

# Session #2: The Book of Revelation: Introduction, Part 2

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As we discussed last week, so that we open ourselves to hear the true Word of God and not base our study on personal opinions and idea, we need to do a bit of “homework as we begin.” Last week we looked at the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the teachings of the Catholic Church in terms of how we are to invest ourselves and study God’s Holy Word. Today we will continue laying our foundation to this study by looking at the “Who”, “When” and other important background information regarding the Book of Revelation. We will be spending a little more time with each question than I have in the past because I have discovered nothing is simple with the Book of Revelation. What I hope to offer today will give us the footing we need as we dive into the deep waters of the Book of Revelation.

## **Who is the Author**

One of the first questions we should always seek to understand is, who did God inspire to write this document. Identifying the author we have a better appreciation of their work by comparing and contrasting images, ideas and teachings with later or earlier work (if there is any). It also gives us direction as we seek to “get inside their head”, and this is particularly true with the Book of Revelation. We know that the book of Revelation’s author is named John because he identifies himself four times: Chapter 1:1, 4, 9 and 22:8. But with the name come no other identifying information. Scholars in the past have suggested such individuals as John the Baptist (who would have written before his beheading, Matthew Chpt. 14), John Mark (who is also the author of the Gospel of Mark), an unknown prophet named John and finally some unknown individual who, to gain authority, used the name John. There are those scholars who offer these men as potential writers based mostly on the fact that the basic writing style of the Gospel of John and the letters in the New Testament we know were written by John are different. In light of the inconsistency of writing style, the vast majority of Catholic scholarship believes that the Apostle of Christ, John the beloved, the author of the Gospel of John and the letters of John is the author of the Book of Revelation. What do they base their confidence in? While there are many reasons I offer four for today’s conversation:

1. It is reasonable that any author could have different styles of writing. Writing in narrative one moment and poetry the next is not out of the realm of possibility. We all write in the style that will communicate most effectively.
2. The early Church Fathers such as St. Justin Martyr (100-165 AD), St. Origin of Alexandria (184-263 AD, St. Athanasius (293-373 AD), Hippolytus (170-235 AD) and St. Jerome (347-420 AD) are in consensus that John the Apostle is the author of Revelation.

3. The authority of John the Apostle. As one of the original twelve, John would have been held unique authority (along with the other Apostles) within the early Church. Historians offer that John the Apostle settled in Asia Minor, just outside of the city of Ephesus. Because of his proximity, John would have held authority over not only the seven Churches identified in the book of revelation, but all the Churches in Asia Minor
4. While the writing styles between the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation may be different, there are too many parallels between the two documents to disregard NOT having the same author:
  - a. The author of both uses the same “titles” or images when referring to Jesus.
    - i. Jesus as “The Word” – John 1:1, Revelation 19:13
    - ii. Jesus as “the Lamb of God” – John 1:29, Revelation 5:6-10, 12
  - b. The themes present in both works:
    - i. Christian worship in the spirit
      1. John 4:23 Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman and says *“But the hour is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth”*,
      2. Revelation 1:10 the author says: *I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day*
    - ii. Salvation is seen as a gift of living water –
      1. John 4:14 Jesus says to the same Samaritan woman: *but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”*
      2. Revelation 21:6 we hear Jesus say: *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.*
    - iii. Jesus as the giver of the bread of life
      1. John 6:22-59 – the Bread of Life Discourse. Jesus is teaching and says *do not work for manna which does not fill you.... I am the bread of life.*
      2. Revelation 2:17 – John talks about *hidden or sacred manna* (Manna is bread)
    - iv. Motif of Bridegroom and the Bride
      1. John 3:29 we hear John the Baptist speaking with a nuptial theme using bride and bridegroom to speak of the Messiah and His followers.
      2. Revelation 19:7 we will read of the wedding of the Lamb.
  - c. Mary, the Mother of Jesus plays a prominent role in both documents
    - i. John 19:26-27 we read of Mary at the foot of the cross. No other gospel offers that.
    - ii. Revelation 12:17 John writes about a woman who scholars identify as Mary, the Mother of God.
  - d. Mary as being called ““Woman”

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- i. John 2:4, the wedding feast at Cana Jesus calls Mary “Woman”. John 19:25 at the foot of the cross as Jesus directs John the Apostle to take Mary into his home and life: “Woman, see your son.”
- ii. Revelation 12 John describes a woman clothed with the sun that Catholic scholarship has identified as Mary.
- e. Satan being cast out
  - i. John 12:31 we hear Jesus speaking about his death and how the “ruler of this world” (Satan) will be cast out.
  - ii. Revelation 12:9 John has a vision of Michael the Archangel casting out the devil.
- f. Jesus as the true Temple
  - i. John 2:21 Jesus tells the Apostles, “Destroy the Temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Jesus is talking about his body and the resurrection
  - ii. Revelation 21:22 John writes 5

So, in conclusion, while there may be another who was the actually author, most Catholic scholars point to the evidence I have given above and much more in stating the believe that John the Apostle is the author of the Book of revelation

### **Date it was Written**

The next question we need to look at is “when”. When was the Book of Revelation written. This is important for any document in the Bible but particularly the Book of Revelation, because depending on when the document is dated, when we believe that John had his vision; this date will determine how the symbolism is to be interpreted and understood. And guess what? As with most elements of this document the dating of Revelation has differing opinions as well.

The majority opinion for centuries has held that John had his vision late in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, possibly 90 AD during the Reign of Domitian who was emperor of Rome 81 to 96 AD. The basis of this understanding and belief begins in the work of St. Irenaeus in his article “Against Heresies”. It is through his belief in a later dating that has led most others to their conclusion that the Book of Revelation is mostly focused on the end of time. But there are problems with this conclusion in regard to any date after 70 AD.

First, while all will agree certain elements of Revelation speak to End Time possibilities, other elements, such as the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor speak to the present moment meaning the first century in which the letter was written. In those part of the document John speaks of a great persecution but there is lack of evidence of any persecution under Domitian who served as Roman Emperor from 81-96 AD or any of the emperors immediately before him or after him. On the

other hand, Nero served as emperor from 54-68 AD and his hatred of the Christians was major. Persecution of the Christians under Nero was extreme.

Secondly, we will spend a great deal of time discussing, as we study, the upcoming destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, speaking of it as something that has not yet come about. The Temple was the core and center of every Jew's life. This is where God was to be found. Historically we know that the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD along with the city of Jerusalem during the Roman Siege of Jerusalem. If something like the Vatican had already been destroyed why would we not have written about it? Why was this battle and destruction not even mentioned in John's Revelation?

These two facts are supported in many other ways. Here are just a few of the reasons more and more scholars today are moving towards dating the book of Revelation as having been written around 60 AD.

- Historical evidence:
  - History of St. John. We know that John received his vision and wrote the Book of Revelation while exiled to the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). Who exiled John there? Nero. When was Nero emperor? 54-68 AD.
  - Persecution of the Christians was at a climax during the reign of Nero. Nero was known for his hatred of the Christians blaming them for the burning of Rome. There is an account from a 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman historian (Tacitus) that gives an account of Nero's hatred. (If you saw the movie *Paul, an Apostle of Christ* you will remember the horrific scenes of Christians being burned alive on the streets. Nero would entertain his guests at parties by burning Christians alive.)
- In the Text itself:
  - Within the individual letters we hear of Christian persecution – Revelation chapter 2-3
  - In the vision God speaks of an IMPENDING judgment on Jerusalem – Rev 11:7-8. If the destruction had already happened why write as if it were coming?
  - Revelation 17:9-10 speaks of: *seven heads or seven hills on which the woman is seated; there are seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come and when he comes he must remain a little while.* First it is important to know that Rome is built on seven hills. Second, when we look at the 1<sup>st</sup> century historical context and look to the history of the Roman emperors we find the following:
    - *five of whom have fallen*
      1. Julius 46-44 BC
      2. Augustus 21 BC – 14 AD
      3. Tiberias 14 -37 AD
      4. Garus 37 – 41 AD
      5. Claudius 41-54 AD
    - *one is* : Nero 54-68 AD

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- *the other has not yet come and when he comes he must remain a little while:*  
Galba June 68 to January 69, seven months.

- The famous number of “the beast”. We read in Revelation 13:18: *Let the person who has insight calculate the number the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.* Those scholars who hold with the dating of the book of Revelation as in the 60’s AD suggest that this number refers to Nero. We all know that numbers can be identified with letters. Most of us studied the Roman numerals (I=1, V=5, X=10...). The same is true of the Hebrew tradition where consonants have numeric values. Scholars have shown if you take the name Caesar Nero and transfer the name into Hebrew and then add up the number of the consonants, the value you come up with is 666. An interesting side fact. In ancient copies of the Book of Revelation which are written in Latin, we read in Revelation 13:18 that the mark of the Beast is 616. When you translate the Latin form of Nero Caesar, translate that into Hebrew and then take the numeric value of the name it equals 616.
- Nero Caesar**

נרונקסר

ך = 200

ס = 60

ק = 100

נ = 50

ך = 200

נ = 50

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**Sum: 666**

of

to

you
- World ending imagery. Throughout the book of Revelation we find this imagery of the world coming to the end which has given much life to the understanding of this book being about the final end of all humanity. But, as we spoke of last week, we must read the Bible, not with 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes but through the culture and time of the one who was writing. John was a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew. In the Hebrew tradition, the world ending imagery did not mean the end of the world but the end of a world order. The prophets used it to speak of the end of a King’s reign (Isaiah 13:1-19 – the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon). Jesus uses this language in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 in the Olivet Discourse when He is prophesying about the destruction of Jerusalem. Scholars suggest what Jesus offered in a short sermon, John writes a whole book about.

In Conclusion, most contemporary Catholic scholarship see this, and there is a great deal I am not sharing, as sufficient evidence to date the Book of Revelation as having been written during the reign of Nero Caesar, while St. John was on the Island of Patmos sometime in the late 60’s AD.

### Who is the Audience

Next we ask the question who was this book written for and once again with the book of Revelation there are unique issues. Scholars have found four major ways of understanding to who this book was written for.

1. **Historicist View:** According to this theory the book of Revelation was written to identify the seven major stages of Church history. Beginning with Christ and ending with His Second

Coming you can map the history of the Catholic Church. This panoramic view is completely anti-Catholic because it delegates the role of the Anti-Christ, the whore of Babylon to the Catholic Church.

2. Preterist View: Preter is Latin and means the past. This theory holds that the entire Book of Revelation, except final chapters, are speaking about the 1<sup>st</sup> century Church experience. As we have discussed in the dating of this document, Rome and Nero play significant roles and the book is foretelling of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. This is a completely historical viewpoint which leads to a problem as 21<sup>st</sup> century readers. Why include this as part of the canon of the Bible? If this is simply a historical document it hold no meaning for us today.
3. Futuristic View: These folk take a complete 180 and see the book of Revelation as being completely about the future. Many Protestant Churches interpret this book that way. The problem with this view is that, once again, it becomes meaningless for everyone but the final generation. There is another problem for us as Catholics because once again we become the “bad guys”.
4. Idealistic View: This opinion was developed through the early Church Fathers in what is called the Alexandrian School and is represented in the teachings of Ss Clement and Origin. Their interpretation is that the Book of Revelation was not really aimed at the past nor is it about the future, but the true interpretation is to see the images as spiritual. That this book could only be understood through an allegorical interpretation. Coming from this view point one should only be concerned with the ideas and principles that are timeless truths that concern every generation of Christian seeking to learn and live a life of faith. Problem with this view is that there is no relevance to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christian and to those historical references.

After looking at all these different viewpoints we today can understand why there is so much confusion around the Book of Revelation. So, as we learned last week we use the wisdom of the Tradition or teachings of the Catholic Church and ask ourselves, what does the Catholic Church teach? To quote Dr. Jeff Cavins: *Favored by most of the Church Fathers, the Catholic Church takes the stand that St. John was describing the situation of the Church in his own time and he is also surveying the panorama of the last times while also taking into consideration our present age. (Revelation: The Kingdom Yet to Come, DVD Series by Ascension Press)*

So, who is this book written for; who is the audience and what is the purpose in writing? What the Catholic Church has done is to take the good that is in each of these approaches and collected them into one. The way we will study the book of Revelation is to see the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians as the primary audience. St. John is writing to those Christians who are undergoing persecution under the reign of Nero. We will also discover that in the last few chapters God gave visions to John regarding the end of all time. But if that was not enough of an audience, the Book of Revelation as do all the documents of the Bible, have a spiritual significance for every generation. As we read and study we

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too, as did the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians, find comfort in our own persecutions, challenges and lessons for our faith lives and direct our hearts and souls towards the God of all history and every generation.

## Main Themes

As we read and study the Book of Revelation we will see two main themes:

- Judgement, primarily on Jerusalem and the Temple but also at the end of all time.
- Liturgy, as we gaze into the heavenly realms and the Supper of the Lamb

These two ideas will repeat throughout the document and for today's conversation give us a good overview of the Book of Revelation.

First we will look at the theme of judgement. As we study we will see that through the vision of St. John, God is bringing judgement in three realms: Nero and the Roman Empire, Jerusalem and the Temple leadership as well as those Jews who rejected the Messiah and finally, judgement on all of humanity at the end of all time in their rejection of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. To see this we must understand the idea of the Book of Revelation as written as a Covenant lawsuit. Scholars have come to see that the structure of an Old Testament Hebrew Covenant lawsuit from beginning to end. To understand this we must remember that much of the Old Testament is the telling of God establishing a covenantal relationship beginning with Abraham (Genesis 12) and structured through the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24). It is the telling of oaths sworn and blessings promised if the Israelites lived up to their promises and were obedient to God but of judgements or curses should the Israelites fail to live up to their end of the commitment. (Just as an aside: This is why many people do not like to read the Old Testament because all they see is the harsh judgement of God. What they fail to see is God's merciful patience and humanities outrageous disobedience which forces God's hand in judgement or punishment.)

In a Jewish Covenantal lawsuit there are five sections:

1. Preamble: This part identifies the power of the King or in our case God.
2. Historical Prologue: Next come the recounting of the history of the dominant parties past relationship leading up to the present issue.
3. Ethical Stipulation: This recounts the obligations or responsibility that were agreed to by the lesser party, in the Old Testament and in the time of Christ this would be the Israelites/Jews. Today, it would be you and I as Christians brought into faith through Baptism and committed in Confirmation.
4. Sanctions: Here we have a list of the blessings to be received by the lesser party in their obedience to the King/God, as well as the curses or punishments (judgements) if the covenant should be broken. We know that God in His perfection never breaks His Word.
5. Succession: When the covenant is broken by a given generation punishment/judgement ensues, but this does not break the covenant. A covenant continues regardless of one

parties lack of participation. As such, the succession discusses plans to continue the covenant with future generations.

What we will see as we study the Book of Revelation, as one document but also as within the document these five moments repeated. Revelation as well as the Book of Hosea are “lawsuit” documents brought against the current generation, and in the case of Revelation that means 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome and the Jewish people and Temple. It is interesting to note, in Matthew 21 we hear Jesus saying as a summation to the parable of the Tenants: *The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit (21:43)*. Jesus directed his comments to the Chief Priests and Temple leadership and they knew it. It was then they got serious about destroying Jesus. It is also interesting to note that God gave the Israelites 40 years to wander in the desert and think about their breaking the covenant by building the golden calf thus allowing that present generation to die so that the Covenant might continue with the next generation. It is also interesting to note that from the rejection and death of Christ to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is basically 40 years.

The second major theme we find in the Book of Revelation is to understand it as a book of liturgy. Liturgy is defined as public worship or public prayer. From the beginning, in small details, through individual moments and the book as a whole, this is a book of public prayer. Pope Benedict said, in referring to Revelation that it was a *“book of the heavenly liturgy which is present to the whole Church as a standard for our own liturgy.”*

In small ways liturgy enters into the Book of Revelation in details such as St. John having his vision while celebrating the “Lord’s Day” (Rev 1:10); through the sound of Trumpets (Rev 1:10, 8:2) which are not only an instrument of Judgement (the fall of Jericho) but also used in the rituals of the Temple. Other Temple liturgical tools we will encounter: Lampstands (Rev 1:12), Altar and Incense (8:3-4, 5:8), Presbyters/Priests (4:4), Manna/Communion (2:17), Harps (14:2), and Songs of Praise and Adoration such as Hallelujah and Holy, Holy, Holy (19:1-6, 4:8).

There will be moments that the “veil will be removed” and we will gaze into the heavenly liturgy in which we share every time we attend Mass. We have already talked about the images of Jesus as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride. As we study Revelation we will be invited into the “wedding feast of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:7-9) which modern scholarship understands to mean the liturgy of the Eucharist, the Mass. The word used to identify the Lord’s coming at the end of time is the Greek word *Parousia* which literally translates to presence.

Finally, some scholars suggest that if you take the Book of Revelation as one, you will see that it is divided into two parts just as our Eucharistic celebration is divided into two parts.



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## **Introduction, Part 2**

1. The Liturgy of the Word. In taking chapters 1-11 they make the statement for these chapters corresponding to the preparing for and hearing God's Word. Chapters 2-3 we read about the seven letters to the seven churches. In 1:3 we are told by John that what he has written down is meant to be read aloud. And finally, Revelations 5:1, 6:1 and 8:1 we read about a scroll "written on the front and back".
2. The Liturgy of the Eucharist. Chapters 11:19 through 22 speak primarily of the Temple liturgy and of the Supper of the Lamb.

To sum all of this up, in the Book of Revelation we have the themes of Judgement and Liturgy running throughout. Four times we will see these themes repeat. To echo many Catholic scholars – Liturgy is warfare. It is through our public prayer, primarily through our celebration of the Eucharist/Mass that God comes, time and time again, to save His people, to vindicate His people as well as to bring judgement and destruction upon those who set themselves up as enemies of God. Think about it. At each Mass we hear God's Word which is meant to comfort us in our affliction but should, more often than not, afflict us in our comfortable worldly ways. If we listen and obey then, when we enter into the Liturgy of the Eucharist we find communion with God. But those very same words that bring comfort to the obedient should bring despair and conviction for those who are not living by God's commandments. The obedient will seek reconciliation but those who have hardened their hearts will eventually find God's judgement as harsh. But we must remember, just as Rome and the Temple leadership brought God's judgement upon themselves so too will each disobedient and rebellious of every age.

### **Structure and Outline**

1. Revelation 1:1-8 Introductory Comments
2. Revelation 1:9-11:19 The First Cycle of Visions
  - a. Rev 1:9-20 The initial vision of one like the Son of Man
  - b. Rev 2:1-3:22 The seven letters to the seven Churches of Asia Minor
  - c. Rev 4:1-5:14 The vision of God's throne and the Lamb
  - d. Rev 6:1-7:17 The opening of the seven seals
  - e. Rev 8:1-11:19 The seven trumpets
3. Revelation 12:1-20:15 The Second Cycle of Visions
  - a. Rev 12:1-18 Vision of the woman and the dragon
  - b. Rev 13:1-18 Vision of the beasts of the sea and the land
  - c. Rev 14:1-20 Vision of the Lamb and imminent judgement
  - d. Rev 15:1-16:21 Visions of the seven bowls
  - e. Rev 17:1-18:24 Fall of Babylon
  - f. Rev 19:1-20:15 Seven visions of the last things
4. Revelation 21:1-22:5 The Vision of the New Jerusalem

## 5. Revelation 22:6-21 Concluding Comments

### **The Value of Revelation Today**

The reading, studying and praying with scripture is important and should be a part of our daily routine. As we embark on this journey into the book of Revelation we need to recognize that, within the various writings we find in the bible (history, prayer, prophecy, story, parable...), the book of Revelation stands unique among all the other documents. The Old Testament gives us history and perspective on the active role God took in human history to prepare the world for His Son's coming. The gospels tell the story of Jesus' teachings, life and gift of salvation through His death and resurrection. The New Testament letters were written to offer teaching, support and inspiration to the first century Church and to each of us as well. The book of Revelation presents to us the risen Lord, Jesus Christ who is entrusting his disciple, John with an urgent word of prophecy. While this prophecy is directed at the original seven Churches of Asia Minor in the first century, this prophecy still holds true for each and every Christian today. As we read, as we study take heart and hear God's personal call to each of us. As I have said before, let the comfort of God come to us in our own persecution. Let it speak to us of God's love as the goal of our lives. But take warning. Just as Temple leadership denied the divinity of Jesus and refused to accept Him as the Messiah and therefore sought to *put a man to death* (18:31), those today who reject God and God's law will also bring down upon themselves the judgement of God.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Think about your "posture" at Mass as you listen to the readings. Are you truly listening with the expectations of feeding your soul? Take a moment to identify three things you can do to help you be more attentive to the Word of God so that it impacts your life.
2. Have you ever heard before the idea that "Liturgy is Warfare"? How does this idea affect you? Can you identify ways that praying for someone or something in a public many has had profound effect?

### **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: 103-108

The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Scripture: 109-119

The Canon of Scripture: 120-130

Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church: 131-133

### **Bibliography:**

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- New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Book of Revelation by Catherine Cory
- Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Letters of St. John and the Revelation to St. John by Scott Hahn & Curtis Mitch
- The Navarre Bible: Revelation

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- Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Revelation, by Peter S. Williamson
- Apocalypse Then and Now: A Companion to the Book of Revelation by Roland J Faley
- *Agape Bible Study: Revelation* by Michal Hunt. Agapebiblestudy.com
- The End: The Book of Revelation, Audio Series by Dr. Scott Hahn
- Revelation: The Kingdom Yet to Come, DVD Series by Ascension Press and Dr. Jeff Cavins