

The End is Near: Much Misunderstood Apocalyptic Literature, Revelation & Daniel

- A dangerous, misread, book. Requires both a careful reading of one's own cultural context as well as attention to the context of this ancient book.
- Source of misreadings: Conflation with conspiracy thinking of any age, that is, what Revelation really reveals is "what is secret" going on in politics or will happen in the future.
- The English title from the Latin, "Revelation" is singular not plural. The verb "apo-kalupto" in Greek is literally (un-covering). Not a chronological series of historical revelations of events. Instead, a singular unveiling of Jesus Christ as Lord. Title comes from first words, "The revelation of Jesus Christ...."
- Christianities differ to the extent that they emphasize Christianity as a religion of salvation (Lord, rescue me) versus Christianity as a way of life (Lord, teach me how to live well). Revelation is a Christianity of salvation. (Anglican theologies, historically, have been way of life theologies).

Historical Context: A Change of attitude toward Rome and its Empire.

Why this strange mode of writing? Because of events that occurred in the intervening years. Harsh turn of the Emperor Nero's administration in the early 60's. murdered his Mom, got rid of his wife in favor of his mistress until he eventually murdered her as well. Nero kills Christians in Rome (Peter and Paul) as scapegoats for the fire. Then proceeded to build a palace for himself on the land that became vacant on account of the fire. Persecution of Christians becomes increasingly a pattern for Roman Emperors. Jewish revolt in Palestine results in the destruction of most of Judaism there including the temple (70AD). Domitian (Ruler from 81-96) demanded public worship of himself as "Lord and God." Empire begins to be looked at differently by Christians (than say the rather benign entity described by St. Paul in Romans 13). Author of Revelation adopts form of writing known from scripture in a similar situations, that is, Daniel 7-12, but also others (Apocalypse of Ezra, Apocalypse of Baruch, Apocalypse of Moses, Enoch, etc.). It is also a creative Christian retelling of Ezekiel (in its revisioning of the heavenly throne and the city of Jerusalem).

Genre and Purpose

- It is a known genre that uses predictable imagery (Beasts are nations, horns are rulers, etc.)
- The purpose of Revelation is to encourage faithful, nonviolent resistance to dominant opposition amid hazardous circumstances: "Because you have kept my message of endurance, I will keep you safe in the time of trial that is going to come to the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming quickly, Hold fast to what you have, so that no one may take your crown." 3:10 (see also 6:11)

The Genre Promotes a Subjectivity or Worldview that Perceives Everything Through Three “Dualisms”

- Temporal dualism: 2 ages, the present age, future
- Spatial dualism, two realms, heaven and earth
- Modified ethical dualism, two powers, good and evil. (yet good is ultimately sovereign).

The Meaning and Contents

By and large a figurative retelling of the gospel story. For example
Rev. 12 woman clothed with the sun = Mary bearer of Israel's hope

Opposition by dragon who lies in wait (Herod)

12: 5 Birth of son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.

12:6 flight to the wilderness- Holy family's flight to Egypt

12:7 Jesus ministry a cosmic struggle

12:11 which culminates in conquering by the blood of the lamb

Structure: 7 Parallel Sections that Recapitulate the Previous Ones and Progress Further

Each ends with an indication that the end-time has come (judgment or blessedness, or both). Not chronological, but progressive parallelism.

1). Rev. 1-3, 7 Letters from St. John to Churches instructing them to persevere amid persecution and be faithful.

2). Rev. 4-7, 7 Wax Seals of Judgment.

Key verses, (Wrath). Rev. 6:12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

(Blessedness). Rev. 7:15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. 16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; 17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

3). Rev. 8-11, 7 Trumpets of Judgment.

Key verses, Rev. 11:18 The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your

name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

4). Rev. 12-14, Birth of Christ and Opposition of Evil (Dragon).

Key verses, Rev. 14:14 Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand! 15 Another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud, “Use your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” 16 So the one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

5). Rev. 15-16, 7 Bowls of Wrath.

Rev. 16:19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; 21 and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

6). Rev. 17-19, Coming of Christ and the Fall of Babylon (Imperial Rome).

Rev. 19:11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Rev. 19:19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

7). Rev. 20-22, Final Triumph of Christ and Doom of all Opposition.

Rev. 20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for *a thousand years*, 3 and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ *a thousand years*. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.

Rev. 20:7 When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. 9 They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. 10 And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Rev. 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. 13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; 15 and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Topics and Themes

- The book is a work of consolation and encouragement. The victory of salvation is already experienced, but not yet fully realized. Its violence is all carried out by divine agents. That violence makes it possible for Christians to be nonviolent and stay true the life and teaching of Jesus. Christians don't have to defend themselves because God is ultimately sovereign (despite appearances).
- Grand story of creation and redemption, exile and return. The use of freedom determines one's destiny. Spiritual growth is an experience that leads either to deceptions and illusion or to reality. Divine judgment is upon the misuse of freedom.
- The Millenium of Revelation 20: Interim reign of Christ in age of Gospel preaching. (A time when Satan is bound; that is, by Christian preaching [Mt. 12:29]). In other words, the millenium is "the church age." It is not an interim kingdom we build through our own efforts.

- Resurrection: Material creation ultimately reaches perfection through experience of Jesus Christ as Lord.
- Notice that salvation ultimately in this book takes the form of an ideal city where all hearts are open to other hearts without shame or fear rather than an individual conversation experience.
- Praise and Worship as political resistance and spiritual sustenance. See the hymns contained in the book:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

Revelation 4:8

Splendor and honor and kingly power *

are yours by right, O Lord our God,

For you created everything that is, *

and by your will they were created and have their being;

And yours by right, O Lamb that was slain, *

for with your blood you have redeemed for God,

From every family, language, people, and nation, *

a kingdom of priests to serve our God.

And so, to him who sits upon the throne, *

and to Christ the Lamb, Be worship and praise, dominion and splendor, *

for ever and for evermore. *Revelation 4:11; 5:9-10, 13*

O ruler of the universe, Lord God, great deeds are they that you have done, *
surpassing human understanding.

Your ways are ways of righteousness and truth, *

O King of all the ages.

Who can fail to do you homage, Lord, and sing the praises of your Name? *

for you only are the holy One.

All nations will draw near and fall down before you, *

because your just and holy works have been revealed.

Revelation 15:3-4