

Comments on Approach to this Class

- Revelation has been and continues to be interpreted according to a variety of different methodologies. The presentations in this class are based on a theory that I believe to be correct, but it is a theory, not a certainty.
- The symbolic imagery used by John is vivid and has been subject to wild interpretations. For example, an invasion of locusts has been interpreted to mean a flight of Apache helicopters. We will attempt to avoid extremes.
- Despite the undeniable fact Jesus declared that no one knew or could know the date of His return, there have been people who convinced followers that they had determined the date of Jesus' return. None have turned out to be true.
- Believing the predicted date, people have left jobs, sold property, and in general cleared the deck to be ready to be carried to heaven by Jesus, all to no avail. Jesus said no one knows the date of His last-day return. He will come like a thief during the night. No one will know until He arrives.
- The point is that Revelation is not a code to be deciphered. It is a revealing by God of things to take place in the future. Most, but not all the document concerns things that were to take place "near in time" to when it was written. There are sections that deal with the "end of time" or the "last day." We will do our best to properly distinguish between them.
- The overall message is that God is Sovereign and His plan for a holy people to live in eternity in His presence will be fulfilled.

A Few Historical Comments

- Nero reigned from 54 AD to 68 AD. Was 16 when he became Emperor. Committed suicide in 68 AD at age 30.
- Josephus, the author of the Jewish Wars, written about 75 AD, was a Pharisee, a Priest, and a General in the Jewish army during the insurrection that began in 66 AD. In 67 AD Josephus led the defense of Jotapatta, a city in Galilee north of Nazareth and west of the Sea of Galilee. It was a city well-protected by the terrain with only one side of the city approachable by the invading Romans. Vespasian brought all the power of the Roman siege army to bear, but it still took 47 days to conquer the city. The siege army consisted of 60,000 troops with siege catapults to cast stones for breaching the city wall, dart throwers for spear-like darts, battering rams, etc.
- Josephus survived the dreadful slaughter of the city's inhabitants by hiding in a cave. He was captured and became useful to Vespasian as a go-between between

the Romans and their Jewish opponents as Vespasian and Titus' attempted to get the Jews to surrender.

- Josephus was an eyewitness to the siege of Jerusalem (60-65 thousand total soldiers against 20-30 thousand defenders), the destruction of the Temple, and the resulting slaughter of defenders and their families. The Jewish rebellion began in 66 AD, ended at Masada in 73 AD.
- Constantine was emperor from 306 AD to 337 AD. He caused the empire-wide Persecution of Christians to be ended by the Edict of Milan in 313 AD. Some localized persecutions continued. Until that time Christians were subject to persecution as atheists

Revelation Part 18

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1. **Introduction:** Today we will continue last Sunday's discussion on history related to the book of Revelation and to the process of establishing the date on which Revelation was written. We begin with a question about possible connections between the Olivet Discourse and Revelation.

2. **What, If Any, Is The Relationship Between the Olivet Discourse and Revelation?** There are some undeniable commonalities. Both are "revelations given by and through Jesus Christ." The Apostle John was present at both the Olivet discourse and a private discussion with Jesus about it.

- From the book itself, John received Jesus' Revelation through visions sent by God via an angel.

3. **Revelation 1:1-2:** *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.*

- Notice the stated purpose of Revelation – to show God's servants things that must soon take place.
- Does the text of Revelation deal with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple? The answer from those who accept a late date for the writing of Revelation is no! For those who accept an early date for the writing of Revelation the answer is maybe.
- Both Revelation and the Olivet Discourse concern future events (some of which are future near in time and others associated with the "last day.") Both deal with "disasters" that are consequences of God's justified and rightful wrath at sin.
- As the book of Job clearly demonstrates, not all disasters are consequences of God's wrath. Job suffered multiple disasters arising from Satan's desire that Job's commitment to God be "tested." For unclear reasons, Satan received God's permission to "test" Job through disasters.

- During it all, Job remained true to God. He was always thoroughly convinced he was upright and obedient to God. For that reason, Job was perplexed by the disasters that befell him. They raised questions and concerns in his mind that he believed only God could and should answer. He wanted to hear directly from God. God ultimately came to him in a whirlwind theophany.
- Though not all disasters are a consequence of God's wrath, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as mentioned in the Olivet Discourse are consequences of God's wrath at Israel for breaking their covenant with Him.

4. **God's Covenant with Israel:** God's covenant with Israel is an agreement where God chose Israel to be His special people, promising them blessings, land, and protection if they obeyed His laws. The Sinai covenant was a conditional covenant given through Moses, outlining laws for Israel to follow, promising blessings for obedience and consequences for disobedience (Exodus 19-24).

- The consequences of obeying or breaking the covenant were made very clear:
- **Faithful obedience will be graciously rewarded. Covenant breaking will be punished.**

5. **Deuteronomy 28:1-6:** *“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. ³ Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. ⁴ Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. ⁵ Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ⁶ Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you.”*

6. **Deuteronomy 28:15, 20, 25-26:** *“But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. ²⁰ “The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me. ²⁵ “The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ²⁶ And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away.*

7. **Deuteronomy 28: 33, 41, 45:** *A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually. ⁴¹ You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity ⁴⁵ “All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and*

overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you.”

8. **Breaking the Covenant:** The penalties for “Covenant-Breaking” were in force when Jesus spoke at the Mount of Olives about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, also in force when He was condemned by the Temple’s elders and Sanhedrim and crucified at their instigation.

- The penalties were in force when the Disciples and converts were hounded and persecuted after Jesus’ crucifixion, in force in 70 AD when the Temple and city were destroyed.
- Jesus’ prediction of that destruction was based on Israel’s repeated gross violation of the Covenant. His prediction about Jerusalem and the Temple in the Olivet Discourse was spoken on Tuesday afternoon of Passion Week, just a few days before His crucifixion.

9. **Properly interpreting Revelation** is critically dependent on knowing “when was it written.”

10. **Establishing the Date Revelation was Written:** Last week we mentioned that, for a long time, many scholars have believed Revelation was written in the 90’s AD during Domitian’s reign. Establishing the date of writing for any book of the Bible depends on two things: (1.) Evidence external to the book and (2.) internal evidence (evidence within the book).

11. **Internal Evidence:** Revelation 17:7-10 contains a reference to a sixth king who was reigning at the time Revelation was written. Identifying that king will pinpoint the date of writing of Revelation to a time during the reign of that king. This passage is one in which the symbols used are interpreted in the text.

12. **Revelation 17:7-10:** *But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. ⁸ The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. ⁹ “Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. ¹⁰ There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.*

- Verses 9-10 give the meaning of the symbols used in 7-8.
- The “seven heads that are seven mountains” most likely mean Rome. All through antiquity, Rome was referred to as the “city on seven hills.”
- What about the reference to seven kings, five fallen, one currently is, and the other has not yet come? This means the sixth king was reigning at the time Revelation was written. Who was he?
- Rome called the rulers of their empire “Emperors.” But the Jews referred to the emperors of Rome as kings as in John 19:15: They cried out, *“Away with him, away with him,*

crucify him!” Pilate said to them, *“Shall I crucify your King?”* The chief priests answered, *“We have no king but Caesar.”*

- The first ruler of Rome to be formally designated as Emperor was Caesar Augustus, but ancient historians like Josephus and Suetonius and others began the list of “kings” with Julius Caesar.
- If Julius Caesar is the first, the sixth king is “Nero.” If Augustus is the first, then Galba is number 6. Galba ruled a very short time before he was killed. Nero seems most likely as number 6. If that is correct, Revelation was written before Nero’s suicide in AD 68.
- If Revelation was in fact not written until the 90’s AD, it seems very strange that John does not mention the destruction of the Temple as a past event. The Temple’s destruction in 70 AD was an epoch changing event for Jews and Christians.

13. **External Evidence:** The 90’s AD assumed time of writing is based is a comment made by Irenaeus (130-202AD) in his book “Against Heresies.” The original book was written in Greek near the end of the second century. It has been lost but Latin translations survive.

- The following is an English translation of the Latin translation: *“We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seem no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.”*
- The critical question concerning the meaning of this comment is to what does “that” in the last sentence refer? Does it refer to the vision John received or does it refer to John who received the vision? Interestingly, Irenaeus, in other writings, refers to “ancient copies” of Revelation which seems to imply Irenaeus believed Revelation was written long before his time.

14. **Other External Evidence:** Another early church father, Clement made comments about Revelation. In a comment from his book, **Miscellanies**, he says, *“For the teaching of our Lord at His advent, beginning with Augustus and Tiberius, was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius. And that of the apostles, embracing the ministry of Paul, ends with Nero.”*

- Clement, who considered John to be the author of Revelation, says apostolic revelation ceased with Nero. That means Clement believes Revelation was written before Nero died.

15. **Conclusion:** From all this, I conclude that Revelation was almost certainly written before Nero committed suicide in 68 AD and obviously before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

- To me, all this means there is likely a significant connection between the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation. Much of Revelation, as is clearly stated several times in the book, occurred “near”, “soon”, etc. to the time the book was written.
- I also believe that the “last day” when Jesus will come again remains in the future on a day that is known only to the Father.

- On that last day, Jesus will come in both judgment for sin and reward and welcome for those “in Christ.”
- The dead will arise and be caught up into the air where they will be joined by those “in Christ” who are alive at the time.
- No one knows when that day will be. No one should attempt to discover or guess the date. All who have been convinced they had figured out the date have been proven wrong every time.
- All such effort signifies that the person does not believe Jesus who clearly said, no one knows the date or time of His coming on the last day except the Father.

16.**Next:** We return to Revelation chapter 6 and the four horsemen of the apocalypse.