

We are just going to look at some basic principles in understanding the Book of Revelation. It is high interest Book often sensationalized and misunderstood.

A. Signs And Symbols

Revelation and some other portions of prophetic Scripture are famous for their signs. The purpose of signs and symbols is not to make things difficult to understand but to communicate concepts with pictures that may be difficult to understand literally or to make a more lasting impression or for general applications that might be missed if it only mentioned the specific details directly. Jesus often talked in parables and as we see the pictures He paints we understand things better.

Something think Revelation was written in symbols to avoid the anger of the Roman censors. Not likely the case. Many things in Revelation would anger any Roman censor. For example, in Chapter 1 Verse 16 Jesus is said to hold the seven stars in his hands. That was a common image of the power of the emperor - the emperor with the stars in his hands. John was saying in language that would be instantly recognized by any who read it, that Jesus, not the Roman Emperor, was the real authority and Source of Power.

Many of the symbols and relationships are drawn from the Old Testament especially the Temple and Temple services and a good knowledge of the Old Testament is necessary for understanding the Book of Revelation.

The Book Of Revelation is not a chronological series of events, but often the same event seen from different angles. Also, there are flashbacks. For example, Rev. 12 takes us back in to time to explain why the surrounding chapters were unfolding they they were.

In Rev. 4:1 John is invited into heaven to view things from a heavenly perspective. We are often limited by what we see in the natural. Like Job, our lives can sometimes appear to be in shambles and we do not know why or understand. We need to get a heavenly perspective - to see God in control. Our nations can be in turmoil and the cause of Christ may seem to be going down in flames, but we need to see the heavenly perspective - Jesus as Victor. From a natural perspective the cross was a crushing defeat, from a heavenly perspective it was THE victory on which all else hinges.

While all of Revelation is important, we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of endless debate on controversial sections and so miss basic and foundational Truth that we need to build into our lives and which will give us encouragement and strength as we go through our own times of trial and persecution.

B. Look At It From The Point Of Those Who First Read It [don't seal]

When we approach the Book of Revelation, or any book of the Bible, we need to ask ourselves, "What did it mean to those who first read it?" Imagine you are a first century

Christian - you just got the Book of Revelation in your hands - what does it mean to you? How does it instruct you? Remember, Rev. 1:3 "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." What would that mean to you?

Some may compare it with the Book of Daniel and say portions of Daniel would not have meant much to the first readers because it referred to events and people in the future that would not be understood until after the fact. Yes, but compare Dan. 12:4 [But you, Daniel, roll **up** and **seal** the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."] with Rev. 22:10 [Then he told me, "Do not **seal up** the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near.]

C. What Is It About?

The beast? the antichrist? 666?

Rev. 1:1 A Revelation from or of Jesus Christ. Christ is the center of every Book of the Bible. When we look into Revelation we must look first and foremost for Jesus. Revelation was written to a struggling Church about to undergo great persecution. The mighty Roman Empire was about to do its best to crush it. It was also facing heresy from within. Almost every NT letter was written to correct some error.

From our standpoint, we can learn how to handle trouble, temptation and persecution. We can see Jesus victorious in all circumstances in our lives. We can catch a glimpse of the risen, glorious, victorious Saviour and know that we also will be victorious because He lives and reigns.

If we don't have this as the center when we read Revelation we will be sidetracked on side issues and miss the real encouragement and instruction of the Book.

D. Look For Personal Applications

Look for how things can be applied to your life today. For example, in Rev. 13 we read of the lamb that spoke like a dragon. That can be a warning for us today. There are people who seem like lambs - seem Christian. They do all the right things, but listen to their voice. The lamb that speaks like a dragon is deception. What do they talk like? Jesus said, "My sheep hear MY voice..." If it looks like a lamb but takes like a dragon - division, strife, etc. - run because deception is at work.

Also in that chapter we have the famous 666. Looking at it from a practical standpoint, we can see that 6 is the number of man. We will have people who oppose us because we are Christians. They may try to destroy us...but they are only a 6 or a series of 6's. They will never make it to a 7 - the perfect number. They may try but they will always fall short. This is an encourage to us as we face the 6's in our lives...they can never succeed...they can never be a 7.

D. Date Of Revelation

Important to understand when Revelation was written for the historical point-of-view. Why does it matter? Everyone agrees that many parts of Revelation foretell future events. In order for that to be true, it must have been written before the events it foretells. In many places I believe it shows the events of the Jewish War and Nero's War against the Church. If I am right, then it must have been written before those events.

The Book of Revelation had to be written either in the time of Nero [AD 54-68] or in the last part of Domitian's reign [AD 91-96].

1. "John to the seven churches which are in Asia..." [Rev. 1:4]

John states the Book of Revelation is written to the seven churches of Asia. Never once did he say that any part of it was not for them. This means that the entire book must have been relevant to the First Century churches of Asia. Many of the theories of Revelation today would have meant nothing to them or to the majority of Christians in history.

2. "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." [Rev. 11:1]

The book of Revelation uses the temple in its visions. The temple was destroyed in AD 70. Any first/second century Christians writings we have that were written after AD 70, which refer to the temple, always use the past tense. John writes as if the temple was still standing when he wrote. That being the case, it must have been written before the temple was destroyed in AD 70. Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim stated: "the Book of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel must have been written before the Temple services actually ceased."

3. "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six." [Rev. 13:18]

Remember the Book of Revelation is addressed to the seven churches of Asia. Here John clearly expects them to be able to figure out who the beast is. This means that the beast must have been someone they knew. There is no one in Domitian's reign who fits the description of the beast. However, Nero fits it very well - see [Who Is The Beast Of Revelation?](#)

4. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must **shortly** come to pass..." [Rev. 1:1]

"...for the time is **at hand**." [Rev. 1:3]

"And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must **shortly** be done." [Rev. 22:6]

"And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is **at hand**." [Rev. 22:10]

John surrounds the entire book of Revelation with a sense of urgency. In both the beginning and ending of Revelation, John tells his original readers that the events prophesied were going to happen quickly - in other words, to them. This sense of urgency is totally unnecessary if the majority of the events of Revelation were not to take place for 2,000+ years. If the events predicted refer to the Jewish War and Nero, then they would happen very quickly indeed. Either John told them the truth or he deceived them as to the time of the prophecy.

5. "And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space." [Rev. 17:10]

John clearly states that the sixth king is reigning as he is writing the Book of Revelation. The [date of Revelation](#) must fall within the reign of the sixth king. Who are the first five kings who have died before Revelation was written? Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius. Who is the sixth king in this line? Nero. Who was the seventh? Galba, who reigned for nine months - a short space. Everything fits naturally, why try to force a different meaning into plain Scripture?

6. "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end..." [Dan. 12:4]

"And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand." [Rev. 22:10]

[Daniel](#), who saw in visions events that were future to his time, was told to seal his book because it was not for his time. If John was also seeing events that were not for his time, he, too, would have been told to seal the Book of Revelation. As you can plainly see, John was told NOT to seal his book because "the time is at hand." This means the events foretold would happen quickly from John's point-of-view. Again, there is nothing in the reign of Domitian which would fit these prophecies.

7. "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." [Rev. 2:9]

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." [Rev. 3:9]

These verses strongly indicate that, in at least two of the churches of Revelation, the Jews were a major force of persecution. We can see this through the book of Acts, as well. This points to the fact that the date of Revelation must be when the Jews were still powerful. In AD 70 the [nation of Israel](#) was totally destroyed and the majority of the survivors were sold as slaves. After AD 70 they were in no position to persecute anyone; therefore, the date of Revelation must be before AD 70.

8. "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." [Rev. 1:9]

The Book of Revelation had to be written either in the time of Nero [AD 54-68] or in the last part of Domitian's reign [AD 91-96]. We know [Jesus was 33 1/2 years old](#) when He was crucified in AD 30. If we give the late date advocates the benefit of the doubt and assume that John was only 20 when Jesus died in AD 30, John would be in his late fifties if he wrote Revelation in Nero's time or in his eighties in Domitian's time.

It is unlikely that the Romans would have sentenced an eighty plus year old man to hard labour on Patmos. Also, church history states that John lived and did a lot of work after he was released from Patmos. This is more likely if he was a younger man.

E. Look For Date/Time Indicators

When looking at a particular section of Revelation, see if there are any time indicators.

For example,

Rev. 10:7 ...in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angels, the mystery of God would be fulfilled just as He announced by His servants the prophets

Col. 1:27 - To them **God** has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches **of** this **mystery**, which is Christ in you, the hope **of** glory.

Col 2:2-3 ...in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Rev. 12:5 ...And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron... Who was this and when did it happen? When Jesus was born. [ps. 2:9 rod of iron] so that gives us a time setting for understanding this chapter.

Rev. 11:5 “The **kingdom** of the world has become the **kingdom** of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.” When was the kingdom of Christ established [Death and resurrection - Matt. 28:18, Mark 9:1]

Rev. 14:13 ...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...

Heb. 2:15 ...and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their **fear of death**.