

Revelation Workbook

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**Publishing Designs, Inc.
Huntsville, Alabama**

Publishing Design, Inc.
P.O. Box 3241
Huntsville, Alabama 35810

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Printed in the United States

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Butterworth, Ken
Revelation Workbook. / Ken Butterworth.
112 pp.; 21.59 cm.
Includes seven chapters, addendum, and study questions.
1. End times. 2. Premillennialism. 3. Christian life.
I. Butterworth, Ken. II. Title.
ISBN 0-929540-42-5
236

To Billie Sue,
my high school sweetheart,
best friend,
the love of my life,
the mother and grandmother of our four children
and four grandchildren,
and my devoted wife for almost forty years.
She taught me the truth,
lit the flame within me to preach the word,
and encouraged me to write.
She sincerely loves the church
for which our Lord died.
Her untiring love for her family and me,
along with her uncompromising faith
in God and the Bible,
has inspired me to serve the Master.
She has given me the realistic hope of heaven,
and no man has ever been
more blessed or fortunate.
She has given me purpose and a plan for my life.
Without her, I would be nothing
and this book would not have been possible.

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

—REVELATION 1:3

CONTENTS

Preface	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1 The Background and Setting	17
Chapter 2 The Recipients and Their Spiritual Condition	23
Chapter 3 Revelation Can and Must Be Understood	37
Chapter 4 A Chapter and Verse Outline of Revelation	49
Chapter 5 Man's View of Revelation	65
Chapter 6 The Beast and His Mark	81
Chapter 7 Lessons Learned from the Book of Revelation	91
Addendum	101

PREFACE

The material covered in this book is the finished product of thirty-six years of study, teaching, and preaching from the book of Revelation. The basic format used in these seven chapters comes from a series of lectures I have presented over the past twenty years. I continue to accept invitations to teach this material as my health and schedule allow. Please contact me if you are interested in this series of lessons. It is my fervent prayer that much and lasting good will be accomplished because of this book. May God receive any and all glory from this effort.

KEN BUTTERWORTH

INTRODUCTION

Yes, the book of Revelation—not Revelations!—can actually be understood. In order to really comprehend and understand the 404 verses within the twenty-two chapters of Revelation, it is absolutely necessary to read the book with first-century eyes. By this, it is meant that the book must be read and accepted in its contextual background. Any attempt to remove the meaning of this book from the first century and apply it to the future is a serious and disastrous mistake.

Multitudes have boldly claimed that the book of Revelation cannot be understood and that it was written in some secret coded message. It is my firm and unwavering conviction that the book can and must be understood. If not, then God is at fault for giving us a book that is extremely difficult—maybe even impossible—to understand and then condemning us for failing to comprehend it! That is foolish and ridiculous reasoning.

The study of Revelation is challenging, fascinating, and rewarding. It is indeed sad that many have either abused or ignored this inspired book. Some have dismissed its true meaning and have made millions of dollars by writing books based on their opinions. It is common to hear preachers (and teachers in colleges and preaching schools)

say that the first three chapters can be understood, but after that, it is anyone's guess as to the meaning of the book. How sad!

There is much disagreement, as well, concerning the dating of the book. Some hold to an early date (before A.D. 70), and others a late date (A.D. 96). Again, John will tell us the truth of the matter.

The book claims for itself that it can be understood (1:3). If the readers of the Revelation letter would allow John to interpret his own writings, then all the wild, fantasy-filled, and unscriptural ideas would be eliminated. By way of example, please note a reading from the first chapter:

And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.
And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;
and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like
unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down
to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden
girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool,
as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of
fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they
burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of
many waters. And he had in his right hand seven
stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged
sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth
in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his
feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me,
saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the
last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold,
I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys
of hell and of death. Write the things which thou
hast seen, and the things which are, and the things
which shall be hereafter; the mystery of the seven
stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the

seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches (Revelation 1:12–20).

Bear in mind that John was commanded to write down these things and send them to the seven churches (1:4, 11). This vision depicts Jesus' standing in the midst of seven golden candlesticks and holding seven stars in His right hand. There is absolutely no reason to guess as to the meaning of this because John explained what he saw and what is represented by the symbols.

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches (Revelation 1:19–20).

How simple and understandable that is. To appreciate and understand Revelation, the student must look at the meaning and message behind the depicted visions. That is a new approach because many (if not most) have never viewed the book as John wrote it.

This study is not an exhaustive commentary on the book of Revelation, but is intended to be a simple and basic approach to show that we can understand the message John received, wrote down, and sent to the seven churches. When the book is seen through first-century eyes, it becomes clear that soon after John's writing it would be fulfilled.

Yes, there are lessons and principles for everyone in this twenty-first century, and this will be noted in chapter 7

of this study. But to John's recipients, Revelation was easily understood. To them, it was like our reading the daily newspaper.

The book of Revelation must be approached and studied in the same manner as the other sixty-five books of the Bible, with the assurance that it was written to be understood. As is the case with all the books of the Bible, some passages in Revelation require an in-depth study to be understood.

The religious world has accepted the man-made view that Revelation supports the premillennial doctrine. This view teaches that all the events in Revelation are yet in the future and every vision must literally take place. The sole purpose of the doctrine of premillennialism is to teach that the kingdom has not yet come and when it does, it will be an earthly kingdom.

There are three basic views held by members of the Lord's church concerning Revelation's meaning.

- The Catholic church is the subject matter.
- The final judgment of Jerusalem.
- Rome will be judged for her terrible persecution of the church.

To ascertain the truth of the matter, we will allow John to tell us the meaning of the book. Archaeology, chronology, and history will be used to support John's words.

This study will consist of seven chapters. To be a successful student, you must approach Revelation with an open mind. Dismiss what man has taught you, what you think the book means, and make a new start at understanding it (John 18:34).

Please accept what John, the author of Revelation, tells us. This material is not written to answer and refute all

the opinions of man, but to grasp and appreciate the revealed messages God gave John in the first century.

This study will absolutely establish that:

- John is the author (1:1).
- John wrote to the seven churches at Asia (1:4, 11).
- John told them that relief from their persecution is coming soon (1:3; 22:6, 10; 6:9–11).
- John wrote Revelation between the years A.D. 69–79 (17:9–11).

This study will approach the book of Revelation as follows:

- The background of the book will be presented.
- The recipients will be named and discussed.
- The fact that the book can and must be understood will be determined.
- A clear and simple breakdown of the book will be outlined.
- Man's view (doctrine) of the book will be discussed and refuted.
- The beast and his mark will be identified.
- The great and wonderful lessons for all who live in our day and time will be noted.

As we begin our journey through this wonderful book, remember to view the contents through first-century eyes. The things John saw and wrote will be applied to whom they were intended, the first-century Christians. May we all be good and honest students of the Bible. Dismiss what your favorite preacher believes about this wonderful book and take what John says about it (Matthew 15:8–9).

QUESTIONS

1. Is this book entitled “Revelations” or “Revelation”?
2. How many chapters are in this book? _____ How many verses? _____ In order to comprehend the context and background of Revelation, it must be read and studied with what kind of eyes?

3. Can Revelation be understood? _____ Must Revelation be understood? _____ Give scripture. _____ Who is to be blamed if it cannot be understood? _____
4. What two main dates are held concerning the writing of the book? _____
5. What do the golden candlesticks represent?
_____ The seven stars? _____
6. Are there lessons and principles in this book for us today? _____ Revelation must be approached in the same manner as all the books of the Bible, with the assurance of what? _____
7. Name the three basic views held by members of the church concerning the book of Revelation.

8. What do we call the man-made view (teaching) of the religious world concerning this book?

9. Supply information about Revelation:

Who is the author? _____

When was it written? _____

To whom it was written? _____

Why it was written? _____

10. To whom must we first apply the things John wrote?

Chapter One

THE BACKGROUND AND SETTING

In order to appreciate and understand the book of Revelation fully, a review of the historical background and setting of the ruling power of the known world in the first century is absolutely necessary. When the background is viewed with first-century eyes, the book will become easier to understand. The great prophet Daniel provides us with prophetic utterances which are fulfilled in the book of Revelation. The true meaning of Revelation is evident when the book of Daniel and history are read and studied. John's message to the seven churches is then made clear. History supports the Bible, chronology is the backbone of history, and archeology is a defense of the Bible. Just as we can know that Babylon fell on October 10, 539 B.C., the temple was rebuilt (finished) on March 12, 515 B.C., and Jerusalem fell July 18, 586 B.C., we can also ascertain many other dates as well. God did not allow useless verses in His Word, so we know that the dating of events was deemed important to Him.

Daniel prophesied concerning the coming of four great empires and the church (Daniel 2:31–44). In another vision, (Daniel 7) Daniel prophesied specific details concerning events to be fulfilled in the Revelation letter. Daniel saw

four beasts: a lion, a bear, a leopard, and one more terrible than the other three (7:1–8). The judgment of the fourth beast is seen (7:9–14). The four beasts represent four kings or kingdoms. The fourth will make war with the saints, but the saints will overcome this persecution (7:15–22). The fourth beast (kingdom) will be in existence in the church age (7:23–28).

Here are the four kingdoms that Daniel saw:

- Lion (Babylon, 626–539 B.C.)
- Bear (Medo-Persian, 539–332 B.C.)
- Leopard (Greece, 332–323 B.C.)
- Terrible fourth beast (Rome, 67 B.C.–A.D. 476)

Daniel prophesied that the church would be established and the saints (Christians) would be persecuted during the Roman kingdom. One of the telling facts that Daniel is prophesying what will be fulfilled in Revelation is the order of the kingdoms (beasts). As Daniel looks down in time, he lists the lion, bear, leopard, and the terrible one that will persecute the saints.

In Revelation 13:1–2, John looks back in time and lists them in exactly the reverse order:

- Persecuting beast (Rome)
- Leopard (Greece), bear (Medo-Persia)
- Lion (Babylon)

This is unarguable! John gives detailed information concerning this beast—kingdom or persecutor—in Revelation 17. It is worthy of our attention to note that there is not one passage in Daniel 7 that refers or relates to A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem. When we get to chapter 6 of this study, this will become evident.

Having determined that Rome is the kingdom ruling with power and the persecutor of the saints in John's day, let us now see some historical facts concerning her. The seven churches are being persecuted by the Roman Empire. Our first-century brethren are facing an evil and corrupt enemy. Rome's single desire is to eliminate the church from the earth. It is hard, if not impossible, for us to comprehend what they were going through. Unless they were willing to bow down and worship the emperor, their lives were at stake. In order to buy the necessary sustenance of life (Revelation 13:15–18), homage to the emperor was demanded. I pray that I will never face this decision. I believe I would stand with God, but in the face of my family starving and their lives being taken, what would I really do? I thank God that I have never faced that decision even though I am unwavering with the conviction that I would never denounce Jehovah God.

The emperors of Rome were some of the most ungodly and immoral men to have ever walked the earth. It was but a play thing for the Romans to make horse feed of Christians or kill them in order to allow the emperors to "feast" their eyes. Truly, they were some of the most blood-thirsty people to have ever lived (Revelation 17:6). It is little wonder that the Christians are crying out for help and relief (6:9–11). God will hear and deliver them (6:11; 19:2).

The nation that is persecuting the church in the book of Revelation is ruling the earth at that time and, supported by her own army, is making war with the saints. She is the leader in commerce and will be destroyed by her own power (Revelation 18). There is but one nation (kingdom) that identifies with these truths: that kingdom

is Rome. Rome was the leading commercial, military, and economic power of the first century. At the time of John's writing, she was at her zenith of power. A knowledge of history and the Caesars is of the utmost importance when studying the book. The Roman Empire stretched from the British Isles to the African desert and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Euphrates River. Rome, being a pagan-oriented society, blamed Christianity for everything that went wrong. Along with this blatant paganism, there were Judaism and Gnosticism. No wonder the Christians were crying out for deliverance. We, in the twenty-first century, just cannot imagine what our first-century brothers and sisters went through. The book of Revelation is God's answer to their cries. It is a book of hope, comfort, and victory. The very theme of the book is that relief is coming shortly (Revelation 1:1, 3; 10:6; 22:6, 10), not two thousand or three thousand years later!

History reveals some of the relationships between Rome and the first-century church. For several decades Christianity went unnoticed by the Roman Empire, but when Rome became aware that Christianity was not just a new sect of Judaism, she began the persecution. The new religion of Christianity was different from all other religions. Christianity refused to mingle with idolatry and paganism. When Christians, because of persecution, were forced to meet secretly, they were accused of cannibalism because they spoke of partaking of the blood and body of their founder—the Lord's Supper. When they refused to go to war, they were branded as traitors to Rome. When they refused to be involved in emperor worship, they were maimed and murdered. Rome was a pagan, materially oriented society, and riches were flaunted. Christians were

of a different mindset and therefore were not tolerated by Rome.

Truly, Rome was the most immoral and powerful empire that the world had seen. Many of the emperors practiced homosexuality and committed unthinkable acts. History tells us that one hundred sixty million people died in the wars with Rome. On just one excursion, Rome captured a thousand castles, nine hundred cities, eight hundred ships, and fourteen millions dollars. No wonder she is described in a terrible and powerful manner (Revelation 17:6, 18). At times Rome would just simply capture a city, and at other times she would “shermanize” anything in her way. Rome martyred thousands of Christians because of their love and support of the church for which our Lord died.

This background will surely enhance the stage for our study. Remember, the first-century Christians in Asia Minor were being persecuted; they were crying out to God for relief. God, through John, tells them by visions that relief is coming shortly. Remember, these things must “shortly come to pass” (Revelation 1:3).

QUESTIONS

1. What prophet provides inspired statements that were fulfilled in Revelation? _____
2. How did Daniel describe the four world empires in Daniel 7:1–8?

3. What four kingdoms did these represent?

4. Give references in Revelation that confirm that this is the telling fact of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 7:1–8?

5. How many verses in Daniel 7 refer to A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem? _____

6. Who was the ruling power and persecutor of the saints in John's day? _____

7. What were the Christians crying out for in Revelation 6:9–11?

8. Who was the leading commercial, economic, and military power in John's day? _____

9. List at least two verses that say relief (or the things in this book) is coming shortly or is at hand.

10. According to history, how many people died in the wars with Rome? _____

Chapter Two

THE RECIPIENTS AND THEIR SPIRITUAL CONDITION

John was commanded to write in a book what he saw and then send it to the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 1:4, 11). The visions seen, explained, and written down make up the content of the Revelation letter. This message was written to the Christians of the first century. God deemed it important to tell us of their spiritual condition before He identified the persecutor and relief that were forthcoming. It is noteworthy that these seven were not the only congregations of the first century. The book of Acts proves that fact. But God had a special message to these seven because of the persecution at hand and their geographical location. When we get to chapter 7 of this study, we will note that these congregations represent all others, then and now. John will tell us that the congregations mentioned must understand the importance of walking with God, especially in view of the horrible persecution the beast will bring. They will need all the help they can get. John says that it looks bad, but they are not to fear, for God is in control and relief will come shortly. The Christians needed to hear that. The message John sends will give them courage, hope, and comfort and finally relief from the terrible persecution.