

The Revelation to St. John - Background Information

Collect for Epiphany VI

O GOD, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life; Grant us, we beseech thee, that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure; that, when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth ever, one God, world without end. ***Amen***

The *Apokalypsis* - the first word in the book and the designation of a particular type of Jewish Literature - we translate this word, Revelation

I. Apocalypse Literature

A. 200 B.C. - 100 A.D. - times of oppression

B. Revelatory literature with a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world. (J.J. Collins - The Apocalyptic Imagination, P.4)

C. Jewish Examples

1. I Enoch
2. Daniel Chapter 7-12 - (Within the Canon of Scripture)
3. 4 Ezra
4. 2 Baruch

II. Detailed look at I Enoch

A. Written during the Maccabees Revolt 167 - 164 B.C.

B. Outline of I Enoch

1. Woes - "woe to you who repays your neighbor with evil"

The woes indicate the view that the world is upside down sinner prosper and the righteous suffer

2. The Exhortations

Type I - "fear not ye sinners, O righteous: for God will again deliver them into your hands..."

Type II - "Be of good courage for you were formerly worn out through afflictions, but now you will shine as the luminaries of heaven"

There are two types of exhortations first the judgment on sinners and the second a positive encouragement for the righteous.

3. The description of future judgments - the weeks in Enoch

- into
- a. history from creation until the final judgment is divided into ten weeks
 - b. the seventh week ends with the choosing of the elect
 - c. the last three weeks offer vision of future judgments as a preview to the endless weeks of punishment for the wicked and endless weeks of joy for the righteous
 - d. In the end the creation will become what God intended it to be.

III. A look at Daniel: 7-12

- A. The first real apocalypse in the Hebrew Bible - Old Testament
- B. In his visions Daniel traces human history in relationship with God
- C. The ultimate end is the victory of God and the reward for God's People

The final victory will be God's victory over the forces of evil and those who have been faithful will share in the victory.

D. There is what we would call predestination in Daniel and perhaps dualism

- 1. The righteous and the wicked
- 2. There is little or no hope of the wicked changing

Note: the very nature of apocalyptic literature is that it is written to encourage an oppressed minority that is powerless to effect change in status or the culture of the time.

3. The only hope is in divine intervention

4. The wicked look for the easy solution - get along with the oppressor and the righteous are equally committed to the more difficult road of being faithful no matter the immediate

result

IV. IV Ezra

A. Written after the fall of Jerusalem - 70 A.D.

B. Outline

1. Seven Scenes - a dialogue and a vision in each scene

a. First scene Ezra sees a woman grieving for her son - woman becomes a city and then the Archangel Uriel appears and tells Ezra that woman is Zion and that God will restore Zion

b. Second vision begins with the vision of an eagle - the symbol of Rome - with three heads - the emperors, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian

c. The third vision introduces "a figure like the son of man"

V. Concerning the Text - Who, why and when

A. Characteristics of the Author

1. New O.T. well and Jewish Apocalyptic Writings

2. Was free with the use of scripture - does not directly quote, but paraphrases the scripture sometimes even twisting it around

3. Wrote this letter to be heard - proclaimed and probably in a liturgical setting

B. Identity of the Author

1. John, Apostle writer of the fourth Gospel -

a. Justin A.D. 150 writes in the Dialogue with Trypho -
 "A man of our number by name John, one of the apostles of Christ, prophesied in a revelation vouchsafe to him that those who believe in our Christ will dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem"

b. Beginning in the third century this identification of John was questioned

Why it is not the Apostle John -

- Critical and theological analysis - it does not have the same message or theology as the fourth Gospel
- The Eastern Church did not accept the Revelation as Canon - the Cappadocian Fathers rejected it because of the nature of the writing.
- Today this same scholarly thought rejects the authorship as being the Apostle John

Why it was John the Apostle -

- Earliest records indicate the Apostle John
- The eastern Church is mystical, but does not share the same tradition as the Latin Church
- Although scholarly work may indicate the authorship as other than John based on critical analysis of the text - it may be either a desire to ridicule the language (not Aramaic) or the simple fact that John was old and his scribe was not as fluent as he himself has been when the fourth Gospel is written

Does it matter? NO

- In the Canon of Scripture
- Written after the fall of Jerusalem - dated by Irenaeus - during the reign of Domitian (81-96 A.D.) clearest literary evidence is the use of Babylon as the code word for Rome

C. Background Data - The culture in which this book is written

1. Domitian's reign is characterized like Nero a megalomaniac
2. It is a time of persecution of the Church
3. The cult of the Emperor is the worship of Rome
4. There is an assumption that the church in Asia is as persecuted as the church in Rome - may not be true*

* This issue is important for the understanding of the underlying message of this book. We will consider this question later - Is the persecution coming from the external source or from the hearts of the believers?

There is evidence that although the influence of Rome is going to wax and wane over the years. The Pastoral Epistles indicates that for the most part Christians lived in relative peace and had learned to live with the Roman Empire

5. The seven church listed are the sites where the cult of the emperor is most firmly in place in Asia

D. The Oppressed Minority - This is the issue that causes the Eastern Church to reject Revelation - Could be considered Gnostic*

* Remember the Gnostics thought they had the secret knowledge and everyone else did not - they were the chosen people - "God's Special People"

1. An Apocalyptic Group can be secretive and isolating to its members

2. The group can be critical of other both inside and outside the primary group

3. John is critical of the outside group, but he is also critical of those inside the group, but unlike other Apocalypse writing he desires and expects reform - Nicolaitans *

* Those who had a non-critical attitude concerning pagan worship - don't make waves - go along and get along concerning worship of the emperor - syncretism

4. The collision course of the "Oppressed Minority" - what happens when an oppressed, powerless minority assumes a militant stand against the powerful group.

The question for us is John actually suggesting that the church take this militant stand? Is he indicating the importance of standing up against Rome or is he taking a stand about reform within the church. Did he recognize the futility of standing against Rome?

Branch Dividians - used Revelation as the argument to oppose the federal government- Gnostic Group - They had the real truth

E. An Alternative View to the Oppressed Minority

1. John is a committed Christian who had found the way to Salvation

2. He is concerned with the Christian Communities in Asia - they are small and may be easily crushed by Roman Power or swallowed up the Roman Culture

3. He has a fear of Rome and sees the world in dualistic terms - the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Rome

4. He is writing in contrast to the Pastoral Epistles - The Pastorals are encouraging the Christians to be Good Citizens*

* What does this mean? Is this the same question as rendering unto Caesar? It would seem that John is asking us to clearly define what we are willing to do and what we are not willing to do. Taxes - fight for the army -

own slaves and use them - offer worship to the emperor? Where does the Christian draw the line?

5. The two reasons John opposes Rome

- a. He understands Rome as the instrument of satan
- b. He understands the Roman Culture to be seductive to people and thus influences them

VI. How might the book be interpreted?

A. The Idealized Interpretation - in this view the book is dealing with eternal truths and the struggle between Good and evil and the ultimate triumph of God.

B. Historical Interpretation - Revelation is regarded as an accurate and detailed prophesy of the historical events connected with both world history and the history of the church

C. End of History Interpretation - This interpretation presupposes that Revelation is about the events at the close of the age - the end time. The seven churches are not seven churches in Asia, but seven ages of the church as we travel through time.

Premillennial dispensationalism is a type of fundamental eschatology that is notable present in some protestant churches. (The Left Behind Series)

It flows from the book, The Late Great Planet Earth by Hal Lindsay an Evangelist. Dispensationalism defers to the theory that God dispenses or administers the divine purpose throughout history in seven distinct and successive stages called dispensations. The seventh dispensation is that of the millennium (Rev. 20:1-6)

Premillennialists believe that will return before the millennium and after a brief reign of the antichrist, Christ will return in the great battle of Armageddon will destroy evil for all time.

D. Contemporary Historical Interpretation - This interpretation presupposes that Revelation is only concerned with the historical conditions in the time of the author. There is no connection between the writing and future generations at all.

Critic of these interpretations -

B- Revelation is not historically correct and can not be correlated to world history

Second, the end time refuses to come - Seventh Day Adventist - Millerites

C. This is a radical misinterpretation when viewed in light of the entirety of Sacred Scripture. That the Lamb of God would remove the elect minority while allowing others to suffer the wrath of the Lamb is not Christian - The flavor of Gnosticism is evident. There is a political implication of seeing nuclear war as God ultimate plan for mankind.

D. This interpretation treats Revelation as the same as any other book written in a particular historical and political setting. It ignores the genre of the apocalyptic literature.

A. is the correct answer for this first pop quiz.