

When Was Revelation Written?

The dating of the books and letters within the Bible have long been the Holy Ground of theologians. While modern interpretations only give passing mention of the book's date of authorship, older, more conservative commentaries will cause today's readers to slip into a stupor.

The bible doesn't give us a date when Revelation was written. Even if John had written a date on the original parchment, a debate would still rage. Ordinary church-going folks assume Revelation was written last because it's the last book in the bible. This simplistic understanding makes more sense when compared to the paper and ink scholars have wasted on the subject. When you remove the scholarly language guessing when it was written, you still end up with conjecture.

One reason a late date is assigned to Revelation may have to do with it taking so long for it to be accepted as part of the NT canon.¹ History tells us that the early church had problems accepting the book due to the highly figurative language.

The vigor and energy spent on trying to prove when Revelation was written is human-centered. People interpret the book from a presumptuous perspective and defend it accordingly. They slant everything toward whatever supports their beliefs. When it comes to figuring out when John wrote the book, the field is sharply divided between dates *before* and *after* the destruction of Jerusalem. Why this particular event? The primary reason is due to the *methods* of interpretation used. To add to the problem, many Christians ignorant of history regard Jerusalem's destruction by Rome in 70 AD as inconsequential. This is like saying the Jewish Holocaust caused by Hitler was only a glitch in history. They elevate a future event (typically seen in *their* lifetime) as far more important than the destruction of God's people and covenant two millennia ago.

Scriptures supporting an early dating of Revelation's writing:

- John was told that he must again “prophesy before many peoples.” (Rev 10:11) Jerome wrote that John was seen in 96 AD, had to be carried to the assemblies, and could speak only a few words.² As such, it is doubtful that John could have carried out that commission.
- Most think that the present-day church must slip into apostasy before the “end times.” However, the NT suggests that the early church was *already* in a state of apostasy.

¹ The word ‘canon’ comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning ‘reed’ or ‘measurement.’ A canonical book is one that measures up to the standard of Holy Scripture. Thus, the canon of Scripture refers to the books that are considered the authoritative Word of God.

² Jerome, *In Gal.* vi, 10)

- The Galatian churches were “quickly deserting Him who called” them. (Gal 1:6)
- Paul said that the apostasy of which he told Timothy (1 Tim 4:1-6) was already underway. (2 Tim 3:1-5)
- Paul spoke of wolves coming into the church. He told the elders who were standing there, “*from your own number* men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on *your* guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.” (Acts 20:29-31)
- John also referred to the apostasy as happening in his time when he wrote, “they went out from us, but they were not of us.” (1 John 2:19)
- John said that Antichrist was already present, proof that it was “the last hour.” (1 John 2:18; 4:3)
- Paul’s description of “the Jerusalem above” (Gal 4:26) and the description of Mount Zion...the city of the living God...the heavenly Jerusalem...myriads of angels...the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (Heb 12:22-23) seem to draw their imagery from Revelation, implying that the book was extant during that time.

When you read the verses above and realize that all of those congregations disappeared into history eons ago, it’s hard to support a “future” timeline of the events of which Paul and the other apostles referred.

Writes Kurt Simmons:

External sources are human and not divine, and therefore are subject to error. The internal testimony of the book is by far the more important. And here the evidence is clearly weighted in favor that Revelation was written before the siege of Jerusalem. First, it should be noted that the book makes numerous references to the imminence of the predicted events. The admonition to “read, hear and keep” the contents “for the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3), clearly shows that the events depicted would come upon that generation (“must shortly come to pass” Rev. 1:1) Jesus gave repeated warnings to the churches that he would come upon them quickly in the events of the vision and catch them unawares if they failed to repent. (Rev. 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11; 16:15; 22:6, 10, 12, 20) Jesus told the apostles that before they had opportunity to preach in all the towns of Israel he would return: “But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.” (Matt. 10:23; *cf.* 16:27, 28) Jesus warned Caiaphas that he would “see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Mk. 14:62) This is an obvious reference

to the destruction of the Jewish nation by Rome. Given so many express statements of Christ that he would come upon that generation, it is indeed anomalous that men should seem disposed to look everywhere *but* AD 70 for fulfillment of the vision. To look to the myriad pages of medieval history or the fall of Rome when abundant testimony exists showing Christ's return in vengeance upon the Jews of that generation (Matt. 23:36; 24:35; Mk. 13:30; Lk. 21:32) is to disregard the obvious in favor of the doubtful and obscure.³

We could go on, but the issue of when Revelation was written will be dealt with as we come to those passages under study.

³ *The Consummation of the Ages*, p. 19, 20 ISBN: 0-9728063-0-X