

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER 1**Read 1:1-3**

Define the words **revelation** and **apocalypse**. What does this title tell us about what to expect as we read the book? (*compare the use of this Greek word in Rom 16:25 and 1 Pet 1:13*)

Apocalyptic Literature

Apocalyptic literature is a genre of vivid imagery that seeks to give us a glimpse into the heavenly realm. It dramatically unveils spiritual forces at work behind the scenes of history. Using a variety of signs and symbols, it illustrates the character of present and future events from this heavenly perspective.

It is not intended to be read literally or provide a detailed chronology of historical events. Rather, it provides a dramatic picture of God's plan for His saints and the hostile world around them. While this filters through into the actual events of history, it primarily illustrates spiritual truths that underlie the events of the physical world.

Robert Harkrider advises: *"Read it like you would read a play. We do not analyze each detail on the stage. We do not ask why a certain chair is green rather than blue. Or why a picture is on the wall. We simply realize the chair and the picture are there to set the stage for the drama that is portrayed by the actors. Likewise, some of the details in Revelation are revealed to set the stage and must not be subjected to forced explanations"* (lix).

Similarly, Ray Summers writes: *"It appears that the wise thing to do in interpreting symbols is to follow the proper method of interpreting parables – find the central truth which is being portrayed and let the details fit in the most natural way"* (20).

To whom did God give this revelation and for what purpose?

What events will this revelation specifically pertain to?

Historical Background

The testimony of the early church is almost unanimous in assigning the book to the Apostle John during the reign of emperor Domitian around A.D. 95-96. In about A.D. 180, Irenaeus wrote concerning Revelation, "For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign" (Harkrider, xxxiv). Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian also wrote near the end of the 2nd century about John's exile to Patmos during the reign of Domitian and subsequent return upon his death (Harkrider, xxxiv-xxxv). Around A.D. 300, Victorinus wrote in his commentary on the book, "When John said these things he was in the isle of Patmos, condemned to the labor of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse" (Hailey, 34).

The internal testimony of Revelation lends itself strongly to this date as well. The intense persecution of saints throughout Asia as described in the book was first introduced in the reign of Domitian. While emperor Nero began persecuting Christians in Rome after blaming them for the great fire of A.D. 64, there is no evidence this persecution extended beyond the city itself (Hailey, 31-32). Widespread persecution for refusal to worship the image of the beast (Rev 13:15-17) fits much better with the reign of Domitian. "Domitian is the emperor who has gone down in history as the one who bathed the empire in the blood of the Christians. His persecution was for the purpose of enforcing emperor worship" (Summers, 83-84).

Who is the author of the book and in what way did he receive this revelation? (*see also v. 9*)

If we want to receive the blessings of this book, what must we do?

Read 1:4-8

Who was this letter written to? How should the book's original audience affect the way we view it? (*see chart*)

What aspect of God is emphasized at the beginning and ending of this section? (*see also 4:8; 11:17; 16:5*) How might this affect our understanding of the book's message?

What titles is Jesus given in **v. 5**? Why might these descriptions be significant for the persecuted Christians of Asia Minor?

What past, present, and future actions of Jesus are described in **vv. 5-7**?

Read 1:9-20

Where was John when he received this revelation? Why?

When did John receive this revelation? What does this mean?

What is John commanded to do?

Briefly describe the one John sees speaking to him.

Where is this individual standing and what is He holding? What do these represent and why is this significant?

How does John react to seeing this being? (*compare Ezek 1:28*)

What words of reassurance is John given? How does this individual identify Himself? How would these words be reassuring to the persecuted Christians of Asia Minor as well?

What three things is John told to write? How will this message parallel the character of God? (**vv. 4, 8**)