Revelation

A Guide to Interpretation
Authorship

• John the Apostle
  – Probably supported by Papias (c. 130)
  – Justin Martyr (c. 140)
  – Melito, bishop of Sardis (c. 165)
  – Irenaus, from Smyrna (c. 180)
  – Muratorian Canon (c. 190)

• According to Gerhard Maier, no NT book has a stronger or earlier tradition of apostolic authorship than Revelation
Date, Provenance, Addressees

• Possibly dated to the reign of one of four different emperors
  – Trajan (98-117) Dorotheus; Theophylact
  – Domitian (81-96; c. 95 or 96) supported by Irenaus and other church fathers
  – Nero (54-68) Syriac versions of Rev
  – Claudius (41-54) Epiphanius
• Evidence for determining date
  – Persecution of Christians (favors Nero date)
  – Conditions of churches (favors Domitian)
  – 7 kings of 17:9-11 (favors Nero)
• Provenance: Patmos
• Addressees: churches of Asia Minor
Characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature

- revelatory literature
- narrative framework
- mediated to human by otherworldly being
- discloses a transcendental reality
  - eschatological salvation
  - supernatural world
Works Classified as Apocalyptic Literature

• Select Jewish or Christian writings produced between 250 BC and AD 150

• Canonical Literature
  – Revelation
  – Daniel 7-12 (though Daniel probably dates to 6th century)

• Noncanonical Literature
  – 14 Jewish documents (including 1 Enoch)
  – 23 Christian documents
Key Features of Apocalyptic Literature

- Eschatological Focus
- Revelation of the Hidden
- Heavy Symbolism (particularly complex and strange symbols like bizarre beasts)
- Angelic Messengers and Heavenly Ascents (Revelation 1:1 and 4:1)
- Three Axes:
  - Temporal: Present Age and Age to Come
  - Spatial: Earth and Heaven
  - Anthropological: Wicked and the Righteous
Apocalyptic Literature and the Political Cartoon (Caird’s view)
Major Approaches to Revelation

• Preterist View
• Historicist View
• Futurist View
• Idealist View
Preterist View

- View I sees Revelation as a prophecy of the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70
  - Revelation predates AD 70
  - Babylon the Great represent Israel who oppresses Christians

- Weaknesses
  - Daniel suggests pagan nations, not apostate Israel, are focus of judgment
  - Revelation seems to describe final judgment
Preterist View

• View II holds that Revelation is a prophecy of the fall of the Roman Empire
  – Does not necessitate a pre 70 date
  – Rome is a more probable id of Babylon

• Weakness
  – Revelation seems to describe final, not temporal judgment
Historicist View

• Revelation predicts major movements of church history up to the time of the commentator
  – Examples: invasions of the Roman Empire by Goths and Muslims, corruption of medieval papacy, the reign of Charlemagne, Protestant Reformation, destruction under Napoleon and Hitler

• Weakness
  – limits prophecies to Western church history
  – has little relevance to original readers
Futurist View

- Regards Rev. 4-22:5 as referring exclusively to future time immediately preceding the end of history
  - Dispensational futurism
    - literal interpretation
    - order of visions represents chronological order of future events
    - Pretribulational rapture
  - Modified futurism
    - not as literal
    - visions are not chronological (allows recapitulation)
    - Christians will pass through final period of trial
Idealist View

• Revelation is a symbolic portrayal of the conflict between good and evil, the forces of God and the forces of Satan

• Weaknesses
  – Does not depict any final consummation to history (no final victory for God or judgment of evil)
  – Links no symbol to actual events
Major Eschatological Schemes

• Premillennialism
  – literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth
  – Second Coming ushers in this reign

• Postmillennialism
  – Millennium represents effectiveness of Gospel in present age
  – Millennium ushers in Second Coming

• Amillennialism
  – 1,000 years are not literal
  – represents entire period between 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Comings
Significant Interpretive Questions

• Tendencies of the Genre: Symbolic vs. Literal
• Temporal Framework:
  – Chronological
  – Telescopic
  – Recapitulative
• Usage of the OT: Actual Dependence upon OT vs. Incorporation of OT Language and Themes
Hermeneutical Keys

• Humility
• Seek to understand the message of the book as a whole especially as expressed in the introduction and conclusion
• Anchor exegesis in the “inaugural vision” since the inaugural vision summarizes the theme of most apocalyptic works
• Study the OT texts to which John alludes in context and assume that John used them faithfully.

• As in the parables, recognize that some details are added simply for “effect” and may not be symbolic. Preach and teach the broad themes and avoid getting bogged down in details.

• Be very hesitant to embrace an interpretation which would not have been sensible to the first century reader.
Tentative Suggestions About the Structure of the Book

• Close examination suggests to me that the three septets involve recapitulation

• Each septet seems to build to a climax of final judgment
  – 7th seal: Vengeance for the persecuted saints
  – 7th trumpet: Consummation of Christ’s Kingdom, see esp. 1117-19
  – 7th Bowl: Utter destruction and judgment of Babylon, the symbol of rebellious sinful humanity
• Similar structures to the septets: series of four, followed by interlude, followed by series of three
• Other apocalyptic literatures describes divine acts as series of sevens. See for example 4th Esdras.
• This suggests that the seventh seal, trumpet and bowl all symbolize the final judgment and the preceding events are the events leading up to the end
  – Notice allusion to Exod. 19:16 in each seventh element
  – Compare 6:12ff with 16:18ff and 20:11
• Compare sixth element of each series
  – Each has a tripartite structure
  – Each describes different situation of believers and unbelievers immediately preceding final judgment

• Notice that some elements of the latter series seem to intensify matching elements of the previous series
Recurring Themes in Matching Elements of the Septets

- Second Trumpet: 1/3 of sea becomes blood
- Third Trumpet: 1/3 of rivers become bitter
- Fourth Trumpet: 1/3 of the sun is struck and darkened

- Second Bowl: Sea turns to blood of dead man
- Third Bowl: Rivers become blood
- Fourth Bowl: Sun scorches men w. heat
Snyder’s Chiastic Outline

A. Introduction: Apocalypse, Epistle, Prophecy (1:1-3, 4-8, 9-20)
B. Vision: Saints on Earth (2-3)
   C. Heavenly Sanhedrin Convened for Judgment and Enthronement (4-5)
   D. Seven Seals (6:1-8:1)
      E. Seven Trumpets (8:2-9:21)
         F. Theophany: Lord’s messenger descending to sea and land (10)
         G. War against the Saints on Earth (11)
         G’. War against the Dragon in Heaven (12)
         F’. Counter-Theophany: Two messengers ascending from sea and land (13)
         E’. Unnumbered Series of Seven Proclamations (14)
   D’. Seven Bowls (15-16)
   C’. Heavenly Sanhedrin Convened for Judgment and the Messianic Reign
A’. Conclusion: Apocalypse, Epistle, Prophecy (22:6-9, 10-20, 21)
## Views of Rev 12

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<td>Casting Out</td>
<td>Beginning of tribulation</td>
<td>Christ’s resurrection destroys Satan’s ability to accuse</td>
<td>toppling of Satan through ministries of Christian disciples</td>
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<td>Flight to wilderness (Petra)</td>
<td>Word enables believers to persevere</td>
<td>No historical equivalent; promise of ultimate deliverance</td>
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