

Dating the Book of Revelation

1. Introduction

- A. Revelation is the Apostle John's apocalyptic vision of Jesus's Olivet Discourse.
- B. The date of its writing has a bearing on how to interpret the book.
 - Early date: During Nero's rule 54-68 AD (favors a preterist interpretation)
 - Late date: During Domitian's rule 81-96 AD (favors a futurist interpretation)
- C. Date of writing determined internal and external sources:
 - Internal – Evidence found in the Word of God
 - External – Evidence from writings outside the Bible

2. The Main External Source

- A. The main piece of "eternal evidence" is a quote from Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), who was a student of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John.
- B. In his book "Against Heresies," written in A.D. 180, there is a statement where he is speaking of the number and name of the antichrist. His statement is as follows.

"Had there been any need for his name to be openly announced at the present time, it would have been stated by the one who saw the actual revelation. For ***it was seen*** (***he was seen***) not a long time back, but almost in my own lifetime, at the end of Domitian's reign." (*Against Heresies*, 5.30.3)
- C. The phrase "*it was seen*" is translated from the Greek word "*heorathi*" (ἐωράθη), which could have also been translated "*he was seen*."
- D. If "*it was seen*" is correct, then Irenaeus is referring to when John's apocalyptic vision (the book of Revelation) was written. This would support the *later date* for the writing of the book of Revelation.
- E. If a better translation is "*he was seen*," then he was referring to the fact that the Apostle John was seen alive during Domitian's reign, not long prior to the time of Irenaeus. This translation supports the *early date* for the writing of the book of Revelation.
- F. John could have revealed the name of the antichrist personally because **John was seen alive** not that long ago (based on Irenaeus's time) or **John had the apocalyptic vision** not that long ago.
- G. The translation of the word "*heorathi*" is ambiguous since its definition can be "*it/he/she was seen*."

3. Internal Evidence: Three Key Pieces of Evidence

- A. When John writes, the temple is still standing (Revelation 11:1-2). He expects the events he is writing about to occur soon (Revelation 1:1, 3). He mentions that the temple is in the holy city, which is Jerusalem. There would not have been temple there if he wrote in A.D. 95, but it is there prior to A.D. 70. Revelation 11:2 and Luke 21:24 parallel each other. Both speak of trampling and it being given to the gentiles. The forty-two months mentioned by John (Revelation 11:2) is the exact length of time of the siege of Jerusalem that lasted from the spring of A.D. 67 to August of A.D. 70.

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- B. Scripture addresses those who have the right to be called “a Jew.” The early church, prior to A.D.70 had a problem of Judaizers who said Christians must to follow the ceremonial Law of Moses. Those who say they are Jews, but are not, are of the synagogue of Satan. Paul calls Christians the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16); the true circumcision (Philippians 3:3); and that a believer is a Jew inwardly who is circumcised of the heart (Romans 2:28). The true Israel, the right to be called a Jew, are the children of the promise (Romans 9:6-8), those who are in Christ. This contention in the early church existed before A.D. 70. Since then, Christianity and Judaism have gone their separate directions. John’s writing in the book of Revelation brings this to light and confirms an early date.
- C. The reference to seven kings in Revelation 17:9-11 provides evidence to the timing of John’s writing. The passage in figurative language speaks of the city of Rome and seven kings, where five have fallen, one is, and one is to come. This is a reference to seven Caesars. Nero was the sixth and the current Caesar when John had his apocalyptic vision, placing the date of his writing prior to A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - 1. Julius Caesar (49-44 B.C.),
 - 2. Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D.14)
 - 3. Tiberius (A.D. 14–37)
 - 4. Caligula (A.D. 37–41)
 - 5. Claudius (A.D. 41–54)
 - 6. Nero (A.D. 54–68)
 - 7. Galba (June A.D. 68–January 69)

4. Other Considerations

- A. One of the oddest facts concerning the later date for the writing of Revelation, is that no mention is given to the most dateable, climactic, and apocalyptic event in Jewish history, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.
- B. No mention of Christ’s prophecy in the Olivet Discourse being fulfilled, such as the practice of New Testament writers noting the fulfillment of prophecy.
- C. Those supporting the early date of the writing of Revelation sees the vision given to John was meant to reveal the apocalyptic events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
- D. The generation Jesus was talking about in His Olivet Discourse would have to be the first century generation. That would agree with Revelation in saying that the things it describes must shortly take place because the time is near (Revelation 1:1, 3).
- E. If the early date concerning the writing of the book of Revelation is correct, then the date of its writing would be prior to A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem. (Preterist)
- F. If the later date is the correct date. The book of Revelation would have been written between A.D. 95-96, well after the destruction of Jerusalem, so that the things written must refer to events in the future. (Futurist)

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