

Revelation and It's Relation to A.D. 70 (Part Two)

Revelation 1:1

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.”

I. John tells the reader of Revelation to take it symbolically and figuratively.

John wastes no time in alerting his readers to his symbolic approach. Revelation is given “to show” (Gk., *deixai*) the message being “*signified*” (Gk., *esēmanen*) by His angel (Revelation 1:1, NKJV). Friedrich Dürstendieck notes: “The *deixai* (showing) occurs in the way peculiar to *sēmainein* (signs). The communication of the prophecy is in significant figures.” Forty-one times John says he “sees” the prophecies (e.g., Revelation 1:12, 20; 5:6; 9:1; 20:1). Premillennial commentator Robert Mounce observes in this regard: “The revelation is said to be signified to John. The Greek verb carries the idea of figurative representation. Strictly speaking it means to make known by some sort of sign. It is admirably suited to the symbolic character of the book. This should warn the reader not to expect a literal presentation of future history, but a symbolic portrayal of that which must yet come to pass.”

Within Revelation you'll see in sign form the literal truth that Christ reigns over all other kingdoms.

II. John shows us in the FIRST vision all things seen are to be taken symbolically and figuratively.

John's first vision sets the pattern for later symbolic interpretation by presenting a vision then interpreting its key elements in a non-literal way. In Revelation 1:20, he records a vision of Christ walking among lampstands. On the literalist assumption, the vision should be teaching that the Lord walks among candles in heaven. However, John will not allow that. In verse 20, Jesus interprets the vision for us: “As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). So then, even though John himself actually saw seven stars and seven lampstands, the stars represent “the angels of the seven churches” and the lampstands represent “the seven churches.” This is what John himself teaches; so, we cannot dismiss it.

III. John continues throughout Revelation to write symbolically and figuratively.

In Revelation 5, John sees a lamb with seven eyes. Even the most naive literalist recognizes this Lamb represents Christ the Lord, for He is called (not literally!) “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Revelation 5:5). After all, the angels of heaven sing His praise as the Redeemer of God's people (5:9–10) and as glorious because of His work (5:12). In the next verse, He is praised equally with God the Father (5:13). In Revelation 14, the Lamb's name is associated with God's name on the elect of God (14:1). John also provides interpretive directives on one of the more unusual features of the vision of the Lamb. He explains the “seven eyes:” “And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, having seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God ... ” (Revelation 5:6).

The expression “seven spirits” is the equivalent of the “Holy Spirit,” and this view was the general view of all ancient scholars. One writer notes that: “John never uses the expression ‘the Holy Spirit,’ but he uses the word Spirit in a variety of ways. ‘The Spirit’ is found in 2:7, 17, etc., so he clearly knows of the Holy Spirit. Seven spirits recur in 3:1, 4:5; 5:6. On the whole it seems most probable that we should think of the number seven as signifying perfection or the like, and of the whole expression as pointing to the Holy Spirit” (Morris, p. 48). We will see throughout Revelation symbolic language of Christ's power!

Other absurdities of taking Revelation literally:

Elsewhere in Revelation, John speaks of men actually washing robes in blood in order to make them white (Revelation 7:14). Do we really see horses with heads of lions (Revelation 9:17)? Do we really expect a literal multi-headed dragon to pull down one-third of the trillions of stars in the Universe, throwing them upon the earth (Revelation 12:3–4)? Who is the winged woman who stands on the moon? And the serpent that vomits out a river of water (Revelation 12:14–15)? Is the angel of God actually going to reap the earth with a literal sickle (Revelation 14:15)? Do demon spirits literally appear in history in the form of frogs coming from the mouths of evil beings (Revelation 16:13)? Will Jesus physically ride out of heaven and through the sky on a horse, while clamping a sword in his teeth (Revelation 19:15a)? Well, you get the picture.

Those “signs” that John saw symbolically illustrated the power of Jesus Christ’s reign over the world. Flavius Josephus was a prominent, wealthy Jewish (and non-Christian) historian who lived from A.D. 37 to A.D. 101. He was of priestly descent and lived in Palestine. To get our historical context we should recall that Christ was crucified in A.D. 30, and the Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70.

Josephus served as a general in the Jewish defensive forces during the Jewish War against Rome in A.D. 67–70. During the War, he was defeated by the Romans at Jotapata, surrendering to the Roman general, Flavius Vespasian. He befriended Vespasian by interpreting a prophetic oracle to mean that Vespasian would one day be emperor of Rome. Shortly thereafter, he began working with Vespasian in urging the Jews to surrender to the Romans and to cease their hopeless and self-destructive cause.

Josephus failed, of course, and because of his attempt, Jews have historically considered him to be something of a Benedict Arnold. Vespasian, who became emperor of Rome in A.D. 69, sponsored the writing of Josephus' famous book *The Jewish War*. This work was written about A.D. 75 (just five years after the fall of Jerusalem). Josephus' name was changed from the very Jewish Joseph Ben Matthias to the more Roman Flavius Josephus, taking on Flavius Vespasian's name as his benefactor. In his multi-volume work (published as seven books), Josephus writes as an eyewitness historian who happened to be in the Jewish War on both sides of the conflict.

His work is extremely helpful for providing historical insights into the names and events of the war, so many of which are foretold in John’s prophecy in Revelation. John states early and clearly that the events he prophesies “must shortly come to pass” because “the time is at hand” (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10). As strange as it may seem to the modern Christian, the further we move into the future, the farther we move away from the events of Revelation.

As we continue through our study in Revelation it will be important to understand that John’s intention from the beginning was to warn the early Christians that everything they believed about Christ was both truth and soon to be tested. The foundation of the Law was about to be uprooted and destroyed, but that did not mean that the Lawgiver was not on His throne. On the contrary, He is on His “white horse.”

Attribution: **Kenneth Gentry** (Commentary on Revelation)

Conclusion: The book of Revelation, written in A.D. 68, refers to the soon coming end of the Old Covenant way of worship (Temple, rituals, sacrifices, etc.) and the dawning of the New Covenant to the entire world, based on God’s love, grace, and mercy in Jesus Christ. Revelation was fulfilled in A.D. 70.