

Rigged for the Journey
Introduction to the End Times

Lesson 12A

I. General Introduction to the Revelation:

A. Purpose of the Writing:

1. The **Revelation** was written to assure believers of the ultimate triumph of Christ over evil (Rev 19:19-21; 20:10-15).

“And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.” (Revelation 19:19-21 NKJV)

“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet [are]. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10 NKJV)

2. It came at a time when Christians needed to be encouraged to keep going in the midst of governmental **persecution**.
3. The Revelation encourages believers to take their eyes off of their circumstances and look at **Christ** in all of His glory, honor, and power.
4. The book also provides **complacent** Christians with a reason why they should live for Christ in view of His imminent return (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8 NKJV)

B. Theme of the Writing:

1. John states his theme in the first verse of the book when he writes, "The revelation of Jesus Christ." The Greek word for "revelation" is *apocalypse*, which means an "unveiling" or "disclosure." From this meaning the theme of the book is an **unveiling** of the person of Jesus Christ.

2. Christ is the subject of the entire work.

- a. In chapter one the believer is given a **vision** of Christ's glory, wisdom, and power.
- b. Chapters two and three reveal His true authority over the **church** (Colossians 1:18).

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18 NKJV)

- c. Chapter five shows Him as the **Lamb** that was slain who is worthy to open the Book of Redemption (John 1:29).

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 NKJV)

- d. Chapters six through eighteen reveal His future **wrath** being poured out upon the earth in judgment of sin, preparing the world for the reign of the Lord Jesus.
- e. Chapters nineteen and twenty provides a glimpse of Christ's future **return** in power to judge and reign as "King of kings" and "Lord of lords."
- f. John closes the Revelation with the last two chapters reminding believers that Christ's reign will be **forever** in Heaven with all those who have placed their faith and trust in Christ alone for salvation (2 Samuel 7:16).

“"And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.""" (2 Samuel 7:16 NKJV)

C. Recipients:

- 1. The Revelation is specifically addressed to the seven churches in **Asia** (Rev 1.4, 10-11; 2-3).

“John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,” (Revelation 1:4 NKJV)

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send [it] to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."” (Revelation 1:10-11 NKJV)

- 2. However, based upon its subject matter, it would have benefitted **all** believers alive during the severe persecution during the time of John's writing.

3. Since the number "7" is God's number for completeness, the messages to the seven literal historical churches in Asia represent a message to the **universal** church as a whole. In them you find the character of each historical church Christ addressed; you see the history of the "Age of Grace" as it unfolds; you observe the state of an individual body of believers; and the state of an individual Christian.

D. Authorship:

1. The author of the Revelation is clearly stated in the contents as being "**John**" (Rev 1.1, 4, 9; 22.8).

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified [it] by His angel to His servant John," (Revelation 1:1 NKJV)

"Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things." (Revelation 22:8 NKJV)

2. **Early** church testimony attributes the book to the apostle John.
3. John's authorship of the Revelation was not questioned until the middle of the **third** century when Dionysius concluded the internal evidence of the book pointed to another John as author of this book.
 - a. This theory gained popularity until a final decision was made at the Third Council of Carthage in A.D. **397**.
 - b. It was there that the Revelation was officially accepted into the **Canon** of the New Testament as a book written by the apostle John.

E. Views of Interpreting the Revelation: ¹

1. There are four major views utilized to interpret the Revelation: Idealist, Historist, Preterist, and Futurist.
2. **Idealists** or the spiritual view use an allegorical approach to the Revelation and believe that the Revelation is solely symbolic and does not represent actual historical events. To the Idealist, the Revelation provides an image of the constant struggle between God and Satan throughout the ages, which ends with God being victorious and good defeating evil in the end.
3. **Historists** believe that the Revelation is a symbolic representation of the Church Age before the physical second coming of the Lord Jesus. The events in chapters 4-19

¹ Probe Ministries, *Four Views of Revelation*; Plano, TX., <http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.5110361/>, 1 January 2014.

represent the fall of Rome, the Protestant Reformation, the Dark Ages, and God's judgment of the Catholic Church, with the papacy being pictured by the antichrist.

4. "Preterist" is taken from a Latin word meaning "past." Preterists use a combination of literal and allegorical methods of interpretation to arrive at their conclusions. Those who hold to this position believe that all or part of the prophecies recorded in the Revelation have already occurred with the destruction of the Temple in Jeruslaem by Rome in AD 70. There are two groups of preterists: full and partial.
 - a. Full preterists believe all events recorded in the Revelation were fulfilled with the destruction of the Temple in Jeruslaem by Rome in AD 70. Those who hold to the view believe that we are currently living in the eternal state. Very few preterists accept this theory because it denies the resurrection and literal second coming of Christ. Even partial preterists consider this position heretical.
 - b. Partial preterists believe that all the prophecies recorded in Revelation 4-19 have come true with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by Titus in 70 AD, but believe the second coming of Christ, the Millennial reign, the Great White Throne Judgment, and the Eternal state will be literally fulfilled in the future.
5. Futurists believe that we are currently living in the "Age of Grace" or "Church Age" and chapters 4-22 are still in the future. Futurists take a literal approach of interpretation to the Revelation. Since there was a literal fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ as Savior, there will be a literal fulfillment of the prophecies revolving around His second coming.

F. Date and Place of Writing:

1. When it comes to the issue of dating, one must use caution in taking a dogmatic stand. It is much like the issue of Creation and chemical evolution when it comes to the origin of life. There were no men present when this event occurred, therefore both are theories; however, one must look at the propensity of evidence to determine which would be the most likely possibility. In order to do this, you must examine both the internal (Biblical) evidence and external (extra-Biblical) evidence to arrive at the best conclusion.
2. Based upon the internal evidence, the Revelation was written at a time when Christians were being severely persecuted by Rome (Rev 1.9; 2.10, 13).

"I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 1:9 NKJV)

"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw [some] of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10 NKJV)

*****“Tribulation ten days”** could represent the 10 Roman emperors that persecuted Christians between 64-304 AD.

“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne [is]. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas [was] My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.” (Revelation 2:13 NKJV)

*****“Antipas [was] My faithful martyr”** maybe a direct reference by Christ to Antipas the first Bishop of Pergamum who was ordained by the Apostle John and was killed for his stand for Christ in **92 AD**.

3. There are two theories concerning the date of the Revelation.
 - a. One is an **early** date when Nero began Roman persecution of Christians. Those who hold to this view are referred to as “Preterists”. Remember, the majority of Preterists believe that all the prophecies recorded in Revelation 4-19 have come true with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by Titus in **70 AD**.
 - b. The other calls for a **late** date toward the end of Domitian's reign in AD **95** or **96**. The majority who favor this date are referred to as “**Futurists**”. Remember, Futurists believe that we are living in the “Age of Grace” or “Church Age” and chapters 4-22 are still in the future.
4. Both the external and internal evidence points to a late date for the writing.
 - a. **External** Evidence
 1. **Irenaeus** (115-202 AD), a disciple of the Polycarp (70-155 AD) who was a disciple of the Apostle John, testified of in his writings, “The Apocalypse, was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation, near the end of the reign of Domitian.”²
 2. From the second through the sixth century AD, nearly all the early Church Fathers say the Revelation was written during Domitian’s reign (Eusebius, Victorinus, Hippolytus, Jerome, Sulpicius Severus). Their united testimony demonstrates the settled **conviction** of the Early Church that the Apostle John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos under the persecution of Domitian.

² Henry Beckthold, <http://www.articlesbase.com/christianity-articles/preterism-is-it-biblical-4254035.html>, January 18, 2012.

3. The church from the beginning believed in the **imminent** return of Christ. This belief did not stop after the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The Moody Handbook reminds us:

The church from the beginning was premillennial in belief. The *Didache* (c. A.D. 100), Clement of Rome (A.D. 96 or 97), the Shepherd of Hermas (A.D. 140-150), Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 50-115?), Papias (A.D. 80-163), Justin Martyr (b.c. A.D. 100), Irenaeus (d. A.D. 200), Tertullian (A.D. 150-225), and other sources indicate that the early church believed in the return of Jesus Christ to personally establish His earthly kingdom.³

4. A late date provides a better foundation for John to have ministered in the Asian churches. The Letters to Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, and Philemon were written between **61-64** AD. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul does not provide a glimpse of the church that is portrayed in Revelation 2:1-7. Paul was not hesitant to confront the churches God established through his life with sin, look at the Church in Colossae, Galatia, or Thessalonica. Paul gave no indication there were problems in Ephesus. It would take more than a few years for a church to deteriorate to the point that Christ would remind them to return to their “first love”.
5. In Revelation 2-3, all the Churches of Asia Minor have **deteriorated** significantly and many defected from the faith. These churches were relatively new works at the time that Nero was persecuting Christians (65-68 AD).
6. Domitian was the first emperor to demand his subjects to worship him as a god. The penalty of refusing to worship Domitian was death. As a result, it has been reported that over **five-hundred** Christians a day were crucified for their faith in Christ during the last years of Domitian's reign (95-96 AD).
7. A late date would have given time for the **Gnostic** heresies to mature and begin to mutilate the Scriptures. This is probably why the Holy Spirit led John to close the Revelation with **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and [from] the things which are written in this book.”** (Revelation 22:18-19 NKJV)

b. **Internal** Evidence

1. Christ provides a **Key** to understanding the Revelation in Revelation 1:19.

“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” (Revelation 1:19 NKJV)

³ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1989, p. 389.

- a) **"The things which you have seen,"** is interpreted as John's **vision** of Christ in all His glory, included in chapter one.
 - b) **"The things which are,"** is interpreted as the messages to the seven churches included in chapters 2-3, which represents the Age of Grace or the **Church** Age that man is currently living under.
 - c) **"The things which shall take place after these things,"** are the description of the Great Tribulation, the Second Coming of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom, the end of human history, and the ushering in of the Eternal State recorded in chapters **4-22**.
 - d) This verse is looked upon as a composite whole. Revelation 4:1 says, **"After these things I looked, and behold, a door [standing] open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard [was] like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.'"** (Revelation 4:1 NKJV)
 - 1) From this point on, the word **"Church"** is no longer mentioned in the Revelation. The word "churches" does not appear again until Christ says, **"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."** (Revelation 22:16 NKJV)
 - 2) The things Jesus is relaying to the churches encompass what is coming in the future. Christ made it crystal clear that the Church will not be a part of the **destruction** and chaos described in Chapters 4-18.
2. In Acts 1:9-11, the disciples watched as Jesus ascended into **Heaven** and two angels stood with them. In verse 11 the angels said, **"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This [same] Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."**
- a) In Christ's first coming, there was great emphasis on His literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the **Messiah**. In fact Jesus once told the Pharisees, **"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 'but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father [is] in Me, and I in Him.' Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand."** (John 10:37-39 NKJV)
 - b) Jesus also reminded the disciples, **"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 'For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.'" (Matthew 5:17-18 NKJV)**

- c) While many of Christ's teachings were in the form of parables, which is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning; He never interpreted a Scripture from the Old Testament utilizing the **allegorical** method of interpretation. It must be understood that the literal contents of the parables were very familiar to Christ's audience. Therefore, the literal interpretation of the parable is the basis and foundation for finding the spiritual truth to be taught through the parable (Matthew 12:39-40; 13:34-35; Psalm 78:2).
 - d) If prophecy concerning the first coming is to be understood literally, then it makes sense that there will be a **literal** fulfillment of prophecy concerning His second coming. The Bible reminds us, **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."** (James 1:17 NKJV)
3. A major concern for those who hold for an early dating of the Revelation is Christ's reference to the apparent **brevity** toward fulfillment of the Revelation (Revelation 1:1, 3).
- a) Statements like **"things which must shortly take place"** or **"the time is near"** are statements of **urgency**.
 - b) The idea of Christ waiting **2000** years and making this statement seems illogical, however there are other passages that seem imminent that took many centuries to fulfill in Scripture.
 - 1) Isaiah speaks of the coming judgment of Babylon in Isaiah 13:6: **"Wail, for the day of the LORD [is] at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty."** (Isaiah 13:6 NKJV) Isaiah prophesied between 740-700 BC, yet the prophecy was not fulfilled until 539 BC at the hands of the Persians **160** years later.
 - 2) In Matthew 24:34, Jesus says: **"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."** (Matthew 24:34 NKJV) The term "this generation" on face value appears to mean that those **alive** will see the events recorded in Matthew 24; however, Jesus provides a different meaning of "this generation" in Matthew 23:34-36.

"Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: [some] of them you will kill and crucify, and [some] of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation." (Matthew 23:34-36 NKJV)

Notice that Christ indicates that “this generation” were the ones responsible for the murder of Zechariah; however his death was recorded 400 years before in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21. The term “this generation” referred to the nation of **Israel** as a whole in this context.

- 3) The Apostle Paul compares his days of affliction and suffering as “**but for a moment**” in the light of eternity (2 Corinthians 4:16-18), yet Paul suffered for his stand for Christ more than **25** years before being beheaded by Nero in 67 AD.
 - 4) Referring to the time of the Babylonian captivity, God reminded Judah that His face would be hid from them but for a “**moment**” (Isa 54:7-8). The “moment” here lasted **70** years, the normal life span of a human being.
 - 5) One must use caution in trying to fit an **infinite** God into the mold of finite man when it comes to the issues of the end times. **2 Peter 3:1-18** warns us about this very issue.
4. Daniel’s Prophecy of the **70** Weeks of Years is best understood in light of the seven year Tribulation recorded in the Revelation (Dan 9:24-27).
- a) The command to “**restore and build Jerusalem**” came to Nehemiah in approximately **445** BC. Artaxerxes began to rule Assyria in 466-464 BC and he gave Nehemiah the command to rebuild Jerusalem in his 20th year (Neh 2:1).
 - b) According to Daniel’s prophecy, **69** weeks of years pass from 445 BC until “**Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself**” (Dan 9:26).
 - c) Using the Jewish **Lunar** Calendar defined as 360 days in Scripture (Gen 7:11, 24; 8:3-4; Rev 12:6; 13:5), from 445 BC + [360 x 483 = 173880 days/365.25 = 476.06 solar years] falls between 30-33 AD. The dates most commonly accepted as the time in which Christ was crucified.⁴
 - d) If all 490 years of Daniel’s prophecy is utilized, then the number of days would be 176400 (360 x 490) or 482.96 solar years. 445 BC + 482.96 years would land between 37-40 AD, which is too late for the historical crucifixion of Christ.
 - e) There is still **seven** more years on God’s time-table for Israel and the seven years of Tribulation begins with the beast signing a peace treaty with Israel (Dan 9:26-27). Remember “Church” is not mentioned in Revelation 4-21.
5. Revelation **16-19** Best Fits A Future Return of Christ Using the Literal Method of Interpretation of Scripture

⁴ Notes taken from J. R. Lawendowski, Daniel’s 70 Weeks ; Berean Watchmen Ministries, 27 September 2009, p. 2.

a) Literal Truths about the “Harlot” of the Revelation⁵

- 1) Those who hold to an early date for the Revelation believe that Jerusalem is the “whore” or “harlot” of Revelation 17, and Nero is the antichrist.
- 2) Revelation 17:4 indicates that the harlot is wealthy and evil personified.
- 3) The harlot’s name is identified in Revelation 17:5-6 as “Babylon.”
- 4) According to Revelation 17:18, “Babylon” **“is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”**
- 5) Revelation 18:2-3, 9-14 indicates that “Babylon” will make the nations rich and the kings of the earth will weep at her destruction.
- 6) Revelation 18:21-23 indicates after the fall of “Babylon,” the city will never again rise and no human activity will be found in her midst after the judgment is complete.
- 7) There is no historical evidence that Jerusalem had power or influence over anyone in 70 AD. They were still under the control of Rome. When Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 70 AD, it was a sad day for the Jewish people, but there was no sense of a worldwide loss.

b) Literal Prophecies that Exclude Nero from Being the Antichrist⁶

- 1) Revelation 16:18-21 says many things will happen before the end of the antichrist. There are no historical records of these events happening before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
 - 2) Revelation 13:16-17 indicates that the beast will have a mark that is placed on the hand or forehead of loyal followers for purposes of commerce. There is no historical evidence that such a system existed in the time of Nero, nor the technology.
 - 3) Revelation 19:19-21 says that after Christ’s physical return to the earth, the antichrist will unite with all the kings of the earth outside of Jerusalem and fight against Christ. But there is no historical evidence that Nero united the armies of the world against Christ in 70 AD. In fact, history tells us that Nero killed himself in 68 AD approximately two years before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD. The beast is still alive and cast into the “lake of fire” at the end of this battle according to Revelation 19:20.
5. If the late date is accepted, then John would have written the Revelation in either A.D. 95 or 96 AD, from the Isle of Patmos where he was exiled because of his effective witness for Christ in Asia (Rev 1.9).

“I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (Revelation 1:9 NKJV)

⁵ Notes from Henry Bechthold, <http://www.godormen.com/preterism/preterism/>, January 18, 2012.

⁶ Ibid.

- a. Most **Futurists** believe that Revelation 4:1 represents the Rapture of the Church before the beginning of the great Tribulation; where the Church will meet Christ in the air (1 Thes 4:16-17).

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NKJV)

1. The futurist view was widely held by the **early church** fathers such as: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Victorinus. Today, this view is held by many evangelical Christians.
 2. Through the Revelation, God provided for all Christians who **suffer** throughout all the ages a positive picture of history ending with the absolute and final **victory** of Christ over all evil.
 3. With this in mind, chapters 4-22 provides Christians with the **hope** to keep their eyes on Christ and allows them to remain **"steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord"** (1 Cor 15:58).
 4. For those who hold to the **inerrancy** of Scripture, the futurist view is the favored choice. As a result, during this study, the futurist view will be used as a foundation for interpreting the Revelation.
- b. The coming study will provide a glimpse of the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Second Coming and Millennial Reign of Christ, and the Eternal State.

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Spending Time with the Master⁷

Day 1: Revelation 1:1-20 What God said:

My Response to God:

Day 2: Revelation 2:1-11 What God said:

My Response to God:

Day 3: Revelation 2:12-29 What God said:

My Response to God:

Day 4: Revelation 3:1-13 What God said:

My Response to God:

Day 5: Revelation 3:14-22 What God said:

My Response to God:

Suggested reading: *Rigged for the Journey*, Chapter 11

Memory Verse: Revelation 1:19

“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this” (NKJV).

⁷ Idea taken from MasterLife “Daily Master Communication Guide”, Avery T. Willis, Jr. and Kay Moore, *The Disciple’s Cross*, LifeWay Press: Nashville, TN., 1996, p. 14.