

Revelation and It's Relation to AD 70 (Part One)

Revelation 1:1-3

"To show ... the things which must soon take place...for the time is near"

Revelation, like most of the NT books, is an occasional writing. That means John deals with a specific historical occasion and circumstances of an intentional and original audience. An example of another "occasional" book is I Corinthians. In the entire letter to the Corinthian church, Paul addresses various problems in that faith community. When he writes that someone there has his own father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1), he is not declaring a universal principle prevailing in all churches. Understanding the historical situation of the original audience is fundamentally important to comprehending Revelation's meaning.

1. John is specifically addressing seven churches (see Revelation 2-3) in Asia Minor (Turkey).
2. These seven churches exist in what was a known Roman postal route, and what John wrote to them contained language and allusions that would have been easily understood by those seven churches.
3. These seven churches were undergoing severe persecution and "tribulation" (Rev. 2:9-10; 3:9-10).
4. There are two reasons given for John writing his letter; to "hear" (Rev. 1:1) and to "heed" (Rev. 1:3).

I. John expects the prophesied events of Revelation to occur very soon.

"Blessed is he who hears and heeds the words of the prophecy ... for the time is near. (Rev. 1:3)

- A. The phrase "shortly" (1:1 - Greek: *en tachei*) occurs three other places (Rev. 2:16; 3:11; 22:6).
- B. The word translated "near" (1:3 - Greek *engus*) occurs other places in the NT ("an approaching Passover" - Matt. 26:18; "the coming of summer" - Matt. 24:32; "a soon festival" - Jn. 2:13).
- C. These two terms are mutually supportive: that which is "shortly" to come means it is "near."
- D. John is writing to encourage these seven churches of Asia Minor - is he telling the truth?
- E. To emphasize, John employs the terms in the beginning and ending of the salutation (1:1; 1:3).

II. John is instructed to *not* seal the scroll "because the time is near."

John does write Revelation anticipating events looming in his own day. He is not writing about events two or three thousand years distant. As we saw in our last study, Daniel was to "seal up the scroll" (Dan. 12:4) because the time of his vision was far away--500 years. How illogical is it for Daniel to be told to seal up the scroll, but John is told to not seal the scroll? **AD 70 was "near"** when John wrote.

III. John's declared method of interpreting his prophecy is figurative, not literalism.

When interpreting any literary work, we should always listen carefully to the author himself, especially if he provides information affecting the proper approach to interpreting his work. Certainly, Revelation is considered the most difficult New Testament book to interpret. Given the widespread interest in Revelation, this exacerbates the difficulties in presenting John's message in the modern context. Consequently, hermeneutic methodology becomes a paramount concern for the would-be interpreter. Interestingly, in his Gospel, John shows the problem of literalism among Christ's early hearers: by thinking in a rigidly literal way, they misconstrue Jesus' teaching regarding the temple (John 2:19-22), being born again (3:3-10), drinking water (4:10-14), eating his flesh (6:51-56), being free (8:31-36), being blind (9:39-40), falling asleep (11:11-14), and his being king (18:33-37). This problem is exacerbated in Revelation with its rich imagery field. (Kenneth Gentry - Revelation).

I believe the Bible is God's inspired Word and is profitable. That does not prevent me from believing in its figurative language. We'll conclude our examination of Revelation's relation to AD 70 next week.