



Folio 17r from *Les Très Riches Heures*
du Duc de Berry (1413-1416)

26. Revelation 1–3

The Revelation to John;
Apocalyptic Literature;
Interpretive Approaches;
Messages to the Seven Churches

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.” (Rev 1:1-2)

Overview of Revelation

- **Attributed Author:** “John” (1:1, 4, 9), a Jewish-Christian prophet
 - Early patristic evidence and latter-day revelation confirm his identity as the apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James (See next slide for other suggestions)
- **Date:** Either late in the reign of Nero (c. A.D. 64–68) or in the later phases of the reign of Domitian (c. A.D. 92–96)
- **To:** “Seven Churches” in Asia Minor (1:4; 2:1-3:22; 22:16)
- **From:** Island of Patmos
 - John has been “exiled” to this penal colony by the Romans, but probably by local officials rather than by the emperor, who would probably have had not idea who he was
 - Perhaps put in final form in the Roman Province of Asia (possibly the city of Ephesus itself)
- **Unity and Integrity:** a single work
 - possibly composed in stages, incorporating some older apocalyptic materials (from John the Baptist?); some scholars see two apocalypses that have been joined.
- **Literary Genre:** an “apocalypse” (1:1; 4:1, more below), with an epistolary frame (letter-like introduction and conclusion, 1:4; 22:21)

Authorship

- **Stated Author: “John,” without title or identifier**
 - Writer of the Fourth Gospel keeps himself anonymous
 - Revelation assumes that its seer, John, is well-enough known and authoritative enough that he does not need to use a title (cf. James)
- **Patristic Evidence**
 - Earliest fathers—Justin Martyr (d. A.D. 165), Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180), Clement of Alexandria (d. A.D. 215), and Tertullian (d. A.D. 220)—all agree that the seer was John, son of Zebedee
 - Later fathers thought that the author was not the work of the apostle (Eusebius, quoting Papias, thought that it was *the elder* John)
 - Following this, much modern scholarship tries to question the traditional identification
 - **Latter-day revelation, however, confirms the identification (1 Nephi 14:18-27; Ether 4:16; D&C 7; D&C 77:1-15; D&C 88:141)**
- **The Problem of Language**
 - Fourth Gospel has fairly literary Greek, Revelation has poor grammar and many Semiticisms
 - The Gospel and the letters could have been written or revised by scribes, **while Revelation may represent John’s own Greek!** (see Acts 4:13 and remember that John was “exiled” on Patmos when he wrote the vision)
- **Unique Similarities with the Fourth Gospel**
 - *Logos* or “Word” (John 1:1; Rev 19:13)
 - “The Lamb” (John 1:29, 36; Rev 5:6 and *passim*)
 - “Water of Life” (John 7:37; Rev 22:17)

8/25/2008

26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

3

Genre

See web pages of Prof. Felix Just, S.J. - Loyola Marymount University

- In popular terminology, an “apocalypse” is a catastrophic event (e.g., nuclear holocaust).
- In biblical terminology, an “apocalypse” is not an event, but a **“revelation” that is recorded in written form**
 - it is a piece of **crisis literature** that “reveals” **truths about the past, present, and/or future in highly symbolic terms**
 - the revelation often **comes in dreams or visions**, and usually needs to be **interpreted with the help of an angel or other divine intermediary**
 - it is usually **intended to provide hope and encouragement** for people in the midst of severe trials and tribulations
- Detailed Definition
 - “‘Apocalypse’ is a genre of **revelatory literature with a narrative framework**, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient . . . intended to **interpret the present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future**, and to **influence both the understanding and the behavior** of the audience by means of divine authority.” (SBL’s “Apocalypse Group”; published in J. J. Collins, *Semeia* 14 [1979], 9)
- Purposes
 - **To encourage Christians to preserve faith in the midst of trials and tribulations** (cf. 13:10b; 14:12)
 - **To reveal the full glory and majesty of Christ**

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26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

4

Six Elements of Style

Richard Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals: The Visions of John the Revelator*

- Repetition
 - Underscores points, allows further insight through different perspectives
- Expansion
 - Brief statements expanded, sometimes after an interval
- Interruptions
 - Displacement within a paragraph or interludes that even break chapters
- Prefaces
 - Offer reassurance before proceeding to more disturbing details of the visions
 - The purpose of Revelation was “to cheer and sustain” its readers!
- Non realism
 - Abrupt changes (7 stars in a hand, hand then laid on John’s shoulder! 1:16-17)
 - Impossible combinations (writing inside a sealed scroll, 5:1ff)
 - Contradictions (saints to be pillars in the temple of New Jerusalem, but then New Jerusalem does not have a temple, 3:12 and 21:22)
- Symbolism
 - Old Testament echoes (esp. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah)
 - **Gematria** or numerical symbolism (7 perfect, 6 incomplete; multiples of 3; 1,000 = a lot or a long time; Individual letters have numeric value. (A=1, B=2, C=3, etc.)

8/25/2008

26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

5

Structure

- **Prologue (1:1–3)**
- **Letter to the Seven Churches (1:4–3:22)**
- **First Revelatory Experience (4:1–11:19)**
 - Vision of the Heavenly Court: God and the Lamb (4:1b–11)
 - The Seven-Sealed Scroll (5:1–11:19)
 - The Scroll and the Lamb (5:1–14)
 - Opening the First thru Sixth Seals (6:1–7:17)
 - Seventh Seal and the Seven Trumpets (8:1–11:18)
- **Second Revelatory Experience (12:1–22:5)**
 - The Woman, Child, and Dragon (12:1–17)
 - The Demonic Trinity: Dragon and Two Beasts (13:1–18)
 - The Lamb and His Servants (14:1–20)
 - Seven Plagues and Seven Bowls (15:1–16:21)
 - Judgment on Babylon, the Great Harlot (17:1–19:10)
 - Victory of Christ (19:11–20:15)
 - New Heaven and New Earth (21:1–22:5)
- **The Letter Resumes: Epilogue and Blessing (22:6–21)**

8/25/2008

26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

6

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Prologue (1:1–3)

- “The **Revelation of Jesus Christ**, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and **signified it by his angel unto his servant John**: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.” (1:1–2)
- **Revelation**, from the Greek *apokalypsis*, means “unveiling” or “uncovering”
 - Book of Revelation (sing.), not revelations!
- **Of Jesus Christ** can be either subjective (possessive) or objective: **Christ’s revelation to John** or **the revealing of Jesus Christ in his glory to John**
 - **The major theme of the book is the revelation or unveiling of Jesus Christ in his power and glory** (in the Gospel he saves—mercy; in Revelation he punishes—judgment)
- **Signified it by his angel unto his servant John**: typical apocalyptic feature (cf. 1 Nephi 11)

8/25/2008

26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

7

“The Words of *This* Prophecy . . .”

Prologue (1:1–3)

- “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the **words of this prophecy**, and keep those things which are written therein: **for the time is at hand.**”
- **Words of this prophecy**: important for interpreting 22:18, “For I testify unto every man that heareth **the words of the prophecy of this book**, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”
 - “This book” from *ho biblios* for a single scroll or book
 - Not from *ta biblia*, a collection of “books” later thought of as a singular “Bible” (*he biblia*)
 - **John is only talking about the book of Revelation here, not adding to or taking away from the Bible as a whole**, which was not compiled until a couple hundred years later
- **The time is at hand**: application to readers in *all* ages
 - Many of the events that the church in John’s day is going to experience (and suffer) will be **types of what will happen in the end . . .**

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26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

8

Christ Unveiled in Glory

Opening formula (1:4–8)

- “John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, **from him which is, and which was, and which is to come**; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. **Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father**; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (1:4–6, **letter format**)
 - Opening Formula of the “Letter” to the Seven Churches
 - The seven churches . . . the seven Spirits which are before his throne: representative figures for the churches; the JST also calls these “servants,” perhaps representing the leadership of the churches
 - **From him which is, and which was, and which is to come**: ungrammatical in Greek, this is a Semiticism which probably reflects a **direct rendition of the meaning of the Hebrew YHWH**; elsewhere in Revelation the title is applied to Christ
 - **Hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father**: the royal and national priesthood not obtained for Israel by Moses under the law and promised to those who receive the fullness of the Melchizedek priesthood

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4. The Revelation of Jesus Christ

9

John’s Inaugural Vision (1:9–20)

“I Am Alpha and Omega . . .” (apocalyptic vision)

- “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, ‘**I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last . . .**’ And in the midst of the seven lampstands [I saw] One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. **His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters**; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘**Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death . . .**’” (1:10–18 NKJV)
 - Cf. Christ in the Kirtland Temple, 3 Apr 1836: “We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber. **His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters**, even the voice of Jehovah, saying: **I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father.**” (D&C 110:2–4)

8/25/2008

26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

10

Seven Churches of Asia



- Ephesus (2:1–7)
 - Abandoned “first love” (faithfulness to gospel conversion)
 - Those who overcome are promised to eat from the Tree of life
- Smyrna (2:8–11)
 - Nothing bad said about this church
 - Those who overcome are promised not to be harmed by second death
- Pergamum (2:12–17)
 - Satan’s throne probably represents the provincial center of the imperial cult
 - Follow false teachings (Balaam and Nicolaitans)
 - Those who overcome are promised hidden manna, white stone with new name

8/25/2008

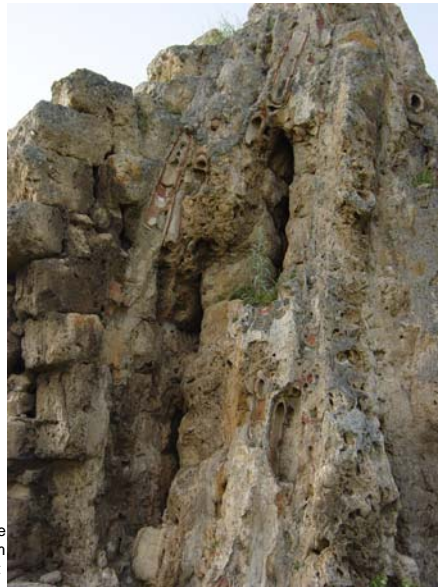
26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

11

Seven Letters (2:1–3:22)

- Thyatira (2:18–29)
 - Tolerated a false prophetess
 - Those who overcome are promised rule, morning star
- Sardis (3:1–6)
 - Nothing good said, alive but dead
 - Those who overcome are promised white garments, name in book of life
- Philadelphia (3:7–13)
 - Nothing bad said
 - Those who overcome are promised to be pillars in the temple, receive Christ’s name
- Laodicea (3:14–21)
 - Nothing good said, neither hot nor cold
 - Those who overcome are promised to sit with Christ on his throne

Water pipes in Laodicea, clogged with mineral deposits from the hot springs at Hierapolis; Laodicea also piped in cold water from Colossae, but by the time both the hot and cold water arrived, it was lukewarm!



8/25/2008

26. Revelation Intro; Rev 1-3

12