



# Revelation: Introductory

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# Authorship of Revelation

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# Apostle John: the Traditional View

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- Supported by most of our ancient sources
- Justin (c150)
- Fathers cited by Eusebius:
  - Melito, Theophilus, Apollonius (170-180)
- Muratorian Canon (c170-190)
- Irenaeus (c170)
- Hippolytus (c220)
- Origen (c240)



## Justin Martyr (c150)

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*And further, there was a certain man, even with us, whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied in a revelation which came to him that those who believed in our Christ will spend a thousand years in Jerusalem, and after that, the general and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all will come to pass at one and the same time.*

*Dialogue with Trypho 81.4*



# Fathers cited by Eusebius

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- Eusebius, not in favor of apostolic authorship, mentions three fathers who refer to John's Revelation.
- As he does not use them to support his view, they apparently felt the Apostle wrote it.
- They are:
  - Melito of Sardis (c170)
  - Theophilus of Antioch (c180)
  - Apollonius (c180)



## Muratorian Canon (c170-190)

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*... since the blessed Apostle Paul himself, imitating the example of his predecessor, John, wrote to seven churches only by name.... For John also, though he wrote in the Apocalypse to seven churches, nevertheless he speaks to them all.... We accept only the Apocalypses of John and of Peter....*



## Irenaeus (c170)

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*John also, the Lord's disciple, when beholding the sacerdotal and glorious advent of His kingdom, says in the Apocalypse: 'I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks....'*

*Against Heresies 4.20.11*



# Hippolytus (c225)

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*Isaiah, then, prophesies these things. But let us see if John uttered things similar to his. For this man, being in the island of Patmos, saw a revelation of awe-inspiring mysteries, which he relates unreservedly and teaches to others. Tell me, O blessed John, Apostle and pupil of the Lord, what have you seen and what have you heard about Babylon? Awake and speak, for she also banished you. 'And there came one of the seven angels, who had the seven vials.... =*

*Of Antichrist 25-26*





## Origen (c240)

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*What shall we say of him who reclined on the breast of Jesus, I mean John? who has left one gospel, in which he confesses that he could write so many that the whole world could not contain them. He also wrote the Apocalypse, commanded as he was, to conceal, and not to write the voices of the seven thunders.*

*Commentary on John 5; cited in Eusebius'  
Church History 6.25*



# Opposition to the Traditional View

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- Usually someone else named John:
  - Eusebius – John the Elder
  - More recently – John Mark
  - Anchor Bible – John the Baptist’s circle
  - Dionysius – Cerinthus
- Ancient opponents of Johannine authorship:
  - Dionysius of Alexandria (231-264)
  - Eusebius (c270-340)



## Dionysius (c250)

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*But it is highly probable that Cerinthus, the same that established the heresy that bears his name, designedly affixed the name [of John] to his own forgery. For one of the doctrines that he taught was that Christ would have an earthly kingdom.*

*On Promises 2; cited in  
Eusebius, Ch History 3.28*



## Eusebius (c325)

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*For it is probable that the second [John the Elder], if it be not allowed that it was the first [John the Apostle], saw the revelation ascribed to John.*

*Church History 3.39*



# Arguments against John

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- Style not like John's Gospel & Epistles
  - Has many peculiar Greek constructions
  - Invention of past & future participles for verb "to be"
  - Use of *apo* with the nominative
- Papias' statement implies there were two Johns.
- Two traditional tombs of John in Ephesus



# Responses to These Arguments

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- There is no tradition against apostolic authorship. There is clear tradition for it.
- Papias' statement can be understood differently.
- The two tombs may be a result of tourism.
- Internal evidence:
  - Author calls himself John.
  - Revelation uses "*logos*" to refer to Jesus.
  - Stylistic differences should not be overemphasized.



# Date of Revelation

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# Internal Evidence of Date

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- Author on Patmos, apparently exiled (1:9)
  - Not explicit about exile, but strong hints
  - Reference to writing during vision (10:4) implies it was written then, not later.
  - When was this exile?
- Some try to use 13:18 (666) and 17:10-11 (seven kings) to date Roman emperor at time
  - Not very successful





# External Evidence of Date

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- Not as unanimous as for author, but still pretty strong.
  - End of Domitian's reign (95-96)
  - Other dates suggested
    - Claudius' reign (c50)
    - Nero's reign (60s)
    - Trajan's reign (98-117)



## Irenaeus (c170)

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*We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of the Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.*

*Against Heresies 5.30.3*



# Others Favoring Domitian's Reign

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- Eusebius' chronology dates it to the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Domitian (95-96).
- Jerome accepts the same date.



## Epiphanius (c400)

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- Dates Revelation during Claudius' reign (so roughly 50 AD).
- But has John 90 years old!
- Could John at 70 have outrun Peter to the tomb?
- Probably a slip on emperor's name.
- John's age fits Domitian's reign.



## Nero's Reign (60s)

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- Theophylact (11<sup>th</sup> cen) says book written 32 years after the ascension. This would put it somewhere 62-65 AD, depending on the date of Jesus' ascension.
- Introduction to the Syriac translation of Revelation (6<sup>th</sup> cen) dates book to exile under Nero.



## Summary on Date

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- Best and earliest tradition puts book at about 95 AD under Domitian's persecution.
- This better fits the situation in Laodicea, as it had been destroyed in 60 or 64 and would still be rebuilding at Nero's time.
- The picture of the Asian churches (Rev 2-3) looks more like Paul has been gone a good while.



# Interpretation of Revelation

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# Schools of Interpretation

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- Revelation is one of the most difficult books in Scripture because of its large figurative element.
- There are four major approaches to the book
  - Preterite
  - Historical
  - Futurist
  - Idealist





# Preterite Approach

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- Proponents
  - Alcasar, a Jesuit (c1615) to counter Protestant view
  - Hugo Grotius, Moses Stuart, Jay Adams
- Features
  - Most of book fulfilled early in church history, usually by about 400 AD
  - Only 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, etc. still to come



# Historical Approach

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- Proponents
  - Berengaud (11<sup>th</sup> cen) first known advocate
  - Wyclif, Luther, many A-mils, Alford (pre-mil)
- Features
  - Fulfillments throughout church history
  - Not necessarily in chronological order
  - Problem – have to revise every century or so, as new events need to be fit into scheme
  - Result – view not so common now as earlier



# Futurist Approach

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- Proponents
  - Apparently held by early church fathers, though hard to distinguish with so little church history.
  - Ribera (c1580) revived view to take heat off the Pope.
  - Held by most modern pre-mils.
- Features
  - Most fulfillment (ch 4 on?) is still future, near end of age, second coming.



# Idealist Approach

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- Proponents
  - Auberlen (19<sup>th</sup> cen), Milligan, Lenski?
- Features
  - Details not linked to single, specific events in past, present or future
  - Instead they picture general teachings on the warfare between good & evil



# Combined Approaches

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- Many interpreters now combine two or more of these previous four approaches.
- Beasley-Murray is preterist & futurist.
- Hoeksema is idealist & futurist.
- Swete is preterist & idealist.



# Some Principles of Interpretation

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- Revelation is Scripture.
- Revelation is revelation.
- Revelation makes considerable use of figure.
- Apparently more than one of the approaches is useful in understanding the book.



# Revelation is Scripture

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- So inspired, inerrant
  - Don't interpret so that its predictions are falsified.
- So intended to be understood
  - Don't interpret as too obscure.
  - Interpretation should make some reasonable sense to original audience.
  - Concentrate on text, not on commentators.



# Revelation is Revelation

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- Don't get sidetracked on what **John** is allegedly doing.
  - He tells us he really had this as a vision.
  - So he claims to be recorder, not inventor.
- According to Rev 1:1:
  - The author is God.
  - The revealer is Jesus.
  - The messenger is an angel.
  - The recipient is John.
- This may explain some of the style differences.





# Revelation uses Figure

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- Much of this comes from the OT, which is used & adapted by God/Jesus (not John!)
- Some of this comes from Greco-Roman culture.
- It looks like a few of the figures pick up ideas previously circulating in pagan circles.



# Several Approaches

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- Futurist – the second coming, etc. hasn't occurred yet.
- Preterite – some of the symbolism comes from John's time.
- Historical/Idealist – the figures may have been chosen to resonate with the experience of Christians throughout the church age.



# Outline of Revelation

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Adapted from G. E. Ladd



# Outline of Revelation

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- Prologue (1:1-8)
- The 1<sup>st</sup> Vision: The Present (1:9-3:22)
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Vision: The Future (4:1-16:21)
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Vision: The End (17:1-21:8)
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Vision: The Beginning (21:9-22:5)
- Epilogue (22:6-21)



# Outline of Revelation

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- Prologue (1:1-8)
- The First Vision: the Present (1:9-3:22)
  - Vision of the Glorified Christ (1:9-20)
  - His Letters to the Churches (2:1-3:22)



# Outline of Revelation

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- The Second Vision: the Future (4:1-16:21)
  - The heavenly throne-room (4:1-11)
  - The seven seals (5:1-8:1)
  - The seven trumpets (8:2-11:20)
  - The 2<sup>nd</sup> vision interlude (12:1-14:20)
  - The seven bowls (15:1-16:21)



# Outline of Revelation

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- The Third Vision: the End (17:1-21:8)
  - Babylon destroyed (17:1-19:5)
    - The woman on the beast (17:1-18)
    - The judgment of Babylon (18:1-19:5)
  - Final victory (19:6-21:8)
    - The marriage of the Lamb (19:6-10)
    - Christ's second coming (19:11-21)
    - The millennial rule (20:1-10)
    - The last judgment (20:11-15)
    - The new heaven & new earth (21:1-8)



# Outline of Revelation

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- The Fourth Vision: the Beginning (21:9-22:5)
  - The new Jerusalem (21:9-27)
  - The river of life (22:1-5)
- Epilogue (22:6-21)





The End!

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See Revelation for Details