

Special Study:
The Date and Message of the Book of Revelation
By: Wayne Dunaway

SPECIAL NOTE: Before we begin this study I need to make it clear that any of us can be wrong when it comes to trying to understand a book of signs and symbols like the Book of Revelation. And so it is important to emphasize that I am making this material available only because this is what I understand the book to teach. The view I hold is a view that was (and is) held by some of the best students among us. But I realize, and freely admit, that I can be wrong about it. I might even be wrong about the *date* of the book. Burton Coffman said, “*Until comparatively quite recently the scholarship of the world was practically united in the acceptance of the early date”.* But the scholarship of the world can all be wrong when it comes to such a controversial matter as the date and symbols in the book of Revelation. And for me (or anyone else) to say, or even indicate, that the date, signs, and symbols “MUST” be understood in order for one to be right with God is simply not true.. It would be highly presumptuous for me (or anyone else) to insist that this highly symbolic book “MUST” be understood--- especially when we may not understand it ourselves. But, thank the Lord, one is not saved by understanding all of the Book of Revelation, but by what Jesus accomplished at Calvary. (I Cor. 15:1-3). And, of course, there are some things that are clear and easily understood in the Book of Revelation that you can easily learn simply by reading it for yourself. But when it comes to the meaning of the signs and symbols, and what specific “city” is being discussed, there are (and have always been) major disagreements and various views. Therefore, I am making this material available to you for your *information, education, consideration, and edification*, but not for your *salvation*!

- I. There is no solid or concrete external evidence for either the late or early date. The statement of Irenaeus that is usually offered in defense of the late date is subject to two interpretations and is, in the words of Foy Wallace, Jr., “More like hearsay than history” (C.R., pg. 15). Furthermore, Phillip Schaff said, “It is indeed difficult to set aside the clear testimony of Irenaeus, who, through Polycarp, was connected with the very age of John. But we must remember that he was mistaken even on more important points of history, as the age of Jesus, which he asserts, with an appeal to tradition, to have been above fifty years” (History of the Christian Church, Vol. I, pg. 427).
- II. The condition of the seven churches of Asia at the time the book was written does not necessarily support the late date. Some say that the conditions of the seven churches are too far removed from the conditions presented in the book of Acts and the epistles to allow for such a change if the book was written early. However, it must be pointed out that Paul MARVELLED that the Galatian churches were “SO SOON REMOVED” from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Gal. 1:16). Thus, a sudden change in the conditions of a church or churches was not impossible, nor improbable, during that age. Furthermore, Jesus predicted that before the fall of Jerusalem the love many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12), which seems to be exactly what happened to the church at Ephesus. (Rev. 2:1-7).

- III. It seems then that the date of the book must be determined from WITHIN THE BOOK ITSELF. And really, what better place could we go to get the evidence than to the book itself? Concerning the internal evidence, brother Franklin Camp wrote, “The internal evidence shows WITHOUT QUESTION (emphasis mine, W.D.) that it was written before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70”. (The Work of the H.S., pg. 58). In my judgment, and according to my understanding of the book, brother Camp is right.
- IV. However, before getting into the internal proof from the book itself, let’s notice some statements from others concerning the early date:
- (1) Foy Wallace, Jr. - “The argument for the early Neroan date has solid internal proof-within the book itself-and external historical support by recognized and respectable scholars of high standing” (C.R., pg. 16).
 - (2) Philip Schaff - “On two points I have changed my opinion, the second Roman captivity of Paul (which I am disposed to admit in the interest of the Pastoral Epistles), and the date of the Apocalypse which I now assign, WITH THE MAJORITY OF MODERN CRITICS (emphasis mine, W.D.), to the year 68 or 69 instead of 95 as before”. (History of the Christian Church, Philip Schaff, Preface, pg. 6).
 - (3) C.C. Crawford - “There is a growing conviction among archaeologists in our day that all the books of the New Testament Canon were in existence by the 70’s or 80’s of the first century” (History Course in Christian Doctrine, Vol. II, pg. 211).
 - (4) Robert Young - “It was written in Patmos about A.D. 68, whither John had been banished by Domitius Nero, as stated in the title of the Syriac version of the book; and with this concurs the express statement of Irenaeus in A.D. 175, who says it happened in the reign of Domitianou - i.e. Domitius (Nero)” (C.R. Wallace, pg. 23).
 - (5) Franklin Camp - “The internal evidence shows without question that it was written before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70”. (The Work of the H.S. in Redemption, pg. 58).
 - (6) John A.T. Robinson - “Hort, together with Lightfoot and Westcott, none of whom can be accused of setting light to ancient tradition, still rejected a Domitianic date in favor of one between the death of Nero in 68 and the fall of Jerusalem in 70... Peake cites the remarkable consensus of ‘both advanced and conservative scholars’ who backed it”. (Re-dating the New Testament, pgs. 224-225).
 - (7) James M. McDonald - “We therefore conclude that a reader of the Apocalypse, without the date, consulting the book itself as a witness on this point, cannot fail to come to the conclusion that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, in the reign of Nero, the sixth in succession to Julius Caesar in the empire of Rome.” (“The Life and Writings of St. John,” copied by Franklin Camp in “The Word of Life,” January and February, 1977).
 - (8) James Burton Coffman - In his commentary on Revelation, Bro. Coffman as this to say: “Until comparatively quite recently, the scholarship of the world was practically united in the acceptance of the early date” (C.R.,

pg. 3). Later he wrote: “So much, then, for our reasons for preferring what seems to us as the far more probable date around 68-70, prior to the fall of Jerusalem...” (C.R. pg. 7).

- (9) Philip Schaff - (again), “...the internal evidence strongly favors an earlier date between the death of Nero (June 9, '68) and the destruction of Jerusalem (August 10, '70)..... The early date is advocated or accepted By Neander, Lucke, Bleek, Eswald, DeWette, Baur, Hilgenfeld, Reuss, Dusterdicck, Renan, Aube, Stuart, Davidson, Crowles, Bishop Lightfoot, Westcott, Holtzmann, Weiss; and among earlier writers by Alcasar, Grotius, Hammond, Abauzit, and John Lightfoot” (History of the Christian Church, Vol. I, pg. 834).

V. The INTERNAL EVIDENCE for the early date of the book of Revelation:

- (1) Rev. 10:11 - John was to “prophesy again before many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.” If John was released after A.D. 96 to fulfill this command he would have been 90 years old or older. Could he possibly carry out such a command to prophesy before many NATIONS? Remember the angel said, “Thou MUST prophesy again before MANY PEOPLES and NATIONS and tongues and kings.” I doubt if he could, especially in light of the following from Foy Wallace, Jr.: “In the light the testimony of Jerome, that in the year A.D. 96, the apostle John was so aged, weak, and infirm, that ‘he was with difficulty carried into the church, and could speak only a few words to the people’ (C.R., pg. 43). However, both the Bible (Rev. 10:11) and tradition indicate that John did leave Patmos and travel to other places preaching etc. Note the following quote from Clement of Alexandria, “When on the death of the Tyrant he was removed from the island of Patmos to Ephesus, he would go off, when requested, to the neighboring districts of the Gentiles also, to appoint bishops in some places, to organize whole churches in others, in others again to appoint to an order some one of those who were indicated by the Spirit” (Re-dating the N.T., Robinson, pg. 222).
- (2) Rev. 11:8 – THE GREAT CITY in the book of Revelation is identified as “WHERE ALSO OUR LORD WAS CRUCIFIED.” This has to be JERUSALEM. And this is the city that is destroyed (not Rome). In Rev. 17:16-18 notice that the ten horns HATE THE WHORE, and shall make her desolate and BURN HER WITH FIRE. The great city cannot be Rome, for the Roman empire did not hate the city of Rome, but they did hate JERUSALEM and destroyed her with fire in A.D. 70.
- (3) Rev. 13:8 – Nero is the beast designated as 666. Concerning the number of the beast the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia., volume 4, pg. 2162, says: “If, as most scholars are inclined to believe, a name is intended, the numerical value of the letters composing which adds up to 666, and if it is assumed that the writer thought in Hebrew or Aramic., NERO CAESAR.....seems to be the best solution.” Also, observe the following from brother Bob Prichard, preacher for the Oxford Church of Christ, in Oxford, Ala. Writing about the beast of Revelation 13:18 he says: “Many early languages used letters of the alphabet as numbers, instead of

the Arabic numbers in common use today, This was true of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin (which used “Roman numerals”). Using a system called gematria, the letters of a name were added according to their numerical value, giving a sum that was a sort of code number for the name. Many different names total 666 in this fashion, but *the most likely identification of an individual which fits with the context of the book of Revelation is Nero Caesar*. (Emphasis mine, W.D.) Nero, who was undoubtedly one of the wickedest men who ever lived, was a persecutor of the church, and demanded worship as a god. His name in Hebrew, totals exactly 666”.

- (4) When we compare the verses referring to the destruction of Jerusalem with those in the book of Revelation, we can clearly see that they are identical, and therefore probably refer to the same event. The first time the great city, is mentioned John tells us exactly who it is. He said it is the city “*where also our Lord was crucified*”. (Rev. 11:8). Note the following comparisons concerning the language referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the language in the Book of Revelation:

(a) Matt. 10:23; 24:30; 26:64; Heb. 10:37; and James 5:8. These verses seem to refer to Christ COMING in judgment on Jerusalem.

(b) Rev. 2:25; 3:11; 22:7,12,20 – These verses also refer to a SOON COMING of Christ (which could not be His second coming), and it seems to me they could be referring to the same coming as those verses above.

(a) Matt. 24:3,5,13, & 14 and I Peter 4:7 – These verses seem to refer to the END of Judaism and the destruction of Jerusalem.

(b) Rev. 10:6 – This verse in Revelation also speaks of an END which was to “shortly come to pass” (Rev. 1:11), and seems to me to refer to the same END as the verses above.

(a) Matt. 23:34-35 – Jesus said that on JERUSALEM would come judgment for “all the righteous blood shed on the earth.”

(b) Rev. 18:24 – Concerning the city that is destroyed in Revelation John records: “In HER (the woman-the great city, Rev. 17:18) was found the blood of the prophets, and of saints, and of ALL that were slain upon the earth.”

(a) Matt. 24:21 – Jesus describes the persecution that immediately preceded the fall of Jerusalem as GREATTRIBULATION.

(b) Rev. 7:14 – Revelation also refers to some coming out of GREAT TRIBULATION.

- (a) Matt. 24:29 – Jesus refers to a DARKENING OF THE SUN AND MOON, AND FALLING OF THE STARS indicating that God was going to put some nations’ lights out. This darkening of the nation would occur during the generation that lived when He did. See Matt. 24:34.
- (b) Rev. 6:12 & 13 – Revelation also refers to a DARKENING OF THE SUN AND MOON AND FALLING OF THE STARS indicating the fall of some nation that was to “*shortly come to pass.*” See Rev. 1:1& 22:6.
- (a) Luke 23:27-30 – Jesus told the women following Him to calvary that at the fall of Jerusalem men would “SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, FALL ON US AND TO THE HILLS COVER US”.
- (b) Rev. 6:15-16 – Revelation says, that when God brought the judgment referred to in that book, men would say, “To The MOUNTAIN AND ROCKS, FALL ON US, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb.”
- (a) Luke 21:20 – Jesus said Jerusalem would be DESOLATE.
- (b) Rev. 18:19 – The great city in Revelation (i.e. Jerusalem, Rev. 11:8) was made DESOLATE.
- (a) Matt. 23:34 & 35 – Jesus said that Jerusalem would persecute and kill the servants He sent to them – the APOSTLES and PROPHETS – and would be punished because of it.
- (b) Rev. 18:20 – God avenged the APOSTLES and PROPHETS on the great city that was destroyed in the book of Revelation which was Jerusalem. See also Rev. 16:6.
- (a) Luke 21:24 – Concerning the destruction of the Jewish nation Jesus said, “JERUSALEM” shall Be TRODDEN DOWN OF THE GENTILES.”
- (b) Rev. 11:2 – In Revelation it is stated that the GENTILES would TREAD UNDER FOOT the HOLY CITY. (See Matt. 4:5 to see that Jerusalem is called the “holy city.”)
- (a) Matt. 23:32; I Thess. 2:14-16 – Jesus and Paul said that the Jewish persecution of Christianity FILLED UP their sins and they would be judged by God.
- (b) Rev. 18:5-8 – The book of Revelation refers to the city that FILLED UP her sins and was judged by God.

- (a) Matt. 22:7 – Jesus indicated, in the parable of the marriage feast, concerning the Jews and Jerusalem that GOD “sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and BURNED UP THEIR CITY.”
 - (b) Rev. 17:16-18 – In Revelation GOD put it into the hearts of the ten horns on the beast to BURN UP THE GREAT CITY (i.e. Jerusalem, Rev. 11:8) with fire.
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- (a) Luke 21:23 – Concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said there would be “WRATH upon this people.”
 - (b) Rev. 6:17 – Revelation refers to a time when “the great day of His WRATH is come.”
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- (a) Daniel 12:7 – Foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, Daniel saw an angel standing on the WATERS of a river, who LIFTED UP HIS HANDS UNTO HEAVEN AND SWARE that the power of the Jewish nation would be scattered (or broken) at a certain time.
 - (b) Rev. 10:5 & 6 – John also saw an angel stand on the SEA and earth, and LIFT UP HIS HAND TOWARD HEAVEN AND SWARE that time would be no longer for a nation.
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- (a) Daniel 12:7 – The angel in Daniel also said that the breaking of the power of the Jewish nation would be accomplished during a certain “TIME, TIMES, and AN HALF.”
 - (b) Rev. 11:2 – The city destroyed in Revelation was “tread under foot FORTY-TWO MONTHS” which is exactly equal to a “TIME, TIMES, and a Half” or 3 1/2 years. See Rev. 12:14.
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- (a) Zech. 14:2 – In foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Zechariah said GOD would “gather all nations against Jerusalem.”
 - (b) Rev. 17:17 & 18 – John says that GOD put it into the hearts of those to destroy the great city in the book of Revelation.
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- (a) Mal. 4:1-3 – Malachi said that Jerusalem would be SO DESTROYED that they would not be LEFT ROOT OR BRANCH.
 - (b) Rev. 18:21 – The great city in Revelation was SO DESTROYED that it would be “FOUND NO MORE AT ALL.”

- (a) Mal. 4:5 – The destruction of Jerusalem is called the “GREAT and dreadful DAY OF THE LORD.”
 - (b) Rev. 6:17; 16:14 – The destruction of the great city in Revelation is called “the GREAT DAY OF GOD ALMIGHTY.”
- (5) While this is not all the evidence that could be presented, it is enough for me to conclude that, IF WE LET THE BIBLE INTERPRET ITSELF, we surely must admit that the book of Revelation was probably WRITTEN BEFORE A.D. 70, and is primarily dealing with THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM and the fall of the Jewish nation. It is important to understand that Rome did not fall until about 476 A.D. But the destruction of the great city in the Book of Revelation was to “*shortly come to pass*” (Rev. 1:1) and “*shortly take place*” (Rev. 22:6) and the city is identified as “*where also our Lord was crucified*” (Rev. 11:8).

THEME: THE VICTORY HAS BEEN WON THROUGH JESUS THE SON.

BRIEF OUTLINE:

- (1) Chapter 1: The CHRIST
- (2) Chapters 2-3: The CHURCH
- (3) Chapters 4-22: The CONFLICT

EXPANDED OUTLINE:

- (1) The CHRIST (chap. 1)
 - (a) The Preface (1:1-10)
 - (b) The Person (1:11-20)
- (2) The CHURCH (chaps. 2 & 3)
 - (a) Ephesus – Loyal but Lacking (2:1-7)
 - (b) Smyrna - Suffering Saints (2:8-11)
 - (c) Pergamos – Satan’s Seat (2:12-17)
 - (d) Thyatira – Jezebel Junction (2:18-29)
 - (e) Sardis – Tombstone Territory (3:1-6)
 - (f) Philadelphia – Faithful Few (3:7-13)
 - (g) Laodiceans – Sickening Servants (3:14-22)
- (3) The CONFLICT (chapters 4-22)
 - (a) THE CONQUERING CHRIST (4-11)
 - (b) HIS BEAUTIFUL BRIDE (12-22)

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