

Revelation as a message of consolidation.

Overview:

The Book of Revelation is the final book of the New Testament. It has long fascinated readers with vivid images and apocalyptic prophecies.

The book of Revelation paints a complex picture of the end times and offers profound insights into the life and challenges faced by Christians living under Roman rule.

The early Christians received hostile treatment from Roman emperors like Nero and Domitian and the book of Revelation holds an urgent message within its apocalyptic tone, to the seven Christian churches, whom it was mainly written for.¹

The book's vision seeks to alter the political, religious and economic life for Christians, at that time and called on them to renew their faith in God.

It provided hope to first century Christians facing persecution and could be seen as a polemic against the Roman empire.

Introduction:

The book of Revelation is mainly symbolic and has more reference to the Old Testament than any other book in the Bible.

To understand the book of Revelation you must understand the Old Testament.

Readers need to see the rich symbolism, culture and historical conditions of that time.

Today the word apocalypse is used as the end times/end of the world scenario, with many books and films using apocalypse as the end of life as we know it, however the meaning of words often changes over time, the word apocalypse, from the Greek *apokalypsis* meant disclosure of events, apocalypse meant that something was going to be revealed, an uncovering or unveiling of things.

Who wrote the book of Revelation.

Traditionally attributed to John the Apostle, one of Jesus' disciples, Revelation is believed to have been written during the late 1st century AD, while John was exiled on the island of Patmos.

John was sent to the Island for preaching about Jesus and the word of God, he was the last surviving disciple, believed to have previously been thrown into boiling oil, but survived.

The fate of the other disciples were abundant by legends, but all met a horrific death, with some being martyred and some sent to die on the cross as Jesus had done before-hand.

According to biblical historians, the Roman emperor who exiled John was Emperor Domitian, under the Roman law of exile-those banned by a Caesar would be released by the succeeding Caesar.

¹ Revelation, historical context, symbolism and early Christian impact the theme of divine narratives

John would have been released from Patmos that year, 96 AD, following the death of Domitian.

John says he was at Patmos when he received the revelation.

John the apostle is believed to have spent two years confined in Ephesus, then died of natural causes as an elderly man, after 98 AD.²

What the book of revelation reveals:

The historical context of severe persecution under Roman rule deeply influences the book's tone and content, offering hope and encouragement to early Christians facing trials.

It's really about what we hope and what we fear, it's as though all your nightmares about plague, destruction, war, torture or natural catastrophe has been wrapped up into a single nightmare, the book of revelation.

However it comes out with hope at the end, so it's very appealing to people who are living in these times of huge turmoil.

Rome was a pagan oppressor and Christians were considered slaves and criminals used for sadistic entertainment.

The book of revelation contains many prophecies leading up to the 'day of judgement', which many Christians at that time believed was going to happen during their lifetime.

A culmination of God's divine plan for humanity, Judgement day is characterized by his ultimate judgment, when the hidden truths of their kingdom are revealed, and God's sovereignty is fully manifested.

A message of consolidation:

A message of encouragement and renewal, the book of revelation can provide some hope and comfort.

John was writing to the seven churches in Asian minor as Peter had done, He writes an individual message to each of the seven churches.

The seven churches were, Ephesus-where John was said to have ministered, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

The book of revelation appeals not only to the fears of the early Christian churches, but it is also a message of hope.

John's message is that the chaotic events they have been facing will finally be set right by God's divine judgement.

John tells the churches the message has come from Jesus Christ himself, to some he tells them to hold steadfast in their faith and be strong, to others he criticises them of their sexual immorality.

We also see seven spirits, seven stars and seven golden lampshades, each church is meant to have its own spirit, each star is an angel to protect each church and each

² Stories of Christian martyrs, the apostle John, persecution.com, foxe, the voices of martyrs, 2021

lampshade represents the light of the church itself, a typological view of things to come.

The purpose is twofold: for the saints to endure, a message of encouragement is sent, but also a warning not to be disobedient, for Christ will have ultimate victory. 'Look I am coming soon! my reward with me, and I will give each person according to what they have done'-revelation 22:12

There is also a message to the immoral churches 'outside are the dogs, the sexually immoral'-revelation 22:15

The book of revelation ends with Amen, which in Hebrew meant truth, the readers would see that all that was written in the book of revelation, previously a scroll, was true.

The book also ends with a vision of a glorious new world for the churches and the followers of Jesus Christ.

A new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away-revelation 21:1.

Key themes within the book.

There are several key themes that the book of revelation gives its readers.

There is a key theme of judgement and justice: God will give his righteous judgment upon the earth.

These themes are intricately woven throughout Revelation, describing various judgments poured out on the earth.

A symbolism of divine retribution against sin and against their oppressors.

Redemption and salvation will come for those who remain faithful to God.

This conveys a message of hope and protection in troubling times.

God's judgement is a response to the sins and a protection for the people of God.

The readers see the ultimate victory of good over evil.

There is a mythological vivid narrative of the cosmic struggle between the forces of light and darkness. Satan will be defeated, God will triumph.

The book reveals that Jesus Christ will return, it is one of the central themes to the book of Revelation, there will be a second coming.

Jesus is portrayed as a victorious warrior, riding a white horse to defeat the antichrist.

Israel is said to be restored to her home land.

This would have been seen by the readers as the end of their oppression under Roman rule, that they would be saved from persecution.

The early Christians believed that Rome was the fourth kingdom in Daniel's vision and that the fifth would be the kingdom of Christ.

Revelation brings a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth.

The prophecy of the return of Jesus Christ would have served as a source of hope and a motivation to hold steadfast in their beliefs, that Rome would soon be destroyed.

The seven seals in the book of revelation are often the most thought of as the most notable and memorable of all the symbolic stories.

The scrolls begin the apocalypse when opened, the first four scrolls see the release of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, each scroll releases a horse and rider.

John sees the seven seals in a vision, where the slain lamb of God opens each seal. Each rider is on a different coloured horse, white, red, black and a pale green.

The fifth scroll saw the souls of martyred Christians clamouring at an altar for God's vengeance, this is thought by some to represent tribulations faced by all Christians.

The sixth scroll showed the cataclysmic doom.

Rome in Revelation:

The antichrist is referred to as the beast from the abyss-revelation 11:7

The number of the beast is 666-revelation 13:18.

To count the number of the beast, is also the number of man.

Nero Caesar ruled until 68 AD, he made the torture of Christians an entertainment, they were thrown to beasts in the amphitheater and burnt alive as human torches, he also crucified them so they could emulate their saviour.

Nero was identified as the antichrist, the final judgement was imminent.

Revelation refers to Roman power as a tawdry harlot on a horrific beast, with seven heads.

The seven heads emerge from the sea,

Revelation 17:8-11 the beast, which you saw, once was, now is not.

Not only have the seven heads been seen as a recall to Rome's seven hills but also as the seven emperors.

Theological symbolism

The book of revelation is full of symbols and understanding these is key to understanding the message of the book.

There are seven seals, trumpets and bowls, these represent the divine judgement coming to earth from God. Each symbol reveals more of God's wrath.

The beast and the false prophet are central to the book, the beast is the symbolism of the oppression they face.

The false prophet symbolizes the deceptive religious authority. Their ultimate defeat signifies the downfall of evil.

The book of revelation concludes with a new Jerusalem being revealed.

An eternal dwelling place for God with humanity.

The symbol of ultimate redemption and reunion summarizes the message of hope.

The book of revelations messages through deep symbolism, gives perseverance, that divine justice will come and the saviour-Jesus Christ will return.

The book gives inspiration and guidance to the seven churches and the christian followers, providing a way to navigate through the tough times they are facing.

Conclusion:

The book of revelation was written to encourage christians, who were suffering, to keep their allegiance to God and Jesus Christ.

John starts his book with a message to the seven churches and ends with the promise of a new Jerusalem, free of persecution from the Roman rulers.

The end was not Jesus being crucified, rising and then ascending to heaven, Jesus would return once again as the saviour.

The book of revelation describes the conflict of the kingdom of god, John's message is to drive home the main purpose for his writing, holy obedience amongst god's people.

The book ends with affirmation once again that everything he has written can be trusted, that Jesus came to him, as he would come once again to save them.

John declares, as Daniel had done in his book, that his words are trustworthy and true, he uses Amen many times.

The book repeatedly warns christians to hold fast in their faith, for the king would return, as his vision had shown him.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear and keep to what is written in it, for the time is near' revelation 1:3

John describes who will be excluded from entering the eternal city, including the liars, cowards and the faithless. It is a stark warning to the churches he believes have strayed from the path of god.

The exhortation to clear throughout the book of revelation, not to compromise their allegiance to god.

Their history was all part of God's divine plan, god heard the prayers, they would be answered, judgement day would come.

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you, in prison, to test you and you will suffer persecution for ten days.

Be faithful, even to the point of death and I will give you life as your victors crown.-revelation 2:10

Some believe the ten days to be a literal period, whilst other scholars see it as another symbol within the book, the devil is the adversary-Rome is their adversary, the crown is god's symbol of eternal life, god will welcome his people at the end with honour and everlasting life, if they keep faithful.

"Behold, I am coming soon, and My reward is with Me, to give to each one according to what he has done."

Bibliography:

Dating the book of revelation, dr richard j krejcir, church leadership.org 2008

What happened to the 12 apostles, ken curtis,2024-christianity.com

The writers bible hub.com the day of revelation

Divine narratives team, divine narratives.com