

Introduction To Revelation

*The world is a vampire, sent to drain
Secret destroyers, hold you up to the flames
And what do I get, for my pain?
Betrayed desires, and a piece of the game*

*Even though I know I suppose I'll show
All my cool and cold like old Job*

*Despite all my rage I am still just a rat in a cage
Despite all my rage I am still just a rat in a cage
Then someone will say what is lost can never be saved
Despite all my rage I am still just a rat in a cage
~~~~~Smashing Pumpkins, Bullets With Butterfly Wings*

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The book of Revelation is a series of prophecies given to the Apostle John, while he was living in exile on the Greek Island of Patmos during the reign of Roman Emperor Domitian around the year 95 AD. The church had grown greatly during the first century under the apostles' ministry. History tells us that the apostles had gone into much of Europe, Asia and Africa, and had spread the Word from Spain all the way to India and possibly beyond. The Apostle Paul's three missionary journeys had brought him throughout the Roman world preaching the Good News about Jesus and how He died to save them from sin--both Jew and Gentile (non-Jew).

Retrospectively we can look at the amazing speed with which the gospel went out from Jerusalem and we can see how God used the mundane and unnoticed things to let that happen. For example, it was during the Pax Romana (i.e., peace of Rome) that the empire turned from a dangerous warring place to an integrated kingdom. In the years before Jesus' birth and during His life on earth, the Romans were pioneering Mediterranean shipping lanes, building roads, and establishing courier and trade routes--quite ambitious public works projects meant to bring commerce and wealth into the empire. But quietly and behind the scenes God commandeered those works for His purposes. We see this as the Apostle Paul writes, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law..." (Galatians 4:4). The "fullness of time" alludes not only to the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth, but the circumstances in the world, too. Those shipping lanes, trade routes and roads were meant for Roman power and commerce. But God used them to spread the Gospel to the world. A century earlier they didn't exist. A century later the empire was starting to unravel.

Though the people of Israel were under Roman rule, the Romans allowed for local jurisdiction by indigenous people during the Pax Romana. This gave room for the local Jewish leaders to often deal with their own people using their own laws--at least up to a certain point. It is in that political environment that Jesus came on the New Testament scene. Jesus spent the majority of His ministry standing against the political authorities of his day. He confronted the leaders, scholars, and lawyers of the various parties--Sadducees, Pharisees, and the politically minded Herodians. His biggest criticisms were how they oppressed the poor, their corruption, and their hypocrisy. From this observation, I wonder why so few Christians are doing the same today,

preferring instead to keep their piety inward and non-confrontational, often ignoring the injustices and deceit that are perpetrated upon the poor at the hands of the government? Are we hiding our light under the bushel? Is our salt losing its savor? Are we going to relegate our speech to modernism and churchianity? If your Christianity is only for Sundays you are missing the point. These are some of the types of things that Jesus confronts in this book.

Because Roman society was immersed in polytheism, heathenism, and emperor worship so the message of a dying Jewish Messiah didn't resonate well with the power people of that day. The early church historian Eusebius tells us that Emperor Domitian toward the end of his reign, which went for 15 years from 81 AD to 96 AD when he was assassinated, heavily persecuted Christians. Because Christians refused to swear loyalty to the emperor as though to a deity they were seen as threats to government rule and to the civil order. Domitian believed that he needed to extinguish any such challenges in order to secure his reign. Several of the megalomaniacal Roman emperors were accustomed to identify themselves as, and be titled, "Lord and God"--something Christians would not do--and Domitian was one. A suspicious and paranoid tyrant, he treated the embracing of Christianity as a crime against the state, and condemned many Christians and even his own cousin, the consul Flavius Clemens to death. The charge? Atheism. Atheism, was charged, because they refused to worship the Roman pantheon of gods, or the emperor god. It was common to confiscate their property, and if the magistrate pitied their advanced age, he would sometimes send them into exile as they did the now aged John the Apostle.

Tradition tells us that the island of Patmos where John was sent into exile had a penal colony during Roman times. The Apostle John, who would have been in his 80's by now, was probably given respite from the labor that would have been required at this penal colony. There is to this day a cave on that island where it was said he received this series of visions that would become the Revelation. Probably written on scraps of parchment with a feather quill and ink, John would be given a series of visions that he would write down and that became this book.

The world hasn't changed much since those days. The message of the gospel is seen as hostile to a world which presently embraces every sort of sin and unrighteousness. Islamic terrorists are beheading children and crucifying women simply because they are Christians and believing that they are serving God by these acts. It was John himself who recorded Jesus' warning years earlier when He was with them that "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). And even a country like the USA, which has a long history of Christianity from its beginnings, can in these last days embrace homosexuality as normative, glamorize adultery and fornication and slaughter millions of our unborn. When a society grows so cold as to dehumanize the most vulnerable among us, there will eventually be an inevitable corresponding collapse of that society. You cannot devalue human life--pre- or post-partum--without undermining part of the fabric which holds that society together. Abortion takes people's sons and daughters who are never afforded the opportunity to see the light of day and turns the serenity of women's wombs into tombs of a violent execution. Modern American society has become drunk in its own sin and sits presently in a self-induced stupor.

In their hit song Sympathy for the Devil, the Rolling Stones had a line that went "Just as every cop is a criminal, and all the sinners saints. As heads is tails, just call me Lucifer cause I'm in need of some restraint." The theme of that song is to show the Devil's works of making

everything backward. Today these sentiments seem to be the norm. The song continues, "But what's puzzling you is the nature of my game." Indeed it is. Surely the time is short.

I wish to offer a basic outline of this book that comes from the first chapter in verse 19. The verse reads "Therefore write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things" (Revelation 1:19). The book can be divided up just that way. The first chapter describes "the things which thou hast seen" and includes the entirety of the initial vision that God gave John. Chapters 2 and 3 can be understood as the second phrase "the things which are" which would be the actual present day churches in John's day. "The things which will take place after these things" refers to the visions that God gives John into the future. They begin in chapter 4 and go till the end of the book (chapter 22).

#### Outline of Revelation

- I. The things which thou hast seen - The revelation of the glorified Jesus - chapter 1
- II. The things which are - The messages to seven present day churches - chapters 2-3
- III. The things which will take place after these things - End of the world - chapters 4-22

#### Mosaic from the Cave of Patmos

