

Revelation

Notes #1

Introduction

- I. The movement of God as determined within the canon of revelation.
 - A. God's movement in time as revealed in the canon.
 1. The rulership of man as the individual purpose of creation.
 2. The rulership of Israel as the national purpose of creation.
 3. The rule of Satan through the rebellion of creation as the judgment on man.
 4. The rule of Satan through the "Times of the Gentiles" as the judgment on Israel.
 5. The restoration of individual and national rule through a "Son of Man", the fullness of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants.
 - B. Daniel
 1. The explanation of, at the inception of, The Times of the Gentiles, the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel.
 2. The prophetic anticipation of the ultimate Son of Man, the Restorer of the Kingdom to Israel.
 - C. Revelation
 1. The explanation of, at the finality of, The Times of the Gentiles, the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel.
 2. The appearance of the ultimate Son of Man and His restoration of the Kingdom to Israel.
 - a. Based on the First Coming for the atonement and recognition.
 - b. The guarantee of His Second Coming to judge.
 3. The prophecy of restoration of individual and national rule in the Son of Man and the demise of the Serpent and his followers, based on the validation of His crucifixion and resurrection as the fulfillment of Gen. 3:15.
 4. The taking of vengeance on the Serpent and his seed as a fulfillment of Gen. 3:15.
 - D. The Age of Grace as the Fullness of Times
 1. The fullness of the atonement as a possession of the believer.
 2. The walk based on faith of the atonement.
 3. Anticipation of the Kingdom based on the resurrection of Christ.
 - E. The Church as a unique body during Israel's apostasy.

1. The Church as the followers of the 12 Apostles.
2. The Church as a believing remnant outside of the nation Israel.
3. The Church includes saved Gentiles for a time.
4. The Word of God was always given to Israel to speak to the nations (Exodus 19). Thus, the Word of God in Revelation is given to the churches as joint-heirs with Israel (Ephesians 2) to be a witness to the nations, with the church participating in the reward.

II. The movement of the Book (1:19)

- A. Chapter 1: The things which you have seen: The revelation of Jesus as the Revealer/Ruler (Representative of the Father).
- B. Chapter 2--3: The things which are: The Seven Churches to represent God during the apostasy of the nation.
- C. Chapter 4--22: The things which shall be: The restoration of man over creation, Israel over the nations.

III. Main Characters of the Book (Who?)

- A. God the Father (1:1): The ultimate Creator, Planner and Controller of the universe and its events.
- B. Jesus the Messiah (1:5): The Rightful Ruler (The One Man who did (past), has (present), and will (future) represent God.
- C. The Reader (1:6): One who has been established as a *priest*, a representative of God to the pagan world, one of the seven churches addressed in 2--3, 22.
- D. The Author (11,4,10): An apostle (revealer of God) as well as a member of the body of Christ ("bond-servant"), fellow-sufferer.
- E. Israel (1:7, 5:1--22:5) The subject of the book (1:7), the nation of promise to be restored.
- G. Gentile Nations (8--9): The opposers of Israel's rule nationally (8--9), submissive to Israel.
- H. Satan (12--13): The opponent of the Father who deceives the nations and attempts to deceive Israel as he did in the beginning (12--13).
- I. The Beast (13--16): The antichrist, who rules over the world under Satan's power and authority (13:1ff.).
- J. Babylon (17--18): The anti-Israel. The nation that has opposed Israel (and God) from the beginning (Gen. 11).

IV. The Subject of the Book (What?) and Complement (How?)

- A. The Restoration of Rule to man to Israel through the Son of Man to God at Jerusalem
- B. Is accomplished by the obedient death of the Son of Man and His return to execute judgment and deliver the faithful.

V. The Times of the Book (When?)

- A. The Church Age (1--3, 22:6-21).
- B. The Tribulation Period (4--18)
- C. The Return of Christ (19)

- D. The 1000 Year Kingdom of Israel (20)
- E. The Eternal Kingdom (21--22:6)

VI. The Location of the Book (Where?)

The locations will change throughout the book. The reader will be given insight into events on the earth and in heaven. The concept is that while earth is under the rule of Satan and its accompanying chaos, heaven is under the rule of God inaccessible to Satan's harm. Thus believers are guaranteed safety upon death, awaiting in heaven their return to earth to rule.

Yet the importance of geographical location will also be important. Jerusalem and Israel, who have been controlled by the Gentiles since the deportation and their recapture, are central to the book. Jerusalem becomes the dwelling place of Israelite believers along with their joint-heirs, the church.

- A. Earth: The dwelling of man: Man was made to represent God on earth. It is here that Satan will attempt to continue his rule through man, and it is through man on earth that God will again rule.
- B. Heaven: The dwelling of God: It is from heaven that God administers, and it is in heaven that believers are protected while waiting their return to earth with Christ to rule.
- C. Israel: Israel is the land of the nation Israel ("the land"¹). It is the central battleground for the activities of Revelation since it is the repossession of this land that is so crucial to God's restoration of the nation (5).
- D. Jerusalem: Jerusalem is the capital of the nation Israel, and has been from the beginning of Israel, the city that is central to the place of God on earth. Thus, it becomes the ultimate dwelling place of the children of Abraham's promise (Israel and their joint-heir, the church). The city is located on earth in the nation of Israel. It is built (created new) in heaven² and is brought to the earth.
- E. The Nations: These are the places where Gentiles dwell.

VII. The Covenants of God (Why?)

A. The Adamic Covenant

This covenant was made at the creation in the statement, "Let us make man in Our image, and let him rule. . ." This was not a conditional statement, but a statement of God's purpose which He alone would insure. Man would rule.

B. The Abrahamic Covenant

¹ Throughout Revelation the Greek word *gh* is most frequently translated "earth". However, depending on the context, it might be translated "land", particularly referring to the land of Israel. For instance in 1:7 the text reads "all the tribes of the earth (*gh*) shall mourn". This is a paraphrase of Zechariah 12:10ff. where each of the tribes (*fūl ai*, correctly contextually translated "families" in Zechariah) of Israel are mourning when they see Christ appear at the Second Coming. Clearly it should be translated "all the families of the land shall mourn." There is no justification for broadening it to "earth". Thus, one must be very careful in Revelation to see contextually whether *gh* should be translated "earth" or "land."

² cf. John 14:1-3.

This covenant was made at the creation of Israel in Genesis 12:1-3, when God says, "I will make you a great nation . . ." It was not conditional, but a statement of God's will which He alone would insure.

C. The Davidic Covenant

This covenant was made with David and insured that his seed would occupy the throne forever as the ruler of Israel (and the world). This would be the individual ruler over the nation guaranteed within the Abrahamic Covenant.

D. Summary: Covenants

1. Human fulfillment: They were made with men regarding their human seed (Adam - man, Abraham - nation, David - King). It was made in regard to a geographical area (Adam - earth, Abraham - Israel, David - Jerusalem). And all of these would rule over their respective realm (Adam - animals, Abraham - Gentiles, David - Israelites).
2. Earthly fulfillment: All of these covenants were earthly. There is no final fulfillment in heaven. It is always with man on earth. While in heaven is the One who guarantees the promises on earth, and from time to time possessions and people are protected in heaven, it is *a/ways* on earth that these are implemented.
3. Summary: Therefore all rulership is exercised locally on earth. The church³ and Israel must minister their rule on earth with Christ, the Man who rules on earth. The Adamic, Abrahamic and Davidic rule must be exercised on earth, not in heaven. Thus Christ will rule over the whole earth through His nation Israel located in Israel at Jerusalem. The church, as a joint-heir, will join the nation (but separate).

VII. The Hermeneutics of the Book

A. Historical

The Book must be understood in the sense that it was written to the first century church (seven of them). It is to them that John addresses his book (1--3, 22:5-21). All imperatives are addressed to them. Thus, no portion of the book is deemed to have correct interpretation until the relationship to the church is demonstrated.⁴

³ It has been proposed, normally in the past, that there was an earthly people, Israel, who fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant, and a heavenly people, the church. One of the most obvious problems with this is the eternal continuation of resurrected men (the church) in heaven. The whole purpose of man was that he would rule over this earth. God will not change that covenant. All men will live on the earth, church, Jews and Gentiles.

⁴ It is quite common for those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture to interpret chapters 4--21 apart from the church of 1--3. In order to rectify this problem some insist that the church must physically go through the tribulation of chapters 4--21 (post-tribulation rapture), else why is it important to include this portion in a book written to the church. However, this conclusion does not have literary basis (the stark difference between 1--3 and 4--21), and another solution must be sought. Since 1--3 is about the church, and 4--21 is about Israel, one must determine from the book what substantial interest does the church have in the events of Israel?

B. Grammatical

The essence of the interpretation must come from the meaning of the words, subjects, verbs, etc. The original language knowledge cannot be negated in order to provide ultimate accuracy in the meaning and usage of the words. What must be rejected as a basis for interpretation is the reader bringing non-authorial intended theology to the text. Any research or validation of the book must come from the meaning of the words in the text.

C. Normal

Since Revelation is apocalyptic in nature from Chapters 4--21, the interpreter must be very careful to utilize the symbols only as indicated in the text. The interpretation must be governed by the indications of the text.⁵ The basic structure is as follows:

1. The literary flow of the text.

John uses clues within the text for his overall and specific meaning. This is the primary interpreter, the Book of Revelation itself. For instance, John's stated purpose is that the reader might be obedient to his belief in Christ. Thus all of the book must contribute to that stated purpose.

2. Explanation of signs and symbols within the text.

Quite frequently the explanation of the sign or symbol is in the text. For instance in 7:13 John asks the angel for the interpretation of those in the white robes. In 7:14 he receives it. These are clear and must be elevated to prime importance.

3. Old Testament Reverences

a. Direct quotations

Within the book John makes direct allusions to the Old Testament. Many are quotations (or paraphrases). John is showing how the Old Testament passage is being (or has been) fulfilled. The interpreter must use the Old Testament passage to coordinate with John's use in the book to determine the consistent fulfillment.⁶

b. Theological thematic allusions

John assumes an understanding of theology which is grounded in the Old Testament. For instance, "a Son of Man" in chapter 1 is an allusion to Daniel 7. But in addition to that there is a

⁵ There is a proposed tenet often heard, "if the literal makes sense seek no other sense." This is not a specific enough guideline for literary interpretation. It is clearly possible that a symbolic message could be given which makes literal sense, yet is only symbolic and the literal interpretation is its related interpretation. However, in that case the context must give clues that the sense is symbolic.

⁶⁶ The interpreter must work with the literal message in the Old Testament as well as the literal message in the New Testament.

theology of “a Son of Man” based in Daniel and even going back to Genesis. The “woman” and “the beast” and “the serpent” of Rev. 12--13 are a theological theme from Genesis 1--3, developed nationally in Deuteronomy and symbolically utilized in Daniel 7. While the book is full of these theological themes, it should be noted that they cannot be used without solid Old Testament textual evidence, else the reader ends up informing the text.

VIII. The History of Interpretation

A. The Preterist

Sees the events as historically fulfilled in the early church, or sees them as demonstrating the timeless battle between God and Satan with no actual events in mind. This generalizes Revelation and requires that the details do not differentiate.

B. The Historicist

Sees the events as being fulfilled by church history during the present age.

C. The Futurist (Dallas Seminary)

Sees the events of chapters 4--22 as being future to the church age involved primarily with the seven years preceding the return of Christ, the return of Christ, the 1000 year kingdom, and the eternal kingdom

1. Chapters 2--3

- a. Historically to the seven churches, applicationally to all church age believers.

This is fairly typical. The address was historically to the seven churches in Asia minor, yet the theology and the applicational principles are held to be applicable to churches throughout the age.

- b. Prophetically of a progression through the church age.

This was held by the dispensationalists more in the past than present, and holds that the order of churches indicated an emphasis in each progressing age (i.e., Ephesus, the apostolic church . . . Laodicea, the present day church.⁷)

The difficulty with this is that it is a look back from the interpreter's viewpoint and is subject to the reader's view of church history to interpret the text correctly. For it to be accurate

⁷ Some would hold that the rapture takes place in the Church at Philadelphia due to the mention of the rapture in 3:10. Thus Laodicea would be the church in the tribulation, which, since it missed the rapture would have been unsaved, and thus is the false church. They would see then the harlot of Rev. 17 parallel to this church.

the text must indicate that it is intending a progression of church history, and this is absent.

The governing principle here hermeneutically is 'historical, grammatical, normal'. In other words the authorial intent requires that the interpretation be able to be accomplished by the historical reader. But no one has presented any literary indicators that this is the case, and thus is only able to be done by a present tense reader looking back and piecing events to their seemingly related church.⁸ If it is able to be done by a first century reader grammatically, then it provides a difficulty with the imminency of Christ's return since historical prophetic events must take place prior to that return.

Since these interpreters would affirm the presence of all the characteristics of each church as present in all churches, the additional prophetic meaning of the churches is an additional meaning. Thus the author would have intended a double meaning beside the literal obvious meaning. This, like any other meaning, must be demonstrated as authorially intended in the text.

- 1) No indication that the churches are in an order related to time ("the things which are"). The only time indicated is John's time ("are") and that these churches are historical and geographical.
- 2) The prophetic progression is subject to one's own view of significant events in history and is thus subject to reader intent.

IX. The Literary Format of the Book of Revelation

A. Apocalyptic

While most interpreters view the book as apocalyptic (high degrees of symbolism, angels, demons, heaven, earth, good, bad), it is clear that not all the book is in that format. Only chapters 4--21 are apocalyptic in nature. This, to a Scriptural student, indicates continuity with the Book of Daniel.

B. Epistolary

Clearly chapters 2--3 take the form of epistolary literature as a group of letters addressed to the churches. However, the sum total of the book is also epistolary since it is written as a whole to the seven churches (1:4).

The book must be seen as epistolary. Thus there will be a problem, a solution, both physical and theological. This must be identified for proper interpretation. While, each church (of the seven) may have a different physical (and theological)

⁸ If this was able to be done by a first century reader grammatically, then it provides a difficulty with the imminency of Christ's return since historical prophetic events must take place prior to that return. In other words the first century interpreter would have known that a considerable amount of time would have to take place for these sequential church ages to be fulfilled. If the interpreter believed in imminency of the rapture, then his age would always be the final church prior to the rapture.

problem, there must be a central problem and theology which each of the churches share and the solution must apply to all the churches.

C. Narrative

In some sense the book as a whole is also narrative. The reason is that once John has introduced it as a letter (1:4) the rest of the letter is narrative, beginning in 1:9 and continuing until 22:16 of John's telling of the events and revelation given to him.

This is the essence of 1:19. John is told not just to address directly, but to tell what he has seen. Thus his instructions are to give a narrative. Since it is a narrative it will have to be understood in the same sense as narrative, that is, at times there will be no imperatives (direct address) to the reader. Through the normal reading of the text, the interpreter must understand the implications for himself without direct application by the author.

It should also be noted that this is the same format as the Book of Daniel. Daniel does not address anyone, and includes himself (the writer) as part of the story. Daniel's suffering, grief and interaction is included as part of the message of the text. And thus so is John standing in as a character (to be interpreted) contributing to the message of the text.

D. Summary

The essence of this analysis is to see that the book is a unified letter to the seven churches and thus chapters 4--22 are not simply informational but are an integral part of the theological solution to the problem which the seven churches face. No interpretation is complete which treats 4--22 as only of remote interest to the churches of 1:4.