

# The Date of the Book of Revelation

## How It Affects Our Interpretation (Part 1)

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When was the book of Revelation written? What bearing does the time of the writing have on the interpretation of the book? It is these and other questions surrounding the date that is the point of focus for this writing.

Two possible dates are commonly suggested for the writing of the book of Revelation. One, a late date, is A.D. 95 or 96. The other is an earlier date and is usually suggested to be about A.D. 68. Why are these dates important? It is not because knowing the precise date or exact year is necessarily important. Rather, it is because there is such a wide range of time within these dates that it directly influences the interpretation and application of the symbols found within the book.

For example, if the later date can be established, then an application to an earlier period must be ignored especially since the book is prophetic and describes things which were “shortly to come to pass,” (Revelation 1:1) i.e., things then imminently future. Event which had already passed could not possibly be considered. The destruction of Jerusalem is an event which took place in A.D. 70. Those who advocate the latter date do not see any reference whatsoever to the destruction of Jerusalem in the book. They must find events future to A.D. 95, to which the prophecies contained therein, must apply.

On the other hand, if the book was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, in or before A.D. 68, then it is possible for the interpreter to apply the contents of the book to that event. This makes the dating of this book a very important issue indeed. It is a subject that every Christian ought to be reasonably aware of, because of the consequences it has on a proper understanding of this beautiful book.

Is this question too difficult for the average person to decide? No, it isn't. In fact, it is only a matter of withholding evidence from the masses that such ignorance even prevails concerning the date. The evidence is strikingly decisive and convincing. The average Bible student can be well assured of the general time in which this book was written and be well on his way to a better understanding of its message and contents. What is the evidence for the two dates?

First, the latter date (A.D. 95 or 96) is based purely on external evidence. By external evidence we mean evidence that originates outside the Bible, or uninspired evidence. It is based on the testimony of one man, Irenaeus who lived about 130-200 A.D.. His statement is preserved by a church historian named Eusebius, who lived about 264-340 A.D.. So, at best, we have second hand uninspired testimony for the latter date.

The statement of Irenaeus is as follows, “If it were necessary to have his name distinctly announced at the present time it would doubtless have been announced by him who saw the Apocalypse; for it was not a great while ago that (it or he) was seen, but almost in our own generation, toward the end of Domitian’s reign,” (*quoted in, The Book of Revelation, Foy E. Wallace Jr., p. 25*).

Concerning the above statement, scholars have long recognized that it is not possible to determine whether Irenaeus meant to say John was seen by Irenaeus’ tutor, Polycarp, or that “the Apocalypse was seen toward the end of Domitian’s reign. Such ambiguity destroys this argument as evidence. Even Eusebius, who recorded this statement, doubted that John, the apostle, even wrote the book of Revelation. The point here is this, if the statement was not strong enough to convince Eusebius that John even wrote Revelation, why do so many think today that it is strong enough to convince one that the apostle saw it during Domitian’s reign (A.D. 95)? It is weak to say the least.

Others who comment on the statement say, “His (Eusebius) quotation does not even mention “the writing” of Revelation, but refers solely to the time when certain unnamed persons are alleged to have *seen* either the *apostle* or the *prophecy*, nobody knows which. This proves *nothing*. Besides that: If he meant the Apocalypse was seen, and if it had been originally composed in quotation could have reference to the Greek translation, if indeed it referred to the Revelation at all. There goes the whole case for the latter date,” (*Commentary on Revelation, Burton Coffman, p 4*).

Finally, Irenaeus said of the age of Jesus, “but the age of 30 years is the first of a young man’s mind, and that it reaches even to the fortieth year, everyone will allow: but after the fortieth and fiftieth year, it begins to verge towards elder age: which our Lord was when He taught, as the Gospel and all the Elders witness...” (Quoted in *Before Jerusalem Fell, Kenneth L. Gentry, p. 63*) Can we trust the testimony of a man that says Jesus taught for 15 years and was fifty years old when he died? Yet, it is largely his testimony alone, for the latter date!