

Introduction to Revelation¹

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Authorship

External evidence indicates that the Apostle John wrote Revelation. Such external pieces of evidence include Justin Martyr, Shepherd of Hermas, Melito, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the Muratorian Canon. There is a virtual unanimous early witness that John authored the Apocalypse. *Internal evidence* also indicates that John wrote the book. John is named five times in the book (1:1, 4, 9; 21:2; 22:8). The book refers to its writer as Christ's servant (1:1), a brother and companion in tribulation (1:9), and on the Island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Christ (1:9). The writer also had credibility with the churches of Asia Minor (1:11). Such a description fits John since tradition indicates that he was bishop over Asia Minor toward the end of his life and ministry. Because of the book's dependence upon the Old Testament, its writer obviously had great familiarity with it. Again, this characterization fits John given his Jewish heritage.

Despite the persuasiveness of these arguments, many postulate that John was not the author of the book on the grounds that Revelation's style, grammar, vocabulary, expressions, theology, emphasis, and presentation are so different in comparison to John's other writings. For example, while "believe" is featured heavily in John's gospel, the word is absent in Revelation. Moreover, while John does not include his name in his gospel, he includes it several times in Revelation. However, there are similarities between Revelation and John's other writings. Both make use of the

¹ Material for this section was compiled from various sources, including Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 509-16; Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 391-98; John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983), 925-27; *Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 482-92; Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Revelation," online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 8 December 2005, 1-2; Stanley Toussaint, "The Revelation of John," (unpublished class notes in BE 307B Hebrews, General Epistles, and Revelation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 1-4.

terms “true,” “lamb,” and “logos” (John 1:1; Rev 19:13). Both also allude to Zechariah 12:10 (John 19:37; Rev 1:7). The Book of Revelation also makes use of the notions of “water of life,” “overcomers,” and “commandment keepers” as do John’s other writings. Both Revelation and John’s other writings also focus upon the conflicting themes of light and darkness, love and hatred, and good and evil.

Perhaps the differences between John’s other writings and Revelation are explainable due to the unusual circumstances surrounding the composition of the Apocalypse. While John’s other writings were the product of careful reflection, Revelation came about because of a sudden reception of a vision. Moreover, while his other writings may have been completed through the assistance of an amanuensis, no amanuensis was available to John on Patmos. Also, the differences in theology could be due to the fact that the subject matter of the visions was so different in comparison to what John had written before. In addition, differences in presentation are attributable to the fact that the vision relayed information to John in a specific genre while John’s other writings are recorded in an entirely different genre. Interestingly, one notices similar differences in grammar and vocabulary when comparing the writings of some first century Greek authors.

Others question Johannine authorship of the Apocalypse on the ground that the writer distinguishes himself from the other apostles in 21:14. However, Paul follows this same practice. While identifying himself as the author of the letter to the Ephesians (1:1), he goes on to seemingly distinguish himself from the apostles in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5. Others contend that if the Apostle John had penned the book he would have attached the word “apostle” to his name somewhere in the letter and yet the writer fails to do so. However, it would have been redundant for John to follow such a practice since he was already well respected by the churches of Asia Minor (1:11).

Johannine authorship of Revelation was not questioned until Dionysius first raised the issue in the third century. While Calvin, Erasmus, and Zwingli rejected Johannine authorship of the Apocalypse, virtually all other orthodox scholars have accepted the apostle John as the book’s writer. The suggestion that some other John rather than the apostle John wrote the book, such as John the elder, a prophet named John, or John Mark, creates more problems than it solves. Similarity of style found throughout the book indicates that John is the book’s single author.

Place of Writing

The vision was addressed to John (1:1) who was exiled on the Island of Patmos at the time (1:9). Patmos is an island located off the west coast of Asia Minor 60 miles south west of Ephesus. It was a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea. It was an island that abounded with volcanic rock and a place where the Roman Empire exiled people. Numerous church fathers (Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Eusebius, Victorinus) indicated that John was released from Patmos at the conclusion of Domitian's reign (A.D. 96) and then returned to Ephesus. The exact date of John's release from Patmos is unknown. However, most assume that the book was completed on Patmos before John's release and return to Ephesus (1:11; 22:7; 9, 10, 18, 19).

Destination

The letter was addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor (1:4, 11). It was intended as a circular letter (1 Pet 1:1). In other words, it was read first by Ephesus and then passed on to Smyrna. After Smyrna read the letter, it was then passed on to Pergamum, etc... According to tradition, John had already been the bishop over Asia Minor for some time before the book was written. Because he was already well known in this area, the churches of Asia Minor would have readily accepted his writings. Because his audience consisted of churches, it seems he was addressing those who were already believers who needed to progress further in the area of practical sanctification.²

Canonicity

Some objected to the inclusion of Revelation in the *canon* on the grounds that its style was so different in comparison to other New Testament writings. Others opposed canonicity because the book taught a future earthly reign of Christ, which contradicted prevailing amillennial theological presuppositions. Yet Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Eusebius, Apollonius, and Theophilus saw the book as divinely authored Scripture. Most have concluded that the book deserves canonical status because it complimented prior revelation (Dan; Matt 24–25).

² Because the letters featured in Revelation 2–3 are addressed to churches (2:1) and over comers (1 John 4:4; 5:3-5), promise rewards applicable to all believers (2:7; 22:2, 14; 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8; 3:5; 20:12, 15), and pronounce discipline (3:19; Heb 12:5-11), it is safe to conclude that John's audience consists of believers.

Title

The title of the book is derived from the opening verse, which says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” Interestingly, the book is not about or from John. Thus, John’s name should not be included in the book’s title. The noun “Revelation” (apokal upsis) is singular. Thus, the book records a singular revelation from God to John. Therefore, the proper title of the book is “Revelation” rather than “Revelations.” Apokal upsis means unveiling. Thus, the purpose of the book is to unveil Christ³ and the final phase of His plan of redemption.

Date

Many today propose a date of composition of the book prior to A.D. 70 during the Neronian reign. Preterism, which sees most or all of the book’s contents as being fulfilled in the events of A.D. 70, has a vested interest in promoting this early date.⁴ How can Revelation be a prophecy about A.D. 70 if the book were written 25 years after the fact? The notions that the letters in Nero’s full name add up to 666 (13:18), that the Nero *Redivivus* myth is spoken of in 13:3, 12, 14, that the temple (11:1-2) refers to the first century Jerusalem temple before it fell, that Revelation makes no mention of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and that the king reigning at the time John (17:10) wrote was Nero are all used to support the idea that John wrote prior to A.D. 70. However, most of this evidence is rather weak and has been successfully rebutted.⁵

It seems better to adhere to a date of A.D. 95 for the composition of the book toward the end of Domitian’s reign. *External evidence* for this late date includes a rather clear statement by Irenaeus that Revelation was written by John toward the end of Domitian’s reign. Irenaeus’ statement is important since he was discipled by Polycarp who in turn was discipled by John, the author of the Apocalypse. Though many have argued that Irenaeus statement is ambiguous, it was interpreted as favoring a Domitianic date for the first several centuries of church history. In fact,

³ “Jesus Christ” seems to function as a subjective genitive in the book’s title.

⁴ Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

⁵ Mark Hitchcock, “The Stake in the Heart: The A.D. 95 Date of Revelation,” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 123-50.

there is no clear statement from a church father indicating that John wrote the Apocalypse during the reign of Nero until the sixth century.⁶

Internal evidence for a Domitianic date can be found in the condition of the churches described in chapters 2–3. Paul addressed some of these same churches in the 60’s. Yet the churches depicted in Revelation seem very different from how Paul initially described them. Examples of such differences include Ephesus’ loss of first love (2:4) and the presence of the Nicolaitans (2:6). Such a spiritual change would presumably take several decades. Moreover, Laodicea is depicted as prosperous (3:17) and yet an earthquake destroyed that city in the 60’s. Presumably, it would have taken several decades for that city to return to the level of prosperity depicted in Revelation. Also, John did not move from Jerusalem to Ephesus until A.D. 67. Thus, a pre A.D. 70 date for Revelation would not have allowed him enough time to establish a respected ministry in Asia Minor. Furthermore, the Neronian persecution could not be the persecution mentioned in Revelation 2–3 since it was a local persecution confined to Rome and never extended into Asia Minor.

Structure

Several items must be kept in mind when contemplating the structure of Revelation. *First*, the key structural verse is found in 1:19. There, John is told to write “the things that he has seen, the things that are, and the things that will take place later.” This verse furnishes the three-fold division of the book. “The things that you have seen” represent the theophanic appearance of Christ that John recorded in chapter 1. “The things that are” represent the letters to the seven churches that are recorded in chapters 2–3. “The things that will be” represent the events of the future that are recorded in chapters 4–22. This third section can be divided further between the events of the tribulation (4:1-19:10), the second coming and subsequent events (19:11-20:15), and the eternal state (21–22).

Some object to this threefold division on the grounds that it is unbalanced since the third section encompasses most of the book. However, such an imbalance is justified upon recalling that Revelation is a prophetic book. Others object to this threefold division on the grounds that chapters

⁶ Ibid., 137.

4–22 do not affect the seven churches. However, this objection vanishes upon remembering that knowledge of the future influences one's present behavior (2 Pet 3:11).

Second, the three series of judgments found in the book take place in chronological order.⁷ Some have posited a recapitulation scheme with the judgments running concurrently and ending with the Second Coming. Such a view is defended on the grounds that the seventh trumpet (11:16–18) is described similarly to the seventh bowl (16:17) since both judgments seem to terminate with Christ's return. However, just because these judgments end the same way does not mean that they end at the same time or begin at the same time. The recapitulation view is also defended by arguing that it is impossible for the fourth trumpet, which darkens a third of the luminaries (8:12), to follow the sixth seal, which darkens all of the luminaries (6:12). However, the darkening of the luminaries in 6:12 could be a temporary rather than a permanent reality.

Therefore, it seems more reasonable to see the judgments progressing in a chronological fashion. They appear to increase in intensity. For example, after ¼ of humanity is destroyed (6:8), then 1/3 of humanity is destroyed (9:15, 18). Moreover, while the early judgments are fractional (8:8), the latter judgments are non fractional (16:3). Previous judgments seem to reach completion before the next judgments are introduced (11:14). For example, peace under the antichrist is introduced under the first seal (6:1–2) and then this peace is taken from the earth with the opening of the second seal (6:3–4). Similarly, the eternal state (21–22) chronologically follows the millennium (20:1–10) rather than being a mere recapitulation of it. This point becomes obvious by observing the numerous characteristics present in the millennium that will be absent in the eternal state. Some of the prophesied millennial activity will include time (20:4), a temple (Ezek 40–48), death (Isa 65:20), satanic activity (Rev 20:7), and human rebellion (Rev 20:8–9). Yet time (22:5), a temple (Rev 21:22), death (Rev 21:4), Satan (Rev 20:10), and sin (Rev 21:27) will be totally absent from the Eternal State.

Third, the judgments progress in a telescoping manner. In other words, the seventh seal introduces the trumpet judgments. These trumpet judgments explain the seventh seal. Similarly, the

⁷ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8 to 22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 525–43.

seventh trumpet introduces the bowl judgments. These bowl judgments explain the seventh trumpet. Several textual clues make this telescoping arrangement self-evident. When the seventh seal is opened, no immediate judgment takes place. Yet John calls attention to the angel that will sound the trumpets (8:1-2).

Also, when the fourth trumpet is sounded, the announcement of three remaining woes is given (8:13). While the fifth and sixth trumpets bring forth horrific judgment (9:1-12, 13-21), no immediate judgment is introduced with the seventh trumpet (11:15-19). Thus, in what sense is the seventh trumpet a third woe? The seventh trumpet is a third woe because it triggers the bowls that will bring forth the final woe. Along these same lines, the fifth trumpet announces the coming of the remaining two woes (9:12) because the seventh trumpet will have the function of introducing the bowls. Similarly, the sixth trumpet indicates that a final woe remains (11:14) because the seventh trumpet will have the function of introducing the bowls. Also, according to 10:7, the seventh trumpet will complete God's judgment. How can this be if the God's judgment will not be completed until the pouring forth of the bowls (15:1)? This connection is made because the seventh trumpet will trigger the bowl judgments.

Seals: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Trumpets: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Bowls: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Fourth, the three series of judgments are interrupted by five non-chronological, parenthetical insertions that offer further information on what has immediately transpired. The first insertion (7:1-17) occurs in between the sixth and seventh bowl. The second insertion (10:1-11:14) occurs in between the sixth and seventh trumpet. The third insertion (12:1-14:20) occurs in between the seventh trumpet and the first bowl. The fourth insertion (16:13-16) occurs in between the sixth and seventh bowl. The fifth insertion (17:1-19:6) occurs in between the seventh bowl and the Second Advent.

SEALS	TRUMPETS	BOWLS
Judgments 1-6 (7:1-17) 7	Judgments 1-6 (10:1-11:14) 7 (12:1-14:20)	Judgments 1-6 (16:13-16) 7 (17:1-19:6)

Method of Communication

John's function in the communication of the vision seems to have been that of a stenographer. He was an observer of the vision who was told to write down what he saw and heard (1:11). In fact, John is given the command to write twelve times throughout the book. John's role becomes apparent by noting the repetition of the phrase "I saw" and "I heard" dispersed throughout the book. The first chapter of the book records the intricate communication process regarding how the vision was to be conveyed from God to John's audience (1:1-4). The Revelation was conveyed from God the Father to Jesus Christ to an angel to John to a book to a reader (presumably the messenger of a given church) to the listener (presumably a church congregation).

Methods of Interpretation

Not all scholars agree upon how to interpret Revelation 6–19 or how to handle the character of the millennium. There are four basic methods for interpreting Revelation. *Preterism* sees most or all of the book's contents fulfilled in the past.⁸ *Historicism* sees most or all of the book's contents as finding a fulfillment in church history. *Idealism* divorces the book's contents from history instead opting to see them as recurring throughout every generation. *Futurism* believes that most of the book's contents await a future fulfillment. This approach is the product of a consistent literal, grammatical, historical approach. This latter approach is the one followed in this argument.

⁸ There are at least two broad categories of preterism. First, full preterism holds that all of the prophecies in the Book of Revelation were fulfilled during the Jewish War in the years A.D. 66 to 70. Second, partial preterism holds that most of the prophecies in the Book of Revelation were fulfilled in the Jewish War of A.D. 66 to 70. Partial preterists believe that the only prophetic events yet to be fulfilled are a future *Parousia*, the general judgment, and the general resurrection. This second category is the most common view held by preterists today.

Amillennialism believes that because the millennium is a present reality, there will be no future kingdom on earth. *Postmillennialism* believes that the church will make progress in Christianizing the world and thus ushering in the kingdom and then Christ will return. These two approaches hold to replacement theology, which teaches that the promises to Israel have been transferred to the church or the “new Israel” and are now being fulfilled in a spiritual sense. *Premillennialism* believes that the kingdom age will only begin after Christ’s return. This latter approach adheres to a consistent hermeneutic and is the one followed in this argument. Preterists, historicists, and idealists are either amillennial or postmillennial while futurists are premillennial.

Some premillennialists are *covenant premillennialists*. They reject the notion that God has separate programs for Israel and the church (and therefore are replacement theologians), the notion that the 1000-year duration of the kingdom is a literal time period (although they do not deny a future, earthly kingdom), and pretribulationism. Instead they embrace posttribulationism (see below definitions). Another premillennial approach is that of *dispensational premillennialism*. They interpret the number 1000, which occurs six times in Revelation 20:1-10, literally. They also believe that God has separate programs for Israel and the church. They see Revelation 6–19 as an expansion of the missing week in Daniel’s prophecy of the 70 weeks (Dan 9:24-27). They also embrace pretribulationism. This latter approach is the product of a consistent hermeneutical approach and is the one followed in this argument.

Premillennialists are also divided as to the timing of the rapture.⁹ There are five rapture views. The first view is *partial rapturism*, which teaches that only the “spiritual” Christians will be raptured. However, this view unnecessarily divides Christ’s body. The second view is *pre wrath rapturism*, which teaches that the church will be raptured after three quarters of the tribulation has transpired. This view believes that God’s wrath or the Day of the Lord will only encompass the final quarter of the tribulation. The third view is *mid tribulationism*, which teaches that the church will be removed mid way through the tribulation. The fourth view is *post tribulationism*, which

⁹ While some seek to merge the rapture and the second coming into one event, the differences between the two events make it obvious that two distinct events are in view. For an exhaustive list of the differences between the two events, see H. Wayne House and Randall Price, *Charts of Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 98-99.

teaches that the church will be removed at the end of the tribulation.¹⁰ The fifth view is *pre tribulationalism*, which teaches that the church will be removed before the tribulation begins.

Pre tribulationalism has better arguments in its favor. *First*, although the church is mentioned 19 times in chapters 1–3, both the word and the concept¹¹ disappear and do not reappear until 22:16.¹² *Second*, only pretribulationalism handles fairly the New Testament emphasis upon imminency (Phil 3:20; 4:5). All the other views teach that Christ cannot return any time because some prophetic scheme must first transpire before the rapture can occur. *Third*, the tribulation period represents a time when God completes His unfinished work with national Israel (Dan 9:24). Thus, the church cannot be present since He deals with Israel and the church on a mutually exclusive basis.¹³ *Fourth*, because the church has been promised an exemption from divine wrath (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rom 5:9) and the tribulation represents a time of divine wrath (6:17), the church cannot be present during this time period.

Genre and Hermeneutics

Revelation exhibits multiple genres. The first genre represented is that of *prophecy*. The book claims to be prophecy on several occasions (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). The second genre

¹⁰ A major weakness of post tribulationalism is its failure to explain who populates the millennium. In the millennium, there will exist a sizeable population who will bear children (Isa 65:20, 23), sin (Zech 14:16-19; Rev 20:7-10), and experience death (Isa 65:20). Thus, mortals will exist in the millennium. However, if all believers are translated at the end of the tribulation as post tribulationalism asserts, where do the mortals come from who will repopulate the millennium? It makes more sense for the rapture to occur earlier and for those converted during tribulation period to enter the millennium in mortal bodies.

¹¹ By “concept” I mean the uniting of Jews and Gentiles on equal footing in one new spiritual organism (Rom 10:12; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-18). Because national distinctions again exist in the tribulation (7:4-8; 11:3-13; 12:1), the church cannot be present during this time period.

¹² Interestingly, in 13:9, the word “church” is left out of the phrase “he who has an ear let him hear.” However, the word “church” is included in this same phrase whenever it appears numerous times in Revelation 2–3.

¹³ This factor may explain why Revelation 4–22 looks so Jewish. The Jewish nature of this section of Scripture is seen through the mention of the 144,000 Jews (7:4-8), the woman (12:1) who represents Israel (Gen 37:9-10), and the two Jewish prophets (11:3-13).

represented is *epistolary*. The salutation (1:4-6) and benediction (22:21) are similar to what one would find in an epistle. The letters to the seven churches (2–3) seem to be written in an epistolary format.¹⁴ The third genre represented is *biblical apocalyptic*. Some have noticed a common cluster of attributes in certain prophetic sections of Scripture. They include intense symbolism and an interpreting angel (Isa 24-27; Ezek; Dan; Zech). Because Revelation shares these same attributes, some also refer to it as biblical apocalyptic.

Revelation is Apocalyptic?

However, recent evangelical interpreters have begun to vest the term “apocalyptic” with a new meaning. When they use the term “apocalyptic literature” they are equating the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation with a host of non-canonical, extra biblical writings that flourished from the intertestamental period and into the second century A.D. Examples include *Enoch*, *Apocalypse of Baruch*, *Jubilees*, *Assumption of Moses*, *Psalms of Solomon*, *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and *Sibylline Oracles*. These writings possess a common cluster of attributes. Such attributes include the following: extensive use of symbolism, vision as the major means of revelation, angelic guides, activity of angels and demons, focus on the end of the current age and the inauguration of the age to come, urgent expectation of the end of earthly conditions in the immediate future, the end as a cosmic catastrophe, new salvation that is paradisaical in character, manifestation of the kingdom of God, a mediator with royal functions, dualism with God and Satan as the leaders, spiritual order determining the flow of history, pessimism about man’s ability to change the course of events, periodization and determinism of human history, other worldly journeys, the catchword glory, and a final showdown between good and evil.¹⁵

¹⁴ However, this argument should probably not be pushed too far since the content of these letters borrows information from the apocalyptic revelation of Christ given in chapter 1 when introducing Christ to the churches (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). These letters also borrow information from the apocalyptic sections dealing with the eternal state (21–22) when making promises to over comers (2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21).

¹⁵ John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semia; 14 (Missoula: MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 9.; George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 76-101.; Frederick J. Murphy, *Early Judaism: The Exile to the Time of Jesus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 130-33.; Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views, a Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 10-12.

It is argued that Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation share many of these characteristics. On this basis, these canonical books are also categorized as apocalyptic literature. The Book of Revelation in particular is categorized with the apocalyptic writings. Not only does the Revelation share many features with these extra biblical books, but it also was composed during the same general time period when the apocalyptic writings were composed. There is no doubt that Revelation is similar to the apocalyptic writings in several respects.

Hermeneutical Changes Resulting From Viewing Revelation's Character as Apocalyptic

However, categorizing Revelation with the apocalyptic writings significantly challenges the traditional, dispensational interpretation of Revelation. The decision to classify Revelation with the apocalyptic genre alters the hermeneutical principles that one uses in interpreting the book. Consequently, four hermeneutical doors seem to open to the extent that Revelation's character is viewed as apocalyptic. *First*, it becomes difficult to approach the text with a straightforward literalism. Kenneth Gentry observes:

Before beginning my survey, I must note what most Christians suspect and what virtually all evangelical scholars (excluding classic dispensationalists) recognize regarding the book: Revelation is a highly figurative book that we cannot approach with a simple straightforward literalism.¹⁶

Elsewhere Gentry observes that consistent literalism "is an impossible ideal."¹⁷ Gregg contends that many interpreters fail to take into account Revelation's apocalyptic character. According to Steve Gregg:

A failure to take into account this feature has led some to the most outlandish teachings on this book by some whose rule of interpretation is 'literal unless absurd.' Though this is good

¹⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 38.

¹⁷ Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 2d and rev. ed. (Tyler: TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997), 151.

rule when dealing with literature written in a literal genre, it is the exact opposite in the case of apocalyptic literature, where symbolism is the rule and literalism is the exception.¹⁸

What Gregg has done here is argue that the ordinary hermeneutical standard that is used in interpreting other sections of Scripture is no longer applicable to biblical eschatology. In ordinary hermeneutics, the assumption is the author wanted to be understood in literal terms unless something compelling from the text informs the interpreter otherwise. Gregg is arguing that this rule no longer holds true in interpreting Revelation and that the inverse is true. The assumption of literalism, unless a textual clue informs the interpreter otherwise, becomes substituted for an assumption of symbolism unless the interpreter is alerted otherwise. Gregg has used the apocalyptic genre categorization to stand ordinary hermeneutical principles on their head. Hamstra does the same thing when he begins with the presupposition that because Revelation is apocalyptic, he views all of Revelation's episodes and visions as symbolic until proven otherwise.¹⁹

The reason for this presupposition that apocalyptic literature cannot be approached literally is because such writings can be described as crisis literature.²⁰ In other words, the writing was produced as a result of some impending crisis.²¹ In order to highlight the severity of the crisis, the apocalypticist spoke in exaggerated terms. Take by way of analogy the statement, "my world has come to an end because I lost my job." This statement obviously does not communicate a literal end of the world. Rather, it is using heightened language in order to communicate the significance of a personal event.

Similarly, an apocalyptic understanding of Revelation views John as vesting earthly events with heightened eschatological language in order to communicate the gravity of the immediate crisis. Understanding Revelation in such hyperbolic terms opens the possibility that the global

¹⁸ Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views, a Parallel Commentary*, 11.

¹⁹ Sam Hamstra, "An Idealist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 129.

²⁰ Mitchell G. Reddish, ed., *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 24.

²¹ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 38.

language of Revelation may in actuality be descriptive of a localized phenomenon that John has invested with global language. Caird best summarizes the matter when he says, “What seems to have escaped notice at the time is that Eschatology is a metaphor, the application of end of the world language to that which is not literally the end of the world.”²² Thus, when John speaks of a great city reigning over the kings of the earth (17:18), he is speaking in heightened language of an immediate oppressive force in his own day, such as Jerusalem or Rome. If John used the same hyperbolic methodology common in apocalyptic writings in Revelation, then statements such as half of the world’s population being destroyed (Rev 6:8; 9:15) and the greatest earthquake in human history (Rev 16:18) cannot be construed literally. Rather, they similarly represent heightened language communicating a past event that the people of God experienced, such as oppression by Jerusalem or Rome. Understanding Revelation in such hyperbolic terms opens the possibility that the global language may in actuality be descriptive of a localized historical phenomenon that John has invested with global language.

This mindset represents a marked departure from literal, grammatical, historical methodology and opens the door to historicism and preterism. For example, whenever the global nature of Revelation’s prophecies do not line up with the local scenario of an A.D. 70 fulfillment, preterist Kenneth Gentry dismisses the global nature of the text as mere hyperbole. He notes, “...the preterist view does understand Revelation’s prophecies as strongly reflecting actual historical events in John’s near future, though they are set in apocalyptic drama and clothed in poetic hyperbole.” Preterist Don Preston also relies upon Revelation belonging to the apocalyptic category in order to find support for his view that Revelation’s global language was fulfilled in the local events of A.D. 70. He observes that apocalyptic literature hyperbolizes the destruction of Jerusalem. According to *Sibylline Oracle* 5:153, “the whole creation was shaken” when war began on Jerusalem. If Revelation is also apocalyptic literature, then Revelation must be similarly using hyperbolic language.²³

²² G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 253.

²³ Don Preston, *Who Is This Babylon?* (Don K. Preston, 1999), 56.

A similar approach is seen in Old Testament studies. Many view Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51 as describing Babylon’s past fall in 539 B.C. rather than her future fall. The interpretation is held in spite of the fact that the details of these texts go far beyond the historic fall of Babylon. This interpretation is justified on the grounds that ancient Near Eastern extra biblical writings often describe the destruction of foes in hyperbolic terms. Because Isaiah and Jeremiah incorporated a similar “destruction genre” in their description of Babylon’s fall, the language of Babylon’s destruction in Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51 can be applied to her historic fall rather than her future fall.²⁴ *Second*, apocalyptic multivalence is another hermeneutical door that opens when Revelation is classified as belonging to the apocalyptic category. Collins offers the following explanation of apocalyptic multivalence:

In other Jewish apocalypses the Babylonian crisis of the sixth century often provides the filter through which later crises are viewed. The emphasis is not on the uniqueness of the historical events but on recurring patterns, which assimilate the particular crisis to some event of the past whether historical or mythical.²⁵

If John also employs apocalyptic multivalence, it is possible that the events of Revelation cannot be anchored to one event but rather can recur repeatedly throughout history. This perspective allows Pate to employ a multi layered hermeneutic in identifying Babylon of Revelation 17–18. Pate concludes that Babylon in these chapters not only refers to a future Babylon but to ancient Jerusalem as well.²⁶ Elsewhere, he argues that the beast of Revelation 13 refers simultaneously to both Nero as well as a future antichrist.²⁷ However, nowhere in the context is it even implied that these texts have more than one meaning. Pate brings an *a priori* presupposition of multiple meanings to the text solely on the basis of Revelation’s alleged apocalyptic content. Such a layered

²⁴ Homer Heater, “Do the Prophets Teach That Babylonia Will Be Rebuilt in the Eschaton?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (March 1998): 31-36.

²⁵ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 51.

²⁶ C. Marvin Pate, “A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 160.

²⁷ C. Marvin Pate and Calvin Haines, *Doomsday Delusions* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Ill, 1995), 42-44.

hermeneutic again represents a significant departure from the literal, grammatical, historical method where texts were presumed to have a single meaning. Milton Terry explains: “A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture.”²⁸

Third, the notion that John used secret codes to disguise the enemies of God’s people mentioned in the book also becomes viable if Revelation is apocalyptic. At times, the apocalyptists disguised through symbolic language the entity that was oppressing them. The apocalyptic writer sought to give hope to the oppressed people of God by predicting the cataclysmic destruction of the enemy that was persecuting them. However, because of fear of retaliation, the apocalyptist was not free to identify the oppressor. Thus, the message had to be disguised in symbolic dress.²⁹ For example, apocalyptic writings sometimes used Babylon as a code for Rome (*Sibylline Oracles* 5: 143, 159-60, 434). If John was following this pattern, he also does not mean Babylon when he says Babylon. Instead, he is using the word Babylon as a symbolic disguise to identify an oppressor. Thus, when John mentioned Babylon, he might have had in mind Jerusalem or Rome. Thomas notes that such code theories are a far cry from literal, grammatical, historical interpretation when he says, “Another clear distinctive of literal interpretation is its avoidance of assumptions not justified in the text. Theories that ‘Babylon’ in Revelation chapters 14 and 16–18 is a code for Rome have been widespread.”³⁰

Fourth, categorizing Revelation as apocalyptic also influences how one interprets Revelation’s numbers. According to Gregg, other apocalypses typically use numbers to convey concepts rather than count units.³¹ Thus, categorizing Revelation as apocalyptic literature moves the interpreter away from a literal understanding of Revelation’s numbers and more toward a symbolic

²⁸ Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947), 205.

²⁹ James Kallas, “The Apocalypse-an Apocalyptic Book?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 70.

³⁰ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 323-38.

³¹ Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views, a Parallel Commentary*, 11-12.

interpretation. Some seem to rely upon such an apocalyptic framework by remaining open to the possibility that the number 1000 mentioned six times in Revelation 20 refers to an extended period of time rather than a literal 1000-year time period.³² Others show a similar reluctance of taking the number 144,000 (Rev 7) literally. Still others have questioned a literal interpretation of the numerical measurements of the eternal city described in Rev 21–22.

However, to argue that the number 1000 in Revelation 20 represents just an extended period of time rather than a literal number is to suspend ordinary hermeneutical rules. Deere points out that when “year” is used with a number, the reference is always to a literal calendar year.³³ Moreover, Hoehner observes when John writes that Satan will be released from the abyss for “a short time” (Rev 20:3), an indefinite period of time is already indicated. How easy it would have been for John to write that the kingdom would last “a long time” had this been his intention. Interestingly, the phrase “a long time” occurs in Matthew 25:19 to depict the duration of the Lord’s absence prior to His Second Advent. Yet John does not employ such a phrase and instead furnishes a specific number.³⁴ Zuck notes that if 1000 is not meant to be interpreted literally, then the door suddenly opens for every other number in the Book of Revelation to be construed non-literally as well, such as 2 witnesses (Rev 11:3), 7000 people (Rev 11:13), 4 angels (Rev 7:1), 7 angels (Rev 8:6), and 144,000 Jews (Rev 7:4).³⁵ Thomas observes that, “no number in Revelation is verifiably a symbolic number.”³⁶ In sum, if Revelation is no different than intertestamental apocalyptic writings then various hermeneutical doors open that would otherwise remain closed. These include an aversion to literal interpretation, a layered hermeneutic, code theories, and a symbolic use of numbers.

³² Darrell L. Bock, “Summary Essay,” in *Three Views on the Millennium*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 303-05.

³³ Jack Deere, “Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (January-March 1978): 70.

³⁴ Harold W. Hoehner, “Evidence from Revelation 20,” in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 249.

³⁵ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: CO: Chariot Victor, 1991), 244-45.

³⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 8 to 22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 408.

Revelation is Prophecy

However, opening these hermeneutical doors on the basis of categorizing Revelation with the apocalyptic books is unjustified. A closer scrutiny demonstrates that the differences between Revelation and the apocalyptic works outweigh any similarities between the two.³⁷ For example, although apocalyptic literature was typically pseudonymous, Revelation bears the name of its author (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). Moreover, Revelation fails to share the pessimism of the apocalyptists who despaired of all human history. Rather, Revelation reflects the optimism of God working redemptively through the lamb presently as well as in the future. Furthermore, apocalyptic literature contains no epistolary material. By contrast, seven ecclesiastical epistles are found in Revelation 2–3.

In addition, non-canonical apocalyptic literature did not emphasize moral imperatives. Although there are occasional exceptions to this rule (1 Enoch 91:19), the apocalyptists are not generally motivated by a strong sense of moral urgency. The reason for this is the apocalyptists' conviction that they were part of the righteous remnant. They saw their role as one of encouraging the remnant to endure, remain faithful, and have hope rather than persuade people to turn from known sin.³⁸ By contrast, Revelation utilizes moral imperatives. Humanity's need for repentance is not only found in Christ's exhortations to the seven churches (Rev 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19), but the exhortation to repent is found throughout the book as a whole (Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11). Moreover, the coming of messiah in apocalyptic literature is something that takes place exclusively in the future. By contrast Revelation portrays Christ as having already come and laid the groundwork for His future coming through His redemptive death (Rev 5:6). Finally, Revelation makes numerous self-claims to be prophecy (Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). In fact, Revelation employs the term *prophētēs* or its cognates eighteen times. These differences between Revelation and apocalyptic literature are summarized in the following chart.³⁹

³⁷ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*, 323-38.

³⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2d ed. (New York: OUP, 2000), 227.

³⁹ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*, 338.

Apocalyptic Genre	Revelation
Pseudonymous	Not pseudonymous
Pessimistic about the present	Not pessimistic about the present
No epistolary framework	Epistolary frame work
Limited admonitions for moral compliance	Repeated admonitions for moral compliance
Messiah's coming exclusively future	Basis for Messiah's future coming is past
Does not call itself a prophecy	Calls itself a prophecy

Additional dissimilarities can be observed. For example, apocalyptic literature has a different view of suffering than that portrayed in Revelation. In apocalyptic writings, suffering is something that emanates from God opposing forces rather than from God Himself. The apocalyptists did not see suffering as something good that is to be submitted to. By contrast, in Revelation, suffering comes from the hand of God (Rev 5:5). Therefore, at times, suffering is something good and must be submitted to.⁴⁰ Moreover, apocalyptic literature is pseudo-prophecy or *vaticinia ex eventu*, which means “prophecies after the fact.” In other words, apocalyptists typically portray a historical event as future prophecy. However, this is not so in Revelation where John looks from his own day into the future.⁴¹ In addition, Revelation is dominated by an already not yet tension as John looked to the needs of his own day as well as the distant future. Yet, this same tension is not evident in other apocalypses.⁴²

Furthermore, other apocalypses typically use numbers to convey concepts rather than count units. By contrast, Revelation appears to use many numbers to indicate specific count units. For example, many futurist scholars believe that various numbers found in Revelation, such as 1260 days (Rev 12:6) or 42 months (Rev 11:2; 13:5), are direct references to the unfulfilled aspects of Daniel's seventy weeks prophecy (Dan 9:24-27). Hoehner's calculations indicate that the fulfilled

⁴⁰ Kallas, “The Apocalypse-an Apocalyptic Book?” 69-80.

⁴¹ Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 94.

⁴² Ibid.

aspects of this prophecy had the potential of being accurate to the exact day.⁴³ Therefore, it stands to reason that the prophecy's unfulfilled aspects will also be fulfilled to the minutest detail. Thus, the numbers 1260 days and 42 months should not be taken as merely communicating concepts but rather should be interpreted as specific count units. According to Thomas, Revelation contains no verifiably symbolic numbers. Rather, non-symbolic utilization of numbers is the norm.⁴⁴

Moreover, Revelation's heavy dependence upon Ezekiel and Daniel also raises questions as to whether the book should be categorized as apocalyptic. Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied 400 years before apocalyptic literature became dominant in the intertestamental period. Also, Revelation 12:1 borrows imagery from Genesis 37:9-10, which took place in the patriarchal era nearly 1800 years before apocalypticism began to flourish. Finally, some apocalyptic writings fail to present a precise eschatological scheme.⁴⁵ Yet, many have argued that Revelation 6–19, with its telescoping and fixed seven-year duration, does communicate a fixed eschatological scheme. A chronology of events also seems to be employed in Revelation 20–22.

In sum, although Revelation has many affinities with apocalyptic literature, it is difficult to classify the book as apocalyptic because these similarities seem outweighed by the differences between the two. A better classification for the book is prophecy rather than apocalyptic. This classification best takes into account Revelation's numerous self claims to be prophecy. It also takes into account Revelation's similarity to the pattern exhibited by the Old Testament prophets who not only called God's people to repentance but also comforted them through visions of victory to take place in the distant future (Isa 40–66; Ezek 36–48; Amos 9:11–15). Revelation fits this identical pattern by not only repeatedly calling the seven churches to repentance but also providing these oppressed churches with a prophecy to be fulfilled in the distant future regarding the believer's ultimate triumph (Rev 4–22). Categorizing Revelation as prophetic is also substantiated upon observing that Revelation alludes to the Book of Daniel more than any other Old Testament book. Moreover, Jesus specifically referred to Daniel as a prophet (Matt 24:15). Because Revelation's

⁴³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 115-39.

⁴⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 8 to 22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 408.

⁴⁵ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 56.

content relies so heavily upon Daniel, it stands to reason that the material found in Revelation should also be categorized as prophetic. The existence of the Greek word *apokalypsis* that appears in the opening verse of the book does not disqualify Revelation from being categorized as prophecy. This word simply means unveiling and does not have the meaning that modern scholars attach to the term “apocalyptic.”

Literalism and Revelation

The decision to categorize Revelation as of the prophetic genre rather than the apocalyptic genre significantly changes the hermeneutical landscape. If Revelation is prophecy, then one interprets Revelation just as he would interpret any other section of prophetic material. The same literal, grammatical, historical method that is used to understand other sections of prophetic material is also what is needed in order to understand Revelation. Therefore, a new set of hermeneutical principles is not needed to properly interpret Revelation.⁴⁶ The previously described hermeneutical doors associated with apocalypticism close to the extent that the genre of the book is prophetic rather than apocalyptic. Instead, the interpreter is confined to literalism, which can be defined as attaching to every word the same meaning that it would have in normal usage.⁴⁷

A consistent application of a literal approach to Revelation logically leads the interpreter away from viewing the book’s contents as being fulfilled in the past and instead leads to the futurist interpretation.⁴⁸ A relationship exists between literalism and futurism because the ordinary import of Revelation’s words and phrases makes it impossible to argue that Revelation’s contents have already been fulfilled. The destruction of half of the world’s population (Rev 6:8; 9:15), and the greatest earthquake in human history (Rev 16:18) obviously has never taken place.

By using the literal approach, the interpreter takes Revelation’s content in its ordinary sense until he encounters some obvious clue in the text alerting him to the fact that figurative or symbolic language is being employed. How does the interpreter recognize when figurative or symbolic

⁴⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1 to 7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 38.

⁴⁷ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 89-92.

⁴⁸ Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 139, 42.

language is being used? One clue involves looking for overt textual indicators alerting the interpreter to the use of figurative language. One such situation is found in Rev 11:8, which notes that Jerusalem “is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.” Here, the use of the adverb “spiritually” is designed to alert the reader to the fact that an allegorical or spiritual application is being made.

Another clue involves the use of the word sign (*sēmeion*). When John uses this word, it alerts the interpreter to the fact that he is speaking figuratively or symbolically rather than literally. For example, because John uses *sēmeion* to describe the woman in Revelation 12:1, it is obvious that the woman is symbolic or representative of something. Another clue involves the words “like” (*homoios*) or “as” (*hōs*). When John employs such language, he is indicating a correspondence between what he saw in the vision and what he was trying to describe. For example, Revelation 8:8 says, “...And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea...” The word “like” alerts the interpreter to the fact that John is simply using comparative language to describe what he saw and the mountain is not to be interpreted literally.

Another clue involves an identical correspondence in the Old Testament. Because the leopard, lion, and bear in Revelation 13:2 are also used in Daniel 7 to depict nations, the interpreter is alerted to the fact that John is employing symbolic language. Thus, the leopard, lion, and bear also represent nations in Revelation 13 just as they did in Daniel 7. Yet another clue involves an interpretation in the immediate context. If something is interpreted for the reader, then the thing interpreted is obviously a symbol. The woman in Revelation 17 is obviously a symbol because the immediate context interprets her to be a city (17:18). A final clue involves looking for absurdity. For example, if the woman in Revelation 12:1 were literally clothed with the sun the heat would destroy her. Because a literal interpretation yields an absurd result, symbolic language must be in use.

After identifying figurative or symbolic language, how is such language to be understood? Sometimes the immediate context interprets the symbol. For example, the dragon of Revelation 12:3 is interpreted as Satan in 12:9. Walvoord identifies twenty-six instances in which a symbol is interpreted in the immediate context.⁴⁹ Another method is to see if the same symbol is employed

⁴⁹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 29-30.

elsewhere in the Old Testament. For example, the same symbol of the woman used in Revelation 12:1 is also used in Genesis 37:9-11 to depict Israel. Thus, the woman of Revelation 12 is symbolic of Israel. This strategy is useful because 278 of Revelation's 404 verses allude to the Old Testament.⁵⁰ Fruchtenbaum's work is helpful to the interpreter in this regard because it contains a lengthy appendix listing all of the Old Testament allusions found in Revelation.⁵¹ A final method for understanding Revelation's symbolic language is to note that John through his use of "like" or "as" is attempting to describe futuristic events that are beyond his linguistic ability. Thus, he communicates through language of correspondence. In other words, in order to communicate the contents of his vision, he uses similes or language of comparison by equating things from his own world to the futuristic events that he sees in his vision.

Conclusion

In conclusion, probably the most significant decision that the interpreter can make regarding what hermeneutic he will use in interpreting the Book of Revelation is determining if Revelation's character has more in common with the prophetic or apocalyptic genre. Viewing Revelation as apocalyptic opens numerous hermeneutical doors such as viewing Revelation's global language as local language, multivalence, code theories, and symbolic numbers. Conversely, those who see Revelation as belonging to the prophetic genre are bound by the literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation, which takes Revelation's words or phrases in their ordinary sense unless a convincing textual clue informs the reader to do other wise. While Revelation has some affinities with apocalypticism, these similarities are overshadowed by vast differences between the two. The book has far more in common with prophecy. Thus, the similarities between Revelation and apocalypticism are not sufficient to cause the interpreter to dispense with a consistent application of literalism when deciphering the book.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1 to 7: An Exegetical Commentary*, 40.

⁵¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1983), 454-59.

Unique Characteristics

The Book of Revelation boasts many outstanding characteristics. *First*, it is the only canonical book that promises a blessing for hearing and heeding its contents (1:3; 22:7).⁵² *Second*, the book is unique in that it promises a curse upon those who add or subtract from its contents (22:18-19). *Third*, although the book contains no direct Old Testament quotes, it contains more Old Testament references than any other New Testament book. 278 of Revelation's 404 verses allude to the Old Testament. This number is almost triple that found in other heavily Jewish New Testament books. Matthew contains only 92 Old Testament references. Hebrews contains 102 Old Testament references. *Fourth*, the book features recurring numbers. The numbers 7, 4, 12 are used frequently throughout the book.

Fifth, the book is interconnected with other canonical material. Revelation builds upon a prophetic foundation already laid in earlier biblical material (Dan 9:27; Matt 24–25, etc...). For example, just as Genesis describes sin's entrance into the world, Revelation describes sin's final exit. Moreover, in His upper room discourse, Christ described how the Spirit would come and bring things to the apostle's remembrance (John 14:26b), teach the apostles all things (John 14:26a), and teach them about things to come (John 16:13). The first promise was fulfilled in the writing of the gospels. The second promise was fulfilled in the writing of the epistles. The third promise was fulfilled in the writing of the Apocalypse.

Sixth, Revelation explains how God is ultimately vindicated and how his plan of redemption is brought to completion. *Seventh*, Revelation is unique in its emphasis on portraying Christ not just as suffering servant but also as the reigning king. *Eighth*, the book routinely praises God on account of His character and works (4:2-5:14; 7:9-12; 15:2-8; 19:1-7). *Ninth*, more than any other New Testament book, Revelation makes extensive use of symbols, visions, and imagery. *Tenth*, other than the last two chapters of the book, Revelation does not provide a great deal of completely new prophetic truth but rather organizes existing prophetic information into a coherent chronology.⁵³

⁵² How is such a blessing possible if the book's contents are unknowable?

⁵³ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 9.

Purpose and Message

The *purpose* of Revelation is to comfort the oppressed churches of Asia Minor as well as stimulate to practical holiness those churches of Asia Minor that were carnal. The book accomplishes this purpose by revealing God's program for the consummation of history. In the future, God will conquer evil. Thus, the oppressed churches can take comfort in the fact that their association with Christ will give them final victory. Similarly, in the future, God will punish evil. Thus, the carnal churches of Asia Minor should pursue holiness in the present. The *message* of the book is that Christians of all ages should be comforted in the midst of oppression and repentant in the midst of carnality because when God fulfills Israel's covenants in the future He will gain victory over evil as well as punish it.

Outline⁵⁴

- I. Prologue (1:1-8)
 - A. Introduction (1:1-3)
 - 1. Title: Revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1a)
 - 2. Chain of communication (1:1b-2)
 - 3. Promised blessing (1:3)
 - B. John's greeting (1:4-8)
 - 1. Writer: John (1:4a)
 - 2. Audience: Churches of Asia minor (1:4b)
 - 3. Salutation of grace and peace (1:4c)
 - 4. Greeting from the triune God (1:4d-5a)
 - 5. Subject: Christ (1:5b-8)
 - a) His past work (1:5b-6)
 - b) His future coming (1:7)
 - c) His Sovereignty (1:8)
- II. The things which you have seen (1:9-20)
 - A. Circumstances of the vision (1:9-11)
 - 1. Place of the vision: Patmos (1:9)
 - 2. Content of the vision: Day of the Lord (1:10)
 - 3. Purpose of the vision: Communication to the churches (1:11)
 - B. Content of the vision: the glorified Christ (1:12-20)
 - 1. Christ's appearance (1:12-16)
 - a) His appearance among the churches (1:12-13a)
 - b) His clothing (1:13b-c)

⁵⁴ This outline was influenced by the one presented in Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, new ed., Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1996).

- i) Robe (1:13b)
 - ii) Sash (1:13c)
 - c) His body (1:14a-16c)
 - i) His hair (1:14a)
 - ii) His eyes (1:14b)
 - iii) His feet (1:15a)
 - iv) His voice (1:15b)
 - v) His right hand (1:16a)
 - vi) His mouth (1:16b)
 - vii) His face (1:16c)
- 2. Christ's interaction with John (1:17a-20)
 - a) John's reaction to Christ (1:17a)
 - b) Christ's comfort to John (1:17b-18)
 - c) Christ's command to John (1:19-20)

III. The things which are (2-3)

A. Ephesus (2:1-7)

1. Destination (2:1a)
2. Description of Christ (2:1b)
3. Commendation (2:2-3, 6)
4. Rebuke (2:4)
5. Exhortation (2:5a)
6. Consequence (2:5b)
7. Exhortation to listen (2:7a)
8. Promise (2:7b)

B. Smyrna (2:8-11)

1. Destination (2:8a)
2. Description of Christ (2:8b)
3. Commendation (2:9)
4. Exhortation (2:10a)
5. Consequence (2:10b)
6. Exhortation to listen (2:11a)
7. Promise (2:11b)

C. Pergamum (2:12-17)

1. Destination (2:12a)
2. Description of Christ (2:12b)
3. Commendation (2:13)
4. Rebuke (2:14-15)
5. Exhortation (2:16a)
6. Consequence (2:16b)
7. Exhortation to listen (2:17a)
8. Promise (2:17b)

D. Thyatira (2:18-29)

1. Destination (2:18a)
2. Description of Christ (2:18b)
3. Commendation (2:19)
4. Rebuke (2:20)
5. Exhortation (2:20-21, 24-25)

6. Consequence (2:22-23)
7. Promise (2:26-28)
8. Exhortation to listen (2:29)
- E. Sardis (3:1-6)
 1. Destination (3:1a)
 2. Description of Christ (3:1b)
 3. Commendation (3:4)
 4. Rebuke (3:1c)
 5. Exhortation (3:2-3a)
 6. Consequence (3:3b)
 7. Promise (3:5)
 8. Exhortation to listen (3:6)
- F. Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 1. Destination (3:7a)
 2. Description of Christ (3:7b)
 3. Commendation (3:8-10)
 4. Exhortation (3:11a)
 5. Consequence (3:11b)
 6. Promise (3:12)
 7. Exhortation to listen (3:13)
- G. Laodicea (3:14-22)
 1. Destination (3:14a)
 2. Description of Christ (3:14b)
 3. Rebuke (3:15-17)
 4. Exhortation (3:18-19)
 5. Consequence (3:20)
 6. Promise (3:21)
 7. Exhortation to listen (3:22)
- IV. The things which shall take place (4-22:5)
 - A. Prologue to the tribulation (4-5)
 1. Heavenly throne (4:1-11)
 - a) John caught up to heaven (4:1)
 - b) Occupant of the throne (4:2-3a)
 - c) Items connected to the throne (4:3b-8a)
 - i) Rainbow encircling the throne (4:3)
 - ii) 24 elders surrounding the throne (4:4)
 - iii) Lightning and thunder from the throne (4:5a)
 - iv) 7 lamps before the throne (4:5b)
 - v) Sea of glass before the throne (4:6)
 - vi) Four living creatures around the throne (4:7-8a)
 - d) Praise to God on the throne (4:8b-11)
 - i) By the four living creatures (4:8b-9)
 - ii) By the 24 elders (4:10-11)
 2. The sealed book (5:1-14)
 - a) The scroll (5:1)
 - b) No one worthy to open scroll (5:2-4)
 - c) Christ is worthy to open scroll (5:5-6)

- d) Christ takes the scroll (5:7)
 - e) Christ Praised (5:8-14)
 - i) By the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders (5:8-10)
 - ii) By the angels (5:11-12)
 - iii) By every creature (5:13)
 - iv) By the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders (5:14)
- B. The tribulation (6-19:6)
1. The seven seals (6:1-8:6)
 - a) First seal: Antichrist (6:1-2)
 - b) Second seal: war (6:3-4)
 - c) Third seal: famine (6:5-6)
 - d) Fourth seal: death (6:7-8)
 - e) Fifth seal: martyrdoms (6:9-11)
 - f) Sixth seal: cosmic disturbances (6:12-17)
 - g) **First non chronological, parenthetical insertion:** Ministry of 144,000 (7:1-17)
 - i) 144,000 (7:1-8)
 - (a) Suspension of judgment and sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-3)
 - (b) Identity of the 144,000 (7:4-8)
 - ii) Gentile salvation (7:9-17)
 - (a) Their quantity saved (7:9)
 - (b) Praises for their salvation (7:10-12)
 - (1) By the Gentiles (7:10)
 - (2) By the 24 elders and Angels (7:11-12)
 - (c) The time of their salvation (7:13-14)
 - (d) The provisions of their salvation (7:15-17)
 - (1) Their service (7:15)
 - (2) Their satisfaction (7:16)
 - (3) Their shepherd (7:17)
 - h) The seventh seal (8:1-6)
 - i) Opening of the seventh seal (8:1)
 - ii) Entrance of the trumpets (8:2)
 - iii) Priest angel (8:3-5)
 - iv) Preparation to sound trumpets (8:6)
 2. The seven trumpets (8:7-14:20)
 - a) First trumpet: one third vegetation destroyed (8:7)
 - b) Second trumpet: meteor falls into the sea (8:8-9)
 - c) Third trumpet: one third of freshwater destroyed (8:10-11)
 - d) Fourth trumpet: one third of luminaries' light darkened (8:12-13)
 - e) Fifth trumpet: demons released (9:1-12)
 - i) Discharging angel (9:1)
 - ii) Discharged from the abyss (9:2)
 - iii) Their activity (9:3-6)
 - iv) Their Description (9:7-10)
 - v) Their leader (9:11)
 - vi) Anticipation of remaining trumpets (9:12)
 - f) Sixth trumpet: 200 million (9:13-21)
 - i) Release (9:13-15)

- ii) Their number (9:16)
- iii) Their description (9:17)
- iv) Destruction of one third of the population (9:18-19)
- v) Man's lack of repentance (9:20-21)
- g) **Second non-chronological, parenthetical insertion** (10: 1-11: 14)
 - i) Angelic announcement of no further delay (10:1-11)
 - (a) His appearance (10:1-2)
 - (b) His sound: the mystery of the seven thunders (10:3-4)
 - (c) His promise of no further delay (10:5-7)
 - (d) His command to John (10:8-11)
 - (1) Eat (10:8-10)
 - (2) Prophecy (10:11)
 - ii) Predicted end of the Times of the Gentiles (11:1-2)
 - iii) Two Witnesses (11:3-14)
 - (a) Duration of their ministry (11:3)
 - (b) Their character (11:4)
 - (c) Content of their ministry (11:5-6)
 - (d) Their martyrdom (11:7-10)
 - (e) Their resuscitation (11:11)
 - (f) Their rapture (11:12)
 - (g) Judgment (11:13)
 - (h) Anticipation of bowls (11:14)
- h) Seventh trumpet (11:15-19)
 - i) Transfer of world's kingdom (11:15)
 - ii) 24 elders praise God (11:16-18)
 - iii) Anticipation of bowls (11:19)
- i) **Third non-chronological, parenthetical insertion** (12-14)
 - i) Satanic animosity toward God's kingdom program (12)
 - (a) Satan's previous attempt to thwart Christ's birth (12:1-5)
 - (b) Satan's future attempt to devour Israel (12:6-17)
 - (1) Israel flees (12:6)
 - (2) Satan cast out of heaven (12:7-9)
 - (3) Satan pursues Israel (12:10-13)
 - (4) God rescues Israel (12:14-17)
 - a. Cycle #1 (12:14)
 - b. Cycle #2 (12:15-17)
 - ii) Satanic opposition manifested through the two beasts (13:1-18)
 - (a) Antichrist (13:1-10)
 - (b) False prophet (13:11-18)
 - iii) Announcements concerning tribulation's remaining months (14:1-20)
 - (a) The 144,000 (14:1-5)
 - (1) Their appearance (14:1-2)
 - (2) Their song (14:3)
 - (3) Their sanctification (14:4-5)
 - a. Virgins (14:4a)
 - b. Followers (14:4b)
 - c. Redeemed (14:4c)

- d. Without deceit (14:5 a)
 - e. Blameless (14:5b)
 - (b) Everlasting gospel (14:6-7)
 - (1) Its universality (14:6)
 - (2) Its emphasis (14:7)
 - a. Fear God (14:7a)
 - b. Worship God (14:7b)
 - c. Glorify God (14:7c)
 - (c) Prediction of Babylon's doom (14:8)
 - (d) Prediction of doom upon beast's worshipers (14:9-12)
 - (1) Their sin (14:9)
 - (2) Their punishment (14:10-11)
 - (3) The righteous encouraged (14:12)
 - (e) Blessing pronounced upon future martyrs (14:13)
 - (f) Armageddon symbolically depicted as of grape harvest (14:14-20)
- 3. The seven bowls (15-19:6)
 - a) Prelude to the bowls (15)
 - i) Manifestation of the seven last plagues (15:1)
 - ii) Martyrs (15:2-4)
 - (a) Their identity (15:2)
 - (b) They praise God (15:3-4)
 - (1) God's deeds (15:3a)
 - (2) God's might (15:3b)
 - (3) God is true (15:3c)
 - (4) God is King (15:3d)
 - (5) God is holy (15:4a)
 - (6) God will be worshiped by the nations (15:4b)
 - iii) Heavenly Tabernacle (15:5-8)
 - (a) Angels of judgment emerge from Tabernacle (15:5-6)
 - (b) Angels given bowls (15:7)
 - (c) No one can enter Temple until bowls are poured out (15:8)
 - b) Enumeration of the bowls (16-19:6)
 - i) Command to pour out the bowls (16:1)
 - ii) First bowl: boils (16:2)
 - iii) Second bowl: sea becomes blood (16:3)
 - iv) Third bowl: freshwater destroyed (16:4-7)
 - v) Fourth bowl: sun scorches man (16:8-9)
 - vi) Fifth bowl: darkness (16:10-11)
 - vii) Sixth bowl: Euphrates dried (16:12)
 - viii) **Fourth non-chronological, parenthetical insertion:** the gathering of nations to the valley of Armageddon (16:13-16)
 - ix) Seventh bowl (16:17-21)
 - (a) Announcement of the judgment's completion (16:17)
 - (b) Greatest earthquake (16:18)
 - (c) Jerusalem divided (16:19a)
 - (d) Babylon destroyed (16:19b)
 - (e) Topographical destruction (16:20)

- (f) 100 pound hail stones (16:21)
- x) **Fifth non-chronological, parenthetical insertion: Babylon (17:1-19:6)**
 - (a) Religious aspects of Babylon (17)
 - (1) Vision (17:1-6)
 - (2) Angelic interpretation (17:7-18)
 - a. Promise of interpretation (17:7)
 - b. Beast (17:8)
 - c. Seven Heads (17:9-11)
 - d. 10 horns (17:12-14)
 - e. Waters (17:15)
 - f. Destruction (17:16-17)
 - g. Woman (17:18)
 - (b) Commercial aspects of Babylon (18:1-24)
 - (1) Prediction of Babylon's fall (18:1-3)
 - a. Proclamation of Babylon's fall (18:1-2a)
 - b. Reasons for Babylon's judgment (18:2b-3)
 - i. Demonic (18:2b)
 - ii. Corrupted nations (18:3a)
 - iii. Corrupted kings (18:3b)
 - iv. Materialism (18:3c)
 - (2) Appeal for tribulation believers to separate from sinful Babylon because of imminent judgment (18:4-8)
 - (3) Reaction to Babylon's fall (18: 9-20)
 - a. Kings (18:9-10)
 - b. Merchants (18:11-16)
 - c. Sea merchants (18:17-19)
 - d. Heaven (18:20)
 - (4) Babylon's fall (18:21-24)
 - a. Described (18:21)
 - b. Nine affected groups (18:22-23a)
 - c. Causation (18:23b-24)
 - i. Sorcerers (18:23b)
 - ii. Martyrdoms (18:24)
 - (c) Heavenly reactions to Babylon's fall (19:1-6)
 - (1) Many (19:1-3)
 - (2) Elders and four creatures (19:4)
 - (3) Throne voice (19:5)
 - (4) Great multitude (19:6)
- C. Events following the tribulation (19:7-22:5)
 - 1. Second Advent (19:7-21)
 - a) Marriage supper of the lamb (19:7-9)
 - b) John's response to the revelation (19:10)
 - c) Second Advent (19:11-16)
 - i) His seven qualities (19:11-13)
 - (a) Faithful and true to his promises (19:11a)
 - (b) Righteous judgment (19:11b)
 - (c) Fiery eyes (19:12a)

- (d) Crowns (19:12b)
 - (e) Unknown name (19:12c)
 - (f) Blood-soaked Vesture (19:13a)
 - (g) Word of God (19:13b)
- ii) His activities (19:14-16)
 - (a) Armies following (19:14)
 - (b) Spoken word (19:15a)
 - (c) Smites nations (19:15b)
 - (d) Rules nations (19:15c)
 - (e) Treads the wine press (19:15d)
 - (f) Rules as King (19:16)
- d) Supper of God (19:17-18)
- e) Christ defeats armies, beast, false prophet (19:19-21)
- 2. Millennium (20:1-10)
 - a) Satan bound (20:1-3)
 - b) Righteous reigning (20:4-6)
 - c) Final rebellion crushed (20:7-10)
- 3. Great White Throne Judgment (20:11-15)
- 4. The Eternal State (21-22)
 - a) Eternal State described (21:1-8)
 - i) New creation (21:1)
 - ii) Descent of the city (21:2)
 - iii) God with his people (21:3)
 - iv) Old order eliminated (21:4-5)
 - v) Complete satisfaction (21:6)
 - vi) Full inheritance (21:7a)
 - vii) Full fellowship (21:7b)
 - viii) Holiness (21:8)
 - b) Description of the city (21:9-22:5)
 - i) Its four titles (21:9-10)
 - ii) Its glory (21:11)
 - iii) Its construction (21:12-14)
 - (a) Wall (21:12a)
 - (b) Gates (21:12b-13)
 - (c) Foundations (21:14)
 - iv) Its measurements (21:15-17)
 - (a) Measuring angel (21:15)
 - (b) Cube (21:16)
 - (c) Wall (21:17)
 - v) Its materials (21:18-21)
 - (a) Wall (21:18)
 - (b) Foundations (21:19-20)
 - (c) Gate (21:21a)
 - (d) Street (21:21b)
 - vi) Its relation to God (21:22-23)
 - (a) No Temple (21:22)
 - (b) No luminaries (21:23)

- vii) Its relation to the nations (21:24-26)
- viii) Its Holiness (21:27)
- ix) Its contents (22:1-5)
 - (a) River (22:1)
 - (b) Trees (22:2)
 - (c) No curse (22:3)
 - (d) Presence of God (22:3b-5)

V. Epilogue: concluding exhortations (22:6-21)

A. Words of comfort (22:6-17)

1. Trusted words (22:6a)
2. Christ's coming soon (22:6b-7a)
3. Blessing for obedience (22:7b)
4. God deserves worship (22:8-9)
5. Do not seal the prophecy (22:10)
6. Destinies will be fixed (22:11)
7. Rewards will be given (22:12-13)
8. Redeemed will be blessed (22:14-15)
9. God is gracious (22:16-17)
 - a) Revealer (22:16a)
 - b) Covenant fulfiller (22:16b)
 - c) Morning Star (22:16c)
 - d) Offers grace (22:17)

B. Words of warning (22:18-19)

1. Warning against addition (22:18)
2. Warning against subtraction (22:19)

C. Words of benediction (22:20-21)

1. Christ is coming soon (22:20a)
2. John's prayer that Christ comes soon (22:20b)
3. Benediction (22:21)

Argument

In the prologue (1:1-8), John furnishes an introduction (1:1-3) as well as a greeting (1:4-8). In the introduction, John begins with a focus upon the content of the vision, which is Christ (1:1a). John wants his readers to understand that God's program for the future involves the exaltation of His son over evil. Thus, those oppressed churches of Asia Minor can be encouraged in the fact that their association with Christ will give them ultimate victory. Those carnal churches of Asia Minor should abstain from evil since they are associated with the one who will one day do away with evil.

In the introduction, John also gives the channel of communication regarding how he received the vision (1:1b-2). The churches of Asia Minor could only be encouraged and convicted if they knew that John's vision really came from God. Thus, John carefully explains that the Revelation was conveyed from God the Father to Jesus Christ to an angel to John to a book to the

reader and to the listener. Next John explains that the churches of Asia Minor would be blessed if they read and heeded the words of the vision (1:3).⁵⁵ In other words, they would only be encouraged in adversity and abstain from carnality when they realized that the Christ that they are associated with would indeed fulfill the contents of the vision.

In the greeting section (1:4-8), John provides information typically found in the introduction of any biblical letter. First, he identifies himself (1:4a). Such an identification adds veracity to his message since he was already a well-respected bishop of Asia Minor at the time of the writing. He also identifies his audience (1:4b) as well as gives a customary salutation (1:4c). John also gives a greeting from the triune God (1:4d-5a). John wants his audience to understand that that his message is divinely authored rather than merely being the product of his own thinking. This greeting from the triune God is quickly followed by a brief description of the subject of the letter, which is Jesus Christ (1:5b-8). John mentions Christ's past work (15b-6) and future coming (1:7). Thus, Christ is the beginning and end of history (1:8). In other words, history's entire purpose is wrapped up in Him. Certainly John's oppressed readers would be greatly encouraged to know that they are vitally connected to the one who will bring all of history to its final consummation. Such an insight would certainly give his readers an incentive in order to adjust their behavior in the present.

Based upon the threefold division found in 1:19, the next three major divisions of the book consist of "the things which you have seen" (1:9-20), "the things which are" (2-3), and "the things which will take place shortly" (4-22). In the first of these sections, John describes "the things which you have seen" (1:9-20), which includes the circumstances of the vision (1:9-11) as well as the one who gave the vision (1:12-20). The circumstances of the vision (1:9-11) include its place, purpose and content. The place of the vision was Patmos (1:9). The content of the vision was the future Day of the Lord (1:10).⁵⁶ The purpose of the vision was to communicate a message to the churches of

⁵⁵ This verse gives the first of seven beatitudes in the book. These seven beatitudes represent seven places where the book promises some sort of blessing upon someone for doing something (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). See Walvoord, "Revelation," 929.

⁵⁶ Some understand the reference to the Lord's Day in verse 10 as communicating the idea that John received the vision on Sunday. According to the Didache and Scripture (John 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2) Christians gathered on Sunday. But how could John receive this entire vision in just one day? Moreover, how does this understanding of the

Asia Minor (1:11). Inclusion of this information would make it more likely that the churches would embrace the vision. In other words, if these churches understood where the vision was given (1:9) as well as understood that its purpose was to motivate them in the present (1:11) through a futuristic vision of the future (1:10), they would be more likely to accept it.

Next John details Christ, who was the giver of the vision (1:12-20). After describing His presence among the churches (1:12-13a),⁵⁷ John depicts His clothing (1:13b-c) and bodily appearance (1:14a-16). Thus, John offers his audience a glimpse of the one who will ultimately subjugate all things. By first explaining His presence among the churches, John helps His readers understand that their connection with Christ places them on the winning side of history. Such a realization would certainly give the churches optimism in the midst of their present struggles as well as a desire to live holy lives. John concludes the chapter by describing his interaction with Christ after observing this theophanic portrait (1:17a-20). After experiencing terror in the presence of the glorified Christ (1:17a), Christ comforts John (1:17b-18) and gives him his assignment of recording the vision and disseminating it to the churches (1:19-20).⁵⁸ The rehearsal of this divine mandate will again help the churches understand that the book is divinely authored rather than merely being the product of human thinking.

Lord's Day relate to the context of the book, which seems to identify the Lord's Day with a time of unprecedented judgment (4–22)? It seems more likely that the Lord's Day should be understood in terms of the Day of the Lord that is unfolded in chapters 4–22.

⁵⁷ The seven lamp stands (1:12) are later defined as the seven churches in 1:20.

⁵⁸ There is debate concerning the meaning of the phrase “angels of the seven churches” (1:20). Some believe that these angels represent celestial beings that are given the assignment of watching over the various churches. It is argued that because every other reference to “angels” after chapter three refers to celestial angels, then consistency seems to dictate that celestial angels are also in view here. There is also a cryptic reference to a celestial angel performing a similar function in 1 Corinthians 11:10. However, it seems better to argue that the angels here refer to the appointed messengers or pastors of the seven churches. First, *aggel os* can refer to a human messenger (Matt 11:10; Luke 9:52). Second, the chain of communication proceeds in a downward descent. It moves from the Father to Jesus to an angel to John to a book to the messenger and to the listener. Inserting a second angel into this chain of communication would disrupt this downward descent. See Toussaint, “The Revelation of John,” 6.

John now turns to the next major section of the book, which consists of “the things that are” (2–3). In this section he seeks to directly correct and encourage the seven churches of Asia Minor.⁵⁹ This section consists of seven epistles to the various churches. Each letter seems to follow a common pattern. First, the destination of the letter is given. Second, a description of Christ drawn from the vision in the previous chapter is provided. Third, a word of commendation is given. Fourth, a word of rebuke is given. Fifth, a word of exhortation is given showing the church how to change its ways. Sixth, if the church fails to heed the exhortation, a consequence is enumerated. Sometimes a positive consequence is enumerated for proper behavior. Seventh, an exhortation to listen is given. Eighth, a promise for over comers⁶⁰ drawn from the vision of the eternal state (21–22) is then provided. However, this pattern is not always “iron clad.” Rebukes are omitted from the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia.⁶¹ Similarly, commendation is omitted from the Laodicean letter. The letters start with Ephesus, the most prominent of the churches, and then move in a northward

⁵⁹ While the letters are addressed to seven literal churches, they obviously are beneficial to all churches since scripture is given for the purpose of edifying all believers (2 Tim 3:16-4:2). It may be that these churches were intentionally selected since their problems are representative of churches in any age. Some have speculated that each church represents a different era of church history (Historico-Prophetic View). Proponents maintain that seven eras of church history fit well with how the churches are described. Also, some of the information given seems more applicable to the distant future rather than to a church back in the first century (3:10). However, several reasons make this view suspect. First, how can the rapture be imminent if various epochs of church history must first transpire before Christ can return? Second, the notion that Laodicea is the modern church seems ethnocentric. While the American church is carnal, the same cannot be said of the suffering church in other parts of the world. Third, the descriptions of some of the churches do not fit the era they supposedly represent. How can Thyatira, whose deeds are greater than at first, be descriptive of the church of the Middle Ages? How can Sardis, the dead church, be descriptive of the church of the reformation? Fourth, the view seems to be derived from an allegorical rather than a literal approach to Scripture.

⁶⁰ Some view the references to over comers as pertaining to sanctified or mature believers. However, in Revelation (21:7) and his other writings (1 John 4:4; 5:4-5), John typically uses the concept as pertaining to all believers. Moreover, the promises of reward spoken in these letters are drawn from the last two chapters of Revelation and are therefore available to all believers rather than just the sanctified believers (2:7; 22:2, 14; 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8; 3:5; 20:12, 15).

⁶¹ Interestingly, those churches experiencing persecution have no need of a rebuke.

direction to Smyrna and Pergamum. The letters then move in a southeastern direction all the way down to Laodicea.⁶² The content of the letters can be summed up in the following chart.⁶³

⁶² For a helpful map of the seven churches, see Ryrie, *Revelation*, 21.

⁶³ This chart has been adapted from Ibid., 22, 40; Walvoord, “Revelation,” 941; *Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps*, 488; Constable, “Notes on Revelation,” 45-46.

Church	Scripture	Background	Historico-Prophetic era	Historico-Prophetic time	Description of Christ	Commendation	Rebuke	Exhortation	Consequence (positive and negative)	Exhortation to listen	Promise
Ephesus	2:1-7	Temple of Diana	Apostolic era	A.D. 33-64	Holds stars, walks among the churches	Deeds, toil, perseverance, discernment, hatred of Nicolaitans	Left 1 st love	Remember, repent, repeat	Removal of lamp stand	2:7	Tree of life
Smyrna	2:8-11	Caesar worship	Persecuted era	64-313	First and last, dead and alive	Tribulation, poverty, blasphemy by Jews	None	Do not fear death, remain faithful	Tested, crown of life	2:11	No second death
Pergamum	2:12-17	Library, Aseklpios worship	Church/state union	313-606	Sword	Held fast, did not deny faith	Tolerated Balaam, Nicolaitans	Repent	Expect an attack from the sword of Christ's mouth	2:17	Hidden manna, white stone, new name
Thyatira	2:18-29	Trade guilds	Middle Ages	606-1520	Flaming eyes, bronzed feet	Deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance, improvement	Tolerated Jezebel	Faithful, repent, hold fast	Sickness, tribulation, kill with pestilence	2:29	Authority over nations, morning star
Sardis	3:1-6	Cybele	Reformation	1520-1750	Seven spirits, seven stars	Some unsoiled	Reputation for life though dead, incomplete deeds	Wake up, strengthen what remains, remember, obey, repent	Christ comes like a thief	3:6	White garments. Book of life, confessed before Father
Philadelphia	3:7-13	Dionysius	Missionary Era	1750-1900	Holy and true, David's key, opens and shuts	Deeds, little power, kept word, not denied faith, perseverance	None	Hold fast	Service from Satan's synagogue, kept from tribulation, Crown taken	3:13	Pillar in temple, names: God, city, Christ
Laodicea	3:14-22	Medicines, hot springs	Modern era	1900-present	Amen, faithful and true, source of creation	None	Lukewarm, self sufficient, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked	Buy: gold, white garments, eye salve Repent, open door	Dine with Christ	3:22	Sit on Christ's throne

In Revelation 4, John begins the next major section of his book. This section encompasses “the things that shall take place” (4:1-22:5).⁶⁴ Here, he encourages the churches toward present hope and obedience by revealing to them God’s future program for defeating and conquering evil. John is transported into heaven (4:1) where he is given a celestial perspective of the earthly events that are about to transpire.⁶⁵ In this heavenly scene, John sees the one who will shortly bring His heavenly rule to the earth. In chapter 4, the focus of attention is on the Father seated upon His throne (4:2-3a). John proceeds to describe various items associated with the Father’s heavenly throne (4:3b-8a).⁶⁶ He also describes the praise directed toward the one seated upon the throne

⁶⁴ The similarities between 1:19b and 4:1b indicate that chapter 4 begins this third section.

⁶⁵ Some have taken this event as descriptive of the rapture. Most of the proponents of this view are from the Historico-Prophetic school of thought. They see chapters 2–3 as revealing the church age that terminates with the rapture to be followed by the tribulation. Although some similarities can be drawn between Revelation 4:1 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, to see the rapture in 4:1 seems to read more into the text than what is actually there. The only thing this text actually describes is John’s personal rapture into heaven rather than an event that affects the entire church.

⁶⁶ One group associated with the throne is the 24 elders (4:4). The identification of the 24 elders has generated much debate. Some say they represent Israel. However, this identification seems unlikely since Israel will not receive their resurrection until later (Dan 12:2; Rev 20:4). Others say they represent the redeemed of all ages. Again this seems unlikely since those from non-church age dispensations receive their resurrected bodies at a later point (Dan 12:2; Rev 20:4). Still others say that the 24 elders are angels. However, this identification seems unlikely since angels typically stand rather than sit in God’s presence (Luke 1:19). Also, John elsewhere distinguishes the 24 elders from the angels (5:11; 7:11). It seems best to argue that the 24 elders represent the church. John describes the 24 elders the same way he describes members of the church elsewhere. For example, he notes that they are crowned (2:10) and clothed in white (3:5). He also observes that they are redeemed (5:8-10). The New Testament typically uses the designation “elders” to depict church leadership (Acts 15:6; 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1, 5). The number 24 is used because that is how the Old Testament priesthood was organized (1 Chron 24). Because the church is similar to (although not identical to) Israel because it too is a priesthood (1:6), the number 24 is reminiscent of the church’s priestly function. For these options I am indebted to J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1997), 333-34. If this identification is correct then more support is furnished for Pretribulationism. During the events of the tribulation, the church is pictured as being in heaven rather than on earth. (Compare also 1:20 and 4:5b).

(4:8b-11). John includes this information regarding God's magnificence and the praise directed toward Him to show that He is worthy to bring His rule to the earth. Of particular interest to John is God's role in the creation of all things (4:11). God is certainly worthy to subjugate all things since He is the one who created all things.

In Revelation 5, John sees the Father holding the seven-sealed scroll (5:1). As indicated in the previously described telescoping arrangement, this scroll will trigger all the other judgments that will transpire during the tribulation period. These judgments will have the net effect of allowing God to assume authority over the kingdoms of this world. This fact explains why so many of Revelation's judgments are reminiscent of the Exodus judgments (Exod 5–12). In the Exodus event, God took Israel out of bondage. Similarly, in Revelation, God will transfer the world out of satanic bondage and back under His authority. However, John begins to weep at the prospect that no one is worthy to open the scroll and thus the world will continue indefinitely under satanic bondage (5:2-4). However, John's fears are alleviated when he discovers that Christ's sacrificial death has made Him worthy to open the scroll (5:5-6). Thus, when Christ takes the scroll (5:7), He is praised by various heavenly entities (5:8-14). The focus of the praise relates to the fact that Christ's sacrificial death has qualified Him to open the scroll and thus retrieve the world from satanic bondage. Thus, God is worthy to bring His realm of heavenly rule to earth because of His role in creation (Rev 4), but also in redemption (Rev 5). Because the churches of Asia Minor were connected to the one who was about to regain the title deed to the earth that was lost in Eden, they should exhibit hope and holiness in their daily lives.

As Christ opens the seven seals on the scroll the initial judgments begin. The first four seals represent the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.⁶⁷ These horsemen usher in the Antichrist's rule (6:1-2),⁶⁸ war (6:3-4), famine (6:5-6), and death (6:7-8). These judgments are followed by martyrdoms

⁶⁷ The colors of the four horses are white, red, black, and ashen.

⁶⁸ Some have speculated that the rider on the white horse is Christ (6:1-2). This identification is made on account of the supposed similarities between this rider and the one described in Revelation 19:11-16. However, three reasons make this view problematic. First, Christ cannot be the rider on the horse since He is in heaven opening the scroll. How can Christ be in heaven and on the horse at the same time? Second, the Old Testament predicted that when Christ returned, He would usher in an era of unprecedented peace (Isa 9:6-7). However, this rider does not usher in peace

(6:9-11)⁶⁹ and cosmic disturbances (6:12-17).⁷⁰ Given the severity of these judgments, the sixth seal ends with the question “who is able to stand?” This question is answered in the first non-chronological, parenthetical insertion (7:1-17).

This insertion describes the ministry of the 144,000 Jews who will reach the world with the gospel in the tribulation period. Before judgment is poured out, God’s servants are sealed (7:1-3).⁷¹ The identity of these servants is clearly indicated as 144,000 Jews with 12,000 each coming from the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4-8).⁷² The fruit of their ministry is demonstrated by the massive number of Gentiles who will come to faith through their influence during the tribulation (7:9-17).⁷³

since the next judgment introduces war (6:3-4). Furthermore, there are differences between the two riders spoken of in chapter 6 and 19. The rider in chapter 6 has a crown while the rider in chapter 19 has many crowns. The rider in chapter 6 has a bow while the rider in chapter 19 has a sword.

⁶⁹ In the opening of the fifth seal, the tribulation martyrs cry out for vengeance.

⁷⁰ The sixth seal contains the following six events: “an earthquake, the blackening of the sun, the reddening of the moon, a meteorite shower, convulsions of the planets and stars, and the displacement of mountains and islands.” Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 405.

⁷¹ A seal is a sign of divine ownership (Eph 1:13).

⁷² Although Ephraim’s name is not mentioned on this list, Ephraim is not excluded. Because Joseph begat Ephraim, Joseph and Ephraim are often used interchangeably (Ezek 37:16). Because Joseph is included on the list (7:8), Ephraim is included as well. Also, many have questioned why Dan is omitted from this list. Some believe that because of Dan’s gross Old Testament sin (Lev 29:11; Judges 18:30-31; 1 Kings 12:28-30) this tribe will be excluded from the blessing of being used by God in the tribulation period. However, if this is true, why is Dan included in the millennial blessings (Ezek 48:1, 32)? It seems more likely that Dan’s omission is merely stylistic. Because Joseph produced two tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh), the total number of tribes comes to thirteen. Thus, in order to maintain the number twelve, one of the tribes must be omitted. It is probably for this reason that Moses dropped Simeon from his list of the tribes in Deuteronomy 33. Ezekiel similarly dropped Levi from his tribal list (Ezek 47–48). It is likely that this practice is being followed here in Revelation 7 in order to maintain the number twelve since that number is so significant in Revelation. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 222-23.

⁷³ The following chart has been adapted from Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *The Truth Behind Left Behind* (Sisters: OR: Multnomah, 2004), 77.

Revelation 7:1-8	Revelation 7:9-17
Numbered (144,000)	Innumerable
Jews	All nations
Sealed	Slain
Sealed before tribulation	Converted out of tribulation

John also provides other information about the Gentiles' salvation, such as the amount saved (7:9), the praises for their salvation (7:10-12), the time of their salvation (7:13-14), and the spiritual provisions that accompany their salvation (7:15-17).

John includes all of this information to show that even though the tribulation period will represent a time of horrific judgment, God's grace will also be at work. The material on the 144,000 Jews is also the first piece of information given in Revelation indicating that God intends to redeem the world by fulfilling Israel's covenants. While Israel as the covenanted nation was given the divine destiny of being light to the Gentile world (Isa 42:6; 49:6), the Old Testament record indicates that she failed to live up to her calling. However, God's evangelistic work through the 144,000 Jews in the tribulation indicates that Israel will fulfill her destiny during Daniel's 70th Week.

After concluding the parenthetical insert, John describes the opening of the seventh seal (8:1-6). As the seventh seal is opened, John's attention is immediately called to the seven angels who hold the seven trumpets. John's attention is drawn to the trumpets at this juncture because of the previously described telescoping arrangement in which the seventh seal triggers the trumpet judgments. The cosmological disturbances that John observes as the seventh seal is opened is a foretaste of the judgments that will soon follow. John also notes the prayers of the saints. These are probably the prayers of God's people calling out for vengeance against their oppressors (6:9-11). Their prayers are answered with the opening of the seventh seal, which will trigger the remaining judgments that will allow Christ to reclaim title deed to the earth.

Next John describes the trumpet judgments (8:7-14:20). The sounding of the first four trumpets bring forth the destruction of a third of the vegetation (8:7), destruction of a third of the sea life (8:8-9), destruction of a third of the earth's freshwater supply (8:10-11), and a darkening of a third of the luminaries' light (8:12-13). Because many of these judgments look like the Exodus

judgments, John reminds his audience that God is using these judgments to create the ultimate Exodus by taking the entire world out of satanic bondage. Thus, the churches can be encouraged in the midst of opposition since they are on the winning side of history. When the fifth trumpet is sounded, demons arise from the abyss and torment men for five months (9:1-12).⁷⁴ When the sixth trumpet is sounded, an army of 200 million is released from East of the Euphrates⁷⁵ to kill one third of mankind.⁷⁶ Lest John's audience conclude that God is unfair in these judgments, he reminds them of man's lack of repentance during this period (9:20-21).

A second non-chronological, parenthetical insertion transpires in between the sounding of the sixth and the seventh trumpets (10:1-11:14). In Revelation 10, John hears the seven peals of thunder. An angel (10:1-2) tells him not to record what he has heard (10:3-4). In other words, the divine judgments will not be extended beyond their allotted number and time period (Matt 24:21-22). Instead the angel promises no further delay in these judgments (10:5-7). Since the soon to be sounded seventh trumpet will trigger the bowl judgments, the completion of God's judgment program is imminent. John is told to prophesy about these remaining judgments (10:11). In preparation for such prophetic activity, he is told to eat the little book containing the remaining judgments (10:8-10; Ezek 3:3-14). Although consumption of the book made John's stomach bitter

⁷⁴ Several reasons make it likely that the locusts are demons. First, they emerge from a place called the abyss or the bottomless pit. This same word is used to describe Satan's place of incarceration during the millennium (Rev 20:1, 3). Second, they cannot be literal locusts since they have a leader (9:11) and literal locusts have no leader (Prov 30:27). Third, they cannot be literal locusts since John uses similes or the words "like" or "as" to describe them. In fact, the words "like" or "as" are used more times in this chapter than anywhere else in the entire Bible.

⁷⁵ At the pouring out of the sixth bowl, the Euphrates river will be dried up to prepare the way for this army of 200 million to fulfill its divine mandate of killing a third of mankind (16:12). Thus, Revelation 9:14 and 16:12 taken together seem to communicate that this evil army will be headquartered east of the Euphrates. The city located immediately East of the Euphrates is Babylon. This city is the subject of much of Revelation's content (14:8; 16:19; 17-18).

⁷⁶ One fourth of mankind was already destroyed at the opening of the fourth seal (6:8). One third of humanity is destroyed at the sounding of the sixth trumpet (9:18-19). Thus, taking these two judgments together indicates a destruction of one half of the world's population. Given the magnitude of these judgments, it is difficult to locate them in history. Thus, they must be speaking of a future event.

because it was a prophesy of coming judgment, it also tasted sweet. This sweetness is due to the fact that these judgments when completed will transfer the kingdoms of this world away from Satan and back to God. This transfer will allow Christ to reclaim the title deed to the earth that was lost in Eden (Gen 3). Thus, John's oppressed audience could draw strength from the fact that the satanic forces that were oppressing them would not be allowed to do so indefinitely.

Because of the inevitability of this kingdom transfer, John is told that the "times of the Gentiles" will only last for an additional 42 months. The times of the Gentiles represent that period in which the Gentiles are allowed to subjugate the Jewish people.⁷⁷ However, because Christ will reclaim the title deed to the earth with the pouring out of the bowl judgments, the Gentiles will only be allowed to trample upon the city of Jerusalem and the temple court for the second half of the tribulation period (11:1-2). Thus, because evil would only be allowed to dominate for a season, the churches could better bear up under their difficult circumstances by realizing that such adversity would not last forever.

Next John sees two Jewish witnesses who will minister during the second half of the tribulation period.⁷⁸ They will be killed by the antichrist, resuscitated, and taken into heaven (11:3-

⁷⁷ Dispensationalists believe that the "times of the Gentiles" began with the Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. and will end with the Second Coming of Christ. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findley, OH: Dunham Publishing Company, 1958), 315-16.

⁷⁸ Some see these two witnesses as unidentifiable prophets who will merely repeat what Moses and Elijah did in Old Testament times. However, there are good reasons for identifying these witnesses as Moses and Elijah. First, their ministries activities (11:6) are the same as that performed by Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament (Exod 7:12-21; 1 Kings 17:1). Even the length of Elijah's ministry (Rev 11:3; Luke 4:25; Jas 5:17) and the manner in which he was taken to heaven (Rev 11:12; 2 Kings 2:11) is the same. Second, they both appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:3). Thus, there is precedent for these prophets to make appearances together involving events pertaining to the appearing of the kingdom. Third, either their lives (2 Kings 2:11-12) or ministries (Num 20:12) were cut short. Thus, it stands to reason that God would allow them to return to complete their ministries in the tribulation period. Fourth, Scripture hints at their future appearance (Deut 18:15; Jude 9; Mal 4:5-6). Fifth, the prophecies about their reappearance have not been fulfilled (Luke 1:17; John 1:21). Some have speculated that one of the witnesses will be Enoch. Because Enoch like Elijah never died (Gen 5:18-24; Heb 11:5) and because men are only appointed to die once (Heb 9:27), it is argued that Enoch must be one of the two witnesses. However, this identification is problematic

14). The ministry of the two Jewish witnesses (11:3-14) is the second piece of information given in Revelation indicating that God intends to redeem the world by fulfilling Israel's covenants. This parenthetical insert ends with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19). As this trumpet is sounded the announcement is made that the kingdom of this world has now become God's kingdom. The bowl judgments will produce this result. Thus, God is praised on account of this transfer in authority. The cosmological disturbances that John sees anticipate the bowl judgments. The bowl judgments are also anticipated in the announcement that the seventh trumpet is a third woe (11:14). Because no immediate judgment takes place at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, in what sense is the seventh trumpet a third woe? As previously explained, the seventh trumpet represents such a woe because it will trigger the remaining bowl judgments.

A third non-chronological, parenthetical insert transpires in between the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the pouring forth of the first bowl (12-14). These chapters reveal Satan's opposition to the transfer of kingdom authority that was announced when the seventh trumpet was sounded (11:15). Revelation 12 records Satan's opposition to God's kingdom program.⁷⁹ Just as Satan opposed the birth of Christ (Rev 12:1-5; Matt 2:16-18), he will similarly oppose Israel after he is cast out of heaven halfway through the tribulation period (Rev 12:6-13). Yet God will supernaturally intervene and protect Israel from Satanic attack throughout the duration of the tribulation period (12:14-17). Satan attacks Israel because it is through this covenanted nation that the kingdom will ultimately come (12:10). God's preservation of Israel in the midst of Satanic opposition would certainly come as a great encouragement to the churches who were experiencing similar satanic opposition (2:9, 13, 24; 3:9). This chapter's focus upon Israel is the third clue in the book that God plans on redeeming the world by fulfilling His promises to Israel, His covenanted nation.

because Enoch was a Gentile and in the tribulation God is at work again through the Jewish people (Jer 30:7; Dan 9:24; Rev 7:4-8; 12:1). Also, Hebrews 9:27 could be speaking of a general principle that has some exceptions (John 11:43-44).

⁷⁹ In this chapter, the dragon represents Satan (12:9), the son represents Christ (12:5; Ps 2:9), and the woman represents Israel (12:1; Gen 37:9-10).

Revelation 13 records the two entities that Satan will use to oppose God's kingdom purpose during the tribulation. Revelation 13:4 indicates that Satan directly empowers these entities. The first entity is the beast that comes out of the sea (13:1-10). The beast represents the future antichrist.⁸⁰ His Gentile origin is evident from the fact that he emerges from the sea (13:1), which typically represents the Gentile nations (Isa 57:20; 17:1, 15). His Gentile origin is also verified through the fact that the various types of the antichrist used by Daniel, such as Antiochus (Dan 11:31) and Titus (Dan 9:26), were all Gentiles.⁸¹ Through a series of miracles⁸² he will catapult himself to world domination and use this global power to oppress God's people. The second beast (13:11-18) is later called the false prophet (19:20; 20:10). He will perform miracles on behalf of the first beast, force humanity to worship the first beast,⁸³ and coerce the world into submission through the use of global economics. He will likely be of Jewish origin since he comes from the land (13:11), which is typically used as a scriptural euphemism for Canaan (Zech 12:12; Matt 2:6).

Revelation 13 leaves the reader with the impression that Satan will have unlimited control during the tribulation. However, John counter balances this sentiment by reminding his audience that God will still be in ultimate control throughout this terrible time period. John does this in Revelation 14 by announcing six events to be fulfilled in the tribulation period's remaining

⁸⁰ Both entities are individuals rather than just systems. Since they are thrown into the lake of fire (19:20) and are still locate in the lake of fire 1000 years later (20:10), they both possess an eternal soul. The possession of a soul characterizes individuals and not systems. The beast's humanity is also seen in the fact that he possesses the number of a man (13:18). Paul's reference to him as "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:3) also testifies to his humanity.

⁸¹ For further verification of the antichrist's Gentile origin, see Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 207-14.

⁸² His greatest miracle will involve his resurrection from the dead. Many view this resurrection as some sort of imitated resurrection on the grounds that only God has the ability to resurrect the dead. However, this view does not hold up under careful exegetical scrutiny. The same verb *ezhsen* that is used to describe the beast's resurrection (13:14) is also used to describe Christ's resurrection (2:8). Although in Satan's powers are limited today, it seems that during the tribulation period Satan will have unrestrained ability to perform miracles through his chosen instrument (13:4). Such miracle working capacity will even include the power to resurrect the dead.

⁸³ Just as the ministry of John the Baptist was to draw attention to Christ (John 1:29), the function of the false prophet will also be to draw people's attention to the antichrist.

months.⁸⁴ All six of these events revolve around the theme of God's ultimate victory. They include the ongoing ministry of the 144,000 Jews (14:1-5), the proclamation of the eternal gospel (14:6-7), the prediction of Babylon's ultimate doom (14:8),⁸⁵ the prediction of ultimate doom upon the beast's worshippers (14:9-12),⁸⁶ the victory of the tribulation martyrs (14:13), and the destruction of the Christ rejecting nations at Armageddon (14:14-20).⁸⁷ Because God will provide ultimate victory over satanic forces during the tribulation, the churches of Asia Minor could be encouraged upon realizing that God would provide them with ultimate victory over Satanic opposition as well.

Chapter 15 marks the end of the parenthetical insert and the beginning of the final series of judgments, which are the golden bowls of wrath (15:1-19:6). Revelation 15 represents a prelude to the bowl judgments. The bowls are described as the seven last plagues (15:1). After the tribulation martyrs (15:2) praise God (15:3-4),⁸⁸ angels emerge from the heavenly tabernacle (15:5-6) holding the bowl judgments (15:7-8). After the command is given (16:1), the bowls are poured out. The first five bowls bring forth the following judgments: boils (16:2), the sea becoming blood (16:3), the fresh water becoming blood (16:4-7), the sun scorching man (16:8-9), and darkness befalling the beast's empire (16:10-11). The parallels between the bowl judgments and the Exodus judgments are obvious (Exod 9:8-10; 7:20-21; 10:21-23; 9:22-25). Thus, the bowls perform the ultimate Exodus of transferring the world's kingdoms out of satanic bondage. Again, this is an encouraging reminder to the churches of Asia Minor that the satanic oppression they are experiencing will not last

⁸⁴ Some of these judgments are introduced with the phrase "another angel" (14:6, 8, 9).

⁸⁵ Babylon's destruction will be described in great detail later on in the vision (16:19; 17-19:6).

⁸⁶ A natural transition exists in between verse 12 and 13.

⁸⁷ Here the final conflict at Armageddon is symbolically depicted as a grape harvest. This conflict is described in greater detail later on in the vision (16:13-16).

⁸⁸ The tribulation martyrs praise God at this juncture because the bowl judgments will allow Christ to regain the title deed to the earth, execute judgment upon Satan and the beast, and avenge the martyrs. It is likely that the song of Moses in verses 3-4 refers to the song recorded in Deuteronomy 32 rather than Exodus 15. First, there are similarities between the two (Deut 32:4; Rev 15:3). Second, the song deals with the latter days (Deut 32:29). Third, the song would never be forgotten (Deut 31:21). See Toussaint, "The Revelation of John," 18.

indefinitely. The sixth bowl (16:12) dries up the Euphrates to make it easier for the kings of the east to accomplish their mission of slaying a third of humanity (9:13-19).⁸⁹

The fourth non-chronological, parenthetical insertion occurs in between the pouring out of the sixth and seventh bowls (16:13-16). This parenthesis describes the supernatural gathering of the nations to the valley of Armageddon for the final conflict.⁹⁰ When the seventh bowl is poured out (16:17-21), God's judgment program is completed (16:17). This judgment is associated with various topographical (16:18, 20) and cosmological disturbances (16:21) resulting in the division of Jerusalem and the destruction of Babylon (16:19).

The judgment upon Babylon (16:19) logically leads to the fifth and final parenthetical, non-chronological insertion (17:1-19:6). This insertion expands upon the fall of Babylon that was announced in the previous chapter. Although numerous interpretations of Babylon exist, it is best to assign Babylon its literal significance as the city on the Euphrates River (18:10).⁹¹ Both chapters speak of the singular destruction of Babylon at the pouring out of the final bowl.⁹² While chapter 17

⁸⁹ A logical connection exists in between verse 12 and 13.

⁹⁰ Armageddon (literally translated "mount Megiddo") is an actual geographic area located in Northern Israel.

⁹¹ For a full discussion of the various views as well as the hermeneutical issues involved in identifying Babylon, see Andy Woods, "What is the Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18?" online: www.spiritandtruth.com, accessed 17 December 2005, 1-67.

⁹² The notion of viewing Revelation 17 and 18 as a unit is buttressed by noting the similarities between the chapters. Both chapters refer to Babylon as having the same name (17:5; 18:2), being a city (17:18; 18:10), wearing the same clothing (17:4; 18:16), holding a cup (17:4; 18:6), fornicating with kings (17:2; 18:3), being drunk with wine of immorality (17:2; 18:3), persecuting believers (17:6; 18:24), experiencing destruction by fire (17:16; 18:8), and experiencing destruction by God (17:17; 18:5, 8). The larger context also supports viewing these chapters as a unit. Revelation 14:8 announces the singular destruction of Babylon while drawing imagery from both chapters (fall: 17:16 and 18:2; name: 17:5 and 18:2; immorality: 17:2 and 18:3). Revelation 19:2-3 also announces the singular destruction of Babylon while drawing imagery from both chapters (compare 19:2 and 17:1; 19:3 and 18:9, 18). Revelation 17–18 must also be singularly connected to the seventh bowl since one of the angels who had the seven bowls also gave John the revelation of Babylon (17:1). Furthermore, most of the arguments used to prove two Babylons have been answered. For example, the phrase "after these things" (*meta tauta*) in Revelation 18:1 can simply indicate the time sequence in which the visions were revealed to John (chronological use) rather than something that must take place

focuses upon the religious aspects of the city, Revelation 18 focuses upon the commercial and political aspects of the city. Apparently, the city of Babylon will rise to great significance and influence in the tribulation period only to be destroyed by God. Babylon will be so wicked and oppressive during this period, that her destruction will invoke numerous heavenly praises (19:1-6). These heavenly hallelujahs are also no doubt due to the fact that Babylon's fall represents the last item that must fall before Christ can return and reclaim the title deed to the earth. Because God will destroy such an oppressive force in just one hour (18:10, 17, 19), John's audience can be assured that they are associated with the one who will also help them gain ultimate victory over the forces that are oppressing them.

Now that John has concluded his discussion of events of the tribulation (4:1-19:6), his vision now focuses upon the events following the tribulation (19:7-22:5). The *first* event following the tribulation will be the Second Advent (19:7-21). When Christ returns the "marriage supper of the lamb" will transpire (19:7-9). While the marriage of the church to Christ takes place in heaven after the rapture, the marriage supper will take place upon the earth subsequent to the Second Advent.⁹³ Because the church is depicted as having already been rewarded when she returns with Christ

later chronologically (eschatological use) because the phrase is accompanied by a verb of perception "I saw." Whenever a verb of perception accompanies "after these things" in Revelation, the phrase is used chronologically (4:1a; 7:1; 7:9; 15:5; 19:1) rather than eschatologically (1:19; 4:1b; 9:12; 20:3). In addition, it is claimed that Babylon in chapter 17 is destroyed in a different manner and by a different source than the Babylon in chapter 18. However, this contention is without merit because the Babylons in both chapters are both destroyed by fire (17:16; 18:9) and by God (17:17; 18:8). Moreover, it is claimed that the response to the destruction of the two Babylons is different because chapter 17 records the kings hating the harlot (17:16) and chapter 18 records the kings weeping over the harlot (18:9). However, this discrepancy can be explained. The kings in 17:16 are those who unite with the beast to defeat the harlot while the kings in 18:8 are those engaged in commerce with Babylon mourning over the loss of their source of revenue. Also, it is claimed that the Babylon in chapter 17 is referred to as a woman while the Babylon in chapter 18 is referred to as a city. However, this argument collapses upon realizing that 17:18 explains that the woman represents a city. Finally it is observed that the reference to "another angel" (18:1) bifurcates the chapters since this phrase is often used to introduce a new vision (10:1; 14:6, 8, 9). However, Revelation also interjects the phrase "another angel" into a vision without indicating that a new vision is in view (7:2; 8:3; 14:15, 17, 18). Charles H. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), 17-38.

⁹³ This distinction harmonizes well with the how those in biblical times celebrated marriage in different phases.

(19:8), the marriage and rewarding of the church at the Bema Seat judgment has obviously already transpired in heaven after the rapture. The prospect of a future reward, marriage, and marriage supper should motivate the churches of Asia Minor to pursue faithfulness and holiness in their daily lives.

John's description of Christ's return (19:11-16) not only includes the attributes that He will manifest when He returns (19:11-13) but it also includes His activities as well (19:14-16). He will slaughter His enemies so that the birds will gorge on the corpses of the dead (Matt 24:28). This event is called the "supper of God" (19:17-18) and is not to be confused with the previously described "marriage supper of the lamb." Christ will then defeat the armies that oppose Him and cast both the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire (19:19-21). The anticlimactic nature of these events is striking. No battle is even recorded. All that is mentioned is the ease of Christ's victory over His enemies. Such information would again be of tremendous encouragement to the oppressed churches of Asia Minor. Their oppressors, who seemed so formidable, would one day be instantaneously vanquished by the omnipotent Christ.

The *second* event following the tribulation will be the millennial kingdom (20:1-10). It will include the binding of Satan (20:1-3), the resurrection of Old Testament saints and tribulation martyrs to rule and reign with Christ (Dan 12:2; 20:4-6), and the defeat of Satan after his momentary release and rebellion (20:7-10).⁹⁴ At this point the title deed to the earth is reclaimed. What was lost in Eden is now regained as Christ rules and reigns over the present earth (5:10) for a thousand years. The information found in this chapter would strengthen the churches of Asia Minor who were experiencing Satanic opposition (2:9, 13, 24; 3:9). The way Satan's rebellion at the end of the kingdom age is immediately crushed without even so much as a battle as well as his binding and ultimate defeat in the lake of fire, would convey to the churches that this angelic foe who was oppressing them would eventually be crushed. The revelation of the righteous ruling in the millennium would also give the churches encouragement to endure under unfair circumstances. Although they were being oppressed in the present, the day would come when the tables would be

⁹⁴ The Gog and Magog rebellion recorded in this chapter (20:8) is not to be confused with the Gog and Magog rebellion mentioned in Ezekiel 38–39. See Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, 349-50.

turned and they would rule and reign with Christ (3:21). Also, the reason that Satan attacks “the beloved city” (an obvious reference to Jerusalem) at the end of the millennium (20:9) is because of her preeminence once again among the nations. This fact represents the fourth indication in the book that God plans on restoring the world by fulfilling his promises to His covenanted nation Israel.

The *third* event to take place after the tribulation is the Great White Throne Judgment (20:11-15). When this judgment transpires, unbelievers of all ages will be resurrected. As their names are not found written in the lamb’s book of life, they will be thrown into the lake of fire where the beast, false prophet, and Satan had previously been deposited. Their evil works as recorded in the “books” will determine their degree of punishment they will receive in the eternal lake of fire. Hades, which temporarily housed these unbelievers prior to this judgment, will then be cast into the lake of fire. The revelation of this judgment would naturally have a purifying effect on those churches in Asia Minor that were carnal. Members of these churches would conclude that if this final judgment represented God’s hatred for sin as well as his program for doing away with sin, then sin should be avoided.⁹⁵ Also, if these assemblies happened to have any non believers in their midst (a debatable proposition), then revelation of this judgment would encourage them to “get right with God” in order to avoid this horrific judgment.

The *fourth* event that will take place after the tribulation is the establishment of the eternal state. Because at this point God has won “the seed of the woman/seed of the serpent conflict” (Gen 3:15) by redeeming the kingdoms of this world, He is now free to create an uncursed new world (21:1; 2 Pet 3:10-13).⁹⁶ First, the eternal state is described in general terms (21:1-8). One of its most striking features is its holiness (21:27). For example, Revelation 21:8 describes eight sinful lifestyles that will be excluded from the eternal state. This insight gives God’s perspective on holiness, which would again encourage those carnal churches to practice holiness in the present.

⁹⁵ Although Christians will not participate in this judgment, living with knowledge of it still can have a purifying effect on their lives by showing them God’s mind on the subject of sin.

⁹⁶ Specific references to the curse being absent from the eternal state are found in 21:4-5; 22:3.

Second, the specifics of the eternal city are given (21:9-22:5). The naming of the gates after the twelve tribes of Israel (21:12b-13) represent the fifth clue given in the book that God plans on redeeming the earth by fulfilling His promises to His covenanted nation Israel. Because the gates are named after the tribes and the foundations are named after the apostles (21:14; Eph 2:20), God will cause the church and Israel, His two great programs for redeeming humanity, to be eternally remembered throughout the eschaton. As indicated earlier, the promises given to the various churches in chapters 2–3 come from this section of this book describing the eternal state. Thus, the material found in these final two chapters would be a tremendous source of comfort and encouragement to these churches to endure in the midst of their trying circumstances. Although they are suffering in the present, they will be richly rewarded in the future through their participation in the eternal state.

Now that John has concluded the major section of his book describing “the things that will take place” (4:1-22:5), he concludes the letter with an epilogue (22:6-21). *First*, words of comfort are provided (22:6-17). Because the things predicted in the letter will soon become a reality, the churches are on the winning side of history. Thus, they can be comforted in the midst of their oppression. Because God will vanquish sin, their daily lives should reflect the character of their destiny. Thus, they should pursue holiness in the present. *Second*, John warns against adding to or subtracting from the content of the vision (22:18-19).⁹⁷ *Third*, the vision concludes with a benediction (22:20-21). Unlike the Old Testament, which concludes with a prophecy of a coming curse (Mal 4:6), the New Testament concludes with the promised blessing of Christ’s soon return.

⁹⁷ Similar warnings against adding or subtracting from divine revelation are found throughout Scripture (Deut 4:32; 12:32; Prov 30:6; 2 Pet 3:16). This warning seems to be operating from the presupposition that a child of God would never purposely injure what God has revealed. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 340.

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⁹⁸ Aune is an example of a historicist commentary. Beale represents a commentary coming from the idealist, amillennial perspective. Chilton represents a commentary from a preterist, postmillennial perspective. Ladd's commentary comes from the covenant premillennial, futurist point of view. Thomas' commentary is from the dispensational, premillennial, futurist perspective.

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