



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Considering the Times of the Text

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The time of the letter.

As mentioned in our last study, scholarship is divided on the time in which this letter was written. Most opt for a late date, that is, post 95 AD. This position is held because of a comment in a letter by Irenaeus, a disciple of John, written in approx. 150 AD in which he speaks of seeing John or of John's "Revelation". The question being: did John receive the revelation prior to Domitian's persecution, which began in 95 AD, or before?

There are two distinct options relative to the text: 1) the Revelation was received during Domitian's reign and subsequent Empire wide persecution or, 2) prior to Domitian's reign.

You ask? What's the difference?

It is somewhat akin to reading the Declaration of Independence and Constitution from a 21st century mindset versus anchoring ourselves in the writings of the 16th and 17th century. For instance: what did the word "Constitution" mean in the early and late 17th century? Did it mean "document" or an overriding structure?

Undoubtedly, you are aware of the host of religious folk speaking about the "end times" and the "signs of the times"?

For decades, we have been exposed to the likes of Harold Camping's "definitive" prognostications, both in 1994 and, more recently, in 2011. He is only the most recent example in memory. In history, the lineup of similar type folk is staggering and embarrassing beginning in 1843 and 1844 here in the US. From that era we have the advent of Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and, probably many others..

But, each proponent was persuaded of their biblical interpretation being persuaded of a "late date" for the book of Revelation. (This is a point at which to suggest one needs be alert to "interpretations" vs. text itself.)

We live in an era dominated by "**pervasive interpretive pluralism**". (More on this as the study progresses.)

Bottom line: any suggested dating of the text is significant since it influences interpretation .

Remembering our last study and the comment relative to: "The Tyranny of the Paradigm", one is legitimately oriented toward questioning the "received" and/or presently dominant religious opinion. One needs always to ask, "According to whom or what"?

Back to our text.

These "signs of the times" are broad references to a sermon the Lord, Jesus, preached during the last days of his ministry, called "The Olivet Discourse" (Matt. 24, 25; Mark 13; Luke 21).

In this discourse, Jesus declared the judgment he was referring to would come on "this generation". In his comment, he used the near demonstrative pronoun, "this", versus the far or distant demonstrative, "that".

Surely, one may legitimately assume the Son of God was familiar with grammar? (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32)

Not only is the particular demonstrative pronoun key, but we are pressed to consider the meaning of "the end" he is referring to in this discourse when he says "the end". (Matt. 24:3, 6, 13, 14; Mark 13:7, 13; Luke 21:9).

We typically assume the end of the physical world; when in point of fact we ought first to ask, "The end of what?" So, we are faced with two considerations: "this generation" and "the end".

If we hold to a late date of The Revelation, "this generation" and the "end" are still future, and the Harold Camping's of the world, etc. have free reign.

Likewise, the meaning of "generation" is thereby changed from contemporaneous to "whatever"-race or generation alive when the events come to pass. If we hold to an early date, the "signs" mentioned are past, the "end" is past, making it, in one sense, of no small matter.

I trust this has not been too confusing. I acknowledge it has been confusing for the past 200 years, broadly speaking. This concept, this teaching, burst upon the American scene from England and has been the dominant orientation since the late 1830s-40s.

Delaware

Considering the time of the text

Hopefully, we can clear up any questions during our face to face interaction in the study. ☺

Circumstances around the letter

In the context of John's letter, the source of persecution being experienced at the time of writing (and referenced in 1 & 2 Peter and Jude) originated with the Jewish community (1 Thess. 2:15). Direct persecution from Rome did not begin til post 64 CE and the fire in Rome: thank you Nero!

Up til that point, Christianity was considered a variation of Judaism and on the roles of Rome as a licit religion, that is, legal. That this troubled the established religious leadership in Jerusalem is apparent in the pressure and persecutions the followers of Jesus experienced as the church began to grow (see 1 Thess. 2:14-16)

In terms of our present religious PC Environment, this is a topic to be avoided; yet, if avoided, we do not faithfully consider the text. The focus of this study is on the text, in its historical context.

'Nuff said. Objectively, we must read documents in their historical provenance. If not, it would be on the level of reading the Declaration of Independence distinctly divorced from its historical context. (Again, and as an aside: the meaning of a word "constitution" in the 18th century blew my long standing understanding of our national constitution).

We know, historically, that up til 64 AD and Nero's burning of Rome, the persecution of Christians was driven by the Jerusalem Religious Leadership. Following that burning, Rome began to persecute, but the intensity of the persecution waited til well after the Jewish Wars of 66-73 AD.

The major concerns of John

As persecutions increased and The Faith advanced into Gentile regions, Greek Philosophical concerns began to surface. The Faith was gaining an intellectual beachhead in that territory with the corresponding response of the other "religions".

The Greeks were primarily Dualists, that is: good and evil existed as co-equal powers, and these two competed against one another, each being absolute (do you see the paradox?). Admittedly, it is far more complex and convoluted than this; I am

merely seeking to make it more manageable for the sake of our study.

The inroads of this incipient philosophy were beginning to be experienced within the community to which John's letter is directed as evidenced by John's observations in 2:19.

Assuming an early dating of The Revelation, John is concerned this community not miss what Jesus had promised. (The particulars of that promise will be part and parcel of our study interaction when we will discuss "timing" and "nature", all in the interest of coming to grips with the text.)

John is also concerned the community is able to think their way through this issue. (Proverbs 22:3 & 27:12).

God invaded human history in the person of Jesus, a major point of denial on the part of the secessionists. God invaded human history with a plan, having two aspects: 1) their present evil generation (Matt. 23:36; 24:34 and, 2) succeeding generations (Eph. 2:7). This reality is often overlooked in the daily consideration of believers.

An afterthought:

In **Ecclesiastes 3:15** we read: "That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away."

What we experience in each passing generation is not something new, but only something cosmetically adjusted to our generation. There is no new thing, under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9... read the whole book of Ecclesiastes).

Tyranny only changes clothes and rhetoric. In our day, having been schooled under Madison Avenue rhetoric, we have become unconsciously willing accomplices.

Biblically, history is both linear (that is, progressing toward an end point, a conclusion) and cyclical (same old, same old) that is, God is moving history in accord with his plan; but because of the inherent nature of man, the same things happen, over and over, and only differ indifferent, cosmetic.

Hence, the importance for believers to be aware of biblical history and from it, draw principles and parallels which might prove applicable to our generation (Isaiah 8:20).