



The Book of Revelation

Author: John the apostle

The author of the book of Revelation identifies himself as John, a prophet imprisoned for Christian witness. Early Church tradition attributed authorship to the apostle John, younger brother of James, and member of Jesus' inner circle of disciples. On the cross, Jesus entrusted his mother to John's care (John 19:26-27). Church tradition teaches that John lived in Ephesus from 66-98, where he wrote his Gospel and shepherded the churches of Asia Minor. The apostle John is also accredited with writing the three epistles of John.

Setting: early 90's AD

The Roman Empire justified its economic and political control on spiritual grounds. It claimed that its emperors were chosen by the gods and promoted imperial theology through a vast array of temples, images, and rituals. Christians were maligned as atheists for refusing to make offerings to the emperor's image or to participate in other pagan practices. Hostilities intensified under cruel tyrannical emperors like Nero (54-68 AD) and Domitian (81-96 AD). John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9) during the persecution of Christians instigated by Domitian. He would have been in his eighties when he received the visions recorded in the book of Revelation.

Audience: Seven churches of Asia Minor

John writes to the churches of Asia Minor (present day Turkey), a part of the Roman Empire which was eager to curry favor with Domitian. Twenty years without overt persecution had lulled these churches into complacency and compromise with the culture.

Genre: Apocalyptic Literature and Hymns

Apocalyptic literature (from *apocalypse* meaning uncovering, revealing) provides a heavenly perspective on earthly events using symbolism and imagery. A common feature is a tour of the unseen realm led by an angel who provides interpretation of the visions (e.g. Daniel 10:5-11, Ezekiel 8:1-18). This genre was particularly used during times of extreme suffering to strengthen the resolve and faithfulness of God's people in the face of external pressures. The book of Revelation also includes songs and hymns that were likely used by the early church.

Theological Significance: Completion of Redemption History

Revelation brings to an end the story of God's conflict with evil, culminating in the restoration of the cosmos. Theologically rich, it draws together major themes found in the rest of the Bible. John's vision provides a vivid description of "The victorious reign and future personal return of Jesus Christ, who will judge all people with justice and mercy, giving over the unrepentant to eternal condemnation but receiving the redeemed into eternal life."¹ Its final chapters (Rev. 21-22) form a bookend with the opening chapters of the Scriptures (Gen. 1-2).

Note: Scholars debate both the authorship and date of Revelation. Whether written by the apostle John or a later Christian leader named John bears no significant impact on its meaning or relevance.

¹ From InterVarsity USA's Doctrinal Basis