REVELATION

INTRODUCTION

The Significance of Revelation

The Last Book of the Bible

The book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible. Whether it was written last or not, the church was led to place it at the end of the canon because she saw in it the completion of God's revelation. *Nothing further would be revealed* by God until the second coming of Jesus Christ. Revelation is thus the culmination of the entire story of salvation contained in the Bible. It is the end point of all that is written in both the OT and NT. For it draws all of revelation, both prophetic and apostolic, to its final goal: the exalted reign of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords (19:11–16) and the fulfillment of the promise of the new heaven and earth (21:1). (CC pp. 1-29)

As the last book of the Bible and the completion of God's revelation to his church, it is the lens through which the entire Scripture is to be viewed. *Revelation reveals and confirms that Christ was prophetically promised and that his incarnation, death, and resurrection happened so that God's creation could be restored to its original glory and righteousness.* Revelation thus points to the *final meaning* and the *final answer* to all that is revealed in the Bible. In addition, as the last book, Revelation puts an imprimatur on all of God's revelation, a *final confirmation* of the divine truth and origin of God's spoken and written Word. This finality points to the *urgency* of the last times, in which all things will be brought to an end—an urgency which reminds the Christian to hold fast to the faith (2:10) and which encourages the church to complete her mission (10:11). (CC pp. 1-29)

The Christological Testimony of Revelation

All of the Scriptures testify to Christ (Jn 5:39). The thesis and chief emphasis of this commentary's exposition is that the book of Revelation is a profound theological work whose heart and center is *Christology*. (CC pp. 1-29)

The Christology of Revelation is surely based on the saving work of Christ. The saving work of Christ is implicit throughout Revelation as it focuses on the exalted reign of Christ, which exaltation resulted from his death and resurrection. Because of his death and resurrection and since his ascension, the Lord Christ, in his state of exaltation, is Lord over all. Revelation everywhere assumes that the meritorious work of Christ (his humiliation and vicarious atonement) has already taken place, and it assumes that the reader knows and trusts that work.[7] While the four gospels narrate the incarnation, humiliation, and resurrection of Jesus, Revelation pictures the exaltation of Christ and what this exalted reign of

Christ means for the church. Where the gospels end at the resurrection and ascension of Christ, Revelation picks up and continues the story from the ascension to the second coming of the Lord—and into eternity. Revelation also demonstrates how the church carries on the mission of Christ in the world (as does also the Acts of the Apostles), for it was *the ascended and exalted Lord* who worked by the Spirit for and through the apostles (Acts 2:47). (CC pp. 1-29)

The Christology of Revelation is rich and broad in its scope. Throughout the book Jesus Christ is presented as the exalted Son of Man (Revelation 1), the Lamb of God (Revelation 5), the mighty angel of the church as imaged by the angel of Revelation 10, the Lord of the church (Revelation 2–3; 22), the Judge of the world (Revelation 19), the everlasting God (22:12–13), the Word of God (λόγος, 19:13), and the "source" (ἀρχή) of the creation of God, the new heaven and earth (3:14; cf. 21:1–22:5). This Christology is expanded in Revelation to include the thoughts that the exalted Christ is the Lord of the cosmos, the Lord of history, the Lord of the living and the dead, the Lord of the angels, and the Lord of the world and of all creation (22:13). Revelation presents a rich lode, the mining of which extends and deepens the Christology of the NT, and in particular that of John's gospel. (CC pp. 1-29)

Revelation: A Celebration of the Saints

This revelation of the Lamb, slain and exalted, evokes from the saints in heaven (often joined by the angels) and the saints on earth a great hymn of praise to God and the Lamb. The great acclamation begins to swell in Revelation 4 and 5, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive [all] the power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (5:12). Such heavenly praise and worship is first given to God the Father (4:11), then to both God the Father and God the Son, the Lamb (5:13). All the saints, all the angels, and all creation are the subjects who worship God and the Lamb. (CC pp. 1-29)

Even though the prophetic message of Revelation has much to reveal about the suffering and judgment of the human race and the world, it also records *a great celebration of the people of God, who believe in the triumphant, exalted Christ.* Throughout the prophecy the saints of God confidently *sing and celebrate* in worship of God and his Christ. This celebrating worship is all the more striking when it is viewed in contrast to the terrible suffering and warfare that God's people on earth endure. In fact, it seems that the more the church on earth suffers, the more confidently and joyously do God's people sing in faith and hope of Jesus Christ (15:1–4). Throughout Revelation, interwoven with all the tribulations depicted, there is heard the greatest Te Deum ever voiced by the saints of God. It is the hymn of victory which begins before the throne of God and before the Lamb in chapters 4 and 5 and is sung by both saints and angels. It continues throughout the prophecy, and, as stanza after stanza is added by saints both in heaven and on earth, it anticipates and reaches its triumphant crescendo at the second coming of Jesus Christ (19:1–8), which concludes with the end of all earthly things and with the creation of the new heaven and earth. (CC pp. 1-29)

Surely part of the purpose and uplifting effect of Revelation is to move the Christian to voice the prayer, “Come now, Lord Jesus” (22:20), and to join all the saints in this great Te Deum in celebration and worship of Jesus Christ *as the one who has come; as the one who still comes now as the church minsters the means of grace; and as the one who will come.* These manifold advents of Christ are part of the meaning of Christ’s divine titles as “the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (22:13) and as the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (19:16). (CC pp. 1-29)

The Character of Revelation

Revelation, a Prophetic Apocalypse

The book of Revelation is named after the first word of its text (ἀποκάλυψις), which is usually translated as “revelation.” The word has also been transliterated into English as “apocalypse,” which has come to be used to designate a certain genre of literature, “apocalyptic literature.” Having roots in the prophetic books of the OT, apocalyptic literature flourished (in both Jewish and Christian contexts) from around 200 B.C. to A.D. 300, though examples appear as late as the ninth century A.D. Although a precise definition of this type of literature is difficult to formulate, it is generally agreed that apocalyptic is a kind of literature in which divine secrets are revealed, usually by heavenly angelic figures, to a human recipient in a historical setting.[13] There is also general agreement as to the chief characteristics of apocalyptic literature, among which are the following. It deals mostly with *eschatology,* the end times. It often uses *symbolic language* to convey its message. Its view of life in this world (under God’s ultimate sovereignty) *is dualistic in nature and character,* that is, it pictures the human race and its history in a *warfare between good and evil* in which there is no neutrality. And most often the message is received by the author *through angelic, heavenly figures* who appeared in *visions.* (CC pp. 1-29)

In the OT, Jacob (Genesis 28), Joseph (Genesis 40–41), and Moses (Exodus 24) were among those given to see heavenly and/or future things, and the later prophets (e.g., Isaiah 6) report what they were allowed to see and hear from above. Especially the visions described in Isaiah 24–27; Ezekiel 1–3; 38–39; Joel; Daniel 7–12; and Zechariah exhibit some of the characteristics prominent in the genre of apocalyptic literature. As for extrabiblical apocalyptic, important Jewish apocalypses are 1 Enoch, the Book of Jubilees, 4 Ezra, the Assumption of Moses, 2 Baruch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Among Christian apocalypses are the Ascension of Isaiah (appended to the Jewish-Christian Martyrdom of Isaiah), the Shepherd of Hermas (not totally apocalyptic), the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Apocalypse of Paul. This body of literature is important for interpreting Revelation because Revelation is composed in the apocalyptic literary genre and shares much common imagery and thought with these other works. The commentary will make frequent references to writings such as these. (CC pp. 1-29)

While there is a general consensus as to the definition and characteristics of apocalyptic literature, there is as yet no consensus as to its purpose. Is it primarily *esoteric* in nature, having as its purpose the revelation of present and future secrets, without a prophetic application toward repentance and a religious change on the part of the hearer? Or is it primarily *prophetic* in character, with the purpose of influencing the hearer toward such a change? It may be true that some extrabiblical apocalypses (for example, the Book of Heavenly Luminaries in 1 Enoch [chapters 72–82]) are chiefly esoteric, but most (if not all) apocalypses are to some extent also prophetic. When one considers apocalyptic literature in general—or any specific example—one may encounter difficulties in determining whether it is primarily prophetic or esoterically visionary in character and purpose. The book of Revelation, however, is primarily *prophetic.* Like all biblical literature, it is a true revelation (19:9; 22:6) of the true God, who desires all people to repent and believe the Gospel of the Lord Christ. (CC pp. 1-29)

Revelation presents its message in an apocalyptic visionary form and thus is apocalyptic in genre. It can be viewed in the tradition of apocalyptic literature and compared to other apocalypses—OT, Jewish, or Christian. But there are characteristics of Revelation that also set it apart. Most obviously, it is *not* pseudonymous. The author identifies himself quite clearly and does not hide under the assumed identity of a previously known person. He names himself John both at the beginning and at the end of his work (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), and he takes for granted that his hearers know who he is (1:9–11). A second difference is that the book is *Christocentric,* not just theocentric. The chief figure in Revelation, around whom everything revolves and from whom everything originates, is Jesus Christ. While the person of Christ acts under the authority of God the Father and frequently uses angels to mediate the revelation, it is quite clear that he dominates the entire prophetic message as to its origin and also its purpose—hence the book's first words, "revelatory-unveiling of Jesus Christ" (ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:1), and also its final promise, "Yes, I am coming quickly" (ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ, 22:20). Third, Revelation pictures the people of God on earth playing an important role as they represent God and his Christ in the battle between righteousness and evil. This is not always the case in other apocalyptic works, especially those which are esoterically visionary. (CC pp. 1-29)

For, above all, Revelation is *prophetic* in intention. The author of Revelation is conscious of his role as a prophet, for he calls his work a "prophecy" (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). He does so because he views his work, and his role in that work, in the OT prophetic tradition (22:6, 18–19). His purpose is not primarily to reveal secrets to God's people, but rather to call them to repentance and faith, and to worship—to the blessedness of faithful service in the confidence of God's love and care. The special emphases of Revelation within the apocalyptic tradition can be summed up in these words: "Blessed is the one who reads and [blessed

are] those who hear the words of this prophecy and who keep the things written in it, for the time is near" (1:3; see also 22:12–21). (CC pp. 1-29)

The Purpose of Revelation

The subject matter of Revelation is stated in the first words of the text, "revelatory-unveiling of Jesus Christ" (ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Whatever the prophetic message of this book has to say, it is about Jesus Christ. John would have his readers take to heart the words of the prophecy, for the time is near (1:3). The time is near for the fulfillment of what is described, because the Lord Christ is coming quickly (22:6–7). The purpose of the message of Revelation is therefore best summed up in this word: *preparation*. The hearer and reader are *to be ready* for what is to come to pass. It is a readiness that comes about through hearing the message. Such preparation consists of baptismal sealing (7:2–3), of being washed in the blood of the Lamb (1:5; 7:9, 13–14; 19:13; 22:14) and through such cleansing to stand ready for the coming of Christ (22:12). *As the Christian stands prepared for the coming Lord, he is encouraged in the hope of his faith (2:10) and is inspired for the mission that Christ has given to his church on earth (10:11).* (CC pp. 1-29)

Revelation ends with the promise that the Lord Jesus is coming quickly, and with John's prayerful response, "Amen, come now, Lord Jesus" (22:20). *This prayer is not only the conclusion to the whole of Revelation, but it is also the specific end at which it is aimed. Thus the explicit goal of Revelation is to lift up to God this prayer. The Spirit (through the message of Revelation) leads God's people to voice this prayer now and until it is answered*. This is to be the daily prayer of the church. It is the prayer that not only sums up all for which the church prays (see 6:9–11) but also testifies to the longing of the Christian heart to be in the presence of God's holiness and glory in heaven. (CC pp. 1-29)

As the Spirit led Simeon to pray for departure into the presence of God after he had seen the Lord's Christ (Lk 2:28–32), so the Spirit now moves the believer to pray in response to all that he has witnessed through the biblical revelation of God—which revelation is now concluded in the unveiling of the glory of the exalted Christ pictured in the last book of the Bible. Simeon, informed by Scripture and in the presence of the Word Incarnate, prayed the Nunc Dimittis, and was moved by the Spirit to witness to others about the Christ (Lk 2:33–35). So likewise the hearer of Revelation is given the full biblical revelation from above through the prophetic Word read in the congregation as he is in the presence of the sacramentally enfleshed Word; he prays this prayer, "Amen, come now, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20), and he is moved by the Spirit to witness. (CC pp. 1-29)

In short, *the more the Christian is confident by faith—strengthened through Word and Sacrament—of going to heaven because of the merits of Christ, the more the Spirit moves the believer to desire to enter heaven. And the more the Christian desires the glory of God in heaven, the more the Spirit moves him to*

witness through this longing hope of faith. This too is part of the purpose of Revelation: to comfort and encourage the worshiping Christian to pray this prayer of longing and to witness to the world through this worship and prayer. (CC pp. 1-29)

The Message of Revelation

The message of Revelation reveals two ongoing phenomena: the terrifying sufferings and horror on earth, and the reign of Jesus Christ as Lord in his heavenly exalted glory. As these two phenomena are described, God's people on earth are encouraged to cling in hopeful faith to the eternal heavenly glory that beckons them in Christ. In turn they also are strengthened and encouraged for the work of Christ's mission on earth. The tribulations and sufferings portrayed lead the Christian not to pessimism and despair but to realism. The adversities and troubles prophesied will come to pass, and Christians will suffer because of and through them (2:10; 7:14; 15:2), as will unbelievers. Such plagues and distresses demonstrate God's wrath and judgment for the purpose of motivating the godless to repentance (16:1, 8–11). God's own people also experience these same sufferings and plagues, for the dragon, Satan, uses these sufferings and plagues in his attempt to destroy the church and her witness (12:13–13:18). (CC pp. 1-29)

Thus an anomaly is set up. While mankind's sin and rebellion against God prompt all the tribulations and sufferings (6:1–11), the dragon uses them and adds to them as he tries to destroy the Gospel witness of the church (11:7–10). In his permissive will, God lets the dragon do this, so that all these sufferings work together to show his anger and judgment, which aim to bring the human race to repentance before it is too late. For the Christian the sufferings serve both as a reminder of God's judgment against all sin, but especially as opportunities to witness to the sufferings and death of Christ, who was without sin but vicariously endured judgment for the salvation of all people (2:8–11; 11:7–13). (CC pp. 1-29)

While much of the prophetic message of Revelation reflects a negative view of the human race and its history, interspersed throughout the book are beautiful pictures of God's glory in heaven and Christ's exalted glory, and of the saints before God's heavenly throne. In fact, the Bible's most beautiful pictures of heaven are in Revelation. Against the backdrop of all the doom and darkness and horror portrayed in Revelation, these visions of the heavenly glory stand out all the more in bold relief. Revelation uses the visions of doom and horror to show that all human history is heading to a certain and terrifying end in the judgment of God. The world is rushing headlong to its destruction and humanity faces eternal damnation. Despite all human efforts and ambitions, human life here on earth in this present age will *not* improve into a happy state. Nor is the kingdom of the enthroned Christ a kingdom of this world. Mankind can do nothing to avert this coming doom, the punishment of God. (CC pp. 1-29)

Into this description of despair, which leads only to the abyss of hell (Revelation 17–18; 20:7–10), there are interjected the glorious pictures of God's hope and plan for the human race, the peace and righteousness of Christ which have come to believers already now and which will come about, will be consummated, in heaven and then ultimately in the new heaven and earth. Thus these glorious reminders of the perfect peace and full glory stored up for those who entrust their lives to God (2:10; 19:9) encourage the Christian in the midst of the sufferings to remain faithful to the Christ in whom they trust. The end of the believer in Christ is not the doom and horror and finally the eternal abyss, but rather the glory of Christ in heaven, which culminates in the resurrection and the new heaven and earth (20:11–15; 21:1). Therefore the visions of heaven inspire Christians *to gaze steadily in faith at Christ and the glory that awaits them* while they suffer through the tribulations on earth. Also these heavenly pictures of the coming eternal glory encourage the believer, *through his suffering here on earth, to witness to the victory of Christ.* Indeed, the sufferings can even facilitate witnessing to the Gospel (15:2–4). Meanwhile, through it all the Christian continually prays, "Amen, come now, Lord Jesus" (ἀμήν, ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ, 22:20) confident of the Lord's promise, "Yes, I am coming quickly" (ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ, 22:20; see also 6:9–11). (CC pp. 1-29)

Thus *the overarching and dominating theme of Revelation is the unveiling of Christ in his exalted glory as the reigning Lord. Before the eyes of the assembled worshiping Christians, the divine presence and the glory of the Savior and Lord is revealed.* The Lord Christ, because of his exalted enthronement at the right of God, by right of his death and resurrection (5:1–14), now rules everything for the sake of his church on earth. This is the faith and comfort of the church: her Lord rules over all history, all events, over sin and evil, the devil, suffering and death and hell. He governs everything so that the church can carry out the mission given to her by God (10:1–11:19). When that mission is completed, then the Lord Christ will come to claim his bride (19:5–16). (CC pp. 1-29)

The Structure of Revelation

Revelation is made up of three parts: an introduction (1:1–3:22), the prophetic message proper (4:1–22:5), and an epilogue (22:6–21). (CC pp. 1-29)

The introduction consists of a prologue (1:1–8), a description of John's commissioning to write the book (1:9–20), and the seven letters to the seven churches (2:1–3:22). The seven letters are not a part of the prophetic message per se but rather serve to prepare the hearer for reception of the message by calling the churches to repentance. (CC pp. 1-29)

The second part, the prophetic message, is by far the largest section of Revelation (4:1–22:5). The prophetic message is introduced by a vision of God's throne and glory in heaven, together with angels and the saints of God, and of the exaltation of the victorious Christ, depicted as a Lamb (4:1–5:14). *This vision of God's heavenly glory and of the exaltation of the Lamb not only introduces the prophetic message of Revelation but also dominates and controls it.* This vision

establishes this truth in the context of which *everything* is to be seen and heard: Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain, is alive and reigns! *The victory has been won! Salvation has been accomplished!* Believers in heaven and on earth can join in the triumphal song. Everything in the book that follows is normed by the reassurance of this opening vision. (CC pp. 1-29)

The prophecy itself contains three visions of events taking place on earth. Each vision covers the same time period: from the first advent of Christ (specifically, his ascension) up to his second coming at the end of this present world. And each vision has seven scenes. (See figure 3 for a depiction of how the scenes of each vision relate to the scenes of the other visions.) (CC pp. 1-29)

The first sevenfold vision (6:1–8:5) is introduced by the opening of the seven seals of the scroll which Christ the Lamb had received in the heavenly vision of God's glory (5:6–7). The opening of the seals introduces the scenes of this vision. The first five scenes, the four horsemen and the martyred souls beneath God's altar (6:1–11), symbolize events happening concurrently from the ascension of Christ up to the End, and they refer to the sufferings that humankind perpetrates upon itself—from which also Christians suffer. The opening of the sixth seal pictures the End, with the destruction of the present universe and the terror that this instills (6:12–17). Before the seventh seal is opened, there is an interlude in which John sees God's people on earth (pictured as the 144,000) sealed for divine protection. They are the church militant (7:1–8). In this interlude John next sees the saints who are in heaven because of the blood of the Lamb, now at peace; they are the church triumphant (7:9–17). The opening of the seventh seal leads the hearer into the second sevenfold vision. (CC pp. 1-29)

The second sevenfold vision is introduced by seven angels with trumpets. As each angel in turn blows a trumpet, a scene appears. The first four scenes display natural disasters which plague the human race all during the time period from the ascension of Jesus up to the End (8:6–13). The fifth trumpet-angel introduces the terrifying scene of demons from the abyss who afflict unbelieving mankind (9:1–12). The sixth scene shows the gathering of an evil host that will be unleashed on humanity just before the End (9:13–21). This is the first of three glimpses that John sees of what is called Armageddon in 16:16 and the battle of Gog and Magog in 20:8. As in the first sevenfold vision, there is an interlude between the sixth and seventh scenes. In this interlude (10:1–11:14) John sees a mighty angel from heaven commissioning him (and the church) to proclaim the message of God to all peoples (10:1–11), and then, by way of the two witnesses (11:1–14), John sees the church carrying out this mission. Then the seventh trumpet-angel introduces the last scene in this second vision. Like the sixth scene of the first sevenfold vision, this seventh scene displays again the end of this world, but this time not the world's destruction, but rather the joy that the End brings to God's people (11:15–19). (CC pp. 1-29)

Before the third sevenfold vision of events on earth is ushered in, there is presented a vision of the cosmic war between God and the dragon (12:1–14:20). *This cosmic vision is the heart of Revelation, for it reveals the cause of all the tribulations and sufferings on earth and the final triumph of Christ's church.* The vision is made up of the symbols of the woman with Child and the dragon (12:1–18), the beasts of the dragon (13:1–18), and the defeat of the dragon and the beasts, together with the end of this world (14:1–20). When the Child of the woman is taken to heaven, the dragon (Satan) and his angels are cast out of heaven. Unable to destroy the woman (the church), the dragon conjures up the two beasts, which war against the woman throughout the time period from the ascension up to the present world's end. The cosmic vision concludes then with the defeat of the evil forces of the dragon and with the victory song of the 144,000 at the End, which this time is pictured as a great harvest. (CC pp. 1-29)

The third and final sevenfold vision of events on earth is introduced by the seven censer-angels (15:1–16:21). As each angel pours out his censer on the earth, a scene is presented. The first five scenes refer to God's anger poured out on the human race in the form of various plagues (15:1–16:11). When John sees the sixth scene, introduced by the sixth censer-angel, he receives a second view of the last battle before the End, the battle now called Armageddon (16:12–16). The seventh scene again brings John to the End (16:17–21). (CC pp. 1-29)

The remainder of the prophetic message is a lengthy conclusion which describes the end of this world in greater detail and the new heaven and earth (17:1–22:5). Chapters 17 and 18 describe the evil forces of the dragon (Babylon—the harlot and the beast) in graphic detail, and then their judgment and destruction. Chapter 19 depicts the second coming of Jesus Christ and the celebration of God's saints. Revelation 20 details the binding, overthrow, and final judgment of Satan by means of the depiction of the millennium and the battle of Gog and Magog—the last battle—together with reference to the two resurrections and the judgment of the human race. The prophecy climaxes with a description of the new heaven and earth and with the heavenly city Jerusalem (21:1–22:5).

Revelation then concludes with the epilogue (22:6–21). See further the outline which forms the table of contents. (CC pp. 1-29)

The Author and Writing of Revelation

The Author

The author calls himself "John" (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), but he nowhere indicates *which* John he might be. In the NT there are three well-known persons named John: John the Baptist, John Mark, and the apostle John, who was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James. (There are two others mentioned in passing; many manuscripts have "John" as the name of Peter's father in Jn 21:15, and another John was a member or an associate of the family of Annas, the high priest [Acts 4:6].) Conceivably the author of Revelation could be any of the first three, or even

another John not mentioned in the NT. The author just calls himself “John,” without any identifying description such as “apostle,” “disciple,” “son of Zebedee,” or “brother of James.” He assumed that his hearers would know who he was. (CC pp. 1-29)

Interpreters in the modern era, for the most part, have rejected the early church tradition that John the apostle and son of Zebedee was the author of Revelation. But beyond this there is no agreement as to who this John might be. Many scholars early in the twentieth century favored an individual called “John the Elder,” mentioned by Papias in a fragment quoted by Eusebius the church historian. Even John the Baptist, together with his pupils after his death, has been suggested as the author. More recently the author has been called “John the Prophet” (because he refers to his work as a “prophecy,” 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19) or “John the Seer”—a person otherwise unknown in the NT, though most likely an acquaintance or even a teacher of the author of the fourth gospel. Today this opinion, that the author is a John never mentioned in the NT, is gaining popularity. (CC pp. 1-29)

The traditional view from the church fathers of the second and third centuries is that the author is John the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve disciples. Irenaeus, a Syrian father who, after receiving his theological training in Asia Minor and Rome, was bishop of Lyons in the Latin Western Church, testifies in his Greek work *Against Heresies* that John the Lord’s disciple was the author of Revelation. He furthermore testifies that it was near the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian that Revelation was written.[35] He also says that John was in Ephesus until the time of Trajan. Irenaeus most likely received this information from Polycarp, at whose feet he sat as a young man. Polycarp (ca. 60–ca. 155) was bishop of Smyrna and had sat at the feet of John in Ephesus.[37] Thus Irenaeus himself may stand in the Johannine tradition. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215) says that after the death of Domitian, “John the apostle” went back to Ephesus after his exile on Patmos. An earlier father who testifies to the Johannine authorship of Revelation is Justin Martyr (ca. 100–ca. 165),[39] who, before moving on to Rome, taught for a time in Ephesus. (CC pp. 1-29)

In the first two centuries the only possible witness against the Johannine authorship of Revelation is Papias (ca. 60–ca. 130), bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor. According to Irenaeus, Papias was a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp. In a quotation preserved by Eusebius, Papias appears to speak of two distinct persons named John, one the disciple of Jesus and the other the elder (who was also a disciple of Jesus, but not one of the Twelve).[41] Much has been written about this fragment of Papias as quoted in Eusebius, arguing both that it supports the apostolic Johannine authorship of Revelation and also that it provides evidence against it. However, on the basis of this fragment alone it cannot be determined whether Papias was referring to two different Johns or twice to the same John.[43] Even if one should conclude that Papias was referring to two different Johns, both of considerable stature and both residing at Ephesus

(which is highly unlikely), this could not be used against the apostolic Johannine authorship of either the gospel or Revelation, for authorship is not the subject Papias is addressing in this excerpt. (CC pp. 1-29)

It is not until the third century A.D. that there appears clear evidence of any father speaking against apostolic Johannine authorship. According to Eusebius, Caius (early third century), who was said to have been a Roman presbyter, rejected the Johannine authorship of Revelation, attributing it instead to Cerinthus,[46] a Gnostic heretic (late first century). A more important witness against apostolic Johannine authorship is Dionysius (died ca. 264), bishop of Alexandria and a pupil of Origen. He believed that Revelation was written by a John, but not the apostle. He came to this conclusion primarily because of the difference between the literary styles of John's gospel and Revelation, though he accepted Revelation as inspired and canonical. (CC pp. 1-29)

Later fathers who either rejected or had doubts about the Johannine authorship of Revelation are Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315–ca. 386), Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 329–ca. 389), Chrysostom (ca. 347–407), and Theodoret (ca. 393–ca. 458). These later fathers all seemed to have been influenced by Dionysius. While some fathers of the third and fourth centuries followed Dionysius in doubting or rejecting the Johannine authorship of Revelation, most did not. Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225), Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–ca. 235), and Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254) accepted the apostolic Johannine authorship without question. The great fathers of the fourth century such as Athanasius, Jerome, and Augustine also accepted the apostolic Johannine authorship of this last book of the Bible. (CC pp. 1-29)

Nevertheless, *the overwhelming evidence from the early church is in favor of the apostolic Johannine authorship of Revelation. There is little reason to doubt this evidence from the fathers* (exemplified especially by Irenaeus), *for nothing since then has come to light which would counter or deny this tradition of the church.* However, the problem that Dionysius raised, that of the difference between the literary styles of John's gospel and of Revelation, will be addressed in the following section, which will offer a final conclusion about the authorship of Revelation. (CC pp. 1-29)

The Writing of Revelation

It can be said with some certainty that the book of Revelation was not planned in the same sense that John must have planned his gospel. No one could have foreseen and planned the writing of Revelation. John wrote the gospel after long thought and maturity in his apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, but there was no way that he could have anticipated the visions he experienced and recorded in Revelation. It happened, under inspiration, through a visionary experience similar to those that came upon Paul (2 Cor 12:1–4) and Stephen (Acts 7:55–56). John experienced and wrote Revelation while he was "in the Spirit" (ἐν πνεύματι, Rev

1:10; 4:2). As he was in the Spirit, he evidently not only saw the visions but also was caught up into them so as to experience them more immediately as well (see 4:1–2). This is beyond our ability to analyze. Perhaps even John himself, like Paul (2 Cor 12:1–4), could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body when he saw and heard what he relates. What matters is that he was "in the Spirit," and he truly was given this Revelation by God. The finished product is a gift of God through his servant John, God's final word until the Lord's return at the End (Rev 1:3; 22:20). (CC pp. 1-29)

As part of their investigation of the question of authorship, some scholars have compared the language and literary styles of John's gospel to those of Revelation. This comparison is inconclusive, however. Whatever decision one makes about the authorship of these two documents, some problems remain. If one concludes because of the dissimilarities[53] in language and style that John and Revelation must have been composed by two different authors, then how does one account for their pointed similarities? If, on the other hand, one concludes because of the similarities that both are products of the same author, then how does one account for the pointed dissimilarities? Swete concludes that the many similarities create "a strong presumption of affinity between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse, not withstanding their great diversity both in language and in thought." And Charles states that the "resemblances … point decidedly to some connection between the two authors." (CC pp. 1-29)

One of the most noticeable dissimilarities in language is the increased presence in the Greek text of Revelation of grammatical irregularities and Semiticisms. The Greek language and style of Revelation is, in fact, so Semitic that one imaginative scholar suggested that the author originally wrote in Aramaic and that our present edition is a Greek translation.[58] Although it is true that at times translating the Greek text into Hebrew or Aramaic might give insights into its meaning, this does not mean that the author wrote the original in Hebrew or Aramaic. Careful analysis of the Greek text reveals that it is not translation Greek (although it contains abundant Greek renditions of OT passages, often by way of the LXX translation). Rather the author wrote and thought in a Greek that was influenced by Semitic idioms and expression. It appears that he *wrote* in Greek while he was *thinking* in Semitic idioms and thought patterns. His original and native language was Semitic, most likely Aramaic, and his Greek was *learned and acquired. Unless he took the time to translate (in his mind) from the Semitic idiom to the Greek before he spoke or wrote, his Greek would be more Semitic. But if he first took the time to translate the Semitic idiom mentally into Greek, then his Greek would be less Semitic*. (CC pp. 1-29)

The difference between the *extent* of the Semiticisms in John's gospel and Revelation is due to the fact that the gospel is a carefully planned theological *narrative,* while Revelation is a composition that may have been written *more quickly and with great urgency.* One can imagine that the author worked deliberately in the composition of his gospel, not only for clarity of thought and

expression but also to screen out many of his natural Semitic idioms—though even the Greek of the gospel is more Semitic than Hellenistic literary Greek. When the same author came to write Revelation he did not, for whatever reason, screen out as carefully the Semitic idioms. (CC pp. 1-29)

Was this because of his state of mind—highly emotional, even mystic? Or was it because of a concern to write quickly in order not to lose anything of what he had seen and experienced? Perhaps both are true. What is clear is that the author did *not* always translate in his mind from his native Semitic way of thinking into standard Greek idiom before he wrote the Greek text of Revelation. One might assume that he did not write several drafts, as might have been the case with his gospel. He left his written Revelation in the language in which he first described what he had seen—composed from the immediate impressions that were made on his mind by the visions and experiences he encountered. The quantity and kind of Semiticisms in Revelation, then, account for much of the difference between the language of John's gospel and Revelation. But one can detect the same mind, with similar Semitic influence, behind the Greek of both the gospel and Revelation. (CC pp. 1-29)

What about the highly irregular grammar, then, in Revelation? Are all the author's strange grammatical constructions also due to his Semitic way of thinking? No, for certain anomalies are not attributable to his Semitic way of thinking. Rather, they are intentional. The author, when he stops to think, knows standard, conventional Koine Greek grammar. But as a skilled artist he sometimes employs unconventional or anomalous grammar in order to make a point, either for emphasis or for theological impact. As one works with the Greek text and begins to notice that many of the grammatical irregularities are repeated in Revelation, it becomes clear that with them the author is *creating literary thought patterns that aid him in giving full expression and meaning to the subject matter at hand*. This author is a highly skilled, literary craftsman. He does not think or express himself as one following ordinary logic or common rhetoric. Rather, he thinks and expresses himself visually in inspired, artistic patterns of thought. Carrington maintains, "It is the only masterpiece of pure art in the New Testament." Humanly speaking, while one could not imagine John writing Romans, one could also not conjecture that Paul could have written Revelation. In each case, the Holy Spirit moved a particular individual in a certain historical context to produce a unique writing. (CC pp. 1-29)

Thus the chief dissimilarities in language and literary style between the gospel according to St. John and Revelation can be explained without resorting to the assumption that there were two different authors. All the evidence, when weighed, points to John the apostle and son of Zebedee as the author of Revelation—as well as of the gospel. Since there is no compelling evidence to the contrary, and there is persuasive supporting evidence, this commentary is written on the premise that the John mentioned in Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8 is the John

who was one of the twelve apostles and who was the brother of James. (CC pp. 1-29)

John the Author: The Man for the Time and Place

The character and personality and reputation of John play an important role in his authorship of Revelation—and also of his gospel. According to Athanasius, John was known as "the theologian" (ὁ θεολόγος) of the apostolic church. In the gospel he is referred to as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (e.g., Jn 13:23; 20:2), the one who lay against Jesus' bosom in the Upper Room (Jn 13:23), and as "the other disciple" (τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν, Jn 20:2). Of this disciple Jesus says tantalizingly, "If I wish him to remain until I come …" (Jn 21:22; cf. 21:20). This disciple then acquired the reputation that he would not die until the Lord's second coming, although he himself protested that Jesus had not promised that (Jn 21:23). All these descriptions identify the author of the gospel of John and are to be attributed as well to John the author of Revelation. That is, the author of both is John the apostle and son of Zebedee, the brother of James. Finally, in the gospel the author says that he was an eyewitness of Jesus' death and resurrection, and that his witness is the truth (Jn 19:34–35; 21:24). (CC pp. 1-29)

In Revelation the author uses his name, John, to identify himself (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). In 22:8 he emphasizes that it was he, John, who heard and saw the things that are written in Revelation. There is a similar attestation in the gospel concerning the author and the validity of what he visually witnessed (19:35; 21:24). In 1 Jn 1:1–4 this same author again makes the claim that his testimony is that of an eyewitness of Jesus Christ. In 2 and 3 John he introduces himself as "the elder" (ὁ πρεσβύτερος, 2 Jn 1; 3Jn 1). By his use of the article ("the") he shows that he takes for granted that everyone knows who he is and that they will without question accept his authority because of his relationship to Christ (cf. also 1 Jn 5:13; 2 Jn 9; 3 Jn 9–10). In Revelation he refers to his writing as a "prophecy" (προφητεία, 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19), that is, a prophetic work in line with the ministry and writings of the OT and NT prophets of God. *He thus understands that his apostolic witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ—his incarnation, death, resurrection, and exalted heavenly glory—is in harmony with and in succession to the prophetic ministry of old*. (CC pp. 1-29)

In the latter part of the first century, when (to our present knowledge) John was the last remaining apostolic witness and voice yet on earth, he was known as *the* elder of the church, *the* theologian and teacher of the church. Certainly it can be said of him that the church could not neglect the word that was spoken by the Lord and witnessed by those who heard it (Heb 2:1–4). As the first century A.D. came to an end, John was the sole apostolic voice witnessing to what Jesus had done and said. He was the last living link between the church at the turn of the first century A.D. and the people among whom Jesus lived during his earthly ministry. (CC pp. 1-29)

According to Irenaeus, John lived into the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan, who ruled from 98 to 117. This means that John not only witnessed the earthly life of Jesus Christ but also the life and ministry of the church up to the early part of the second century. For example, he was still living in Ephesus when Clement, the bishop of Rome, wrote an epistle to the church in Corinth (ca. A.D. 95) known today as 1 Clement. He died near the time that Ignatius was martyred under Trajan. In more than one of the letters of Ignatius, which are reckoned among the most famous documents of the early church, Ignatius seems to show that he knew Revelation. John lived through some seventy years of the formative history of the church before his own witness was finished! (CC pp. 1-29)

What had John witnessed? It appears that the author of the gospel and Revelation was introduced to Jesus at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (Jn 1:35–42; Acts 1:21–22). Prior to meeting Jesus, John was a fisherman, together with his brother James and their father Zebedee. But after having been called by Jesus he became one of the twelve apostles (Mk 1:19–20). John, together with his brother James, and Peter, made up the inner circle and as such witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:37), the transfiguration of the Lord (Mk 9:2), and the agony of Jesus at Gethsemane (Mk 14:33). Most likely John witnessed most, and perhaps all of the miracles of Jesus and heard his public and private teachings (Jn 21:25). John is usually thought of as reserved, but he was not afraid to push himself forward, even when he should not have (Mt 20:20–21). He may have been the youngest of the Twelve, or at least among the younger disciples; he ran faster than Peter (Jn 20:4), and he is mentioned after his brother James (Mk 1:19). Given Jesus' fondness for the lowly, including children, it may have been partly in light of John's younger status that Jesus loved him and perhaps sheltered him (Jn 13:23). At any rate his youth did not prevent him from becoming one of the leaders of the Twelve (cf. Jer 1:5–7). (CC pp. 1-29)

But what stands out most prominently about John is that *he was the only disciple to witness the entire passion of Jesus Christ*. With Peter he witnessed the trial of Jesus before the Jewish court (Jn 18:15–16). But after Peter left (Mt 26:75; Lk 22:62), through the trials of Pilate and Herod and on to Golgotha, John was the only disciple to witness the entire suffering, crucifixion, and death of Jesus. It was to John that Jesus entrusted the care of his mother (Jn 19:26–27). John saw the shameful treatment and bitter earthly end as Jesus died (Jn 19:31–37). And John saw with his own eyes the resurrected Lord and believed in his resurrection. This was crucial for his later witness to the truth. (CC pp. 1-29)

John ends his gospel by relating not the ascension of Jesus but the commissioning of Peter and the foretelling of Peter's death, to which is attached Jesus' affirmation of the *possibility* that John could remain alive until the Lord's return (Jn 21:20–23). Whether the early Christians believed that John *would* remain alive until the return of Jesus, or whether they entertained the idea only as a *possibility* dependent on the Lord's will (Jn 21:23), certainly John's long life on this earth would have heightened the hope of the Lord's return within John's

lifetime. His extended life also can be seen as a confirmation of the *possibility* about which Jesus spoke. (CC pp. 1-29)

By ending his gospel with the foretelling of Peter's ministry and death, and the foretelling of the enduring witness of the beloved disciple, John prepares his readers to be introduced to the mission of the church under the apostolic ministry. This ministry would proclaim the words and actions of Jesus and would be sealed by suffering and death. This ministry would be confirmed by the ongoing eyewitness of the apostolic tradition, of which John was a part and also of which he would be the last (cf. Heb 2:1–4; 1 Jn 1:1–4). This ministry of the apostles, as exemplified by John, would continue until their proclamation concerning Christ was authoritatively established and codified for the church. That is, *their personal apostolic ministry would continue until their apostolic Word was set down in writing, so that it and it alone would remain authoritative for the church until the Lord's return.* The long apostolic ministry of John played an important role in the establishment of that authoritative apostolic legacy. (CC pp. 1-29)

What all did John witness? After witnessing the Lord's ascension and the promise of his return (Acts 1:6–11) and receiving the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send the Spirit (Acts 2:1–4), John became one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, together with Peter and James the brother of Jesus (Acts 12:17; Gal 2:9). How long John's ministry lasted in Jerusalem is not known. Church fathers testify that John was in Ephesus before and after his exile on the island of Patmos. It can be surmised that he became the bishop at Ephesus before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The lack of precise knowledge as regards the date of his move to Ephesus notwithstanding, it seems that he was the pastor and bishop of the church there for many years. (That church had been founded by Paul together with Apollos, Aquila, and Priscilla [Acts 18:24–19:1].) During his long ministry at Ephesus, John witnessed the growth of the church throughout much of the Roman Empire. Certainly it can be said that before his death he saw the church well established, despite severe sufferings and persecutions. (CC pp. 1-29)

While at Ephesus, and for many years, John was *the* theologian of the church, *the* elder and apostolic spokesman. His long apostolic witness and ministry was an affirmation of the oral tradition of Christ's words and actions. John did not die until after the apostolic tradition concerning the words, deeds, and message of Christ had been established in written form. For John lived long enough for the writings of the NT not only to have been written but also to be in circulation. When his apostolic witness was no longer necessary to vouch for the authenticity of the apostolic tradition (now in literary form), the Lord Christ called his servant John to himself. While there is no direct evidence that John helped determine the NT canon, he was alive through the whole process of the writing and the circulation of those documents that came to be recognized as authoritative for the church. *In his wisdom, God left this servant of Christ alive to vouch for the*

veracity and faithfulness of those writings that would be accepted by the church. After that oral apostolic tradition was set in written form and after it was no longer necessary for a living voice to confirm that apostolic tradition, the prophecy was fulfilled, "If I wish him to remain until I come …" (Jn 21:22). Jesus came to his church in the written Scriptures and would continue to come to his people through the reading of those Scriptures. (CC pp. 1-29)

After John's death the church would not consider including in the canon a previously unknown writing lately brought to light, for there was no longer a living apostolic voice to vouch for its authenticity—though the church would for some time leave open the possibility of receiving or rejecting a writing that had been known during John's lifetime. (CC pp. 1-29)

The Acceptance of Revelation

It might appear surprising that the early church received Revelation as authoritative and canonical, apparently with little question for over a century. According to Charles "throughout the Christian Church during the 2nd cent. there is hardly any other book of the N.T. so well attested and received." Whether or not it was used and understood as much as the other writings of the NT is not clear, but it was certainly accepted by the church. It would be difficult to understand today how it could have been accepted unless it was known to have been written by a recognized, authoritative teacher of the church. Perhaps even the young John could not have had the theological stature to motivate the church to accept a writing such as Revelation! But from a mature John, who was recognized as *the* elder and theologian, it would be received. When doubts arose in the third century about the canonicity of Revelation, it was because some thought that John the apostle perhaps was not the author. But where there was no doubt of the apostolic Johannine authorship, it was accepted. (CC pp. 1-29)

The Gospel and Revelation: Literary Complements

One might ask, Why did not John include an account of Jesus' transfiguration in his gospel? After all, of the four gospel authors, he is the only one who actually witnessed it. This, together with the fact that John's gospel also does not have an account of or even a reference to Christ's ascension, may be *telling marks* in the gospel, directing John's readers to look to Revelation. In 1:9–20 there is a description of Jesus in his transfigured glory after he had come into it at his ascension. John on the mount of transfiguration saw a preview of this glory. Now in Revelation he sees this glory once again, *but after the Lord Christ had fully and permanently entered it.* (CC pp. 1-29)

Could the fact that John in Revelation gives to the reader a description of Christ in his transfigured glory be the reason why he does not have an account of the transfiguration in his gospel? The same may be said for the absence of any account of the ascension in his gospel, since there is in Revelation 5 a beautiful description of Jesus' ascension, but as seen and understood from heaven's viewpoint. If this might be the explanation for the absence of any report of these important events in John's gospel, *then perhaps John wrote the gospel after*

Revelation. The scenario might be this: first John experienced and wrote Revelation and then, after meditating on it, he undertook to write a gospel *as an introduction for Revelation.* (CC pp. 1-29)

Whether the above conjecture is true or not, there is a strong probability that after he had written both the gospel and Revelation, John saw that *they went together and thus were two parts of one work.* Even as Luke meant for his gospel and the Acts of the Apostles to be received as two volumes from the same author, so also John would have the church receive his gospel and Revelation as one two-part work. Luke planned beforehand that his gospel and Acts were to be received as one work in two parts (Lk 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–5), but perhaps John did not begin with such a plan in mind. Yet after both his gospel and Revelation were finished, they stood out as one grand account of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. For the gospel leads into and finds its goal in Revelation, and Revelation has its foundation in the gospel. Revelation thus is not to be read and understood in isolation, but rather in relationship with John's gospel. What is seen and interpreted in Revelation is anchored in the incarnation of the Word (ὁ λόγος, Jn 1:1, 14; Rev 19:13). Whatever is seen and interpreted in the gospel points to the exalted reign of Christ as depicted in Revelation. They are complementary. (CC pp. 1-29)

Literary Style

The literary style of the author of Revelation is more that of an artist than of a technical writer (cf. 12:1–2). He thinks and writes in visual patterns rather than in logical axioms. His artistry is even evident in his use of grammar and syntax. For example, he is fond of parallelism (see 21:23), especially antithetical statements, where he first states the positive and then the negative (3:3; 10:4). He uses the article repeatedly for emphasis (1:5; 21:10). He will use the nominative case where ordinarily an oblique case would be expected. He does this for emphasis and/or because of the dominance of the nominative word or thought (1:5; 3:12). After a participle or an infinitive, he will use a finite verb, although normally the verbs would correspond, with both verbs either as participles or as infinitives; this is due to his Semitic mode of expression (see, e.g., 1:6, 16; 2:20, 23; 14:2–3). He uses parataxis instead of syntaxis; for example, he uses καί, "and," to introduce an apodosis or subordinate part of the sentence (14:9–10), which is usually not done in Greek. Again, this is due to the influence of Semitic thought. The future is sometimes used for a present action, most likely in analogy to the Hebraic imperfect tense. He will often include a superfluous personal pronoun after a relative pronoun. This may reflect the Hebrew construction of a personal pronoun following the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר, which is indeclinable. But such a pronoun is not necessary in Greek, where the relative pronoun is declined. Such constructions are also found in the LXX. Sometimes after a preposition the author will have a noun or a nominal construction in a case that does not normally follow that preposition (1:4). (CC pp. 1-29)

All these oddities and irregularities, whether due to the author's Semitic background or to his own peculiar use of language, are used in a skilled, disciplined fashion which contributes to his artistic way of presenting the inspired message. For example, in 1:4–5 the preposition ἀπό, "from," is used three times. In the second and third instances a noun follows in the (expected) genitive case (ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων, "from the seven Spirits"; ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, "from Jesus Christ"), but in the first instance the following nominal construction is unexpectedly in the nominative case (ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, "from the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming"). Here the author purposely frames an unusual grammatical construction to make a theological point. The three phrases refer to the three persons of the Trinity. The author phrases the description of the Father (the first construction with ἀπό) in the nominative to emphasize his importance as first among equals. (CC pp. 1-29)

The literary artistry of the author finds expression in his use of the symbolic pictures which make up so much of his prophetic message. The experience of the author, and perhaps more importantly the content of his message from God, evidently demanded such images. For the hearer and reader of Revelation, this type of literary presentation poses certain questions. What do the various symbols mean? What do they represent? Once those questions have been answered for John's original historical context, we still must ask, What significance do they have for the reader and the church today? (CC pp. 1-29)

Symbolic imagery is usually patterned after some known entity. Something served the creator of the symbol as a model. It could be a historical person, a historical event, or a noted geographical place. Once the symbol is created, it then is used by the author to suggest and evoke a meaning without any explicit explanation of it. The symbol, as used by the writer, no longer refers to the model after which it was patterned. Rather, it refers to something different or new. If the model can be identified, this can help to determine how the model was used by the author and so can help the reader arrive at a correct interpretation of the symbol. However, when one discovers and examines the model, he may fall prey to the danger of thinking that the symbol *refers* to the model. The interpreter should not equate the symbol with its model. The model is *only a pointer to clues* which will help the reader to discover the application of the symbol. The symbol is a metaphor, and so its meaning is metaphorical, not literal. (CC pp. 1-29)

When an author creates a symbol as an image or metaphor for something that is common to human life and experience, the reader may be able to draw on that which is recognizable and known from his own experience in order to interpret the symbol. But when a symbol employs elements that are not drawn from common human experience and are not from human knowledge or nature, then the reader may conclude that the symbol is being used to picture something of the supernatural. An example of this is the dragon of Revelation 12. A dragon is not a real, natural creature known from common human experience. Rather, it is

drawn from human imagination. The referent in Revelation 12 is Satan, a supernatural being. (CC pp. 1-29)

In addition to literary symbols that are modeled after created things (the Lamb) or after the imagination (the dragon and beasts), other nonphysical realities from the realm of human thought—such as numbers—can be made to serve as symbols. Examples in Revelation are the numbers four, seven, ten, twelve, twenty-four, one thousand, and one hundred forty-four thousand. (CC pp. 1-29)

Much of the symbolic imagery in Revelation is taken from the OT. The OT often uses symbols as a method of teaching, "but it becomes especially noticeable in the later prophecies, and in the book of Daniel." The body of this commentary will show how knowledge of the OT plays an important role in interpreting Revelation. However, not only is the OT a rich source for the symbolism in Revelation, but so also are the pseudepigraphal writings of Judaism, especially those written during the intertestamental period such as 1 Enoch.[89] Another possible source of symbolic imagery is the mythological milieu of the Graeco-Roman world in which John lived. John shows knowledge of this milieu, and also at times he seems to use it—but for his own theological purposes. (CC pp. 1-29)

Finally, the literary style of Revelation includes John's artistic appropriation of the OT, not only as a source for symbolism, but even more importantly as the basis for much of his theological insights and literary expressions. John's use of the OT can be subtle. On the one hand, he never formally introduces an OT quotation with a citation formula. Yet no writer in the apostolic age, including the NT authors, makes more use of the writings of the OT. John constantly uses OT imagery, phrases, thought patterns, and theological motifs. The OT furnishes the vocabulary, mode of expression, and theological mind-set with which Revelation was written. (CC pp. 1-29)

John's quotations from and allusions to the OT are primarily from the LXX. This Greek translation of the Hebrew OT was John's Bible. It gave to John his theological vocabulary in the Greek language. And he uses it as a skilled artist, for it is the palette which he employs to depict the images he saw in his vision.[92] Often John will use the words and phrases and thought patterns of the LXX as an artist would inlay small pieces of various colored glass or tile to form a mosaic. For example, in 1:12–16, where John describes the appearance of the exalted Christ as the Son of Man, he uses Daniel 7 and 10 as his sources. He takes the words and phrases of Daniel and uses them to form his mosaic of the exalted Son of Man in Revelation 1. While Daniel serves as his source, the finished picture of Christ in Revelation 1 transcends that of the Son of Man in Daniel 7 and 10. For John is a creative artist even when he uses other sources. His portrait of the Son of Man is similar to that of Daniel, yet distinctly his own rendering. At various places throughout Revelation he demonstrates his literary artistry in other innovative uses of the OT. In this type of creativity he is paramount among the authors of the NT. (CC pp. 1-29)

The Transmission and Interpretation of Revelation

The Greek Text of Revelation

The earliest manuscript of Revelation is P^{98}, a papyrus fragment of 1:13–20 now located in Cairo in the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology and dated probably to the second century A.D. It is too brief to be of much significance for establishing the text of Revelation. Its importance lies rather in the fact that it is dated so close to the autograph of Revelation. There are six known Greek papyri manuscripts of Revelation, five of which are only small fragments. The sixth is by far the most important papyrus manuscript of Revelation: P^{47} in the Chester Beatty Library collection in Dublin. It is dated in the third century and is of great use in helping to establish the text of Revelation. However, even this important witness is fragmentary, containing only 9:10–17:2 with some lacunae. (CC pp. 1-29)

There are eleven known uncial manuscripts of Revelation, dating from the fourth to the tenth centuries. Only four (**א**, A, 046, 052) contain the whole of Revelation. The remainder are incomplete. In addition there are around 275 cursive/minuscule manuscripts dating from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, the most important of which is codex 1 of the twelfth century. (CC pp. 1-29)

The single most important witness to the Greek text of Revelation is codex Alexandrinus (A). The value of its witness to the original text is attested by the fact that it retains many Semiticisms not found in other manuscripts. Next in importance is codex Ephraemi (C). Codex Sinaiticus (**א**) is less important than codex A and codex C because it tends to alter the Semitic Greek so as to make it conform more closely to typical Koine usage. The Chester Beatty papyrus (P^{47}) also frequently alters the Semiticisms and therefore is closer to codex **א** than to codex A in terms of its importance as a witness to the text. (CC pp. 1-29)

There are no major problems in ascertaining the text of Revelation. Those variant readings which are of special interest or which, if adopted, could alter slightly the meaning of a given verse will be discussed in the textual notes. (CC pp. 1-29)

Early Commentaries

The two earliest known commentaries on Revelation are those by Melito, bishop of Sardis, who died about A.D. 190, and by Hippolytus, a theologian and possibly also a presbyter of Rome, who died in ca. A.D. 235. Both wrote their commentaries in Greek (even though Hippolytus was a Western father). Sadly, both commentaries are lost. We know of their existence from Eusebius and Jerome. The oldest extant Greek commentary on Revelation is that of Oecumenius, who lived in the sixth century.[101] Little is known of his life. The next oldest Greek commentary is that of Andreas, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, who died in A.D. 614. (CC pp. 1-29)

The earliest known Latin commentary which is still in existence is that of Victorinus, bishop of Pettau in Pannonia, who died around A.D. 304, possibly by martyrdom. He is generally recognized as the first great exegete of the Western church. Of his many commentaries, only that on Revelation has survived. It now holds the honor of being the oldest extant commentary on Revelation. The next oldest Latin commentary which is still extant is that of Primasius, who was bishop of Hadrumetum in North Africa and lived during the sixth century.[104] His commentary is largely based on an earlier commentary, no longer extant, by Tyconius, a Donatist theologian who died around A.D. 400. There are also extensive homiletical notes on Revelation by Augustine (354–430), some of which are still in existence. Throughout the early and later Middle Ages several commentaries on Revelation were written by Latin fathers such as Bede (673–735),[106] Alcuin (735–804), and Anselm of Laon (died ca. 1117). (CC pp. 1-29)

Commentaries on Revelation from the earliest time up to and through the Middle Ages are of particular interest to the church historian and theologian. Yet they also contain interesting and important interpretations for the modern exegete. Some reference will be made to them throughout this commentary. (CC pp. 1-29)

Interpreting Revelation

Throughout the history of the church, Revelation has been interpreted in many different ways. In the final analysis, the variety of methods can be reduced to two basic ways of interpreting and understanding the book. One places the book on a linear scale, a straight line, so that each item related in the book follows or succeeds that which was related before, and the events unfold in an orderly, chronological way. This method is sometimes called the *millenarian* method. The other method is cyclic, today more commonly called the *recapitulation* approach. This method understands the prophecy of the book to be repetitive, so that the events are described several times, with each description covering the same time period. (CC pp. 1-29)

Throughout most of the history of the church these two methods of interpreting Revelation have coexisted, but often with one, then the other dominating. While the linear or millenarian method is popular today, increasingly the recapitulation method is coming again into its own. At first glance, the linear way of understanding Revelation might seem more rational and plausible, but the repetition of many of the events makes it difficult to view the book as linear. For example, the end of this present world is depicted several times, though in different ways, throughout the book (6:12–17; 11:15–19; 14:14–20; 16:17–21; and 19:1–21). The repetition of events such as this suggests that Revelation cannot be interpreted on a linear, chronological scale. The visions of the seven seals (6:1–17; 8:1–5), the seven trumpet-angels (Revelation 8:6–9:21; 11:15–19), and the seven angels with censers (15:1–16:21) are all parallel and cover the same time period, namely, events on earth from Christ's ascension to his parousia. This suggests that the proper method of interpretation is that of the cyclic or recapitulation approach. It is with this method of interpreting and

understanding the structure of Revelation that the present commentary is written. (CC pp. 1-29)

The Book of Revelation - TLSB

WHEN I SAW HIM, I FELL AT HIS FEET AS though dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this." (1:17–19)

The Book of Revelation is unique within the New Testament. Although features of Revelation are comparable to other New Testament Epistles (cf 1:4; 2–3; 22:21), on the whole the Book has a markedly different style, which requires special reflection and explanation.

A Startling Portrait
In 1890, artist Vincent van Gogh wrote his sister Wilhelmina that he would like to "paint portraits that become a revelation." The images he created startled and even repulsed those who first viewed them. For years, Van Gogh's work collected dust. During his life, he sold only one painting! He was regarded as an utter failure. Yet today his works sell for millions of dollars because no one painted like Van Gogh. Through intensely personal qualities, his works revealed this long-hidden artist.

The last Book of the Bible also startled and repulsed people who first read it. Whereas congregations immediately and universally accepted the Gospels as genuine portraits of Jesus, Christians needed time to see the value of Revelation. Some congregations in the Early Church would not include Revelation in their list of books to read during worship, even though John wrote Revelation for that specific purpose (cf 1:3; on authorship, see p 2196). Yet in time, Christians embraced this intense and dramatic portrait—a personal revelation—of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Apocalyptic Style
Perhaps the greatest reason people questioned the value and authenticity of Revelation came from its style, summarized by the Greek word *apokalypsis*, "to uncover or reveal." Authors like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah wrote in this way, rapidly recording what God revealed to them through heavenly visions. (See pp 1393–95.) But Revelation speaks with a new intensity. It contrasts with the apostle John's other reflective works in the New Testament. Like an excited artist capturing his subject through bold strokes and daubs, John moves the reader from vision to vision, describing heaven's brilliant colors and the devil's dark deeds. Revelation describes life not as we see it with physical eyes but as God sees it and shows it to His trembling disciple.

As you study Revelation, do not let the drama or colorful descriptions distract you from the artist's real subject: Jesus. John knew Jesus of Nazareth in weakness, when He walked the dusty roads of Galilee and suffered betrayal and crucifixion. That is what

John describes in his Gospel. In Revelation, John shows how Jesus now reigns in eternal splendor. He shows that even though Jesus now enjoys the full restoration of His glory, His thoughts and plans focus here on earth with you.

Revelation's Colorful Character

Long before Vincent van Gogh amazed us with his bold use of colors, John recorded brilliant colors in the visions of Revelation. Learn more about these colors and their meanings:

Colors	References
Agate (chalcedony)	21:19
Amethyst	21:20
Beryl	21:20
Black	6:5, 12
Bronze	1:15; 2:18; 9:20; 18:12
Carnelian (sardius)	4:3; 21:20
Chrysolite	21:20
Chrysoprase	21:20
Crystal	4:6; 21:11; 22:1
Emerald	4:3; 21:19
Fire	1:14; 2:18; 9:17; 16:8; 19:12
Gold	1:12–13; 3:18; 4:4; 9:7, 13, 20; 15:6; 17:4; 18:12, 16; 21:18, 21
Green	9:4
Ivory	18:12
Jacinth	21:20
Jasper	4:3; 21:11, 18–19
Onyx (sardonyx)	21:20
Pale	6:8

Pearl	17:4; 18:12, 16; 21:21
Purple	17:4; 18:12, 16
Red	6:4, 12; 12:3; 16:4; 19:13
Sapphire (hyacinth)	9:17; 21:19
Scarlet	17:3–4; 18:12, 16
Silver	9:20; 18:12
Sulfur	9:17
Topaz	21:20
White	1:14; 2:17; 3:4–5, 18; 4:4; 6:2, 11; 7:9, 13–14; 14:14; 15:6; 19:8, 11, 14; 20:11

A quick look at this list shows the dominance of white and gold, colors associated with purity, holiness, and glory. Note that many colors have both a positive and a negative use. For example, white comes in a variety of shades: snow, wool, fine linen, and pale as a corpse. Gold appears on the garments and vessels of heaven, yet it also glimmers on the idols of Babylon. Remarkably, the color blue, which we often associate with heaven because of the blueness of the sky, never gets mentioned directly (though some translations use “blue” to translate Gk *hyakinthos*, Eng hyacinth in 9:17).

Throughout, we behold the red blood of Christ, shed for our salvation. Contrary to all earthly experience, that red blood turns the robes of the saints pure white (7:14). “Blessed are those who wash their robes” in the blood of the Lamb (22:14)!

AD 33	AD 49	AD 70	AD 95	AD 132
Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost	Jerusalem Council	Romans destroy Jerusalem	Revelation written	Bar Kokhba revolt begins

OVERVIEW

Author
John the apostle

Date
AD 95

Places
Patmos; Ephesus; Smyrna; Pergamum; Thyatira; Sardis; Philadelphia; Laodicea; the Euphrates; Jerusalem; Mount Zion; Armageddon

People
John; seven congregations in Asia; false teachers (Nicolaitans; the "synagogue of Satan"; Jezebel)

Purpose
To comfort suffering Christians and encourage their faithful witness with prophetic portraits of the victory that is already ours in the risen and living Lamb of God, Jesus Christ

Law Themes
Deception of false prophets; call to repentance; beasts; dragon (Satan); God's wrath; plagues; torment; woe; bottomless pit; tribulation; Babylon the great; second death; judgment; call to patient endurance

Gospel Themes
Word of God; made a kingdom, priests; Jesus' love; Lamb of God and numerous titles for the Savior; Spirit and authority of God; truth; Christ who conquers; Lord God Almighty; tree of life; Bride of the Lamb (Church); God is faithful and true; water of life

Memory Verses
Be faithful (2:10); Jesus at the door (3:19–20); the song and new song (4:11; 5:9–10); heaven's bliss (7:15–17); conquering Satan (12:10–11); marriage of the Lamb (19:6–9); Christ coming with recompense (22:12–15)

Revelation

Reading Revelation
A blinding flash pierced the dark shroud of storm clouds, followed by a deafening thunderclap. Contrary winds blasted salty spray over the side of the ship and into the navigator's face. The pitching waves lofted the ship and clawed at its hull as though they would pull it under. "All may be lost," the navigator whispered to himself.

But then, for a moment, a beam of moonlight fell through the storm clouds to reveal an island and sheltered bay off the port side—a haven of hope amid the storm.

The challenging Book of Revelation presents not merely the stormy future of suffering that will afflict the earth but also a message of hope—a haven for the beleaguered soul. In Revelation, we see that Christ is enthroned on high, mediating on our behalf and planning for our salvation. He will return in glory to deliver the Church from evil. On the island of Patmos, He gave these stormy visions to John for our comfort.

Luther on Revelation

There are many different kinds of prophecy in Christendom. One is prophecy which interprets the writings of the prophets. Paul speaks of this in I Corinthians 12 and 14, and in other places as well. This is the most necessary kind and we must have it every day, because it teaches the Word of God, lays the foundation of Christendom, and defends the faith. In a word, it rules, preserves, establishes, and performs the preaching ministry.

Another kind foretells things to come which are not previously contained in Scripture, and this prophecy is of three types. The first expresses itself simply in words, without images and figures—as Moses, David, and others of the prophets prophesy about Christ, and as Christ and the apostles prophesy about Antichrist, false teachers, etc. The second type does this with images, but alongside them it supplies their interpretation in specific words—as Joseph interprets dreams, and Daniel both dreams and images. The third type does it without either words or interpretations, exclusively with images and figures, like this book of Revelation and like the dreams, visions, and images that many holy people have had from the Holy Spirit—as Peter in Acts 2[:17] preaches from Joel [2:28], "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." So long as this kind of prophecy remains without explanation and gets no sure interpretation, it is a concealed and mute prophecy and has not yet come to the profit and fruit which it is to give to Christendom.

This is the way it has been with this book heretofore. Many have tried their hands at it, but until this very day they have attained no certainty. Some have even brewed it into many stupid things out of their own heads. Because its interpretation is uncertain and its meaning hidden, we have also let it alone until now, especially because some of the ancient fathers held that it was not the work of St. John, the Apostle—as is stated in *The Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, chapter 25. For our part, we still share this doubt. By that, however, no one should be prevented from regarding this as the work of St. John the Apostle, or of whomever else he chooses.…

We can profit by this book and make good use of it. First, for our comfort! We can rest assured that neither force nor lies, neither wisdom nor holiness, neither tribulation nor suffering shall suppress Christendom, but it will gain the victory and conquer at last.

Second, for our warning! [We can be on guard] against the great, perilous, and manifold offense that inflicts itself upon Christendom. Because these mighty and imposing powers are to fight against Christendom, and it is to be deprived of outward shape and concealed under so many tribulations and heresies and other faults, is impossible for the natural reason to recognize Christendom. On the contrary, natural reason falls away and takes offense. It calls that "the Christian Church" which is really the worst enemy of the Christian Church. Similarly, it calls those persons damned heretics who are really the true Christian Church. This has happened before, under the papacy, under Mohammed, indeed with all the heretics. Thus they lose this article [of the Creed], "I believe in the holy Christian Church." …

This is why natural reason cannot recognize it, even if it puts on all its glasses. The devil can cover it over with offenses and divisions, so that you have to take offense at it. God too can conceal it behind faults and shortcomings of all kinds, so that you necessarily become a fool and pass false judgment on it. Christendom will not be known by sight, but by faith. And faith has to do with things not seen, Hebrews 11[:1]. Christendom joins with her Lord in the song, "Blessed is he who takes no offense at me" [Matt. 11:6]. A Christian is even hidden from himself; he does not see his holiness and virtue, but sees in

himself nothing but unholiness and vice. And you, stupid know-it-all, would behold Christendom with your blind reason and unclean eyes!

In a word, our holiness is in heaven, where Christ is; and not in the world, before men's eyes, like goods in the market place. Therefore let there be offenses, divisions, heresies, and faults; let them do what they can! If only the word of the gospel remains pure among us, and we love and cherish it, we shall not doubt that Christ is with us, even when things are at their worst. As we see here in this book, that through and beyond all plagues, beasts, and evil angels Christ is nonetheless with his saints, and wins the final victory. (AE 35:399–411)

Challenges for Readers

Study Other Books First. Many interpreters become horribly confused about the Book of Revelation because they fail to understand the character of biblical prophecy. They typically read Revelation as depicting a series of end-times events that simply happen one after the other. Such an approach usually generates a long, confusing wall chart and bizarre investigation of current events (e.g., dispensationalism, premillennialism, and postmillennialism), searching for things that might connect with the symbols in Revelation. Anyone wishing to understand the complex symbolism and visions of Revelation must first acquire (1) a broad understanding of OT prophecy generally and (2) a specific, clear understanding of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. If you have not carefully studied OT prophecy, do not begin a study of Revelation. Do your homework; study the OT first. See pp 1425–26, 2099. On the complex structure of Revelation, see the following outline and notes.

Symbolism. In Revelation, Jesus is described as "one like a son of man" (1:13), a lion (5:5), and a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes (5:6). Clearly, the Book is very symbolic. Those who try to read the visions literally end up interpreting and applying the Book in hopelessly confused ways. To understand the symbolism in Revelation, study OT prophecy first.

Authorship and Date. Early tradition from Irenaeus attributed Revelation to the apostle John, "who beheld the apocalyptic vision … towards the end of Domitian's reign" (AD 81–96; *ANF* 1:559–60). Information in the overview of this Bible is based on this traditional understanding. However, readers should also know that some scholars propose an earlier date for Revelation, c AD 68, during the persecution that took place under Emperor Nero (AD 54–68). Both explanations are defensible and the interpretation and application of the Book is not adversely affected in either case.

Book of Woe or Book of Comfort? God's throne is the central thematic element of OT apocalyptic literature (Ezk 1; Dn 7). Rv 4–5 builds on this theme by depicting the enthronement of Christ after His ascension. All other scenes in the Book must be understood in light of this central vision, which depicts Jesus as the worthy Savior of His people and judge of Satan and his followers. This central theme shows that Revelation is not chiefly a book of woe but a book of comfort for God's people. Luther explained, "In chapters 4 and 5 there is prefigured the whole of Christendom that is to suffer these coming tribulations and plagues. There are twenty-four elders before God (that is, all the

bishops and teachers in unity); they are crowned with faith, and praise Christ, the Lamb of God, with harps (that is, they preach); and they worship him with censers (that is, they exercise themselves in prayer). All this is for the comfort of Christians, that they may know that Christendom is to endure in spite of the plagues that are going to come" (AE 35:401). Across the centuries, the heavenly anthems (4:8, 11; 5:9–10) and John's vision of heavenly worship have greatly influenced the Church's liturgy (e.g., focus on the Holy Trinity, celebration of redemption, and worship in courtly style). On OT liturgical practices, see p 959.

Structure of Revelation. Do not fall into the trap of reading Revelation as one long timeline about the end of the world—note well its repetitions. Rv 6:1–21:8 is arranged as a series of visionary scenes that repeatedly depict the end of the world in different ways. Each scene emphasizes different themes and aspects of the one judgment that will come at the end of time. Recognizing this is crucial to understanding the Book. Carefully review the following outline. The study notes also alert readers to this important structure.

The Millennium. See p 2199.

THE SETTING OF REVELATION

When John received his revelation, he "was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rv 1:9). Patmos is a small island off the coast of Miletus.

Revelation is addressed to the seven churches in the cities marked with squares: *Ephesus* was an important stop on Paul's second and third missionary journeys (Ac 18:19–21; 19). It successfully vied with *Smyrna* and *Pergamum* to be the chief city of Asia Minor. Like Smyrna and the other cities mentioned by John, Ephesus embraced the emperor cult. It also held the temple of Artemis. Pergamum boasted of a great library and many pagan temples. *Thyatira* was known for its cloth dyers (Ac 16:14) and for general worldliness. *Sardis* lived to recall its past glory. Philadelphia was known for its pagan temples. *Laodicea*, located at an important trade-route junction, was a wool producer and a center of medicine (cf Col 4:13–16).

The "Rapture" Theory. Some evangelical interpreters take a variety of passages in the Bible, including Rv 4–5, as predicting an event named the "rapture" (see p 2051; see also note, 1Th 4:17). According to this view, Christ will return to take all Christians out of the world before a seven-year period of distress begins. This ensuing "tribulation" (which they see in Rv 6–19) is believed to end as a "millennium" begins (see note, Rv 20:2; see also p 2199). They claim that Christ will return yet again to administer the final judgment (this makes a third return, nowhere mentioned in Scripture). In contrast to such a rapture theory, Scripture repeatedly states that Christ will return again only once: His second coming (as stated in the Apostles' Creed). At that time, Christ will raise both believers and unbelievers from the dead for the last judgment (Mt 25:31–46; Jn 5:28–29; Ac 24:15; 1Th 4:13–15; Rv 1:7; 20:11–15).

Blessings for Readers

As you study Revelation, take to heart Jesus' admonition and encouragement for the churches in John's day (chs 2–3). Apply His words for your life and the life of your congregation. Pray for ears to hear what the Spirit says through the Word.

Most important, ask the Lord to maintain your focus on the heavenly vision of chs 4–5, which describe the reign of your Savior. No matter what the devil may throw at you, Christ your King is with you. He has overcome the evil one. He will strengthen you in the face of all persecution and distress. Pray for those who live in fear of worldly troubles or of the last judgment, that through the forgiveness of sins, the Lord would extend His perfect peace to them; the Church may face the future with all boldness and confidence in Christ.

Outline
Revelation is a series of visions. The first two visions describe Jesus appearing to John and messages that Jesus asks John to share with seven churches. Chs 4 and 5 are the heart of the book, revealing the worthiness of Jesus, who will save His people and judge the world.

Chs 6–21 are scenes of the end-times judgment. Three of Revelation's end-times scenes are clearly structured in seven parts (6:1–8:5; 8:6–11:19; 15:1–16:21). The other visions lack this sevenfold structure. The vision of 12:1–14:20 is clearly delimited by the sevenfold visions that come before and after it. Interpreters divide up 17:1–20:8 in different ways.

The End Times in Revelation

Though Revelation can be difficult to understand because it uses so many symbols, it actually provides a very simple description of the End Times as the early Christians noticed. For example, after reading Revelation and the rest of Scripture, the early Christians summarized the End Times as follows: "[Jesus now] sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead … We believe in … the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting" (The Apostles' Creed). For centuries this simple summary of the End Times—rooted in Revelation—guided Christian teaching.

Today, however, false teachers have created many confusing and complex interpretations of Revelation. They have added false doctrines like the *Rapture* and the *Millennium* to Revelation's summary of the End Times. As a result, many Christians are confused about what will happen in the future. For a simple, clear understanding of how Revelation differs from modern, false opinions, study the timelines below. Be sure to look up the Bible references and see how Revelation agrees with the rest of God's Word.

REVELATIION - CSB

God's Grace in Revelation†

As in Genesis we see the beginning of God's grace, so in Revelation we view the consummation of God's grace. God's plan of salvation is brought to eternal fruition, conquering all of its civil and religious opponents. John's account is truly "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1), since it comes from him and centers on him. It tells of his glory, wisdom, power, authority, righteous wrath and return to judge the world and to receive all who believe through God's grace into eternal bliss—into a new heaven, a new Jerusalem with the angelic hosts.

Luther on Revelation†

"… we can profit by this book and make good use of it … We can rest assured that neither force nor lies, neither wisdom nor holiness, neither tribulation nor suffering shall suppress Christendom, but it will gain the victory and conquer at last" (*LW* 35:409).

Author†

Four times the author identifies himself as John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). From as early as Justin Martyr in the second century A.D. it has been held that this John was the apostle, the son of Zebedee (see Mt 10:2). The book itself reveals that the author was a Jew, well versed in Scripture, a church leader who was well known to the seven churches of Asia Minor, and a deeply religious person fully convinced that the Christian faith would soon triumph over the demonic forces at work in the world.

In the third century, however, an African bishop named Dionysius compared the language, style and thought of the Apocalypse (Revelation) with that of the other writings of John and decided that the book could not have been written by the apostle John. He suggested that the author was a certain John the Presbyter. Although many today follow Dionysius in his view of authorship, the external evidence seems overwhelmingly supportive of the traditional view.

Eusebius (*History,* 3.25. 2–4) misconstrued a statement of Papias and assumed a certain "John the Elder (Presbyter)," because he had a theological "ax to grind." He was looking for a nonapostolic author for Revelation, since the derogatory remarks in Revelation concerning Rome (Babylon) were embarrassing at that time (c. A.D. 324), after the emperor Constantine had converted to Christianity (c. A.D. 312). All the references in Papias are to "the elder John"—i.e., to the aged apostle. If there were a second John, the form of his name would have been "John the Elder" (as in the case of "John the Baptizer")—to distinguish him from John the apostle.

Concerning style, some unusual grammatical constructions in Revelation are found also in John's Gospel (e.g., the change in case for appositives; cf. Rev 1:5; Jn 1:14). Other instances are best explained as Aramaic influence and as characteristic of apocalyptic literature.

Date

Revelation was written when Christians were entering a time of persecution. The two periods most often mentioned are the latter part of Nero's reign (A.D. 54–68) and the latter part of Domitian's reign (81–96). Most scholars date the book c. 95. (A few suggest a date during the reign of Vespasian: 69–79.)

Occasion

Since Roman authorities at this time were beginning to enforce the cult of emperor worship, Christians—who held that Christ, not Caesar, was Lord—were facing increasing hostility. The believers at Smyrna are warned against coming opposition (2:10), and the church at Philadelphia is told of an hour of trial coming on the world (3:10). Antipas has already given his life (2:13) along with others (6:9). John has been exiled to the island of Patmos (probably the site of a Roman penal colony) for his activities as a Christian missionary (1:9). Some within the church are advocating a policy of compromise (2:14–15, 20), which has to be corrected before its subtle influence can undermine the determination of believers to stand fast in the perilous days that lie ahead.

Purpose

John writes to encourage the faithful to resist staunchly the demands of emperor worship. He informs his readers that the final showdown between God and Satan is imminent. Satan will increase his persecution of believers, but they must stand fast, even to death. They are sealed against any spiritual harm and will soon be vindicated when Christ returns, when the wicked are forever destroyed, and when God's people enter an eternity of glory and blessedness.

Literary Form

For an adequate understanding of Revelation, the reader must recognize that it is a distinct kind of literature. Revelation is apocalyptic, a kind of writing that is highly symbolic. Although its visions often seem bizarre to the Western reader, fortunately the book provides a number of clues for its own interpretation (e.g., stars are angels, lampstands are churches, 1:20; "the great prostitute," 17:1, is "Babylon" [Rome?], 17:5, 18; and the heavenly Jerusalem is the wife of the Lamb, 21:9–10).

Distinctive Feature: Symbolism of Numbers†

One example is the frequent use of the number seven (52 times). There are seven beatitudes (see note on 1:3), seven churches (1:4, 11), seven spirits (1:4), seven golden lampstands (1:12), seven stars (1:16), seven seals (5:1), seven horns and seven eyes (5:6), seven trumpets (8:2), seven thunders (10:3), seven signs (12:1, 3; 13:13–14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20), seven crowns (12:3), seven plagues (15:6), seven golden bowls (15:7), seven hills (17:9) and seven kings (17:10), as well as other sevens.

Revelation may be divided into seven major visions (see Alternate Outline below). The number seven may stand for completeness, or it may symbolize the reunion of God with men through his covenant of grace, as three is the number of God and four is the number of the world (three plus four equals seven).

Three and one-half, since it is always associated with evil forces of a spiritual and religious character that oppose the church, would be the symbol of the broken covenant (half of the number seven, the number of the covenant). Twelve (and its multiples: 24, 144, 12,000, 144,000) is the number of the church. Ten, with its cube 1,000, appears to be the number of completeness.

Interpretation†

Interpreters of Revelation normally fall into four groups:

1. *Preterists* understand the book exclusively in terms of its first-century setting, claiming that most of its events have already taken place.
2. *Historicists* take it as describing the long chain of events from Patmos to the end of history.
3. *Futurists* place the book primarily in the end times.
4. *Idealists* view it as symbolic pictures of such timeless truths as the victory of good over evil.

The interpretation of the Historicists is no doubt the preferable view. It is important to realize, however, that the visions are not to be explained as if they were successive to each other chronologically. Each major vision from the seven seals to the seven bowls (see Alternate Outline below) discusses a different aspect of the same period—namely, the entire NT era, from Jesus' ministry to his second coming. That is, John is employing a spiral method as he does both in his Gospel (the parallelism of vv. 11a, 11b, 12, 16 in the prologue and the basic outline of the book) and in his first letter (see Introduction to 1 John: Outline).

Siebert Becker…Symbolic and figurative language must never be pressed beyond the point of comparison. That does not mean that the symbols are arbitrary and can be interpreted any way aT all. There is a reason why the Savior is described as a lamb and the devil is pictured as a great red dragon. Those who remember that the Savior told his disciples to let their light shine will know why the seven golden candlesticks are used as symbols for the seven churches.

In the ancient world, grotesque symbols always symbolized something supernatural. At times the grotesque was combined with symbols from everyday life to indicate the entry of the supernatural into the everyday lives of people. Example: The Jews of the first century still regarded the Babylonian captivity with horror, a horror akin to that which the Holocaust holds for present-day Jews. So John used Babylon to represent the satanic power and evil of Rome and also for all future satanic powers that would persecute the people of God. CPH P.14

In the Bible's apocalyptic writings (Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah etc.) God inspired his prophets to use exciting word pictures. Apocalypse, then is bold, picturesque language that describes the coming of Jesus, either his first coming to redeem his people or his final coming to take them home.

To avoid false interpretations, we must look carefully at the words that lead up to passages we have questions about. The words themselves will tell us when John is speaking directly and when he is describing the visions the Spirit gave to him.

Like Jesus' parables, each picture has one point of focus that conveys a single lesson. Individual details contribute to the overall beauty of a vision but must not detract our attention from the main point. John explains many of his own word pictures, just as Jesus frequently did in his parables. A few of John's pictures will remain hidden to us, (PBC P.3)