

Revelations as Apocalyptic Genre

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Genre: "epistolary apocalypse, frequently interrupted for worship."

A Metanarrative for the present in light of the future... We see the present in light of the ultimate future.. our present is the beginnings of the future such as to give us perspective... Therefore, the emphasis is upon the heavenly perspective of history so that the churches will be reminded that there is a "story behind their particular stories-- something bigger is going on! I.e. a prophecy cast in an apocalyptic mold and written down in a letter form in order to motivate an audience to change their behavior in the light of the transcendent reality of the books message...

Redemptive-Historical Context: (circ. 95 AD)

During the reign of Domitian around 95AD

Emperor Worship-- Rev. presupposes that Christian's were being required to participate in imperial cult (13:4-8, 15-16; 14:9-11, 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4) The threat of persecution because of refusal to worship the ungodly king. Later, there is hard evidence given the legal requirements for emperor worship in 113AD during the reign of Trajan...)

Note 1 Clement 1:1 (96 AD) "the sudden and repeated calamities and reverses that have befallen us."

- Pliny's letter to Trajan refers to people who had apostatized "many years" earlier and a "a few as much as 25 years ago" (i.e. Domitian's reign)
- Pliny also noted in 113 AD that he was unsure about "the nature of their (the Christian's) creed" but was at least certain that their "inflexible obstinacy" should be punished. Indeed, even before 70AD Tacitus affirms that those "called Christians by the populace" were considered separately as "a class hated for their abominations"...
- Some also suggest that the cult of Domitian at Ephesus with its colossal statue, is what lies behind the depiction in Rev. 13 of believers being put to death for not worshipping the "image of the beast."
- There was a danger of identifying with a religion that denounced any involvement with the imperial cult in a culture where socio-political requirements and religion overlapped...

Therefore, outright oppression was rising and John expects a heightening of the persecution imminently.

Options in the face of persecution:

1. Recant and deny their Christian faith as Pliny records that some did.
2. The letters in Rev. suggest that Jewish Christians were tempted to escape persecution by seeking some form of identification with Jewish synagogues which were exempted from emperor worship and even the emperor cult in order to escape persecution...
3. Openly confess Christ and suffer the persecution as Pliny also tells us happened.
4. They could compromise which is what some of the false teachers in the churches were encouraging (2:14-15, 20)--- the line of logic for this was as following.
 - a. Some felt that they could attend trade guild festivities honoring patron gods or acknowledge Caesar as god if called to since close association with idolatry would enable at

Christian to "know the deep things of Satan (12:24) and his inner counsel-- purportedly this would allow Christians to know the satanic opponents deceptive methods as to defeat him from the inside out...

b. Synergistic combination of Christianity and pagan religion could be made in which the Christian faith could still be held with integrity-- much as OT Israel had attempted to combine Baal worship with worship of Yahweh...

c. Perhaps also inspired by the Jewish practice in which sacrifices were made in honor of the emperor as a respected person but not as a god, etc. John has these in mind when he called them "liars" in 21:8, 27, 22:15.

Enter John's Apocalyptic Epistle to the "7" Churches (note symbolism below):

- John's exile to Patmos (1:9) fits the conditions of Domitian's reign when forms of persecution for refusal to participate in emperor worship were likely increasing and becoming more systematic.
- Some of the seven churches have already endured degrees of tribulation (2:9) and persecution on account of the name of Christ (2:3)
- Many in Smyrna will be imprisoned in the future 2:10
- The Condition of Churches in Asia Minor--Spiritual lathargy of Ephesus, Sardis and Laodiceas is so widespread and severe that each church is on verge of losing its identity as a church... the language seems to fit a longer development, perhaps so that the church was in its second generation of existence...

Theological Crisis: A perceived discrepancy with belief that the kingdom had been inaugurated, that God was sovereign over history and that Christ would soon return to conclude history and on the other hand, the reality that forces of evil continued to exist, to dominate culture and even flourish, while oppressing believers to varying degrees.

How did the truths of the gospel relate practically and specifically to the difficult cultural, social, political and economic realities, all of which were inextricably linked to various forms of Greco-Roman religion? Enter John's Apocalyptic epistle!

Is Christ winning??

John's Response: vs. 1-4 Blessed... 4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

E.g. A Pastoral Epistle:

- A letter to Christian community toward entering the "blessed" life of God's covenant purposes for them in Christ...
- Rev. is broadly an epistle the contents of which are apocalyptic and prophetic in genre... as in the introduction at 1:4, grace is pronounced over the churches and 22:20 also contains a concluding "Amen" to enhance the epistolary closing... the main purpose of the epistolary genre in the NT is to address present problems that have arisen in various churches. The epistle writers appeal to the readers present and future participation and blessings in Christ as the basis for appeals to obedience...
- As an epistle, Revelations is written from a pastoral motivation. John identifies with the listeners as their "brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom ...that our ours in Jesus Christ. " His seven misunderstandings sprinkled throughout the book remind the listener that John is truly our brother and companion, one like us..." (alerting us then to the misunderstanding that we would have about God's plan." Syd Hielma

e.g. The Blessing of Having A Metanarrative In Life as to see our "Stories within THE Story"

John's Method: *Apocalyptic Prophecy*

The first three verses contain a general summary of the whole book...and give us important clues as to how to read it...

Note esp. Revelation 1:1-3 compared to Daniel 2 and esp. vs. 28

Rev. 1:1 *The apocalypse of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to "show" to his servants what is necessary to happen shortly and 2 (the things which) God signified by sending his angel to his servant John who witnessed (testified) the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ as much as he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*

1) **Apocalyptic:** *The apocalypse of Jesus Christ... showed...signified*

Clearly an allusion to Dan. 2:28-30, 45. The clauses "apocalypse ... God showed..."

NOTE: the phrase "what must come to pass".. and "he made known" occur together *only* in Daniel 2 and Rev. 1:1.

- Rev is best seen as fitting into the genre of OT apocalyptic works, especially that of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. John tells us this from the very beginning.
- Apocalyptic—prophetic theology communicated through visions/dreams/images/

E.G We are told in the book's introduction that the majority of the material in it is revelatory symbolism. Hence the predominant manner by which to approach the material will be according to a nonliteral interpretive method!

- This doesn't mean that every part is symbolic, but the essence of the book is a narrative of symbol by which we understand the transcendent meaning of history!
- Why? The literary form of symbolic parable appears whenever ordinary warnings are no longer heeded, by people who are spiritually callous and intent on continuing in darkness. I.e.
- I.e. Against the OT and Gospel background, John repeatedly will use the expression "the one having ears let him hear" -- this is in line with prior prophetic patterns (Is. 6:9-10, Ezek. 3:27 and of course used by Christ to introduce his symbolic parables in places like Mt. 13:9, etc.) the use of symbols then was both to open the eyes of the remnant even as it condemned those who were hard of heart....
- Rev. will have this effect as well. Its vivid symbolism acts then as parables that teach a transcendent truth about life! E.G. A Genre akin to C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*... *Pelandra*... what these books do so well is both jolt our imaginations in order to get our attention, but in doing this they get us in touch with a narrative that explains our everyday experience. This is exactly what Revelation will do for us, especially those who are disillusioned or have become hopeless and dull of hearing to get us to see life from the balcony of heaven.

Use of OT Images and Symbols:

- *Old Testament:*
Rev. contains more OT references than any other NT book! Range includes Pentateuch, Judges, 1-2 Sam. 1-2 Kings, Pss, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Job and the major and minor prophets.

I.e. John does not view himself as a prophet independent of his OT tradition or heritage but applies to himself the history of redemption as being worked out in his own situation and as being fulfilled in his own redemptive era...

Daniel is most referenced-- Among the allusions to Daniel-- the most are from Daniel 2 & 7. (Ezekiel ranks as the second most used OT book- and perhaps exerts a greater influence in Rev. than Daniel...)

- *Images and Symbols*

We should not look for a one-to-one correspondence between the symbols of Rev. and the events of church history and/or the future. The apocalypse symbolically portrays events throughout history in so far as they are to be understood within the greater meta-narrative of redemptive history and its categories for understanding history.

OT Numerology:

Symbolism of 7's: The principal concept and reference used in the Book of Revelation is the number seven (7). Since their early history, the number seven had the meaning of "completeness", "totality", and/or "perfection", to the Jews. Items that refer to sevens represent totality of what they refer to . (seventh day represents the totality of all of life being brought to God in consecration to him ,etc)

Examples:

- On 7 occasions scattered throughout Rev. John misunderstands what he sees and is corrected by someone else = Life Isn't what it seems, what we misunderstand as darkness is light to God as the perfect plan that leading to victory! Jesus Wins, even if we must now see it through the eyes of faith.
- Seven Visions—Eyes of Faith from the perspective of heaven's wisdom
- 7 Seals—Perfect history under the rule of God...

Symbolism of 12's: The number twelve (12) has significance in the light of the twelve tribes of Judah (Judah, Benjamin, plus the other ten "lost" tribes). This "image" is re-emphasized by Jesus Christ's twelve apostles, in the New Testament.

Symbolism of 1,000's: The number one thousand (and therefore millennia) had been used for many years by the Jews as a concept of "many" or "a very great amount". It was used in relation to many people, many years, a very large amount of time,....etc. Never as a precise number.

Symbolism of 144,000: One more number in the Book of Revelation. The number one hundred and fortyfour thousand (144,000) is used to denote all (or most) of humanity. It is the twelve tribes, times the twelve disciples (new covenant), times one thousand [12 x 12 x 1000].

OT Allusions:

Allusions to Egypt: The "image" of Egypt is normally used in reference to those who under adverse conditions want to abandon their faith. A reference to those who are like the Israelites in the desert, who wanted to return to the fleshpots of Egypt

Allusions to Sodom: The image of Sodom, to those who have given in to immorality and corruption

like the inhabitants of the city of Sodom, which God destroyed.

Allusions to Babylon: The allusions to Babylon on the other hand, in Revelation and the many other writings of the time, always represents Rome and the Roman government. Corrupt, tyrannical, and immoral Rome becomes a personification of Babylon; the "harlot" or prostitute of the world.

Allusion to Armageddon: Although the name Armageddon as such does not appear in any literature before Christ (or after, other than Revelation), most of the scholars believe that it is a reference to, or better said a Greek transliteration of, the Hebrew name A'r Megiddo; that is to say "Mount" Megiddo. The plain of Megiddo, or better said again, the "mountain pass" of Megiddo, was the location of many major critical battles in the Old Testament. It is the place where the Israelite armies first confronted all the invasions from their north, such as the Assyrians, Macedonians and the Chaldeans (Babylonians). In other words, it is "the place of confrontation". [The mountain overlooking this pass (or plain) is now called Mt. Carmel.]

Allusion to Plagues: Exodus... represent the many calamities that befall those (past and future) who stray from, or reject, the Word of God.

Allusion to Desert: Exodus... used both as a traditional symbol of a place to hide; a place of refuge; and also, of a place of temptation.

Allusion of Idol/Statues in OT: For example, we can certainly understand why John is reminded of Daniel... AS compared to the statue of Domitian in Ephesus in Rev. 13, John is reminded of Daniel 3 and the narrative of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's refusal to bow down to a huge statue of Nebuchadnezzar (see Lxx of Dan. 3:12, 18 and comments on Rev. 13:7-8, 14-15, 18) And of course there was the refusal of Daniel to compromise his faith against all social, political and even legal odds.

Therefore, Revelations is A Description of life on God's earth from the perspective of the heavenly throne room... symbols with multiple meanings come and go... we are not called to find an earthly correspondent for every number, symbol and time frame referred to. Rather this is learning by immersion, the listening community is called to swim in the ocean called Revelation... we are to participate in it... the early Christians would have heard the book read in its entirety during worship; its many choruses of praise would have evoked from them worshipful participation concluded with the celebration of the Lord's Supper... "

2) Prophetic: (the ESCHATOLOGICAL now/not yet) *what is necessary to happen "shortly"...for the time is near*

- Interpretive key: Vs. 1— Rev. 1:1's "quickly..." is an intentional alteration of the LXX "in the latter days" of Dan. 2:28 in and should be carefully noted.
 - Daniel 2:28 (LXX) "he showed... what things must take place in the latter days"
 - Rev. 1:1 "to show... what things must take place quickly (immediately)"

What Daniel expected to occur in the distant "last days" with respect to the defeat of cosmic evil and the ushering in the of divine kingdom, John expects to begin "immediately" or in his own generation, if it has not already in fact begun.

- Notice also the "now/not yet" theme was already commonplace to John as understood from Daniel... Example: Luke 20:18, Mt.21:44 identifies the "stone" of Dan. 2:34-35 with Christ and understands the Daniel 2 prophecy as having already begun to be realized in Jesus earthly ministry. The same "inaugurated eschatological" of Da. 2:35 is probably referenced in Rev. 12:8.

- Notice then the parallel structure of the three septets-- Seals, Trumpets and Bowls... as divided into four catastrophies, the woes intensify, interlude, the end..
- Therefore, the primary intention of the numbering is to represent the order of John's visions, not necessarily the order of historical events, which would have to be only secondary..
- Notice also the repetition of significant themes

Components of Recapitulation

1. *Rev. is divided into 7 sections (each initiated by "I saw" in relation to one of John's visions ... ,*
For example: c.f. Rev. 20:1 below... vs. 1—7th *Then I saw a*

this language is used throughout the book of Rev. to introduce the "dream" component of John's revelation as related to symbolic visions meant not to be taken literally, but symbolically as related to theological and redemptive historical themes... (thus 1:1, 4:1, 12:1, 13:1, 14:1, 17:1, etc)

6th section--17 thru 19-- fall of Babylon (evil city) and the beasts and the glorification of the church (heavenly city) Set in contrast as via two dinners, etc.

Chapt. 20 "I saw" begins 7th section-- If it is understood as we have already, that 20-22 is but the last of the seven section of the book of Rev., even the seventh trumpet and therefore doesn't describe a chronology but a theology at a different level...

2. *Each section runs parallel to each other in the form of a Recapitulation: (7 frames that speak to the same period in history!)*
 - *Recapitulation== "re-caps" what was just said, but in more vivid terms in a way that makes the reader feel it more and more intensely as if history itself is moving in waves that are getting more and more intense...*
 - *each frame/section depict the church in the world from the time of Christ's bodily ascension to the time of his bodily descension or return to earth as heaven...
Therefore, Rev. 20:1 is the last of the seven sections such as to take us back to the beginning of the New Testament era...*
3. *Each section tells the story about the church militant that is also the church triumphant as culminating in the final return of Christ and the ultimate judgment of evil together with the ultimate rewards/triumph of the Christians...*

E.g. History now is framed within an eschatological (last days) tension or struggle-- but in a way that wants to show that perhaps in spite of what it feels like at times, to see life from the vantage point of ascension is to see the struggle as a struggle in progress vs. defeat-

Each make the same point 7 times: The church militant being the church triumphant!

*I.e. Ascension theology is framed in terms of making process albeit a progress that is being made through struggle and suffering! **The church is at war!!** The church needs to see itself in war, even if it is war not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces—*

But not to be discouraged, the church, though militant within conflict of war, IS the war triumphant—it is already happening, but it will eventually happen in a way that is definitive and complete...

1. The three and one half years of persecution in 11:2-3, 12:6, 14; 13:5 suggest that chs. 11, 12, and 13 do not follow one another chronologically but refer to the same events...

2. The battle imagery in 19:17-18, 21 and 20:8-9 is all from the same eschatological battle in Ezekiel 39...

Example: Notice how this impacts specific interpretation: Rev. 20:1-6!

What should we expect about this present redemptive period and life under Christ's ascension ministry today? What should life look like NOW if we are experiencing ascension?

And what passage(s) should we turn to for the answer?

- "re-cap" was has been said already 6 times...
6th section--17 thru 19-- fall of Babylon (evil city) and the beasts and the glorification of the church (heavenly city) Told in terms of two contrasting dinners....

Chapt. 20 "I saw" begins 7th section-- If it is understood as we have already, that 20-22 is but the last of the seven section of the book of Rev., even the seventh trumpet and therefore doesn't describe a chronology but a theology at a different level...
- / Having described the final judgment of both the "wicked" outside of Christ and the "righteous in Christ" in Chapt. 19, , the question driving much of Rev. remains-- "when?"
- John's answer in chapt. 20 is "in 1000 years" And by this he meant " when God's purpose for the present age is perfectly and finally completed..."
 - What John "saw" in this particular vision was a people resurrected and given life for 1,000 years... these are "symbols" very much like the rest of the vision wherein John sees a serpent, a beast, chains, an abyss, a dragon, etc.-- i.e. things which are clear meant to be symbolic of greater redemptive historical realities...
 - John is describing the "present" context, after Christ's ascension and before his return as the 1000 year period!

Therefore, the "millennium" is now! We are living in the millennium! I.e. The descending angel introduces a vision in vv 1-6 going back before the time of the final judgment in history--a time extended form Christ's resurrection to his final coming.
- BUT NOTE ESPECIALLY:
 - the Milliniam consist of a 2 part vision introduced by "I saw"
 - vs. 1-3-- "I saw"... 1000 yr. binding of Satan
 - vs. 4-6-- "and (then in sequence to the dream, not in sequence to time of accurance) I saw..." the 1,000 year reign of those who have died in Christ.
 - NOT 2 1000 YEAR PERIODS, BUT ONE AND THE SAME, AS SPANING THE AGE FROM CHRIST'S FIRST COMING TO HIS SECOND...
- **What is happening during the Millennium (ascension era)?** Binding of Satan and expansion of kingdom, albeit during INCREASED tribulation. (VS. 1-3)

- **First** The "key of the abyss" is the same as " the key of death and of Hades" which Christ holds in ch. 1 since he has overcome death by his resurrection (1:18) (note also 1 Cor. 15)
 - **Next (second) and a great chain.**
 - How exactly is this "binding" to be defined?
 - Answer-- vs. 3, "*that he should no longer deceive the nations*"-- i.e It keeps Satan from preventing all people" throughout the earth being drawn to Jesus
 - Satan is not completely destroyed YET, I.E. he is "let out" for a while" under restraint (v. 3) "after this" could be "with this" i.e. till the thousand years were ended, with these he must be loosed for a little while...
- **20:4-6-- A CONCURRENT REIGN OF CHRIST WITH SUFFERING/STRUGGLE/MILITANTS**
 - **Vs. 7** initiates the events that will happen at the end of our present age in escalation of the tribulation (as symbolized by the 1000 yrs)

MAIN POINT: "progress" is ironically as through the sufferings and tribulations of the saints.

THE KEY HERE IS THA THE PRESENT AGE IS DESCRIBED A BOTH MILITANT (STRUGGLE, FIRST DEATH) AND TRIUMPHANT!

A description of the "last days" as symbolically represented by a "1,000" years (a perfect and premeditated allotment of time determined by God to fulfill his plan to glorify himself among the nations)

In these "last days"-- Satan is "bound" or "restrained" so as to be unable to thwart the spreading of the gospel throughout the nations. BUT STILL ACTIVE AND ABLE TO INFLICT SUFFERING AND CONTEXT (This we have seen since pentecost where, in a way unparalleled in all of redemptive history before, God has expanded his name to more and more nations)

Also, in these last days-- those who die the "first death" as related to their earthly death, but who belong to Christ are described as "reigning" with Christ in heaven ... these are a people over whom the "second death" (as related to their eternal and spiritual death) has no power.

And so,

It is about this "second death" that John turns his attention in vs. 7ff.

Beale:

"After emphasizing that the initial judgment of Satan (1-3) resulted in the blessing of life for God's people (vv. 4-6) John now in contrast underscores in 7-15 the final judgment of the "second death" for Satan and all his allies... "

-- i.e. the second death is the final judgment of God at the final resurrection whereby those in Christ will be fully glorified and those against Christ will suffer eternal punishment as judgment against them by God...

In keeping with John's vision, the whole thing is depicted with images that are meant to describe such things as are too awful, for words... for here, we come to the end of what began way back in Gen. 3 and the promise to eventually defeat Satan and to ultimately and finally vindicate God as the only great and cosmic King of creations, both in the spiritual and physical realms!

Mainpoint:

Ascension theology is framed in terms of making process albeit a progress that is being made through struggle and suffering! A Theology of Realistic Optimism coupled Activism in relation to the world contra a theology of pessimism and passivity!

The church is at war!! The church needs to see itself in war, even if a war not against flesh and blood but against spritilaity forces— but the church is winning the war, even if at times it doesn't seem like it in the heat of a particular battle—but we fight therefore as spiritual warriors that are already tasting victory.

Persevering Worship (c.f. Rev. 4-5 esp, but scattered throughout in response to each vision, recapitulation.

Ultimate Purpose: A WORSHIPFUL LIFE OF FAITH IN THE MIDST OF THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AMIDST GREAT TRIBULATION

In John's *REVELATIONS*, The consummation of church history is told with the jolting visions of heavenly liturgy in John's apocalyptic epistle. We are met there with visions of the glorified Christ in the company of worshippers. These liturgical visions are central to John's exhortation to the church in her mission to persevere in being a witness to the nations for the glory of God as revealed in Christ.

The primacy of worship as the response of the child of God to the acts of God demonstrates that on one level the entire book of R. is a response to Pss 137: 4, How can we sing the song fo the Lord while in a strange land? Unlike the Psalmist, he is not in a strange land, but he is in exile-- he is in the Spirit and where the spirit is there is th presence of the Lord there is the temple... therefore, while we live in exile, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us... Rom.8:37, 39.