



“I shall always be ready to remind you of these things...” 2 Peter 1:21

Keys to Understanding the Book of Revelation, II

By Alex Hale

Key #1: Revelation has a unique style. See last week’s bulletin for a discussion of this point.

Key #2: Revelation has a time frame. It is true that Revelation is a book of prophecy. It describes events that were to take place in the future (1:19; 4:1). But when were these events going to happen? Many religious people believe that most, if not all, of the events written in the book have not yet occurred and will not occur until the end of time. However, John reveals a time frame which is different from the common interpretation of the book. From the very first verse, John makes it clear that the events described would “*shortly take place.*”

Key #3: Revelation has a specific audience. Revelation was written to a specific group of people, namely the members of the seven churches in Asia (1:4, 11). While this may seem obvious to you, it is a key point nonetheless. When we start trying to make sense of many of the images in the book, we must understand that *they must be explained in ways which would have made sense to the original readers.* Any explanation or interpretation of the book which leaves the original readers out simply will *not* work!

Key #4: Revelation has a background. As we work to understand the book’s meaning, it helps to know something about what was happening in the lives of the disciples who were the original recipients of the book. The brethren addressed in Revelation were facing a great struggle.

During the early days of the church, the Roman authorities mostly ignored the Christians. They saw them as nothing more than another Jewish sect. In fact, in the early days of Christianity, most persecution came at the

hands of the Jewish leaders (see Acts 4 for an example of this). However, even during this time, Christians were looked at with suspicion because of their different lifestyle.

Then, in AD 64, the city of Rome suffered a terrible fire. Many historians believe that the emperor, Nero, had set it himself. In a likely attempt to shift blame away from himself, Nero claimed that the Christians were responsible for the fire. Since Christians were already viewed with suspicion, they became a natural “scapegoat” and were persecuted as a result. Some believe that Revelation was written during the reign of Nero.

This pattern of persecution would be repeated by other Roman emperors in the decades following Nero. Domitian was emperor of Rome roughly 30 years after Nero. He took seriously the idea that the emperor was a god and insisted on being worshipped. Obviously, this presented a problem for the Christians. They would not worship the emperor, and as a result, were seen as disloyal to the Roman Empire and persecuted. Their property was taken from them, and many were killed. Living during these challenging times, believers had to make a choice – will I be loyal to God or be loyal to Caesar? Loyalty to God cost many of these brethren their lives.

We must keep this background in mind as we study the book. Throughout Revelation we read about a great conflict. However, it is not, as many of our religious friends believe and teach, some great battle yet to come in the future. That simply would not fit the background of the book. John is instead referring to the great battle being waged against the Christians *in their day.* John even calls himself a “*fellow partaker in the tribulation*” (1:9).



CABOT WESTSIDE CHURCH OF CHRIST

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When We Meet

Sunday

Bible Classes – 9:00 am

Worship – 10:00 am, 5:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Classes – 7:00 pm

Our Elders

R.D. Hopper

Norman Kemper

Our Preacher

Alex Hale