



Part 12: Unlocking the Mystery (Allegiance to the Lamb)

Revelation 1:1-8

Revelation is a prophetic call to the people of God to resist the seduction of cultural powers, whether political, ideological, or religious.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND GENRE OF LITERATURE

- Historical Context

The story of Rome was one in which the Empire was chosen and blessed by the gods. The emperor was semi-divine and an agent of the god's rule and salvation. It was said that "at Jupiter's command, he rules for him the blessed world." Rome's rule was a mixture of Roman ideology and pagan spirituality.

Persecution started with Nero (AD65) but moved into a new realm with Domitian, who demanded that all people worship him as "Lord and God." He changed the name of the Empire to "Eternal Empire" and called himself "Everlasting King."

The Church was on a collision course with the Empire. John and these early disciples were not participating in the political, social, and religious customs of their culture. They were viewed as unpatriotic and atheistic.

Exiled to Patmos (10 miles off the coast of Turkey), John writes to the churches to encourage them and challenge them towards faithfulness to Jesus Christ. He is addressing both the external and internal pressures on them.

- Type of Literature (Revelation 1:1-4)

John received a prophetic Word from God (v.3), communicated through apocalyptic imagery (v.1, 4), which he in turn communicated to the seven churches by letter (v.4).

"Revelation" (*apocalypsis*) = unveiling, uncovering, or revealing something hidden.

Apocalyptic literature used rich symbolism to show that God would break into history to overthrow evil and vindicate the suffering of His people. It brought a heavenly perspective on an earthly situation.

“It is important to remember that the imagery he uses is intended to be symbolic rather than pictorial. The various elements in the vision are significant symbols to be interpreted, rather than actual features to be imagined.” John Stott

“Numbers are much more likely to be symbols than statistics. And these symbolic number patterns clearly have great importance, or the drama would not include a lot of them.” Michael Wilcock

KEY CHARACTERS

- Resurrected and Ruling Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:4-7)
- The Dragon (Revelation 12) = Satan
*“Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.”
Revelation 12:3*

“The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” Revelation 12:9

- The Sea Beast (Revelation 13) = Rome and any political power manipulated by Satan
“And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.” Revelation 13:1

Like the dragon, the sea beast is a sign pointing beyond itself. The language comes from Daniel 7:1-14, referring to successive empires opposed to God’s people.

- The Land Beast aka False Prophet (Revelation 13, 16, 19 and 20) = religious institutions and powers manipulated by Satan

“Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.” Revelation 13:11-13

These are Satan-manipulated religious institutions and powers that lead people to put their trust in themselves and political powers (Sea beast) in rebellion against God.

- Babylon (Revelation 17-19) = Rome and any political power manipulated by Satan.

“There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ... The title was written on her forehead:

*Mystery
Babylon the Great
The Mother of Prostitutes
And of the Abominations of the Earth.” Revelation 17:3, 5*

Babylon was code in apocalyptic literature for humanity seeking to build a society without God. Babylon represents the world opposed to God. Babylon was recognized as any nation or power seeking to destroy God’s people.

PURPOSE

*“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit ... All the nations had drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries. Then I heard another voice from heaven say: ‘Come out of her so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.’”
Revelation 18:2-5*

*“I do not read Revelation to get additional information about the life of faith in Christ. ... Everything in Revelation can be found in the previous sixty-five books of the Bible. ...I read Revelation not to get more information but to revive my imagination.” Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder**

Resource: For a more detailed introduction to the Book of Revelation, see [Unveiled Hope, Part 1: Introduction to the Book of Revelation](#).