

COMMENTARY: Believers Church Bible Commentary. REVELATION

John R. Yeatts. Believers Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003),

Apocalypse:

Revelation is called apocalyptic literature. The most accepted definition of apocalyptic literature is: “Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which both temporal [chronological] as it involves another, supernatural world. (J. J. Collins, 1979:9). Within apocalyptic literature, the manner of revelation is through visions, epiphanies, otherworldly journeys, angel interpreters, and secret books; the recipient receives revelation from a venerable person, usually identified pseudonymously as from the other world, through discourse or dialogue; the content of revelation includes eschatological predictions about the final outcome of human history, a special journey into other world. ¹

Authorship:

Revelation itself communicates several important things about its author. First, the author’s name is John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). Second, the author was clearly a Palestinian Jew. Hebrew seems to be his native language; he writes in a very Hebraic form of Greek. He is steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures. There are more allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation than in any other New Testament book. Revelation author was also familiar with extra-biblical Jewish literature – The Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Esdras, 1 and 2 Enoch, 2 Baruch, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Sibylline Oracles, and the Greek Septuagint, and Aramaic Targums. ² Third, the author was most likely a Christian who lived in Asia near the churches addressed because of the intimate knowledge about them revealed in Revelation. Fourth, the author calls himself a prophet. Ford claimed

¹ John R. Yeatts. Believers Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003),440.

² Yeatts. Believers Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 442

that Revelation is a production of John the Baptist and the Baptist community. Others thought the author was the John, the son of Zebedee, the disciple of Jesus. ³ Yet, there have been some compelling arguments against the traditional view of the authorship of John. As result of these arguments questioning the authorship of Revelation by John the disciple, several possible theories have been suggested. First, it may be that Revelation was written by an unknown person and, at least implicitly, attributed to John the disciples. ⁴

Revelation was written in a specific historical context. The context reflects the reality that it was written when Jewish Christians were under Rome's imperial power. Many of the symbols refer either to Rome or to some characteristic of the Roman Empire. Therefore, to make sense of the teachings of Revelation, the reader must understand what was happening in the Roman world. By the time the book of Revelation was written, the *Pax Romana* (peace of Rome) was in place. The Roman government had brought relative tranquility to the empire. That does not mean that there were no uprisings, but these were usually local and quickly squelched by those who ruled on behalf of Rome. In short, the Romans had brought law and order to Asia. This *Pax Romana*. As result of the *Pax Romana*, the provinces were grateful. They expressed this gratitude by desire to worship and give divine status to the empire. Temples to the goddess Roma and to various Roman emperors sprang up throughout the empire, including the province of Asia. As this sentiment grew, emperor worship became more common. ⁵

The context reflects the reality that it was written when Jewish Christians were under Rome's imperial power. Many of the symbols refer either to Rome or to some characteristic of the Roman Empire. Therefore, to make sense of the teachings of Revelation, the reader must understand what was happening in the Roman world. By the time the book of Revelation was written, the *Pax Romana*

³ Yeatts. Believers Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 443.

⁴ Yeatts. Believers Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 444.

⁵ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 19.

(peace of Rome) was in place. The Roman government had brought relative tranquility to the empire. That does not mean that there were no uprisings, but these were usually local and quickly squelched by those who ruled on behalf of Rome. In short, the Romans had brought law and order to Asia. This *Pax Romana*. As result of the *Pax Romana*, the provinces were grateful. They expressed this gratitude by desire to worship and give divine status to the empire. Temples to the goddess Roma and to various Roman emperors sprang up throughout the empire, including the province of Asia. As this sentiment grew, emperor worship became more common.⁶ For the most part, it was not imposed by the Roman government since it grew out of patriotism. Therefore, pressure was on Christians. Emperor worship; was not exclusive. Persons could other gods as long as they said, “Caesar is Lord.” The failure to worship the emperor was viewed as a political revolt. Not to worship the emperor – and thus not to recognize all the Roman government had done for the empire – was perceived to be a lack of gratitude. The person who refused to give honor to the emperor was considered unpatriotic. Christians and Jews both adhered to exclusive religions; they could not say, “Caesar is Lord,” because such worship could only be given to God. Therefore, they were considered to be political subversives. At times it was recognized in the empire, because Jews were monotheist, they could not worship Caesar and therefore were to be given exemption. When the Christians sought similar treatment, Jews became fearful that they would lose their exclusion if others wanted it also. Therefore, Christians were a threat to both Jewish and other Roman subjects. In any case, because Christians could not worship the emperor, they believed persecution to be imminent. In this context, the political message of Revelation is clear;⁷ do not compromise with the world; do not give to the state honor that should be reserved for God. In Any case, Revelation teaches that worship belongs to God alone, not to the emperor and the empire. Pilgrim asserts that Revelation proclaims “one mighty NO to imperial Caesar.” For Christians at the end of the

⁶ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 19.

⁷ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 20.

first century, following this affirmation to resist the Roman state brought the threat of persecution and perhaps even death.⁸

The Imminent Context of Revelation:

It seems likely that Revelation was written when the conflict between the empire and the church had reached a crisis. The reigns of two emperors are the most likely possibilities for this crisis point – Nero in the early sixties, and Domitian in the mid-nineties. The expected persecution of Domitian is the probable context for the book.⁹ Although the extent of persecution when Revelation was written may have been exaggerated in the past, Sodi is no doubt correct to insist that actual persecution was present: Wengst documents this persecution from the book Revelation itself: (2:13; 6:9; 20:4; 17:6; 18:24).¹⁰

The Setting of Revelation

Although the immediate context of Revelation is the first-century Roman Empire, the visions of Revelation have both earthly and heavenly settings.¹¹

The New Heaven and the New Earth 21:1-8

The last vision of Revelation begins as John *saw a new heaven and a new earth*. The word heaven here is equivalent to “sky,” indicating that the new heaven has continuity with the present cosmos (3:12; 11: 12; 21:10). Newness here carries with it the idea, not of a spiritual existence, but of a new creation of the material world (Gen. 1:1; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10; 4:24). Indeed, salvation includes the entire universe because all of creation must be renewed to serve as an appropriate abode for the faithful saints. Thus, the Bible places humanity in a restored heaven and earth from which evil is banished and the righteous reign supreme, rather than in a spiritual realm separated from the physical (Dan. 12:3-4). To prepare for the new heaven and earth, *the first heaven and the first earth*

⁸ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 21.

⁹ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 21.

¹⁰ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 22.

¹¹ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 23.

had passed away. And *sea was no more*. The Hebrew tradition regarded the *sea* as a hostile force that God brought under control in creation (Job. 38:8-11; Ps. 89:9; Is. 57:20-21; Amos 9:3).¹²

After observing the new heaven and new earth, John saw **the holy city, the new Jerusalem**. While the new heaven and earth point to a new cosmos, the New Jerusalem speaks of a new society. A new Jerusalem, not a rebuilt, restored city but coming down from out of heaven from God. The implication is that the city's character is closely bound to its divine origin. God is the architect and builder of the city (Heb. 11:10), which in turn, holy and separate unto God (Is. 52: 1-2).¹³

The voice said, See, the home of God is among mortals (Ezkeil 48: 35). What is announced with such fanfare is the presence of God. The word translated *home* and the verb *dwell* that follows are both forms of the same Greek word (*skene*), which translates the Hebrew "*tent*" or "*tabernacle* (*mishkan*), where God dwelt in the wilderness. In the New Jerusalem, God descends from heaven to earth to live eternally with the faithful. The idea of the presence of God is repeated in the words: *He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them*. In Revelation the faithful are composed of peoples from all races and cultures. **When God dwells with his people, he will wipe every tear from their eyes**. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. Because God is present, evil and all that comes with it is eradicated.¹⁴

¹² Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 399.

¹³ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 400.

¹⁴ Yeatts. Church Bible Commentary. *Revelation*, 401. (Reference: Rev. 10:11; 11:9; see also Is. 56:7; John 10:16; Rom. 9:24-26; Gal. 3:28; Lev. 26: 11-12; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 22:2; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; Ezek. 36:28; 37:12; 23:27; Hos. 1:9; 2:23; Joel 2:27; Zech. 2:13; 8:8; I Pet. 2:10).

