



# The Historical Situation of Revelation

**Comfort in Crisis**

**Vern Sheridan Poythress**

**Westminster Theological Seminary**

# Copyright Specifications

Copyright (c) 2005 Vern S. Poythress.

Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.2 or any later version published by the Free Software Foundation; with no Invariant Sections, no Front-Cover Texts, and no Back-Cover Texts. A copy of the license is included in the next slides and at

<<http://www.fsf.org/licenses/licenses/fdl.html>>.

The clipart embedded within the slides is from various sources, primarily from MS Office clipart gallery, Corel Clip-Art from *CD-ROM Clipart, Symbols & Flics*, which was part of Corel Draw 3.0, and Corel Megagallery, which came with Corel Draw 8. I have tried to make sure that the clipart can be freely copied and modified, but it is not itself subject to the GNU Free Documentation License. Likewise photos are from various sources, primarily Corel Megagallery. Except when the photos are my own, they are not subject to the GNU Free Documentation License.

GNU Free Documentation License

Version 1.2, November 2002

Copyright (C) 2000,2001,2002 Free Software Foundation, Inc.

51 Franklin Street, Fifth Floor, Boston, MA 02110-1301, USA

Everyone is permitted to copy and distribute verbatim copies of this license document, but changing it is not allowed.

## 0. PREAMBLE

The purpose of this License is to make a manual, textbook, or other functional and useful document "free" in the sense of freedom: to assure everyone the effective freedom to copy and redistribute it, with or without modifying it, either commercially or noncommercially. Secondly, this License preserves for the author and publisher a way to get credit for their work, while not being considered responsible for modifications made by others.

This License is a kind of "copyleft", which means that derivative works of the document must themselves be free in the same sense. It complements the GNU General Public License, which is a copyleft license designed for free software.

We have designed this License in order to use it for manuals for free software, because free software needs free documentation: a free program should come with manuals providing the same freedoms that the software does. But this License is not limited to software manuals; it can be used for any textual work, regardless of subject matter or whether it is published as a printed book. We recommend this License principally for works whose purpose is instruction or reference.

## 1. APPLICABILITY AND DEFINITIONS

This License applies to any manual or other work, in any medium, that contains a notice placed by the copyright holder saying it can be distributed under the terms of this License. Such a notice grants a world-wide, royalty-free license, unlimited in duration, to use that work under the conditions stated herein. The "Document", below, refers to any such manual or work. Any member of the public is a licensee, and is addressed as "you". You accept the license if you copy, modify or distribute the work in a way requiring permission under copyright law.

A "Modified Version" of the Document means any work containing the Document or a portion of it, either copied verbatim, or with modifications and/or translated into another language.

A "Secondary Section" is a named appendix or a front-matter section of the Document that deals exclusively with the relationship of the publishers or authors of the Document to the Document's overall subject (or to related matters) and contains nothing that could fall directly within that overall subject. (Thus, if the Document is in part a textbook of mathematics, a Secondary Section may not explain any mathematics.) The relationship could be a matter of historical connection with the subject or with related matters, or of legal, commercial, philosophical, ethical or political position regarding them.

The "Invariant Sections" are certain Secondary Sections whose titles are designated, as being those of Invariant Sections, in the notice that says that the Document is released under this License. If a section does not fit the above definition of Secondary then it is not allowed to be designated as Invariant. The Document may contain zero Invariant Sections. If the Document does not identify any Invariant Sections then there are none.

The "Cover Texts" are certain short passages of text that are listed, as Front-Cover Texts or Back-Cover Texts, in the notice that says that the Document is released under this License. A Front-Cover Text may be at most 5 words, and a Back-Cover Text may be at most 25 words.

A "Transparent" copy of the Document means a machine-readable copy, represented in a format whose specification is available to the general public, that is suitable for revising the document straightforwardly with generic text editors or (for images composed of pixels) generic paint programs or (for drawings) some widely available drawing editor, and that is suitable for input to text formatters or for automatic translation to a variety of formats suitable for input to text formatters. A copy made in an otherwise Transparent file format whose markup, or absence of markup, has been arranged to thwart or discourage subsequent modification by readers is not Transparent. An image format is not Transparent if used for any substantial amount of text. A copy that is not "Transparent" is called "Opaque".

Examples of suitable formats for Transparent copies include plain ASCII without markup, Texinfo input format, LaTeX input format, SGML or XML using a publicly available DTD, and standard-conforming simple HTML, PostScript or PDF designed for human modification. Examples of transparent image formats include PNG, XCF and JPG. Opaque formats include proprietary formats that can be read and edited only by proprietary word processors, SGML or XML for which the DTD and/or processing tools are not generally available, and the machine-generated HTML, PostScript or PDF produced by some word processors for output purposes only.

The "Title Page" means, for a printed book, the title page itself, plus such following pages as are needed to hold, legibly, the material this License requires to appear in the title page. For works in formats which do not have any title page as such, "Title Page" means the text near the most prominent appearance of the work's title, preceding the beginning of the body of the text.

A section "Entitled XYZ" means a named subunit of the Document whose title either is precisely XYZ or contains XYZ in parentheses following text that translates XYZ in another language. (Here XYZ stands for a specific section name mentioned below, such as "Acknowledgements", "Dedications", "Endorsements", or "History".) To "Preserve the Title" of such a section when you modify the Document means that it remains a section "Entitled XYZ" according to this definition.

The Document may include Warranty Disclaimers next to the notice which states that this License applies to the Document. These Warranty Disclaimers are considered to be included by reference in this License, but only as regards disclaiming warranties: any other implication that these Warranty Disclaimers may have is void and has no effect on the meaning of this License.

## 2. VERBATIM COPYING

You may copy and distribute the Document in any medium, either commercially or noncommercially, provided that this License, the copyright notices, and the license notice saying this License applies to the Document are reproduced in all copies, and that you add no other conditions whatsoever to those of this License. You may not use technical measures to obstruct or control the reading or further copying of the copies you make or distribute. However, you may accept compensation in exchange for copies. If you distribute a large enough number of copies you must also follow the conditions in section 3.

You may also lend copies, under the same conditions stated above, and you may publicly display copies.

### 3. COPYING IN QUANTITY

If you publish printed copies (or copies in media that commonly have printed covers) of the Document, numbering more than 100, and the Document's license notice requires Cover Texts, you must enclose the copies in covers that carry, clearly and legibly, all these Cover Texts: Front-Cover Texts on the front cover, and Back-Cover Texts on the back cover. Both covers must also clearly and legibly identify you as the publisher of these copies. The front cover must present the full title with all words of the title equally prominent and visible. You may add other material on the covers in addition. Copying with changes limited to the covers, as long as they preserve the title of the Document and satisfy these conditions, can be treated as verbatim copying in other respects.

If the required texts for either cover are too voluminous to fit legibly, you should put the first ones listed (as many as fit reasonably) on the actual cover, and continue the rest onto adjacent pages.

If you publish or distribute Opaque copies of the Document numbering more than 100, you must either include a machine-readable Transparent copy along with each Opaque copy, or state in or with each Opaque copy a computer-network location from which the general network-using public has access to download using public-standard network protocols a complete Transparent copy of the Document, free of added material. If you use the latter option, you must take reasonably prudent steps, when you begin distribution of Opaque copies in quantity, to ensure that this Transparent copy will remain thus accessible at the stated location until at least one year after the last time you distribute an Opaque copy (directly or through your agents or retailers) of that edition to the public.

It is requested, but not required, that you contact the authors of the Document well before redistributing any large number of copies, to give them a chance to provide you with an updated version of the Document.

### 4. MODIFICATIONS

You may copy and distribute a Modified Version of the Document under the conditions of sections 2 and 3 above, provided that you release the Modified Version under precisely this License, with the Modified Version filling the role of the Document, thus licensing distribution and modification of the Modified Version to whoever possesses a copy of it. In addition, you must do these things in the Modified Version:

- \* A. Use in the Title Page (and on the covers, if any) a title distinct from that of the Document, and from those of previous versions (which should, if there were any, be listed in the History section of the Document). You may use the same title as a previous version if the original publisher of that version gives permission.
- \* B. List on the Title Page, as authors, one or more persons or entities responsible for authorship of the modifications in the Modified Version, together with at least five of the principal authors of the Document (all of its principal authors, if it has fewer than five), unless they release you from this requirement.
- \* C. State on the Title page the name of the publisher of the Modified Version, as the publisher.
- \* D. Preserve all the copyright notices of the Document.
- \* E. Add an appropriate copyright notice for your modifications adjacent to the other copyright notices.

\* F. Include, immediately after the copyright notices, a license notice giving the public permission to use the Modified Version under the terms of this License, in the form shown in the Addendum below.

\* G. Preserve in that license notice the full lists of Invariant Sections and required Cover Texts given in the Document's license notice.

\* H. Include an unaltered copy of this License.

\* I. Preserve the section Entitled "History", Preserve its Title, and add to it an item stating at least the title, year, new authors, and publisher of the Modified Version as given on the Title Page. If there is no section Entitled "History" in the Document, create one stating the title, year, authors, and publisher of the Document as given on its Title Page, then add an item describing the Modified Version as stated in the previous sentence.

\* J. Preserve the network location, if any, given in the Document for public access to a Transparent copy of the Document, and likewise the network locations given in the Document for previous versions it was based on. These may be placed in the "History" section. You may omit a network location for a work that was published at least four years before the Document itself, or if the original publisher of the version it refers to gives permission.

\* K. For any section Entitled "Acknowledgements" or "Dedications", Preserve the Title of the section, and preserve in the section all the substance and tone of each of the contributor acknowledgements and/or dedications given therein.

\* L. Preserve all the Invariant Sections of the Document, unaltered in their text and in their titles. Section numbers or the equivalent are not considered part of the section titles.

\* M. Delete any section Entitled "Endorsements". Such a section may not be included in the Modified Version.

\* N. Do not retitle any existing section to be Entitled "Endorsements" or to conflict in title with any Invariant Section.

\* O. Preserve any Warranty Disclaimers.

If the Modified Version includes new front-matter sections or appendices that qualify as Secondary Sections and contain no material copied from the Document, you may at your option designate some or all of these sections as invariant. To do this, add their titles to the list of Invariant Sections in the Modified Version's license notice. These titles must be distinct from any other section titles.

You may add a section Entitled "Endorsements", provided it contains nothing but endorsements of your Modified Version by various parties--for example, statements of peer review or that the text has been approved by an organization as the authoritative definition of a standard.

You may add a passage of up to five words as a Front-Cover Text, and a passage of up to 25 words as a Back-Cover Text, to the end of the list of Cover Texts in the Modified Version. Only one passage of Front-Cover Text and one of Back-Cover Text may be added by (or through arrangements made by) any one entity. If the Document already includes a cover text for the same cover, previously added by you or by arrangement made by the same entity you are acting on behalf of, you may not add another; but you may replace the old one, on explicit permission from the previous publisher that added the old one.

The author(s) and publisher(s) of the Document do not by this License give permission to use their names for publicity for or to assert or imply endorsement of any Modified Version.

## 5. COMBINING DOCUMENTS

You may combine the Document with other documents released under this License, under the terms defined in section 4 above for modified versions, provided that you include in the combination all of the Invariant Sections of all of the original documents, unmodified, and list them all as Invariant Sections of your combined work in its license notice, and that you preserve all their Warranty Disclaimers.

The combined work need only contain one copy of this License, and multiple identical Invariant Sections may be replaced with a single copy. If there are multiple Invariant Sections with the same name but different contents, make the title of each such section unique by adding at the end of it, in parentheses, the name of the original author or publisher of that section if known, or else a unique number. Make the same adjustment to the section titles in the list of Invariant Sections in the license notice of the combined work.

In the combination, you must combine any sections Entitled "History" in the various original documents, forming one section Entitled "History"; likewise combine any sections Entitled "Acknowledgements", and any sections Entitled "Dedications". You must delete all sections Entitled "Endorsements."

## 6. COLLECTIONS OF DOCUMENTS

You may make a collection consisting of the Document and other documents released under this License, and replace the individual copies of this License in the various documents with a single copy that is included in the collection, provided that you follow the rules of this License for verbatim copying of each of the documents in all other respects.

You may extract a single document from such a collection, and distribute it individually under this License, provided you insert a copy of this License into the extracted document, and follow this License in all other respects regarding verbatim copying of that document.

## 7. AGGREGATION WITH INDEPENDENT WORKS

A compilation of the Document or its derivatives with other separate and independent documents or works, in or on a volume of a storage or distribution medium, is called an "aggregate" if the copyright resulting from the compilation is not used to limit the legal rights of the compilation's users beyond what the individual works permit. When the Document is included in an aggregate, this License does not apply to the other works in the aggregate which are not themselves derivative works of the Document.

If the Cover Text requirement of section 3 is applicable to these copies of the Document, then if the Document is less than one half of the entire aggregate, the Document's Cover Texts may be placed on covers that bracket the Document within the aggregate, or the electronic equivalent of covers if the Document is in electronic form. Otherwise they must appear on printed covers that bracket the whole aggregate.

## 8. TRANSLATION

Translation is considered a kind of modification, so you may distribute translations of the Document under the terms of section 4. Replacing Invariant Sections with translations requires special permission from their copyright holders, but you may include translations of some or all Invariant Sections in addition to the original versions of these Invariant Sections. You may include a translation of this License, and all the license notices in the Document, and any Warranty Disclaimers, provided that you also include the original English version of this License and the original versions of those notices and disclaimers. In case of a disagreement between the translation and the original version of this License or a notice or disclaimer, the original version will prevail.

If a section in the Document is Entitled "Acknowledgements", "Dedications", or "History", the requirement (section 4) to Preserve its Title (section 1) will typically require changing the actual title.

## 9. TERMINATION

You may not copy, modify, sublicense, or distribute the Document except as expressly provided for under this License. Any other attempt to copy, modify, sublicense or distribute the Document is void, and will automatically terminate your rights under this License. However, parties who have received copies, or rights, from you under this License will not have their licenses terminated so long as such parties remain in full compliance.

## 10. FUTURE REVISIONS OF THIS LICENSE

The Free Software Foundation may publish new, revised versions of the GNU Free Documentation License from time to time. Such new versions will be similar in spirit to the present version, but may differ in detail to address new problems or concerns. See <http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/>.

Each version of the License is given a distinguishing version number. If the Document specifies that a particular numbered version of this License "or any later version" applies to it, you have the option of following the terms and conditions either of that specified version or of any later version that has been published (not as a draft) by the Free Software Foundation. If the Document does not specify a version number of this License, you may choose any version ever published (not as a draft) by the Free Software Foundation.



# The Situation of Revelation: Outline

- **A. Genre: Apocalyptic Literature**
- **B. Audience: The Seven Churches**
- **C. Troubles in Asia Minor**
- **D. Is Babylon a Symbol for Jerusalem?**
- **E. Author: John**
- **F. Date**

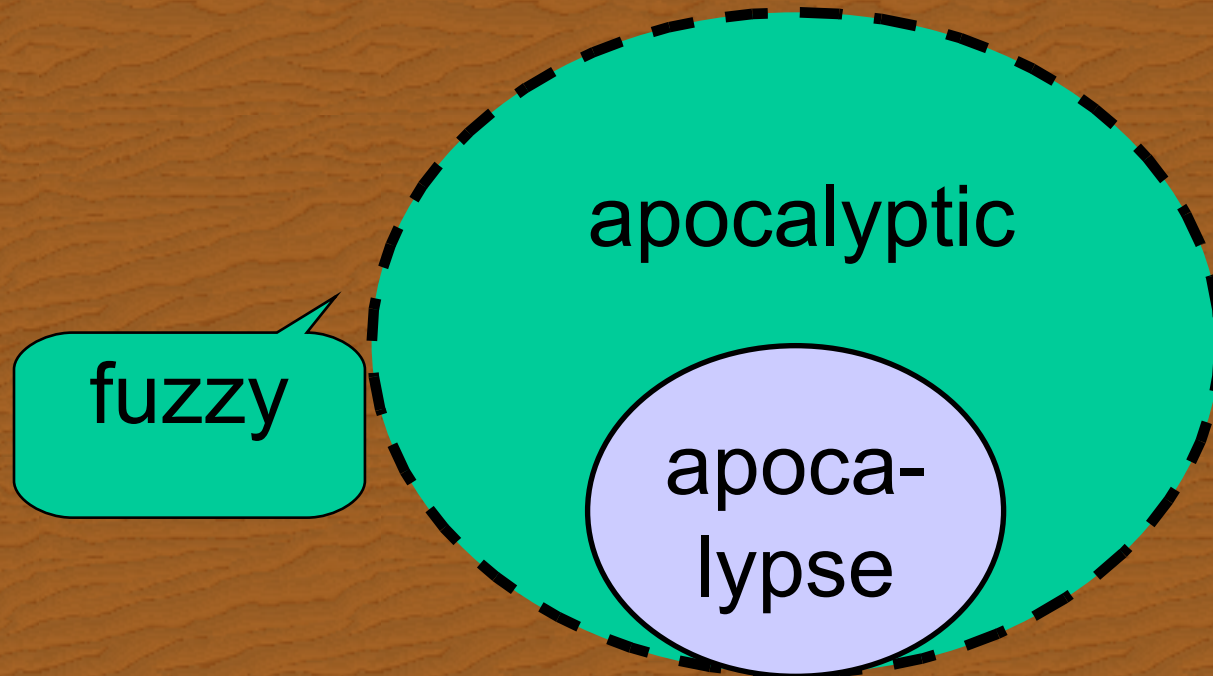
A. Genre:  
Apocalyptic Literature

# What Is Apocalyptic?

- ✓ • Revelation of God's secrets.
- Pseudonymy.
- History rewritten as prophecy.
- ✓ • Determinism in history, ending is cosmic cataclysm.
- ✓ • Dualism of good and evil.
- Pessimism about God's *saving* rule at present.
- ✓ • Bizarre and wild symbols denote historical events.

# Situating Apocalyptic

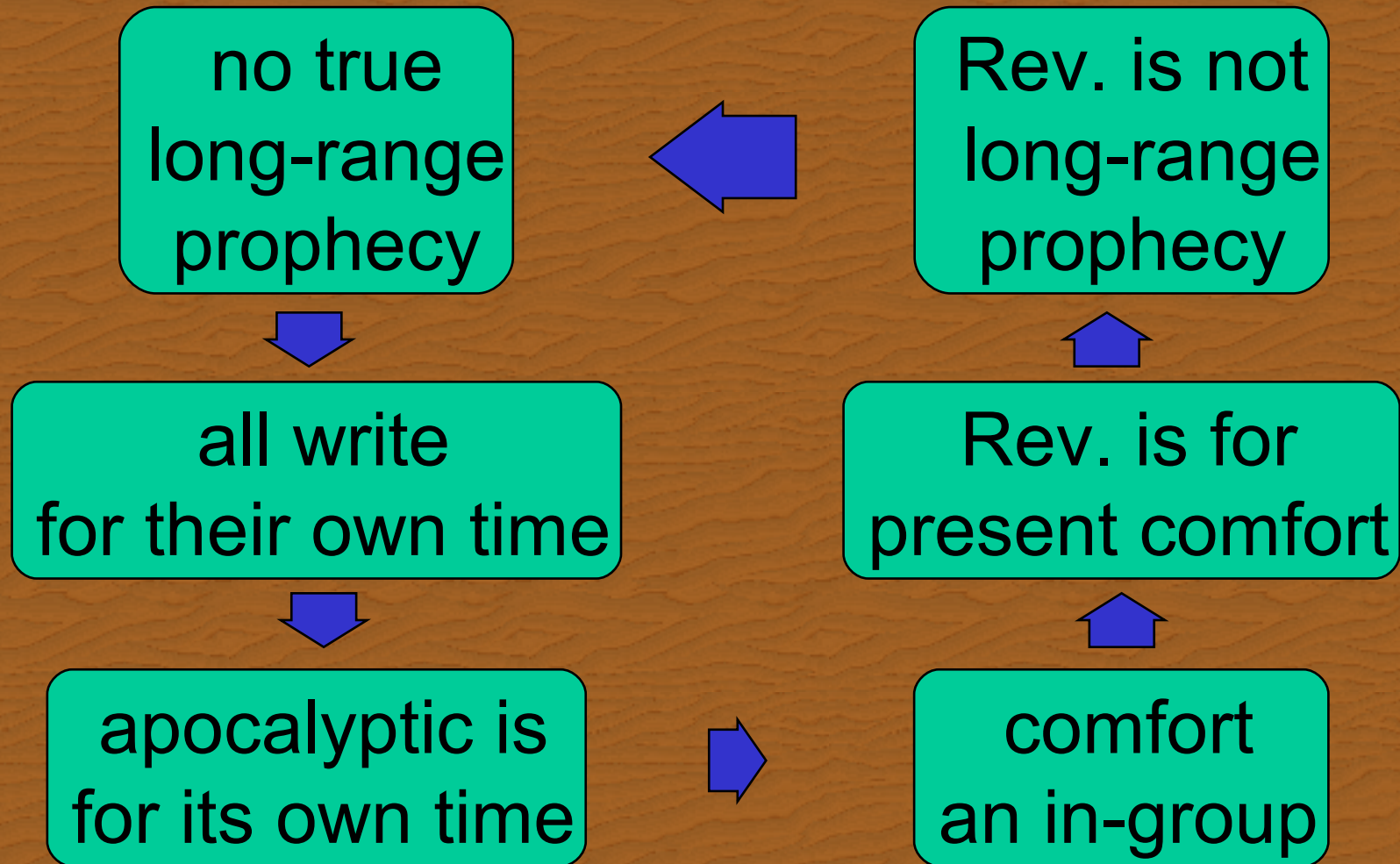
- See Morris, *Apocalyptic*;
- Morris, *Revelation 22-25*.
- Collins, “Apocalypse” 9.



# Examples of Apocalyptic

- **Numbers 23-24, Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah 24-27, 1 Thess 4-5, 2 Thess 1-2, the Olivet Discourse, Revelation.**
- **Extrabiblical: 1 QM, Assumption of Moses, 1-2-3 Enoch, 2-3 Baruch, 4 Ezra, Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Paul, Apocalypse of Thomas, Ascension of Isaiah.**

# Modernists' View of Apocalyptic



# Prediction in Apocalyptic

- **Daniel 7; Zech. 6; 9.**
- **1 Enoch; 4 Ezra.**
- **Comfort for the immediate audience can take place *through* long-range prediction.**

# Lessons from Apocalyptic

- **Bizarre symbols are common.**
- **Prediction may be included.**
- **Present comfort may be one goal.**
- **Difficult to generalize about all apocalyptic.**



# Use Extracanonical Literature?

**No**

- Superficial, vague connections.
- Rev. is Christocentric.
- Much is explainable from canonical parallels.

**Yes**

- Symbols may come from general culture.
- Parallels may be polemical rather than merely approving paganism.

## B. The Seven Churches

1:11

# Asia Minor



# Importance of the 7 Churches

7 messages  
(2-3)



real  
church  
situations



application  
to Roman  
Empire

thematic  
connection

Rest of Rev.



# Structure of the 7 Messages

- “To the angel of the church in *X* write:”
- “These are the words of ...”
- “I know ...” (state of the church)
- Commendations and rebukes
- Promise
- “He who has an ear, let him hear ...”
- “To him who overcomes ...”

# Message to the Church in Ephesus

- **“To the angel of the church in X write:”**

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

- **“These are the words of ...”**

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:

- **“I know ...” (state of the church)**

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

# Message to Ephesus (cont.)

- **Commendations and rebukes**

You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. ... But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

- **Promise**

If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your landstand from its place.

- **“He who has an ear, let him hear ...”**

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- **“To him who overcomes ...”**

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

# Research on Churches

- **William A. Ramsay, archeological research.**
- **Ramsay, *Letters of the Seven Churches* (1905).**
- **Colin J. Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (1986).**



# Notes on Ephesus (2:1-7)



- “If you do not repent, I will ... remove your lampstand from its place” (2:5).
- “I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2:7).
- City of Ephesus had to be moved because its river silted up.
- Tree is used as a symbol for the patron goddess Artemis.

# Notes on Smyrna (2:8-11)



- “These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again” (2:8).
- “Be faithful, even to the point of death, ...” (2:10).
- Smyrna was destroyed in 627 B.C.; refounded 400 years later.
- Smyrna was known for being outstandingly faithful to Rome.

# Notes on Pergamum (2:12-17)



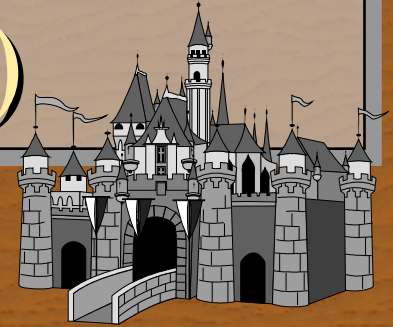
- “I know where you live—where Satan has his throne” (2:13).
- “I will also give him a white stone ...” (2:17)
- The local god Askeplios was associated with the serpent.
- Inscription stones at Pergamum use not local pink granite, but imported white marble.

# Notes on Thyatira (2:18-29)



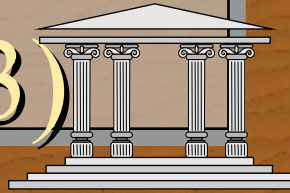
- “... whose feet are like burnished bronze” (2:18).
- Thyatira was known for its guild of bronze workers, with their own trade name for their product.
- “He will rule them” (2:27).
- Thyatira was the weakest of the cities.

# Notes on Sardis (3:1-6)



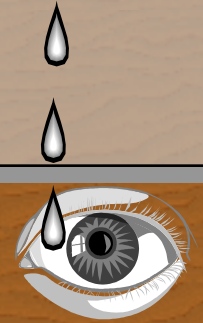
- “I will come like a thief” (3:3).
- “Strengthen what remains and is about to die” (3:2).
- Sardis felt impregnable, but Cyrus captured it by a night climb.
- Some of the SW citadel was lost in an earthquake in 17 A.D.

# Notes on Philadelphia (3:7-13)



- “See, I have placed before you an open door ...” (3:8).
- “I will make [him] a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it” (3:12).
- A road ran up from Philadelphia to the great central plateau of Asia Minor.
- After an earthquake in 17 A.D., many left the city. Because of earth movements, people did not want to live there.

# Notes on Laodicea (3:14-22)



- “So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—...” (3:16).
- Neighboring Hierapolis had medicinal hot springs; Colossae had a cold stream. Laodicea piped in unhealthful lukewarm water.
- “salve to put on your eyes” (3:18).
- Medicine for eyes originated from guild of physicians in Laodicea.

# Multifaceted Allusions

**“died and came to life again” (2:8)**

- **City died.**
- **Church threatened with death.**
- **OT promise of life.**
- **Christ died and came to life.**
- **City**
- **Church**
- **OT**
- **Christ**

**← All-sufficiency of Christ →**



## C. Troubles in Asia Minor

# Trouble #1: Persecution

- **Emperors called themselves divine.**
- **People offered incense (an act of worship) to the “genius of the emperor” to show political loyalty.**
- **Those who refused were guilty of treason.**



Uh oh!

# Jewish Opposition

- **Jews were exempt from emperor worship, and paid a two drachma tax instead.**
- **At first, Roman authorities would regard Christianity as a Jewish sect.**
- **Non-Christian Jews could denounce Christians to the authorities: “These are not true Jews, and should be subject to the requirement of emperor worship.”**

# Domitian Persecution?

- **Suetonius *Domitian* 12.2:** “Besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied with the utmost rigour, and those were prosecuted who without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews, as well as those who concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people.”
- **Jews might disown Christians and render them liable to the imperial cult.**

# Trouble #2: Seduction to Immorality

## ① Sexual immorality

Pagans accept prostitution.

Gentile Christians feel the pull

Jezebel in 2:20 says it's OK.

## ② Idol food

business

guild

patron god

eating the god's food



D. Author

# Who Is John?

## The Apostle ?

- **Justin Martyr and Irenaeus say so.**
- **No other John is attested.**
- **Thematic connections with the Gospel of John.**

## Someone else ?

- **Style differs from the Gospel.**

# The Bearing of Authorship

## The Apostle

- **Treat Rev. together with his other writings.**
- **But the different genre requires different treatment.**

## Someone else

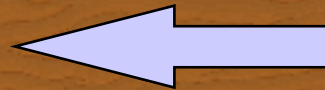
- **Treat Rev. separately from Gospel.**
- **But thematic connections invite joint treatment.**



E. Date

# The Roman Emperors

- **Augustus** 27 B.C. - 14 A.D.
- **Tiberius** 14-37 A.D.
- **Caligula** 37-41
- **Claudius** 41-54
- **Nero** 54-68
- Galba 68-69
- Otho 69
- Vitellius 69
- **Vespasian** 69-79
- **Titus** 79-81
- **Domitian** 81-96



most  
plausible



# Domitian Date (Irenaeus)

Irenaeus

says

Domitian's  
reign

from

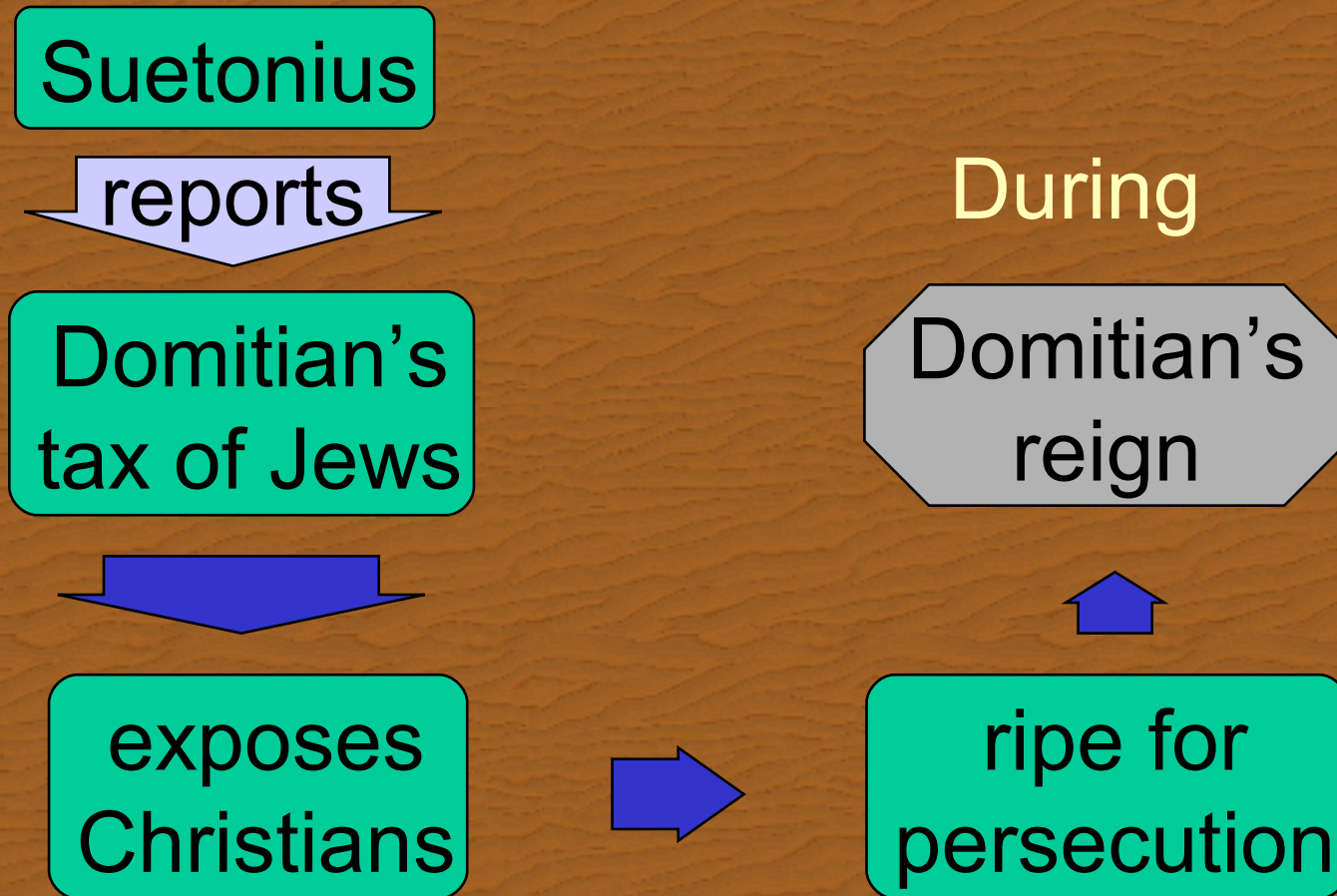
Polycarp

from

John

was the time  
when Revelation  
was written.

# Domitian Date (Suetonius)



# Nero Date (17:10)

“5 fallen”  
Rev. 17:10



Nero is 6th, if  
Julius Caesar  
is 1st.

But:

- **Augustus first?**
- **Galba and Otho don't work as 7th and 8th.**
- **Heads = empires?**
- **6th is symbolic of next to last.**

# Nero Date (11:1-2)

But:

temple in  
Jerusalem  
is standing  
(11:1-2)



before  
70 A.D.

- 11:1-3 implies preservation of inner room.
- Does not match the events of 70.
- Rev. 11 is symbolic of the church (11:4 and 1:20).
- City is figurative (11:8)

# Value

- **God cared for churches back there**
- **Christ knew their situation**
- **God cares for you here today.**
- **Christ knows your situation.**
- **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." -- 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22.**