

God's Covenantal Ways

Let me begin by showing you how our current view of Revelation is primarily subjective guessing.

(Rev 9:16) The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

Here is Hal Lindsey's interpretation:

"These 200 million troops are Red Chinese soldiers accompanied by other Eastern allies. It's possible that the industrial might of Japan will be united with Red China. For the first time in history there will be a full invasion of the West by the Orient." (Hal Lindsey "There's a New World Coming" p. 140.)

In the 19th century there was another Christian prognosticator, J.L. Martin who wrote a book "The Voice of the 7 Thunders: or Lectures on the Apocalypse" Martin, because he was 100 years earlier than Lindsey, (Lindsey 1973 and Martin 1873) he reached an entirely different conclusion. He believed this number in Rev. 9 was the fighting force of the whole world.

"We have a few more than 1 billion inhabitants on the earth... but of that billion 500 million are females leaving 500 million males; of that number about one-half are minors, leaving 250 million adult males and of that number one-fifth are too old to fight. These are statistical facts and this leaves exactly John's 200 million of fighting men on the earth. And, when we prove a matter mathematically, we think it is pretty well done." p. 149f

Here is the personal struggle I am having with our understanding of Revelation...

If we insist on reading this book primarily as either a prediction of 21st century conditions and technology then we are seeing as something different than the rest of the bible ...

... rather than fitting into the continuity of the whole bible it becomes some kind of eschatological appendix....

... mysterious document that has little to do with the message, purpose, and concerns of the rest of the bible..

So, what is Revelation???

Let's begin by establishing author and time of writing.

John, the beloved disciple, author of the gospel of John, is also the author of the Revelation so this identity informs us in regards to author's perspective.

1. There are several biblical indications that John was a priest and came from the high priest's family.

¹⁵ Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple [John] was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing at the door outside. So, the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. (John 18:15-16)

2. There are numerous references in both the Gospel and Revelation that reveal the author's unusual familiarity with the details of the temple as well as temple worship.

Alfred Edersheim in his book *"The Temple: Its ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Christ"* writes this:

"...It is specially remarkable, that the Temple references with which the book of Revelation abounds are generally to minutiae. A writer who had not been as familiar with such details (as only personal contact and engagement with them could have rendered him) would scarcely have even noticed, certainly not employed as part of his imagery."

IMPORTANT: John's intimate acquaintance with the minute details of Temple worship (and the expectation of his reader's understanding) indicate that the book of the Revelation as well as the fourth gospel must have been written before Temple services had actually ceased.

3. Temple worship ceased in September of 70AD when Titus led the Romans to sack the city of Jerusalem and destroy the temple... this is important.

The Word of God tells us exactly when special revelation would cease...

... by special revelation I am referring to what Paul is talking about in 2 Tim. 3:16 when he writes that "all scripture is inspired by God etc.

Listen to what the angel Gabriel told the prophet Daniel...

(Dan. 9:24-26)²⁴ "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. ²⁵ "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. ²⁶ "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

In a nutshell the Canon of Holy Scripture was entirely completed before Jerusalem fell.

In the 4th century some of the churches were using and preaching from books and letters written 2 and 3 hundred years after Jesus so around the end of the 4th century all churches met to talk about what was and was not part of the bible.

... one of those bishops was a man named Athanasius.

"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. So, of course, once the Holy One had come, both vision and prophecy were sealed and the kingdom of Jerusalem ceased ... 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."

The death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ marked the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant...

...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 enough to establish the writing of Revelation as taking place before A.D. 70.

So, Revelation was written by John the disciple before A.D. 70

What is it??

Allow me to begin with an obvious statement: The book of Revelation is part of the Bible.

Recognizing that Revelation is a biblical document forces us to ask the obvious question: What is the Bible?

The bible is a book about the revelation of God and the covenant that He has made with humanity.

In the Old Testament it was clear that God had made a covenant with Israel...

I use the term "covenant" because I want you to see the legal nature of God's relationship with man.

(Col. 2:13-14)¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Allow me to explain how the covenant worked.

"After a war, the victorious king would make a covenant with his defeated foe, making certain promises and guaranteeing protection on condition that the vassal-king and all under his authority would obey their new lord. Both lord and vassal would swear an oath, and they would thenceforth be united in covenant." [David Chilton, Day of Vengeance p. 69]

The covenant usually consisted of:

- **Preamble** identifying the lordship of the king stressing his greatness, power, nearness and presence.
- **Historical Prologue** recounts the history of the king's relationship with the vassal reminding him of the lord's authority and faithfulness and the blessings the vassal has received from the king.
- **Ethical Stipulations** explaining the vassal's obligations to the king.
- **Sanctions** outlined the blessings for obedience and the judgment/curses for disobedience.

- **Succession Arrangements** showing the continuity for the continuing relationship over future generations.

This is called a covenant. In fact, this exactly how Deuteronomy is organized because Deuteronomy is the covenant that God made with Israel.

Deuteronomy

- Preamble 1:1-5
- Historical Prologue (1:6-4:49)
- Ethical Stipulations (5:1-26:19)
- Sanctions (27:1-30:20)
- Succession Arrangements (31:1-34:12)

Now if the nation of vassals violated the terms of the covenant the king would send a letter or messengers to the vassals warning the disobedient offenders of coming punishment in which the judgments and curses of the covenant would be enforced.

This letter/message of warning was called a **Covenant Lawsuit**.

In every case this was the function of the Old Testament prophets...

... they were God's prosecuting attorneys bringing God's covenant lawsuit to the offending nations of Israel and Judah.

The Structure of the Covenant Lawsuit was always patterned after the original structure of the covenant.

So, if you look at HOSEA you will see the same outline as Deuteronomy.

I say all of that to make this point...

... It seems that the book of Revelation is a prophecy of Covenant punishment against Israel specifically and against all humanity generally.

God's relationship with Abraham's children has always been defined in terms of the Covenant, the marriage bond by which God joined Abraham's children to Himself as His special people.

The part that we miss is that Abraham's children are not defined by those who came from Abraham's loins.

This is what we learned in our recent study in Romans.

Ishmael and the children of Keturah came from that fountain but only Isaac was the promised son. Jacob and Esau both came from that fountain but only Jacob did God love.

Israel as a nation has disobeyed God and Humanity has disobeyed God... This is what Revelation is about.

Revelation

1. Preamble: Vision of the Son of Man (1)
2. Historical Prologue: The Seven Letters (2-3)
3. Ethical Stipulations: The Seven Seals (4-7)
4. Sanctions: The Seven Trumpets (8-14)
5. Succession Arrangements: The Seven Chalices (15-22)

As far as Israel is concerned the Great Tribulation was the holocaust and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when temple worship was ended forever.

Revelation

1. Preamble: Vision of the Son of Man (1)

Preamble identifying the lordship of the king stressing his greatness, power, nearness and presence.

(Rev 1:9)⁹ I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

I want you to see that John's fundamental outlook is the opposite of the modern TV evangelist who says that Christians have no tribulation, Christ does not have an earthly kingdom, and that Christians are not required or expected to persevere.

(Rev 1:10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

John isn't saying he has a "good feeling" he is saying that he had a definite experience.

... the "Lord's Day" shows God's completed work.

(Rev 1:17)²⁷ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

The majesty of the Lord always results in bowed humility ... always in the bible God's presence results in man's humility.

Revelation

1. Preamble: Vision of the Son of Man (1)

2. Historical Prologue: The Seven Letters (2-3)

The second part of the covenantal treaty structure recounts the history of the Great King's relationship with the vassal and reminds him of his lord's authority and covenant faithfulness, listing benefits that have been provided, enumerating the vassal's transgressions of the law, commanding the vassal to repent and renew his obedience and promising future rewards.

Every address to each of these churches follows the same outline as the total covenant.

I give you this example and we will end here tonight.

1. Preamble: (2:1) "The one who holds the 7 stars in his right hand...."
2. Historical Prologue: "I know your deeds" (2:2-4)
3. Ethical Stipulations: "Remember from where you have fallen and repent..." (2:5a)
4. Sanctions: "Or else I am coming to you to remove your lampstand..." (2:5b)
5. Succession Arrangements: "...To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life..." (2:6-7)