

# Introduction to the Book of Revelation

## 1. Who Was Revelation Written By?

- 1) The author identifies himself as John (1:1, 4, 9: 22:8), as a servant (1:1), and a brother (1:9), all of which are consistent with John the apostle.
- 2) The author uses many OT expressions, pointing to one who knew the Jewish Scriptures.
- 3) The content and tone of the words spoken to the churches point to one who knew the readers and had a position of authority.
- 4) Many parallels with the fourth gospel and 1 John—
  - Christ as the “Word” (cf. 19:13 with John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1)
  - Identifying Christ as the “Lamb” (cf. 5:6, 8, 12–13; 13:8 with John 1:29, 36 [citing John the Baptist])
  - Describing Christ as the “Bridegroom” (cf. 19:7; 21:2; 22:17 with John 3:29)
  - The author calling himself a “witness” (cf. 1:2 with John 21:24; 1 John 1:1)

## 2. Who Was Revelation Written To?

- 1) Specific local churches, 1:4, 11
- 2) A wider audience, 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9

## 3. Where Was Revelation Written From?

The isle of Patmos, 1:9, a place where political prisoners were held.

## 4. When Was Revelation Written?

It is best to see Revelation written near the end of the reign of Roman emperor Domitian, probably A.D. 90–95.

## 5. What Kind of Book is Revelation?

This is an epistle—it begins and ends just like other epistles, and was written to local churches. The bulk of the letter is prophecy (cf. 1:3; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18–19), given under God’s sovereign hand, encouraging godly living (1:3 and throughout).

## 6. How Has Revelation Been Interpreted?

Over the course of church history Revelation has been interpreted in four different ways:

### 1) **Preterist** (from the Latin word meaning *past*)

- Description: Revelation symbolizes the conflict between the church and her enemies in John's time. The events are not in the future but were fulfilled symbolically in John's time. This is popular with post-millennialists.
- Analysis: This makes Revelation without any true long-range prophecy, and denies the literal, face-value truth of the Lord's return.

### 2) **Idealist** (also called the *spiritualist* view)

- Description: Revelation gives timeless, spiritual principles to direct the church through its history. The prophecies don't predict anything specific in future history but only symbolize the struggle between good and evil. This is popular among amillennialists.
- Analysis: This spiritualizes interpretation rather than by sticking to what the Bible plainly says. The result is that interpretation is left to one's own imagination. Also, this approach contradicts what John himself says, that it is prophecy of future events and persons (1:1).

### 3) **Historicist** (also called the *continuous historical view*)

- Description: Revelation gives the future history of the church from Pentecost to Christ's Second Coming. Those who have held to this view limit their interpretation only to the Western church. This view was held by the Reformers, who saw the pope as the Antichrist.
- Analysis: Similar to the objections to the idealist view; this results in many different interpretations that change as history progresses. Revelation is interpreted allegorically in order to make the text match specific individuals and events in church history.

### 4) **Futurist**

- Description: Chapters 1–3 are written to churches in John's time, and chapters 4–22 describe end time events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ. This is the approach of pre-millennialists.
- Analysis: This seeks to "let the text speak for itself" and is the result of a consistently literal interpretation. Symbols convey a plain meaning that can be understood in their context. It understands that Revelation's purpose is to reveal truth about Jesus Christ and the end times that other Bible books speak of only briefly.

## 7. Why Was Revelation Written?

- 1) From 1:10–11 and what Jesus says to the seven churches, we learn that they were persecuted by Jews and Rome, and that some churches weren't as faithful in Christian doctrine and living as they should have been.
- 2) From 1:1, 19 and the book itself, future events surrounding Christ's Second Coming are foretold to show that God will be victorious over evil. This would encourage believers to be faithful in difficult times. Revelation was written to encourage believers to be faithful to God in difficult times.