

Revelation

Just as Genesis is the book of beginnings, Revelation is the book of endings. In it, the divine plan of redemption is brought to fruition and the holy name of God is vindicated before all creation. Although there are numerous prophecies in the Gospels and Epistles, Revelation is the only New Testament book that focuses primarily on prophetic events. Its title means “unveiling” or “disclosure.” The book is an unveiling of the character and plan of God. Penned by John during his exile on the island of Patmos, Revelation centers around visions and symbols of the resurrected Christ who alone has authority to judge the earth, remake it, and rule it in righteousness.

INTRODUCTION

John directed this prophetic word to seven selected churches in the Roman province of Asia (1:3-4). The messages to these churches in chapters 2 and 3 begin with Ephesus, the most prominent, and continue in a clockwise direction until Laodicea is reached. It is likely that this book was initially carried along this circular route. While each of these messages had particular significance for these churches, they were also relevant for the church as a whole (“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” 2:7,29).

Revelation was written to assure the recipients of the ultimate triumph of Christ over all who rise up against Him and His saints. The readers were facing dark times of persecution, and even worse times would follow. They needed to be encouraged to persevere by standing firm in Christ in view of God’s plan for the righteous and the wicked. This plan is especially clear in the stirring words of the epilogue (22:6-21). The book was also written to challenge complacent Christians to stop compromising with the world. Revelation also serves the additional purpose of providing a perspective on end-time events that would have meaning and relevance to the spiritual lives of all succeeding generations of Christians.

AUTHOR

Revelation was written by one author, “John,” mentioned four times (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). Jesus nicknamed John and his brother, James, “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). John was evidently among the Galileans who followed John the Baptist until they were called to follow Jesus at the outset of His public ministry (John 1:19-51).

The title of this book in the Greek text is *Apokalypsis Ioannou*, “Revelation of John.” It is also known as the “Apocalypse,” a transliteration of the word *apokalypsis*, meaning “unveiling,” “disclosure,” or “revelation.” Revelation is an unveiling of that which otherwise could not be known. A better title comes from the first verse: *Apokalypsis Iesou Christou*, “Revelation of Jesus Christ.” This could be taken as a revelation which came from Christ or as a revelation which is about Christ - both are appropriate. Because of the unified contents of this book, it should be called “Revelation” not “Revelations.”

DATE & SETTING

John’s effective testimony for Christ led the Roman authorities to exile him to the small, desolate island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea (1:9). This island of volcanic rock was one of several places to which the Romans banished criminals and political offenders.

Revelation was written at a time when Roman hostility to Christianity was turning into persecution (1:9; 2:10, 13). It is likely that John wrote this book in A.D. 95 or 96. The date of his release from Patmos is unknown.