotations valuable is that men who were personally engaged with the Apostles wrote them; or men only a generation away from the Apostles; or from the church that was started by the Apostles themselves.

In the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation we have the apostle John, as dictated by Jesus, writing the seven letters to the seven churches. One of those churches, the church of Smyrna, a city in what is modern day Turkey, had an elder or pastor by the name of Polycarp. He was a

disciple of John. Well, Polycarp had a disciple named Irenaeus, and he wrote extensively on the church and is one of the “Early Church Fathers”.

So you can see how close Irenaeus is to Jesus Himself. Jesus taught John; and John taught Polycarp. Polycarp taught Irenaeus. These are a few of the men we refer to today as the “Apostolic Church Fathers”, which is a small group within the larger group of “Early Church Fathers”. They have many writings that survive today that tell intricate details of how the church was laid down by Jesus as well as its complete doctrines. The point is, when the Apostolic Church Fathers have something to say about how things were done, dates of events, or what true doctrine is, we can rest assured that the information is accurate and without distortion. This means that their ideas are most likely, especially when we see a consistent theme throughout their writings, what was handed down by the Apostles, which in turn got their ideas directly from Jesus Himself. So I am going to start by giving you these extra-Biblical quotes; and then we are going to get into the Bible and see if the Bible really backs this up or not.

Let’s look at the first one. And we will go chronologically. This is from the **Epistle of Barnabas**. Not the Barnabas of the Bible, but he lived approximately the time that John wrote the book of Revelation. So this document is about as old as the book of Revelation itself. It is most likely that this Barnabas was an elder in one of the churches, probably in North Africa or possibly Alexandria.

Epistle of Barnabas (100 AD) – Here is what he wrote:

“And God made in six days the works of His hands and made an end on the seventh day; and rested on it, and sanctified it. Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, “He finished in six days”. This implies that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him as a thousand years. And He Himself testified saying, “Behold, today will be as a thousand years.” Therefore, my children, in six days (that is 6,000 years) all things will be finished. And He rested on the seventh day. This means that when the Son coming again will destroy the time of the wicked man (the Antichrist), and shall judge the ungodly and change the sun and the moon and the stars, then He shall truly rest on the seventh day.” (Epistle of Barnabas, XV)

So what he is saying is that the six days of creation is a prophecy of six one-thousand-year periods. Then the seventh one-thousand-year period, will be the time of rest, which is also Christ’s coming kingdom.

The next quote is from Irenaeus. He lived shortly after Barnabas, 20 or so years.

Irenaeus: (AD. 120-202)

“In summing up the whole of that apostasy, which has taken place during 6,000 years; for in as many days as the world was made, in so many thousand years it shall be concluded. And for this reason the Scripture says, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished in all their adornment, and God brought to a conclusion upon the sixth day the works that He had made. And God rested upon the seventh day from all His works. This is an account of the things formally created, as also it is a prophecy for what is to come. (Do you see what he is saying? He is saying that Genesis is not only history, it is also prophecy.) For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years, and in six days created things were completed. It is evident therefore, that they will come to an end on the six thousandth year. The whole apostasy of six thousand years and unrighteousness, and wickedness, and false prophecy, and deception, which things say, a cataclysm of fire shall also come upon the earth.” (Against Heresies V. XXVIII, 3)

Commodianus: (AD. 240)

“This has pleased Christ, that the dead should rise again, yea, with their bodies; and those, too, whom in this world the fire has burned [martyrs], when six thousand years are completed...” (Instructions of Commodianus, LXXIX)

This is a very brief statement; but it shows that he also held that same view.

Methodius: (AD. 260-312)

“For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing that is past as a watch in the night.” For when a thousand years are reckoned as one day in the sight of God, and from the creation of the world to His rest is six days, so also to our time, six days are defined, as those say who are clever arithmeticians. Therefore, they say that an age of six thousand years extends from Adam to our time. For they say that the judgment will come on the seventh day, that is in the seventh thousand years.” (Extracts From The Work on Things Created. IX)

Or in the 7th millennium, is what he is saying. All right, let’s look at our last quote, Lactantius, also another leader in one of the churches after John.

Lactantius: (AD. 260-330)

“Therefore let the philosophers, who enumerate thousands of ages from the beginning of the world, know that the six thousandth year is not yet completed,”

What he is saying is the common thinking of the day, among the philosophers, was that the creation was infinitely old. Does that sound familiar? Scientists today say that creation is billions of years old. Well, that is nothing new. In fact, some of the philosophers said that creation was infinite, that it has always been here. Well, what he is saying is no, it hasn’t always been here; it’s less than 6,000 years old.

“Therefore let the philosophers, who enumerate thousands of ages from the beginning of the world, know that the six thousandth year is not yet completed, and that when this number is completed the consummation must take place, and the condition of human affairs be remodeled for the better ... Therefore, since all the works of God were completed in six days, the world must continue in its present state through six ages, that is, six thousand years. ... And again, since God, having finished His works, rested the seventh day and blessed it, at the end of the six thousandth year all wickedness must be abolished from the earth, and righteousness reign for a thousand years; and there must be tranquility and rest from the labors which the world now has long endured. ... “For six thousand years have not yet been completed, and when this number shall be made up, then at length all evil will be taken away, that justice alone may reign.”* (The Epitome of the Divine Institutes, Chapter 70)

* The 6,000 years are not counted from creation, but from when sin entered the world, and the expulsion from Eden (Genesis 3).

Biblical Support for this view might include, but not limited to:

Romans 8:18-25; 2 Peter 3:1-9; Hebrews 3:1-4:13; Revelation 20:1-4

Now this is only a small sampling of the early writers. There were many more. In fact, this seems to be one of the most widely held views among the church’s early writers. That is a very interesting point of view; the question is, is it Biblical? Does the Bible support it? They seem to quote from Genesis in support of it. They quote that God says a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. As we go through our studies over time, we will determine if Chiliasm is biblical.