

Argument of Revelation

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to attempt to determine and display John's argument in the book of Revelation. Biblical literature is not just thrown together, but is carefully and artistically composed in order to properly communicate the author's purpose for writing. Revelation is no exception. A cursory reading of this book might cause one to wonder what structure and purpose a book like this has; however, by analyzing the themes and emphasis within the book, its overall structure and message are apparent. Thus as we attempt to present an argument of Revelation it would prove beneficial for the reader to read the book in order to acquaint him/herself with the material contained therein. In the meantime, let us consider what I feel is the argument of this divine and exciting revelatory book. Hopefully, your reading and study of the book will be more meaningful as you consider its argument and structure.

II. Subject/Purpose Statement.

This is designed to communicate the major subjects of the book in question, viz., Revelation, and to relate these subjects to the author's intended purpose in writing. My subject/purpose statement of Revelation is as follows.

John's revelatory book discloses Christ's priestly role over the Church, the need for Church repentance (more precisely the Asian churches), Christ's future tribulational judgments, millennial reign, and heavenly rule, in order to challenge believers to have hope, live holy lives and above all else to exalt Christ as enthroned Judge and victorious King.

Explanation: The book of Revelation is, namely just that, a revelation or disclosure of some mystery on God's part. The revelation which God made known to John deals primarily with the consummation of world history. According to John, history and sinners will be brought to an abrupt ending by the wrath of the exalted Messiah, Jesus. However, as the book demonstrates, God gave man insight into the future of the world so that they would be motivated to repent, but most of all so that Christ would be seen in his exalted position.

To begin with, John revealed Christ's eternal nature and priestly duties among the Church (1:1-18). By so doing the Church is acquainted with Christ's disciplinary ministry (1:11-18). He then summarizes the layout of the book (1:19) and proceeds to detail Christ's stern messages to the seven Asian churches (2:1-3:22). Accordingly, this preliminary information is designed to exalt Christ's priestly ministry and to encourage believers to live holy lives in light of Christ's duties. Then after dealing with his immediate past and present, John advances and reveals God's word

about the future (4:1-20:5). This large section, which is the heart of the book, covers subjects like, the heavenly scene before the Tribulation (chps. 4-5), the various judgments during the Tribulation (6-19), the post-tribulational reign of Christ (20:1-6), the judgment of the wicked (20:7-15), and the revelation of the new earth and the new Jerusalem (21:1-22:6). Apparently, all of this material is designed to give believers hope in seeing justice established and hope in the fact that they would eternally reign with Christ. In addition, by seeing Christ's judgmental reaction toward sin, believers would be challenged to live holy lives. Yet, as true as these purposes are, they are eclipsed by the ultimate purpose of exalting Christ as the enthroned Judge and victorious King.

Finally, as John considers all that God has revealed to him about the past, present, and future, he is moved to disclose Christ's last message; that being that He is eternal and that he is coming back soon to reward His saints (22:6-16). Indeed, this material was placed here as one last solemn warning for believers to live godly lives.

Therefore, in light of what has been said, Revelation is seen as a disclosure about the past, present, and the future on God's behalf. In the past, Christ is revealed as the great Priest (1:1-20). In the present, the Church is called to live holy (2-3). In the future Christ's earthly wrath is described (4-22). By presenting the material in this threefold fashion, John revealed God's desire for men to turn to Him, the believers need to live holy lives, and the right of Christ to be seen as the exalted Judge/King. Now, in order to better understand John's subject and purpose for writing, let us briefly consider the structure of the letter.

III. John identified his book as God's revelation, greeted the seven Asian churches, disclosed his vision of the priestly Christ and Christ's command to write, in order to challenge believers to live holy lives and to exalt Christ (1:1-20).

Explanation: The following points demonstrate that the above statement correctly represents the first section of Revelation. First, John begins by showing that his divinely disclosed book is primarily about Jesus the Messiah (1:1). Jesus will thereby be exalted by the contents of this letter which are focused on him. Second, after John greets the seven Asian churches (1:4), he describes Christ's unique role as ruler over death, redeemer, and king of the earth (1:5). Such topics are certainly designed to cause Christ to be exalted in the minds of believers. Third, John's vision of Christ's priestly role portrays Him as the eternal God (1:8, 11), the wise God (1:14a) and the judgmental Lord (1:14b-16). Seeing Christ in this awe-inspiring fashion would, by definition, serve two purposes; 1. To cause believers to see their need for moral purity, and 2. To cause believers to exalt Christ. Fourth, Christ's command to write (1:19) reveal his absolute authority and also his ability to disclose mystery (1:20). Hence, in light of Christ's revealed nature He would certainly receive exaltation and believers would be urged to live holy lives.

IV. John recorded Christ's stern messages to the seven Asian churches, in order to motivate them to repent of their sinful behavior and to give them hope for faithful lives (2:1-3:22).

Explanation: This statement is verified as being true based upon the structure of Christ's seven messages. Each one of these messages contain seven key elements, excluding the letters to Smyrna

(2:8-11), Sardis (3:1-6), and Laodicea (3:14-22) which contain six elements. For the most part, these seven points are 1. destination, 2. descriptive title of Christ, 3. commendation, 4. condemnation, 5. correction, 6. counsel, and 7. promise. Central to these messages are Christ's words of condemnation and correction. By speaking so tersely, Christ attempted to challenge believers to live holy lives. However, Christ did not close on such a negative note. He finalized his message by giving faithful believer certain promises about the future (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 20-21). No doubt, Christ's words at this point gave believers hope for living obedient lives for Christ. Hence, John's record of Christ's messages serve to convict believers of sin, to drive them toward holiness, and to give them hope for living for Christ.

V. John detailed the future heavenly scene before the Tribulation, as well as God's program during and after the Tribulation, in order to give believers hope and encouragement for daily living and to demonstrate above all else that Christ is both the exalted Judge and victorious King (4:1-22:5).

Explanation: In this third section, John first describes what will transpire in heaven prior to the Tribulation (chps. 4-5). Elders representing the Church (4:4-5) and four living creatures (4:6-11) are seen gathered around God's throne worshiping Him. A strong angel, at this time, enters the scene with a scroll with seven seals. As John records in chapter five, no one is worthy to open the scroll & save Jesus the Messiah. The rest of this chapter is then strictly devoted to expressing Christ's greatness as King. By doing this John thereby support the general character/purpose of the statement given for this movement of his thought.

Next, John demonstrates the judgeship of Christ as the Sovereign King (chps. 6-20:6). In this large, eventful section, John encourages believers and gives them hope for daily living by showing them that Christ will judge the wicked and the evil world system that opposes them now. In chapters six through eleven, John details the seven seal and seven trumpet judgments. These judgments, which gradually intensify, are designed to punish the wicked and portray Christ as the sovereign Judge and King who rules his subjects.

Furthermore, chapters twelve through nineteen express Christ's judgments against evil personages (i.e., Satan chp. 12; the Beast chp.13, and the False Prophet chp.13), the wicked in general (cf. Chps. 15-16, the Bowl Judgments), and evil institutes (cf. Chps. 17-18). As these judgments are given, John carefully introduces two parenthetical sections (viz., 10:1-11:14; 16:13-16) which contain added insight into Christ's desire during judgment. Most definitely, Christ's actions during this section of the book would have motivated believers to live righteously. He alone is the God who deals with sin. He alone is also the God who has the right to judge and for these facts he should be praised by his people.

Moreover, in chapter nineteen John describes Christ's second advent and destruction of evil forces. Again, as in chapter 6-18, Christ's vindictive actions would have caused believers to trust in His ability to deal with evil forces which presently plagued them. John's record of Christ's swift judgments here would also have served to motivate believers to exalt Him as the true judge and king. Therefore, by lumping all of these end-time judgments together John shows that Christ has absolute sovereign power to judge and rule the earth. Such material as this would have then

brought exaltation to Christ and motivated believer to have hope in this present evil age.

Now, thus far in this large section John has addressed what will happen before and during the Tribulation. Yet, he explains in 20:1-22:5 what will transpire after the Tribulation. At this point he reveals the millennial reign of Christ (20:1-6); the final defeat of Satan and his forces (20:7-10), the Great White Throne Judgment (20:11-15), and the establishment of the New Jerusalem along with paradise privileges (21:1-22:5). This grand climax brings to the forefront Christ's greatness as Judge and King over all things. Also, as John's readers pondered over this material, they would have been encouraged and given hop for daily living for the life that John described here, would one day be theirs.

VI. John closed his book by giving Christ's last message, along with words of warning and promise, so that believers would be challenged to live godly lives and to remember Christ's greatness (22:6-21).

Explanation: John recorded Christ's last message which revealed that He was returning "quickly" with rewards (v.12). Such a warning/promise called on all believers to live holy lives, for their Lord could return at any time (cf. 22:7, 10). Also Jesus' greatness is to always be recalled for he is the first and the last, and he is from the Davidic line (cf. 22:13, 16). He is the King exalted, who prepares to come. His words should then be heeded (cf. vs. 18-19) and his coming expected with joy (cf. V.20). John's words at this point are then directed at motivating believer to always remember Christ's kingly greatness and to always live lives that would be found pleasing at His glorious return.

VII. Conclusion

John's revelatory letter offers sound teaching concerning the Tribulational period for believers. By reading this book, believers would have been motivated to live holy lives and to stand firm in hope. But more than anything else, believers would have seen the ultimate purpose of this book, which is, to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is both the exalted Judge and victorious king over all things in heaven and earth.