

## CHAPTER 11

### JOHN'S WRITINGS

Most of the NT books were written before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. The last ones written had been the final epistles of Peter and of Paul (2 Peter; 2 Timothy) and the book of Hebrews. Now over twenty years passed. Most of the original apostles died. According to the tradition of the church fathers, the apostle who outlived the others, reaching old age, was John.

John's later life was in Ephesus, where he was the honored patriarch of the church. For several years during that time he was incarcerated in exile on the island of Patmos by the emperor Domitian, who ruled A.D. 81-96. During his exile John wrote Revelation, in response to the visions shown him there by God (cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5:30:3, John wrote Revelation "towards the end of Domitian's reign"). On the other hand, John wrote his Gospel and his epistles while living in Ephesus, either before or after his exile. Most NT scholars date them as written during the 90s. John's Gospel has been covered already in these notes. This chapter will cover his epistles and Revelation.

### John's epistles

#### *Authorship of John's epistles*

The letters themselves give little information; 2 and 3 John both identify their author as the "elder" (*presbuteros*). It is universally agreed by scholars that the author of John's epistles is the same as the author of his Gospel. Therefore, the evidence showing that the Fourth Gospel was written by John also applies to these three letters. Likewise, there is strong external evidence supporting John as the author of the First Epistle, and thereby also as the author of the other two.

John presents himself as old, and addresses the Christians as "little children." According to the church fathers, John died during the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98-117).

#### **1 John**

## **Background of 1 John**

This letter probably was written to the churches around Ephesus.

John was concerned about the error of the early Gnostics, especially Cerinthus, and of the Nicolaitans, who favored licentiousness (see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1:26:3, 1; 3:9:1; cf. 1 John 2:15-27; 4:1-6, esp. v. 2).

John also realized that the Christians at the end of the first century needed assurance and encouragement (1 John 1:4; 5:13-18). They also needed strengthening of resolve to live as Christians in a time of wickedness and persecution (1 John 1:6-10; 2:28-29; 3:3-10).

## **The tests of life in 1 John**

Theme: How to know you are a Christian (1 John 5:13). John offers three ways to know:

1. You believe orthodox doctrine
2. You are obeying God's commandments
3. You love your brothers and sisters in the Lord

## **Content of 1 John**

1. Confession of sin (1 John 1)
2. Christian holiness vs. apostasy's wickedness (1 John 2-4)
3. Christianity that overcomes (1 John 5)

## **Points of interest in 1 John**

- Confession verse (1 John 1:9)
- Universal atonement? (1 John 2:2)
- Love of the world (1 John 2:15-17)
- Heavenly hope (1 John 3:2)
- Perfectionism? (1 John 3:6)
- Test for orthodoxy (1 John 4:6)

- Spurious passage (1 John 5:7b-8a)
- Assurance verse (1 John 5:13)

## **2 John**

2 John was written to a prominent Christian lady and her children (2 John 1, 10). John was concerned that this lady might be taken advantage of by traveling preachers who were giving out false doctrine. She was to have nothing to do with them; if she were to help them, she would be participating in their evil works. The doctrinal error of these false teachers was their denial of the humanity of Jesus—a Gnostic heresy.

### **Content of 2 John**

1. The Christian walk (2 John 1-6)
2. Deceivers and antichrists (2 John 7-11)
3. John's planned visit (2 John 12-13)

## **3 John**

3 John was written to a Christian lay leader in the church, Gaius. That name was very common in the Roman culture, and there are a number of Gaiuses in the NT; this man may have been one of them, or else another Gaius.

The situation faced by Gaius was the opposite as that faced by the lady of 2 John. In his case there were many traveling preachers who were preaching the true gospel. John urges Gaius to give these men hospitality and to help them in their ministries. John also takes time to commend a local church leader, Demetrius, and to criticize and rebuke another church leader, Diotrephes, who ruled in the church as a tyrant.

### **Content of 3 John**

1. The Christian walk (3 John 1-8)
2. Warning against Diotrephes (3 John 9-11)
3. Commendation of Demetrius (3 John 12)
4. John's planned visit (3 John 13-14)

## **Revelation**

Revelation is unlike the other NT books; it is in the genre of “apocalyptic literature.” This literature sees the believers’ hope to be found, not in this age, but in the coming age. And this coming age will come not by gradual progress or natural development, but by a cataclysmic divine act, the future divine judgments on the earth, culminating in the second coming of Christ and his defeat of all his enemies. In this sense, Revelation most closely resembles the OT books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and, in fact, Revelation quotes or alludes to those books frequently.

### ***Authorship of Revelation***

The author names himself as “John” (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). Strong external evidence supports him as the Apostle John (e.g., Justin Martyr, Irenaeus).

The main argument opposing John as the author is that the style of writing is so different from his Gospel and epistles. This has led to some ancient critics of Revelation (as Dionysius of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea) postulating that he was a separate John, the “elder John.” This argument can be answered by two explanations:

- On the island of Patmos John would have had no amanuensis to help him, as he would have had in Ephesus.
- Revelation is written as apocalyptic literature, with a conscious effort to imitate the style of the OT apocalyptic books.

The second argument is strengthened by the fact that Revelation has passages that show its author capable of elevated and eloquent Greek style.

### ***Background and destination of Revelation***

John was in exile in Patmos, off the coast of the province of Asia. There he saw visions from God, showing the glory of Christ and the future events leading up to the new heavens and new earth. He also received messages from Christ for the churches in seven cities in Asia.

The seven cities in Asia comprised a circular loop through the province, following the Roman mail route. The Lord addressed a message to each church that was suited to its situation and needs.

### ***Purpose and theme of Revelation***

- Stated purpose of Revelation: To show future to John (Rev 1:1)

- Theme of Revelation: The second coming of Christ (Rev 1:7; cf. piercing in Zech 12:10 and John 19:37)
- Times involved: Past, present, future (Rev 1:19; outline of book follows these times)
- Present purposes of Revelation:
  - To show believers that Christ will overcome all evil powers (Rev. 4:11; 5:5, 9-10, 12-13; ch. 6-16 [seals, trumpets, bowls]; 11:15; 12:5-12; 15:3-4; 17:14; 19:1-2, 6, 12-16; 20:4, 6; 22:5)
  - Therefore, we believers should endure and overcome all trials and persecutions (Rev 1:3, 9; 2:7, 11, 26-27; 3:5, 12, 21; 5:9-10; 7:15-17; 11:18; 12:10-11; 13:10; 14:13; 16:15; 18:20; 20:4-6; 21:3-4; 22:3-5)

### ***Interpreting Revelation***

Revelation abounds in figures and symbols. The interpreter must decide if any particular statement has been or will be fulfilled literally, symbolically, or allegorically. The heart of the book describes the “great tribulation,” leading up to the coming of Christ (Rev 6-19). There are three major schools of thought as to the timing of this central portion of Revelation:

- *Preterite*.—Events related or described in Rev 6-19 had happened or were in the process of occurring when John wrote Revelation. Taken to be fulfilled in A.D. 70 (thus requires an early date for Revelation’s writing); relies heavily on symbolic language; some view the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as the second coming of Christ.
- *Historical*.—Events described in Rev 6-19 are predictions of the long history of the Christian church from John’s time to the second coming of Christ. Requires much symbolic and subjective interpretation; often has to be reworked.
- *Futuristic*.—Events described in Rev 6-19 are still future, and are to take place near the time of Christ’s second coming. Allows more literal interpretations; is not contradicted by history.

### ***Content of Revelation***

Note that the outline of the main body of Revelation follows the outline provided in Rev 1:19 (past, present, future), with the emphasis being on the future (as indicated by Rev 1:1; 4:1).

1. Introduction (Rev 1:1-8)
2. Things that are past: vision of Christ (Rev 1:9-20)

3. Things that are present: letters to the seven churches of Asia (Rev 2-3)
4. Things that are to come: the tribulation, coming of Christ, and new order (Rev 4 – 22:5)
  - a. Heavenly preparation for the tribulation (Rev 4-5)
  - b. The tribulation period (Rev 6-18)
    - Includes the series of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls
  - c. The return of Christ (Rev 19)
  - d. The millennium and judgment (Rev 20)
  - e. The new order (Rev 21 – 22:5)
5. Conclusion (Rev 22:6-21)

### ***Points of interest in Revelation***

- Motto for the International Council of Christian Churches (Rev 1:9)
- The 144,000 (Rev 7, 14)
- 3½ years = 42 months = 1,260 days (Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5)
- Characters: Two witnesses, Woman, Child, Dragon, Michael, Beast, False Prophet (Rev 11-13)
- Everlasting suffering in hell (Rev 14:10-11; 19:20; 21:10, 14-15)
- Babylon the Great (Rev 17-18)
- Marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9)
- Battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16; 19:11-21)
- The millennium (Rev 20:2-7)
- The tree of life (Rev 22:2; cf. Gen 2:9; 3:22-24; Ezek 47:12)
- Sacredness of Scripture (Rev 22:18-19)