

THE GATE CHURCH HIGH DESERT  
RANDY HOWARD

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS AT 6:30PM  
JAN - APR, 2021

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

A STUDY OF REVELATIONS AND THE VICTORY OF CHRIST

## A PROPER APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING - THE BOOK OF REVELATION

### CHAPTER ONE

#### **Developing the Right Hermeneutic (*Interpretation of Scripture*)**

Literal, Figurative, Symbolic and Figurative Language  
Systems of Eschatology and the Approach to End Times  
Preterism, Futurism, Historicism and Idealism  
Amillennialism, Pre-Millennialism and Post Millennialism

### CHAPTER TWO

#### **Deciphering the Old Testament Prophecies (*Daniel, Zechariah*)**

Zechariah's Description of the Temple  
Daniel's Vision of the Four Kingdoms  
Daniel's Timeline of the Seventy Weeks

### CHAPTER THREE

#### **Discovering the First Century Relevance of Jesus' Prophecy (*Matthew 23-25*)**

The Temple Experience and a Walk in the Garden  
The Disciples Questions and a Curiosity for the Unknown  
The Future Unveiled and the Prophecies Unfold

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Detailing the Observations as Seen in the Visions of John (*Revelation*)**

The Purpose of the Book (Christ and His Church Victorious)

The Person of the Book (*Christ*)

*Jesus Christ the Lamb of God | Jesus Christ the Lord of All*

The Prophecy of the Book (Warnings, Judgments and Outcomes)

*Dating the Revelation: Crucial to Understanding the Book*

*Warnings to the Churches of Asia Minor*

*Judgments on the Jews, the Romans Empire and the Nations of Earth*

*Second Coming, the Kingdom of God and New Creation*

# REVIEW - THE LAST QUESTIONS ASKED OF JESUS

So, we have covered a lot during this study on Eschatology. We closed last week by completing the answers to the three questions the disciples asked Jesus. The first question was WHEN WILL THESE THINGS TAKE PLACE, in reference to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. The answer: AD 70 which was within a generation. The second question was WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN OF YOUR COMING INTO YOUR KINGDOM and Jesus again answers that it will be when you see the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. The the last question was concerning THE END OF THE AGE and Jesus stated that no one knew the when but gave some descriptive examples of what it will be like. For example,

## **Matthew 25:31-46: The Great Day of Judgment**

In the final passage of Matthew 25, Jesus gave a description and summary of the coming great day of judgment.

*"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom ...' Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire ...' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Again, the lesson is clear: Jesus will return to judge the righteous and the unrighteous. The third question that the disciples asked—“What about the end of the age?”—Jesus clearly answered.

## **Summary**

So to summarize where we left off last week, the historical understanding of Matthew 24 is held by a significant portion of the Body of Christ around the world. The reason we mention this is to make clear that we have not presented some bizarre doctrine that no one else believes.

Thousands of Bible teachers would explain Matthew 24 similarly to the way we have just explained it. If you come to accept the historicist view of Matthew 24, then you will embrace many ideas that may be new to you, the most important point being that there will be no signs preceding the second coming of Jesus or the end of the world. Jesus did not know of any signs, and no one else will be able to figure it out either. Jesus was emphatic about this point, giving no less than six different parables to make sure His followers would understand that it will be a total surprise to everyone except the Father. This is contradictory to what is spoken of by futurist teachers, who love to create in their listener's anticipation of the Second Coming by talking about increasing wars, famines, earthquakes, false religious leaders, and people falling away from the faith. In reality, all of those signs preceded the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. When Jesus returns at some point in the future, you will be eating and drinking, driving your car, sleeping in bed, or working at your job. Then suddenly Jesus Christ will appear. No warning, no signs.

Now, we turn our attention to:

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Observations as Seen in the Visions of John (*Revelation*)**

The Purpose of the Book (Christ and His Church Victorious)

The Person of the Book (*Christ*)  
*Jesus Christ the Lamb of God | Jesus Christ the Lord of All*

The Prophecy of the Book (Warnings, Judgments and Outcomes)

*Dating the Revelation: Crucial to Understanding the Book*  
*Warnings to the Churches of Asia Minor*  
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*Second Coming, the Kingdom of God and New Creation*

This study is fundamental to how we see the Kingdom of God and the sovereign plans of God that have been in play since before the foundation of the world.

For now, let's look at THE DATING OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION!

#### **❖ Two Dates in Question**

There are two dates that are commonly mentioned for the writing of the Book of Revelation:

- An early date - still during the lifetime of Caesar Nero, about the middle of the 60's AD; and
- A late date - about 95/96 AD during the time of Caesar Domitian.

## ❖ Sources and Evidence

- External Sources and Evidence

- Irenaeus - Hints to a Late Date?

The proponents of a late date determine their conclusion mostly from a statement by church father Irenaeus who lived from AD 130 to AD 202. He was quoted by the church historian Eusebius in AD 325, where he writes:

*"We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of 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 not very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign."*

- Irenaeus' Ambiguous Statement

If John had seen these visions toward the end of the reign of Caesar Domitian, then the years 95/96 AD would be good candidates for the time of writing.

Domitian died in 96 AD after having reigned 14 years as Caesar and Roman emperor. However, there are a number of things about this quote from Irenaeus that are not as clear and somewhat ambiguous. A question remains about "who" or "what" was seen.

Was John seen still at that time?

Or did John see the vision that then was recorded in the Book of Revelation at that time?

A difficulty is that the statement comes to us as a third party quote of what someone else quoted that someone else supposedly said about two centuries earlier. We read what Eusebius had heard or knew from some source about Irenaeus, but the statement by Irenaeus is actually a "second hand" report, in that he makes reference to Polycarp. It was not Irenaeus himself, but Polycarp, who according to Irenaeus' recollection saw "that" sometime toward the end of Domitian's reign. It is not clear from this statement what Polycarp was referring to as "that was seen", for he could be referring to John and the visions John saw, he could be referring to the name of the Antichrist, he could also be referring to the book without it being clear if he actually meant that the book was written then or that it already existed.

This quote is not as clear as some want to make it, when they base their dating of the writing of the Book of Revelation on this source.

➤ Irenaeus' Ancient Statement

Irenaeus mentioned in another one of his works concerning the number of the name of the antichrist that this number is found in all ancient and approved or recognized copies or writings. This mention of "ancient copies" is interesting because Domitian's reign ended only shortly before Irenaeus'

own time and if the book were written in about 95/96 AD, there would hardly have been any "ancient" copies of the book in his day. This mention in Irenaeus' 5th book of his writings seems to point to an earlier date of writing of the Book of Revelation, at least a few more decades removed from his own time so that he could speak of "ancient [older]" copies being in existence.

In this connection, Edersheim brings up a point that is more important for our interpretation than the issue of Revelation's human authorship (for ultimately [see 1:1] it is Jesus Christ's Revelation). John's intimate acquaintance with the minute details of Temple worship suggests that the Book of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel must have been written before the Temple services had actually ceased. Although some scholars have uncritically accepted the statement of Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) that the prophecy appeared "toward the end of Domitian's reign" (around A.D. 96), there is considerable room for doubt about his precise meaning (he may have meant that the Apostle John himself "was seen" by others). The language of Irenaeus is somewhat ambiguous; and, regardless of what he was talking about, he could have been mistaken. Irenaeus, incidentally, is the **ONLY** source for this late dating of Revelation; all other sources are simply quoting from him. It is thus rather disingenuous for commentators to claim as Swete does that "*Early Christian tradition is almost unanimous in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian.*" Certainly, there are other early writers whose statements indicate that John wrote the Revelation much earlier, under Nero's persecution.

A good deal of the modern presumption in favor of the Domitian date is based on the belief that a great, sustained period of persecution and slaughter of Christians was carried on under his rule. This belief, as cherished as it is, does not seem to be based on any hard evidence at all. While there is no doubt that Domitian was a cruel and wicked tyrant (I come to bury a myth about Caesar, not to praise him), until the fifth century there is no mention in any historian of a supposedly widespread persecution of Christians by his government. It is true that he did temporarily banish some Christians; but these were eventually recalled. Robinson remarks: *“When this limited and selective purge, in which no Christian was for certain put to death, is compared with the massacre of Christians under Nero in what two early and entirely independent witnesses speak of as ‘immense multitudes,’ it is astonishing that commentators should have been led by Irenaeus, who himself does not even mention a persecution, to prefer a Domitianic context for the book of Revelation.”*

Our safest course, therefore, must be to study the Revelation itself to see what internal evidence it presents regarding its date. As we will see throughout the commentary, the Book of Revelation is primarily a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This fact alone places John’s authorship somewhere before September of A.D. 70. Further, as we shall see, John speaks of Nero Caesar as still on the throne –and Nero died in June 68.

See the detailed discussion in Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Andover: Allen, Merrill and Wardwell, 1845), Vol. I, pp. 263-84; see , also James M. MacDonald, *The Life and Writings of St. John* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), pp. 151-77.

Robinson has in mind the statements of the Christian pastor St. Clement (1 Clement 6) and the heathen historian Tacitus (*Annals* XV.44).

Robinson, p. 233; cf. pp. 236ff. 4

## ➤ Author and Date

More important than any of this, however, we have a priori teaching from Scripture itself that all special revelation ended by A.D. 70. The angel Gabriel told Daniel that the “seventy weeks” were to end with the destruction of Jerusalem (*Dan.* 9:24-27); and that period would also serve to “seal up the vision and prophecy” (*Dan.* 9:24). In other words, special revelation would stop – be “sealed up” – by the time Jerusalem was destroyed. The Canon of Holy Scripture was entirely completed before Jerusalem fell. Athanasius interpreted Gabriel’s words in the same way:

*“When did prophet and vision cease from Israel? Was it not when Christ came, the Holy One of holies? It is, in fact, a sign and notable proof of the coming of the Word that Jerusalem no longer stands, neither is prophet raised up nor vision revealed among them. And it is natural that it should be so, for when He that was signified had come, what need was there any longer of any to signify Him? And when the Truth had come, what further need was there of the shadow? On His account only they prophesied continually, until such time as Essential Righteousness had come, Who was made the ransom for the sins of all. For the same reason Jerusalem stood until the same time, in order that there men might premeditate*

*the types before the Truth was known. So, of course, once the Holy One of holies had come, both vision and prophecy were sealed. And the kingdom of Jerusalem ceased at the same time, because kings were to be anointed among them only until the Holy of holies had been anointed . . ."*

While he does not base his case on theological considerations, an excerpt from J. A. T. Robinson's thesis in *Re-dating the New Testament* states,

*"The plain fact is, as I say, that there is no longer any king or prophet nor Jerusalem nor sacrifice nor vision among them; yet the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and the Gentiles, forsaking atheism, are now taking refuge with the God."*

He arrives at this conclusion through a careful study of both the internal and external evidence regarding each New Testament book. Support from archeological findings for an early New Testament is presented in David Estrada and William White Jr., *"The First New Testament"* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978). See also Ernest L. Martin, *"The Original Bible Restored"* (Pasadena: Foundation for Biblical Research, 1984), for his interesting thesis that the New Testament was canonized by St. Peter and St. John.

17. St. Athanasius, the "patron saint of postmillennialism," thus applies the "millennial" promise of Isaiah 11:9 to the triumphs of the New Covenant era.

## ➤ Introduction of the New Covenant

The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ marked the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New; the apostles were commissioned to deliver Christ's message in the form of the New Testament; and when they were finished, God sent the Edomites and the Roman armies to destroy utterly the last remaining symbols of the Old Covenant: the Temple and the Holy City. This fact alone is sufficient to establish the writing of the Revelation as taking place before A.D. 70. The book itself gives abundant testimony regarding its date; but, even more, the nature of the New Testament as God's Final Word tells us this. Christ's death at the hands of the apostate children of Israel sealed their fate: The Kingdom would be taken from them (Matthew 21:33-43).

While wrath built up "to the utmost" (1 Thessalonians 2:16), God stayed His hand of judgment until the writing of the New Covenant document was accomplished. With that done, He dramatically terminated the kingdom of Israel, wiping out the persecuting generation (Matthew 23:34-36; 24:34; Luke 11:49-51). Jerusalem's destruction was the last blast of the trumpet, signaling that the "mystery of God" was finished (Revelation 10:7). There would be no further canonical writings once Israel was gone.

- Aramaic Peshitta Preface - Hints to an Early Date

The Aramaic Peshitta Bible is the Scriptures written in the Semitic language and accepted as the Eastern Scriptures.

The preface comment to the Book of Revelation in the Aramaic Peshitta version has a comment that would place the writing of the Book of Revelation to the early date, a time prior to 70 AD. The title page of the Book of Revelation contains the following statement:

*"The revelation that God gave the Evangelist John on the island of Patmos where he had been banned by Nero Caesar."*

The emperor Nero however died in 68 AD, and according to Roman rules those banned by a Caesar would be released after the Caesar's death. Thus, John would have been released from Patmos in 68 AD (or shortly thereafter) and the time when he received this revelation and wrote it down would have been prior to 70 AD. John himself mentions in the book that he was at Patmos when he received this revelation.

- Internal Evidence and Sources

There are a number of points arising from the internal evidence, that is, from information given in the book itself, which all indicate the early date as not only probable but the only possible date for what is stated in the Book.

## ➤ Warnings to Seven Churches in Asia

The Book of Revelation specifically mentions that this revelation was of special relevance to the seven churches in Asia and that John wrote it and had it sent to those churches by messengers (Revelation 1:4). It is important to note that during Paul's ministry in the 50's AD, there had been nine churches established in Asia. At about 60/61 AD there was a large earthquake in which, as we can read in secular sources, the cities of Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea were totally destroyed. Laodicea was the only city of these three which was rebuilt soon afterwards, which then left seven cities with churches in Asia. The period of time where there were only seven churches in Asia was only during the few years from the early 60's AD to the time prior to the Jewish war. In order for the book to even be of benefit to the Christians in Asia, it must have been written prior to 66/67 AD, before Vespasian was coming through this area with his armies as they were getting in position for the war against the Jews. Once the war started, the Romans plundered and persecuted the Christians as well as the Jews wherever they came through. An interesting detail from the message to the church at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7ff) also sheds some light on the possible time of writing. The believers at Philadelphia are warned by Christ in this revelation that an "hour of temptation" was imminent and "about to come upon all the world [the Roman empire]" and that they should hold fast and remain faithful as he [Christ] was coming soon. This is important and significant in that it is addressed to believers of a church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and in that the first persecution of Christians all over the Roman Empire took place under Nero

Caesar in 64 AD. If this warning to the believers in Asia about an imminent temptation and the encouragement to hold fast related to this persecution, then the book seems to have been written even prior to 64 AD.

#### ➤ John's Later Activities

Another internal evidence in the book itself is connected to a reference about certain activities that John was still to experience in his life afterwards. In Revelation 10:11, John is told that he "*must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings*". Now, if John would have received this revelation in 96AD and written it at that time, then these words which he was told did not come to pass, seeing that he was a very old man at that time and hardly able to walk and travel. But, if John did receive this revelation and write it down during the time of Nero approximately 65-66 AD, then he could fulfill what he was told. He would have been able to prophesy and to teach during the reigns of Caesar's Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus and also Domitian (spanning the time from 68-96 AD).

#### ➤ Destruction of City and Temple at the End of the Age

There are a number of references in the book of Revelation with symbols that have reference to the temple, and in addition Revelation 11:1-2 makes reference to the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. This event was also foretold by Jesus when he prophesied about the judgment on Jerusalem which was to come by the Son of man at the end of the age. There

is a parallel record in Zechariah 14:2 about this "*day of the Lord*" with its destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and Zechariah 13:7 places this shortly after the shepherd would have dispersed his sheep (Jesus did quote from this section in Matthew 26:31). Revelation 11:2 is also a parallel to Malachi 4, where a day of the Lord is spoken about when the Lord would separate and burn the chaff (the evil ones). This also parallels what Jesus mentions in parables about the burning of the chaff, the burning of apostate Israel, "at the end of the world [age]" (Matthew 13:40,49). Now, when is or was "the end of the age"? Other records in the NT scriptures provide some insight as they mention certain things which happen in connection with the end of the age. The writer of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as "*now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*" (Hebrews 9:26). We can see from this passage that "the end of the world [age]" is the time when the Messiah Jesus through His sacrifice put away sin; in other words, the "end of the age" was the time during which Jesus lived and fulfilled his ministry almost 2000 years ago.

➤ The Coming of the Lord is Placed as "Near"

In Revelation 1, the coming of the Lord is introduced and it is carried through the whole book to Revelation 22, where we read about "*Surely, I come quickly [soon]!*"

In Revelation 1:7 the coming of the Lord in the clouds is mentioned, in addition we learn that those who pierced him would see him, as would be the

case with all the tribes of the land, etc. Revelation 1:7 is a reference to Zechariah 12:10, the words which Jesus also used when he was speaking to Caiaphas the high priest (Matthew 26:64). The descriptions of Jesus about his coming in Matthew 16:27-28; 23:34-39 and 24:30-31 are parallel to the record in Daniel 9:24-27. Jesus was very clear about His coming being imminent and still happening during "*this generation*", that is, during the lifetime of some of his contemporaries, while some of His apostles and disciples would still be alive. Christ would come to judge the wicked and to execute the judgment on apostate Israel who persecuted Him and His disciples.

This would not be a judgment that would occur at some very distant time in the future; instead, Jesus was rather emphatic about it being "soon", and "about to come". For example, in Mt 16:27, Jesus used the words "*For the Son of man SHALL COME ...*" Grammatically, this looks in English like a simple future, describing an event that could be at any time (near or distant) in the future. However, the Greek uses the word 'mello' in connection with the word "come", and the expression should be translated as "*For the Son of man IS ABOUT TO COME ...*" (For the meaning of 'mello', compare Thayer, Greek and English Lexicon, p. 396). Jesus declares that He "*is about to come*", and this immanency He emphasizes by stating in the next verse, that some of those who heard him that day would not die and actually see the Son of man coming in His kingdom! In other words, they would still be alive when Christ would come!

## Conclusion:

As we consider these points given in the NT scriptures, and as we accept that what is stated is indeed true, there are really two possibilities: (1) Jesus did already come into His Kingdom, as he Himself prophesied, or (2) there are some of those disciples who heard Jesus that day who are still alive somewhere on earth and who are approximately 2000 years old by now. The coming of the Lord was one of the various judgments of God and is parallel to the judgments of the LORD mentioned in Gen 3, when Adam and Eve were judged for transgressing God's command. It is parallel to the coming of the LORD to judge Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 18; it is parallel to the coming of the LORD upon Egypt at the time of the exodus of Israel from Egypt (also Exodus 2:8, Jeremiah 5:25; 10:5-11; Joel 2:1; Zephaniah 1:1-18; 14:5). The coming of Christ in Rev 1:7 is a mention of that coming when the Son of man would judge the enemies of his assembly and His coming to execute judgment on apostate Israel, it marks the events prophesied to happen at the end of the age. From both external and internal evidence of the Book of Revelation, an early date is the only option that will harmonize well with the content of the book. Although the later date of 96 AD is widely accepted in many Christian circles and groups today (even though this theory basically only rests on one statement in one external source), the evidence in the book of Revelation itself points rather clearly to an earlier date of 65-66 AD for the time of writing, the time when John was banned to the Isle of Patmos during the persecution by Caesar Nero.