

John on Patmos

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A proper understanding of when Revelation was received and written makes a great deal of difference in how it is to be interpreted.

Many would agree that when one begins a study of Revelation, he should first deal with the questions:

1. When did John receive the visions that are recorded as Revelation?
2. When did John write down the document we call Revelation?

These two things did not necessarily occur at the same time.

Something to think about

Where did the Church ever get the idea that John was exiled to Patmos by a Roman ruler? Certainly not from the following passage:

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in persecution, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 1:9)

There is absolutely nothing in this passage that says that he was an exile or that he had been sent there by anyone. John simply states that he "was on the isle called Patmos **for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.**"

If we went to a specific place **to preach** and **evangelize** it would be perfectly proper for us to say that we were in that place "**for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.**"

How, when, and where did the notion that John was exiled to Patmos by a Roman King get started?

According to the Bible, was John really exiled to Patmos or did he go there voluntarily to teach and preach about Jesus Christ?

Where did Eusebius get the notion that John was banished by Domitian? And to which Domitian was he referring? Eusebius states that Nerva released John from his exile on Patmos. Historically who was Nerva? Did he have the authority to undo what Domitian did?

The works of Eusebius posit a late date for the writing of Revelation, i.e. 95 AD. Today, we know from many passages in Revelation and the balance of the NT that *Eusebius' notion of a late date was false*. Why would we accept his tradition about the banishment of John to Patmos by Domitian? Would it not be suspect as well?

We think that it can be proven, from the context of the NT alone, that John received the Revelation, at least part of it, much earlier than 68 AD.

What was John doing between 36 and 46 AD?

Could it be that he was going out preaching the “gospel of the kingdom,” as Jesus had instructed, in fulfillment of the great commission when he received the Revelation?

Based on the information we have right now it would appear that John received the Revelation, at least the first two portions of it, about 46 AD.

According to internal information in Revelation, John received the first portion (chapters 1-3) of the vision when Jesus Christ "sent and signified" it by his messenger to John (1:1). The second portion (4-16) was received when he was commanded to "come up here (to the third heaven) and I will show you things which must soon come to pass." The third portion (17-21:8) was received when the messenger invited him to "come here; I will show unto you the judgment of the great whore that sits upon many waters. And the fourth and final portion (21:9-22:21) of the vision was received when the messenger came to John and took him to “a great and high mountain”. Nothing is said about how long there was between each of these, but it is clear that John could not go three different places at once (i.e. "up here," into the 3rd heaven; "come here to the wilderness" to see the

judgment of the whore; “come here, to a great and high mountain, to see the bride, the lamb's wife.”

The Bible does not record that Peter, James, or Paul "received Revelation" yet each one of them apparently knew about it and seemly make reference to its contents in their pre 65 AD writings.

Example: Who was Paul writing about in 2Cor 12:1-5?

"...I will come to **visions** and **revelations** of the Lord: **I know a man in Christ** who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one **was caught up to the third heaven**. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— how **he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words**, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (or write). ***Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.*** (2 Corinthians 12:1-5 NKJV, emphasis and comment added)

We submit to you that in this passage, Paul is writing about John. This is a clear accounting of John's situation as described in Revelation.

Compare:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him **to show His servants**—things which must soon take place. And He sent and signified by His messenger to **His servant** John, (Revelation 1:1)

After these things I looked, and behold, a door open in heaven (the third heaven). And the first voice which I heard, like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "**Come up here** (to the third heaven), and I will show you things which must take place after this." (Revelation 4:1)

And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not [unlawful to be uttered]. (Revelation 10:4, emphasis and comments added above)

When shown in this manner the similarities are astonishing. Who else could Paul possibly be referring to? The context makes it clear that he was not

referring to himself. Therefore, it seems clear to us from this comparison that John had this experience (the third heaven vision) 14 years before Paul wrote 2Corinthians. Of course the liberals and the late dating futurists will deny this, but this is extremely supportive of the early date position.

Some will say that the exile is implied. Implication is not enough, nor is it clear that "exile" is actually implicated.

While the passage clearly states that John was a "companion" with others "in persecution" nothing is said about "exile." If some group decided that they were going to beat up on my family, we would be "companions in tribulation," but that would certainly not mean that we were in exile.

The Greek word translated "tribulation" is:

2347 *thlipsis* *thlip'-sis* from [2346](#); TDNT-3:139,334; n f

AV-tribulation 21, affliction 17, trouble 3, anguish 1,
persecution 1, burdened 1, to be afflicted + [1519](#) 1; 45

1) a pressing, pressing together, pressure

2) metaphor. oppression, persecution, affliction, tribulation,
distress, straits

By definition "thlipsis" could be and often is translated "affliction" or "persecution." The apostate Jews began to persecute and afflict the Christians long before the Romans got involved in this activity. John's statement here is most likely a reference to the disciples of Jesus, including John, who were being afflicted and persecuted by the Jews following the Jewish killing (stoning) of Stephen in c. 36 AD. It is probably not a statement about Roman persecution as, unfortunately, is commonly assumed because of late dater and liberal bias.

The statement:

"...was in Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ"

Could very easily be a reference to the "preaching of the good news" which Jesus commanded. Again there is nothing in the text about "exile." That appears to be an assumption that may be totally unwarranted.

Some would make reference to Rev 1:9 as follows:

John indicates that it was 'because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' that he was formerly on Patmos. He was not there to preach that Word but because of religious-political opposition to his faithfulness to it.

First of all, this acknowledges that the notion of John's exile is based on "religious tradition," not the Bible, and the statement which is quoted above continues that religious tradition.

Look again at Revelation 1:9:

I, John, your brother and companion in the persecution and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos because of the word of God and because of the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 1:9)

John simply writes that he "was on the island called Patmos **because of the word of God and because of the testimony of Jesus Christ.**" He does not say anything about "because of exile."

Some attempt to make a case for the use of Patmos for penal purposes. That is a given, everyone familiar with Roman history is aware of that. However, exile is not the only reason that John may have gone to Patmos. We personally know many that go to penal institutions; not because they have been sent there, but because they are compelled to go there by the Spirit because of the word of God to give testimony of Jesus Christ. We submit that John could have been on Patmos for that very reason not because he had been exiled there by some Roman ruler named Domitian in 95 AD.

Above we quoted Paul's statement from 2nd Corinthians about his knowing this man "fourteen years ago." Many Bible scholars date the writing of 2Corinthians at about 60 AD. If we count fourteen years backwards from 60 AD, what do we have? We have 46 AD.

Many scholars date the events of Acts 15 to about 46 AD. If we count forward fourteen years from 46 AD we have 60 AD.

Acts 15 records the Jerusalem counsel and it demonstrates that Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to confer **with the apostles** and were "**received by the apostles.**" Peter and James are mentioned by name and, given the language, it is a certainty that **John and the other apostles** were there also.

We submit for your consideration that by the time of the Jerusalem council, John had already been to Patmos; possibly several times on preaching missions, during the time (beginning in ca. 36 AD) of the apostate Jewish afflictions (persecution) upon Christians, and had received the Revelation while there on one of these trips, and that it was there, at this conference, that he conveyed, at least a portion of, the information of the Revelation to Paul and the other apostles. Then the document which we call Revelation could have been written later.

Revelation 1:1 specifically states that John was given the Revelation by Jesus Christ "to show unto **His servants**, things which must soon come to pass," and John identifies himself as one of those "**servants**". Taken as a whole this identifies the **apostles as His servants**. Paul, Peter, James, and John all made reference to events (last days) recorded in Revelation in documents which they wrote.

Can this all be just one colossal coincidence? Can we really believe that Paul inserted these words for no useful purpose at all? Where else does the New Testament make reference to anyone being caught up into the third heaven, to the throne of God and words that should not be uttered (written)?

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