

Revelation:

Wait on the Lord

Unit One: Introduction

Lesson One: Apocalyptic Literature/Methods of Interpretation

I. Apocalyptic literature - a special genre of literature

- A. The word “apocalyptic” is related etymologically to the Greek word “ἀποκάλυψις” which means “*an uncovering; prop. a laying bare, making naked*” (Thayer, 62). This Greek word is translated “revelation” in Revelation 1:1.
- B. The *primary* purpose of apocalyptic literature is not to hide, but to “uncover” or “reveal” a message. Apocalyptic literature does employ signs and symbols which would perhaps be unintelligible to those unfamiliar with them, thus hiding the meaning of the book *from some*. In this respect, the purpose of this literary genre is similar to that of parables. Nevertheless, the apocalyptic genre is intended to reveal a divine message.
 1. A distinguishing characteristic of apocalyptic literature is the use of highly detailed and fantastic visions.
 2. “*Biblically, an apocalypse is a book that uses visions and dramatic word pictures to convey information about God’s activity, particularly regarding the oppression of God’s people by their enemies. Books that have that kind of common theme are called apocalypses or are said to be ‘apocalyptic.’*” (Roberts, You Can Understand Revelation, p. 6; unpublished copy)
 3. “*Apocalyptic literature flourished during a time of some great national crisis when a formidable enemy threatened the life of the people--a time of trial and stress.*” (Homer Hailey, Revelation, 19)
 4. Ray Summers (Worthy Is The Lamb, 48) makes the following important observation about the interpretation of apocalyptic literature:
 - a. “*For this reason the ordinary rules of interpretation cannot be followed. Usually the words of any passage of Scripture must be understood in their plain and natural sense, unless there is some reason to take them figuratively. The presumption is always in favor of the literal meaning; if one takes it otherwise, he must show the cause. This is not the case in Revelation. In this book, presented in pictorial form, one must assume that the symbols are to be taken figuratively unless there is good reason for regarding them as literal. There are few places where literal language is used in the midst of symbolical, but these stand out in bold relief as Greek words stand out in a context of English.*”
- C. It is crucial to recognize the fact that God “intends” for us to understand the book of Revelation.
- D. Apocalyptic literature has several distinguishing characteristics:

1. **Narrative framework** - has a story line, not just a collection of ideas. “*Apocalyptic contains exhortation but the exhortations are woven into a story line.*” (Roberts, p. 12)
 2. **Dualistic** – a dual view of reality; deals with what is happening on earth, but also with what is happening in heaven itself. Apocalyptic literature stresses that what takes place on earth is the result of heavenly events/purposes.
 3. **Eschatological salvation** - written in crisis situations when people's faith is tested. The apocalyptic theme is that victory will not be assured until God intervenes and decisively establishes His order. In apocalyptic literature, God always wins.
 4. **The use of visions and symbols** - designed to make the message more interesting, hold the attention of the readers.
 5. **Revelation through otherworldly beings** – an angel or some other heavenly being is used as a medium of revelation.
 6. Summary: “[A]pocalyptic functioned as a kind of pictorial narrative theodicy which acknowledges the legitimacy of the inevitable question found not only on the lips of scoffers, namely, ‘If there is a good God who is in control of things, why doesn't he do something about the present evil?’ The apocalyptists' response: ‘He will, for history is a unified story which is not over yet.’” (M. Eugene Boring, “*The Theology of Revelation*” Interpretation, 260.)
- E. The intertestamental period generally was a difficult time for the Jewish people, particularly during the years of Syrian domination.
1. Antiochus IV (more commonly known as Antiochus Epiphanes) attempted to force the Jewish nation to accept Hellenism, Greek culture.
 2. Antiochus set up images in the temple, desecrated the altar (December 168 B.C.), outlawed the observance of Jewish feasts and destroyed copies of the Hebrew Scriptures.
 3. A Jewish resistance movement arose, led by the Maccabean family. It was a time of desperate struggle for survival.
- F. This period of Jewish history spawned a body of literature we know as intertestamental apocalyptic. This literature arose from the need to assure Jewish readers that God would eventually grant them victory.
1. Examples of intertestamental apocalyptic include: The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36), The Similitudes of Enoch (1 Enoch 37-71), The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries (1 Enoch 73-82), The Book of Dream Visions (1 Enoch 83-90; 85-90 are known as The Animal Apocalypse), The Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch 93:1-10; 91:11-17), The War Scroll (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls) and the Apocalypse of Zephaniah.
 2. Apocalyptic literature did not originate in the intertestamental period. Intertestamental apocalyptic literature was preceded by and perhaps found its inspiration in such books as Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah.
 3. Apocalyptic literature did not cease to be written at the close of the intertestamental period.
 - a. Second Enoch, The Testament of Abraham, Second Baruch, Second Esdras 3-14, Apocalypse of Abraham, The Apocalypse of Moses and some portions of the

Sibylline Oracles were written during the first century A.D (dates sometimes uncertain).

- b. The book of Revelation is also apocalyptic literature. Like many of these other books written in the intertestamental period, Revelation grew out of a period of struggle for God's people. Differences include the fact that the church constitutes God's people (rather than the physical nation of Israel) in Revelation and Revelation is inspired of God.

II. Various Interpretations of Revelation

A. Revelation is a type of literature which has spawned many interpretations. Whatever interpretation one adopts, it should meet the following criteria:

1. It should be consistent with the rest of Scripture. One should always interpret the difficult in light of the easier, the unknown in light of the known.
2. It should be consistent with the purpose stated in the book. Revelation is primarily a book about “things which must shortly take place” (1:1; see also 1:3; 3:11; 22:6-7, 10, 20).
 - a. It is possible to over-emphasize this point. I believe that these “time markers” have reference primarily to the major story line of the book, i.e., the judgment of the great harlot.
 - b. It is also clear that the book speaks of some future events whose fulfillment were chronologically distant. For instance, chapter 19 (vs. 19-21) predicts God’s judgment against the sea beast and the false prophet. Assuming that the sea beast represents the Roman empire, the divine judgment against that empire was not complete, historically speaking, until the fifth century (cf. - the fall of Rome). This judgment doesn’t fit the “things which must shortly take place” timeframe.
3. It should not embellish the stated meaning of the text. Many fanciful theories have arisen from the embellishment of certain portions of Revelation.
4. It should recognize that Revelation is apocalyptic literature, employing extensive figurative language. This is not to say, however, that nothing in the book is literal.

B. Preterist

1. “Preterist” means past in fulfillment and is essentially the opposite of the futurist viewpoint.¹ The true preterist scholar sees everything in Revelation as already having been fulfilled.
2. This view of Revelation suggests that the events of the book were fulfilled in the specific time period and circumstances of its readers. Most preterists see the fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
3. While some preterists see little application for the modern Christian in Revelation, most preterists seem to believe that the message of the book is timeless.

C. Historical Background (Sometimes called the “early historical”)

¹International Preterist Association, Inc. More information about the preterist view can be found at the website <http://preterist.org>

1. This view is similar to the preterist approach in that both see the fulfillment of most of the prophecies of Revelation in the past. The advocates of this view "*see in Revelation a book written for the people of that day, set in a definite historical background and fulfilled in the events of the first two or three centuries.*" (Homer Hailey, Revelation, 50)
2. While proponents of this view may tend to favor the "late date" (in the time of the emperor Domitian), there is little difference between the preterist and historical background views in their basic approach to the book.
3. One could argue that this method of interpretation violates the stated purpose of the book in that it sees the primary fulfillment of the prophecies of the book as stretching over a couple of centuries (even to the fall of Rome in A.D. 476).

D. Continuous Historical

1. "*The Historicist interpretation holds that Revelation outlines in symbolic form the entire course of history of the church from Pentecost to the advent of Christ. The symbols portray in sequence the great events that have taken place: that is, the seals are the breakup of the Roman Empire; the eruption of locusts from the bottomless pit is a picture of the Mohammedan invasions, etc. Each major event in the history of Christendom was thus broadly foreshadowed, so that Revelation becomes a calendar of events written in advance.*" (Merrill C. Tenney, The New Testament: A Survey, p. 404)
2. This view violates the criteria of the stated purpose of the book; it spreads the events prophesied in Revelation over the entire course of church history.
3. This view became especially popular with Reformation scholars who saw the Roman Catholic Church in the book. It should be noted that there is wide variation in the application of the book to history by advocates of the continuous-historical view.

E. Futurist (also known as the eschatological view)

1. The futurist approach suggests that most of Revelation deals exclusively with conditions and events just prior to and after the final coming of Christ. Advocates of this view see the book as being wholly eschatological and mostly unfulfilled at the present.
 - a. Chapters 1-3 describe the condition of the churches in John's day.
 - b. Chapters 4-19 detail events which will take place during a seven-year period just prior to the second coming of Christ.
 - c. Chapters 20-22 are concerned with a millennial kingdom, the great judgment, and the final reward or punishment of men.
2. The glaring weaknesses of this view are that it ignores both the stated purpose of the book and the figurative language of the book (futurists are typically also literalists). It is an extremely speculative method of interpretation and proponents of this view often embellish the text to fit premillennialist theories.
3. This is probably the most popular view of the book in modern times.

F. Philosophy of History (also known as the spiritualist or idealist view)

1. Summers describes this view as follows: *"It looks upon the book as containing a discussion of the forces which underlie events but not a discussion of the events themselves. Revelation is viewed as an expression of those great principles of God's government whose operation may be observed in every age. It is a book setting out the principles on the basis of which God deals with all men in all ages. Symbols are understood to refer to forces or tendencies and may thus be fulfilled over and over as these forces or tendencies are repeated in history."* (Ray Summers, Worthy Is The Lamb, 41)
2. This method of interpretation essentially divorces the book entirely from its historical context. The book becomes a generalized battle between the physical and spiritual forces of good and evil.
3. Like some of the other views, the philosophy of history view ignores the stated purpose of the book.

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Unit One: Introduction
Lesson Two: Story Survey/Structure

I. Story survey

- A. As noted in Lesson One, one of the characteristics of apocalyptic literature is a narrative framework, i.e., a story line.
- B. Like apocalyptic literature in general, Revelation is designed to appeal to the physical senses, particularly sight and sound. As students of the book, we must avoid getting caught up in its interpretation and failing to allow its story to work on our physical senses.
- C. Although the actual story line doesn't begin until chapter six with the opening of the first seals, we begin a brief summary of the events in Revelation with chapter one.
 1. John saw the Son of God standing in the midst of seven lamp stands and was commanded to write the things he saw (chapter 1).
 2. The seven churches of Asia mentioned in chapter one are addressed in letters dictated by the One in the midst of the lamp stands (chapters 2-3).
 3. John saw the throne of God and witnessed both the praise given to God and the taking of the scroll by the triumphant Lamb (chapters 4-5).
 4. Chapters 6-11 relate the opening of the seven seals of the scroll, thus apparently setting into motion the contents of the scroll, i.e., the divine plan for vengeance.
 - a. The opening of the first four seals revealed four horses with their riders. The horses were of different colors (white, red, black and pale [literally green]) and represent turmoil and death on the earth (6:1-8).
 - b. The fifth seal (6:9-11) is particularly important. It shows that a conflict was going on and the righteous would suffer for a while at the hands of the ungodly. This seal suggests the theme of God's vengeance against the enemies of His people, avenging their blood.
 - c. The opening of the sixth seal (6:12-17) resulted in the depiction of God's wrath by means of astral events and a great earthquake.
 - d. There is an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. During this interlude, John saw the 144,000 (7:1-8) and the great multitude (7:9-17).
 - e. The opening of the seventh seal resulted in seven trumpets being given to seven angels (8:1-5).
 - f. The sounding of each of the first four trumpets resulted in great destruction (8:7-13). An angel characterized the blasts of the remaining three trumpets as "woes" (8:13).

- g. When the fifth trumpet sounded, a star fallen from heaven opened the abyss with a key; smoke arose out of the pit and out of the smoke came unusual locusts, creatures with the faces of men, hair of women and teeth like lions. They tormented all of the men of the earth who were not sealed (9:1-11).
 - h. A mighty angel announced that there would be no more delay; the mystery of God would be finished. John was given a little book and he ate it (chapter 10).
 - i. John was informed that the holy city would be “trampled” by the Gentiles, the two witnesses would be killed and then resurrected (11:1-14).
 - j. The announcement of the Lord's victory was made at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19).
5. As noted in Lesson One, another characteristic of apocalyptic literature is dualism. The first eleven chapters have pictured the divine vengeance on the enemies of God's people. It appears that the latter part of the book is a recapitulation of the judgment in chapters 6-11.
6. Chapter twelve is particularly important to the understanding of the story line of the book in that it provides the greater context of the persecution of God's people.
7. Chapters twelve and thirteen also identify the major “players” in the struggle.
- a. The woman, the dragon and the man-child (chapter 12)
 - 1) John saw a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet and a garland of twelve stars on her head.
 - 2) The woman was next seen in the labor of childbirth.
 - 3) A great fiery red dragon appeared; he had seven heads with crowns and ten horns. He was waiting to devour the newborn child, but the child (apparently Jesus Christ; vs. 5; Psalm 2:9) was caught up to the throne of God.
 - 4) The dragon, frustrated at his failure, next attempted to destroy the woman. She was given two wings with which to fly to the wilderness. The dragon tried to carry her away with a flood of water from his mouth, but the earth opened up and swallowed the flood.
 - 5) The enraged dragon goes to war with the rest of the woman's offspring - those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.
 - b. The sea beast (chapter 13)
 - 1) John saw a beast rising out of the sea, a creature with seven heads and ten horns with crowns on them. He had a body like a leopard, the feet of a bear and a mouth like a lion. On each of his heads was a blasphemous name.
 - 2) All the world marveled at and worshiped the sea beast and the dragon who gave him his power.
 - 3) The sea beast blasphemed God and he was given authority to make war against the saints.
 - c. The land beast (chapter 13)

- 1) John saw a second beast coming up out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but spoke like a dragon.
- 2) He did great signs (fire from heaven; caused the image of the sea beast to speak) and caused the people of the earth to worship the sea beast.
- d. The scarlet woman (called Babylon; first introduced by name in 14:8; described in greater detail in chapter 17)
 - 1) Arrayed in purple and scarlet, she was sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns, evidently the sea beast of chapter 13. She was adorned with gold and precious stones and held a golden cup full of abominations in her hand.
 - 2) On her forehead was written the name “Babylon The Great, The Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.” She was drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus Christ.
 - 3) The judgment against the great harlot was announced as accomplished in chapter 18.
8. John saw the seven angels with the seven bowls of the wrath of God pour out those bowls on the earth (chapter 16).
 - a. The first five bowls, like the seals and trumpets, were against the men of the earth.
 - b. Although there is a gathering of the wicked together at Armageddon in chapter 16, the defeat of the sea beast, the false prophet (land beast) and the kings of the earth and their armies isn’t recorded until the latter part of chapter 19.
 - c. The dragon would also be restrained for a period of time, loosed and defeated, and ultimately judged (20:1-10).
 - d. All of the followers of the dragon are judged (20:11-15).
9. God’s people were protected.
 - a. In chapter 7, the 144,000 were sealed with the name of God being placed on their foreheads. The 144,000 were next seen with the Lamb (14:1-5).
 - b. They were not protected from tribulation, but from God’s judgments.
 - c. God’s people were further pictured as victorious in chapters 21 and 22.

II. The structure of Revelation¹

- A. There are actually several different ways of looking at the structure of Revelation.
- B. First, as suggested in the story line survey, the book’s structure can be described along the lines of its dualism, thus suggesting two major sections.
 1. The first section describes events from a heavenly viewpoint (chapters 1-11).
 2. The second section describes the same basic events, but from the viewpoint of the earth, identifying some of the specific forces acting on the earth (chapters 12-22).

¹A special word of thanks to David Holder for his excellent work in this area.

- C. Second, we can view the structure of Revelation from the standpoint of the visions which John saw.
1. There are four visions in the book with the phrase “in the Spirit” constituting the structural marker which indicates the beginning of each vision (see 1:10; 4:2; 17:3 and 21:10).
 - a. Vision One: 1:9-3:22 location: on Patmos
 - b. Vision Two: 4:1-16:21 location: in heaven
 - c. Vision Three: 17:1-21:8 location: in the wilderness
 - d. Vision Four: 21:9-22:5 location: on a great and high mountain
 2. The four visions suggest some natural divisions of the text. For instance, the first three chapters introduce the Son of God and contain the letters to the churches. Beginning in chapter four with the second vision, the divine plan for vengeance is unfolded from the heavenly and earthly viewpoints. The third vision portrays the judgments against the persecutors in more detail, although the seventh bowl of wrath has already been poured out at the conclusion of the second vision (“it is done” – 16:17). The fourth vision takes up the story after the description of the ultimate judgment of all of the enemies of God’s people and describes the protection and care of God for His saints.
- D. Third, we can look at the structure of Revelation in terms of the series of sevens.
1. There are seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls of plagues.
 - a. John helps us understand that the Lord is familiar with the seven churches through the letters addressed to them (chapters 2 & 3).
 - b. The seven seals (6:1-17; 8:1) and the seven trumpets (8:2-9:21; 11:15-19) appear in the first half of the book. There seems to be some similarity in the first four items of each series.
 - c. The seven trumpets grow out of the seventh seal.
 - d. The seven bowls of the wrath of God (15:1-16:21) appear in the second half of the book.
 2. There is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals and the sixth and seventh trumpets.

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Unit One: Introduction

Lesson Three: Author/Recipients/Date

I. Author

- A. The author identified himself five times in the text of the book as “John” (1:1, 4, 9; 21:2; 22:8).
- B. There is some question about whether this John was the apostle John or another John (John Mark, author of the gospel of Mark, or a presbyter at Ephesus mentioned by Papias and named John).
 1. The external evidence for the authorship of John the apostle is quite strong. Witnesses include: Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165), Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 153-217), Tertullian (A.D. 145-220), Origen (A.D. 185-254) and Hippolytus (A.D. 170-236).¹
 2. Although there are some differences in the Greek styles of the gospel and other epistles of the apostle John with that of Revelation, one can also argue that there are some striking similarities in the vocabularies of the books.

II. Place of Writing

- A. The apostle John was on the island of Patmos, apparently having been banished there, when he received the revelation (1:9).
- B. Patmos is an island located about 24 miles from the coast of Asia Minor and 70 miles southwest of Ephesus. It is a rocky, desolate piece of land about 10 miles long and 5 miles wide.

III. Recipients

- A. The book of Revelation is addressed to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. They are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos (translated Pergamum in some versions), Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (1:11).
- B. It might be asked why these churches (cities) were selected inasmuch as there were other churches in Asia (e.g., Troas, Colosse and Hierapolis).
 1. Some have suggested that these churches were addressed because they were “representative churches.” With the number “7” often symbolizing completeness or perfection, these seven churches represented the various conditions which can exist in congregations of the Lord's people in any age or location.²

¹ Homer Hailey, Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 21-22.

² William Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 15, 75, 97-8.

2. William Ramsay proposed the idea that Revelation was intended as a circular letter and these seven churches form a natural route for a messenger from Patmos. Each of the churches would, in turn, serve as a distribution center for other churches/cities in its area of Asia Minor.³
- C. Like other New Testament epistles, Revelation was intended for a larger audience than its original readers.

IV. Date of Writing

- A. The date of the writing of Revelation has been a controversial point in its study for a long time. The date one accepts for the authorship of the book will determine one's understanding of the historical conflict which served as a background for the book.
- B. There are two popular suggestions for the date of the apocalypse:
1. During the latter part of the reign of Nero (A.D. 54-68); known as the early date (A.D. 64-68)
 2. During the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96); known as the late date (A.D. 95-96)
 3. There is a third date which has some advocates. This third view places the writing of Revelation during the time of the emperor Vespasian who ruled from A.D. 69-79.
- C. There is strong support for a date of authorship prior to A.D. 70.
- D. External evidences for the early date include (by no means an all-inclusive list!):⁴
1. The Syriac Peshitta, the oldest direct translation of the New Testament, dated the book of Revelation at A.D. 68 on its title page for the book. While this witness is not as early as some of the church fathers, it is an important witness.
 2. Robert Young made the following statement, *"It was written in Patmos about A.D. 68, whither John had been banished by Domitius Nero, as stated in the title of the Syriac version of the book; and with this concurs the express statement of Irenaeus in A.D. 175, who says it happened in the reign of Domitianou -- i.e., Domitius (Nero). Sulpicius, Orosius, etc., stupidly mistaking Domitianou for Domitianikos, supposed Irenaeus to refer to Domitian, A.D. 95, and most succeeding writers have fallen into the same blunder. The internal testimony is wholly in favor of the earlier date."* (Commentary on Revelation (1885))
- E. Internal evidences (from the text of Revelation itself) for the early date include:
1. The time frame for the fulfillment of the prophecies of the book is emphasized in the book.
 - a. John began and ended the book with the warning that the prophesied events were to transpire soon.
 - 1) "things which must shortly take place" - Revelation 1:1
 - 2) "for the time is near" - Revelation 1:3
 - 3) "the things which must shortly take place." - Revelation 22:6

³ William Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 185ff.

⁴ Foy E. Wallace, Jr., The Book of Revelation, (Fort Worth, Texas: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, 1966), p. 23-4.

- 4) “Behold, I am coming quickly” - Revelation 22:7 (the “coming” in this context is the Lord’s coming in judgment upon the harlot)
 - 5) “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.” - Revelation 22:10
 - 6) “And behold, I am coming quickly,” - Revelation 22:12
 - 7) “Surely I am coming quickly.” - Revelation 22:20
- b. Such statements do not specify a date of authorship, but they indicate that the fulfillment of the prophecies of the book was close in time to the date of authorship.
 - 1) Some would argue that John’s statements only indicate that the fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation would be “sudden,” but not “soon.”
 - 2) In response, it should be noted that this does not harmonize with the established meanings of τάρχος (“shortly”; 1:1; 2:16; 3:11; 22:6, 7, 12, 20) and ἐγγύς (“near”; 1:3; 22:10).⁵
 - c. If the apocalypse was written during the reign of Nero (early date), the relative time frame indicated in the book better supports Jerusalem as the great harlot of chapter 17 inasmuch as the promised judgment upon the harlot would then have taken place within perhaps a handful of years from the writing of the apocalypse.
 - d. If the fall of the city of Rome in A.D. 476 to barbarian invaders is understood as the promised judgment upon the harlot, even the late date for authorship (during the reign of Domitian) necessitates a period of approximately 375 years between the writing of the prophecies and their fulfillment. Such a time frame strains the clear and emphatic language of the apocalypse.
2. The vengeance of God against Jerusalem which was promised by Jesus in the gospels matches the statements made in Revelation regarding the reason for Babylon’s judgment.
 - a. The gospels: Matthew 23:34-37a; Luke 11:49-51; 13:33-34
 - b. Revelation: Revelation 6:9-10; 11:17-18; 16:5-6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:1-2
 - c. The finishing of the mystery of God (Revelation 10:7) and the fulfillment of all things which are written (Luke 21:22) appear to refer to the same event(s).⁶
 3. The identity of the sixth king (17:9-11) is a crucial issue in the dating of the book. The mystery of the harlot and the beast is explained by the angel in Revelation 17:7-11.
 - a. The seven heads of the beast upon which the harlot sits are identified as seven kings.
 - b. The sixth king was reigning at the time of the writing of Revelation (17:10).
 - c. Assuming that the “kings” are emperors (note that the seven heads also represent seven mountains, clearly indicating the city of Rome) in a chronologically

⁵ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Before Jerusalem Fell (Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1998), p. 133-142.

⁶ Arthur Ogden, The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets (Louisville: Ogden Publications, 1985), p. 25-6.

sequential order, one must simply determine who the first emperor was and then count to the sixth to identify the time of authorship.

- d. The common view is that Augustus (31 B.C. - A.D. 14) was the first. If so, the series of emperors would be as follows:
 - 1) Augustus (31 B.C. - A.D. 14)
 - 2) Tiberius (A.D. 14-37)
 - 3) Caligula (A.D. 37-41)
 - 4) Claudius (A.D. 41-54)
 - 5) Nero (A.D. 54-68)
 - 6) Galba (A.D. 68-69; June of 68 to January of 69)
 - 7) Otho (A.D. 69)
 - 8) Vitellius (A.D. 69)
 - 9) Vespasian (A.D. 69-79)
 - 10) Titus (A.D. 79-81)
 - 11) Domitian (A.D. 81-96)
 - e. Galba, Otho and Vitellius are sometimes not counted as true emperors because of the brevity of their “reigns.” Reckoning in this fashion, Vespasian becomes the sixth emperor. Titus would then be the seventh, the one who would “continue a short time.” However, several ancient historians/historical works include these men among the emperors of Rome (e.g., Suetonius, Tacitus, Josephus, Sibylline Oracles, 4 Ezra).⁷
 - f. A strong historical argument can be made to the effect that Julius Caesar was actually the first emperor.⁸ If Julius (49-44 B.C.) was indeed the first, then Nero becomes the sixth. The brevity of Galba's reign (then the seventh) would fit the description of 17:10.
4. The beast of chapter 13 (apparently the same beast upon which the harlot is sitting in chapter 17) has a name which is designated by a number (Revelation 13:16-18).
- a. That number is “the number of a man” and is identified as “666.”
 - b. The designation of a word or name by a number (“gematria”- *“the use of the letters of a word so as by means of their combined numerical value to express a name, or a witty association of ideas”* - International Standard Bible

⁷ Gentry, p. 161.

⁸ Gentry, p. 155-8. Gentry cites Suetonius (A.D. 70-160; Lives of the Twelve Caesars), Dio Cassius (A.D. 150-235; Roman History, 5), Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-101; Antiquities 18:2:2; 18:6:10; 19:1:11), 4 Ezra 12:13ff, Epistle of Barnabas 4:4, Sibylline Oracles 11:26ff (A.D. 180) and Theophilus of Antioch (A.D. 115-181; Theophilus to Antolycus 2:28). Josephus wrote, “After him came Annus Rufus, under whom died Caesar, the second emperor of the Romans, the duration of whose reign was fifty-seven years, besides six months and two days, (of which time Antonius ruled together with him fourteen years; but the duration of his life was seventy-seven years;) upon whose death Tiberius Nero, his wife Julia's son, succeeded. He was now the third emperor;...” (Antiquities 18:2:2). “So when Tiberius had at this time appointed Caius to be his successor, he outlived but a few days, and then died, after he had held the government twenty-two years, five months and three days. Now Caius was the fourth emperor;...” (Antiquities 18:6:10).

Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, 2162) is an example of a cryptogrammic riddle. The difficulty lies in the fact that a variety of words or names could fit the same numerical total.

- c. It seems to be the general consensus that the name of Nero (Nero Caesar) will provide the total of 666 if the name is translated to a Hebrew spelling.⁹
 - d. There are a few manuscripts which have the number “616” instead of “666.” It is interesting that one common variation of Nero's name would produce this number (by use of gematria).¹⁰
 - e. It is argued by some that the number is purely symbolic and is not intended to designate any particular man.¹¹
5. It is asserted by some that Revelation 1:7 states the theme of the book. Both the centrality of the judgment of the harlot to the message of the book and the repeated references to the coming of the Lord support the reasonableness of this conclusion.
- a. Although the Romans were actually the ones who put Jesus on the cross, the Jews were credited with having crucified the Son of God.
 - 1) In the sermons recorded in the early chapters of Acts, the crucifixion of Jesus is clearly imputed to the Jews (e.g., Acts 2:22-23, 36; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:27-30; 7:52).
 - 2) In the writings of the early church fathers, responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus is assigned to the Jews.¹²
 - b. The significance of this verse is seen in Adam Clarke's comment on the verse: “By this the *Jewish people* are most evidently intended, and therefore the whole verse may be understood as predicting the destruction of the Jews; and is a

⁹Gentry, p. 198-200. Gentry explains how the gematria would work and cites, with references, a large number of Revelation scholars who have accepted Nero as being identified by the number. Even Hailey (Revelation, 298), who does not believe that the number represents a specific individual, writes, “Of the many efforts to reduce the 666 to the name of a man, the most popular choice has been Nero Caesar, which in the Greek is Neron Kaisar. Translated into the Hebrew script and applying the Hebrew system of gematria, the name can be translated into the desired number, 666; however, in Greek it would be 1005.”

¹⁰Gentry, p. 201-2. Gentry argues that the variant is intentional based on the idea that the number was originally only three letters in the Greek language and it would be difficult to confuse the two letters which would result in a change from 666 to 616. Chilton adds, “Of some related interest is the fact that if Nero's name is written without the final *n* (i.e., the way it would occur to a Gentile to spell it in Hebrew), it yields the number 616 - which is exactly the variant reading in a few New Testament manuscripts. The most reasonable explanation for this variant is that it arose from the confusion over the final *n*” (Chilton, The Days of Vengeance, 351).

¹¹Homer Hailey, Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 299. Hailey writes, “Throughout the book, seven expresses the idea of perfection or completeness: the seven churches, seven horns, seven eyes, seven spirits, and so forth. So six, which falls below the sacred seven, can never be seven or reach perfection; therefore, it symbolizes the imperfect, that which is human and destined to fail. It is said that to the Jews the number six was an omen or symbol of dread and doom, so when it was tripled, 666, it represented the completeness of doom and failure.”

¹²Gentry, p. 125-6. Gentry cites Ignatius (c. 50-115), Justin Martyr (c. 100-165), Irenaeus (c. 130-202), Melito of Sardis (c. 190), Tertullian (c. 160-220), Hippolytus (c. 170-236), Cyprian (c. 195-258) and Lactantius (c. 240-320).

presumptive proof that the Apocalypse was written *before* the final overthrow of the Jewish state.”¹³

6. The treading underfoot of the holy city by the Gentiles was a future event when John wrote (Revelation 11:1-2).
 - a. It is obvious that there is a mixture of the literal and figurative in this passage (chapter 11). For example, the great city of 11:8 is described spiritually as Sodom and Egypt. It is also described as “where also our Lord was crucified.”
 - b. There are many theories regarding the symbolism of the temple, altar, outer court and even the holy city.
 - 1) The similarity between this passage and the words of Jesus in describing the destruction of Jerusalem is striking (compare Revelation 11:2 with Luke 21:24).
 - 2) If Revelation 11:2 is speaking of the literal destruction of the city of Jerusalem, some measure of figurative interpretation must be employed since the literal temple was totally destroyed (Matthew 24:2).
 - 3) Although the time period “forty-two months” is viewed by some as symbolic, it should be noted that it also equals the length of the Jewish-Roman war (spring 67 to summer 70; see Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5; the locusts in 9:5 are given power to torment for five months - the length of the final siege of Jerusalem).
 7. A major character in the conflict of the book is the great harlot. She is hated by the ten kings who are represented by the ten horns on the same beast (Revelation 17:16).
 - a. The ten kings may be a reference to the ten provincial governors in the empire who provided armies for Rome or perhaps to an indeterminate number of other armies who encamped around Jerusalem in the course of its besiegement.
 - b. Associated with the beast, the ten kings are united in their intention to give their power and authority to the beast (Revelation 17:12-13).
 - c. They will not only hate the harlot, but will “make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (Revelation 17:16; 18:8).
 - d. Revelation 17:17 explains that by giving their support to the beast these ten kings fulfill the purpose of God. Note the possible connection between Revelation 10:7, Luke 21:22 and the last phrase in this verse, “until the words of God are fulfilled.”
 - e. The relationship between the ten horns, the beast and the harlot does not describe the historical attitude of the provinces toward the city of Rome. If, on the other hand, Jerusalem is understood as the harlot, the idea of the ten horns supporting the beast (Rome and the empire) at the same time that they hate the harlot is more reasonable.
- F. Although this lesson contains only a brief discussion of the date of writing, several arguments offered against the early date include:

¹³Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, n.d.), Vol. 6, p. 971.

1. There wouldn't have been enough time for the churches of Asia, particularly the church at Ephesus, to have gotten in the condition they were.
 - a. This argument compares the condition of the churches as known from other New Testament epistles with their condition as described in the letters to the churches in Revelation.
 - b. In response, it should be noted, both historically and anecdotally, that it sometimes requires only a short time for the spiritual condition of a congregation to change drastically.
2. The persecution of Christians by Nero was not widespread.
 - a. Although it may be responded that the persecution of Christians by Rome is not the key conflict of the book, there is historical evidence in both secular and ecclesiastical writings that Nero's persecution was quite virulent and very probably extended beyond the environs of Rome.¹⁴
 - b. It is typically argued that the persecution of the church during the time of Domitian better fits the persecution described in Revelation. However, it is also admitted by a number of "late-daters" that the historical case for any Domitian persecution is weak.
 - 1) See *Searching The Scriptures*, June, July 1989, pp. 423-28, 447-52 for a written debate on the historicity of a Domitian persecution.
 - 2) "Thus, the documentary evidence for a general imperial persecution of Christianity under Domitian is deemed questionable by a number of competent scholars."¹⁵
3. Emperor worship was not mandated until Domitian's time.
4. Jerusalem doesn't seem to fit some of the descriptions of the harlot as well as the city of Rome would (cf. Rev. 17:18).
 - a. The apparent strength of this argument is due to a lack of appreciation for the importance of the city of Jerusalem.
 - b. It should be remembered that Jerusalem was the object of devotion among Jews scattered throughout the Roman empire.
5. It is thought by some that Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) claimed that John saw the apocalypse in the days of Domitian. Irenaeus' statement is ambiguous, however, and it is difficult to tell whether he meant John or the apocalypse had been seen at that time. Wallace quotes the statement, "*If it were necessary to have his name distinctly announced at the present time it would doubtless have been announced by him who saw the apocalypse; for it was not a great while ago that (it or he) was seen, but almost in our own generation, toward the end of Domitian's reign.*"¹⁶

¹⁴ Gentry, p. 290-295.

¹⁵ Gentry, p. 289.

¹⁶ Wallace, p. 25.

Revelation:

Wait on the Lord

Unit One: Introduction

Lesson Four: Message/Historical Background

I. The message of the book

- A. Psalm 94 describes the basic message of apocalyptic literature. The wicked persecute and mistreat the righteous, but God will take vengeance. The book of Revelation is detailed prophecy of the avenging of the blood of God's servants shed by a wicked and rebellious nation.
- B. Although determining and studying the specific application of Revelation to the readers of the apostle John's day has value in making the book more understandable, we don't want to miss the over-riding message of the book...which is the same as in all apocalyptic literature...God will win.
 1. The book of Revelation pictures a struggle between Jesus Christ and Satan. Persecuted saints were and are a part of that struggle.
 2. Whatever it may seem like on this earth, the dragon won't win ultimately. The saints of John's day needed to know that their struggle would eventually be victorious. In fact, regardless of what hardships, tribulations, persecutions we might face, we also need to know that Jesus has already won (see Revelation 12:10-12)!
 3. That fact provides comfort in the midst of troubles, assurance that we have chosen the right side, and motivation to continue to struggle against the dragon.
 4. Viewing Revelation is like reading a book where you skip to the last chapter of the story and find out how it ends.
- C. In a sense, the message of Revelation does not depend on our knowledge of the specific historical conflict contemplated in the book.
- D. Summary: “[A]pocalyptic functioned as a kind of pictorial narrative theodicy which acknowledges the legitimacy of the inevitable question found not only on the lips of scoffers, namely, ‘If there is a good God who is in control of things, why doesn't he do something about the present evil?’ The apocalyptists' response: ‘He will, for history is a unified story which is not over yet.’” (M. Eugene Boring, “*The Theology of Revelation*” Interpretation, 260.)

II. Historical Background

- A. Since the book of Revelation is about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the historical relationship between Jerusalem and Rome is of interest. Following is a brief summary of the relationship between the Jews and the Roman empire.

1. It appears that Rome came into major contact with Jewish affairs for the first time during the time of the Maccabeans. The Roman general Pompey took Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and backed the Maccabean leader Hyrcanus II as leader of Judea.
2. Herod, son of Antipater, was proclaimed “king of the Jews” in 37 B.C. Known as Herod the Great, he was exceptionally cruel and hated by the Jews, but he also renovated the temple, essentially rebuilding it in the process and making it a magnificent structure.
3. Control of Palestine was given to Herod's sons at his death.
4. After ten years Archelaus, one of Herod's sons and ruler of Judea, was replaced by a Roman procurator (A.D. 6). Roman procurators ruled until A.D. 41.
5. Herod Agrippa I ruled briefly over the area of Judea (A.D. 41-44). Acts 12 records his death.
6. At the death of Herod Agrippa, Judea was once again ruled by Roman procurators (Fadus [44-46]; Alexander [46-48]; Cumanus [48-52]; Felix [52-59]; Festus [59-61]; Albinus [61-65]; Florus [65-66]). These dates are taken from Merrill C. Tenney's New Testament Survey, p. 428.
 - a. These procurators were generally poor administrators and in fact some were involved in plundering the Jewish people.
 - b. Speaking of the conduct of these procurators, Ogden comments, “*The last and worst of them was Florus whose apparent aim as procurator was to prod the Jews into a war with Rome.*”¹
 - c. It may very well be that Florus was determined to push the Jews into a military conflict with Rome to cover up his own criminal malfeasance.

B. The Jews had been given special privileges by the Romans.

1. Note the following comment of Titus at the siege of Jerusalem (as quoted by Josephus): “It can therefore be nothing certainly but the kindness of us Romans which hath excited you against us; who, in the first place, have given you this land to possess; and, in the next place, have set over you kings of your own nation; and, in the third place, have preserved the laws of your forefathers to you, and have withal permitted you to live, either by yourselves or among others, as it should please you; and, what is our chief favour of all, we have given you leave to gather up that tribute which is paid to God, with such other gifts that are dedicated to him; nor have we called those that carried these donations to account, nor prohibited them; till at length you became richer than we ourselves, even when you were our enemies...”²
2. The Sanhedrin, with the Jewish high priest as its head, was given authority over all Jews in the known world. It was for this reason that Saul of Tarsus could be sent from one Roman province to another with letters from the high priest (e.g., Acts 9:1-2).
3. Although other nations subject to the Romans placed images of the Roman emperors in their temples and worshipped them as gods, the Jews steadfastly refused to do this and Rome acquiesced.

¹ Art Ogden, The Avenging of the Apostles & Prophets (privately published, 1985), p. 86.

² Wars; 6, 6, 2.

- C. Conflict between the Jewish nation and Rome, however, was inevitable.
1. The commitment of the Jews was to God first (as evidenced in part by their respect for the holy city, Jerusalem) and state second; the Romans were committed to state first and religion second.
 2. The Romans used emperor-worship as a means to unite a heterogeneous empire.
 - a. Emperor-worship began with Julius Caesar, who was “deified” by the Roman Senate after his death, and continued during the reigns of successive emperors.
 - b. Caligula (A.D. 37-41) ordered that a statue of himself be erected in the temple at Jerusalem. Fortunately, this order which would have certainly resulted in open war was not carried out because of his assassination.
 - c. *“Nero enjoyed having the populace sacrifice to his image, and would have had the people think of him as a god.”*³
 3. To some extent, the Christians suffered with the Jews in this conflict of allegiance, being considered by the Romans a sect of Judaism. And, indeed, the Christians shared the Jewish commitment to God before state. Eventually, the church would find herself in conflict with Rome also as a result of her unwillingness to worship the Roman emperor or pagan gods.
- D. In A.D. 66, there were a number of local uprisings in which Jewish rebels massacred Roman soldiers and the Herodian fortress Masada was taken from the Romans. War between Rome and the Jews was the result.
1. Cestius Gallus came from Syria in October, A.D. 66, besieged Jerusalem and probably could have taken the city (since the Jews were not really ready for protracted hostilities), but retreated for unknown reasons. Emboldened by his retreat, the Jews made the Romans pay a high price by means of guerrilla warfare against Gallus’ troops as they retreated.
 2. The emperor Nero sent one of his finest generals, Vespasian, to Palestine in the spring of A.D. 67 and Galilee was subdued by the fall of that year.
 3. The Jews gathered to make their final stand at Jerusalem.
 - a. There was factionalism between the Herodians and the Zealots.
 - b. Even the Zealots were divided among three leaders: Eleazer, Simon, leader of the Idumeans and John of Gishcala.
 4. Vespasian resumed the conflict in the spring of A.D. 68.
 5. Nero committed suicide in June of A.D. 68.
 6. After three men (Galba, Otho and Vitellius) had made their unsuccessful claims for the throne, Vespasian traveled to Rome to claim the position of emperor.
 7. Vespasian sent his son Titus back to Jerusalem; the siege was begun in April of A.D. 70.
 8. After terrible suffering on the part of the Jewish defenders, Jerusalem was taken in August of A.D. 70.

³ Hailey, p. 65.

9. The mountaintop fortress of Masada would not be captured until A.D. 73.
- E. In order to relate the story line of Revelation to the historical circumstances described above, note the following facts:
1. The sea beast was a persecutor of the saints (Revelation 13:5-7).
 - a. After the great fire in Rome in the summer of A.D. 64, Nero persecuted Christians until his death in A.D. 68, a period of 3 ½ years.
 2. The great harlot was also a persecutor of the saints (Revelation 17:3-6). She was drunk with the blood of the saints.
 - a. The Jews were the primary persecutors of Christians in the book of Acts.
 3. The sea beast supported the great harlot at first (Revelation 17:3, 7).
 - a. The Romans gave the Jews special privileges.
 4. The sea beast (specifically the ten horns of the beast) was responsible for the destruction of the great harlot (Revelation 17:12-17).
 - a. The Romans were responsible for destroying Jerusalem and the Jewish nation.
 5. In summary, the relationships and actions of the characters in the story line of Revelation match the circumstances of the relationship between the Romans, the Jews and the church.