

# OpenTheo

## Revelation - Four Views (Part 1)



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "Revelation - Four Views," Steve Gregg presents four different approaches to interpreting the Book of Revelation. The book, a unique blend of epistle, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature, addresses the seven churches in Asia and includes both foretelling future events and sermonic aspects. Understanding the book's date, setting, and audience is crucial to interpreting its meaning, and while there are four views about the date of its writing, the strongest external evidence suggests it was written near the end of the reign of Domitian, with internal evidence suggesting an earlier date.

### Transcript

Tonight we are going to be going through the four views of the Book of Revelation. I taught this lecture, I think it was a couple of months ago, in Yorba Linda. As you know, probably, I wrote a book on the subject.

Back in 1997, this was the book that came out. It was only about 550 pages. They wanted me to revise and update it, so I did last year.

It's now 600 pages. Paperback, cheaper. You can't buy it from me, because you can't buy anything from me.

I won't sell anything, but you can buy them elsewhere. The book is called Revelation Four Views, a parallel commentary. It basically introduces the reader to four different standard approaches to the Book of Revelation.

I say standard approaches. All of these approaches, though very different from each other, have been held by evangelical leaders for centuries. It's very difficult to know what the very earliest view of Revelation was that the early church had, for the simple reason that Revelation wasn't actually added to the canon of Scripture until the year 397 A.D. Now, it was around before that.

It was written in the first century, but its authorship was disputed, its canonicity, that is, whether it belongs in the Bible or not, but it was disputed in the church until almost 300 years after it was written. And that's because they weren't sure if John the Apostle had

written it or some other John had written it. Some churches accepted it from the very earliest times as belonging to Scripture.

Other churches held it at somewhat arm's length. The church in Alexandria was very slow to accept it, and there were other churches that weren't quite sure. But it was finally added to the canon of Scripture in 397 at the Council of Carthage.

But because it was not in the canon of Scripture until almost 400 A.D., we don't have an awful lot of commentary on the book of Revelation from those early centuries. The early church fathers didn't comment on it very much, partly because they didn't even know if it was in the Bible or not. But they knew of it, and they sometimes quoted from it, just not enough for us to really identify what their view of the whole book was.

But from the later centuries of the early church, different views of Revelation began to emerge and have still held sway. There still are four entirely different approaches to the book of Revelation that are held by evangelical, conservative, Bible-believing Christians. Now, I would have never believed that.

Growing up, I was only familiar with one view of Revelation. And when I began to be a Bible teacher, I still had only heard one view of Revelation. And that was in 1970.

I taught that one view, and only that one view, because I didn't know there were any others around. And I taught it for many years. And then I began to be exposed to commentaries by other evangelicals outside of my denominational stream.

And to my shock, there were people who held entirely different approaches to the book of Revelation. I want to say entirely different. I'm emphasizing entirely because many people know of some slight differences.

For example, when you hear of four views of Revelation, you might think, well, we've got the pre-trib, and we've got the mid-trib, and we've got the post-trib. Like, there's three of them right there, right? No, those aren't three of them. That's one of them.

That's three varieties of one of them. And, you know, some people say, well then, you must mean the amillennial, the premillennial, and the postmillennial views. No, that's only three also.

And those are not the views of Revelation. Those are views of the millennium. And therefore, they are views of one chapter in Revelation, the only chapter that mentions the millennium.

Frankly, the only chapter in the whole Bible that mentions the millennium. That's Revelation 20. But the rest of the book, the other 21 chapters, are seen in different ways by different Bible students.

And they're much more different than you might think if you're not already familiar with them. What are the four views? Well, we'll get into that. I'm going to tell you tonight what each of the four views believes.

And that'll certainly take up our whole evening. But before we get into a survey of the four views, I want to talk about some preliminary issues that you can't really make any sense of some of these views unless you have dealt with these issues, all right? And I've given you notes. If you don't have notes, there should be one on your seat where you're sitting.

And I want to acquaint you with some things that many people don't tell you about the book of Revelation. One is that the book of Revelation is unique in that it occupies three different genres of literature. There's no other book in the world, as far as we know, that occupies all three of these genres.

First of all, the book is an epistle. Like most of the books of the New Testament, it's written from an author to a church or churches. Just like Paul wrote to the church in Rome and the church in Corinth and the church at Thessalonica and the church in Ephesus, and James wrote to the 12 tribes that were scattered abroad and so forth, and Peter wrote to those who were in Asia and Bithynia and Galatia and so forth.

All the epistles of the Bible are written by somebody to either a church, usually a church or churches, or an individual, as in the case of Paul writing to Timothy or to Philemon or to Titus. But they are personal letters. Now, they are more than just personal letters, but you can see that Paul's letters are very personal.

He greets his friends there, he talks about where he's been traveling, what he's been going through, what his emotions have been, and he also gets into theological stuff. They are authoritative letters from apostles, and therefore they have remained in our canon of Scripture. But nonetheless, we have to understand that they are epistles.

Now, I said that Revelation is also an epistle, and I can easily justify that. If you look at Revelation chapter 1 and verse 4, it says, John, to the seven churches which are in Asia. Now, obviously that's the form of an epistle.

Paul begins by saying, Paul, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to the churches of Galatia or to the church of Colossae or to whoever he's writing to. This is the way an ordinary letter would open in those days. And the author identifies himself as John, and we take that to be John the Apostle, who may have been the last surviving of the twelve apostles at the time this was written.

And it says, to the seven churches which are in Asia. Now, Asia does not mean what we mean by Asia. When we talk about Asia, we're talking about a huge continent that includes China and India and, you know, Thailand and, you know, Vietnam and Korea and

Japan, all those countries.

Asia in the Bible times, we're talking about during the Roman times, there was a province of the Roman Empire that was called Asia or Asia Minor. And that is the same geographical landmass that is now called Turkey. They didn't call it Turkey until the Turkomans came and dominated the area.

But in the days of the Roman Empire, that region was called Asia or Asia Minor. That's where these seven churches are. Later in the epistle, it identifies them by name in verse 11, where Jesus says to John, what you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

Now, these churches are essentially not there anymore, but they were there when John wrote the book. In many cases, the cities aren't even there anymore, to say nothing of the churches. There is a fellowship of sorts at Philadelphia still, and there is a city of sorts, a church of sorts, in Smyrna, which is now called Izmir in Turkey.

But apart from those two, the other five churches are gone, and in many cases, the cities are gone. Even Ephesus, a very important church in Paul's day and John's day too, even the city of Ephesus doesn't exist anymore, much less the church there. So we're talking about historical ancient churches that mostly aren't there anymore, but were there when he wrote this.

This is an epistle to those churches from the apostle John, or more properly from Jesus, because Jesus is dictating the contents for John to write. Now look at the end of the book of Revelation, chapter 22 and verse 21. It says, Now if you would take the time, not now but later, to look at the end of each of Paul's epistles, he always ends by saying, That's how he closes an epistle, just like we'd say, you know, sincerely, or whatever.

We would have some other kind of way of ending letters in our culture. But this is the way epistles were written. The book starts like an epistle, it ends like an epistle.

It is an epistle to seven churches that were in Asia at the time. So the book is an epistle. In that respect, it's not at all unique among biblical books, because almost all the books of the New Testament are epistles.

There's only really probably two exceptions. The gospel of, well, maybe three. The gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Mark, and the gospel of John were not epistles.

But Luke and Acts were written by Luke to a man named Theophilus, and the rest of the books in the New Testament were all epistles from Paul or someone else. So is the book of Revelation. But I said Revelation's unique not in being an epistle, but by occupying three different genres of literature.

An epistle is one. It is also a prophecy. We see that from the statement in chapter 1, verse 3, where it says, So he says this book is a prophecy.

Now, you'd say, duh, what else would you think of Revelation? Of course it's a prophecy. Well, it is a prophecy, but you may not realize how unusual it is that an epistle would be a prophecy. No other epistle in the Bible is a prophecy.

This is the only epistle in the Bible that is dictated by Jesus Christ. This is an epistle from Christ to the seven churches dictated through his servant John. All the other epistles are from Paul or James or John or Peter, a servant of Jesus Christ.

This is an epistle from Jesus Christ, and as such, it is a verbal oracle from God, like Isaiah might have written or Jeremiah, one of the prophets of old. It's the only book of prophecy in the New Testament. There are other prophecies, of course, in the New Testament.

In the Gospels, we have Jesus making some prophetic statements. Paul makes a few in his writings. In fact, a number of the New Testament writers will include a prophetic word or two in their epistles, but this is the only book of the New Testament that is itself a prophecy, like an Old Testament book.

Now, the Old Testament doesn't have any epistles. The New Testament doesn't have any prophecies, except for this book. So this book holds both offices.

It's a book of prophecy, like Daniel is or Isaiah is. It's also a book like Paul's epistles written to churches. Now, I want to make this clear that when we talk about an epistle, we're talking about a message that was given to a certain set of original readers.

It may have application to others besides the original readers, but its primary application is to the original readers. For example, when we read the letters of Paul to the Thessalonians or to the Corinthians, we recognize immediately there are things going on in those churches that Paul is addressing. There are people in a specific time and place that he has in mind.

He's addressing situations that they are in, and we will not understand those epistles without understanding something about the situation they were in and what it was he was concerned to communicate to them, the original readers. Now, we also know, of course, that Corinthians and Thessalonians and the other epistles have statements that are broad and universal, so that even though they were not written to us, they are nonetheless written for our benefit, too. That the epistles of the Bible are written to an original audience, and their initial meaning must be understood in terms of who that initial audience is.

But the principles in it are much more broadly applicable to Christians anywhere. And so is the book of Revelation. When we look for the meaning of the book of Revelation, we have to realize this is an epistle.

It's written to actual people. It addresses situations that they really are in, and therefore, whatever interpretation we give it, it has to have some kind of relevance to the original audience. It may have additional relevance to others besides, but that's a secondary level, just like any epistle.

Now, when we talk about prophecy, that's the second category. What's a prophecy? Well, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14, I think it's verse 3, he said, he that prophesies speaks to the exhortation, edification, and comfort of men. So, prophecy edifies, it exhorts, and it comforts.

And the book of Revelation obviously has all those features. There are two elements in prophecy that have often been pointed out by Bible teachers. One is that prophecy sometimes tells the future, of course.

In fact, some people think of it primarily in that function. They think of it almost entirely as telling the future, but that's not really the case. If you read the book of Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel, you'll find that most of the time they're not really predicting anything, they're preaching.

The prophets preached repentance, they preached against sin, they preached against the abominations people were doing, and they preached judgment, and then they made predictions, specific predictions. But actually, as you read through the Old Testament prophets, the vast majority of what they wrote wasn't really predicting anything, but denouncing. Denouncing sin, denouncing the behavior of the apostates, and so forth.

Anyone who's read the prophets knows this is true. And so, in addition to predicting things, the prophets would speak forth God's oracle against or for the people they're addressing. Generally speaking, prophets came when people were misbehaving.

And so, usually, in their sermons, they're denouncing the people, and they peppered their sermons with predictions about things that are going to happen. So, you've got the foretelling of the Word of God, which is the sermonic aspects of prophecy. And then there's the foretelling, F-O-R-E, telling, predicting, foretelling things in advance.

So, prophets would foretell a message, current and applicable to the readers, and would foretell future events. Revelation being a prophecy has both of those features. The first three chapters, especially the seven letters to the seven churches, clearly address the situations in the churches as they were at the time.

Jesus says to each one of them, after He greets them and tells who He is, He says, I know your works. Every time, He says, I know your works. And then He begins to comment about their works.

Usually, He has something negative to say. But before He says it, He usually says something positive. Generally speaking, He'll say something positive, if He can, about

the church.

And then He'll say, but I have something against you. And He'll say something negative. Now, this is the pattern in general, but there's actually some exceptions.

Two of the churches, the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia, are the only churches He has nothing negative to say to. He only says good and encouraging things to them, those two churches. Interestingly enough, they're the only two of those seven churches still around.

He didn't call them to repent, because He didn't identify anything for them to repent of. And so, they stand out as exceptions to the general rule, that He speaks only well to them and not negatively. But then there's two other churches, Sardis and Laodicea, that He says nothing good about.

He only has bad things to say. After He says, I know your works, He starts reading off the laundry list of things they're doing wrong. And there's no good things about those two churches that He has to say.

And so, the general pattern is to say, I know your works, these are the good things I know you're doing. But I have something against you, and this is what I have against you. That is Jesus' words.

These are the only epistles in the Bible that are dictated by Jesus Himself. They're prophetically dictated to John. And they are forth-telling, they're not foretelling future things, they're forth-telling the word of the Lord to those churches about their state.

And the ones that He has something negative to say, He calls them to repent, and makes promises to those who will be overcomers. Okay, so that's what the first three chapters are about. Then in chapter four, you begin to see John's caught up into the heavens.

He sees the throne of God, he sees the strange throne attendants, the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures, and gazillions of angels. And he describes all this, and the praise that emanates from them. And that occupies chapters four and five.

But then, in chapter five, he sees a scroll with seven seals upon it. And initially, it appears as if it will never be opened. Because a great voice, in the early part of chapter five, cries out and says, throughout heaven and earth, says, Who's worthy to break the seven seals and open the scroll? And the question was not who's strong enough to, anyone's strong enough to break wax seals.

Seals were not hard to break, they're wax. The question was who's authorized, who's worthy to do it, is the question. Anyone could do it if they're authorized, but no one's authorized.

And initially, no one was found in heaven or earth or under the earth who was authorized to do it. And John began to weep, and one of the elders said to him, Oh, don't weep, John. The lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed, has triumphed, to break the seals and open the scroll.

And so John looked up to see this lion of the tribe of Judah, and what he saw was a lamb as if it had been slain, with seven eyes and seven horns. And we know this is a symbol for Christ. And the lamb went up and received the scroll from the hand of him who sat on the throne, and then all of heaven burst forth into a huge celebration of praise.

It begins with the 24 elders and the four living creatures singing, and then angels join them, ten thousands and ten thousands of angels, and then every creature in heaven and earth and in the sea and under the sea, they're all joining by the end of chapter 5. There's not a voice that isn't praising God, because the lamb has taken this scroll and is about to open the seals. And from that point on, the future, from John's point of view, begins. That's where the predictions begin.

That's where the foretelling begins. Because each seal is opened, and as each seal is opened, something happens. And after the seventh seal is opened, there's seven angels with seven trumpets that appear, and they each sound their trumpet in sequence, and each time they sound a trumpet, something happens, and so forth through the rest of the book.

There are things happening, which are predictions, from John's point of view, predicting what is going to happen in the future. So the book is an epistle, which has a message to the original audience, but secondarily to everybody else. It is a prophecy in that it foretells and it foretells the Word of God.

We're mostly familiar with the foretelling part, the predictive part. That's the part that we want to get to real quick when we start reading the book. Forget about the seven letters, I want to see what's going to happen in the end times.

Well, that's just the point. Only one of the four views believes it is even about the end times. Can you imagine three views that don't? Well, there are three entirely different views that don't even believe Revelation is about the end times.

So we're going to look at all four of those views, but let me just say that there's a third category the book falls into. In addition to being an epistle and a prophecy, it's also an apocalypse. Now, I don't know if you're familiar with that term.

The name of the book of Revelation in the Greek New Testament is Apocalypse. And the anglicized form of the word Apocalypse is Apocalypse. If you were raised a Catholic and read a Catholic Bible, you know that the book is actually called the Apocalypse in the Catholic Bible.



And that's just because they transliterate the Greek name, but the Protestant Bibles translate the name, and Apocalypse comes from two Greek words, apa, which means away from, and kalupsis, which means cover or veil. Now, apa means to, away from, and kalupsis means veil, unveil, remove the veil away, is what really Apocalypse means. So the word Apocalypse or Revelation means an unveiling, a removing of the curtain, to let you see what's going on behind the scenes.

Okay? That's what the book is called. Now, because it is called the Apocalypse, we have a whole genre of literature called Apocalyptic Literature. Now, this literature was written between the year 200 BC and 100 AD.

Many, many books were produced by the Jews and Christians during those 300 years. The book of Revelation was also written near the end of that 300 year period, but before the book of Revelation was written, there were a bunch of other books. The Sibling Oracles, the book of Enoch, the Testimony of the Twelve Patriarchs, and oh, a lot of others.

The Jews had a lot of books they wrote in what we call the Intertestamental Period, between the Old Testament and the New Testament. There's 400 years there. And in the latter part of that period, the Jews wrote a bunch of books, and they were all very much like the book of Revelation.

The book of Revelation, when it came to be written, was later in that period, and obviously any reader of the book would have recognized it's a book of the same sort as these other apocalyptic books. Now, they weren't called apocalyptic. Modern scholars call them apocalyptic in retrospect, because the book of Revelation is the apocalypse, and they recognize that it's the same style.

The Jews didn't have a name for this style of literature. But it was a very symbolic, very poetic, very sensationalistic type of literature. It described the struggles of the Jews in most cases, although the Christian apocalypses described the struggles of the Christians, usually in times of great persecution.

That's one thing the apocalyptic literature all had in common. They also had in common that the writer always claimed that some angel was guiding him around, showing him visions, explaining them to him, and so forth. I'm talking about the ones other than the book of Revelation.

I'm talking about all those apocalyptic literature that was written before Revelation was written. And they were filled with dragons and monsters and angels and earthquakes and planets blowing up and stars falling and things like that. This is the kind of stuff that apocalyptic literature was.

That's the imagery they used. But scholars know, who've studied apocalyptic literature,

that this was an entirely symbolic way of looking at things. Because what they were really describing was struggles between the Jews and the persecutors, these very earthly things described in cosmic imagery.

Now, we might say, why'd they do that? I don't know. But they did. And we know that they were doing this with a lot of their literature before the book of Revelation was even written.

And therefore, we can see, once we study these apocalypses, that God gave John this book in a style that was already very popular among the Jews and the Christians of the time, which they would be more familiar with than we are. It's not the case that any modern western writers write apocalyptic literature. Though we have our own genres.

We have science fiction, for example. We have cowboy and Indian stories and things like that. We have the Louis L'Amour stories and things like that.

There's different genres of literature that are popular with different crowds. Well, one genre that was popular with Jews and Christians in general was this apocalyptic style. And Jesus apparently chose that style, because it was popular, to convey his message through John to these other people.

There's no other way to conclude. Because we know that Revelation is very much like these other apocalypses. Now, we are very fortunate to have a very striking example of apocalyptic literature that's the non-inspired.

When I'm talking about these other apocalypses, I'm not talking about inspired literature. We're just talking about religious literature that the Jews wrote. But just like C.S. Lewis wrote the Space Trilogy or the Chronicles of Narnia or something like that.

There's a good example. C.S. Lewis wrote the Seven Chronicles of Narnia. Well, they're not true stories.

They're fantasies. They're mythology. They're children's stories.

But he couched a Christian message in them. That was his choice of an avenue to convey his Christian message through a literary device of children's literature with mythology and things like that as the milieu. And so also apparently Christ chose apocalyptic style to convey the message of the book of Revelation.

Now, I said we're very fortunate to have a good example of this in an apocalyptic passage that has survived and is even found in the Catholic Bible because it is found in the Septuagint and the Catholic Bible includes this in their Bible. You know, the Catholic Bible has some books in it that aren't in the Protestant Bible what we call the Apocrypha. And among the Apocryphal writings was an Apocryphal paragraph that was a prologue to the book of Esther.

And there's also another paragraph that's an epilogue to the book. Now, you know the book of Esther. It's a really mundane kind of story about a love relationship between a queen and her king and this crisis that arose for the Jews and how her uncle Mordecai discovered the plot, revealed the plot, and the bad guy got hung and the good guys prevailed and all this is a story.

In fact, it's the only book in the Bible that doesn't mention God. All the books of the Bible mention God except the book of Esther. It's just that down to earth.

It's obvious you can see God's hand through the whole book but it doesn't ever mention God by name in the book. But the story is known to us and you don't really find anything very supernatural in the book of Esther although many providential things. In fact, the providence of God is probably more visible in the book of Esther than almost any other short story in the Bible.

But what I want to say is that the book of Esther is inspired. It is biblical. It is canonical.

But the epilogue and the prologue that some apocryphal writer wrote for Esther is not inspired. It was written centuries later by a writer who claimed to be Mordecai. Now, Mordecai is one of the main characters in the story of Esther.

The writer of this epilogue and prologue was not Mordecai but see, almost all the apocalyptic literature is written by people claiming to be someone else. The non-inspired apocalypses of the Jews claimed they were written by Enoch or written by Baruch or written by the twelve patriarchs or someone like that but they weren't. It's just one of their literary devices of apocalyptic literature.

Now, this writer, we don't know who it was but he claimed to be Mordecai and he wrote a paragraph that he put before the book of Esther and a paragraph he put after. And these are written in the standard apocalyptic style of the literature of that period and they're a great example for us of this kind of stuff because he claims that he had a dream. I've got it in your notes so you can read along if you want.

Here's what Mordecai's dream is. This paragraph is affixed in the apocryphal Bible before the book of Esther proper and Mordecai, the alleged speaker, says Now, can you make any sense of that story? That's Mordecai's alleged dream. Then in the apocryphal Bible follows the actual book of Esther the same as we have it in our Bible.

But at the end, there's another apocryphal paragraph. It's the epilogue and I've got it here for you. At the end of the book of Esther, the same hand writes this.

I remember the dream that I had concerning these matters and none of them has failed to be fulfilled. The tiny stream which became a river and there was light and sun and abundant water. The river is Esther, whom the king married and made queen.

The two dragons are Haman and myself. The nations are those gathered to destroy the name of the Jews and my nation, this is Israel, who cried out to God and were saved. Now, you can see how non-literal this dream represented the story.

You've got dragons, you've got earthquakes, you've got famines, you've got every nation in the world at war, the whole earth is shaken, there's tribulation, there's distress. And yet, it's just an apocalyptic paragraph describing the book of Esther, where none of those kinds of things really happened. And at the end he says, yeah, the dragons, that was me and Haman and the nations were against, that's the Persians coming against the Jews and the river was Esther and the light and the dawning was the great deliverance.

In other words, we have in this wonderful sample of apocalyptic literature a test case to see how the Jews were expected to understand this kind of apocalyptic imagery. The story itself was very non-sensational, but the apocalyptic description of it was very sensational. In fact, that sensational dream sounded like it could have been taken right out of the book of Revelation or frankly out of the book of Enoch or out of the book of Baruch or out of any number of the apocalyptic books.

But you can see easily that those who were reading this kind of literature and received as an epistle the book of Revelation to their churches, they were accustomed to this kind of flamboyance of expression. I mentioned a moment ago that when John saw the lamb, he was first of all said to be the lion of the tribe of Judah, then he looked and he was a lamb and he had seven eyes and seven horns. Does Jesus really look like that? Does anyone really think Jesus looks like a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns? No, of course not, no one believes that, nor should we.

Even later in the book of Revelation, he's a man on a horse, he's not a lamb. You see, these are symbols. This is how apocalyptic literature communicated.

Now once we become familiar with that, we're in a much better position to decide some of the decisions we have to make about understanding the meaning of the book of Revelation. And we'll have some more clues given later on. This is just for starter.

So I want you to be aware of what kind of book we're talking about. We're talking about a book that is at once an epistle, a prophecy, and an apocalypse. And by the way, it's the only apocalypse in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, there's a few. Daniel, Zechariah, and a few of the prophets have definitely apocalyptic passages in them. But those ones are inspired.

I think it's probably books like Daniel and Zechariah that inspired the intertestamental Jews to write books that were imitations of those. So the uninspired apocalypses probably copied the inspired apocalypses of Daniel and Zechariah and those kinds of books. But the book of Revelation is inspired.

At least we accept it as such. It's in the canon of scripture. So I believe that Daniel and Zechariah and Revelation are inspired apocalypses.

But they follow a type of literature of which there are many uninspired examples written by the Jews around the period of time that Revelation was popular and was written. Okay, now, a second important set of considerations before we get into the four separate views is the date of writing and the setting that the readers were in. Now, with some books of the Bible, these issues aren't as important as with others.

If you want to understand the book of 1 Corinthians, you've got to know something about what was going on in the church of Corinth. If you want to understand the book of Romans, it's not going to matter quite as much what's going on in the church in Rome because, frankly, it's more of a generic epistle. It's more of a generic theological treatise.

But some of the epistles, you really got to know what's going on there to know why in the world Paul says such and such a thing to him. In the book of Revelation, we need to have some idea of when it was written and, in particular, we need to know who the emperor was at the time. And there are two theories about this.

First of all, everyone agrees Revelation was written at a time of great persecution. There's many references to it. In Revelation 2.9 and in Revelation 3.9, there's evidence that the Jewish community in Smyrna and in Philadelphia were persecuting the Christians in that town.

Not surprising. They persecuted Paul wherever he went. And they persecuted the church in Jerusalem.

And so it would appear some of the churches were experiencing local persecution. There was one church that already had had a martyr. Probably not martyred by the Jews because it was not one of the churches that had Jewish problems but Roman problems.

Probably the Romans had killed this one martyr. His name was Antipas. We know nothing about him except he's named in one of the epistles as a martyr.

The church of Smyrna is told that they're going to have tribulation for ten days and that the devil is going to throw some of them into jail. But they should endure to the end and they'd receive a crown of life. As you go through the book of Revelation, you can see there's a lot of persecution motif.

And not only persecution but also martyrs in heaven. John sees the souls of martyrs in heaven when the fifth seal is broken in chapter 6. He sees the martyrs in heaven again in chapter 20. There's a lot of references to martyrs in the book of Revelation.

There's those who overcame Satan by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony and who did not love their lives even to the death in Revelation 12, 11. So we

can see that through the book there's this martyrdom persecution theme. And I don't think there's a scholar or a commentator in Revelation regardless of their viewpoint of the book who would deny that this was written to comfort Christians in a time of suffering and persecution.

But the question is which time? There were two emperors in the first century in John's lifetime who persecuted the church very severely. One of them was Nero and one was a much later emperor named Domitian. Now most modern commentators will tell you that this was written during the reign of Domitian.

If you have a study Bible and it has like notes at the beginning of each book, it'll probably say when you come to Revelation it was written late in the reign of Domitian probably around the year 96. This is sort of the standard popular view today. In earlier centuries it was commonly thought that it was written during the reign of Nero.

Now Nero was much earlier than Domitian and it may seem like it doesn't matter to you whether it was written in the reign of Nero or the reign of Domitian but when we come to consider the four views this will be a very important point. Nero reigned from 54 AD to 68 AD and the most important thing to recognize about this is that if it was written during the reign of Nero it was written before 70 AD which is significant at least for one or more of the views of Revelation. I'll just let you know one of the views holds that Revelation is talking about 70 AD is predicting the destruction of Jerusalem that took place when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and slaughtered the Jews and took them away captive.

One of the four views holds that the book of Revelation is predicting that but it certainly can't be predicting that if it wasn't written before the event. So that view would have to have the book written in the reign of Nero and that was a more popular view in the earlier century nowadays there's different vogues, fashions in theology nowadays the moderns prefer to make it Domitian's reign. Domitian's reign was later from 81 to 96 AD so obviously as much as a quarter of a century after the fall of Jerusalem and if it was written during Domitian's reign of course it couldn't be predicting the fall of Jerusalem and that's an important thing to some people.

Now the question is which is true? Which time of suffering was it? Well let's just look at the evidence for different suggestions. The early date is supported primarily by what we call internal evidence. The late date really rests more on what we call external evidence.

Now what do we mean by internal and external evidence? When scholars talk about the internal evidence for the authorship or date of a book they're talking about information that the book tells you itself. What you find inside the book. What clues are found inside the book that tell you who wrote it, who it's to what the situation was, when it was and things like that.

That's considered internal evidence. Notably internal evidence is inspired because it's in the Bible. It's the Bible telling you about itself.

Now there's also something called external evidence and that is where what was the testimony of the church fathers about this? What did the earliest fathers say about this? About the authorship, about who received it, about what year it was written and so forth. If it's someone outside the Bible talking about the Bible like the church fathers or scholars or historians that's called external evidence because the evidence is external to the book. Now the evidence that is adduced for the early date is usually internal evidence.

That which is adduced for the later date is the strongest evidence is external. There is some internal evidence that is appealed to but it's not very strong. The real strong evidence for the later date is external evidence, church fathers.

And let me go through this real quickly. Why would anyone say it was written before A.D. 70 in the reign of Nero? First of all because in chapter 11 verses 1 and 2 it would appear that the temple was still standing. If it was then that settles the matter right there.

Because the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. And if the temple was standing when Revelation was written then it was written before the temple was no longer standing. It was written in the earlier period.

In chapter 11 verse 1 it says I was given a reed like a measuring rod and the angel stood saying rise and measure the temple of God, the altar and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it for it has been given to the Gentiles and they will tread the holy city underfoot for 42 months. Now Jesus talked about how Jerusalem would be tread underfoot by the Gentiles till the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled.

He talked about the destruction of Jerusalem. And so it would appear that this is saying that some portion of God's worship that's in the temple is going to be preserved. But some is going to be given over, the outward part is going to be given over to the Gentiles.

Now if this is saying that the temple, at least part of it is going to be destroyed then this would suggest that the temple had not yet been destroyed at the time this was written. And so that's one of the things pointed to for this early date. Okay, and then in chapter 13 there's something more.

In chapter 13 we have the famous rise of the beast with seven heads and ten horns. And the beast is given a name and a number. And in verse 18, most people know this verse if they know any part of Revelation.

It says, Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the

beast. For it is the number of a man.

His number is 666. Now, what does 666 mean? Well we're told what it means. It's the number of a man.

What's that mean? Well, this is what we call a gematria. This is something that was fairly well known from the Roman times. All the languages spoken in the Roman world had something in common.

They used the letters of their alphabet for their numeric system. We're familiar, for example, with Latin, which was of course the Roman language. We have the Roman numerals.

Some of us are old enough to still learn how to read Roman numerals when we were in grammar school. You know, the letter X means 10, and the letter C means 100, and the letter V means 5. These were actually letters in the Roman alphabet, but they doubled as numeric values because they didn't have another set of numbers. Later, the Arabic numbers became what we use now in the English language.

But the Romans, they used letters of their alphabet for numbers, as we know. So did the Greeks with their alphabet. The Greeks didn't have separate numbers.

They had letters of their alphabet functioned as certain numbers. And so did Hebrew. The Hebrews, the Greeks, and the Romans all had that feature.

Instead of using numbers in addition to letters, they used their letters for numbers. And that meant that any word you might choose, you could take the letters of it, and the ones that had numeric value, you could assign that number value to that letter, and you could total up the numbers in the word and get a total. And people did this a lot.

There's actually graffiti from the Roman period, it has been found by archaeologists, that says, you know, graffiti says, you know, 475 loves 386. And basically it's coded, a coded message. You work out the number, and you'll know who we're talking about, really.

Because everyone's name could be reduced to a number in this way. Now, this was popular in the Roman world, and John, or Jesus, who's given this prophecy, is saying, you want to know who the beast is? It's a man's name. It's a man's number.

His number is 666. Now, the readers would have known what to do with that. They'd start looking for someone whose name, you could take the numbers of his name, Adam, to 666.

And what's interesting is that John said, he that has wisdom, let him calculate the number of the beast. Now, he's writing to people in the first century. John was not writing a letter to us.



He was writing a letter to seven churches in Asia, most of which aren't even here anymore. He was writing to these readers saying, if you are wise, you can calculate who I'm talking about here. I'm giving you a clue.

His number is 666. Now, this tells us something. Whoever was the beast was alive at that time and could be identified by name by clever people.

John was sure that not everyone could work it out, but those who are wise could. If you're wise, you can calculate this and figure out who I'm talking about. Now, he could never have said that if the beast was not somebody living at that time.

And many scholars believe the beast he's referring to is Caesar Nero. Why? Because if you take the name Caesar Nero and translate it into Hebrew and add up the characters, it comes to 666. It doesn't work in Latin or Greek, but it works in Hebrew.

Now, some might object, well, why in the world would John, in referring to a Roman, use the Hebrew form of his name? For the same reason he gives the coded number. He's not interested in everybody knowing who he's talking about. This is written in code.

Now, the readers, although they were Greek-speaking, they knew some Hebrew. We know that because he has some Hebrew words in the book of Revelation. Though it's written in Greek, he has the word Maranatha.

He's got the word, no, that's in 1 Corinthians, but he's got the word Alleluia. He's got the word, the angel of the bottle is given a Greek and a Hebrew name, Abaddon and Apollyon. And Abaddon's the Hebrew name and Apollyon's the Greek name.

And you'll find in a number of cases a Hebrew word is thrown in as if his readers know something about Hebrew. They're Christians, they use the Hebrew scriptures. They didn't read Hebrew in all likelihood, but the wise ones probably could translate a name into Hebrew.

And that would mean that the Romans, from whom this message is intended to be concealed, would not likely figure out who he's talking about because they would know Greek and Latin, but they wouldn't probably know Hebrew in most cases. So if the name Caesar Nero was the name he had in mind and translated into Hebrew, it comes out to 666. Now, there's nobody else that we know of, no other famous person who would fit any description of the beast at all from the first century, not even Domitian, has a name that that works with.

Now, since that time, there's been scores of people that people have come up with. Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, all these people have been identified by someone or another as the Antichrist and they've, in clever ways, made out their name to be 666. For example, Ronald Reagan.

Ronald has six letters, Reagan has six letters, and I forget his middle name, but it has six letters too. All three of his names have six letters. So someone says, ah, he's definitely the Antichrist.

I don't believe Ronald Reagan is the one because I don't think that John's readers could be expected to calculate this number saying, I got it! It's Ronald Reagan for sure! First century readers would not have that ability, but his readers were expected to. And so this argues for the possibility at least that Nero is the emperor in question. Now there's another thing too that might point toward Nero, and that's in chapter 17.

Chapter 17, we've got this vision of the beast again, with the seven heads and the ten horns, and the angel says, I'm going to give you an explanation of this. And you might as well close the shop when the angel says he's going to give you the interpretation because it's harder to understand the interpretation than the symbol. The first time you see that is in chapter 1, where John sees Jesus with seven stars in his hand, and he's among the seven lampstands, and the angel says, I'm going to tell you what those are.

He said, the seven lampstands, those are the seven churches. And the seven stars, those are the seven angels of the seven churches. And scholars to this day cannot answer who the seven angels of the seven churches refer to.

But that was the explanation. The seven stars was the symbol. They are the seven angels.

But who are the seven angels? We are not given a clue anywhere in the book. Likewise, we're told that the seven heads of the beast, I'm going to explain this, angel. Let me read the explanation and see how clear this comes to you.

Verse 9 and 10 of chapter 17. Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.

Now that's not difficult, because Rome was called the city on the seven hills. So almost everyone sees that seven mountains as a reference to Rome. But then it says, there are also seven kings.

So the heads, they double as mountains and kings. It says, five have fallen, one is, that'd be the sixth one, is, and the other has not yet come. And just so it doesn't seem overly clear, it goes on and says, and there is another one.

Verse 11, the beast that was and is not and is himself, is also the eighth and is of the seven and is going to perdition. So in case you were starting to find it too easy to understand. He says, the seven heads are seven kings.

And besides that, there's an eighth one and he's of the seven. And he goes, you know, I mean, well, what are we talking about here? Well, it's very confusing. But one part is not

very confusing.

So there's five kings have fallen and the sixth one now is. Most scholars believe that John is referring to emperors. He's telling his readers who's reigning at the time he's writing.

At the time they're reading this. Five kings have fallen, one now is. There's more to come.

One, two, who knows how many more. But there's the sixth one is here now. The sixth emperor was Nero.

Nero is the sixth emperor of the Roman Empire. And many people think that what John is saying here is, OK, there have been. There's the city on the seven hills here.

The seven heads represent seven mountains on which this city sits. But also there are seven kings. Five of them are gone.

The one that now is is the sixth. And so many feel that John is telling his readers this is referring to our present emperor, Nero, the sixth. Now, what might someone say who doesn't agree with that interpretation? Some might say that kings here means kingdoms, not emperors, but kingdoms.

Like the first being the Babylonian. Or we can even skip that and just start with the Egyptian. You've got Egypt, you've got Assyria, you've got Babylon, you've got Medo-Persia, you've got Greece.

That's five that had fallen. And Rome would be the sixth. So if kings means kingdoms, as some would say, then all that John is saying is currently the Roman Empire is the sixth kingdom.

But since he has mentioned the seven hills, which seems to point to Rome itself, then he talks about the kings individually, many are more inclined to think he's talking about the emperors, and therefore identify Nero as the reigning emperor at the time. Now there's one other set of circumstances that are important here, and that is that the situation in the church is thought to point to a period earlier than A.D. 70. Mostly because both the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia were having conflicts with the Jewish people in their town.

Now we know from the book of Acts that there's tremendous conflict in the early years of the church between the synagogue and the church. And for that matter, the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin were those who condemned Jesus and took him to Pilate.

The Sanhedrin are those who stoned Stephen, the first martyr. The Sanhedrin are those who commissioned Saul of Tarsus to go out and persecute Christians around the world. The Sanhedrin are those who, after Saul of Tarsus became a Christian, sent out people to

kill him.

The Sanhedrin was a big persecutor of the church, and Paul was persecuted by the synagogues. In fact, many times Paul went into a Gentile town, preached, was well received, and then the Jews came to that town and stirred up the people and stoned him to death and dragged him out of the city. In many cases, the Gentiles were receptive to the gospel, but the Jews were the main persecutors.

Now that wasn't always the case. There were Gentile persecutors too. But it is thought that after the fall of Jerusalem, with the destruction of the temple, the destruction of the priesthood, the destruction of the Jewish state, the Jews scattered around the pagan world and slaughtered in great numbers by the Romans in AD 70, the Jewish people would be more or less demoralized and not so cocky as to be launching persecution against the Christians in their town.

They'd be mainly trying to lick their own wounds and stay alive themselves. And that may be true, but that's not so certain. One reason it's not so certain is because even in the 2nd century, the Jews in Smyrna were still persecuting the church, long after AD 70.

Because Polycarp, who was the bishop of Smyrna, was arrested by the Romans and the church fathers tell us that as the Romans were taking him to burn him, the Jews were gathering the sticks to build the fire and urging on the crowds to call for his death. So even though Jerusalem had been destroyed long since, this is now in the mid part of the 2nd century, Polycarp was still suffering persecution from the Jews in Smyrna, the second church that's mentioned here. So, anyway, these are some of the things that make people think it was written in time of Nero.

And they all have to do with internal evidence. Now, what about the later date? What evidence is there for the later date? Domitian's reign from AD 81 to AD 96. Well, some internal evidence is appealed to.

First of all, they say that in chapter 13 we read about emperor worship. Why? Because the beast requires everyone to worship him or be put to death in chapter 13. Now, scholars who make this argument are saying essentially that the beast is the emperor at the time of writing and he is requiring people to worship him.

And therefore, we have to look in history for an emperor that required people to worship him. And they say Domitian was the first one to do that. Nero persecuted Christians, but not requiring them to worship him.

He persecuted Christians because he had burned Rome down himself. And then the people of Rome were so angry at Nero, he had to find someone else to blame for it. And he blamed the Christians because they were already kind of disliked.

And so he did all this horrible persecution of the Christians to get the onus off of himself

as the perpetrator of the fire that burned down Rome. It wasn't asking the Christians to worship him. But Domitian, they say, did require Christians to worship him and kill them if they didn't.

However, you don't have to go as far as Domitian to find a conflict between the worship of God and the worship of the state. I mean, even when Jesus stood on trial before Pontius Pilate, and Pilate said, Shall I crucify your king? They said, the Jews said, We have no king but Caesar. Crucify him.

They already were choosing Caesar long before even Nero's day to be instead of God, instead of Jesus. And, you know, we don't want this king, Jesus. Our Caesar is our king.

The conflict between loyalty to God and loyalty to Caesar was never absent from the time the Romans conquered Jerusalem 63 years or 73 years before Christ. And so all the emperors in one way or another demanded loyalty. Loyalty that many of the Jews felt belonged only to God.

And could easily be represented as Revelation 13 represents it if they wish. There's another thing that some people think points to the later date. And that is the extent of the persecution.

These churches were not in Rome. They were in Turkey. There was a sea, two seas, between them and Rome.

And therefore it is said that Nero's persecution, which was largely confined to persecution of Christians in the city of Rome, would not have reached these people. So there'd be no reason to write a letter like this to these people because the persecution was too far away. It was in Rome.

It wasn't a general empire-wide persecution. But, these same people say, Domitian was the first emperor to issue persecution against Christians empire-wide. And therefore the churches in Turkey would be affected by this.

And therefore the persecution here points to Domitian, not Nero as the emperor. Now in answer to this one might easily say, but you don't really read of these churches being persecuted by the emperor. A couple of them were being persecuted by the synagogue.

Some of them were being persecuted by the local Roman authorities. You don't need an empire-wide official persecution to have Christians being persecuted in their local towns. And what we read in the seven letters is that some of these churches were persecuted by local people.

And in fact if Nero, the emperor, was officially persecuting Christians in Rome, it might be that throughout the empire it would encourage people who hated Christians anyway to say, well if the emperor does it, we can get away with it. And we don't have any real

evidence that there was an empire-wide persecution necessarily at the time of this writing. So it doesn't prove necessarily.

And by the way, many historians say that there wasn't an empire-wide persecution even in Domitian's time. That's some disagreement about that amongst historians. There's also an appeal to what's called the Nero-Redidivus myth.

What's the Nero-Redidivus myth? Well, historians tell us that after Nero died, his reign had been such a reign of terror that people could hardly believe it was really safe to go out again. They hardly believed he was really dead. And a rumor circulated that Nero had simply gone east to the Parthians and that he would return a second time with the Parthian armies and conquer Rome again.

So the people of Rome weren't really that at ease after Nero died, because some doubted that he was really dead. And they thought he was going to come back. And they had this idea that there was going to be an emperor coming back, like it'll be Nero.

Now when Domitian reigned, many of the Romans called him a second Nero. And therefore, some likened him, some called him the bald Nero. But he was like another Nero, another awful guy, like Nero.

Now scholars, and I don't sympathize with them on this, but scholars often say that the author here seems to sponsor that myth. Because in chapter 13, in verse 3, the beast is described this way, I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. So it's like he had been like he was dead, but whoops, he's back.

His deadly wound is healed. And scholars like to say this is an allusion to the Nero redidivus myth, that Nero would come back though he had died. Now by the way, this is the argument the commentators give.

I don't think there's any merit in this particular argument, I'm just telling you that right now. But you find the same information in chapter 13, verse 12. It says, he, the second beast, exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast whose deadly wound was healed.

And then in verse 14, And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. Now there's three times here, it refers to this beast having a head wound, and he received a deadly wound in one of his seven heads, but he lived. Some think this is saying that Nero, though he had died, was thought to have returned in Domitian, and therefore that this speaks about Domitian as the current emperor.

Now I have a real problem with this argument. For one thing, I don't see any evidence

here that this is talking about a resurrection. The beast had seven heads, one of them got killed.

The beast had six more good heads, it never died. The beast didn't die and come back, it suffered a mortal wound in one of its six heads. There's no reference to it coming back to life from being dead.

Even the head that was wounded doesn't come back to life, but there's six good heads left. The beast can live on despite the mortal wound to one of its heads, and that's all that we're really told of it. There's no reference to someone dying and coming back here, although popular eschatology sometimes describes the Antichrist that way, based on these verses also.

But these verses don't say that. But more than that, if the writer is in fact referring to that, it almost sounds like he's sponsoring this myth, as if it's true. As if Domitian really is a return of Nero.

But he's not. And so, I mean, this argument has always seemed vacuous to me when I've heard it. I've heard it many times, many commentators bring it up.

Now, there's a couple of other things they bring up, and I'm going to give you a stretch break before we get into the four views themselves. And that is that the condition of the churches in Revelation are sometimes said to be such as would be more likely to be true in Domitian's reign than Nero's reign, for the following reasons. The church of Laodicea, in chapter 3, verse 17, is said to be wealthy.

But Laodicea, the city, had suffered a severe earthquake in the early 60s. And it is argued it would not have recovered from this devastating earthquake so quickly as at some point in Nero's reign to be wealthy again. This argument is very subjective, of course.

How long does it take for a city to recover from an earthquake? Depends, doesn't it? I mean, it doesn't actually say the city was wealthy. It says the people were saying, I am wealthy, and I have need of nothing. This is almost talking about their spiritual attitude anyway.

It might not even be talking about their wealth. In any case, who says they couldn't have recovered to the place where they could be described as wealthy? It was a banking city, and it had been destroyed many times by earthquakes. Laodicea was on a fault line, and it was destroyed by many earthquakes and rebuilt again.

They had lots of money. The city had a lot of money, and they always rebuilt it pretty quickly. So this argument doesn't really tell us much.

Now, here's a much more difficult one. The Church of Smyrna. We know that the Church

of Smyrna was around when Revelation was written because one of the seven churches addressed is the Church of Smyrna.

But Polycarp, who in a later century was the bishop of Smyrna, wrote a letter to the church in Philippi, and we have that letter. And the letter of Polycarp to the Philippians makes reference back to Paul's earlier letter to the Philippians, which we have in our Bible. And in his letter, Polycarp says, Among you, you Philippians, the blessed Paul labored, who are praised in the beginning of his epistle.

For concerning you he boasts in all the churches who then alone had known the Lord, for we had not yet known him. Now, the argument here is that Polycarp, who's at the Church of Smyrna, said, We in Smyrna didn't know the Lord back then. And the argument goes, therefore, is that the Church of Smyrna did not exist in Paul's lifetime because Polycarp said that we didn't know the Lord at that time.

And Paul died probably around the year 67. So the argument is, if there was no church in Smyrna in Paul's lifetime, and Paul died in 67, then the Church of Smyrna would have to come into existence sometimes after 67. Nero died in 68.

There just doesn't seem time for the rise of the Church of Smyrna in the reign of Nero if the Church of Smyrna was not there until Paul died. But that's reading something into Polycarp's statement that isn't there. Polycarp didn't say there was no church in Smyrna in Paul's lifetime.

He said there was no church in Smyrna when Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians. Just read the passage. He's saying, when Paul wrote this letter to you, we didn't know Christ yet.

Well, when did he write that? As far as we know, he wrote it around the years between 60 and 62 AD, a full eight years before 70 AD. The Church of Smyrna could easily have come into existence in the time since then and still be in the reign of Nero. So it doesn't really prove anything against that early date, although this argument is often used.

It's a fallacious argument. Then there's reference to the spiritual decline in Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea. By the time Paul wrote this, the Church of Ephesus had left their first love.

The Church of Sardis had nothing good about them except their reputation. They had a name to live, but they were dead. The Church of Laodicea had become lukewarm.

These churches were established during the time of Paul's ministry in Asia. We're told that in the three years Paul spent in Asia, all of Asia heard the gospel, and these churches were established that time in Paul's second missionary journey, essentially, or third. And so this being so, they say, listen, if Paul started these churches up like in the 60s or late 50s, they wouldn't have time before A.D. 70 to lose their first love, to become



lukewarm, to have a name that they lived, but be dead.

And I say, really? Where have you lived? How long does it take a church to lose their first love or to become lukewarm? It doesn't take any decade. When Paul left Galatia from his first missionary journey, he had to write a letter back to them before he'd even settled down back in his home church. He wrote to the Galatians and said, they departed from the gospel.

They've accepted a false gospel. The Corinthian church received a letter from him only months after he left them, and he said, you've got a man there who's living with his father's wife. You've got people getting drunk at communion.

You've got people splitting the church following Paul, Apollos, and Cephas. This is a church only months after Paul left. How long does it take for a church to go bad? Not very long.

It can happen while the apostles are still there, practically. And I've seen churches that grew up in the 70s that have long since left their first love and things like that. I mean, it doesn't take that long.

So this argument, again, is entirely subjective. But the real argument for the late date, and I'm going to give you this quickly, and then we're going to take a break. The real argument for the late date is this.

Irenaeus, who wrote in 170 AD, just less than a century, or maybe just a century after the book of Revelation was written. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp. And Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John.

And the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation. So it is thought that Irenaeus is pretty closely connected to John. Only two generations removed.

John disciplined Polycarp, Polycarp disciplined Irenaeus. And Irenaeus had something to say about the Revelation and its writing. And there's a very famous passage in Irenaeus' writings, which I will read to you.

It's there in your notes. And based on this, most scholars believe that John wrote the book of Revelation in the reign of Domitian. And you'll see why as we read it.

Irenaeus wrote this. He's talking about the number of the beast, 666. He says, now since this is so, and since this number is found in all the good and ancient copies, he means of the book of Revelation, and since those who have seen John face to face testify, and reason teaches us that the number of the name of the beast appears according to the numeration of the Greeks by its letters in it, he said reason tells us that, we will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively the name of the Antichrist.

For if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in the present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision, meaning John. For that was seen no very long time since, almost in our own day, toward the end of Domitian's reign. Okay? Now, something or someone was seen toward the end of Domitian's reign.

The way this is worded, the most natural way to understand it, is the vision was seen by John, near the end of Domitian's reign. He says, he talks about him that beheld the apocalyptic vision, for that was seen no very long time since, almost in our own day. What, the apocalyptic vision? Well then, in that case, the book of Revelation is written, according to Irenaeus, in the reign of Domitian.

However, many people think this has been misunderstood, for a number of reasons. One, is that John speaks of the time of Domitian as not very long ago, almost in his own day. And yet, he talks about very ancient copies of the book of Revelation, in the very first line.

He said, it's found in all the good and ancient copies. Now, if a book already has good and ancient copies, would not the original from which they were copied, be more ancient still? Would he speak about a book that was written almost in his own day, as he put it? Not very long since, as being a book that now has very ancient copies, in circulation of it? It doesn't seem to jive well. Besides, the apocalyptic vision is not the only thing that he says was seen.

In the underlying portion, in the second line, he says, those who have seen John face to face testify. Who was seen? John was seen. Now, likewise, in the second to the last line, he says, him who beheld the apocalyptic vision, for that was seen.

What was seen? The vision, or the one who saw the vision? Is he talking about people having seen John, as late as Domitian's reign? Or is he talking about John having seen the vision, in Domitian's reign? You see, if he's talking about when John was last seen, he's telling us nothing about when the vision was seen. The vision could have been seen decades earlier, but some people have seen John not very long ago, near the end of Domitian's reign. And this would actually make some sense, because the point he's making, in the paragraph, as you can see, is, I'm not going to tell you who the Antichrist is, because John himself didn't tell us who he was.

Now, that would make sense if he said, and John has been seen not very long ago, some people I know even had a chance to know him, and he didn't tell them. His point is, it must not be important for us to know at this time who it is, because John, perhaps he's even saying, very recently, I knew someone who saw him recently, in Domitian's reign. He didn't tell us what the number means, so we just have to be curious about it.

Now, that seems to be Irenaeus' thought. If he's trying to make that point and tells us,

but the vision was seen not very long ago, what's that got to do with the point he's making? It's like it'd be a side issue. The point he's making is that John didn't bother to tell anyone what 666 means.

That's his point. And it would be relevant to say, and John was seen not very long ago, and he still didn't say anything about it. But if he said, and the vision was seen not long ago, what's that got to do with whether John said it or not? To me, I'm having problems with this.

I don't think it's necessarily being understood correctly to say that the vision was seen in the reign of Domitian. It could be. But there's another thing to consider, that Irenaeus is not inspired.

Irenaeus is still two generations removed from the situation and might be mistaken. After all, in Irenaeus' writings, he said that Jesus lived to be 50 years old before he was crucified. I don't know any scholars who believe that to be true.

Most believe he died in his middle 30s. But Irenaeus said Jesus lived to be 50. Now, we basically just disregard that and say, well, Irenaeus, I don't know where he got that figure, but we think you're wrong.

And he could be wrong about other things too. The main thing to note is the strongest evidence for the late date is Irenaeus. And that's what we call external evidence, a non-inspired testimony.

He could be right, but internal evidence would be more important. And you have to make your own judgment about that. I'm not going to decide for you which view is correct.

I'm just saying these are the evidences that are out there. Now, I want to give you a break for about five minutes. If you'd come back at 8.30, I want to go through these four views and tell you what they are.