

Revelation's Call for Faithfulness

¹² Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Revelation 14:12 (ESV)

The book of Revelation is a unique book. Revelation engages readers' imagination while also causing much confusion, misunderstanding, and mystery. Much of the confusion comes from Revelation chapters 6 through 19 with the book's strange numbers, symbols, judgments, and peculiar visions experienced by John. Revelation chapters 1 through 5 and Revelation chapters 21 and 22 are often the most read chapters of Revelation. Understanding the Holy Bible is incomplete without reading all of Revelation. Revelation contains the most exalted and majestic portrait of the true and living God, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (see Revelation chapters 4 and 5).

Scholars classify Revelation as apocalyptic literature. Revelation describes the second coming of Jesus (Revelation 1:7), the judgment of God at the end of the age (Revelation 6 through 20), and the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21 and 22). Most of the Holy Scriptures focuses on God working within human history through various narrative stories, parables, and poetry. However, books such as Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation focus on God's future reigning and judgment. Even more, Revelation is also prophetic such as the books of Old Testament books of Jeremiah and Amos. Revelation reveals the true and living God heaven and earth, and He is reigning, sovereign, omnipotent, and omnipresent (Revelation 4:1-11; Revelation 19:6; see also Exodus 15:11; 2 Chronicles 6:14, 18). Finally, the author John wrote Revelation as a letter to the seven churches in Asia Minor to assure the churches of God and His Son Jesus' ever-presences with them (Revelation 2:1-3:22). Seven represents completion. Thus, John is writing to all churches of God and His Son's care and presence.

One of Revelation's themes is the importance of continual faithfulness and obedience to God and His Son, Jesus (see e.g., Revelation 12:17; Revelation 13:10; Revelation 14:12). At the time of John's writing, the churches in Asia Minor were suffering at the hands of the Roman government. John assured the churches that God and His Son Jesus promised redemption, blessing, and victory for those who faithfully and obediently worshipped Him and His Son, Jesus, as their Lord and God (see e.g., Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-29; Revelation 5:9-14; Revelation 14:3-5). As Jesus informed His disciples before His death and crucifixion, "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NLT; see also Revelation 3:5, 12, 21; Revelation 21:7).

Scholars have dated John's writing of Revelation as early as Claudius (A.D. 41-54) and as late as Trajan (A.D. 98-117). Many scholars believe John wrote Revelation approximately A.D. 95, during the reign of the Roman emperor

Domitian. Domitian enacted an old Roman practice of emperor worship, and he demanded all people worship him as “our lord and our god.” However, faithful Christians during Domitian’s reign refused to worship Domitian and only acknowledged God and His Son Jesus as “Lord and God.” The earliest Christian’s confession was that “Jesus is Lord” (see Revelation 19:16). The Christians’ refusal to worship Domitian led to severe persecution as the Roman government threatened and pressured early Christians to accept the practice of emperor worship. In fact, early church tradition believes that Domitian exiled John to the island of Patmos, a Roman penal colony off the coast of Asia Minor, because of his faithful testimony of Jesus Christ (see Revelation 1:2, 9).

Some biblical scholars maintain that John wrote the book of Revelation during the latter part of Nero’s reign (A.D. 54 – 68). During Nero’s reign, faithful Christians suffered great persecution. In fact, Roman writings report that Nero even set fire to portions of Rome and unjustly blamed the Christians. Nero’s persecution of the Christians was so severe that even other Roman gentiles sympathized with the Christians. However, scholars note that Nero centered his persecution of Christian mainly in the city of Rome. Revelation primarily discusses Christian suffering persecution in Asia Minor. Scholars note that there was no evidence that Christians suffered persecution outside Rome during Nero’s reign.

Thus, most biblical scholars believe that John wrote Revelation during the harsh reign of Roman emperor Domitian (A.D. 81 - 96). Roman historical writings support Christians’ widespread suffering and persecution during Domitian’s reign. The book of Revelation does not specifically mention Domitian’s name or the Romans. However, John personified the Roman Empire as a beast who demanded universal worship (see e.g., Revelation 13:4; Revelation 14:9; Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20) and insisting that everyone bear his evil “mark” or be put to death (see e.g., Revelation 20:4).

In Revelation, John warned the churches against coming opposition and the importance of worshipping only God and His Son Jesus as “our Lord and God” (see e.g., Revelation 1:6; Revelation 2:10; Revelation 4:11; Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:3, 10). Also, John wrote Revelation to encourage Christians to remain faithful to God and His Son Jesus as Lord (Revelation 1:18) and not compromise their faith (see e.g., Revelation 2:10; Revelation 20:4). Like the church today, accommodation and compromise were issues facing these early Christians. Some within the church were advocating a policy of compromise (see e.g., Revelation 2:14-15, 20).

Sadly, every Christian in every generation faces temptations to compromise to the world and their values. Previously, the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter wrote to the Church not to be conformed to this world’s values (see Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 1:14; 1 John 2:15). Revelation is John’s call to Christians to remain faithful to God and His Son, Jesus and not to accommodate or

compromise their Christian values and worship the beast of this world. John assured Christians of God's presence, redemption, and blessings as a reward for their continual faithfulness to Him and His Son Jesus as Lord. John encouraged Christians to stand firm against persecution and compromise in light of the return of Jesus to deliver the righteous and judge the wicked. At God's appointed time, the risen and ascended Jesus will burst onto the world scene and reveal He is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14). Then everyone will know that Jesus is Lord of the universe (see also Philippians 2:6-11)!

Revelation promises a happy conclusion to all faithful worshippers of God and His Son Jesus. God would seal His faithful and holy servants from judgment and wrath by placing His name and Jesus' name on their foreheads (see e.g., Revelation 7:3; Revelation 14:1; Revelation 22:4). Even more, John says that God will create "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). On this new earth, there will be no more tears and no more pain (Revelation 21:4). God will be with His faithful servants, and they will reign with Him forever and ever (Revelation 22:2-5). Out of the bad news predicted in Revelation, Revelation ends with hope and good news – specular Good News. For all the faithful believers, Revelation becomes a book of hope that the faithful will be with Jesus forever.

So, REPENT of your sins and turn to God and His Son, Jesus (see Revelation 2:5, 16, 21-22; Revelation 3:3, 19; Revelation 16:11; see also Matthew 4:17). Revelation promises a happy ending is coming for the faithful of God!

References

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