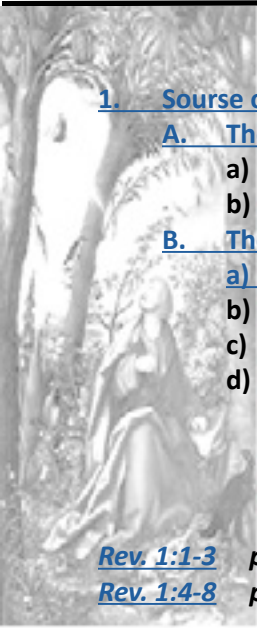




**THE REVELATION OF JOHN**  
**Bible Study Day 1**  
**Text: Revelation 1:1-20**  
 All rights reserved ©



**QUICK LINKS**  
[Introductory Foundation for the Studies](#)

<p><b>1. Source of the this material</b></p> <p><b>A. The Commentary Section</b></p> <p>a) <a href="#">BIC volume 32</a></p> <p>b) <a href="#">Format of the studies</a></p> <p><b>B. The Scripture Section</b></p> <p>a) <a href="#">The Greek Text</a></p> <p>b) <a href="#">Die Gute nachricht Bibel</a></p> <p>c) <a href="#">New Revised Standard V ersion</a></p> <p>d) <a href="#">New Living Translation</a></p>	<p><b>2. Exegetical Methodology in these Studies</b></p> <p><b>A. What the text meant</b></p> <p>a) <a href="#">Background considerations</a></p> <p>b) <a href="#">Exegesis of the text</a></p> <p><b>B. What the text means</b></p>
--	---

## Introduction

[Studies of Text Units in Chapter One](#)

<a href="#">Rev. 1:1-3</a> page 12	<a href="#">Rev. 1:9-11</a> page 60
<a href="#">Rev. 1:4-8</a> page 33	<a href="#">Rev. 1:12-16</a> page 77
	<a href="#">Rev. 1:17-20</a> page 97

<b>Greek NT</b>	<b>Gute Nachricht Bibel</b>	<b>NRSV</b>	<b>NLT</b>
<p>1.1 Αποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, 2 ὃς ἔμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.</p> <p>4 Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἐπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὧν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ 5 καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς. Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, 6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ</p>	<p>1.1 In diesem Buch ist die Offenbarung aufgeschrieben, die Jesus Christus von Gott empfangen hat, damit er denen, die ihm dienen, zeigt, was sich in Kürze ereignen muss. Jesus Christus sandte seinen Engel zu seinem Diener Johannes und machte ihm dies alles bekannt. 2 Johannes bezeugt hier die Botschaft, die von Gott kommt und für die Jesus Christus als Zeuge einsteht: alles, was er gesehen hat. 3 Freuen darf sich, wer die prophetischen Worte in diesem Buch anderen vorliest, und freuen dürfen sich alle, die sie hören und beherzigen; denn die Zeit ist nahe, dass alles hier Angekündigte eintrifft.</p> <p>4 Johannes schreibt an die sieben Gemeinden in der Provinz Asien. Gnade und Frieden sei mit euch von Gott – von ihm, der ist und der war und der kommt – und von den sieben Geistern vor seinem Thron 5 und von Jesus Christus, dem treuen Zeugen, der als erster von allen Toten</p>	<p>1.1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.</p> <p>4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and</p>	<p>1.1 This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him concerning the events that will happen soon. An angel was sent to God’s servant John so that John could share the revelation with God’s other servants. 2 John faithfully reported the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ -- everything he saw. 3 God blesses the one who reads this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to it and obey what it says. For the time is near when these things will happen.</p> <p>4 This letter is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. Grace and peace from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the commander of all the rulers of the world. All praise to him who</p>

πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, αὐτῷ ἢ δόξα  
καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας  
[τῶν αἰῶνων]· ἀμήν.

7 Ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν  
νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν  
πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ οἵτινες  
αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ  
κόψονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πᾶσαι  
αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. ναί, ἀμήν.  
8 Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ  
ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν  
καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ  
παντοκράτωρ.

9 Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης,  
ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ  
συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει  
καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ  
ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ  
νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ  
διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ  
καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

10 ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι  
ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ  
ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν  
μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος 11  
λεγοῦσης· ὁ βλέπεις γράψον  
εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον  
ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς  
Ἐφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν  
καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς  
Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις  
καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς  
Λαοδίκεϊαν.

12 Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα  
βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἣτις  
ἐλάλει μετ’ ἐμοῦ, καὶ  
ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ  
λυχνίας χρυσᾶς 13 καὶ ἐν  
μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον  
υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον  
ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον  
πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην  
χρυσᾶν. 14 Ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ  
αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ  
ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών  
καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς  
φλόξ πυρός 15 καὶ οἱ πόδες  
αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ  
ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης  
καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς  
φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, 16  
καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ  
αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ  
ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ  
ρόμφαία δίστομος ὅξεϊα  
ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ ὄψις  
αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν  
τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

17 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν,  
ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας

zu neuem Leben geboren worden  
ist und über die Könige der Erde  
herrscht. Ihm, der uns liebt, ihm,  
der sein Blut für uns vergossen  
hat, um uns von unseren Sünden  
freizukaufen, 6 der uns zu Köni-  
gen gemacht hat und zu Priestern,  
die seinem Gott und Vater dienen  
dürfen: Ihm gehört die Herrlich-  
keit und Macht für alle Ewigkeit!  
Amen.

7 Gebt Acht, er kommt mit den  
Wolken! Alle werden ihn sehen,  
auch die, die ihn durchbohrt ha-  
ben. Alle Völker der Erde werden  
seinetwegen jammern und klagen;  
das ist gewiss. Amen! 8 »Ich bin  
das A und das O – der ist und der  
war und der kommt, der Herrscher  
der ganzen Welt«, sagt Gott, der  
Herr.

9 Ich, Johannes, euer Bruder,  
teile mit euch die Bedrängnis und  
die Hoffnung auf Gottes neue Welt  
und die Standhaftigkeit, die Jesus  
uns schenkt. Ich wurde auf die In-  
sel Patmos verbannt, weil ich die  
Botschaft Gottes verkündet habe,  
alles, wofür Jesus als Zeuge ein-  
steht. 10 Am Tag des Herrn nahm  
der Geist Gottes von mir Besitz.  
Ich hörte hinter mir eine laute  
Stimme, die wie eine Posaune  
klang. 11 Sie sagte: »Schreib das,  
was du siehst, in ein Buch, und  
schicke es an die sieben Gemein-  
den in Ephesus, Smyrna, Perga-  
mon, Thyatira, Sardes, Philadelphia  
und Laodizea!«

12 Ich wandte mich um und  
wollte sehen, wer zu mir sprach.  
Da erblickte ich sieben goldene  
Leuchter. 13 In ihrer Mitte stand  
jemand, der aussah wie der Sohn  
eines Menschen. Er trug ein lang-  
es Gewand und hatte ein breites  
goldenes Band um die Brust. 14  
Sein Kopf und sein Haar strahlten  
wie weiße Wolle, ja wie Schnee.  
Seine Augen brannten wie Flam-  
men. 15 Seine Füße glänzten  
wie gleißendes Gold, das im  
Schmelzofen glüht, und seine  
Stimme klang wie das Tosen des  
Meeres. 16 Er hielt sieben Sterne  
in seiner rechten Hand, und aus  
seinem Mund kam ein scharfes,  
beidseitig geschliffenes Schwert.  
Sein Gesicht leuchtete wie die  
Sonne am Mittag.

the ruler of the kings of the earth.  
To him who loves us and freed us  
from our sins by his blood, 6 and  
made us to be a kingdom, priests  
serving his God and Father, to him  
be glory and dominion forever and  
ever. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the  
clouds; every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him; and  
on his account all the tribes of  
the earth will wail. So it is to be.  
Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the  
Omega," says the Lord God, who is  
and who was and who is to come,  
the Almighty.

9 I, John, your brother who  
share with you in Jesus the perse-  
cution and the kingdom and the  
patient endurance, was on the is-  
land called Patmos because of the  
word of God and the testimony of  
Jesus. 10 I was in the spirit on the  
Lord's day, and I heard behind me  
a loud voice like a trumpet 11 say-  
ing, "Write in a book what you see  
and send it to the seven churches,  
to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Per-  
gamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to  
Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

12 Then I turned to see whose  
voice it was that spoke to me, and  
on turning I saw seven golden  
lampstands, 13 and in the midst  
of the lampstands I saw one like  
the Son of Man, clothed with a  
long robe and with a golden sash  
across his chest. 14 His head and  
his hair were white as white wool,  
white as snow; his eyes were like  
a flame of fire, 15 his feet were  
like burnished bronze, refined as  
in a furnace, and his voice was like  
the sound of many waters. 16 In  
his right hand he held seven stars,  
and from his mouth came a sharp,  
two-edged sword, and his face  
was like the sun shining with full

loves us and has freed us  
from our sins by shedding his  
blood for us. 6 He has made  
us his Kingdom and his priests  
who serve before God his Fa-  
ther. Give to him everlasting  
glory! He rules forever and  
ever! Amen!

7 Look! He comes with  
the clouds of heaven. And  
everyone will see him -- even  
those who pierced him. And  
all the nations of the earth  
will weep because of him.  
Yes! Amen! 8 "I am the Alpha  
and the Omega -- the begin-  
ning and the end," says the  
Lord God. "I am the one who  
is, who always was, and who  
is still to come, the Almighty  
One."

9 I am John, your broth-  
er. In Jesus we are partners in  
suffering and in the Kingdom  
and in patient endurance. I  
was exiled to the island of Pat-  
mos for preaching the word  
of God and speaking about  
Jesus. 10 It was the Lord's  
Day, and I was worshiping in  
the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard a  
loud voice behind me, a voice  
that sounded like a trumpet  
blast. 11 It said, "Write down  
what you see, and send it to  
the seven churches: Ephesus,  
Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira,  
Sardis, Philadelphia, and La-  
odicea."

12 When I turned to see  
who was speaking to me, I  
saw seven gold lampstands.  
13 And standing in the mid-  
dle of the lampstands was the  
Son of Man. He was wearing  
a long robe with a gold sash  
across his chest. 14 His head  
and his hair were white like  
wool, as white as snow. And  
his eyes were bright like  
flames of fire. 15 His feet  
were as bright as bronze re-  
fined in a furnace, and his  
voice thundered like mighty  
ocean waves. 16 He held  
seven stars in his right hand,  
and a sharp two-edged sword  
came from his mouth. And his  
face was as bright as the sun

αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός, καὶ 17 Als ich ihn sah, fiel ich wie  
 ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ’ tot vor seinen Füßen zu Boden. Er  
 ἐμὲ λέγων· μὴ φοβοῦ· ἐγὼ legte seine rechte Hand auf mich  
 εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος und sagte: »Hab keine Angst! Ich  
 18 καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην bin der Erste und der Letzte. 18  
 νεκρός καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς Ich bin der Lebendige! Ich war tot,  
 τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ doch nun lebe ich in alle Ewigkeit.  
 ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου Ich habe Macht über den Tod und  
 καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου. 19 γράψον die Totenwelt. 19 Schreib alles auf,  
 οὓν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ was du soeben gesehen hast und  
 ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ was dir noch offenbart wird über  
 ταῦτα. 20 τὸ μυστήριον τῶν die Gegenwart und über das, was  
 ἐπταῖ ἀστέρων οὓς εἶδες in Zukunft geschehen wird. 20 Du  
 ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς siehst die Sterne in meiner recht-  
 ἐπταῖ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖ· en Hand und die sieben goldenen  
 οἱ ἐπταῖ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι Leuchter. Ich sage dir, was sie bedeu-  
 τῶν ἐπταῖ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν ten: Die sieben Sterne sind die En-  
 καὶ αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἐπταῖ ἐπταῖ gel\* der sieben Gemeinden und die  
 ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν. sieben Leuchter sind die Gemeinden  
 selbst.«

force.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave. 19 Write down what you have seen -- both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen later. 20 This is the meaning of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this background study of Revelation chapters one through three. The materials contains in these studies will go into great detail in exploring the deeper meaning in the original language text. The purpose of these studies is to provide a background that will enable the reader to explore in much greater details implications from the Greek text that could not be presented in the class room study because of time restrictions.

### 1. Source of the material:

The material contained in these studies was originally produced as a background commentary for two Bible study groups: the Sunday morning Adult Bible Class of the [International Baptist Church](#) in Escazú, Costa Rica, and the Friday Evening Bible Study group of the [Evangelisch-Freikirchliche Gemeinde](#) of Bonn, Germany. Both of these congregations have played very important roles over the years in the ministry that God has granted me. Thus the targeted application of the contemporary meaning of the scripture text is made with these two groups of people in mind.

#### A. The Commentary Section

After the listing of the scripture passage under consideration, what follows is a commentary based interpretation of the passage.

##### a) BIC volume 32.

These studies form a part of the massive commentary project that is currently underway and is titled [Biblical Insights: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary on the New Testament](#). This is a 34

volume plus project with each volume ranging from 250 to 1,250 pages covering the text of the New Testament, along with related topics to its interpretation. These materials are available free of charge in pdf formatted files at [cranfordville.com](#) in the BIC commentary section.

[Volume 32](#) contains the various studies connected to the book of Revelation in the New Testament. This is the internet location of these studies, along with other studies on the book of Revelation. All of the materials are available free of charge.

#### b) Format of the studies

Some explanation of how the studies are arranged will be helpful. Every study is developed around two central questions:

##### 1) What did the text mean?

The premise of the entire interpretative process is that establishing the best possible history meaning of the scripture text is absolutely foundational to determining proper boundaries for contemporary applications to our world.<sup>1</sup> No modern applicational claim that goes beyond or stands contradictory to the established historical meaning can be legitimate. God doesn't speak in some superstitious magical way to moderns that overrides the boundaries of understanding in the world of the scripture writers. Every document contained in the Bible was originally composed by human authors with a targeted audience in their world in mind. Not a single

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed exploration these details, see my *MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE* at [cranfordville.com](#). This is a seven chapter study developed for the Bible class at the International Baptist Church in Escazú, Costa Rica.

human author considered that he was writing 'scripture' at the time of composition. The revelation of God in and through scripture, which came to be recognized over time by those dedicated to God, was intended to express God's will to this initial reading audience in terms and with concepts fully understandable to them.

How does one determine this historical meaning? This has been the challenge to Christians over the century. The following approach that is utilized in these studies represents the best elements of the various methods that have been developed over time. It is carefully thought out both historically and theologically, and represents a Christ centered approach based upon the time honored Protestant Christian principle of *solā scriptura*, i.e., scriptures alone stand as the foundational source of correct faith and practice of Christianity. Other aspects such as how other have interpreted scripture, the confessions of faith of Christianity over the past many centuries etc. can help inform and contribute to sharpening one's understanding. But all of these must ultimately come under the judgment of scripture alone as the final criteria of true faith and practice.

The putting together of a method of interpreting scripture is labeled *hermeneutics* in the broad definition of the term. But *hermeneutics* is often defined more narrow to refer to the theoretical principles foundational to the actual methodology of interpretation which is then labeled *exegesis*. The rare use of the term *hermeneutics* in these studies will assume the more narrow definition which is distinct from *exegesis*. This latter concept is the focus behind these studies, which is explained in detail below.

The historical meaning of every biblical text is carefully sought by probing in detail two aspects of the text: the historical and literary background; and then a careful exegesis of the words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs contained in the scripture passage. By looking at each relevant part of both the background and the content of the biblical text, interpretative conclusions are reached as to the most like meaning the text had for the initial readers of the passage. This serves then as the foundation for projecting modern applications of relevancy and meaning of the scripture passage to our world today.

## 2) *What does the text mean today?*

Making an application of this historical meaning to our world today is the more challenging aspect. Some general principles, however, should be used in order to keep the interpretation for today legitimate.

**First**, is the critical principle of *usus loquendi* as it applies to reading ancient texts. The literal meaning of this Latin phrase is 'usage in speaking' which does not seem to have much relevance. But in interpretation of ancient texts contextual issues come to the forefront

here. At the heart is how much culture distance exists between the biblical concept as expressed in the ancient world of either the Old or New Testaments and the modern setting and understanding of that concept.

For example, the biblical concept of marriage is a good illustration. Biblically the conceptualizations of marriage remained relatively similar from the OT era into the world of the NT, particularly the Jewish and then early Christian ideas. These included the following core principles: a) marriage was between a man and a woman under arrangement of the parents; b) a marriage contract was agreed upon by the two fathers with little or no input from either the groom or bride; c) this agreement was normally made while the girl was quite young, often an infant; d) the consummation of the marriage came through a wedding feast between the two families where the two fathers formally reconfirmed the terms of the wedding contract; e) typically at that point in time the girl had reached puberty and was in her early teens, while the Jewish boy had to be a minimum of thirty years of age; d) love for one another was a possible but a non-necessary by-product coming after the wedding, since often the couple had not seen one another prior to the wedding night; e) the marriage was primarily the bonding of two families closer together, thus children became critically important as the "mixing of the bloods" of the two families.

Culturally this perspective of family and marriage that is foundational to the Bible represents in many ways a very different conceptualization to most modern perspectives on marriage and family. How to build a connecting bridge from the 'then' to the 'now' meaning becomes challenging. Typically most scholars would contend that the closer the cultural distance between the 'then' and the 'now' meanings the easier the application to the present day the text becomes. For example, committing murder is essentially the same across time, just the ways of going about it change. Thus when the cultural gap between the world of the text and the contemporary world is small, we can be more confident of our applications of the biblical text. But, honesty demands that when the cultural gap between the 'then' and the 'now' meanings is great, the more cautious we should be about contemporary applications.

**Second**, making modern day applications needs to be 'customized.' By this I mean that broad based generalized principles relevant to the modern world made from scripture are both very limited and also highly risky to make. Much better and more legitimate are going to be applications made to specific contemporary situations in the lives of specific people.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>2</sup>This is what lies behind the approach in these studies. They were produced with two specific groups of people in mind, one in Germany and one in Costa Rica. My prayer before writing each of

revelation of God came through the ancient writers with the intention of addressing specific issues taking place in the lives of their initial targeted readers. That same 'specificity' for spiritual truth remains in place through time and must always guide the shaping of the 'now' meaning understood from the biblical text.

In German Homiletik, i.e., principles of preaching, a term is sometimes used and is *Brücke schlagen*, which literally means *to toss across the bridge*. This idea is that the sermon delivered in the pulpit should correctly toss God's truth from the biblical world across the bridge of time to the world of the sermon listeners. When it lands on the 'now' side of the bridge, it should hit the center of the road, not fly off into a ditch on either side of the road.

In this second section of each of the studies careful attempt is made to put forth applications of scripture follow these principles.

## B. The Scripture Text Section

The listing of the scripture texts under study consideration is done intentionally in the above format and inside each study section. A theological assertion underlies this format.

**a) Greek Text.** First, the original language biblical text is listed in the left column. Any serious study of scripture must treat the language text in which the scripture passage was written. The level of attention given to the original language text will vary due to the language skills of the Bible student. But no legitimate interpretation of scripture can be based exclusively on a translation of the biblical text! Every translation -- no matter how high the quality of the translation -- can capture at best no more than 20% of the meaning of the underlying biblical expression. And most of the time the translation based reader is gaining closer to 10% or less of the meaning of the scripture.

Consequently, when one becomes serious about learning the message of divine revelation, some attention will have to be given to the biblical languages if understanding is to move beyond a very superficial level of comprehension. How deep one can penetrate into the profound riches of divine revelation in the Bible will be in proportion to how much one knows about Koine Greek, ancient Hebrew and Aramaic. Of course, other interpretive skills come into play as well. But knowledge of the biblical languages remains foundational to deeper knowledge of the Bible.

These commentary studies are built off a detailed analysis of the Greek text of these three chapters of Revelation. Two modern editions of a print Greek text of the New Testament are utilized. The first is *The Greek New Testament* in the fourth revised edition that the studies has been, "Lord, help me to meet real needs in the lives of both these groups of people whom I know."

is published by the United Bible Societies. This is the most widely used print edition of the Greek New Testament in the English speaking world today. It is the Greek text that stands underneath the vast majority of English translations of the New Testament since the middle of the last century.

The second Greek New Testament that is consulted extensively is the *Novum Testamentum Graece*. The text of the current 28th edition of this Greek New Testament is used, while the Text Apparatus of the previous 27th revised edition is used. This is the dominant printed Greek text used in the German speaking world, as well as being widely used elsewhere including the English speaking world. The wording of the UBS 4th and the N-A 28th are virtually the same, but the roles of the Text Apparatus in each are distinctly different and complement one another in the examination of variations of wording that surfaced over the centuries of hand copying the text from the second through the fourteenth centuries. More about that below.



### b) Die Gute Nachricht Bibel.

In the second column of the studies is listed the German translation called *Die Gute Nachricht Bibel*. This is the German equivalent of *Good News For Modern Man* in English, or the formal title, the *Good News Translation Bible*. Any number of German translations could have been chosen,<sup>3</sup> this particular translation was chosen because it offers the biblical text in words that individuals with no church background can understand quite easily. Additionally, it represents an example of Bible translation following the *Dynamic Equivalent method* of Bible translation, which is one of the two core approaches to modern translation of scripture. The German translation is chosen for the benefit of most of those present at the IBC Summer Experience in Interlaken, since it will be the 'second' language of the majority of those present.

### c) New Revised Standard Version.

In the third column stands the NRSV English translation which represents a mixture of the Formal Equivalent and the Dynamic Equivalent methods of Bible translation. Several factors commend this translation. Among them are the following: it is an ecumenical based committee produced translation for all English speaking Christians; it is the first English Bible

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed critique of the majority of German translations see my article, "The Origin and History of the Bible: Study 17: topic 6.0, An Overview of the German Bible," at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com).

to attempt to use the developing third form of English called either International Business English or Global English; it is a gender sensitive translation.

In the studies I sometimes 'pick on' it when I disagree with how a phrase etc. is translated. But this is not because I don't appreciate it. The truth of the matter is that more criticisms would be offered of virtually any other English translations than the NRSV.

#### **d) New Living Translation.**

This translation in the right hand column represents also a Dynamic Equivalent translation of the Bible. Additionally it reflects an evangelical Protestant Christian translation of the Bible in American English. Quite often it produces a very clear and easy to understand expression of the biblical text.

Hopefully something of the rationale for the choice of these scripture texts is now clear. Comparative checking of the three translations can usually throw much more light on the meaning of the Greek text than just reading one of the translations.

## **2. Exegetical Methodology behind these studies**

In the above discussion a lot of emphasis has been placed on methodology of Bible interpretation. One cannot overemphasize the importance of this, because from whatever methodology is used the interpretative conclusions are almost always pre-determined by this utilized methodology. What is listed below is arranged around the format used in each of the studies of the biblical text, and is based on the hermeneutical principles discussed above. It represents a methodology developed over a forty year period of time, that especially was centered in the leading of a PhD seminar, New Testament Critical Methodology, for many years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Extensions and adaptations of this method were made during the eleven years of teaching at Gardner-Webb University in North Carolina.

### **A) What the text meant.**

Every ancient written text has certain dimensions built into it that must be understood and given appropriate attention, if that text is to be correctly understood. The fact that we are examining sacred texts produced through divine inspiration does not alter this nature of such texts one iota. This is because these texts historically have human authors who did the actual composition of the sacred writings. Modern exegesis is not focused on how God inspired ancient writers to compose these texts. Rather modern exegesis centers purely on the human side of the composition: how it was done, why it was done, to whom it was addressed in its own world etc.

This perspective is what sets Jewish and Christian interpreters apart from the rest of the religious world.

Most other world religions have a highly superstitious based understanding of their sacred writings that lifts such writings above history into some kind of fantasy world. Of course, such is delusion because every one of these writings occurred at a certain point in historical time and by historical writers. But the religion spoon out of such activity denies this historical dimension and instead lives in a mythological non-existing dream world.

Both Judaism and especially Christianity are historical based religions with full acknowledgment of this -- apart from small segments of fringe groups whose Judeo-Christian orientation is highly questionable. Christ was a historical figure whose historical death forms the redemptive basis for the existence of the religious movement called Christianity. The exploration of that history is a major part of the exegetical process of studying the scriptures of Christianity. The historical nature of Christianity is a major hermeneutical principle of scriptural study. The analysis of that history is an important aspect of the exegesis of scripture texts.

But how does one accomplish this analysis? Emerging interpretive methods of understanding the Bible have surfaced especially over the past four centuries in western societies. Typically every new methodology has focused on one particular approach. Often this has neglected other equally important aspects and thus left the new methodology distorted in its understandings of scripture.

The only authentic way to approach exegesis of a scripture passage is to do it from a holistic stance. Each methodology can contribute limited insight, but no single methodology focused on one approach can provide full and complete understanding. The methodology for doing exegesis of the Christian Bible followed in these studies seeks to be holistic and inclusive of all relevant historical and literary facets of every scripture passage.

The following segments are treated in each of the studies: background considerations and exegetical analysis of the content of the passage.

**Background:** the historical and literary backgrounds are presented first. In the historical category both how the text was written and hand copied are important (External Histories). And then allusions to history inside the content of the passage are important (Internal History). In the literary perspective, it is important to identify literary genres as they exist in the passage, the literary setting or context of this small portion to text to the larger segments that it belongs to, and finally a careful analysis of the arrangement of major and minor ideas set forth by the author inside the passage.

**Exegesis:** this section contains detailed analysis of the words, phrases, sentences, and paragraph units of thought expression.

a) **Background considerations**  
**Historical Aspects:**

Among the historical aspects are what are arbitrarily labeled external and internal histories. With the *external histories* are the compositional history and the transmission history. How the text was originally composed and then how it was hand copied for the next several centuries form important parts of any historical understanding. With *the internal history* perspective an examination of time and place markers becomes the center of attention. Often the text alludes to formal historical events and pivotal individuals. Examining these becomes important. Equally often what is mentioned is a social history tradition, such as friendship. A close examination of perspectives on such topics as, for example, what to Jews, Romans, Greeks, and others viewed being a friend meant, can throw enormous light onto the Christian writer's views of friendship in terms of how it was similar to alternative views in his world, and especially onto how Christian friendship was different than alternative views. Thus depending on the nature of the time and place markers inside a passage the insights of formal ancient history and/or ancient social history can play a significant role in the exegetical process.

**External History.** First comes how the scripture text was composed initially. This study takes on greater significance in the first study of a 'book study' than when doing a topical study. But it remains of importance for subsequent studies across the span of the contents of a document in the New Testament. The *Compositional History* of a document includes *Source History* analysis and these can be important on various occasions. For example, with the first three gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, an entire discipline of study emerged in the early 1900s called *Literar Kritik* in German and *Source Criticism* in English over the use of ore-existing sources by these three gospel writers. And this also laid the foundation for most of the other methodologies that emerged during the twentieth century. One of the most consistently used sources by NT writers is the text of the OT. How these OT texts are both cited -- whether from the LXX or the Hebrew -- and what meaning they attach to these quoted texts is very important to understand.

In the book of Revelation a very unique situation emerges in this regard. Not a single OT text is quoted any where inside Revelation. But this NT document is more dependent on OT themes and terminology than any other single document elsewhere in the NT. One cannot begin to make sense of John's apocalyptic visionary language without a deep knowledge of the Israelite prophetic visionary tradition. And for John, his use of contemporary Jewish apocalyptic language is deep

and profound as well, thus requiring knowledge of this literary tradition of postexilic Judaism.

But not only is the *Compositional History* important, the *Transmission History* of the text is equally important. By this is meant the tracing of the process of hand copying the NT text until the invention of the printing press in the late 1400s. In actuality, however, the focus here extends only into the early middle ages, since by the end of the first thousand years the copying of sacred texts inside Christianity centered much more on copying the Latin Vulgate than the Greek text of the NT. The critical importance of this was only recognized beginning in the late 1800s when the discovery of hundreds of manuscripts of the text of the NT began with the Biblical Archaeology movement. Prior to then less than a dozen Greek manuscripts were known to still exist, and none of them were complete texts. But at the beginning of the twenty-first century over 5,600 manuscripts have been discovered and are located in libraries all over the western world. Out of very scientific oriented procedures for comparing ancient texts in the literary world emerged the two major approaches used almost universally today in comparing all of these manuscripts with the goal of determining the most likely original wording of each document in the NT.

The studies in this series incorporate the primary method of text comparison and analysis known as *Rational Eclecticism*.<sup>4</sup> This approach gives careful attention to both internal and external aspects of comparing these many existing manuscripts. The first principle of interpreting scriptures is to "establish the text." Because virtually always one is dealing with copies of copies etc. of the ancient writings that often are separated in time from the original writing by many centuries, the first thing that must be done is establish the exact wording of the original writing as the basis for interpretation. Over the process of hand copying through many centuries variations of wording etc. surface in comparing the existing manuscripts to one another. We seek to do this in each study from application of this procedure of manuscript comparison.

The details provided in each study, always listed in the External History section, are limited to the basics in order to not overwhelm the readers with massive highly technical information. This limited presentation centers on the Text Apparatus of both *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) and the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.). Each of these print Greek New Testaments contains a Text Apparatus which enables the reader to analysis variations in wording that surface in the passage. This device in the UBS text lists only those variations considered by the editors to be

<sup>4</sup>For more details see my "LEARNING ABOUT TEXTUAL CRITICISM at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com) with Greek 202 students.

of enough significance to impact the translation of the passage. But the apparatus of the N-A 27th Greek NT lists all of the variations that occur across the spectrum of existing manuscripts. This is done through a somewhat complicated system of abbreviations and use of symbols. The listing of each Text Apparatus is given along with a summary overview.

**Internal History.** The time and place markers inside the passage under consideration frequently allude to events, people, and places that possess their own histories. The writer assumes that his initial readers understand all this, but we as much later readers most of the time will have little understanding of such things. This section in the study attempts to fill in these gaps that we have so that our level of understanding comes up to that of the beginning readers.

This information flows into two distinct types of historical information. What in the modern world is termed Formal History is the first aspect to be analyzed. When a city such as Ephesus is mentioned, we ask about its history, its religious, political, social etc. orientation. Particularly important are those aspects that may influence the understand of the text with the reference occurs. But the second type of history that plays an important role is called the Social History view. Modern sociology and related studies have taught us that you cannot understand the thinking and actions of individuals outside of the social setting in which they lived. Their society, whether it was ancient Jewish, Greek, Roman, Egyptian etc., shaped profoundly their thinking and defined boundaries of proper and improper actions. The more we know about this features the better we can understand the thinking and proposal for actions contained inside a passage of scripture. A lot of attention is devoted to this aspect in the studies.<sup>5</sup>

### **Literary Aspects:**

In addition to the historical background of a passage, one must give careful attention to the literary background of a text. These are focused on three distinct aspects which have a dominate literary nature to them.

**Genre:** This French word simply specifies literary patterns that surface not only inside the text being examined but that have counterparts in numerous other texts across the ancient world of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic writings. The pri-

<sup>5</sup>Much of this is derived from also teaching the PhD New Testament History seminar at SWBTS for many years. And especially does it come from having spent a sabbatical year (1990-1991) working with Prof. Gerd Theissen at the University of Heidelberg who at the time was among the top two or three specialists in the world for reading ancient texts from a sociological perspective. I profited immensely from Prof. Theissen's insights and methodology.

mary reason for the importance of this is the same as is found in our modern world. The use of already existing structures for communicating ideas is essential for successful understanding by one's readers. It saves space and enhances the level of communication enormously.

Although determining genre at a detailed level is somewhat controversial among literary experts, virtual universal agreement exists about the significant role that established patterns play in the communicating of ideas, both in the modern world and in the ancient world.

Genre determination exists at various levels of text content. At the broad level entire documents, particularly inside the NT, tend to follow established patterns of organizational structure. This is especially true for the history (Acts), letters (Paul's and general letters), and apocalypse (Revelation). The four gospel documents form an early distinct Christian pattern, although they clearly utilize elements of ancient history and biography writing.

The identification of Revelation as an apocalypse means that its communication of ideas shares in common vehicles of expression found in the dozen or so Jewish apocalyptic writings dated all the way from the second century before Christ to the second Christian century. This vehicle of idea expression by John inspired a number of subsequent [Christian apocalypses](#) in the second through eighth centuries that were falsely attributed to various first century Christian leaders.

At the broad genre level, Revelation is a self named Αποκάλυψις in the very first word in 1:1. Implied in this self identification is going to be additional interpretive procedures beyond the standard approach described above. These sensitivities do not cancel out the basic interpretive method, but supplement and complement it. One has to learn how to think 'apocalyptically' which in the ancient world was a uniquely different mindset found only among ancient Jews and Christians. The rest of that world did not have such a method of communicating ideas. And this way of communicating was built off of the eighth century and later Israelite prophetic visionary vehicle for communicating God's will to the Israelites during the eras of the kings. It was not a simple logical way of thinking at all. Rather it could be described more as a kaleidoscopic manner of putting ideas together -- often illogically and irrationally from a modern mindset -- in order to paint grand images of God's desires and intentions covering the entire scope of human history.

The term eschatological in regard to Revelation is sometimes used, but is accurate only when understood in the broad meaning of alluding to cosmic perspectives and activities by God. To label Revelation eschatological and then mean by this a futurist eschatology



is completely false and highly misleading. As an apocalypse the complete scope of God's relationship with creation throughout the scope of human history is what Revelation is about. To be sure, this includes His actions at the end of that era of human history, but that's just one part of what the document reveals. At its core, Revelation is a depiction of divine action in and from Heaven that impacts God's material creation and the people living in it.

Additionally this cosmic perspective means that actions are moving from the timelessness of Heaven to the time bound and oriented earth. Thus most of the divine activity depicted in/from Heaven covers the entire gamut of time on earth in the form of consistent principles and activities that are consistent to the holy nature of the God who rules over all things. To limit Revelation to the final few segments of earth bound actions is to miss most of the rich and reassuring content of the NT document.

In general this is central to most all ancient apocalyptic literature. This kind of communication vehicle arose during times of stress and suffering by God's people and thus sought to address the inequity and injustices being thrust upon the faithful by evil people. The apocalyptic writers sought in the main to address such suffering with a reminder of the holiness of God who has administered justice throughout human history. These have come often in the form of 'temporal judgments' connected with the concept of the Day of Wrath when God defended His integrity as a holy God by holding evil people accountable for their injury to His faithful people. Sometimes this Day of Wrath was future in regard to the people being addressed. For example, with Amos and Hosea it targeted the coming wrath upon the evil of the northern kingdom of Israel with the invasion of the Assyrians who would destroy the nation. But for Isaiah and Micah who lived in the same eighth century that Day of Wrath would target the evil in the southern Israelite kingdom with the destruction of the nation, Jerusalem, and Solomon's temple by the Babylonians in the sixth century before Christ, almost two centuries after these prophets lived and ministered. Yet during the sixth century many of the Israelites prophets would speak of the wrath of God coming on these very kingdoms who had destroyed especially the southern kingdom as an expression of the wrath of God. A major vehicle of expressing these ideas was the prophetic oracle and one of the significant sub-genres inside the oracle was the prophetic vision.

For the OT prophets the prophet vision with its frequent emphasis on divine wrath was a source of encouragement to the faithful people of God. Usually their faithfulness to a holy God was ridiculed by their fellow rebellious Israelites and their pagan neighbors. Often

they suffered greatly from persecution by these people. Why then be faithful to God in such instances? The answer from the prophets was found in the holiness of God who treated all people justly and would hold all accountable for their actions, both good and evil. The integrity of God was at stake and thus His wrath would indeed be poured out on evil actions and evil people. Their message was that this has always been true from the very beginning and remains true for the suffering faithful in their day. John's message in Revelation continues that theme and carries it to new levels of depiction and projection. And this to seven Christian communities at the end of the first Christian century who lived in the Roman province of Asia and were experiencing persecution from not just pagan neighbors and authorities, but frequently from the local Jewish synagogues in their towns. Thus just as was true of the ancient Israelites who remained faithful to God, these Christian believers should remain true to the same God who eternally remained holy and true to His character and nature. Their faithfulness would also be vindicated in the times of God's wrath coming down from Heaven upon the evil actions of evil people in this world.

Thus the determination of genre both at the broad level and also in the smaller units of text plays an important role in helping us understand more correctly and clearly what John is trying to say in this document.

**Literary Setting:** But not only is the determination of the use of established literary forms important, also the determination of the literary context of a passage is important. Particularly in documents such as Revelation a well defined literary structure for the contents of the entire document is present and each piece, i.e., each passage, fits into this overarching picture in a specific place. It contributes to the general picture being painted by John with the document. This structure of Revelation is summarized in an [outline of the book](#) that should be studied prior to beginning a study of the document. Because this internal structure is so clearly defined most every outline of Revelation will be very similar, assuming that the biblical text is taken seriously.

For example, the various natural units of texts, called pericopes by scholars, in chapter one fulfill the general purpose of introducing the remaining contents of the rest of the document. Especially the final unit in chapter one, vv. 9-20, return to the initial phrase in 1:1, Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, apocalypse of Jesus Christ, in preparing the reader for the two part apocalyptic vision of John first on Patmos in chapters two and three, and then in Heaven in chapters four through twenty-two. Thus the exegesis of vv. 9-20 must conclude meaning within the framework of this literary context. It does not contain an independent presentation

of idea detached from either vv. 1-8 or from chapters two through twenty-two. To interpret these verses that way violates the literary setting of the passage and will inevitably lead to false understanding.

In these studies careful attention will be paid to the literary setting of each passage. Discussion of that setting is put forth, along with how that establishes boundaries on possible meaning inside the passage under consideration.

**Literary Structure:** The final literary aspect to receive attention in these studies is the internal arrangement of ideas inside the passage itself. Ancient Greek just like modern western languages that are in part derived from ancient Latin and Greek so structured their language between primary and secondary level expression of ideas. To be sure, the method of writing Greek in the first Christian century did not mark this out with punctuation marks, spacing between words etc. But careful analysis of the written Greek text clearly indicates the presence of such understanding built inherently into the language. When with the emergence of minuscule writing in the fifth and sixth centuries, systems of punctuation, spacing etc. began surfacing in the format of writing, and this conceptual organizing structure becomes very obvious. Thus the modern Greek printed texts build on this later feature of written Greek with the system of formatting the text into words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs etc.

How to effectively take advantage of this inbuilt structural arrangement becomes the challenge for modern students of Koine Greek. Modern students in the 1800s and early 1900s were better equipped to grasp this, unfortunately than today's students are. The de-emphasis on the study of grammar in modern language instruction has left most students ill equipped to understand structure arrangement of idea expression.<sup>6</sup>

Many ways of getting at this organization of ideas exist, but these studies will make use of the system of analysis that I developed for seminary students beginning in the late 1970s. Through the use of Block Diagramming and Semantic Diagram procedures I have taught hundreds of students over these past forty years how to get into the mind of the biblical writers.<sup>7</sup> This has

<sup>6</sup>The one positive thing that can be said for the way languages are taught in the contemporary modern world is their emphasis on distinguishing between surface level meaning as reflected in the grammar construction of ideas, and sub-surface level meanings that provide a foundational structure to organizing ideas where one person can communicate to another person understandably. The literary disciplines of Structuralism, Deconstructionism etc. center on analysis the sub-surface level arrangement of thought. Unfortunately, not many are trained in these disciplines and thus know how to do the required analysis. Even fewer biblical scholars even know that such disciplines exist much less have skills in using them.

<sup>7</sup>For a more detailed presentation of these methods see my [Guidelines for Diagramming a Text](http://cranfordville.com) at cranfordville.com.

proven to be a very helpful approach for sorting out the internal structure of a scripture passage.

The part of this procedure used in these studies is the block diagram of the Greek text but expressed in a very literal English translation. This provides a foundation for summarizing the natural structure inside the passage. This structure then becomes the organizing structure for exegeting the passage which follows. This exegetical structure represents a bit of the Semantic Diagram of the passage, which serves to develop a detailed teaching and/or preaching outline of the passage. The goal is always to produce a biblical based teaching or preaching of the passage. In this manner, the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* is better maintained. One subtle but deadly way that human thinking takes authority over divine revelation is how a passage of scripture is preached or taught. If the working outline underneath the sermon or the teaching misses the structural arrangement of ideas inside the text, then the teacher's or preacher's ideas take precedent over God's ideas. What results is the traditions of men rather than the mind of God. Thus the principle of *sola scriptura* has been nullified.

**b) Exegesis of the scripture text:** Not only are the above background concerns important to the interpretive process, the heart of interpretation is analysis of the various units of idea expression inside the passage. Generally it is best to analyze a passage sentence by sentence, ignoring the versification markers. Remember that both chapter and verse markers were inserted into the scripture text many, many centuries after their composition. Most of the time the division of thought with verse marker comes a break points between natural divisions, but many, many times this is not the case and these markers artificially separate out closely connected ideas. Thus when these markers are ignored and the natural units of sentences are followed there is much less opportunity for misunderstanding of the text.

Meanings are derived from two basic sources at this level of analysis. There is the 'dictionary' meaning of words and idiomatic phrases. And then there is the influence of the literary context of the use of these word and phrases. Most Greek words have multiple possible meanings and thus multiple translation words into a modern language.<sup>8</sup> Which one of these dictionary

<sup>8</sup>The determination of the 'dictionary meaning' through modern principles of lexicography takes on distinct directions for the Greek text of the New Testament and early Christian literature. Although limited only to terms with theological implication, the Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* illustrates this distinctive process of word meaning determination. First a Greek word is examined against its use in the Greek speaking word beginning with the age of Homer in the eighth century BCE. Next

meanings is the correct one is determined by the context of its usage inside the passage. Usually this becomes quite obvious and leaves little uncertainty about the choice.<sup>9</sup> When the analysis of the Bible reader is done carefully and properly, correct understanding will result. If not, then mistakes will be made in the interpretive conclusions reached.

**B) What the text means.**

This is the application of the results reached from the analysis of the ‘then’ meaning as described above. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, making the correct application or applications involves carefully implementation of certain principles. How much cultural gap between ‘then’ and ‘now’ exists? This determines the degree of certainty about applicational statements that can be made. Little cultural gaps, greater certainty; large cultural gaps, more tentativeness in applicational statements. Second, be very cautious about broad, sweeping applicational statements. The spiritual principles embedded in the scripture text virtually always come out of specific historical situations in the ancient world. Thus, they will best address modern specific situations more easily than universally apply to all modern situations. Applications need to be ‘customized’ to individual situations.

Also remember that application statements need to be principle oriented statements much more often than specific instructions on what to do. Christian the-

---

the word is examined for how it was used in Jewish literature, beginning with the use of this word by the translators of the LXX for the underlying Hebrew words in the Old Testament. Several categories of Jewish usage are examined in order to form a backdrop for how the NT writers used the word. Additionally, how the word was used in early Christian writings beginning in the second century AD is examined in order to see mostly how word meanings changed from the apostolic use of them. It is against this kind of tracing out of the occurrences of a particular word in ancient literature that the range of possible meanings are proposed in a Greek lexicon such as Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, which stands at the top of the list for Greek-English lexicons.

<sup>9</sup>One comment about translations and their use of different words in translation. More variation in words and phrases will surface in American English based translations. The reason for this is due solely to the hugely restrictive copy right laws in the US as opposed to those in Europe, which are much less restrictive. Quite often American English translations are forced to use different wording simply to avoid the risk of legal action from other translation publishers accusing them of copy right intrusion. With the enormous ambiguity of American English presently, coming up with different wording but with similar meaning is not that difficult. While at first this may seem to be a weakness, in reality it becomes a plus for the Bible student with little or no knowledge of the biblical languages. Comparing a series of differing expressions that attempt to say the same basic idea can be enormously helpful in expanding the reader’s grasp of the text meaning.

ology affirms the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the individual to make the correct decisions in individual situations. The role of scripture is to define parameters of correct and incorrect decisions. And there will usually be multiple choices on either side here. The Holy Spirit takes those options and prompts the individual Christian to make the best one for that particular decision. Thus a complementary role between scripture and the ministry of the Holy Spirit emerges.

Living an obedient Christian life is not a mechanical process of studying the Bible and then making the correct choice set forth in the Bible. The vast majority of individual decisions that we make day to day in the modern world are not addressed specifically by the Bible at all. It is completely false and misleading to say that the Bible specifically answers every issue you will ever face. It doesn’t and doesn’t intend to! What the Bible does is lay out defining parameters of proper decision making in the form of basic principles of obedient living. The Spirit of Christ provides us with enough spiritual insight from scripture to understand which one of these decisions best suits the particular decision we are making. Both the Bible and the Holy Spirit are essential dynamics for living the Christian life properly and obediently. Ignore either one and spiritual disaster awaits the believer.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Studies of Text Units in Chapter One**

Included below are five indepth studies of the text of Revelation chapter one. The format of these studies follows the above discussion and is outlined as follows:

**Biblical Text Listing:**

*Greek NT      GNB      NRSV      NLT*

**Study of the Passage:**

*Introduction*

1. *What the text meant*

*Historical Aspects*

*External History*

*Internal History*

*Literary Aspects*

*Genre*

*Literary Setting*

*Literary Structure*

*Exegesis of the Text:*

2. *What the text means*

The studies cover natural pericopes in chapter one:

- |                                 |                |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. <a href="#">Rev. 1:1-3</a>   | <i>Page 12</i> |
| 2. <a href="#">Rev. 1:4-8</a>   | <i>Page 33</i> |
| 3. <a href="#">Rev. 1:9-11</a>  | <i>Page 60</i> |
| 4. <a href="#">Rev. 1:12-16</a> | <i>Page 77</i> |
| 5. <a href="#">Rev. 1:17-20</a> | <i>Page 97</i> |

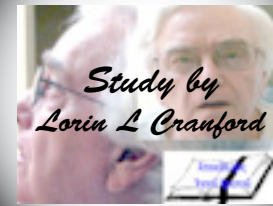


# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 01

Text: 1:1-3

All rights reserved ©



**QUICK LINKS**

**1. What the text meant.**

**Historical Aspects:**

- External History
- Internal History

**Literary Aspects:**

- Genre
- Literary Setting
- Literary Structure

**Exegesis of the Text:**

- I. The Revelation, vv. 1-2
- II. The Blessing, v. 3

**2. What the text means.**

1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἂν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, 2 ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

### Greek NT

1.1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, 2 ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

### Gute Nachricht Bibel

1.1 In diesem Buch ist die Offenbarung aufgeschrieben, die Jesus Christus von Gott empfangen hat, damit er denen, die ihm dienen, zeigt, was sich in Kürze ereignen muss. Jesus Christus sandte seinen Engel zu seinem Diener Johannes und machte ihm dies alles bekannt. 2 Johannes bezeugt hier die Botschaft, die von Gott kommt und für die Jesus Christus als Zeuge einsteht: alles, was er gesehen hat. 3 Freuen darf sich, wer die prophetischen Worte in diesem Buch anderen vorliest, und freuen dürfen sich alle, die sie hören und beherzigen; denn die Zeit ist nahe, dass alles hier Angekündigte eintrifft.

### NRSV

1.1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

### NLT

1.1 This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him concerning the events that will happen soon. An angel was sent to God's servant John so that John could share the revelation with God's other servants. 2 John faithfully reported the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ -- everything he saw. 3 God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of the book of Revelation in experience stands on the opposite side of the fence to the stated purpose of the book in v. 3 to bring blessing to the reader. Almost from the very beginning, and clearly from within two hundred years after being written, this document has been a source of divisiveness and disunity inside Christianity. How has this been so? And why?

Is this the fault of the document itself? I seriously doubt it! The problems lie with the readers and with a falsely assumed understanding of the contents of the

document. Perhaps more than any other document in the entire Bible, this document has been subjected to eisogesis, that is, the importing of alien ideas from the surrounding culture of the reader back into the book as though this was what the document was actually saying. Entire religious systems of doctrine have been contrived externally and then read back into Revelation as supposed justification for the religious system, e.g., dispensationalism. Here is where all the troubles with Revelation lie! Not with God who inspired it, nor with John who wrote it, but with the reader who wants to tell

God how to run His business.

In history, the cumulative result of this divisive way of treating Revelation has produced two extremes. A few make Revelation the key to interpreting the entire Bible. Or, to be more accurate, they make their contrived interpretive understanding of Revelation the key to interpreting the Bible. On the other extreme are those who in being aware of the controversial nature of the document ignore it and avoid reading it, if at all possible. The most famous of these individuals was the Reformer Martin Luther who relegated this document to an appendix status in his translation of the Bible in the 1500s. It could be read by Christians, but Luther felt that little spiritual insight would come from such reading. Somewhere between these two extremes is a whole host of folks who are very curious about the meaning of the document, but at the same time very hesitant to attempt a study of all these bizarre symbols and images found in the book. One of the extremely rare positive, indirect, contributions of anything worthwhile by Hollywood is the popularizing of much of this seemingly science fiction world through movies etc.

How do we get past these barriers? The promised blessing (1:3) to the reader is genuine and still available. But it will come -- in my opinion -- only to those who cast off every inclination to pre-understanding and then utilize the best available methods for interpreting scripture as a whole. This is clearly going to be our objective for this study of Revelation. Nothing will be mentioned about millennialism -- pre-, mid-, or post--until after the completion of the study, when we are in a position to evaluate these man-made ideas with solid understanding of the scripture text. None of them has a thing to do with divine inspiration!

Our approach for this document will use the best methods for Bible interpretation which we have been studying in the previous MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE series. Some of these principles will receive expanded treatment due to the unique demands of the literary genre of apocalypse. At the heart of this document is the same interpretive principle that applies to every document of the New Testament: **God inspired the composition of the document to meet specific spiritual needs of first century believers whom the writer targeted as his intended audience.** We, as later readers, are privileged to 'listen in' to this first century conversation so that we can find spiritual values given to the first readers that are relevant and helpful to us in our world. These documents, above all other writings of all times, have the ability to provide those insights because *ὁ θεόπνευστος*, *the breath of God*, permeates these writings exclusively.

One fundamental principle of interpretive approach is critical here. The less a cultural gap between

the 'then' and 'now' meanings of the text, the more certain we can be of authentic applications. But the wider that culture gap between these two meanings, the more tentative our applicational understandings must become! Dogmatism over interpretation is nothing but a clear sign of ignorance by the interpreter. That is, an ignorance driven by fear of being wrong!<sup>1</sup> This will highlight even more the importance of understanding both the world of John in late first century and, just as much, the world that we live in today.

With the stage set, now let's begin the journey of discovery of God's program of blessing and protecting His people in times of their suffering and troubles.

### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

The first question always to be asked of an ancient text of any kind, and particularly of the biblical text, is what did it mean to the people who first read the document as the people the writer had in mind during the compositional process. It was to address relevant issues in the lives of these people that brought the document into existence to begin with. To bypass this question in order to cut across the centuries to one's own world is to rather arrogantly assume that we, the modern readers, were the only people that God was concerned to help. Such mistakes ignore not only the believers of the first century, but all those in the centuries between the 'then' and the 'now' of the ancient text. Clearly the God of the Bible is not that kind of god!

When asking about the 'then' meaning of the text, several aspects are implicit in such a question. Determining the historical meaning depends on understanding how the text came into being along with how it attempted to communicate the divine message to the initial readers. Both historical and literary dimensions are included in such understanding. We will probe these as we seek to obtain this historical meaning.

One should note that the distinction between historical and literary is not an absolute distinction. At certain points these two perspectives will merge together in an inseparable manner. This will be noted as we make the inquiries.

#### Historical Aspects:

Under historical we somewhat arbitrarily group several aspects of the text. This is done for ease of understanding from a modern western vantage point.

<sup>1</sup>The human psyche develops a vast array of 'defense mechanisms.' Dogmatic convictions are mostly driven by the fear of failure, often times mixed with a strong dosage of a quest for power and control. In religious studies, nothing seems to expose this fundamental tenant of human nature like the study of Revelation. The only other issue rivaling it is the so-called 'women in ministry' debate.

A few of the aspects by definition pertain to the document in its entirety and thus need to be treated only in the beginning study of a document. Primarily, this refers to the compositional history of the document. The relevancy of the compositional history in subsequent studies into the document shifts to where the author's use of sources for the writing of individual pericopes becomes important to the interpretive process.

Other historical aspects, such as the transmission history, the historical references inside each passage etc., become important for the study of every passage of the document, and thus will be included with each study.

Also important is to keep continuously in mind the differences between the idea of history in the ancient world and in the modern western world. Most of the time enough compatibility between these two sets of viewpoints exists so that few difficulties arise. But on occasion profound differences in understanding will surface. Our conviction is that any historical evaluations made about the text must give full consideration to standards of history writing adopted in the compositional process.<sup>2</sup> To arbitrarily judge the history issues connected to the text solely by modern standards is patently unfair and wrong.

**External History.** With this grouping come two distinctive historical aspects: composition and transmission histories. The first will receive considerably more treatment in this beginning study of the document.

**Composition history.** This concern centers on how the entire document came into existence in the first Christian century. Included in this are the so-called 'reporter questions' of who, where, when, to whom, and why.

Thus what was the situation in which the Book of Revelation came into being? In the Prologue to the book in 1:1-3 a few of these questions are partially answered from inside the document. The document is identified as having been given to Jesus Christ by God (ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός) and then revealed to John through the sending of an angel (ἔσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ). The human composition of the document by John is then defined not as writing it down but as ἔμαρτύρησεν, *having given a witness to*. The Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *revelation from Jesus Christ*, is defined further as τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the Word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ*. This is what the book of Revelation gives witness to. But further qualifi-

<sup>2</sup>For an introductory overview of these kinds of history issues, see chapter four, "What does history have to do with scripture?," in the MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE series at cranfordville.com.

cations are still made: ὅσα εἶδεν, *whatever he saw*. Thus John signals that his witness is limited to the things that he saw through what God revealed (ἔσήμανεν) to him through the angel. Implied here is that not everything was seen, and thus not everything is reported.

With the documents not identifying the human source, e.g., the four gospels and Acts as well as a few of the general letters, the first place to turn to for this compositional history is the early church traditions that discuss these issues during the second through the sixth centuries. With those documents containing some sort of author identification, the turning to the church fathers then becomes the second step in the process. This later tradition will suggest how these identifying tags were understood early on by church leaders. The final step, either the second or third step from the above beginning steps, is to analyze carefully the contents of the document in order to develop an 'internal' author profile. The church fathers will enable us to establish an 'external' author profile. Once both profiles have been carefully developed, they need to be compared very thoroughly. Should the two profiles sync with one another reasonably well, then substantial confidence in the accuracy of the church father traditions can be given. But if the two profiles contain elements that strongly differ from one another, then the greatest of hesitancy in granting confidence in the accuracy of the church father traditions should be exercised. Conclusions then about the compositional history can only be made as possibilities, but not as certainties.<sup>3</sup>

Now let's apply these procedures to the book of Revelation.

Internally the document makes the claim of being an ἀποκάλυψις about Jesus Christ given from God to John through an angel (1:1). Ἰωάννης, John, is identified in 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8 as the human agent in communicating this message to its targeted audience. This audience is identified in v. 4 as ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, *the seven churches in Asia*. In chapters

<sup>3</sup>In summary follow these steps for compositional history determination:

a) Determine whether specific id tags are contained inside the document.

b) If none exist, turn to the church fathers to develop an external author profile from these perspectives. If internal id tags are present in the document, examine how these were treated in the early church traditions.

c) Develop an 'internal' author profile by examining the contents of the document for items such as writing style, theological viewpoints, time and place markers to signal something about the composition of the document.

d) Compare carefully both profiles with one another. If they are close to one another, then substantial confidence in the accuracy of the early church traditions can be concluded. But if not, then only tentative conclusions about the compositional history can be legitimately drawn.

two and three these seven churches are identified as being located in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Note from the map how the listing creates a full circle from Ephesus back to Ephesus. The place of origin is identified in v. 9 as Patmos, an island just off the western coast of the province of Asia.

In summary then, here are the signals of composition from inside the document:

**Who:** Ἰωάννης, John (1:1; but which one?)

**To whom:** ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, to the seven churches in Asia (1:4)

**From where:** τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένη Πάτμῳ, the island called Patmos (1:9)

**What:** Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, a revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1); τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας, the words of the prophecy (1:3).

**Why:** Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near (1:3).

These are substantial claims with even more details about the compositional history. Virtually no other document in the New Testament contains this much information about the compositional history. But some of these questions are missing, e.g., when? Thus answers must be sought elsewhere.

A number of questions surface from this information that will need answering as far as is possible. The first one, and somewhat foundational one, is the specific identity of the human agent in composing this document who is termed Ἰωάννης in 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8. The name Ἰωάννης was relatively common in the first century world, and is mentioned some 136 times in the NT.<sup>4</sup> Several different individuals in early Christianity possessed this name. Thus specific identification of the person named John in the book of Revelation is the first challenge. Once this is established then the parameters for answering the remaining questions will fall into place better.

Where does one go to establish the identity of this individual names Ἰωάννης in the text? Historically, interpreters have looked first and foremost to the church fathers who are much closer in time and space to the first century world than we are. The developing traditions in Christianity from the second through the eighth

<sup>4</sup>“Since John (the anglicized form of *Ioannes*, in turn a graecized form of the Hebrew name *Yohanan*, meaning ‘Yahweh is gracious’) was a relatively common Jewish name in antiquity, it is not immediately evident who this particular John actually was.” [David E. Aune, “Revelation, Book of” In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1125.]



centuries will play an important role in this identification process.

The most notable impact of the influence of the church fathers can be seen in the listed title of this document, ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ, Revelation of John.<sup>5</sup> The

various titles that surface in the different manuscripts from the third through the eighth centuries reflect the differing understandings about the origin of the document, particularly who was responsible for its composition. Also, the addition of a title to the document was prompted by the emergence of several similar documents claiming apostolic origin.<sup>6</sup> This title helped to distinguish it from these other documents, most of which had similar titles.

Generally the document was attributed to the apostle John, although from the second century on questions about this were raised by some major lead-

<sup>5</sup>“The oldest textual witness to the opening of the book of Revelation (Codex Sinaiticus) gives ‘Revelation of John’ (*apokalypsis iōannou*) as its title. This title is also found in Codex Alexandrinus (5th century), the best witness, along with Codex Ephraemi (also 5th century), to the text of this work. Other mss contain the titles, ‘Revelation of John, the one who speaks about God’ (*apokalypsis iōannou tou theologou*); ‘Revelation of Saint John, the one who speaks about God’ (*apokalypsis tou hagiou iōannou tou theologou*); ‘Revelation of John, the one who speaks about God, [the] evangelist’ (*apokalypsis iōannou tou theologou kai euaggelistou*); and ‘The Revelation of the Apostle John, the Evangelist’ (*hē apokalypsis tou apostolou iōannou kai euaggelistou*). The work may have already been known by the title ‘Revelation of John’ (*apokalypsis iōannou*) in the 2d century. The Muratorian Canon (ca. 200 C.E.) states, ‘We receive also the apocalyptic works, only [those] of John and Peter’ (*scripta apocalypse[s] etiam johanis et petri tantum recipimus*; text cited by Charles Revelation ICC, 1:5). In the 2d century, however, the work may simply have been known as ‘Revelation’ (*apokalypsis*; Swete 1909: 1).”

[Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation, Book of” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 694.]

<sup>6</sup>“Several works frame themselves as visions, often discussing the future, afterlife, or both: *Apocalypse of Paul* (distinct from the Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*); *Apocalypse of Peter* (distinct from the Gnostic *Apocalypse of Peter*); *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*; *Apocalypse of Thomas* (also called the *Revelation of Thomas*); *Apocalypse of Stephen* (also called the *Revelation of Stephen*); *First Apocalypse of James* (also called the *First Revelation of James*); *Second Apocalypse of James* (also called the *Second Revelation of James*); *The Shepherd of Hermas*.” [“New Testament Apocrypha,” *Wikipedia.org*]

ers of the Christian movement.<sup>7</sup> Differing motivations seem to lie behind the objections to the tendency to associate this document with the apostle John.<sup>8</sup> The book itself encountered difficulty in gaining widespread acceptance into the canon of the New Testament, not primarily because of these authorship questions, but in large measure due to the abuse of the contents of the document as supposedly giving legitimacy to a rather materialistic view of the kingdom of God. In the third century both Caius of Rome and Dionysius of Alexandria reflect this negativism. It was the fifth century church father Augustine whose work, *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* [*The City of God*], moved the understanding away from the crass materialism of the Montanist approaches, thus helping legitimize the document among early Christians.

Modern scholarship tends to reject the early church's association of the document with the apostle John in favor of a stance that identifies the writer a one of the several Christians named John. Often this is

<sup>7</sup>“The book is traditionally part of the Johannine corpus, which consists of five compositions: the Gospel of John, the three Letters of John, and the Revelation of John. However, the name John occurs only in the titles of the Gospel and Letters of John, which appear to have been added to these works sometime in the 2nd century C.E. While there was some doubt in the ancient Church that Revelation was written by John the Apostle (the dissenting opinions of the elder Gaius and Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, were preserved by Eusebius HE 7.25), the common view among the church fathers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries was that all of these works were written by the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee and the brother of James. Modern critical scholars, aware of the striking differences in the grammar, vocabulary, style, and theological perspective between the Gospel and Letters of John and the Revelation of John, generally assign these works to at least two different authors, neither of which is thought to be the Apostle John. Various scholars have proposed that Revelation was written by the shadowy figure of John the Elder (Eusebius HE 3.29.2–4), or by John Mark or by John the Baptist or the heretic Cerinthus (3.28.2; *Ephraim Adv. haer.* 51.3–6).” [David E. Aune, “Revelation, Book of” In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1125.]

<sup>8</sup>“The first opposition to its apostolicity came from the Alogi (ca A.D. 170), who opposed the Logos doctrine of the Fourth Gospel and therefore rejected all Johannine literature. The Alogi therefore testify indirectly to the Johannine tradition and to the tradition that the Gospel and Revelation came from the same hand. Caius of Rome (3rd cent) rejected the book because he opposed the Montanists, for whom Revelation was the prime source of their chiliastic ideas. The first ‘literary critic’ of Revelation, Dionysius of Alexandria (d ca 267), was offended by its millennial teaching and rejected it, pointing out differences of language, style, and grammar between it and the Gospel. He cited the tradition that there were two monuments to John in Ephesus and therefore probably two Johns (cf. Papias in Eusebius HE iii.39.5ff).” [*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 4:172.]

based on the obvious and often dramatic stylistic differences between Revelation and the Gospel of John, reflecting many of Dionysius’ points in 267 AD.<sup>9</sup>

In comparing what we know about the apostle John from inside the New Testament and from early church traditions to the author profile that can be developed from inside the document,<sup>10</sup> no overwhelming problems clearly move toward rejecting the dominant church tradition regarding the apostle John. But in honest appraisal of the evidence, one must conclude that also no overwhelming evidence makes this link to the apostle absolutely certain.

In working with the conclusion that the apostle John is the person intended by the name Ἰωάννης, several other issues begin to come together. The missing question of ‘when’ not treated inside the document will find an answer within the span of the apostle’s public ministry.<sup>11</sup> Early church tradition puts the end of John’s

<sup>9</sup>“As Dionysius pointed out, the language of Revelation differs so markedly from the Fourth Gospel’s that common authorship is difficult to uphold. In spite of certain distinct resemblances between the two books (see E. F. Harrison, intro to the NT [1964], pp. 441–43), the Greek of the Gospel is smooth and idiomatic, while the Greek of Revelation is studded with so many irregularities and solecisms that R. H. Charles devoted a chapter of forty-two pages to ‘A Short Grammar of the Apocalypse.’” [*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 4:172.]

<sup>10</sup>“He calls himself John (1:4, 9; 22:8). This is most likely not a pseudonym but rather the name of a person well known among the Asian churches. This John identifies himself as a prophet (1:3; 22:6–10, 18, 19) who was in exile because of his prophetic witness (1:9). As such, he speaks to the churches with great authority. His use of the OT and Targums makes it virtually certain that he was a Palestinian Jew, steeped in the ritual of the temple and synagogue. He may also have been a priest.”

[Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1847.]

<sup>11</sup>“The common tradition of the Church affirmed that, after his leadership role in the church of Jerusalem, John moved to Ephesus, where he lived to an old age and died a natural death. The tradition is summarized by Eusebius (Hist. Eccl. 3.18.1; 23.3–4; 39.3–4; 4.18.6–8; 5.8.4; 18.14; 20.6; PG 20.252, 255–64, 296–98, 376, 449, 479–82, 486) who appeals to Irenaeus (3.18.1; 39, 3–4), Justin (4.18.6–8), Clement of Alexandria (3.39.3–4), Apollonius (5.18.14) and Polycrates (5.24.3) as early witnesses to the tradition.

“The testimony of Irenaeus (Haer. 2.22.3.5; 3.1.2; 3.4; PG 7.783–85, 845), Justin (Dial. 81.4; PG 6.669) and Clement of Alexandria (q.d.s., 42; PG 9.648–50) about John is known from extant sources, but the pertinent texts from Apollonius and Polycrates are extant only in the portions cited by Eusebius. Irenaeus claimed that he had reports on John’s Ephesian ministry coming from Polycarp and Papias.

“The mid-2d century apocryphal Acts of John is another early witness to an Ephesian residency by John. Among the Latin Fathers, Tertullian tells of John’s death at a late age (*De anima*. 50; PL 2).”

[Raymond F. Collins, “John (Disciple)” In vol. 3, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Dou-



life during the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan (98 - 117 AD). He lived to be an exceptionally old man for that day and age, and fulfilled most of his ministry in the last several decades of his life in and around Ephesus.

Out of this comes two possibilities of dating of the book of Revelation. Internally one has to look at 11:1-2 which is taken by some to imply that the temple in Jerusalem is still standing.<sup>12</sup> Should this be the case then the composition of the book would fall during the reign of Nero who persecuted some segments of Christianity in the mid 60s. But such is extremely unlikely for several reasons. First, Nero's persecution of Christianity was limited to Rome and the immediate region; it was not a empire wide persecution and was brief. Second, in the visionary nature of Rev. 11:1-2 it is considerably questionable as to whether the text is alluding to the physical temple in Jerusalem.

Clearly from repeated emphases in the book, Christians at the time of the writing are experiencing intense persecution. Historically the only other possible time frame that will fit comes during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96 AD). This would place the composition of the document late in John's life and ministry. Christian commentators from Irenaeus, Victorinus, Eusebius, and Jerome in the early church to the majority of modern scholars believe this to be the correct time period for the composition of the document. Thus Revelation comes into being sometime between 90 and 96 AD. If the statement of the church historian



bleday, 1992), 885.]

<sup>12</sup>Rev. 11:1-2. 1 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Come and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.

Καὶ ἐδόθη μοι κάλαμος ὅμοιος ῥάβδῳ, λέγων· ἔγειρε καὶ μέτρησον τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας ἐν αὐτῷ. 2 καὶ τὴν αὐλὴν τὴν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ναοῦ ἐκβάλε ἔξωθεν καὶ μὴ αὐτὴν μετρήσῃς, ὅτι ἐδόθη τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἅγιαν πατήσουσιν μῆνας τεσσαρῶντα [καὶ] δύο.

Eusebius is correct (*Church History*, 3.18.5), then this date comes toward the end of Domitian's reign in 96 AD. This is the best answer to the 'when' question.

This developing scenario also sets a better framework for understanding the To Whom question. The text in 1:4 clearly indicates that the document was written ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, [to the seven churches in Asia](#). The island of Patmos is just off the coast from the city of Ephesus. The atmosphere created by Domitian, who was a micromanaging total dictator in the extreme, fits this picture quite well. He demanded total loyalty from all subjects in the empire as a supreme god, and had zero tolerance for any challenge to his authority. He revived the emperor worship tradition, and the province of Asia became one of the areas most fervently committed to this practice. The church historian Eusebius claims extensive persecution of Christians under Domitian.<sup>13</sup> The letters of the Roman governor in Bithynia-Pontus, Pliny, to emperor Trajan in 111/112 reflects hostility to Christians generally, but suggests some lowering of the intensity of persecution after Domitian (81-96).

Internally the document claims to have been written from the island of Patmos. This small Greek island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of modern Turkey contains some 13.15 square miles of land (34.05 km<sup>2</sup>). Although hardly ever mentioned in ancient literature, its historical importance is due to the book of Revelation and Christian tradition connected to it from the end of the first century onward. In the first century Roman empire Patmos was one of islands in the Dodecanese Island group used for prisoners of Rome in banishment. John was banished to Patmos by the Romans according to Rev. 1:9. Irenaeus in the late second century is the first to mention more details, which were picked up in the fourth century by Eusebius and Jerome.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>“DOMITIAN, having shown great cruelty toward many, and having unjustly put to death no small number of well-born and notable men at Rome, and having without cause exiled and confiscated the property of a great many other illustrious men, finally became a successor of Nero in his hatred and enmity toward God. He was in fact the second that stirred up a persecution against us,<sup>14</sup> although his father Vespasian had undertaken nothing prejudicial to us.<sup>15</sup>” [Eusebius of Caesaria, “The Church History of Eusebius”, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert In *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Volume I: Eusebius: *Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 147.]

<sup>14</sup>“Roman prisoners and dissidents were often banished to islands, and three islands, in particular, in the Sporades were used for exiles (Pliny *HN* 4:69–70; Tacitus *Ann.* 4:30). John was exiled to Patmos, according to early church tradition, in the 14th year (95 C.E.) of the emperor Domitian (Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3:18–20; see also Irenaeus *haer.* 5.30.3; Jerome *vir. ill.* 9). Legends about John's deeds on Patmos are preserved in the *Acts of John* (by Prochorus),



The details of the what and why questions will be treated in the exegesis section of these first two studies since they surface directly in the scripture text. But in summary, John is writing to Christians in the Roman province of Asia undergoing severe hostility to their Christian faith. As a prisoner of Rome he was not free to say directly what he felt inspired to communicate to his targeted readers. Thus by using the existing forms of apocalyptic writing in a loosely constructed document, he was able to communicate this message of hope and confidence in the ultimate control of God over human history in spite of the mighty hand of the Roman emperor Domitian at the end of the first Christian century.

Although absolute certainty with some of the details of the answers to the compositional questions is not possible, the basic contours of those answers are established with sufficient clarity to enable us to interpret the book against its historical setting with confidence. From this historical based exegesis we can find relevant applications of the text to our world.

**Transmission history.** The other aspect of the external history needing attention is how this text was copied and passed on to successive generations of readers prior to the invention of the printing press in the 1400s. All of this work was hand copying of the text in a variety of patterns. In this study, we will look at two aspects: the transmission of the text of the entire document in summary fashion, and the process of the copying of 1:1-3 in detailed fashion. Only the second

a 5th-century text pseudepigraphically attributed to the apostle's scribe. John was probably released during the reign of Nerva (*Cas-sius Dio* 68.1) and lived into the reign of Trajan (Irenaeus *haer.* 2.22.5), serving as pastor of the church at Ephesus." [Scott T. Carroll, "Patmos (Place)" In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 179.]

aspect will be repeated in each successive study.

In the text of Revelation, early signals indicate that the document began to be circulated among Christians beyond Asia early on in the second century.<sup>15</sup> Although generally accepted as authentic, not everyone in the early church saw it as authoritative scripture (Note: us-

<sup>15c</sup>Opinion differs as to whether traces of the Apocalypse are to be found in the Apostolic Fathers. A number of apparent parallels may be cited from the Shepherd of Hermas, such as reference to the coming great tribulation<sup>111</sup> and the author being transported by the Spirit.<sup>112</sup> There are also a number of common images in the two works (the church as a woman, her enemy as a beast, the apostles as part of a spiritual building, etc.).<sup>113</sup> While such parallels may indicate nothing more than that both books drew from a common apocalyptic tradition, the possibility that Hermas may have known the Apocalypse is by no means precluded. The parallels in Barnabas<sup>114</sup> and Ignatius<sup>115</sup> are incidental rather than substantive and offer no solid base for literary dependence.

"According to Andreas in the prologue to his commentary on Revelation (sixth century), Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in the early years of the second century, knew the book and accepted it as inspired.<sup>116</sup> Justin Martyr, who lived and taught at Ephesus shortly after his conversion about A.D. 130, wrote that 'a certain man among us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, prophesied in a revelation made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would spend a thousand years in Jerusalem.'<sup>117</sup> Another witness from the geographical area to which the Apocalypse was first sent was Melito, bishop of Sardis, who in about A.D. 175 wrote a work on Revelation, the title of which is preserved by Eusebius.<sup>118</sup>

"Irenaeus (born in Asia Minor, probably at Smyrna), bishop of Lyons in South Gaul, quotes frequently from the Apocalypse in his major work, *Against Heresies* (written in the last decade of the second century). He speaks of 'all the genuine and ancient copies' of the Revelation of John,<sup>119</sup> thus indicating its early circulation. In an epistle to the believers in Asia and Phrygia, the churches of Lyons and Vienne (A.D. 177) make several references to the Apocalypse (12:1; 14:4; 19:9; 22:11), one of which is introduced by the NT formula for citing Scripture.<sup>120</sup>

"That the Apocalypse was included in the *Muratorian Canon* (the earliest extant list of NT writings) indicates its circulation and acceptance as canonical in Rome by the end of the second century. Hippolytus, the most important third-century theologian of the Roman church, quotes it repeatedly, considering its author to be 'the apostle and disciple of the Lord.' In Carthage (the 'daughter of the Roman church') the Apocalypse was accepted as authoritative by the end of the second century. Tertullian, the great Carthaginian apologist for Christianity, quotes extensively from Revelation (citations from eighteen of its twenty-two chapters) in the first years of the third century.<sup>121</sup> About the same time, Clement of Alexandria accepted the book as apostolic Scripture,<sup>122</sup> as did his younger contemporary Origen.<sup>123</sup> In western Syria, Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, made use of "testimony from the Revelation of John" in his treatise 'Against the Heresy of Hermogenes.'<sup>124</sup> Additional references are available, but these will demonstrate that by the close of the second century the Apocalypse had circulated throughout the empire and was widely accepted both as Scripture and as the product of the apostle John."

[Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 22-23.]

ing a document and viewing it as scripture were two very different matters in early Christianity).

Despite early widespread use of the document, questions about its legitimacy arose and increasingly became strong objections, particularly in eastern Christianity.<sup>16</sup> The impact of the Latin Vulgate translation at the beginning of the 400s pretty much sealed the issue of including Revelation in so far as western Christianity was concerned. But the issue of inclusion or rejection of Revelation in eastern Christianity remained a live issue for some considerable time. By the end of the fifth century most eastern Christian traditions had accepted Revelation into its canon, but a few of these traditions have never included the document in their list of sacred scriptures until the present.<sup>17</sup>

The history of the copying of the text of Revelation as a complete document presents some special issues. The level of variations -- most minor but some major -- is much more extensive than with the remaining documents of the New Testament. Sorting out the existing manuscripts by family type is much more complex for Revelation. Interestingly, the so-called 'western text' type that is substantially significant for most of the rest of the New Testament has no representative man-

<sup>16</sup>“Some attention, however, should be given to the opposition that arose against Revelation. Marcion rejected it on the grounds of its Jewish character. Later in the second century, the Alogi, a group of anti-Montanists in Asia Minor, rejected the Apocalypse on the basis of its unedifying symbolism and because they held that it contained errors of fact (e.g., no church existed at Thyatira at that time). Gaius, a zealous anti-Montanist in Rome, rejected the book, holding it to be the work of a certain heretic Cerinthus, who conceived of the millennium in terms of sensual gratification.<sup>125</sup> The writing of Gaius was convincingly countered by the great Hippolytus, and from the early years of the third century the Apocalypse was uniformly accepted in the West. Only Jerome seems to have expressed certain doubts.<sup>126</sup> It was in the East that the Apocalypse encountered sustained opposition. In order to refute the millennial position of Nepos (an Egyptian bishop), Dionysius of Alexandria examined the book critically and came to the conclusion that, although inspired, the Apocalypse could not have been written by the apostle John.<sup>127</sup> Rejection of apostolic authorship led to severe questions about canonicity. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea in the early fourth century, was apparently influenced by the work of Dionysius and suggested that the book was written by a John the Elder of whom Papias spoke.<sup>128</sup> Others in the East who questioned the work include Cyril of Jerusalem (315–86), Chrysostom (347–407), and Theodoret (386–457). It was not included among the canonical books at the Council of Laodicea (ca. 360)<sup>129</sup> and was subsequently omitted from the Peshitta, the official Bible in Syriac-speaking Christian lands in the fifth century.” [Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 23-24.]

<sup>17</sup>“The Revelation of John is one of the most uncertain books; it was not translated into Georgian until the 10th century, and it has never been included in the official lectionary of the Greek Church, whether Byzantine or modern.” [“Biblical canon,” wikipedia.org]

uscripts for this book. Additionally, Codex Vaticanus (B), one of the three pivotal early manuscripts of the NT, does not contain Revelation. The Greek text of the *Textus Receptus*, upon which the early English Bibles through the KJV are based, along with other translations, is a highly flawed text for Revelation in part re-created by Erasmus in the 1500s.<sup>18</sup>

One of the foundational studies in this area remains H.C. Hoskier, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse* (published in 1929).<sup>19</sup> Also important is the subsequent work of J. Schmidt, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes II* (published 1955; vol. 2 of 3 vol. work). These are but two very important massive studies of the Greek text of Revelation and how the copying of it has fared over the centuries prior to the Reformation. Without getting overbearing with technical details, let me indicate that analyzing the variations in readings for this NT document requires advanced skills in analyzing ancient manuscripts beyond those needed for the rest of the New Testament. These issues surface in part because of the nature of the Greek expression, which is generally regarded as quite inferior Greek to the rest of the New Testament. This prompted massive efforts to 'correct and improve' the Greek in the process of copying. The patterns of uncertainty about the role of this document in the canon of the New Testament lie behind some of the challenges in analyzing the existing copies.<sup>20</sup>

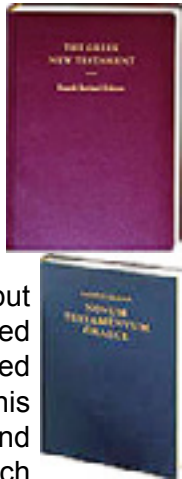
<sup>18</sup>“Allerdings hatte sich der *Textus Receptus*, die Edition des Erasmus mit einigen, wahrscheinlich unter dem Einfluss der Complutensischen Polyglotte vorgenommenen Korrekturen, gerade bei der Apk im Allgemeinbewusstsein außerordentlich verfestigt (ich zitiere im Folgenden die Edition durch Stephanus / Robert Estienne 1550). Es war bekannt, dass dessen Grundlage weder A noch C benützte und kritischen Maßstäben nicht genügte (den Apk-Schluss etwa rekonstruierte Erasmus ohne griechische Vorlage, worauf wir zurückkommen <sup>7</sup>). Doch das hatte die außerordentliche Wirkung im Deutschen über die Lutherübersetzung, im Englischen durch die King James Bible 1611 nicht behindert (zitiert wird im Folgenden Luthers Deutsche Bibel von 1545 mit normalisierter Rechtschreibung [Lu45] und King James gemäß der Blayney edition 1769). Mit der Edition des Sinaiticus stellte sich nun heraus, dass sich viele Eigenheiten in dieser rasch berühmt gewordenen Handschrift fanden. Der *Textus Receptus* gewann eine Stütze.” [Martin Karrer, “Der Text der Johannesoffenbarung -- Varianten und Theologie,” *Neotestamentica* 43.2 (2009) 373-398.]

<sup>19</sup>This massive, although highly technical, work is available online for viewing and/or downloading.

<sup>20</sup>Not treated here largely because of its complexity is the issue of the unity of the book of Revelation. That is, only in modern scholarship has the issue been raised that Revelation may have originally been composed as two or three separate documents that were later brought together into a single document. One example of this approach is Ford, J. Massynberde. Vol. 38, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008.). Based on highly subjective stylistic grounds, the assumption is made that

Thus as we give attention to variations of wording in the pericopes of the text of Revelation additional analytical skills will be brought to bear in the analysis. I will seek to be clear about these as they become necessary for this section of each of the studies.

I will continue the pattern of using the text apparatus of the two major printed Greek texts of the New Testament in use today: The United Bible Societies' *The Greek New Testament* (4th revised edition), and the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th revised edition). The newest revision of the N-A Greek text is the 28th edition, but the critical apparatus has not yet appeared in electronic format, although the printed Greek text for each study is taken from this edition. The very different structure and purposes for the text apparatus in each Greek text make them important for inclusion in the discussion. The UBS apparatus is limited in its listings and covers only those variations deemed to impact the translation of the text into other languages. The much more inclusive apparatus of the N-A text illustrates the full range of possible variations for a passage from the now existing ancient copies of the text. Both perspectives are helpful.



In Rev. 1:1-3, the text apparatus of the UBS Greek text lists no variations deemed significant enough to impact the translation of this passage. On the other hand, the apparatus of the N-A Greek text lists some 8 places where variations surface from the full range of existing manuscripts.<sup>21</sup> From these variations one can tell that the document represents several fragments (chaps 1-3; 4-11; 12-22) that were pieced together from writings reaching back to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The core sections of chaps 4-22 are assumed to have been non-Christian Jewish apocalypse with Christian revisions added.

The highly speculative nature of such approaches does not commend itself as having credibility and thus severely limits the value of such commentaries. From such works one learns more about the imagination of the commentator than about the meaning of the biblical text.

#### <sup>21</sup>Inscriptio:

\* (+ του αγιου α) I. του θεολογου M (three variations in the title from ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ surface)

| I. τ. θ. και ευαγγελιστου 046 pc

| txt (8 A)

#### Offenbarung 1,1-2

\* της γεναμενης εις εμε Ιωαννην τον αποστολον του κηρυξαι τον λογον του θεου και την μαρτυριαν Ιησου Χριστου οσα ειδον 2050 (in mss 2050 [11th cent.] this text replaces verses one and two beginning with ην εδωκεν... in verse one.)

\* αγιοις κ\* (αγιοις replaces δουλοις)

\* 2036 pc (του θεου is omitted after λογον)

\* και ατινα εισι και ατινα χρη γενεσθαι μετα ταυτα M<sup>A</sup> (these words are added after ειδεν in this text recension)

no serious variation of text meaning is present in any of these alternative readings. Thus we can exegete vv. 1-3 in full confidence that we are analyzing the original wording of this passage.

**Internal History.** The time and place markers inside vv. 1-3 set up an interesting series of events. First there is the vertical action of an Αποκάλυψις given to Christ regarding ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, *things which must take place shortly*. Then Christ moved to make these things known to John by sending His angel to him. These things center in τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ*. Thus a sequence of actions carries the Αποκάλυψις, *revelation*, from God to Christ to an angel and finally to John. John then passes it on to his readers. All of these actions are past time, while the beatitude in verse three pronounces a future blessing on both the reader and the listeners to this revelation.

The reference to ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, *things which must happen shortly*, contains the temporal marker ἐν τάχει, *shortly*. This prepositional phrase construction particularly emphasizes a short period of time after the writing of this document.<sup>22</sup> More details will be given in the exegesis below, because of exegetical issues connected to the relative clause where this occurs.

#### Offenbarung 1,3

\* ακουων 2053. 2062 pc it vg<sup>cl</sup>; Apr Bea (οἱ ἀκούοντες is replaced by ἀκούων)

\* τ. λ. τουτους C (τοὺς λόγους is replaced with τούτους) | τον λογον κ 046. 1854 pc

\* ταυτης 1611. 2053. 2062 pc gig vg<sup>ww</sup> sy bo (ταύτης is added after προφητείας)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 632.]

<sup>22</sup>τάχος, ους, τό (Hom. et al.; ins, pap, LXX; TestSol 7:3 D; Just., D. 68, 3)

**1. a very brief period of time, with focus on speed of an activity or event, speed, quickness, swiftness, haste,** μετὰ τάχους with speed (Pla., Prot. 332b, Leg. 944c; POxy 2107, 4 [III A.D.]) MPol 13:1.—ἐν τάχει (Pind., Aeschyl. et al.; Galen, CMG V/9/2 p. 25, 25 al.; ins, pap, LXX; Jos., Ant. 6, 163; 17, 83) quickly, at once, without delay **Ac 10:33 D; 12:7; 17:15 D; 22:18; 1 Cl 48:1; 63:4.—τάχει** (Tetrast. Iamb. 2, 6, 1 p. 287; SibOr 1, 205; in Plut., Caes. 717 [20, 4], Lys. 438 [11, 2] w. the addition of πολλῶ, παντί; cp. Just., D. 68, 3 σὺν τάχει) quickly **Rv 2:5** v.l. (s. Tdf.).—τὸ τάχος as acc. of specification, adverbially (very) quickly, without delay (PHib 62, 13; PPetr II, 9, 2, 9; PSI 326, 12; 495, 17; 18 [all III B.C.]; LXX; Jos., Ant. 13, 8. Without the art. as early as Aeschyl.) 1 Cl 53:2; B 4:8; 14:3 (w. all three cp. Ex 32:7).

**2. pert. to a relatively brief time subsequent to another point of time, ἐν τάχει** as adverbial *unit soon, in a short time* **Lk 18:8; Ro 16:20; 1 Ti 3:14; Rv 1:1; 22:6; 1 Cl 65:1; shortly** Ac 25:4. Cp. ταχύς 2.—DELG s.v. ταχύς. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 992-93.]

Additionally in the beatitude of verse three the formula expression ὁ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, **the time is near**, is given as the foundation of the beatitude (γὰρ). Clearly the adverb ἐγγύς is temporal in this usage rather than spatial, which it can also designate.<sup>23</sup> The repetition of

<sup>23</sup>ἐγγύς adv. freq. funct. as prep.(Hom.+ comp. ἐγγύτερον (X. et al.; Jos., Ant. 19, 217 [cp. C. Ap. 2, 224 ἐγγίω]); superl. ἐγγιστα (Antiphon, Hippocr. et al.; ins [BCH 18, 1894, p. 324 no. 2, 26; OGI index]; BGU 69, 8; 759, 9; LXX; TestAbr A 2, p. 78, 14 [Stone p. 4], B 13 p. 117, 24 [Stone p. 82]; TestJob 2:2; Joseph. [always; e.g., Bell. 1, 289, Ant. 4, 254]).

**1. pert. to being in close proximity spatially, near, close to**

**a. abs.** ἐ. εἶναι *be close by* **J 19:42**; IRo 10:2; Hs 9, 6, 6; αἱ ἐγγύς κῶμαι the neighboring villages **Mk 1:38** D (Appian, Iber. 42 §174 οἱ ἐγγύς βάρβαροι; likew. Appian, Syr. 42 §220). αἱ ἐγγιστα ἐκκλησίαι the closest assemblies IPhld 10:2; cp. **Mk 6:36** D οἱ ἐγγιστα ἀγροί (Dionys. Hal. 1, 22, 1 ἢ ἐγγιστα νῆσος; Ps.-Callisth. 2, 11, 6).

**b. w. gen.** (Hom. et al.; also Joseph. as a rule [Schmidt 379f]; TestDan 6:11; TestJob 2:2) ἐ. τοῦ Σαλίμ **J 3:23**; ἐ. Ἱερουσαλήμ **Lk 19:11**; **J 11:18**; **Ac 1:12**; ἐ. τῆς πόλεως **J 19:20**; ἐ. τοῦ τόπου **6:23**; ἐ. τῆς ἐρήμου **11:54**; ἐ. ὑδάτων Hv 3, 2, 9; 3, 7, 3. W. gen. of pers. Hs 8, 6, 5; 9, 6, 2; ApcPt 20:34.

**c. w. dat.** (Il. 22, 453; X., Cyr. 2, 3, 2; al. in later writers as Polyb. 21, 28, 8; Dionys. Hal. 6, 52. Cp. Kühner-G. I 408; Jobrecht, D. echte u. soziative Dativ bei Pausanias, Zürich diss. 1919, 14; Ps 33:19; 144:18; Jos., Ant. 1, 335; 7, 218) **Ac 9:38**; **27:8**.

**d. ἐ. γίνεσθαι come near** (opp. μακρὰν εἶναι) **Eph 2:13**. W. gen. (Vett. Val. 196, 28f) 2 Cl 7:3; 18:2; ἐ. τοῦ πλοίου γίνεσθαι **J 6:19**; ἐ. τινος ἔρχεσθαι (Theophanes, Chron. 389, 12f de Boor ἐγγύς σου ἐλθεῖν=come to you; BGU 814, 30f [III A.D.]) Hv 4, 1, 9 (Unknown Sayings 85f quotes Ox 1224, Fgm. 2 recto I, 5 [ἐγγύς ὑμῶν γ]ενήσεται).

**2. pert. to being close in point of time, near**

**a. of the future:** καιρὸς **Mt 26:18**; **Rv 1:3**; **22:10**. Of summer (Herodas 3, 45 ὁ χειμῶν [winter] ἐγγύς) **Mt 24:32**; **Mk 13:28**; **Lk 21:30**. Of a festival **J 2:13**; **6:4**; **7:2**; **11:55**. Of God's reign **Lk 21:31**. Of the parousia **Phil 4:5**; 1 Cl 21:3; B 21:3. Of death Hs 8, 9, 4. ἐγγύτερον ἡμῶν ἢ σωτηρία, ἢ ... our salvation is nearer than ... **Ro 13:11**. Abs. soon ἐ. τὸ ἔργον τελεσθήσεται will soon be completed Hs 9, 10, 2.

**b. of the past** ἐγγιστα a very short time ago 1 Cl 5:1.

**3. pert. to being close as experience or event, close**, extension of mng 1 (Vi. Aesopi I 6 p. 241, 7 Eberh. ἐγγύς ἡ γνώμη=his purpose is obvious) ἐ. σου τὸ ῥῆμά ἐστιν the word is close to you, explained by what follows: in your mouth and your heart **Ro 10:8** (Dt 30:14); κατάρας ἐ. close to being cursed=under a curse **Hb 6:8** (cp. Ael. Aristid. 26, 53 K.=14 p. 343 D.: ἀμήχανον καὶ κατάρας ἐγγύς); ἐ. ἀφανισμοῦ ready to disappear altogether **8:13**; οἱ ἐ. (opp. οἱ μακρὰν as Is 57:19; Esth 9:20; Da 9:7 Theod.; TestNaph 4:5) those who are near **Eph 2:17**; ἐ. (εἶναι) be near of God Hv 2, 3, 4 (cp. Dio Chrys. 14 [31], 87 τινὲς σφόδρα ἐγγύς παρεστῶτες τοῖς θεοῖς); πάντα ἐ. αὐτῷ ἐστιν everything is near (God) 1 Cl 27:3; cp. I Eph 15:3 (Just., A I, 21, 6); ἐ. μαχαίρας ἐ. θεοῦ close to the sword (martyrdom) is close to God I Sm 4:2 (cp. Paroem. Gr. II p. 228, Aesop 7 ὁ ἐγγύς Διός, ἐγγύς κερανοῦ; Pla., Philebus 16c ἐγγυτέρω θεῶν; X., Mem. 1, 6, 10; Pythag., Ep. 2; Crates, Ep. 11 ἐγγυτάτω θεοῦ; Lucian, Cyn. 12 οἱ ἐγγιστα θεοῖς; Wsd 6:19). Agr 3 s.v. πῦρ c. ἐ. ἐπὶ θύρας at (your) very door **Mt 24:33**; **Mk 13:29**.—B. 867. DELG. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer,

the same phrase in Rev. 22:10 with the same meaning underscores the perception of the time (ὁ καιρὸς) when the blessing from reading and hearing the words of the document were not in the distant, but the near, future. Again, the exegetical details connected to the expression will be given below.

Place markers here are not significant and are indirect, as is reflected in the verbal **ἀποστείλας** διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, **having sent through His angel to His servant John**. This implies a specific location but without specifying where it is. These details will be stated in 1:9-20 when the particulars of the vision John received are put on the table.

### Literary Aspects:

All kinds of knotty issues regarding the literary aspects of not just this pericope of 1:1-3, but about all the contents of chapter one emerge. Our approach will be to treat first those emerging inside the particular passage under consideration, and also to treat larger issues as they have important connections to details in the passage itself.

**Genre:** Specific terminology surfaces in these first three verses giving signals of the literary form of the entire document. But the open question is to what extent the two specific terms in this passage should be considered as labels for the document: Ἀποκάλυψις, **revelation**, and προφητεία, **prophecy**. They clearly provide insight in as much as John unquestionably uses these terms to characterize the content of what is contained in this document.

But not to be overlooked are some other terms found in these first three verses: τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, **the Word of God**, and τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, **the witness of Jesus Christ**. These two labels also deserve attention as sources of insight into the nature of the document.

The first set of terms, ἀποκάλυψις and προφητεία, need to be considered together. The category ἀποκάλυψις did not exist in the Greco-Roman literary world, in as much as the projection of future events was predicated largely on the assumption of the Greek view of the future as an endless repetition of cycles of events as reflected from the past. There was little if any religious connection to the future, other than that the gods would continue doing in the future what they had done in the past.

Thus apocalypse is a literary form with distinctly Jewish tones connected to it coming out of the Old Testament prophetic understanding that God controls the future and His intention will be carried out in the future.

*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 271.]

But the term ἀποκάλυψις is not just a literary label. In the 18 uses of the noun in the NT it designates a revealing action of God in making His will known to individuals.<sup>24</sup> The verb ἀποκαλύπτω, I disclose, used some 26 times in the New Testament, moves along similar lines of meaning centering on the disclosure of God's will across time. But interestingly the noun ἀποκάλυψις is only used in 1:1 in the document itself, and the verb is never used.

This prompts some consideration of whether the term ἀποκάλυψις in 1:1 is intended more as a title for the document (or, for chapter one, in the view of some commentators).<sup>25</sup> In later Christian writings the term

<sup>24</sup>ἀποκάλυψις, εως, ἢ (s. ἀποκαλύπτω; Philod., Vit. [περὶ κακιῶν] p. 38 Jensen) (Plut., Cato Mai. 34 8 [20, 8], Aemil. 262 [14, 3], Mor. 70f ἄ. τῆς ἁμαρτίας; Sir 11:27; 22:22; 41:26 v.l.; TestAbr A 6 p. 83, 27 [Stone p. 14]; GrBar, ApcEsdra ins, Just.) the lit. sense 'uncovering' as of head (s. Philod. above) does not appear in our lit., which uses the term in transcendent associations.

**1. making fully known, revelation, disclosure**

**a. of the revelation of truth** gener., w. obj. gen., **Ro 16:25**. πνεῦμα σοφίας κ. ἄ. Eph **1:17**. φῶς εἰς ἄ. ἐθνῶν a light of revelation for gentiles **Lk 2:32**.

**b. of revelations of a particular kind, through visions, etc.:** w. gen. of the author ἄ. Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ **Gal 1:12**; **Rv 1:1** (w. ὀπτασία) ἄ. κυρίου **2 Cor 12:1**. κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν because of a rev. **Gal 2:2**; MPol 22:3, Epil Mosq 5. κατὰ ἄ. ἐγνωρίσθη μοι τὸ μυστήριον the secret was made known to me by revelation **Eph 3:3**. Cp. **1 Cor 2:4 D; 14:6, 26; 2 Cor 12:7**.—In the visions of Hermas the ἄ. are not only transcendent rev. for eye and ear, but also the interpretations given to such rev. The ἄ. is ὀλοτελής complete only when it is explained and understood v 3, 10, 9; 3, 13, 4a. W. ὀράματα 4, 1, 3. Cp. 3, 1, 2; 3, 3, 2; 3, 10, 6–9; 3, 12, 2; 3, 13, 4b; 5 ins.—MBuber, Ekstatische Konfessionen 1909.

**c. of the disclosure of secrets belonging to the last days** ἄ. τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ **1 Pt 4:13**. Of the parousia ἐν ἀποκαλύψει, I. X. **1 Pt 1:7, 13**; cp. **1 Cor 1:7; 2 Th 1:7**. τὴν ἄ. τ. υἱῶν τ. θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεσθαι wait for the revealing of the children of God, i.e. for the time when they will be revealed in their glorified status **Ro 8:19**. ἄ. δικαιοκρισίας τ. θεοῦ **2:5**.

**2. as part of a book title Revelation** (Porphy., Vi. Plot. 16 συγγράμματα ..., ἀποκαλύψεις Ζωροάστρου κ. Ζωστριανοῦ κτλ.) ἄ. Ἰωάννου Rv ins ἄ. Ἰακώβ GJs ins and subscr.—EDNT. TRE XXV 109–46. DELG s.v. καλύπτω. M-M. TW. Spicq.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 112.]

<sup>25</sup>“An apocalypse (Ancient Greek: ἀποκάλυψις *apocalypsis*, from ἀπό and καλύπτω meaning ‘un-covering’), translated literally from Greek, is a disclosure of knowledge, hidden from humanity in an era dominated by falsehood and misconception, i.e., a lifting of the veil or revelation, although this sense did not enter English until the 14th century.<sup>1</sup> In religious contexts it is usually a disclosure of something hidden. In the Revelation of John (Greek Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου, Apocalypsis Ioannou), the last book of the New Testament, the revelation which John receives is that of the ultimate victory of good over evil and the end of the present age, and that is the primary meaning of the term, one that dates to 1175.<sup>1</sup> Today, it is commonly used in reference to any prophetic revelation

ἀποκάλυψις came to be used by a number of anonymous writers imitating the book of Revelation in the New Testament canon. Some twelve of the numerous apocalypses in the New Testament apocrypha writings use the term as a book title, while sixteen Jewish apocalypses exist as a part of the pseudepigraphical writings and also use either the Greek term or the Syriac equivalent of it.<sup>26</sup>

From the Jewish writings, coupled with the apocalyptic type sections found in several Old Testament prophets,<sup>27</sup> we gain the necessary background understanding of this kind of writing among ancient Jews. Historically, the book of Revelation comes out of this setting as a Christian expression targeting a specific readership of believers in the Roman province of Asia. The much later New Testament apocryphal writings provide some insight into how John's revelation was understood and the kind of influence it had on later Christian thinking in the second through fifth centuries AD.

The titular role of ἀποκάλυψις in 1:1 is rather clear, and as such sent signals clearly to the first listeners to this book being read of the kind of emphasis they should expect to hear in the reading of the contents.

But when carefully considered from the Old Testament materials along with the intertestamental Jewish writings one comes to another clear understanding that often gets lost in today's discussions. An ἀποκάλυψις is also a προφητεία, *prophecy*. This John makes abundantly clear in 1:3 with the ἀποκάλυψις being renamed τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας, *the words of the prophecy*. In fact, this is by far the most common designation of either the document or portions of the document, and occurs some seven times (out of a total of 19 NT uses).<sup>28</sup> The reality is that an ἀποκάλυψις is but one sub-category of προφητεία. And it must never be overlooked that προφητεία must be defined in terms of the eight century Israelite prophets beginning with Amos. Their mission had little if anything to do with predicting the future. Rather, their message of prophecy was to or so-called End Time scenario, or to the end of the world in general.” [“Apocalypse,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>26</sup>**Non-canonical Christian apocalypses:** Apocalypse of James (First); of James (Second); of Goliath; of Methodius; of Paul; of Paul (Coptic); of Peter; of Peter (Gnostic); of Samuel of Kalamoun; of Stephen; of Thomas; of the Seven Heavens.

**Non-canonical Jewish apocalypses** (pseudepigraphical): Apocalypse of Abraham; of Adam; of Baruch (Greek); of Baruch (Syriac); of Daniel; of Daniel (Greek); of Elijah; of Ezra (Greek); Gabriel's Revelation; of Lamech; of Metatron; of Moses; of Sedrach; of Zephaniah; of Zerubbable; Aramaic Apocalypse.

[“Apocalyptic literature,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>27</sup>Isaiah 24-27, 33, 34-35; Jeremiah 33:14-26; Ezekiel 38-39; Joel 3:9-17; Zechariah 12-14 are usually labeled “proto-apocalyptic,” while Daniel 7-12 is ‘apocalyptic.’

<sup>28</sup>Rev. 1:3; 11:6; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19.

declare the will of God for God's people both in the present and how that divine will would unfold in judgment in the coming days. To make the book of Revelation a road map predicting the future of mankind<sup>29</sup> is a horrible distortion of what John had in mind and is completely contradicted by both the rich Israelite heritage of the document as well as by the other defining labels given by John.<sup>30</sup>

The distinctly Christian perspective on this document is stressed not only by the chain of passing down the ἀποκάλυψις in 1:1, but also by the labels of τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the Word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ*, in 1:2. The expression ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ surfaces seven times in the document: 1:2, 9; 6:9; 17:17; 19:9 (plural: οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ); 19:13; 20:4 (plural: οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι ἀληθινοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ). The point of the expression is to designate the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

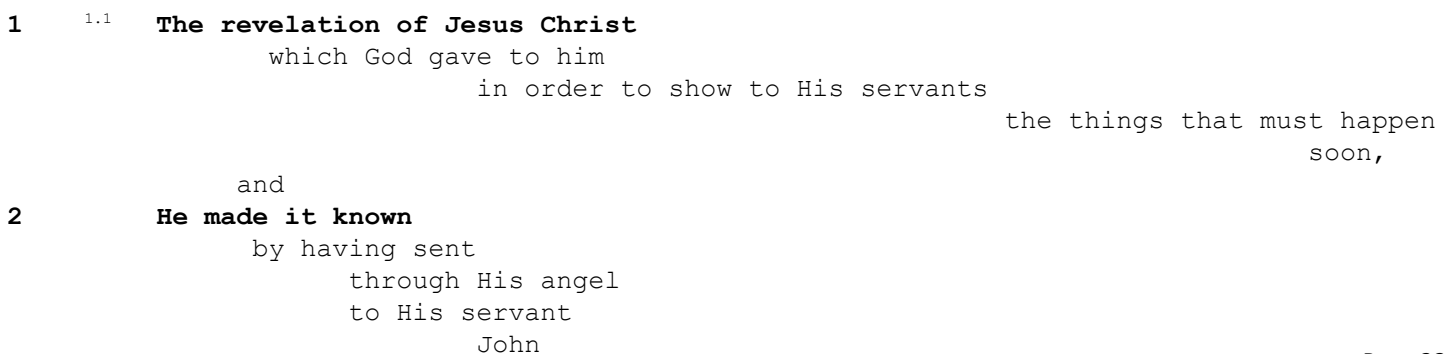
The second phrase καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ

<sup>29</sup>Mostly what I have in mind by this is the horrible twisting of the book of Revelation by John Darby (1800-1882), the Plymouth Brethren preacher who is the father of modern dispensationalism and futurism. Systematically through the exegesis of the book of Revelation this heresy will be exposed for what it truly is: a dangerous perversion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

<sup>30</sup>“Commentators now generally acknowledge that John has utilized the three genres of apocalyptic, prophecy, and epistle in composing the book. Though there are many definitions of apocalyptic (according to either form, thematic content, or function), it is best to understand apocalyptic as an intensification of prophecy. Too much distinction has typically been drawn between the apocalyptic and prophetic genres. Indeed, some OT books combine the two to one degree or another.<sup>1</sup> Apocalyptic should not be seen as too different from prophecy, though it contains a heightening and more intense clustering of literary and thematic traits found in prophecy.<sup>2</sup> That this is the case especially in Revelation is borne out by its self-description as a ‘prophecy’ in 1:3, as well as in 22:6–7, 10, where verbatim parallels with 1:1, 3 are found (see also ‘prophets’ in 22:6; see below on 1:1).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 37.]

### Literary Structure:

Not only is it imperative to learn the connection of a passage to the remainder of the contents of a document, it is equally important to understand how the ideas are arranged inside the passage. The block diagram is one of the best ways to grasp this connection, and thus is presented below.



Χριστοῦ, *the witness of Jesus Christ*, is a virtual synonym of the first τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, as is made clear in the repeated parallel uses in 1:2, 9; 6:9 and 20:4.

This pair of Christian labels places the book of Revelation squarely within the framework of the apostolic Gospel of the first Christian century. The document is intended to promote and under gird that Gospel message that was foundational to the beginning Christian movement.

In the background of the linking of both pairs of terms, and especially the inter connectedness of the second pair, is that John reflects a conviction of standing with the Old Testament prophets who received the word of the Lord (λόγος κυρίου) to deliver to the people of God.<sup>31</sup> He experiences similar visions and appearances from God or the angel of the Lord as did these prophets centuries before. His commission was the same as theirs: deliver that message to the people of God as both warning and hope for coming days.

**Literary Setting:** Coming as the first three verses of the document, the literary setting is rather clear. This unit of text material serves to introduce the entire document to its readers. It identifies the divine origin of the contents of the book and invokes God's blessings on those who read it and who hear it read. Collectively these verses form something of a prologue to the book. Thus from the beginning the reader is aware of the process of disclosure of God's revelation through an angel to John who then has passed on to the reader what he has received.

<sup>31</sup>“Four times the phrases ‘the word of God’ and ‘the testimony by Jesus’ are closely associated or virtually equated (1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4). John's use of this phrase suggests that he considers himself a prophet in the tradition of the OT prophets who received the word of God (Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jer 1:2, 4, 11). In the LXX the phrase λόγος κυρίου, ‘word of the Lord,’ is a stereotypical formula used to categorize a sequence of revelatory experiences (Zech 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 19.]

who gave witness to the Word of God  
and  
the testimony of Jesus Christ  
as much as he saw.

3 1.3 **Blessed is the one reading**  
and  
**the ones hearing the words**  
of this prophecy  
and  
**keeping the things written in it,**  
for  
4 **the time is near.**

### **Summary of Structural analysis:**

These first three verses hang together as a literary unit but internally divide naturally into two sections, based on the two Greek sentences: vv. 1-2 and v. 3.

The first lengthy sentence, as illustrated in the above diagram, begins with a main clause, but without a verb. A long relative clause expands the almost formula like title Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Although unlikely grammatically, the verb ἐσήμανεν could be taken as the second verb after ἔδωκεν coming off the relative pronoun ἧν. The impact of this would be to reduce Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ completely to the level of a title rather than the subject of an implied main clause verb. The comma in the Greek text after τάχει signals that in the opinion of the N-A 28th ed. editors, the second verb reflects a second main clause. This second statement ἐσήμανεν, *he made it known*, is then expanded substantially by a series of secondary statements with participle expressions and relative clauses.

As diagrammed above, the first two core ideas are simply to affirm that this document is (1) an Ἀποκάλυψις, and (2) that the contents of this revelation were made known by God through an angel to the apostle John.

The very distinctive third element in the second sentence is the beatitude in verse three. As the diagram above reflects visually, a divine blessing is pronounced on the individual reading this book to a congregation of listeners. This invoking of God's blessing upon the reading and hearing of the contents of the book is then based (γὰρ) upon the stock phrase ὁ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, *the time is near*.

Thus structurally two basis ideas are put on the table: the nature of the book and the invoking of God's blessings on those who read and hear it read.

### **Exegesis of the Text:**

The above structural analysis provides the outline for the exegesis of these verses in a twofold division. These center around the assertion of the nature of the book and the divine blessing invoked on those properly using the book.

### **I. The Revelation, vv. 1-2**

1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, 2 ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν.

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

The statement begins with a declaration that this document is an apocalypse. The first expansion element in the relative clause affirms how it was communicated ultimately to the apostle John. The relative clause expansion off of John's name asserts his faithfulness to communicate everything he had received to his audience.

**The title.** This book is an Ἀποκάλυψις.<sup>32</sup> Two English words have been used primarily to translate this Greek word. The literalistic word *apocalypse* is virtually taking the letters of the Greek word and using their equivalent letter in the Latin alphabet of the English to create a word in English. The other word, 'revelation,' is more a translation word, and more popular in English. The English word 'revelation' first appears in the fourteenth century in English and is derived from the Latin *revelatio* (*revelare*) with the basic religious meanings of either 'an act of revealing or communicating divine truth,' or 'something that is revealed by God to humans.'<sup>33</sup> The other word, 'apocalypse,' is a synonym and came into English in the thirteenth century through the Latin *apokalypsis* from the Greek word. More limit-

<sup>32</sup>The titles, i.e., the introductory sentence(s) of several Jewish and Christian revelatory compositions have some similarity to the title of Revelation (Jer 1:1-2; Ezek 1:1-3; Amos 1:1; 1 Enoch 1:1, probably modeled on Deut 33:1; 3 Apoc. Bar. praef. 1-2). One example is the title of the Apocalypse of Weeks, which consists of 1 Enoch 93:1-10; 91:1217 (Black, 1 Enoch, 287-89; J. C. VanderKam, 1 Enoch, 142-49); the title is found in 93:1-3 (Milik, Enoch, 264).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 9-10.]

<sup>33</sup>“Revelation,” *Merriam-Webster* online: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revelation>.



ed in meaning it primarily specifies

one of the Jewish and Christian writings of 200 b.c. to a.d. 150 marked by pseudonymity, symbolic imagery, and the expectation of an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom.<sup>34</sup>

Note the various ways that Ἀποκάλυψις is translated in some of the modern western languages:

**English:** **revelation** (NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVA-CE, NRSVCE, ESV, CEB, CJB, ERV, ESVUK, EXB, GW, HCSB, Knox, LEB, Mounce, NCV, NirV, NIV, NIV 1984, NIVUK, NLT); **Revelation** (KJV, ASV, NASB, DRA 1899, GNV, 21st Cent. KJV, NKJV, Phillips); **This is what God showed** (CEV); **the record of events** (GNT); **a revealing** (MSB); **The things that are written in the Book** (NLV).

**Spanish:** **La revelación** (LBLA, DHH, NVI, CST, PDT, BLP, BLPH, RVR1960, RVR1995, RVA); **La Revelación** (El Apocalipsis) (NBLH); **una revelación** (NTV); **Esta revelación** (RVC).

**French:** **Révélation** (BDS, LSG, NEG1979, SG21).

**German:** **die Offenbarung** (LUTH1545, LUTH1984, GNB, ZB); **Offenbarung** (Menge, SCH1951, SCH2000, EUB); **eine Offenbarung** (NLB); **In diesem Buch enthüllt Jesus Christus die Zukunft** (HOF, NGU-DE);

In evaluating these translation patterns one notices first that in the English, Spanish, and German translations a difference between viewing Ἀποκάλυψις in its dictionary meaning or as a book title surfaces. In the English and Spanish it is the difference between capitalizing or not capitalizing the word, while this is reflected in which article is used with Offenbarung. The highly dynamic equivalent translations in the English, Spanish, and German will use a phrase explaining what Ἀποκάλυψις means, rather than a single translation word. What this reveals is that among Bible translators there is not complete certainty as to the grammatical function of Ἀποκάλυψις. It could be the subject of an implied verb, or else the formal title of the book. Again, this will reflect the uncertainty of commentators on this issue.

Varying understandings of the function of Ἀποκάλυψις surface in the early copying of the book. The formal title ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ listed before verse one reaches back to two major manuscripts: Sinaiticus (ⲛ, IV cent.) and Alexandrinus (A, V cent.), but variations of this surface later on.<sup>35</sup> The addition of

<sup>34</sup>“Apocalypse,” *Merriam-Webster* online

<sup>35</sup>“An alternative title, ‘an apocalypse of John of the divine word,’ appears in 046 2329 al TR; R.” [J. Massyngberde Ford, vol. 38, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 373.]

the formal title ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ points to the understanding of Ἀποκάλυψις as referring to the nature of the document more than as a title, at least in the minds of the subsequent copyists of this document. Whether or not this was the intent of the apostle John is another question, and tends to point in the direction of an internal title of the book.

One interesting observation about the title and the first line of the text: John did not name the book using his own name, as did later copyists. Instead, he ascribed the book to its real source: Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup>

But as discussed above under Genre concerns, one should be cautious in taking this term Ἀποκάλυψις to specify the genre of the document. It points to the nature of the writing, to be sure, but just within this beginning sentence are other terms that also provide perspectives on the nature of this document. It also contains τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, *the Word of God*, and τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the testimony of Jesus Christ* (v. 2). Further this document is labeled τῆς προφητείας, *the prophecy* (v. 3). Thus if we are to correctly understand what John intended by the use of Ἀποκάλυψις, all of these labels must be put together in order to gain the full picture of John’s meaning.

In addition the qualifies of both Ἀποκάλυψις and the other terms must be examined as a further step in understanding John’s ideas. First, Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is expressed. Although Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ could mean the revelation from Jesus Christ (ablative of source or subjective genitive case function possibilities), the likely meaning is the revelation about Jesus Christ (objective genitive case).<sup>37</sup> But not all commentators take it as ‘about Jesus Christ’; some prefer ‘from Jesus Christ.’<sup>38</sup> In part, this is impacted by who is un-

<sup>36</sup>“In the book he is unveiled and disclosed to human view. John, then, did not look upon this as the “Revelation of John” as our common versions indicate. In other Jewish apocalypses the revelation is ascribed to some great man of Israel: Abraham, Ezra, Moses, Enoch, Baruch, etc. John ascribes this revelation directly to the Christ who reveals it; John is only the scribe. The message is that of the risen Lord, and John wants that clearly understood by the churches. Only this understanding can help them to receive the message of hope and comfort here afforded them. This is a message which God gave to Christ to show or demonstrate to his servants.” [Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb: An Interpretation of Revelation*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), 98.]

<sup>37</sup>“The genitive may be objective, i.e. a revelation about Jesus Christ, or subjective, i.e. given by Jesus to John. The present writer prefers the former because Rev 4–11 predicts Jesus as the Lamb but the Baptist does not seem to have identified him until his baptism (John 1:33).” [J. Massyngberde Ford, vol. 38, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 373.]

<sup>38</sup>“The opening expression Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (‘revelation of Jesus Christ’) could mean that the ‘revelation’ is given by or from Jesus (subjective genitive or genitive of source). How-

derstood to be the 'him' in the following statement ἦν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός, *which God gave to him*. Assuming that the 'him' goes back to Jesus Christ, then the idea naturally moves along the lines of the Ἀποκάλυψις being given by God to Jesus Christ who then gives it to the angel who in turn gives it to John. But the objective genitive understanding remains possible in spite of the difficulty of 'him' going back to Jesus Christ.

The combined name Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Jesus Christ, only shows up two other times in the book: 1:2, 5. Elsewhere it is either Ἰησοῦς, *Jesus* (1:9, 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4; 22:16, 20, 21), or Χριστός, *Christ* (20:4, 6).<sup>39</sup>

The second qualifier of Ἀποκάλυψις is the relative clause ἦν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, *which God gave to him in order to show His servants the things which must happen soon*. This revelation God gave to him - this is the core expression. Very important theologically here is that the disclosure of God's will came about when God chose to reveal it. Divine initiative, not human initiative, made understanding God's plan possible.

If αὐτῷ, *to him*, refers to Christ, then the first step of that divine disclosing process went to Christ. But this action of revealing had a purpose: δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ, *in order to show to His servants....* The verb δείκνυμι means simply to show in the sense of explaining or exhibiting something so that it becomes understandable.<sup>40</sup> The indirect object of the verb is τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ, *to His servants*. This very inclusive reference indicates the Christian community, rather than

ever, the phrase may also include the idea that the revelation is about Jesus (objective genitive), since Ἰησοῦ ('Jesus') could be understood in this sense in a number of passages in the book (1:9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10a, b, 20:4; cf. 6:9; 12:17; 19:10), though this is contested by many.<sup>6</sup> The immediate context does favor the subjective genitive: (1) the following clause says that 'God gave' (or revealed) the revelation to Jesus; (2) Christ is set within the chain of revelation, so that he is one of the agents who reveals (see below); (3) in the NT and Revelation prophecy comes from Christ to a prophet, and the content of the message is not always information about Christ.<sup>7</sup> Rev. 22:16, 20 confirm this by portraying Jesus as the One who bears revelatory testimony through his angel to the churches.<sup>87</sup> [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 183.]

<sup>39</sup>Most of the time κύριος, *Lord*, refers to God and not to Christ: to God, 1:8, 4:8, 11, 6:10; 11:4, 15, 17, 15:3, 4; 16:7; 17:14; 18:8, 19:6, 16, 21:22; 22:5, 6; to Christ, 1:10, 11:8; 14:13, 22:20, 21.

<sup>40</sup>*To show to his servants*: the verb *to show*, in connection with the noun *revelation*, means 'to reveal,' 'to make known,' 'to disclose,' or 'cause to see.'" [Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 12.]

## Revelatory Process

Revelation 1:1-2



a limited group such as prophets.<sup>41</sup> Thus John affirms that this special revelation of God was given to Christ who then made it known to the believing community.

But the step between Christ and the believing community (His servants) has some sub-steps that are spelled out in the second main clause of this sentence: καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, *and He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John*. The role of an angel in apocalyptic literature generally is to accompany the 'seer' on his journeys, but John paints a somewhat different picture here.<sup>42</sup> The verb used here, ἐσήμανεν, means in this context to report or communicate information. Depending upon the understood subject of the verb -- either ὁ θεός or Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; probably the former more than the latter -- God then communicated the

<sup>41</sup>"The phrase τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ('to his servants') refers to the community of faith, which has a general prophetic vocation,<sup>9</sup> rather than to a limited group of prophets. This scheme of communication probably explains why in some sayings later in the book it is difficult to discern whether the speaker is God, Christ, or an angel, since the message actually derives from all three (note likewise that in the OT the angel of the Lord and God himself are sometimes indistinguishable [e.g., Gen. 18:1–33; 22:12–18; Judg. 6:11–18; 13:1–24]). The conclusion of the book confirms this reasoning by asserting that one angel sent from Christ revealed all of the visions to John (cf. 22:6, 8, 16)." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 183.]

"The noun servants here is used in the general sense of all believers, all followers of Jesus Christ, those who will hear this account being read (verse 3). In 2:20 they are servants of Christ; here and in 7:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6 they are servants of God. In a more restricted sense God's servants in 10:7 and 11:18 are Christian prophets." [Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 12.]

<sup>42</sup>"In apocalyptic literature an angel usually accompanies the seer on his visionary journeys, e.g. Daniel, Enoch, and the Shepherd of Hermas. His duty normally is to explain the meaning of the visions but he does not always play this role in this apocalypse. The angelic companion may be a literary device, characteristic of later biblical and Judaic literature, e.g. Dan 9:21–22, to keep God at a distance by introducing an intermediary. This would be an adaptation of the OT 'angel of Yahweh'." [J. Massyngberde Ford, vol. 38, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 373-74.]

Ἀποκάλυψις to an angel who then passed it on to John. Thus the basic meaning of ἄγγελος as ‘messenger’ is the role played by this angel, who is not identified by name.<sup>43</sup> This function as divine messenger is central to the Old Testament understanding of a מַלְאָךְ, (*mal’āk*, = messenger), [angel](#).

This process of revealing the message of the book stands in contrast to the typical patterns found in the Jewish apocalypses. Note 1 *Enoch* 1:1-2,

1. The words of the blessing of Enoch, wherewith he blessed the elect and righteous, who will be living in the day of tribulation, when all the wicked and godless are to be removed. 2. And he took up his parable and said -- Enoch a righteous man, whose eyes were opened by God, saw the vision of the Holy One in the heavens, which the angels showed me, and from them I heard everything, and from them I understood as I saw, but not for this generation, but for a remote one which is for to come.

Note the *Testament of Solomon*,

1. Testament of Solomon, son of David, who was king in Jerusalem, and mastered and controlled all spirits of the air, on the earth, and under the earth. By means of them also he wrought all the transcendent works of the Temple. Telling also of the authorities they wield against men, and by what angels these demons are brought to naught.

Only a superficial similarity of divine revelation through angels in the form of visions connects Revelation with these two Jewish apocalyptic writings. The strong differences come quickly to the forefront with John de-emphasizing himself by placing the emphasis on this Christian revelation being from both God and Jesus Christ.

What was it that was made known? Most basically this Ἀποκάλυψις contained ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, [those things which must happen quickly](#). This unusually constructed relative clause serving as the direct object of δεῖξαι, [to show](#), defines the content of the Ἀποκάλυψις, [revelation](#). The sense of oughtness expressed in δεῖ is a divinely mandated set of things. These will γενέσθαι, [come about](#), because God mandated them to. And they will happen ἐν τάχει, [soon](#), not at some distant future time. Exactly what ἃ, [these things](#), are will be spelled out in the content of the book. But the nature and character of ἃ are defined in this passage by a series of synonyms. The ἃ as the content of the Ἀποκάλυψις

<sup>43</sup>References to angels in the Old Testament increase substantially in the later writings of the OT, reflecting the growing influences of surrounding cultures to place intermediaries between deity and humanity. This was especially prominent in the Babylonian religions that Jews encountered in the Exile. The theological motive for this was an growing emphasis on the transcendence of God who could not come into direct contact with sinful humans without doing them severe harm. Thus in the origin of intertestamental apocalyptic Jewish writings angels will play major roles in these texts. John reflects that orientation, but assigns distinctive roles to the angels in his writing.

is in reality τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, [the Word of God](#). Now this is not referring to the Bible, but rather to the orally preached Gospel message of Christians. The sense of this is [the Word from God](#) with τοῦ θεοῦ as the subjective genitive case function.<sup>44</sup> For additional instances of this phrase in Revelation see 1:9; 6:9; 19:20; 20:4 and with slight variation see 12:17, τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν, [the word of their testimony](#); 17:17, οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ, [the words of God](#); 19:9, οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι ἀληθινοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσιν, [these are the true words of God](#).<sup>45</sup> But this τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ is also τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, [the witness of Jesus Christ](#).<sup>46</sup> This second phrase is repeated six times in the book (cf. 1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10 twice; 20:4). In each of these instances except for 12:17 it shows up with ὁ λογὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. Although it can -- and does on occasion in the book -- mean [“the testimony about Jesus,”](#) the more probably meaning here is [“the testimony that Jesus gave.”](#)<sup>47</sup> Thus what is given ultimately to John is the Gospel witness to salvation in Christ, and how that divine salvation is going to work itself out

<sup>44</sup>“In the phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, the gen. τοῦ θεοῦ could be either an obj gen. (‘the message about God’) or a subjective gen. (‘the message from God’); the latter seems more appropriate in this revelatory context.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 6.]

<sup>45</sup>“In 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4 the phrase has the same force it has in Acts (cf. 4:31; 6:2; 8:14; 11:1), referring to Christian witness to and proclamation of the gospel message (in 17:17 and 19:9 it refers to the revealed message of this book).” [Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 56.]

<sup>46</sup>“The two aspects, ‘word of God’ and ‘testimony of Jesus,’ are not separate but complementary descriptions of these visions. Due to their frequent appearance in the book, they become a semi-technical formula for gospel truth and faithful Christian witness to it.” [Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 56.]

<sup>47</sup>“It is debated whether Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is an objective genitive (‘testimony about Jesus’) or a subjective genitive (‘testimony by Jesus Christ’). The former is favored by the other instances of the phrase in Revelation, where it refers to the ‘testimony’ of the saints ‘to Jesus’ (1:9; 6:9; 12:17, where it may be a general genitive; 19:10; 20:4, where it is an objective genitive). In 1:1–2, however, Jesus functions as the revealer of divine truth, and so the subjective sense is strongly favored by the context (so Giesen, Aune; Beale sees this as a general genitive as well). This is confirmed by the parallel in 22:16, where Jesus sends the angel ‘to testify’ or ‘give Jesus’ testimony’ to the churches. Jesus’ witness is added to John’s in validating the divine origin of the visions written down in this book (though see 1:9, where it may well be a general genitive). Kraft (1974: 22) finds this witness primarily in Jesus’ death and resurrection as producing eternal life and hope for the Christian. While this is certainly an aspect of the ‘witness,’ there is too little contextual evidence supporting this as the main meaning here.” [Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 57.]

in God's plan to culminate it at the end of human history. It is a message that comes from God and from Christ, and thus represents ultimate truth and reality. It is not some Hollywood fictionalized "Apocalypse Now" fantasy.

These two traits of τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ are then qualified by ὅσα εἶδεν, *as much as he* [John] *saw*. At this point the message from God this is the testimony of Jesus Christ that came to John as something he could see, that is, a series of visions. The NT vocabulary for visions includes ὄραμα (12x), ὀπτασία (4x), and ὄρασις (4x). Only ὄρασις is used in Revelation and only at 9:17 in the sense of vision; the other two uses in 4:3 are with the meaning of 'appearance.' But although the labels for visions are not used in Revelation, the descriptive language of visionary experience is clearly present. And this clause ὅσα εἶδεν signals the strategy of John in describing what he experienced.

**The method of delivery.** On the receiving side John εἶδεν, *saw*, the Ἀποκάλυψις. But on the giving side he ἐμαρτύρησεν, *gave witness*, to this Ἀποκάλυψις as τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the Word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ*. The vocabulary of μαρτυρέω, *I testify* (75 NT uses), and μαρτυρία, *testimony* (37 NT uses), characterize the nature of communicating this message from God.<sup>48</sup> Although the verb is frequent in the fourth gospel and the Johannine letters, it is only used in Revelation here and in 22:20 (and there Jesus is the verb subject, not John as in 1:2). Again the noun μαρτυρία, *testimony*, is a frequent Johannine word, but is not frequently used in Revelation. Of the nine uses, 4 refer to a testimony given by Jesus



(1:2, 9; 19:10 twice), and 5 refer to a testimony given

<sup>48</sup>The personal noun, μάρτυς, *witness* (35 NT uses), also shows up five times either in reference to Jesus (1:5; 2:13; 3:14) or to Christian witnesses to the Gospel (11:3; 17:6). But it is not used in reference to John specifically.

about Jesus (6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 20:4).

The language of μαρτυρέω, *I testify*, and μαρτυρία, *testimony*, is the language of verification of the divine origin and thus the correctness of the Gospel. Christ verifies that the message He gives truly comes from God. John and the other servants in giving testimony verify the same point. This is not persuasion by logical argumentation, and especially not in a modern sense of that idea. Rather, it is affirmation of the divine origin of the message growing out of personal relationship and witness to God and His revealing of His will. Often, out of the Old Testament tradition of multiple witnesses giving greater credibility, the testimony of both Jesus and of His servants comes together as greater evidence for the divine origin of the message that they are sharing. Additionally qualifying adjectives, especially πιστός, *'faithful,'* will be linked to the expressions of witness or testimony.

**The faithful servant.** The key human agency in getting this message to the people of God is John, Ἰωάννη. Out of the 135 instances of the name Ἰωάν(ν)ης, John, in the NT, only four of them are found in this book, and then only in the first and last chapters of the book: 1:1, 4, 9 and 22:8. He is identified as τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ, *His servant*, in 1:1. The image here is both of committed slave to and authorized spokesman for God through Christ. In 1:9, he describes himself as ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκαινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, *your brother and fellow participant in persecution and the Kingdom and endurance in Jesus*. He felt a deep bond of kinship with his targeted readership. In the Epilogue at the end of the book at 22:8, John describes himself as ὁ ἀκούων καὶ βλέπων ταῦτα, *the one hearing and seeing these things*. Thus he concludes the book by affirming his role as a witness to the message of God, just as the verb ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν, *who witnessed to*, begins in 1:2.

## II. The Blessing, v. 3

3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

In this beginning section we find a beatitude, here serving as a climax to the Prologue in vv. 1-3. In the Epilogue of 22:8-21 comes a final beatitude in v. 14 also invoking God's blessings:

Μακάριοι οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν εἰσέλθωσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

These form a set of prayer ‘book ends’ to the document that set Revelation in the context of divine blessing. Between these two beatitudes come five more scattered through the document at 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; and 22:7.<sup>49</sup> Thus the perfect number seven is achieved with seven beatitudes in the document.

By definition a beatitude in the ancient world, and in particular in the Jewish and Christian religious traditions, was a prayer request for God to grant His blessing upon the individual or individuals who met the conditions laid out in the beatitude. The adjective Μακάριος, *blessed*, introduces the form as a prayer wish and alludes to God’s blessings. The specification of the subject also spells out the requirement(s) for God to be able to bless. Here a twofold subject is indicated, who read or hear the words of this book: ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα. Sometimes the content of the blessing is specified in a dependent causal clause introduced by the Greek conjunction ὅτι meaning ‘*because*.’ But this element is not found in any of the seven beatitudes in Revelation. Here in 1:3 a different kind of causal statement is given as ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, that points to a quick realization of the blessing, but doesn’t define the content of the blessing.

The sixth beatitude in 22:7 comes closer in content to this first one:

6 Καὶ εἶπέν μοι· οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί, καὶ ὁ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν προφητῶν ἀπέστειλεν τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει. 7 καὶ ἴδου ἔρχομαι ταχύ. **μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου.**

6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. 7 See, I am coming soon! **Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.**

The first beatitude in 1:3 pronounces God’s blessings on a particular situation in early Christianity. Since the vast majority of early Christians did not possess a copy

<sup>49</sup>Rev. 14:13. μακάριοι οἱ νεκροὶ οἱ ἐν κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκοντες ἀπ’ ἄρτι. *Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.*

Rev. 16:15. μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῆ καὶ βέλωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ. *Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.*

Rev. 19:9. μακάριοι οἱ εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου κεκλημένοι. *Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*

Rev. 20:6. μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ. *Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection.*

Rev. 22:7. μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου. *Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.*

of either scripture or authoritative Christian writings, one of the major activities of Christian gatherings would be the reading of scripture and other appropriate texts to the assembled group of believers. This would then be discussed by the group subsequent to its reading.<sup>50</sup>

It is this setting that is presupposed by the first beatitude with its blessing pronounced both on the one who does the reading of the book as well as to those who hear the book being read in gathered assembly. But the responsibility of listening to the contents of Revelation being read is also the obligation to obey these words τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, *and keeps the things written in it*. In the epilogue beatitude it is this part of the first beatitude that is emphasized, ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου, *the one keeping the words of the prophecy of this book*. The assumed literary strategy by John is to invoke God’s blessings on the assembled group of believers set to listen to the book being read to them. Then as one of his final words to this group is the invoking of God’s blessings again upon those who obey what the book says.

Also note the similarity of this beatitude to one of Jesus’ in Luke 11:28, μενοῦν μακάριοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ φυλάσσοντες, *Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!* John is echoing the words of the earthly Jesus with his emphasis on hearing and obeying the message of God.

But the very last beatitude in 22:14 invokes God’s blessings on those John assumes will obey. These are the ones who have ‘washed their robes,’ that is, affirmed their salvation by obedience. These alone will then have access to the tree of life and the celestial city of God. As v. 15 goes on to affirm, everyone else will be excluded from access: ἔξω οἱ κύνες καὶ οἱ φάρμακοι καὶ οἱ πόρνοι καὶ οἱ φονεῖς καὶ οἱ εἰδωλολάτραι καὶ πᾶς φιλῶν καὶ ποιῶν ψεῦδος, *Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood*. Thus John ends on a positive note that to obey God’s message brings the ultimate heavenly blessings: access to the tree of life and the celestial city of God!

Thus at the beginning of the book we find encouragement to read and listen to the words of Revelation. The document is here labeled τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας, *the words of this prophecy*, and τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, *the things written in it*. This depic-

<sup>50</sup>“The public reading of Scripture was taken over from Jewish practice (Neh 8:2; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15; cf. Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27).<sup>19</sup> At first the reader was probably someone chosen from the congregation who had acquired some proficiency in the art. Later the office of reader became an official position in the church.<sup>20</sup>” [Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 43.]

tion of Revelation parallels that in 22:7, τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου, *the words of the prophecy of this book*. Also note 22:18, τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου, *the words of the prophecy of this book*, and 19, τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης, *the words of the book of this prophecy*.

Central to both beatitudes is the characterizing of Revelation as a book of *prophecy*, προφητεία. As demonstrated in the above discussion on genre, the definition of this term must be limited to the historical setting of an ἀποκάλυψις out of the eighth century Israelite prophetic heritage. Often since the heretical teachings of John Darby in the 1700s, the idea of prophecy has been turned into little more than religious based fortune telling -- something not only condemned in the OT Law but standing in complete contradiction to the idea of προφητεία in both the Old and New Testaments.

What then does John mean by calling the book of Revelation a προφητεία? The word occurs seven times in Revelation (out of 19 NT uses): 1:3; 11:6; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19. He gets close to a definition of προφητεία in 19:10, ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας, *For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*. That is, a προφητεία is ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, the same label used in 1:2, τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, which is also τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, *the Word of God*.

What stands at the heart of the Gospel as the Word of God? It centers on God's plan of salvation of sinful humanity. The life and death of Christ, along with His resurrection, are the foundation stones of that plan. He lived, died, and was raised as the Son of God who became the Lamb of God -- a central Johannine emphasis in his writings. That divine deliverance encompasses all of one's life from conversion to acceptance into Heaven at the end of the journey. The segment of that salvation with greater emphasis in the book of Revelation is the so-called 'consummation' of salvation in the future. But this is God's plan to save, not a road map of future events of human history. No chart drawn by a human being can correctly and adequately sketch it out. As we will see in the contents of the book, especially from chapter four on, John comes at this central theme of God's deliverance from both sin and suffering with a fundamental emphasis on hope and expectancy. He will hammer in this theme within the general framework of the existing Jewish apocalyptic tradition, which makes this central point from virtually every conceivable angle. Repetition will be the most notable feature of his approach.

Thus John begins with invoking God's blessing on those who expose themselves in obedience to this message of hope and deliverance. He also closes the book with the most severe of warnings about modifying or altering God's plan of salvation as set forth in this

book (cf. 22:18-19):

18 Μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ παντὶ τῷ ἀκούοντι τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου· ἐάν τις ἐπιθῆ ἔπ' αὐτά, ἐπιθήσει ὁ θεὸς ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς πληγὰς τὰς γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ, 19 καὶ ἐάν τις ἀφέλῃ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης, ἀφελεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; 19 if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The motivation for giving attention to the words of this book are given in 1:3 as ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, *for the time is near*. The word for time, καιρὸς, is not 'clock time' as is specified by χρόνος. Rather, it anticipates the divine opportunity to move toward realizing His intention. Out of the 85 NT uses, seven of them are found in Revelation: 1:3; 11:18; 12:12, 14 (3 times); 22:10. In both the Prologue (1:3) and the Epilogue (22:10), the exact same phrase is repeated: ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς (1:3) and ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστὶν (22:10). In 12:12 another similar emphasis is found: οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, ὅτι κατέβη ὁ διάβολος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔχων θυμὸν μέγαν, εἰδὼς **ὅτι ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει**, *But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*

John writes to his readers in the seven churches of Asia fully expecting God's plan of salvation to be completed within a short period of time after the writing of this book.<sup>51</sup> This expression had its origin in Jewish Messianic expectation that was picked up and used by Jesus and the apostles.<sup>52</sup> That the phrase speaks of the

<sup>51</sup>“The time is near: the Greek word that appears here (*kairos*) is regularly used in the New Testament of a time, or occasion, that God chooses to act on behalf of his people; see 11:18, and in 22:10 see the exact same statement. Here it means the time when the events foretold in the book will take place. BRCL has ‘the chosen moment,’ RNAB ‘the appointed time,’ REB ‘the time of fulfillment.’ Something like ‘The time is near when all these things will take place’ may be the best way to translate this. Or, more extensively, ‘Before long, at the time that God has already chosen, all these things will happen’ or ‘The time that God has already chosen for all these things to happen is coming very soon’.” [Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 16-17.]

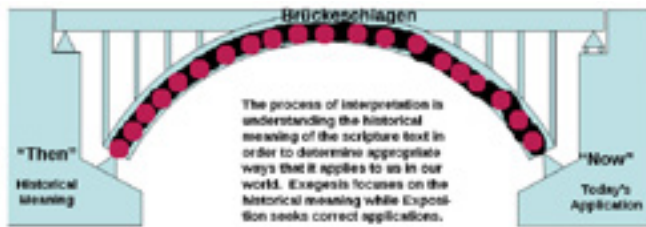
<sup>52</sup>“The statement seems to have come from the standard Jewish messianic expectations of the day. In Mark 13 Jesus warned his disciples that many would come in his name claiming to be the promised Messiah (v. 5). A bit later in the chapter he spoke of the time of his return, telling them to be on guard because they did not know when that time (*kairos*) would come.<sup>22</sup> The critical moment for the fulfillment of all that John had seen in his visions had drawn

near future is clear from the expression in Matt. 26:18, ὁ καιρὸς μου ἐγγύς ἐστιν, *my time is near*, in referring to Jesus' impending crucifixion less than two days later.<sup>53</sup>

What John expresses in the phrase ὁ καιρὸς ἐγγύς ἐστιν is entirely consistent with the similar emphasis on the imminent return of Christ all through the New Testament. As Jesus explicitly stated, no one but the Heavenly Father knows the 'clock time' (χρόνου ἢ καιροῦς, Acts 1:6-7) for the second coming. And trying to calculate it out even in 'clock time' (ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τοῦτω) is severely condemned by Jesus in response to the disciples' question at His ascension. What we must do is to be prepared whenever that moment in history arrives. Preparation equals obeying the words of God.

And that obeying the Word of God admonished to us by John in the beatitude is done in the full confidence of the triumph of our God over evil and evil people who oppose the Gospel in our world. This is the heart of John's words to the members of the seven churches of Asia, and to us today. Thus right off the bat, he signals this intention to his readers. We dare not miss that point!

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?



In trying to draw application conclusions of this passage to our day, several thoughts come to mind.

**First, God does not leave His people guessing about what He is up to in this world.** This book comes to us as an ἀποκάλυψις (a revelation), a προφητεία (a prophecy), ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (the Word of God), and ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (the testimony of Jesus Christ). And this all bundled together in a single package. It is the message of the Gospel in terms of God's plan of deliverance for His people and the condemnation of the evil world. It extends the emphasis on divine deliverance and ultimate condemnation of evil preached by Jesus and the apostles during their earthly ministries.

Thus interpreting the contents of the book must be treated the same way as the rest of the Bible. No magical key or hidden secret about its message are to near. Hence the urgency of hearing and obeying the words of the prophecy." [Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 43-44.]

<sup>53</sup>For John then to proceed to describe in successive stages several thousand years of human history -- as some propose -- is utterly impossible and contradictory to what is repeatedly stated by ὁ καιρὸς ἐγγύς ἐστιν in 1:3 and 22:10.

be sought after in this book.<sup>54</sup>

**Second, this Prologue reminds us of the central role of Christian hope and expectation.** We live unquestionably in an evil world whose desire is to destroy everything connected to God. But John at the very beginning reminds us of the supremacy of God, and we are assured of His blessing as through this book we relish in the confidence about coming days in the plan of God.<sup>55</sup> This is the intent of the book: to give believers hope, especially those suffering heavily for their religious commitment to Christ, that God is indeed in control and is moving toward fulfilling His plans.

**Third, we are reminded pointedly that the heart of Christian commitment is obedience.** It is not enough to simply 'hear' the words coming from God. They must be obeyed, if legitimate Christian faith is present. When God speaks, indeed we must listen carefully to what He is saying. But what He both expects and demands of us is obedience to His words! As this text reminds us, we stand before Him as τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ, *His slaves*, who are fully prepared to carry out His instructions.

This obedience is not developing some elaborate scheme for interpreting this book away from strong ethical demands! Rather it is living every day of our lives

<sup>54</sup>“These verses discourage ‘futurist’ views of Revelation. Certainly the book deals with much that still lies in the future. But notice that John was shown ‘what must soon take place’. This is a phrase taken from pre-Christian apocalyptic and subtly changed. The revelation to Daniel concerned what was to happen ‘in the latter days’ (Dn. 2:28). But the early church believed that when the Christian era began, the last days had actually begun also (Acts 2:16 f.; 3:24). It is true that the word for ‘soon’ could also be translated ‘suddenly’ (it is ambiguous, like the English ‘quickly’); and it could therefore be held to mean that when the prophesied events did happen, they would happen speedily, but that they might not begin to happen till long after John’s time. On this view the greater part of Revelation might still, even today, be unfulfilled. ‘Suddenly’, however, sounds most unnatural in the context of verse 1; and the verse as it stands is certainly not referring to the far future. When we find Daniel’s ‘what will be in the latter days’ replaced by John’s ‘what must soon take place’, the object is rather the opposite—to bring events which were once distantly future into the immediate present; so that it is in this sense that ‘the time is near’.” [Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 32.]

<sup>55</sup>“We live each day as if it were our last, and each day as if there was a great future because of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Our pathway in the present we dare to live from the decision of the eternal Father because Jesus Christ is Lord of history and we are blessed because of that fact. All of the other facts of our lives and our history are important, but not final. They affect us, but they do not define us. This is the Bible’s definition of success.” [Earl F. Palmer and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 35, *1, 2 & 3 John / Revelation*, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982), 109.]

in full surrender to His leadership in a way that bears witness to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.





# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 02

Text: 1:4-8

All rights reserved ©



1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ ἡν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην, 2 καὶ ἐκτύπησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ ὄσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ποιῶν τὰς ἐντολὰς τούτων λόγων τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

### QUICK LINKS

#### 1. What the text meant.

##### Historical Aspects:

External History

Internal History

##### Literary Aspects:

Genre

Literary Setting

Literary Structure

#### Exegesis of the Text:

A. [The Praescriptio, vv. 4-5a](#)

B. [The Doxology, vv. 5b-6](#)

C. [The Prophetic Oracle, vv. 7-8](#)

#### 2. What the text means.

#### Greek NT

4 Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ἦν καὶ τοῦ ἐρχόμενου καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ 5 καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ μάρτυρος, τοῦ πιστοῦ, τοῦ πρωτότοκου τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ τοῦ ἀρχῶν τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς. Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, 6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]: ἀμήν.

7 Ἴδου ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόψονται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἰφυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. ναί, ἀμήν.

8 Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

#### Gute Nachricht Bibel

4 Johannes schreibt an die sieben Gemeinden in der Provinz Asien\*. Gnade und Frieden\* sei mit euch von Gott – von ihm, der ist und der war und der kommt – und von den sieben Geistern vor seinem Thron 5 und von Jesus Christus, dem treuen Zeugen, der als erster von allen Toten zu neuem Leben geboren worden ist und über die Könige der Erde herrscht. Ihm, der uns liebt, ihm, der sein Blut\* für uns vergossen hat, um uns von unseren Sünden freizukaufen, 6 der uns zu Königen gemacht hat und zu Priestern, die seinem Gott und Vater dienen dürfen: Ihm gehört die Herrlichkeit\* und Macht für alle Ewigkeit! Amen.

7 Gebt Acht, er kommt mit den Wolken! Alle werden ihn sehen, auch die, die ihn durchbohrt haben. Alle Völker der Erde werden seinetwegen jammern und klagen; das ist gewiss. Amen\*!

8 »Ich bin das A und das O – der ist und der war und der kommt, der Herrscher der ganzen Welt«, sagt Gott, der Herr.

#### NRSV

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

#### NLT

4 This letter is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. Grace and peace from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the commander of all the rulers of the world. All praise to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. 6 He has made us his Kingdom and his priests who serve before God his Father. Give to him everlasting glory! He rules forever and ever! Amen!

7 Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him -- even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the earth will weep because of him. Yes! Amen!

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega -- the beginning and the end," says the Lord God. "I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come, the Almighty One."

### INTRODUCTION

This second pericope at the beginning of the doc-

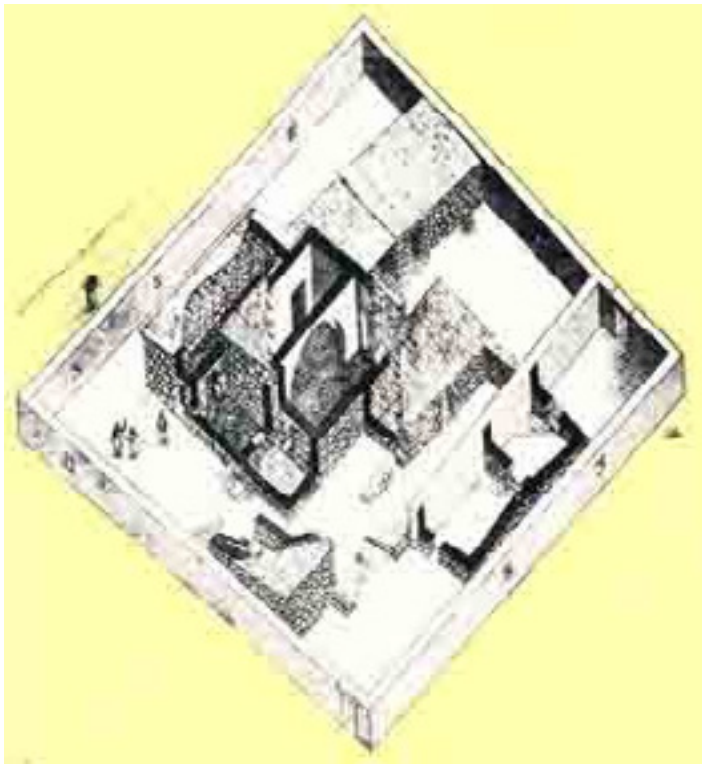
ument continues the formal Prologue with more introductory materials. The scope narrows to center on the

seven churches as the targeted recipients of this document. Excitement and spiritual rapture characterize the tone of these words as John reaches out with a Doxology of praise to Christ. This initial portrait of Christ paints the Lord in majestic tones as witness and ruler who will triumph over the forces of evil. The subsequent vision of Christ in vv. 9-20 shifts over into the apocalyptic style of portrait painting with similar emphases but in dramatically different strokes than here.

The section begins as a letter *Praescriptio* with the standard *Superscriptio* (v. 1a, ἰωάννης), *Adscriptio* (v. 4b, ταῖς ἐπτά ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ), and a lengthy *Salutatio* (vv. 4c-5a). But John quickly moves into a formal Doxology of praise (vv. 5b-6). Then two formal affirmations of the Lord are tacked on in vv. 7-8. The standard use of ἀμήν at the end of verses six and seven give the Doxology and the first affirmation the tone of a temple liturgy of praise with the congregational response of ἀμήν.

What this communicates to John's readers -- and hopefully that includes us as well -- is the great joy he feels upon reflecting on the Christ who is revealing himself to the aged apostle. As we work our way through the details of the scripture text, may this joy and sense of overwhelming awe overwhelm us as it did John.

## 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?



Quite clearly these verses communicated to an ancient audience in powerful tones. Imagine yourself as a part of a couple of dozen or so believers gathered together in a private home to find encouragement from one another to remain faithful in the midst of a growing at-

mosphere of hostility and persecution across the city from the government leaders and other citizens. News has spread among the various house church groups meeting across the city that a special writing from the beloved apostle John has arrived and is being systematically read in each of the groups across the city, even as hand copies of the document are also being made.

Now it is the turn of your group to have the document read before the assembled group of believers. With great anticipation you wait for the designated reader to begin reading the text. When the reader calls out these verses, the entire group senses the excitement of the apostle and joins spontaneously as a group in the standard doxology response of ἀμήν to these words of praise. Wonderful, amazing words of praise and encouragement to the entire group pour out of this text.

### Historical Aspects:

In examining the historical aspects of 1:4-8, the focus on the external history will be on the copying of this passage, with some exploration of possible sources utilized by John. The literary forms in this passage minimize greatly time and place markers, thus limiting the treatment of the internal history side.

**External History.** First, the matter of sources for this material. Unquestionably standard, widely used literary forms surface in 1:4-8. These forms are quite common elsewhere in the New Testament, as the discussion below on **Genre** highlights. Thus John reaches out to established Christian tradition for the vehicles of expressing his ideas about God and Christ. Although the content of these expressions is rather unique to this book inside the New Testament, clearly John has picked up on several phrases from the Old Testament to present his depiction of the Heavenly Father especially.

The threefold depiction of God, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, comes clearly out of Exod. 3:14 (LXX):<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>“The complete threefold clause is a reflection of Exod. 3:14 together with twofold and threefold temporal descriptions of God in Isaiah (cf. Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12), which themselves may be developed reflections on the divine name in Exod. 3:14. The name in Exod. 3:14 was also expanded in twofold and threefold manners in later Jewish tradition: ‘I am he who is and who will be’ (Targ. Ps.-J. Exod. 3:14); ‘I am now what I always was and always will be’ (Midr. Rab. Exod. 3.6; Alphabet of Rabbi Akiba; likewise Midr. Ps. 72.1); ‘I am he who is and who was, and I am he who will be’ (Targ. Ps.-J. Deut. 32:39; see likewise the gloss to Targ. Neof. Exod. 3:14). In Mekilta Shirata 4.25–32; Baḥodesh 5.25–31, a similar threefold formula is used of the God of the Exodus in direct linkage with Deut. 32:39 (the *Shirata* reference is also linked to a like threefold formula based on Isa. 41:4; note the threefold formula based on Isa. 44:6 in Midr. Rab. Gen. 81.2; Midr. Rab. Deut. 1.10; and Midr. Rab. Song 1.9§1; for a similar threefold formula for God without reference to a precise OT text see Josephus,

The Jewish heritage of John comes through brightly here.

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωυσῆν Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὦν· καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἔρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Ὁ ὦν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Second comes the unusual depiction of the Holy Spirit: καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ. Possibly the background of 1 Enoch 20:1-8 stands behind this image.<sup>2</sup> But this is not likely. Some think these seven spirits are the seven angels of the trumpets (Rev. 8:2) and the bowls (Rev. 15:1, 6-8). But again this is also unlikely. The contextual use of πνεῦμα here in conjunction with God the Father and the Son points strongly toward πνεῦμα as Holy Spirit, consistent with a uniform pattern throughout the New Testament. Rev. 4:5 additionally points this direction where the 'seven flaming torches' are defined as ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, which are **the seven spirits of God**. Regarding sources for this image, John seems to be influenced by Zech. 4:2-7, where the seven lamps whose role was to reveal the Word of the Lord to the prophet.<sup>3</sup> Another additional possible source for John

Ap.2.190; Ant.8.280; Aristobulus, fragment 4.5; Sib. Or.3.16; cf. Rom. 11:36)." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 187-88.]

<sup>2</sup>1 Enoch 20:1-8, 1 These are the names of the angels who watch. 2 Uriel, one of the holy angels, who presides over clamor and terror. 3 Raphael, one of the holy angels, who presides over the spirits of men. 4 Raguel, one of the holy angels, who inflicts punishment on the world and the luminaries. 5 Michael, one of the holy angels, who, presiding over human virtue, commands the nations. 6 Sarakiel, one of the holy angels, who presides over the spirits of the children of men that transgress. 7 Gabriel, one of the holy angels, who presides over Iksat,<sup>31</sup> over paradise, and over the cherubim.

<sup>3</sup>Zech. 4:1-7. 1 The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. 2 He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; **there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.** 3 And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." 4 I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." 6 He said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts. 7 What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"

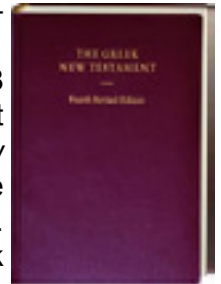
4:1 Καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐξήγειρέν με ὄν τρόπον ὅταν ἐξεγερθῇ ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ὕπνου αὐτοῦ· 2 καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με Τί σὺ βλέπεις; καὶ εἶπα Ἐώρακα καὶ ἰδοὺ λυχνία χρυσοῦ ὅλη, καὶ τὸ λαμπαδεῖον ἐπάνω αὐτῆς, καὶ ἑπτὰ λύχνοι ἐπάνω

here is Isa. 11:2, καὶ ἀναπαύσεται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως, πνεῦμα βουλής καὶ ἰσχύος, πνεῦμα γνώσεως καὶ εὐσεβείας· The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. This becomes likely with the subsequent use of Isaiah 11 in Rev. 5:5 and 1:16. Further, the lengthy exposition of the seven spirits of God in 1 Enoch 61:1-62:4 points this same direction.

The very graphic depiction of Jesus Christ as ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός,<sup>4</sup> ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, the martyr, the faithful one, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth, also reflects terminology found elsewhere in the New Testament. Jesus as the ὁ μάρτυς, the martyr, is repeated in 3:14, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός, the martyr faithful and true. Strong similarities with Psalm 89 point to it as the source for this language. All of these images surface in vv. 19-32 of the LXX translation (chap. 88). In Jewish tradition this psalm was understood as messianic, portraying the coming Messiah in idealized terms of the reign of King David.

What we are beginning to see with the text of Revelation is a heavy dependence on the language and imagery of both the Old Testament and the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic writings. Although not a single verse from the OT is directly quoted in the book, Revelation will contain more allusions to the ideas of the OT than any other single document of the New Testament. A major factor in this is John's dependency on the Jewish apocalyptic heritage of intertestamental Judaism.

Regarding the copying of vv. 4-8 has not produced many significant variations of wording. *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev ed.) lists three places where variations take place. These are in vv. 5, 6, and 8. Let's look



αὐτῆς, καὶ ἑπτὰ ἐπαρυστρίδες τοῖς λύχνοις τοῖς ἐπάνω αὐτῆς· 3 καὶ δύο ἐλαῖαι ἐπάνω αὐτῆς, μία ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ λαμπαδεῖου καὶ μία ἐξ εὐωνύμων· 4 καὶ ἐπρώτησα καὶ εἶπον πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον τὸν λαλοῦντα ἐν ἐμοὶ λέγων Τί ἐστὶν ταῦτα, κύριε; 5 καὶ ἀπεκρίθη ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με Οὐ γινώσκεις τί ἐστὶν ταῦτα; καὶ εἶπα Οὐχί, κύριε· 6 καὶ ἀπεκρίθη καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με λέγων Οὗτος ὁ λόγος κυρίου πρὸς Ζοροβαβελ λέγων Οὐκ ἐν δυνάμει μεγάλη οὐδὲ ἐν ἰσχύϊ, ἀλλ' ἢ ἐν πνεύματί μου, λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ· 7 τίς εἶ σὺ, τὸ ὄρος τὸ μέγα, πρὸ προσώπου Ζοροβαβελ τοῦ κατορθῶσαι; καὶ ἐξοίσω τὸν λίθον τῆς κληρονομίας ἰσότητα χάριτος χάριτα αὐτῆς·

<sup>4</sup>One uncertainty, which generates alternative translations, relates to the presence or absence of a comma ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός. With a comma, the translation becomes, the martyr, the faithful one. But without a comma the translation is the faithful martyr. The similar construction in 3:14, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός, the faithful and true witness, could be taken in favor of the second alternative in 1:4.

at each one:

In verse 5, the participle λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ, *to the one having loosed us from...* is replaced with λούσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ, *to the one having washed us from...*<sup>5</sup> This alternative reading is from much later manuscripts with less importance. Thus the weight of evidence favors strongly the text reading of λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ.<sup>6</sup>

In verse 6, the text reading εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων], *unto the ages of the ages*, is shortened to read εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, *unto the ages*.<sup>7</sup> No difference in meaning is present, but the longer form is standard throughout the New Testament, as well as in eleven other places of the book of Revelation. Probably it should be understood here as well, although the evidence is rather evenly balanced between the two.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>{A} λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ P<sup>18</sup> κ<sup>2</sup> A C 2050 2329 it<sup>h</sup> Andrew; Victorinus-Pettau Primasius // λύσαντι ἐκ κ<sup>\*</sup> 1611 2344<sup>vid</sup> (arm) // λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ 2351 (eth) // λούσαντι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ 205 209 1006 1841 (1854 2053 2062 ἐκ for ἀπὸ) Byz [P 046c (046\* *homoio-teleuton*)] it<sup>(ar)</sup>. g<sup>ig</sup>. t<sup>1</sup> vg cop<sup>bo</sup> Apringius Beatus

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>6</sup>“Instead of λύσαντι, the *Textus Receptus*, in agreement with the later uncials, most of the minuscules, and several early versions, reads λούσαντι (to the one having washed). The reading λύσαντι is to be preferred because it has superior manuscript support; because it agrees with OT imagery (for example, Isa 40:2 LXX); and because it suits better the idea expressed in v. 6a. The expression “‘to free someone from sin’ is a metaphor that implies that individuals are held captive by their sins and that release from this captivity has been secured by Christ. In effect, λύειν ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν means ‘to forgive sins’” (Aune, Revelation 1–5, p. 47).

“The reading λούσαντι, which sometimes may have been pronounced like λύσαντι, seems to have arisen ‘due to failure to understand the Hebraic use of ἐν to denote a price ... and a natural misapplication of 7:14’ (Hort, “Notes on Select Readings,” p. 136). With the verb λούειν (to wash), the preposition ἀπὸ (from) is naturally more appropriate than ἐκ; the early versions translated both prepositions the same. NJB follows the variant reading: ‘He loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood’.”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 526.]

<sup>7</sup>{C} εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων κ<sup>2</sup> (κ<sup>\*</sup> τὸν αἰῶνα) C 205 209 1006 1611 1841 1854 2053 2062 2329 2351 Byz [046] it<sup>ar</sup>. g<sup>ig</sup>. h. t<sup>1</sup> vg syr<sup>ph</sup>. h (arm) eth Didymus Andrew; Apringius Beatus // εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας P<sup>18</sup> A P 2050 cop<sup>bo</sup> // omit including ἀμήν 2344

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>8</sup>“The words τῶν αἰώνων are absent from a number of manuscripts. It is difficult to decide whether the shorter text arose accidentally through a copyist’s oversight, or whether copyists added the words in agreement with the customary liturgical formula. Since the fuller form occurs eleven other times in Revelation (1:18;

In verse 8, in some manuscripts τὸ Ὡ, *the Omega*, is followed by the explanatory phrase ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος, *the beginning and the end*.<sup>9</sup> The weight of evidence both externally and internally strongly favors the shorter reading without the explanatory phrase.<sup>10</sup>

In the more inclusive apparatus of the Nestle-Aland 27th revised edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece*, some eighteen variations in reading surface in these verses, none of which signifi-



4:9, 10; 5:13; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5), it may be original here also. On the other hand, since copyists tended to expand such formulas of praise, these words have been put in brackets to indicate uncertainty regarding the original text. REB appears to follow the variant reading: ‘to him be glory and dominion for ever!’ The Greek renders a Semitic expression meaning ‘for all time to come’ or ‘for all eternity.’ Since receptor languages may have an idiomatic way of expressing this, and since the variant readings have the same meaning, this variant reading is not very significant for translation.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 526-27.]

<sup>9</sup>{A} Ὡ κ<sup>1</sup> A C 1006 1611 1841 2053 2062 Byz [P 046] it<sup>h</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup>. h arm eth Epiphanius; Ambrose Varimadum Primasius // Ὡ, ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος (see 21.6) κ<sup>\*</sup>, <sup>2</sup> 205 209 1854 2050 (2329 ἢ ἀρχὴ and τὸ τέλος) (2344 τὸ τέλος) 2351 it<sup>ar</sup>. g<sup>ig</sup>. t<sup>1</sup> vg cop<sup>bo</sup> Andrew; Apringius Beatus

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>10</sup>“After Ω, the *Textus Receptus*, in agreement with a few manuscripts and versions, adds ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος (beginning and end), and twenty other minuscules add ἢ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος (the beginning and the end). If the longer text were original, no good reason can be found to account for the shorter text. The presence of the longer expression in 21:6 obviously led some copyists to expand the text here.

“A literal translation, such as ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’ (RSV), will have no clear meaning in many languages where the Greek alphabet is unknown. Aune (Revelation 1–5, p. 57) clearly expresses the sense: ‘Since alpha and omega are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet, this divine title emphasizes the sovereignty of God in a way similar to the titles ‘the beginning and the end’ (21:6; 22:13; see 3:14) and ‘the first and the last’ (1:17; 2:8; 22:13).’ TEV attempts to make the meaning clear by rendering ‘I am the first and the last.’ FC translates literally, and then explains in a footnote that ‘Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters in the Greek alphabet. As in 21:6 and 22:13, the expression means the first and the last, or the beginning and the end.’ A third approach toward making the meaning clear is taken by ITCL, which says ‘I am the First and the Last’ in the text and then states in a footnote that this is the meaning of the Greek expression the Alpha and the Omega.”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 527.]

cantly alter the meaning of the text.<sup>11</sup> But upon careful examination, almost all of the variations reflect either stylistic efforts to update the language or careless mistakes in failing to see the word -- or mostly to hear the word being read -- correctly in the copying process.<sup>12</sup>

The consequence of this analysis is that we can

#### <sup>11</sup>Offenbarung 1,4

\* θεου *M* (ar) t; Vic Prim (θεοῦ is added before ὁ ὢν)

| txt P<sup>18</sup>(vid) κ A C P 2050 al lat sy co; Apr

\* τῶν κ A pc (τῶν is added before ἂ)

| α εστιν 2053 *M*<sup>A</sup>

#### Offenbarung 1,5

\* εκ *M*<sup>A</sup> (ἐκ is added after πρωτότοκος)

\* bis κ\* (Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς is omitted)

\* -πῆσαντι 2053. 2062 *M*<sup>A</sup> (ἀγαπῶντι is replaced with ἀγαπήσαντι)

\* λουσάντι P 1006. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2062 *M*<sup>K</sup> lat bo (λύσαντι is replaced with λούσαντι)

| txt P18 κ A C 1611. 2050. 2329. 2351 *M*<sup>A</sup> h sy; Prim

\*<sup>1</sup> απο P 1006. 1841. 2351 *M*<sup>K</sup> (ἐκ is replaced with ἀπὸ)

\*<sup>1</sup> A 1 al (ἡμῶν is omitted after τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν)

#### Offenbarung 1,6

\* ποιῆσαντι 046. 1854 pc (ἐποίησεν is replaced by ποιήσαντι)

\* ἡμῖν A 1678. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2080. 2344 pc (ἡμᾶς is replaced with either ἡμῖν or ἡμῶν)

| ἡμῶν C 1611. 2329 h t vg

| txt κ *M* ar gig vg<sup>cl</sup>; Tert Vic Prim

\*<sup>1</sup> -λειον 046. 1854. 2050. 2351 pc (βασιλείαν is replaced either with βασιλείον or βασιλείς καὶ)

| -λεις καὶ *M*<sup>A</sup>

\*<sup>2</sup> ιερατευμα 2351 pc vgms (ιερεῖς is replace with ιεράτευμα)

\* P<sup>18</sup> A P 2050. (2344) pc bo (τῶν αἰῶνων is omitted)

| txt κ C *M* latt sy; Did

#### Offenbarung 1,7

\* ἐπι C 2053 pc sa (μετὰ is replace with ἐπι)

\* οψονται κ 1611. 2351 al sy bo (ὄψεται is replaced with ὄψονται)

\* κ\* (αὐτὸν after οἵτινες is omitted)

\* αυτον κ\* 2050. 2344. 2351 pc h; Prim (ἐπ' αὐτὸν is replaced with αὐτὸν)

| - 1 pc

#### Offenbarung 1,8

\* αρχη και τελος κ\*<sup>2</sup> 1854. 2050. (2329). 2351 *M*<sup>A</sup> lat bo (ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος are added after τὸ ὄ)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 632-33.]

<sup>12</sup>Although in copying the text of the New Testament the monks sometimes were visually looking at an existing text when copying, most of the time several scribes were writing down simultaneously what another scribe orally read to the group. Given shifting pronunciation patterns of letters and words over time etc. numerous errors crept into the text of their copies. These usually are very easy to spot simply because they create a nonsensical expression in Greek with obviously wrong grammar. As an illustration, if you were reading a formal document that had a text that read "I has no time...." you would immediately recognize the incorrect grammar. Remember that little or no proofing of copies ever occurred in the ancient world. The only exception was the work of copying the Hebrew text of the OT by highly trained Jewish scribes.



confidently exegete the existing text of 1:4-8 as the original wording of the scripture text.

**Internal History.** The key place reference in these verses is the specification of the seven churches being located ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, in Asia (1:4). This term specified the Roman province called Asia at the end of the first Christian century. Although referred to some 18 times in the New Testament -- mostly in Acts -- this is the only reference to it in Revelation.<sup>13</sup> From the available Roman sources this province during the Flavian era of the 70s through the 90s was a period of unrivaled prosperity and growth.<sup>14</sup> The province was second only to

<sup>13</sup>Clarification of possibly confusing terms. In English, one will come across three labels: Asia, Asia Minor, and Anatolia. Although the terms can be used interchangeably, they are not really synonymous. The biblical term Ἀσία literally is *Asia* in English. But the term "Asia Minor" is often used in order to distinguish this Asia from the far eastern continent also named Asia. The term Anatolia is commonly used to refer to the entire region of western Turkey that includes Asia, but also other provinces as well. Neither Asia Minor nor Anatolia are used in the Bible.

<sup>14</sup>"Vespasian's reign was marked by a continuation of the trend toward centralization and his efforts to ensure the allegiance and contentment of the cities of Asia seem to have met with success. There is little evidence of cruelty by Domitian in Asia, and his administration of the provinces seems to have been marked by intelligence and vigor. In fact, the Flavian period was a time of urban growth and architectural development in the cities of Asia.

"Thus, the peace in Asia that began with the reign of Augustus lasted throughout the 1st cent. ce, and indeed continued throughout the 2nd cent. The establishment of the Pax Romana, and the spirit of confidence that peace engendered, along with improvements throughout the empire, made it possible for the extensive natural resources of Asia to be greatly developed and this introduced an era of stability and prosperity, such as the area had never known. This becomes most apparent in the commencement of building work undertaken in the cities. In the 1st cent. ce the increase in building work, financed primarily by municipal funds and private gifts, gives the impression that a gradual and sound recovery had taken place, a recovery that laid the foundation for the wide expansion of urban life and culture."

[Paul Trebilco, "Asia," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of* Page 37



the Italian peninsula in influence and affluence during this period in the Roman empire. The interior of the province were blessed with abundant natural resources which were exploited extensively for trade and commerce. The massive trade going west to Rome from the eastern Mediterranean world largely traveled overland through this region. Major sea ports were located along the southern and western coasts with Ephesus being one of the most important ones. The economic foundations of the empire were built on developing trade and bringing goods and services into Rome from the various parts of the empire. Consequently a massive network of excellent roads were constructed for overland trade, along with extensive fleets of ships for sea trade. Both the geographical location of Asia, along with its abundant natural resources, made it a center of commerce and trade for the empire.

Christianity first came to the province through the ministry of the apostle Paul, although Jewish pilgrims from Asia were a part of those who converted to Christianity on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem in 30 AD (cf. Acts 2:9-10). Luke describes Paul's initial contact with the city of Ephesus in Acts 18:19-21 on the second missionary journey in the mid first century. From this time forward Christianity began spreading rapidly in the province with the result of numerous Christian communities being in existence all over the province by the end of the first century. Judaism, however, had a long and deeply entrenched footing in the province that reached back two centuries before Christ. Thus several hundred thousand Jews were residents of the region during the first Christian century. Thus Christianity and Judaism existed along side numerous other religious groups, some native to the area but many as 'imports' from other parts of the empire. In the polytheistic atmosphere of that time, religions were tolerated as long as they did not undermine Roman culture and authority. But toward the later 90s this would change

with the unleashing of a vicious persecution of religions perceived to be 'un-Roman' by Domitian, and then by Nerva. Christianity would be caught up in persecution from this ultra-nationalistic movement by the emperor.

### Literary Aspects:

Literary questions play an especially important role here. Not only are very distinct literary forms used by John, but their use in the broader apocalyptic genre contributes to the unusual, and sometimes, illogical use of different literary forms inside this broad genre.

**Genre:** As a continuation of the formal Prologue in 1:4-8, these verses take several unusual twists genre wise into very distinct directions.

The first sub-genre unit is found in vv. 4-5a and stand as an epistolary **Praescriptio** with the standard internal elements of **Superscriptio**, **Adscriptio**, and **Salutatio**. From them we gain understanding of the sender of this document (Ἰωάννης), the recipients (ταῖς ἐπτά ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ), and the typical early Christian greeting (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη).

The **Superscriptio** designation of Ἰωάννης, John, only gives us a personal name. No title -- as often is the case with the letters in the New Testament -- is provided. To be sure, this is somewhat addressed in the formal introduction to the vision that follows in 1:9-20, although the focus there is more on the historical situation of John's encounter with the risen Christ while on the island of Patmos.

The **Adscriptio** specifies that the document is addressed to ταῖς ἐπτά ἐκκλησίαις, **the seven churches**. We don't yet know who these churches are, but if you had been sitting in one of the meetings of a house church group in one of these seven cities, you would not be wondering about this matter nearly as much as we do today. But even our curiosity is satisfied in v. 11 as the names of the seven cities is given. What we do receive from the Adscriptio is an important expansion element that identifies the Roman province where these seven churches are located: ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, **to those in Asia**.

It is the **Salutatio** that proves to be the most interesting part of this **Praescriptio**. The core elements are very typical of NT patterns: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη, **grace to you and peace**. In fact, the pattern exactly follows Gal. 1:3a; 1 Thess. 1:c; 2 Thess. 1:2a; 1 Cor. 1:3a; 2 Cor. 1:2a; Rom. 1:7a; Philm. 1:3a; Col. 1:2b; Eph. 1:2a; Phil. 1:2a; Tit. 1:4b; 1 Pet. 1:2c; 2 Pet. 1:2a. Interestingly, the only Johannine letter with a Salutatio (2 Jhn. 1:3a) follows a different pattern that is closer to Jude (1:2) and 2 Tim. 1:2a.

The very distinctive aspect here are the expansion elements in 1:4b-5a:

...ἀπὸ ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπτά πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ

Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

...from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

The source of the greeting is typically from both God and Christ. But the depiction of them is uniquely different from what one finds in the letters of the New Testament. The eternal existence of God who reigns from a throne as well as the multi-faceted ministry of Christ are stressed. The eloquence of these expansion elements set up the reader for the *Doxology* that follows in 1:5b-6.



The *Doxology*<sup>15</sup> of praise comes next, and reflects a standardized structuring of such expressions in the Bible both in Hebrew and Greek.<sup>16</sup> This literary genre centered on the idea of praise. Notice also the subsequent use of this form in Rev. 5:13 and 7:12. As the above chart illustrates the vocabulary of praise encompasses numerous expressions in ancient Greek. As a literary genre, an identifiable form surfaces and is generally followed by the biblical writers in both Hebrew and Greek.<sup>17</sup> In the letters of the New Testament,

<sup>15</sup>The English word ‘doxology’ first shows up in the seventeenth century and is comes through medieval Latin from the Greek doxologia (δοξολογία). In English usage it refers to “a liturgical formula of praise to God.” [Soanes, Catherine and Angus Stevenson. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. 11th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. S.V., “Doxology.”]

<sup>16</sup>For a listing of these see my “Doxologies in the New Testament,” cranfordville.com: <http://cranfordville.com/DoxologiesIn-TheNT.pdf>. Both Greek and Hebrew texts from the OT are listed along with English translations, but with major emphasis on the NT expressions.

<sup>17</sup>“A short poetic statement of praise to God, often expressed in parallel or balanced lines; Rev 4:8 b and 4:11 are good examples. Doxologies (from doxa [δόξα] ‘glory’) often seem to end or to divide longer sections of other material. For instance, Amos 4:13 interjects a word of praise to God at the conclusion of a series of oracles of doom against Israel and just before another one begins; whether original to the design of Amos or added by a compiler, the doxology lightens the gloom of Amos’ words by focusing on saving aspects of God’s power. Ephesians 3:20-21 marks the transition

these doxologies mainly surface in the Praescriptio and Conclusio sections, but not always. One of the characteristic signals of this genre is the beginning phrase Τῷ... that does not contain a main clause verb. It is very distinctive in the Greek, although English translations tend to greatly diminish the formal structure in favor of clearly expressing the idea found in the formula type expression. It stands distinct from a benediction in the Jewish heritage.<sup>18</sup>

The very formal -- and somewhat disjointed -- expressions in vv. 4-8 have suggested to several modern commentators that a highly liturgical structure has been put in place to signal the formal beginning of an early Christian worship service.<sup>19</sup> Although reflecting some-

to the more instructional part of the letter, and 2 Cor 9:15 ends the ‘collection’ section. Doxologies probably also invited the congregation to join in the praise to God, especially if (as many think) the biblical doxologies mirror prayers said by the people. Some of the psalms, for example, have repeated doxological lines, ideally suited as unison responses to the intervening stanzas; Ps 136 repeats “for his steadfast love endures forever” after every statement (see also Pss 104:1 a, 35b; 107:1, 15, 21, 31). In the oldest manuscripts, Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer ends with “deliver us from evil” (Matt 6:9-13), but early Christians added various doxologies to it. Many NT letters conclude with a doxology (Phil 4:20; 2 Tim 4:18 b; 2 Pet 3:18 b; Jude 25), and this may indicate the author’s wish to be included with the congregation’s worship, even if only through the written text.” [Richard B. Vinson, “Doxology,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, online]

<sup>18</sup>“A doxology is formally distinct from a benediction, or *berakah*, which is typically introduced by the term ברוך or εὐλογητός, ‘blessed’ (see Pss 41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48; Tob 13:18; 1 Enoch 84:1-4). Yet there are instances in which the forms are mixed; see 1 Enoch 90:40, ‘I woke up and blessed the Lord of righteousness and ascribed glory to him.’ Doxologies are rare in Judaism but occur frequently in early Christian texts; on the other hand, benedictions occur frequently in early Judaism but are rare in early Christian texts (Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus*, 40-43). If a doxology is strictly defined as a formula that includes the term δόξα or כבוד *kābōd* (both meaning ‘glory’), there are no synagogue prayers that can be properly designated doxologies (A. Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy* [London, 1958] 67). However, the term doxology can be understood in a broader sense that includes Jewish *berakah*, ‘blessing,’ formulas as well as Christian doxologies (Heiler, *Prayer*, 333). Werner (HUCA 19 [1945-46] 276-77; id. *Sacred Bridge*, 273-74), however, does not think that the formal presence or absence of the terms gloria, δόξα, or כבוד *kābōd* can be used as an essential criterion for defining a doxology (2 Cor 1:20, which contains the term δόξα, is not a doxology, while 1 Tim 6:16 is a doxology though the term δόξα is missing). According to Wieder (HUCA 19 [1945-46] 276-81), only two features are characteristic of the doxology: (1) it must contain a proclamation of God’s praise; (2) it must affirm the eternity of God. There are no benedictions in Revelation.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 43-44.]

<sup>19</sup>“Some scholars have proposed that the salutations in which many NT letters begin, following the general pattern ‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (e.g., Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 2

thing of a modern tone, the proposal of the French commentator Vanni in *L'Apocalisse* is quite interesting:

**Lector** (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων):

4b Grace to you and peace

from him who is and who was and who is to come,  
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness,  
the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of kings on  
earth.

**Assembly** (οἱ ἀκούοντες):

To him who loves us  
and has freed us by his blood,

6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.  
To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

**Lector:**

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds  
and every eye will see him,  
every one who pierced him;  
and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

**Assembly:**

Even so. Amen.

**Lector:**

8 I am the Alpha and the Omega,  
—says the Lord God—  
who is and who was and who is to come,  
the Almighty.<sup>20</sup>

The obvious disjointedness of these literary forms certainly finds a plausible explanation in this liturgical proposal, which would clearly echo some of the ways the Psalms were used in both temple especially and synagogue practice among the Jews during the first century.

Following this in vv. 5b-6 are a pair of **Prophetic Oracles** with little content connection to one another in vv. 7-8.<sup>21</sup> These reflect the prophecy character of the

Thess 1:2; cf. Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 1 Tim 1:2) are derived from the introductory greeting that began Christian services of worship, a 'formula of introduction' to the service (Delling, *Worship*, 48–50; Cullmann, *Worship*, 23; Schlier, *Galater*, 30). Vanni goes further by proposing that Rev 1:4–8 reflects a liturgical dialogue (Bib 57 [1976] 453–67; id., *L'Apocalisse*, 101–13; see Kavanagh, *Liturgical Dialogue*, 117–21)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 28.]

<sup>20</sup>"The schema that Vanni finds is the following (Bib 57 [1976] 460–61; id., *L'Apocalisse*, 107–8):....

"Vanni argues that recognizing this passage as a liturgical dialogue solves the problem of the apparent lack of unity in this section. Rev 1:3 has revealed the existence of a reader or lector and a group of listeners, the assembly. The two amens (vv 6, 7) lend a clear liturgical flavor to the passage. An abrupt change of person occurs in the passage between 1:4–5a (χάρις ὑμῖν, 'grace to you,' a second person plural pronoun) and 1:5b–6 (τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ... καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς, 'to the one who loved us, and washed us ... and made us,' three first-person plural pronouns)."

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 28–29.]

<sup>21</sup>"Rev 1:7–8 consists of two discrete units with no intrinsic literary connections, which are linked together only by virtue of the

document and will stand as the first of several pairs of such oracles in the remainder of the book: 13:9; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 21:5–8; 22:12–15, 18–20. Numerous other individual oracles also surface in the book as well.

What a 'duke's mixture' of literary forms in the space of five verses! The blending of these very diverse forms would have indeed been strange to any other kind of writing in early Christianity, but in the apocalyptic style such odd patterns are more the norm than the exception.

**Literary Setting:** Standing as the second part of the Prologue (vv. 1–8) these verses continue the process of setting up the reader/listener to be prepared to hear the contents of this book as different from the usual early Christian writing. The first segment in vv. 1–3 places on the table the nature and orientation of this document that John has written. Verses 9–20 will paint a standard apocalyptic picture of Christ in dramatic and weird symbolic expression.

Thus verses 4–8 stand sandwiched between these two patterns with standard epistolary Praescriptio elements combined with a doxology and a pair of prophetic oracles. Conceptual connections to both what precedes and to what follows are clearly expressed in the content of the verses. This, even though the genre elements have very little logical connection to one another.

In one sense vv. 4–8 move the reader/listener a step forward from the introductory ideas in vv. 1–3 to the more fully apocalyptic expression in vv. 9–20. Signals of major segments in the book comes with the epistolary segments in 1:4–5a, and the prophet oracles<sup>22</sup> in vv. 7–8 anticipate major emphases in the book. These provide

fact that they are sandwiched between two carefully defined textual units, the doxology in 1:5b–6 and John's vision and commission in 1:9–3:22. The author regularly places two oracles together at various points in his narrative, with the second often amplifying the first (e.g. 13:9; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 21:5–8; 22:12–15, 18–20; see Aune, *Prophecy*, 327). These and other prophetic oracles that the author has inserted in various contexts throughout his work provide evidence for the author's prophetic activity, which must have been exercised for many years previously. Revelation itself is a kind of *magnum opus* in which the author's previous work (some of which was formulated as much as twenty to thirty years earlier, i.e. in the 60s and 70s of the first century A.D.) was incorporated into a new and more comprehensive context." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 51–52.]

<sup>22</sup>One should not forget the important role that 'prophetic oracles' played in the various streams of the Greco-Roman religious heritage. Although very different in many ways, this substantial body of literature proposed to communicate the will of the gods to the people through designated priests and priestesses. Those non-Jewish believers in the communities of faith would identify these 'prophetic oracles' with their background in paganism, while their Jewish brothers and sisters in the faith would connect them up to the Old Testament.



a 'sandwich covering' for the doxology in 5b-6 which sets a theme for the contents of the entire book. By this point those listening to the contents being read in the small house church groups among the seven cities would have begun sensing that what was coming in the main part of the book had elements of a letter but also would be dominantly an OT style prophecy in the tone of the apocalyptic writings they had heard about from their Jewish friends.

**Literary Structure:** The block diagram below will help picture the internal structure and arrangement of the ideas in vv. 4-8. The presence of the disjointed genre segments of Praescriptio, Doxology, and Prophetic Oracle creates a dramatically different picture than would be with a succession of sentence expressions. The diagram helps to underscore this as well.

-----<sup>23</sup>

4     **John**  
       **To the seven churches,**  
                                   who are in Asia;  
       **Grace to you and peace**  
           from the One who is and who was and who is coming  
           and  
           from the seven spirits  
                                   which are before His throne,

5             and  
           from Jesus Christ,  
                   the martyr,  
                   the faithful one,  
                   the firstborn of the dead,  
                   and  
                   the ruler of the kings of the earth.

-----

          To the one loving us  
                                   and  
                                   having freed us  
                                   from our sins  
                                   by His blood

          and

6           He made us a king  
                                   priests to God even His Father,

5     **to Him be glory and power**  
           forever and ever,  
           amen.

7           Behold

6     **He is coming**  
           with the clouds,  
           and

7     **every eye will see Him**  
           and

8     **especially those who pierced Him,**  
           and

9     **all the tribes of the earth will wail because of Him,**  
                                   yes,  
                                   amen.

8     I am the Alpha and the Omega,

10                                   **says the Lord God,**  
                                   who is  
                                   and  
                                   who was  
                                   and  
                                   who is coming,  
                                   the Almighty.

**Summary of the Structural Analysis:**

What is particularly noticeable is the Praescriptio segment in vv. 4-5a. The letter *Praescriptio* in the ancient world was expressed as a formula -- X to Y: hello -- and not as a sentence statement. This instance follows

<sup>23</sup>The epistolary Praescriptio in vv. 4-5a is a formula rather than a sentence by intention.

very clearly the standardized pattern commonly found especially in the letters of Paul inside the New Testament. The standard three sub-forms of *Superscriptio*, *Adscriptio*, and *Salutatio* are included in the *Praescriptio*. Yet this *Praescriptio* is not located at the very beginning of the document, as would be the case were this document intended purely as a letter. Rather it comes after the rather formalized introduction in vv. 1-3.

Also one should note that the book of Revelation is the only apocalypse either Jewish or Christian in the ancient world that has letter elements framing it: the *Praescriptio* in 1:4-5a and the *Benedictio* of a *Conclusio* in 22:21. This adds a distinctiveness to the document giving it a flavor not found elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

The *Praescriptio* is followed by a *Doxology* in vv. 5b-6. The formulation of the internal structure is very typical of this genre form in the rest of the New Testament. But unlike Gal. 1:5 which injects a doxology expression into the letter *Praescriptio*,<sup>25</sup> here the insertion of the *Doxology* is disjointed and doesn't flow naturally in the Greek. Although rather typical for the way the book of Revelation is written as an apocalypse, elsewhere a more natural grammar connection is set up expressing a normal flow of ideas.

This second form is then followed by two distinct expressions of a *Prophet Oracle* in vv. 7-8. They have no inherent inner connectedness to one another. But they do signal a pattern that will surface repeatedly inside the document from this point on; two oracles are commonly paired together numerous times, 13:9; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 21:5-8; 22:12-15, 18-20.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>“Revelation is the only Jewish or Christian apocalypse that is framed as a letter, with the epistolary prescript in 1:4-5a and a concluding postscript in 22:21. The main part of the work, however, contains no explicitly epistolary features. Hellenistic epistolary prescriptions typically consisted of three elements, the superscription (sender), the adscription (addressee), and the salutation. ‘Grace to you and peace’ is a distinctively Christian salutation that first appears in Paul’s letters (see 1 Thess 1:1). It is often expanded to make the divine source of grace and peace explicit: ‘Grace to you and peace from God our/the Father and our/ the Lord Jesus Christ’ (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2). The elaborate salutation in Rev 1:4-5a is a distinctively Johannine expansion of the traditional Pauline salutation.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 40.]

<sup>25</sup>**Gal. 1:3-5.** 3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 4 τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλθῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, 5 ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>26</sup>“Rev 1:7-8 consists of two discrete units with no intrinsic lit-

The first oracle in v. 7 seems to be a combining of ideas from Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10-14, following the similar pattern found in Matt. 24:30.<sup>27</sup> The *ναί, ἀμήν*, *yes, amen*, marks the division between the two oracles. The second oracle in v. 8 utilizes language from the Old Testament in the qualifies of κύριος ὁ θεός, *the Lord God*, which are ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, *the One who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty*. The direct statement, Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, *I am the Alpha and the Omega*, interestingly make a play off the Hebrew word for ‘truth.’<sup>28</sup> But

erary connections, which are linked together only by virtue of the fact that they are sandwiched between two carefully defined textual units, the doxology in 1:5b-6 and John’s vision and commission in 1:9-3:22. The author regularly places two oracles together at various points in his narrative, with the second often amplifying the first (e.g. 13:9; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 21:5-8; 22:12-15, 18-20; see Aune, *Prophecy*, 327). These and other prophetic oracles that the author has inserted in various contexts throughout his work provide evidence for the author’s prophetic activity, which must have been exercised for many years previously. Revelation itself is a kind of *magnum opus* in which the author’s previous work (some of which was formulated as much as twenty to thirty years earlier, i.e. in the 60s and 70s of the first century A.D.) was incorporated into a new and more comprehensive context.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 51-52.]

<sup>27</sup>“The first oracle (v 7), which is unattributed, is introduced by the particle ἰδοῦ, ‘behold,’ and concludes with *ναί, ἀμήν* ‘yes, amen,’ both characteristic of early Christian prophetic speech. The oracle in v 7 is formed by the conflation of two allusions to the OT Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10-14, a combination also found in Matt 24:30 (see Stendahl, *School*, 212-15; Yarbro Collins, “‘Son of Man,’” 536-47). The similarities between Matt 24:30 and Rev 1:7 make it highly probable that there is some kind of traditional link between the two, while the differences indicate that neither text is directly dependent upon the other (Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 60-71). In the Aramaic text of Dan 7:13, the verbal clause *הוּא כְּמִנְיָן* .*ātēh hāwā* consists of the participle *מִנְיָן* .*ātēh* (from *מִנְיָן* .*ātā*, ‘come’), together with the perfect verb *הָוָה* *hāwā*, ‘to be, become,’ in a periphrastic construction meaning ‘came.’ The LXX version translated this periphrasis with the imperfect ἦρχετο, ‘came’ (J. Ziegler, ed. *Daniel*, 169-70), while in Theodotion it is rendered with the present participle ἐρχόμενος, ‘coming.’ The text of Rev 1:7a is also similar to Theodotion in that the preposition *μετά* is used in both. In Rev 1:7, on the other hand, the verb is changed from the past to the present (i.e. futuristic present) verb ἔρχεται, changing the allusion to Dan 7:13 to an oracle referring to a future rather than a past event (Yarbro Collins, “‘Son of Man,’” 541). The striking feature of the first oracle is that it does not explicitly mention ‘the one like a son of man’ found in Dan 7:13.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 52.]

<sup>28</sup>“Since alpha and omega are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet, this divine title emphasizes the sovereignty of God in a way similar to the titles ‘the beginning and the end’ (21:6; 22:13; see 3:14) and ‘the first and the last’ (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). In Jewish alphabet symbolism, the Hebrew word *אמת* .*emet*, ‘truth,’ was understood as a way of designating God as beginning, middle, and end, because *א* was the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *מ*

these two oracles represent creations of John that are intended to set the tone for much of the remainder of the document.

### Exegesis of the Text:

The above three fold analysis of structure provides the basis for outlining the passage in our exegesis section. The outline will attempt to give full credence to the disjointedness of the passage along with providing some sense of the intended thought flow by John.

## I. The **Praescriptio** identify for the document, vv. 4-5a.

4 Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἐπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ἦν καὶ τοῦ ἐρχόμενου καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπτὰ πνευμάτων τῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ 5 καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ μάρτυρος, τοῦ πιστοῦ, τοῦ πρωτότοκου τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ τοῦ ἀρχῶν τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

In this first unit we encounter a standardized letter introduction very much in the pattern of the letters of Paul in the New Testament. The one missing element is the title after the personal name Ἰωάννης. But, of course, that has already been given in verse one as τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννη, to His servant John. Thus, the apostle felt no need to repeat it here.

The simplest way to get into this text is by taking each of the component elements of the letter *Praescriptio* separately.

### **Superscriptio**,

Ἰωάννης. The name in Greek for John surfaces 135 times, making it one of the most common names in the New Testament. There are five and possibly six different individuals with this name in the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> This



the middle letter, and η the last letter.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 57.

<sup>29</sup>Ἰωάν(ν)ης, ου, ὁ (on the spelling s. W-S. §5, 26c; FBlass, *Philology of the Gospels* 1898, 75f; 81; B-D-F §40; 55, 1c; Mlt-H. 102; Rob. 194; 214; GRudberg, *Ntl. Text u. Nomina sacra* 1915, 13f.—The name is also found 1 Macc 2:1f; 9:36, 38; 13:53; 1 Esdr 8:38; 9:29; ApcEsdr 1:19 p. 25, 13 Tdf. [Christian addition]; Ep-Arist 47; 49; 50 and in Joseph. and Just.) John.

1. the **Baptizer/Baptist** (Jos., Ant. 18, 116–19; Just.) **Mt 3:1, 4, 13; 4:12 al.; Mk** (s. JStarr, *JBL* 51, '32, 227–37) **1:4, 6, 9, 14;**

name shows up four times in the book of Revelation, all

**2:18; 6:14, 16ff; 8:28; 11:30, 32; Lk 1:13, 60, 63; 3:2, 15f, 20 al.; J 1:6, 15, 19, 26, 28, 32, 35 al.; Ac 1:5, 22; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24f; 18:25; 19:3f;** GEB 13, 74 and 77f; 18, 36 and 38f; PEg3 67; ISm 1:1.—Schürer II 345–48; JThomas, *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie* '35; MDibelius, *Die urchr. Überlieferung von Joh. d. Täufer* 1911; CBernoulli, *J. der Täufer und die Urgemeinde* 1918; CBowen: *Studies in Early Christianity*, ed. SCase (Porter-Bacon Festschr.) 1928, 127–47; E Parsons: *ibid.* 149–70; WMichaelis, *Täufer, Jesus, Urgemeinde* 1928; MGoguel, *Jean-Baptiste* 1928; ELohmeyer, *Joh. d. T.* '32; WHoward, *J. the Bapt. and Jesus: Amicitiae Corolla*, '33, 118–32; PGuénin, *Y a-t-il conflit entre Jean B. et Jésus?* '33; GMacgregor, *John the Bapt. and the Origins of Christianity: ET* 46, '35, 355–62; CKraeling, *John the Bapt.* '51; WWink, *John the Bapt. in the Gosp. Trad.* '68; JRife, *The Standing of the Baptist: Gingrich Festschr.*, 205–8. JBecker, *Joh. d. T. u. Jesus v. Nazareth* '72.—HWindisch, *D. Notiz üb. Tracht u. Speise d. Täuf. Joh.:* *ZNW* 32, '33, 65–87; PJoüon, *Le costume d'Élie et celui de J. Bapt.:* *Biblica* 16, '35, 74–81. Esp. on his baptism: JJeremias, *ZNW* 28, 1929, 312–20; KAland, *Z. Vorgeschichte d. christlichen Taufe*, *Neutest. Entwürfe* '79, 183–97; his death: HWindisch, *ZNW* 18, 1918, 73–81; PZondervan, *NThT* 7, 1918, 131–53; 8, 1919, 205–40; 10, 1921, 206–17; DVölter, *ibid.* 10, 1921, 11–27; his disciples: HOort, *TT* 42, 1908, 299–333; WMichaelis, *NKZ* 38, 1927, 717–36.—JDoeve, *NedTTs* 9, '55, 137–57; DFlusser, *Johannes d. Täufer* '64; AGEyser, *The Youth of J. the Bapt.*, *NovT* 1, '56, 70–75; CScobie, *John the Bapt.* '64; JMeier, *John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel: JBL* 99, '80, 383–405.—HBraun, *Qumran u. d. NT* '66, II, 1–29. On the Mandaeans s. RGG3 IV '60. 709–12 (lit.).

2. **son of Zebedee, one of the 12 disciples, brother of James** (s. Ἰάκωβος 1) **Mt 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mk 1:19, 29; 3:17; 5:37; 9:2, 38; 10:35, 41; 13:3; 14:33; Lk 5:10; 6:14; 8:51; 9:28, 49, 54; 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3:1, 3f, 11; 4:13, 19; 8:14; 12:2; Gal 2:9;** GEB 34, 60; Papias (1:4; 2:17; 3:1; 7:11f). Title of the Fourth Gospel κατὰ Ἰωάννην.—WThomas, *The Apostle John* '46; cp. JKügler, *Der Jünger den Jesus liebte* '88.

3. **Tradition equates J., son of Zebedee (2), w. the John of Rv 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8** (Just., D. 81, 4).—On 2 and 3 cp. the comm. on the Johannine wr., also Zahn, *RE IX* 272ff, *Forsch. VI* 1900, 175–217; Harnack, *Die Chronologie der altchristl. Lit.* 1897, 320–81; ESchwartz, *Über d. Tod der Söhne Zebedäi* 1904; WHeitmüller, *ZNW* 15, 1914, 189–209; BBacon, *ibid.* 26, 1927, 187–202.—S. survey of lit. HThyen, in *TRu* 39, '75 (other installments 43, '78; 44, '79); also in *EDNT II* 211.

4. **father of Peter J 1:42; 21:15–17;** *Judaicon* 158, 74 (s. Ἰωνᾶς 2 and cp. 1 Esdr 9:23 with its v.l.).

5. **an otherw. unknown member of the high council Ac 4:6** (v.l. Ἰωνάθας). Schürer II 233f.

6. **surnamed Mark, son of Mary.** His mother was a prominent member of the church at Jerusalem. He was a cousin of Barnabas and accompanied Paul and Barn. on the first missionary journey **Ac 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37;** s. Μάρκος and BHolmes, *Luke's Description of John Mark: JBL* 54, '35, 63–72.

7. **Ἀριστίων καὶ ὁ πρεσβύτερος** Ἰ., Aristion and John the Elder Pa (2:4) distinguished from the sons of Zebedee Eus. HE 3, 39, 5ff.—M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 485–86.]

in the first and last chapters: 1:1, 4, 9, and 22:8. Those in chapter one come at appropriate points of introducing the source of the document. The final occurrence in 22:8 also signals the beginning of an Epilogue where John affirms by name the validity of what has been composed. Between these two terminus points the author steps into the background in the sense of calling attention to himself. The focus centers on receiving the visions given to him from God, rather than on the producing of the document.

**Adscriptio**, ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, to the seven church in Asia.<sup>30</sup> This specific designation of the recipients of this document clarifies the broader reference δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ, in order to show His servants, in verse one. This comes mid-way between the broad specification in verse one and the most detailed specification in verse eleven in which the seven churches are named by their city location. Thus a progressive identification of the targeted readers is introduced here in chapter one.

There are seven churches who were to first receive this document. Why just seven churches? Ancient Christian records -- both Acts and several church fathers -- clearly suggest that many more than seven churches were scattered across the Roman province of Asia by the end of the first century.

The number seven plays a significant role throughout the book of Revelation and does so here. As a symbol of completeness it reminds the readers from these seven churches that what he will say about each one has significance for all the others as well. To all seven churches collectively comes the complete message of God with relevance to each one.<sup>31</sup> No single

<sup>30</sup>“In the phrase ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, ‘to the seven churches,’ the definite article anticipates v 11, where the churches are specifically named. ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις is a dative of indirect object in this elliptical epistolary formula, which omits a verb and object (such as ἔγραψε ταῦτα, ‘wrote these things’). This is the *adscriptio*, or address of the letter, and is remarkable for the fact that, like the *superscriptio*, it is unadorned and unexpanded (for an example of an amplified *adscriptio*, see Ign Eph. praef.; Rom. Praef.)” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 29.]

<sup>31</sup>“In view of the prominence and symbolic significance of the number seven in Revelation (it occurs fifty-four times), the fact that seven churches are addressed is significant. The number is not chosen to symbolize the universal Church, a notion found in the Canon Muratori 171–72, where the seven churches addressed by Paul are thought to symbolize all the churches (since ‘seven’ does not symbolize ‘completeness,’ a view justly criticized by A. Yarbro Collins, “Numerical Symbolism,” 1276–78). Rather, the number seven emphasizes the divine origin and authority of the message of John, since seven is primarily a number with cosmic significance and is therefore associated with heavenly realities.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 29.]



group could look down in disdain on any of the others to say, “We sure don’t have their problems! So John isn’t talking to us.”

The geographical location likely played a major role in referring to just seven churches, as well as prior personal contact. As displayed on the above map, a trip to each of the seven in the order of their subsequent listing creates a circle reflecting completeness.<sup>32</sup>

The idea of Darby in the seventeen hundreds that somehow these seven churches paint a history of Christianity from the second century to the second coming of Christ is utterly baseless and a classic example of false eisegesis of the text.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup>“We do not know on what principle the seven were selected. There were certainly more than seven churches in the region by the time this book was written (Acts 20:5ff.; Col. 1:2; 4:13). John may have had a special relationship with these seven. Again, if the seven named in verse 11 were visited in order, one would traverse a rough circle.” [Leon Morris, vol. 20, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 53.]

<sup>33</sup>Several reasons for rejecting this false understanding exist. 1) such a view completely ignores the obvious literary function of this reference as an epistolary *Adscriptio* specifying the targeted readership of the document; 2) it requires a hugely false reading of Christian history that is wrongly divided up into ‘seven dispensations.’ No honest reading of the primary documents of Christian history from the second century to the present could ever make such conclusions. 3) It imposes a rationalistic based line of reasoning that always puts the present (at least the past two to three hundred years) into the Age of Laodicea, the age of complacency for Christianity. This very conveniently allows preachers to lambast contemporary Christianity as their favorite ‘whipping boy.’ This opens the door for the false teachers like Hal Lindsey to dupe naive readers with unbiblical predictions of the second coming of Christ in the near future. 4) It completely fails to understand the symbolism of the number seven by wrongly attributing to it a chronologi-

What the expansion element in the *Adscriptio* does is identify the Roman province where these seven congregations were located: ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ. As treated above in the **Internal History** section, Patmos was the location of the composition of the document and these seven churches in the same Roman province formed the collective destination of the document. The use of the epistolary form here puts strong emphasis on this point. What is not clear is whether a single copy of the document was composed on Patmos -- rather likely -- and then taken one by one to these seven churches where each one made their own copy before the original was carried to the next congregation. Or, whether seven copies were originally made on Patmos -- less likely -- with seven different couriers taking their copy to the individual cities.

**Salutatio**, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη..., **grace and peace to you...** What I find absolutely fascinating is how Pauline this greeting is.<sup>34</sup> The core element is unusually close to the overwhelming pattern Paul used in his letters.

This combination of ‘grace’ and ‘peace’ represented a merging of the standard Greek and Jewish oral greetings in the first century world. The oral greeting χαίρειν and χάρις come from the same root stem, even though the English translations of ‘to rejoice’ and ‘grace’ appear to have little direct connection to one another. The religious background of χάρις in early Christian teaching provided the distinctively Christian way to greet one another with a reminder of God’s grace as foundational to one’s life. The Greek εἰρήνη in translation of the standard Hebrew oral greeting, שָׁלוֹם, **shalom**, for ‘peace’ with its Hebrew meaning of wholeness and completeness<sup>35</sup> served to complement the Greek χάρις. The sense then becomes “May you enjoy God’s favor which brings wholeness to your life!”

The uniquely Johannine element of the *Adscriptio* is found in the expansion elements, with its trinitarian formulation.

First comes the designation from God: ἀπὸ ὃ ὢν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος, **from the One who is and who was and who is coming**. For students of Greek, immediately the incorrect Greek grammar shines out like a sore thumb. Universally in ancient Greek the preposition ἀπὸ always requires either the Genitive case (5 cal scheme. No where in the seventy odd uses of the number seven in the book is there a chronological assumption about the number. It is a religious number rather than a ‘historical’ number!

<sup>34</sup>For more details see the above Genre discussion under **Salutatio**. Also my article in Cranfordville on the epistolary *Praescriptio*.

<sup>35</sup>“שָׁלוֹם **shalom** (1022d); from 7999a; completeness, soundness, welfare, peace.” [Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anahem: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998).]

case system) or the Ablative case (8 case system). It is not grammatically possible to use the nominative case form, as is done here, with this preposition. Also present is the use of a regular verb form ἦν, he was, in parallel expression to two present tense participles, ὃ ὢν, **the one being**, and ὃ ἐρχόμενος, **the one coming**. This will be the first instance of a long list of incorrect grammar constructions encountered in the text of Revelation.

Why does John do this? One part of the general answer is that Jewish apocalyptic writings, produced in times of persecution, tended to deliberately use wrong grammar as a part of their ‘encoding’ system to fool the censors of their conquerors who had to pass on the documents before allowing them to be sent out.

In this particular usage of ὃ ὢν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος, John seems to either have turned it himself into a fixed form formula style name for God based on the LXX of the Old Testament, or else picked it up as such from early Christian and perhaps Jewish tradition. It will be repeated in exact form in verse eight. The same form along with ὃ παντοκράτωρ, **the Almighty**, in 4:8. In 11:17, it is partially repeated as ὃ παντοκράτωρ, ὃ ὢν καὶ ὃ ἦν after ὃ θεός. This partial repeating of ὃ ὢν καὶ ὃ ἦν surfaces again in 16:5. Only in 1:4, 8, and 4:8 is the third segment καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος, **the One coming**, found.

All of this mainly stems from Exod. 3:14-15 in the Old Testament.<sup>36</sup> This Greek paraphrase of the sacred name of God in Hebrew, YHWH (יהוה), broached this name only to be spoken by the high priest inside the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement festival once a year. The expansion of past, present, and future time frames only gathers up the implicit Hebrew meaning of the perpetual existence of God across all instances of time.<sup>37</sup> Thus to the former Diaspora Jews who are now

<sup>36</sup>Exod. 3:14-15. 14 God said to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM.**” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’” 15 God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

**LXX.** 14 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωϋσῆν **Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὃ ὢν**· καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ **Ὁ ὢν** ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.† 15 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πάλιν πρὸς Μωϋσῆν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, θεὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακώβ, ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς· τοῦτό μού ἐστιν ὄνομα αἰώνιον καὶ μνημόσυνον γενεῶν γενεαῖς.†

<sup>37</sup>“In Revelation, John refers to God only as ‘my/his [Jesus’] Father’ (1:6; 2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1), but here, perhaps intentionally, he omits the designation ‘Father’ from the greeting. In fact, he transforms this part of the traditional Christian salutation by referring to God using this very elaborate set of three clauses, each of which functions as a divine rifle. Though unattested elsewhere in early Christian literature, this distinctive phrase occurs three times in Revelation (here; 1:8; 4:8). There is some variation in word order. In 1:4; 1:8, the phrase is ὃ ὢν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος, while

believers John reaches out from their shared Jewish heritage to point them to God. But interestingly enough, this phrase and ones similar to it are found in the Greek literature referring to Zeus<sup>38</sup> and other Greco-Roman

in 4:8, ὁ ἦν and ὁ ὄν are transposed. A shorter, bipartite formula, perhaps a more traditional form that John expanded, is ὁ ὄν καὶ ὁ ἦν, 'who is and who was,' which occurs twice (11:17; 16:5). This bipartite formula is expanded to a tripartite formula in 16:5 through the addition of the predicate ὁ ὁσιος, 'the holy one.' ὁ ὄν, 'the one who is' (a substantival participle from the verb εἶμι, 'to be'), was, among Greek-speaking Jews, a popular name for God ultimately derived from the phrase ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ὄν, 'I am the one who is,' in the LXX translation of the Hebrew phrase, אהיה אשר אהיה, *hyeh .āšer .ehyeh*, 'I am who I am,' in Exod 3:14. Josephus places the phrase ὁ ὄν on the lips of Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:10 (Ant. 8.350) but omits it from his version of Exod 3:14 (Ant. 2.276). Philo often uses the phrase ὁ ὄν of God, sometimes in combination with θεός, 'God' (e.g., ὁ ὄν θεός, 'the God who is'; ὁ ὄντως ὄν θεός, 'the God who truly is'). The phrase ὁ ὄν is used at least eight times as a divine name, with the asterisks marking passages that allude to Exod 3:14 (Mos. 1.75; Som. 1.231; Mut. 11; Det. 160; Quod Deus 110; Opif. 172; Leg. 3.181; Abr. 121); see J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysic* [Amsterdam, 1964] 83 n. 213). Presumably the popularity of ὁ ὄν as the name for God among Greek-speaking Jews influenced the later insertion of the phrase in the LXX text of Jeremiah, where the phrase ὁ ὄν occurs four times, always in the context of prayer (1:6; 4:10; 14:13; 39:17). The title was familiar to Jews in Asia Minor as attested by an inscription on an altar from Pergamon that reads θεὸς κύριος ὁ ὄν εἰς αἰεῖ, 'God, the Lord who exists forever.' Despite the objection of Delling (*Worship*, 78–79), this is very probably an allusion to the LXX version of Exod 3:14 (Nilsson, *Eranos* 54 [1956] 169–70; Bickerman, "Altars of Gentiles," 341–42), for even though the expression εἰς αἰεῖ, 'forever,' is not found in direct connection with ὁ ὄν, Exod 3:15 does describe the name of God as a ὄνομα αἰώνιον, 'an eternal name,' a feature emphasized by Philo (Mut. 12; cf. Mos. 1.74f–75). [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 30.]

<sup>38</sup>A similar threefold temporal description of divinity is widespread in Greco-Roman literature beginning with Homer (F. Büchsel, TDNT 2:399). In a reference to a hymn to Zeus that has perished, Menander Rhetor (1.342) mentions that 'Zeus was before all things [Ζεὺς πρὸ πάντων ἐγένετο]' but that this statement contradicted other elements in the hymn. Plato Timaeus 37E preserves the traditional formula λέγομεν γὰρ δὴ ὡς ἦν ἔστιν τε καὶ ἔσται, 'For we say that it [Eternal Being] was and is and will be' (see Plato Leges 4.715e). Empedocles (frag. 14, line 9 in M. R. Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1981] 100–101 [text], 177–79 [translation and commentary]): ἐκ τῶν πάνθ' ὅσα τ' ἦν ὅσα τ' ἔστι καὶ ἔσται ὀπίσσω, 'From them [fire, air, water] comes all that was and is and will be hereafter.' Here, however, this time formula is used not of divinity but of aspects of the material world. Plutarch preserves an inscription from the base of a statue of Athena, whom the Egyptians identified with Isis: 'I am all that has been, and is, and shall be [ἐγὼ εἶμι πᾶν τὸ γεγρονός καὶ ὄν καὶ ἐσόμενον], and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered' (De Iside et Osiride 354C [tr. LCL]; cf. 352a; 372f–373ah). A similar passage is found in Pausanias 10.12.10: 'Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus shall be; O mighty Zeus [Ζεὺς ἦν, Ζεὺς ἔστιν, Ζεὺς ἔσσεται· ὃ μέγαλε Ζεῦ].' The setting of this hexameter line is important, for Pausanias attributes it to the Peliades ("Doves"), the female

deities.<sup>39</sup> One strong potential implication from the pagan and the Jewish mystical background use of this phraseology on amulets worn as head bands or arm bands is the belief that this special name of deity would

priestesses of Zeus who were cult officials at the oracle of Zeus at Dodona; the setting therefore connects Zeus with prophecy since the tripartite prophecy formula is also based on the three moments of past, present, and future. In Asclepius 14.17–18 (Nock-Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste* 2:313): *deus aeternus ... hoc est, hoc fuit, hoc erit semper*, 'he eternal God ... is the one who is, the one who was, and the one who will always be.' In Asclepius 29.5–7 (Nock-Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste* 2:337): *si enim animal mundus uiuensque semper et fuit et est et erit, nihil in mundo mortale est*, 'if the world itself is a living being and was and is and will be, nothing in the world is mortal.' Finally in Asclepius 134.25–26 (Nock-Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste* 2:344): *et sine hoc nec fuit aliquid nec est nec erit*, 'and without whom nothing was, nothing is, nothing will be' (see John 1:3). The last two passages from Asclepius, however, concern not divinity but the world and material reality." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 31–32.]

<sup>39</sup>Numenius, a second-century A.D. Middle Platonic philosopher, refers to the supreme being as ὁ ὄν (frag. 12, in É. des Places, *Numenius: Fragments* [Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1973] 55–56; see brief commentary on p. 108). Normally, Numenius uses the term τὸ ὄν, "Being, Existence" (frags. 2.23; 3.1, 8, 9; 4a.7, 9, 12; 5.5, 6, 14, 18 [bis]; 6.7, 8, 15; 7.2, 13, 14; 8.2). The Greek magical papyri, many of which exhibit clear Jewish influence (ISBE, rev. ed., 3:219, s.v. "magic"), reflect the popularity of divine names borrowed from Judaism and also use ὁ ὄν as a divine name, often in connection with Ἰάω, "Iao," a divine name with close associations with the Hebrew divine name YHWH (often vocalized as Yahweh and shortened in ancient texts as Yahu). PGM LXXI.3–4, for example, has several points of contact with Rev 1:8 (the divine names ὁ ὄν, κύριος and παντοκράτωρ): and 'The God who is, Iao, Lord Almighty [ὁ θεὸς ὄν ὁ Ἰάω, κύριος παντοκράτωρ].' For other magical texts containing the divine predicate ὁ ὄν, see PGM XII.111; XIII.1020, 1048. The title ὁ ὄν also occurs on several amulets. A bloodstone amulet in the British Museum depicts Helios and Selene, with the inscription 'Ἰαὸ, Sabaōth, Abrasax, the Existent One [ὁ ὄν]' on the reverse (Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols* 2:259; vol. 3 fig. 1116). One amulet, apparently of Jewish origin, has the inscription 'One God in the heavens [ἐν οὐρανοῖς] who exists [ὁ ὄν] and who existed before [προῶν], the one greater than all, who dominates all beings in midheaven' (Delatte-Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, 266, no. 381; cf. Peterson, *Ἐἷς Θεός*, 260–61); the plural form οὐρανοῖς is either a Semitism or reflects an elevated hymnic style, and ὁ προῶν is a more literary grammatical choice than ὁ ἦν in Rev 1:4. On another amulet (Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 108–9, no. 151), the words ἐγὼ and ὁ ὄν, 'I am the one who is,' are found on either side of a mummy, an allusion to LXX Exod 3:14. A Christian amulet (British Museum, 56473), of uncertain date, has the divine names Iaoth Sabath Adōnaei on the obverse with ὁ ὄν on the reverse (Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 225). A Christian amulet of uncertain date has ὁ ὄν on the reverse, with one crux potens at the top and another at the bottom, while the obverse reads 'Iaoth Sabath Adonaei,' with one crux potens above and three below (C. Bonner, "Amulets Chiefly in the British Museum," *Hesperia* 120 [1951] 333–34, no. 46)."

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 30–31.]

protect one against evil if worn properly on some part of the body.<sup>40</sup> Some of John's listeners with this religious background in the churches of Asia where paganism was very extensive would have picked up on the image of awesome power by God as a source of encouragement.

Contextually the use of this very unusual designation of God's name here in vv. 4 and 8 seems to be driven mostly by the example of Moses who in Exod. 3:14-15 was instructed to give this name to the Hebrews in Egypt as the authentication of Moses' words to them.<sup>41</sup> John affirms early on that this grace and peace come from the Lord God, as well as all of what will be said in this book.<sup>42</sup>

The second source of this grace and peace is καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ, and from the seven spirits which are before His throne. As touched on above under the discussion of sources used under **External History**, this unusual expression points toward the Holy Spirit in symbolic designation. Similar depictions surface in 4:5<sup>43</sup> and 5:6<sup>44</sup> clearly defining the seven spirits as the Spirit of

<sup>40</sup>The much later counter part to this in Roman Catholic Christianity is the use of icons of patron saints located in homes, cars etc. for protection against harm.

<sup>41</sup>"Instead of the phrase ὁ ἐρχόμενος, 'the one who will come,' one fully expects the temporal expression ὁ ἐσόμενος, 'the one who will be' (Kraft, 31). This expression is found in Clement of Alexandria (Strom. 5.6), who claims that the name of God is pronounced Ἰαουέ, which he interprets as 'the one who is and who will be [ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐσόμενος]'. " [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 32.]

<sup>42</sup>"John uses the phrase ὁ ὢν four times (1:4, 8; 11:17; 16:5), twice in the context of prayer (11:17; 16:5), like the LXX variants in Jeremiah. He is the first Christian author to use this divine name; it rarely occurs among later Christian authors (see LPGL, 418). Why does John use this divine name twice in the opening sections of his book (vv 4, 8)? Just as Moses was told by God to accredit his message by telling the people that ὁ ὢν had sent him, so John appears to be authenticating his prophetic book by claiming that its actual source is none other than ὁ ὢν. ὁ ὢν is understood by Philo as the divine name that Moses, as a prophet, used to authenticate his message (Mos. 1.75; Mut. 11)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 31.]

<sup>43</sup>**Rev. 4:5.** Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God;

Καὶ ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ, καὶ ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καίόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ,

<sup>44</sup>**Rev. 5:6.** Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἄρνιον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον ἔχων

God, representing the complete presence of God in the world. The symbolism of the number seven comes into the image asserting the full expression of God's spiritual presence. This divine presence imminates from the throne of God and extends out to completely cover all the earth.

This core idea has been understood a several different ways down through the centuries of interpretive history, as Aune (*WBC*, pp 33-35) points out three major options.<sup>45</sup> The heart of the issue is the plural form τὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ. Does this refer directly back to the Holy Spirit, or does it indirectly get back to the Holy Spirit by referring to the angels of God? In the Jewish literature heavily influenced by Greek thought such as several of the Jewish apocalypses like First Enoch (e.g., 21:3-6) as well as by the Qumran literature (e.g., 1QM 9:12-15) a great deal of emphasis is placed on the divine presence of God through His Spirit being expressed by angels. In the very latest writings of the Old Testament during the Babylonian exile period and beyond, the influence of Babylonian religious thought on angels expressing divine presence begins surfacing in some of these OT writings such as Esther 1:14 and Ezra 7:14.

The uncertainty about this connection comes primarily because the typical NT expressions "the Holy Spirit" (τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα) and "the Spirit of God" (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ) are never used inside the book of Revelation. The perspective on the divine spirit from inside the book of Revelation seems to be significantly different from that in the rest of the NT, and especially from that of the fourth gospel. This necessitates caution when the attempt is made to connect up the concept inside Revelation to the rest of the NT.

The perspective in the book of Revelation is com-

---

κέρατα ἑπτὰ καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ οἳ εἰσὶν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν.

<sup>45</sup>(1) A widespread and ancient Christian view that this is a way of representing the Holy Spirit in its fullness (Cowley, *Apocalypse*, 186: "He said 'seven,' referring to the completeness of his gift.") appears to have originated in the LXX version of Isa 11:2-3, which describes seven benefits of the Spirit of God to be enjoyed by the future Davidic king: "The Spirit of God will rest upon him, a spirit of [1] wisdom and [2] understanding, a spirit of [3] counsel and [4] might, a spirit of [5] knowledge and [6] godliness; the Spirit will fill him with [7] the fear of the Lord" (only six benefits are found in the MT; six are mentioned in 4Q161 = 4QIsaiah Peshera 8-10 iii 11-13; and six are mentioned in rabbinic literature: cf. b. Sanh. 93ab; Num. Rab. 13.11; Gen. Rab. 2.4.97; Ruth Rab. 7.2)....

"(2) A second important view, in my opinion certainly the correct one, understands the seven spirits as the seven principal angels of God....

"(3) A third major interpretation understands the seven spirits in terms of ancient Near Eastern groups of seven astral deities."

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 33-35.]

plex, but Aune's proposal of this being largely due to successful revisions of the document is unpersuasive.<sup>46</sup> The modern tendency to see the disjointedness present in the document as reflecting successive layers of editing of the document ignores the ancient reflections of intentional disjointedness inserted in these documents by the original writers.<sup>47</sup>

Within the heritage of both OT prophetic writings and especially the Jewish apocalyptic traditions of defining the divine presence via the vehicle of πνεύματα, *spirits*, I believe that these point back to the presence of God on the earth in a way that dramatical underscores that Presence coming out of the very throne of God in Heaven. The conceptualization here, apocalyptic clearly as it stands, points the reader ultimately back to the same spiritual reality expressed elsewhere in the New Testament in terms of the Holy Spirit.

Thus the divine favor (χάρις) and divinely produced wholeness in life (εἰρήνη) come to the readers and hearers of this book (ὑμῖν) in part from the manifestation of God's overpowering Presence on earth through His Spirit.

The third source of this grace and peace comes καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, *from Jesus Christ, the martyr, the faithful one, the first born of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*<sup>48</sup>

Once more we encounter both familiar and unique language about Jesus Christ. One textual issue already noted above but needing to be re-affirmed here refers to the punctuation of ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός. The Nestle-Aland 28th edition Greek text inserts a comma between the noun and the adjective. This pattern reaches back

<sup>46</sup>“The analysis of the Spirit in Revelation is complex because of the composition history of Revelation, which exhibits changing conceptions of the Spirit.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 36.]

<sup>47</sup>Consequently Aune's conclusions that reject any connecting link between the seven spirits of God in Revelation and the Holy Spirit in the rest of the NT fail to be convincing, despite his contentions to the contrary:

“While many scholars have maintained that the seven spirits of God, particularly those mentioned in 1:4, refer to the Holy Spirit (Beckwith, 426–27; Bruce, “Spirit,” 333–37) or to the fullness of the one Spirit of God (de Smidt, *Neot* 28 [1994] 241), that equation does not hold up to scrutiny (see Comment on 1:4).”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 36.]

<sup>48</sup>One should note this additional misuse of Greek grammar here. For ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς to properly stand either as a modifier or in apposition to Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ the core nouns should be changed to the genitive case form rather than the nominative forms as presently used. Thus a grammatically correct rendering would be ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ μάρτυρος, τοῦ πιστοῦ, τοῦ πρωτοτόκου τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ τοῦ ἀρχοντος τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

several editions in both the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* and the United Bible Societies The Greek New Testament. The translation impact is “the martyr, the faithful one” rather than “the faithful martyr” with the comma removed.<sup>49</sup> One needs to remember that in the original composition of the document and throughout the first several centuries of copying of it no punctuation marks such as commas existed in the Greek language, as well as spacing between words. So the issue of whether to insert a comma or not is more a modern editorial question growing out of perceived meanings of the alternatives.<sup>50</sup>

The difficulty here is not decisively settled by subsequent uses of identical or similar terms in the document. See ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, *my witness, my faithful one* (2:13), ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός, *my faithful and true witness* (3:14), οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί, *those with Him are called and chosen and faithful* (17:14), ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτὸν [καλούμενος] πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός, *the one sitting up it (the horse) is called faithful and true* (19:11), οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοὶ εἰσιν, *these words are faithful and true* (21:5), οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοὶ, *these words are faithful and true* (22:6).

Although the recent printed Greek text perspective is ‘the witness, the faithful one’, overwhelmingly both Bible translators and commentators adopt the alternative ‘the faithful witness’ understanding. The essence of the difference between these two patterns is whether ‘faithfulness’ covers just the witness of Christ or His entire being. Most understand, from contextual considerations, that in this instance the emphasis is upon the witness given by Christ being trustworthy.

<sup>49</sup>The grammar construction ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός could easily move either direction with ὁ πιστός without the comma being taken as an articular attributive adjective, but ὁ πιστός with the comma as a substantival adjective.

<sup>50</sup>Note the translation patterns adopted:

**English:** *the faithful witness* (ASV, NASB, NKJV, 21stCent-KJV, RSV, RSVCE, NRSV, NRSVUK, NRSVCE, CEB, CEV, DRA1899, ESV, ESVUK, GNT, HCSB, Phillips, Knox, LEB, Mounce, NCV, NET Bible, NIV, NIVUK); *that faithful witness* (Geneva 1599); *a faithful witness* (WYC); *Loyal Witness* (Message); *What Jesus gives witness to can always be trusted* (NIRV); *Who is faithful in telling the truth* (NLV); *the Witness who is true and faithful* (Voice); *What he says is true* (WE).

**Spanish:** *el testigo fiel* (LBLA, NBLH, NTV, NVI, CST, BLP, BLPH, RVC, RVR1960, RVR1995, RVA); *testigo fiel* (DHH); *quien es el testigo fiel* (PDT).

**German:** *dem treuen Zeugen* (SCH1951, SCH2000, GNB, Menge; ZB, EB); *dem treuen Zeugen dieser Dinge* (NLB); *welcher ist der treue Zeuge* (LUTHER1545, LUTHER1984); *der uns zuverlässig Gottes Wahrheit bezeugt* (HOF); *dem vertrauenswürdigen Zeugen 'für die Wahrheit'* (NGU-DE); *er ist der treue Zeuge* (EUB).

**French:** *le témoin fidèle* (LSG, NEG1979, SG21); *le témoin digne de foi* (BDS).



Most translations underscore ὁ μάρτυς as witness rather than as martyr. But one must understand that the same Greek word μάρτυς means both English ideas. A μάρτυς gives witness or testimony, and in the ultimate expression by sacrificing his/her life in giving that witness. Elsewhere in Revelation the giving of a witness is associated with dying for that witness: 2:13, 11:3; 17:6.

This raises a secondary but important question. Is this the historical Jesus giving witness or the risen Christ giving witness? Most likely the emphasis in Revelation is on the exalted Christ actively working in witness etc.

In Revelation Jesus is mentioned in a variety of ways: ὁ Ἰησοῦς (1:9 twice, 12:17, 14:12, 17:6, 19:10 twice, 20:4, 22:16); Ἰησοῦς Χριστός (1:1, 2, 5), Χριστός (11:15, 12:20, 20:4, 6), κύριος (11:8, 17:14, 19:16),<sup>51</sup> κύριος Ἰησοῦς (22:20, 21). Although one should be cautious about pressing much distinction between the historical Jesus and the risen Christ, the perspective in Revelation is dominantly on Christ in Heaven working in coordination with God to move events on earth according to the divine plan. Thus it is from the risen Christ that we have received grace and peace as well. His affirmation of the reliability of that grace and peace come out of Him having sacrificed His own life in order to affirm it to believers as the risen Christ. This sacrifice guarantees His witness.

But He is also ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν, *the first born of the dead*.<sup>52</sup> Clearly a reference to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, this label underscores the central role of that resurrection for that of believers following Christ. Christ stands at the head of the line of God's children who anticipate resurrection in their own life. That hope is exclusively based on the reality of Christ's resurrection. He is, in one sense, our older brother who went ahead of us and now paves the way for us to follow. This grace and peace affirmed to us comes from this resurrected Christ waiting for us as the gates of Heaven.

Thirdly, Christ is καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς, *the ruler of the kings of the earth*. Clearly the picture

<sup>51</sup>Although κύριος is used some 22 times in Revelation, it only refers to Christ in five (maybe 6 if 14:13 is included) instances (17:14, 22:20, 21). Elsewhere it refers to God in the pattern of OT expression.

<sup>52</sup>With this phrase occurring elsewhere only in Col. 1:18 as a part of an early Christian hymn incorporated into this letter of Paul to the churches of the Lycus Valley that included Laodicea some 40 or so years before, the expression most likely had wide circulation in the province of Asia which enabled John easily to pick it up here as a helpful point of communication.

**Col. 1:18.** *He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.*

καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὃς ἐστιν ἀρχή, *πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν*, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,

is that Christ is the supreme authority in all the earth. Ultimately every political ruler in all of human history will be accountable to Him on the day of judgment. No one has the power to challenge Him! This wording only surfaces here, but the idea is also found in 17:14 and 19:16:

**Rev. 17:14.** *they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is **Lord of lords and King of kings**, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.*

οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς, ὅτι **κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων** καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί.

**Rev. 19:16.** *On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "**King of kings and Lord of lords**."*

καὶ ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον· **Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων**.

Throughout Revelation a lot is said about the rules of the earth and their hostility to Christ and His people.<sup>53</sup> A few of the terms easily alluded to the Roman emperor, whom John was subtly attacking. To his Christian readers, the point was clear. Christ reigns supremely over all human rules with unchallengeable power and authority.

Where did John get these labels? The role of Psalm 89 (LXX 88) for these Christological titles should not be overlooked.

27 αὐτὸς ἐπικαλέσεται με Πατήρ μου εἶ σύ, θεὸς μου καὶ ἀντιλήμπτωρ τῆς σωτηρίας μου·† 28 κἀγὼ  
<sup>53</sup>Though this title occurs only here in Revelation, it is a functional equivalent to 'king of kings,' which is applied to Jesus in Rev 17:14 and 19:16 (see Comment on 17:14). The phrase 'kings of the earth' occurs seven times elsewhere in Revelation (6:15; 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:19; 21:24), while the parallel phrase 'the kings of the whole world' occurs in 16:14; these phrases are consistently used in a negative sense in Revelation. A relatively close though antithetical parallel to Rev 1:5 is 17:18, where the Harlot is identified as ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη ἡ ἔχουσα βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, 'the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth.' Another relatively close parallel occurs in T. Mos. 8:1: 'a king of the kings of the earth [*rex regum terrae*].'; The Latin Vulgate translates the phrase 'ruler of the kings of the earth' with *princeps regnum terrae*, a title with significant political ramifications since it could designate the Roman emperor. ὁ ἄρχων (found only here in Revelation), the substantival participle of the verb ἄρχω, was one of several terms used to translate *princeps* from Latin into Greek (Mason, *Greek Terms*, 27, 198; it does not however occur in official *imperial titulature*, 113); others relevant to the political imagery of Revelation include βασιλεὺς (15:3; 17:14; 19:16), δεσπότης (Rev 6:10), and κύριος (17:14; 19:16). In addition to inscriptional evidence, many Greek authors used ἄρχων of the Roman *princeps* (Aelius Aristides 19.5; 20.15; 25.56; 26.23, 107; Dio Chrysostom 32.60; 37.34; Marcus Aurelius 3.5.1; Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 7.1). Latin Christian authors frequently referred to Christ as *imperator* (Tertullian De exhort, cast. 12; De fuga in pers. 10; Cyprian Ep. 15.1; 3.5; *Ps.-Cyprian De mont. Sina et Sion* 8; *Acts Scill.* 2). [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 40.]

**πρωτότοκον** θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν **παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς**.† 29 εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα φυλάξω αὐτῶ τὸ ἔλεός μου, καὶ ἡ διαθήκη μου πιστὴ αὐτῶ.† . . .

38 καὶ ὡς ἡ σελήνη κατηρτισμένη εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· καὶ **ὁ μάρτυς** ἐν οὐρανῷ **πιστός**. διάψαλμα.†

27 I will make him **the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth**. 28 Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him, and my covenant with him will stand firm. 29 I will establish his line forever, and his throne as long as the heavens endure. . . .

37 It shall be established forever like the moon, **an enduring witness** in the skies.” (Selah)<sup>54</sup>

This mostly likely reflects early Christian interpretive use of this Psalm, which John draws from.<sup>55</sup> Out of this rich OT heritage then comes the eloquent exaltation of the triune God as the source of grace and peace to the believing readers and listeners to this document.

Although the sequence of God, Spirit, and Son is different from other similar references inside the NT, and clearly later in church tradition, of Father, Son, and Spirit, John picks up on this developing Christian perspective of the profound nature of our God. The shifting of the Son to the final listing opens the opportunity for the Doxology that follows.

This *Salutatio* expresses in profoundly rich manner the blessing of God upon those to whom this document is addressed. As both a greeting and a prayer wish John reaches out to his targeted readers in a marvelous manner.

## II. The Doxology praise to Christ, vv. 5b-6

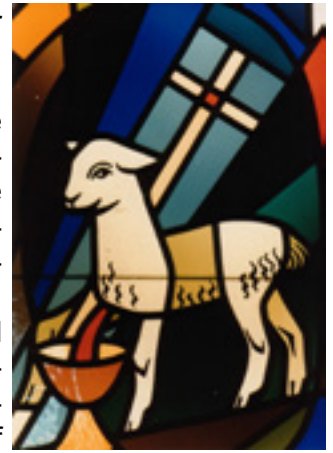
5b Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, 6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρι αὐτοῦ, αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]· ἀμήν.

5b To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>54</sup>“The three christological titles found in vv 5a–c may be derived from Ps 89:38, 28 (LXX 88:38, 28): (1) LXX Ps 89:38b, καὶ ὁ μάρτυς ἐν οὐρανῷ πιστός, ‘the faithful witness in heaven [i.e. ‘the moon’]’ = ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, ‘the faithful witness’; (2) LXX Ps 89:28a, κἀγὼ πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτόν, ‘and I will make him the firstborn’ = ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν, ‘the firstborn of the dead’; (3) LXX Ps 89:28b, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς, ‘the most exalted among the kings of the earth’ = καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, ‘the ruler of the kings of the earth’ (see also Prov 14:5; Jer 42:5; Isa 8:2; 43:10; 55:4).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 37.]

<sup>55</sup>“Fiorenza suggests that together with Psalm 89 there is also an allusion to Isa. 55:4: ‘I have made him [David] a testimony (μαρτύριον) . . . a prince (ἄρχοντα) and a commander to the Gentiles.’<sup>541</sup>” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 192.]

John next inserts a *Doxology* of praise to Christ upon providing the rich depiction of Him in the *Salutatio*. The grammatical construction follows a typical pattern to the other doxologies found elsewhere inside the New Testament.<sup>56</sup> In 5:13-14, 7:12, and 19:1 we find three additional doxologies.<sup>57</sup> Rev. 5:13 follows the form of 1:6 closer, but all stand as a part of



<sup>56</sup>“Doxologies generally consist of four stereotypical elements: (1) Mention is first made of the one to whom some attribute is ascribed (usually in the dative case, less frequently in the genitive). (2) Mention is then made of the specific attribute(s), of which δόξα, ‘glory,’ is the most common (usually in the nominative). (3) A formula is used describing the unending extent of time during which the one praised will possess this attribute or these attributes, usually ‘forever’ or ‘for ever and ever,’ or ‘to all generations’ (Eph 3:21) or ‘from generation to generation’ (Mart. Pol. 21), followed by (4) a concluding ‘amen.’ Including 1:6, five doxologies are found in Revelation (4:9 [a peculiar text since it refers to the reiterated recitation of a doxology]; 5:13–14; 7:12; 19:1).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 44.]

<sup>57</sup>Rev. 5:13-14. 13Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,

**“To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”**

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

13 καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα ὃ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἤκουσα λέγοντας·

**τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.**

14 καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα ἔλεγον· ἀμήν. καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν καὶ προσεκύνησαν.

Rev. 7:12. 12 singing, **“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”**

λέγοντες·

**ἀμήν, ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ ἰσχύς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων· ἀμήν.**

Rev. 19:1. After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,

“Hallelujah!

**Salvation and glory and power to our God,**

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν μεγάλην ὄχλου πολλοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λεγόντων·

ἁλληλουϊά·

**ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν,**

Heavenly praise lifted to God. In 4:9 not a doxology per se but the description of doxologies being given to God is depicted.<sup>58</sup> Across the spectrum of ancient Jewish and Christian writings doxologies served several functions in written texts.<sup>59</sup> This doxology in 1:5b-6 functions as a part of the opening epistolary segment, here as an extension of the *Salutatio*.<sup>60</sup> The others in Revelation serve as a segment of a liturgy of prayer and/or worship.

In typical fashion the *Doxology* is directed to Christ as God.<sup>61</sup> Again the grammar structure is somewhat

<sup>58</sup>Rev. 4:9. *And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, . . .*

Καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν τὰ ζῶα δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων,

<sup>59</sup>“Doxologies have several functions when they occur in written texts. (1) *They can be used to conclude a religious text, with the text functioning as a surrogate for a service of worship* (4 Macc 18:24; cf. Tobit 14:15 [var. lect. MS S]; 3 Macc 7:23; 1 Clem 64:2; 2 Clem 20:5; Acts Carpus [Greek rec.] 47; Acts Carpus [Latin rec.] 7; Acts Justin [rec. A, B, and C] 6; Mart. Apollonius 47; Mart. Perpetua 11; Mart. Pionius 23; Mart. Fruct. 7.2; Mart. Conon 6; Mart. Marian 13.5; Mart. Julius 4.5; Mart. Dasius 12.2; Mart. Agape 7.2; Mart. Irenaeus 6; Mart. Crispina 4.2; Test. Forty Martyrs 3). Similarly, doxologies can be used to conclude a section of a religious text (Rom 11:36; 1 Tim 1:17; 1 Pet 4:11; 1 Clem 20:12; 32:4; 38:4; 43:6; 45:7; 50:7; 58:2; 61:3; Mart. Perpetua 1).

“(2) *Doxologies may have a special epistolary function either in the opening* (Gal 1:5; Rev 1:6) *or concluding* (Rom 16:25–27; Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 6:16; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet 5:11) *portions of letters.*

“(3) *Doxologies can be used in direct discourse to introduce a prayer* (1 Chr 29:11) *or, more frequently, to conclude a liturgy narrated within a text* (Rev 4:9; 5:13–14; 7:12; 19:1; Tob 14:15 [var. lect. MS S]; 1 Enoch 39:10, 13; Did. 8:2; 9:2, 3, 4; 10:2; 10:4, 5).

“(4) *Doxologies can be referred to in indirect discourse* (Rev 4:9). The benedictions in 1 Enoch are frequently referred to in this way (25:7; 27:5; 36:4; 39:9; 81:3; 83:11).”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 44.]

<sup>60</sup>“This type of doxology occurs just three other times in the NT: Rom 16:25–27, τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ . . . μόνῳ σοφῷ θεῷ . . . ᾧ ἡ δόξα . . .; Eph 3:20–21, τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ . . . αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα . . .; Jude 24–25, τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ . . . μόνῳ θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν . . . δόξα μεγαλωσύνη κράτος καὶ ἐξουσία. . .” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 45.]

<sup>61</sup>“Doxologies can be addressed to God in either the third person singular or the second person singular. Doxologies in the third person singular frequently use the relative pronoun ᾧ or the intensive pronoun αὐτῷ, both in the dative of indirect object or the dative of advantage (dativus commodi) or the dative of possession. Doxologies in the second person singular are comparatively rare (none occur in the NT and only seven in the Apostolic Fathers). Some are introduced with σου, a pronoun in the genitive of possession, e.g. Did. 8:2: ‘Yours is the power and the glory for ever’ (see also Did. 9:4; 10:5), while more commonly they are introduced with σοί, a pronoun in the dative of advantage, e.g. Did. 9:2: ‘To

convoluted. The designation of the object of praise is defined by αὐτῷ, *to Him*, in v. 6. This personal pronoun goes back most immediately to the implied subject of the regular verb ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς, *He made us*. But with greater detail it also reaches back to τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς, *To the one who loves us and freed us*, at the beginning of the sentence. These two participles stand in antecedent apposition to αὐτῷ. Once more we are seeing the sometimes strange Greek grammar used in the document.

The delineation of the specifics of Christ as the object of praise define why ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος, *glory and dominion*, belong to Him. These are:

τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, *To the One who loves us and freed us from our sins by His blood*. First, the matter of an alternative reading needs our attention. Already discussed in detail above, we need only to remind you of the issue here.<sup>62</sup> Some uncertainty about the second pronoun ἡμᾶς, *us*, and the preposition ἐκ, *from*, exists but without altering the meaning of the expression. The main variation is the replacing of λύσαντι, *having freed*, with the alternative λούσαντι, *having washed*. This is done only in the much later manuscripts and then is followed by the Textus Receptus.<sup>63</sup> Thus it will show up in the early English Bibles through the King James Version.

you is the glory for ever’ (see also Did. 9:3; 10:2, 4; 1 Clem 61:3).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 44–45.]

<sup>62</sup>{A} λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ P<sup>18</sup> κ<sup>2</sup> A C 2050 2329 it<sup>h</sup> Andrew; Victorinus-Pettau Primasius // λύσαντι ἐκ κ<sup>\*</sup> 1611 2344<sup>vid</sup> (arm) // λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἀπό 2351 (eth) // λούσαντι ἡμᾶς ἀπό 205 209 1006 1841 (1854 2053 2062 ἐκ for ἀπό) Byz [P 046c (046\* homoioteleuton)] it<sup>(ar)</sup>. sig.<sup>1</sup> vg copbo Apringius Beatus

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>63</sup>“Instead of λύσαντι the Textus Receptus, following the later uncials (P 046), most of the minuscules, and several early versions (it<sup>sig</sup> vg cop<sup>bo</sup> eth), reads λούσαντι. The reading λύσαντι is to be preferred because it has superior manuscript support (P<sup>18</sup> κ<sup>2</sup> A C 1611 it<sup>h</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup>.<sup>h</sup> arm al); because it is in accord with Old Testament imagery (e. g. Is 40:2 LXX); and because it suits better the idea expressed in ver. 6a. The reading λούσαντι, which sometimes may have been pronounced like λύσαντι, seems to have arisen ‘due to failure to understand the Hebraic use of ἐν to denote a price . . . and a natural misapplication of 7:14’ (Hort, “Notes on Select Readings,” ad loc.).

“With the verb λούειν the preposition ἀπό is naturally more appropriate than ἐκ; the early versions cannot discriminate between the two prepositions.”

[Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 662.]

The grammatical construction is very picturesque with the present tense and the Aorist tense participles linked together here. Christ ‘loves’ us and has ‘set us free’ in the combination of ongoing love demonstrated most clearly on the cross where our liberation from sin was accomplished. The true nature of His love is seen in this sacrificial offering up of Himself (ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, *by His blood*).<sup>64</sup> Here we get the first glimpse into one of John’s favorite portrayals of Christ as the Lamb of God.<sup>65</sup> The verb λύω when used with the prepositions, either ἀπό (most common) or ἐκ, meaning ‘from’ or ‘out of’ underscores a spiritual liberation from whatever has us captive. In this text, our captor is τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, *our sins*.<sup>66</sup> The phrase found here does

<sup>64</sup>“The two motifs joined in this passage are those of the love of Jesus for humanity and the expression of that love through voluntary death that frees certain beneficiaries. This combination of motive plus action has a traditional ring, for there are a number of formulaic statements that contain the motif of the voluntary self-sacrifice of Christ (Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus*, 112–13). In Gal 2:20, Paul speaks of ‘the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me [τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ],’ just as in Eph 5:2 ‘Christ loved us and gave himself up for us [ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν]’ (see Eph 5:25, ‘Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’). These formulaic passages all coordinate the two motifs of love and death, though death is referred to under the metaphors of ‘giving’ and ‘freeing.’ The voluntary, sacrificial nature of the death of Christ and the salvific benefits of that death are central features of early Christian catechesis: Mark 10:45 = Matt 20:28 (‘The Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for many’), John 10:11 (‘the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep’; cf. John 10:15, 17), Gal 1:4 (‘Who gave himself for our sins’), Titus 2:14 (‘Who gave himself for us’), 1 Tim 2:6 (‘Who gave himself as a ransom for all’), 1 John 3:16 (‘he laid down his life for us’). The willingness of Christ to die, however, is not invariably mentioned: 1 Cor 15:3 (‘Christ died for our sins’), 1 Pet 3:18 (‘Christ also died for sins once for all’); see also Rom 5:8; 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; 1 Thess 5:9–10. The love of God for his people is mentioned frequently in early Christian literature (John 3:16; Rom 9:13; 2 Cor 9:7; Eph 2:4; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13, 16; Heb 12:6; 1 John 4:10; 1 Clem 56:4; Barn. 1:1; Ign. Trall. inscr. Rom. inscr.). ‘Jesus,’ however, is only occasionally the subject of the verb ἀγαπᾶν, and then in passages that are predominantly Johannine [John 11:5; 13:1, 23, 34; 14:21; 15:9, 12; 19:26; 21:7; Eph 5:2, 25; Rev 3:9].” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 46–47.]

<sup>65</sup>Cf. Rev. 5:6; 7:17; 14:10; 15:3; 19:9; 21:23; 22:1, 3.

<sup>66</sup>A good commentary on this statement is **Heb. 9:9–14. 11** But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), 12 he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, although the general idea is common.<sup>67</sup> Thus with this beginning image of being released from the prison of our sins we begin to understand the works of the Lamb which led to songs of praise and celebration throughout the document.

καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, *and He made us a kingdom, priests to God and His Father*. Here more grammar challenges confront us, with the use of a regular verb ἐποίησεν when the Aorist participle, ποιήσαντι, would have been the correct grammar structure, thus creating the correct flow of Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι...καὶ λύσαντι... καὶ ποιήσαντι.

In this sacrificial death of the Lamb, we sinners are turned from slaves to sin into a king and a priest to God. We move from being ruled (by sin) to ruling over sin. And we become dedicated forever to the service of

11 Χριστὸς δὲ παραγενόμενος ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν διὰ τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνης οὐ χειροποιήτου, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως, 12 οὐδὲ δι’ αἵματος τράγων καὶ μόσχων διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος εἰσηλθὼν ἐφάπαξ εἰς τὰ ἅγια αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν εὐράμενος. 13 εἰ γὰρ τὸ αἶμα τράγων καὶ ταύρων καὶ σποδὸς δαμάλεως ῥαντίζουσα τοὺς κεκοινωμένους ἀγιάζει πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς καθαρότητα, 14 πόσω μᾶλλον τὸ αἶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ, καθαρῶς τὴν συνείδησιν ἡμῶν ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων εἰς τὸ λατρεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι.

<sup>67</sup>“The phrase λύειν τινὰ ἐκ/ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, ‘to free someone from sin,’ occurs only here in the NT and in the Apostolic Fathers. λύειν means ‘to release, rescue’ in the literal sense of setting free from being tied up, chained, or imprisoned (Louw-Nida, § 18.18) and, in figurative extensions, to set free from political domination, sickness, as in Luke 13:16, or sin, as in Rev 1:5 (Louw-Nida, § 37.127). Thus, ‘to free someone from sin’ is a metaphor that implies that individuals are held captive by their sins and that release from this captivity has been secured by Christ. In effect, λύειν ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν means ‘to forgive sins,’ and this meaning (though not using this idiom) occurs in later Christian literature (Ps.-Clement Ep. James 2, 6; Ps.-Clement Hom. 54.2; cf. LPGL 817). In the final edition of Revelation, since people are ‘ransomed for God by the blood’ (ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματι) of the Lamb (5:9), i.e. God is the new owner, λύειν and ἀγοράζειν are virtually synonymous (see Holtz, *Christologie*, 65–68). The language of new ownership of those ransomed is also found in Rev 14:4, which refers to the 144,000 who have been ‘redeemed [ἠγοράσθησαν] from humanity as the firstfruits for God and the Lamb.’ The redemption metaphor occurs in Paul (Gal 3:13; 4:5; 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; cf. 1 Pet 1:18; 2 Pet 2:1), and it is possible that the metaphor originated with him (Holtz, *Christologie*, 67). According to Rev 7:14, those who came through the great tribulation ‘washed their robes and made them white by the blood [ἐν τῷ αἵματι] of the Lamb’ (on the verb ‘wash,’ see the variant λούσαντι in Note 1:5d.d.). There are parallels in pagan literature, as in Ps.-Hippocrates *Morb. sacr.* 4, where it said (speaking of the ritual procedures of Greek public cults) that ‘the Divine cleanses, sanctifies, and purifies [καθαῖρον καὶ ἀγνίζον καὶ ῥύμμα] us from the greatest and most wicked of our sins [ἁμαρτημάτων].”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 47.]

God in His temple. John's choice of grammar here is due in part to taking this idea from Exodus 19:6.<sup>68</sup> Out of the sacrifice of the Lamb with His blood is coming a people over whom God reigns as supreme. And these people function as priests in His temple. This dualistic understanding of Exod. 19:6 reflects a Jewish interpretive tradition found in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition as well as in other later Jewish sources.<sup>69</sup> Again a sig-

<sup>68</sup>**Exodus 19:5-6.** 5 Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6 but you shall be for me **a priestly kingdom** and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.

5 καὶ νῦν ἐὰν ἀκοῇ ἀκούσητε τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς καὶ φυλάξητε τὴν διαθήκην μου, ἔσεσθέ μοι λαὸς περιούσιος ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν· ἐμὴ γὰρ ἐστὶν πᾶσα ἡ γῆ· † 6 ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι **βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα** καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον. ταῦτα τὰ ῥήματα ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ. †

<sup>69</sup>John alludes here to Exod 19:6, where the Hebrew phrase מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים *mamleket kōhānīm*, 'kingdom of priests,' is ambiguous and can be understood as 'a royalty of priests' (Fohrer, TZ 19 [1963] 359–62) or 'kings [who are] priests,' i.e. 'priestlike kings,' to mention just two options (see Durham, Exodus, 263). The phrase is rendered idiomatically by the LXX version: βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, 'royal priesthood,' which is cited in 1 Pet 2:9 and Ign. Eph. 9:2 (long recension). The literal Greek version of the OT by Aquila reads βασιλεία ἱερέων, 'kingdom of priests,' which is how Mussies thinks the phrase in Rev 1:6 should be understood (Morphology, 94); cf. 4Q 504 = 4QDibHama frag. 4, line 10: '[a kingdom of] priests and a holy people.' Yet it is clear that, when Rev 1:6 is compared with 5:10 (where the phrase βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, 'kingdom and priests,' is found, also alluding to Exod 19:6), John is thinking in terms of two privileges of the people of God rather than just one (as in the MT LXX and Aquila). The second-century A.D. Greek translations of Symmachus and Theodotion render the phrase as βασιλεία ἱερεῖς, 'a kingdom, priests,' thus reflecting the same understanding of Exod 19:6 found in Rev 1:6; 5:10. The Ethiopic text of Jub. 16:18 has 'a kingdom and priests' (the translation 'a kingdom of priests' in Charlesworth, OTP 2:88 is therefore incorrect), though the Latin text reads *regnum sacerdotale*, 'a kingdom of priests,' or 'a priestly kingdom.' The Ethiopic text seems to be confirmed by Jub. 33:20, which has 'a nation of priests, and a royal nation' (Charlesworth, OTP 2:120), or 'a priestly and royal nation' (Sparks, AOT 104). In allusions to Daniel, John seems to reflect a Greek version similar to Theodotion rather than to the LXX (Swete, Old Testament in Greek, 48). McNamara (Targum, 227–30) has shown that all the texts of the targums understand מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים *mamleket kōhānīm*, 'kingdom of priests,' as two distinct substantives, though the targums use the paraphrase 'kings and priests' rather than John's 'a kingdom, (and) priests.' The same understanding is reflected in allusions to Exod 19:6 in Philo (Abr. 56; Sob. 66), 2 Macc 2:17; and the Peshitta Syriac *mlkw. wksn*, 'a kingdom and priests,' a reading so close to Rev 1:6; 5:10, however, that it may have been influenced by the NT. Similarly, 4Q504 4 line 10 alludes to Exod 19:6 with the phrase מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ [ממלכת] *kwahnym wgw y qdws*, 'a kingdom of priests and a holy people' (M. Baillet, *Qumran Grotte 4*, vol. 3, DJD 7 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1982] 154–56). John, then, appears to be drawing on a very early Jewish understanding of Exod 19:6 in terms of two distinct privileges rather than the single one reflected in the MT and LXX.

nal of influence from these Jewish sources upon John's thinking.

The idea of priests, ἱερεῖς, while present in Rev. 1:6; 5:20; 20:6, is not very prominent in the document. The concept speaks of the status of Christians before God with direct access to Him, rather than indirect. Contrary to Roman Catholic tradition that say these statements as justifying a Christian priesthood in the church, John saw the image affirming direct access to God by every believer.<sup>70</sup> Additionally as every Jewish

Isa 61:6 addresses the people of Israel with these words: "You shall be called the priests of the Lord." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 47–48.]

<sup>70</sup>The related term ἱεράτευμα, 'priesthood,' is applied to Christians in 1 Pet 2:5, 9 (the latter also alludes to Exod 19:6). Using an extended metaphor in Rom 15:16, Paul speaks of himself as 'a minister [λειτουργόν] of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service [ἱερουργούντα] of the gospel of God.' Here ἱερουργεῖν means 'to serve as a priest' (Dunn, *Romans* 2:859–60), though Paul himself rather than ordinary Christians is in view. ἱερουργεῖν is specifically used by Philo in referring to something that the whole people can do (Spec. Leg. 2.145; Mos. 2.229); the verb ἱεραῖσθαι is used the same way in Philo Mos. 2.24. In two references in Josephus, however, ἱερουργεῖν apparently means 'to offer sacrifice' (J. W. 5.14, 16) without implying the priestly status of those doing so. These metaphors are only rarely applied to ordinary Christians in early Christian literature (Irenaeus Adv. Haer. 4.8.3 ['all the righteous have the priestly rank']; Clement Alex. Strom. 7.7; Tertullian De oratore 28.1–2 [sacerdotes]; De exhort. cast. 7 [quotes Rev 1:6]; De monogamia 7 [quotes Rev 1:6]; Esaias Abbas Or 5.3; Apost. Const. 2.25). Cyprian later refers to the 'priesthood of martyrdom' (Ep. 20.3), a conception close to that found in Rev 20:6. Oecumenius thought Christians were appropriately designated priests because they are enjoined in Rom 12:2 to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God (Comm. in Apoc. 5:10; Hoskier, Oecumenius, 81–82). The Stoics reportedly held, in an aphorism with wide variations, that 'the wise are the only priests' (Diogenes Laertius 7.119; Origen *Comm.* in Joh. 2.10 [on 1:4]; Stobaeus Ecl. 2.67.20; see SVF 3:604–10), while for Marcus Aurelius (3.4.3), the good man is 'a priest and minister of the gods.' A priest may normally be defined as a religious specialist who performs religious rites, usually sacrificial rituals at a fixed location (e.g. an altar), and in so doing functions as an intermediary acting for or on behalf of a community (W. G. Oxtoby, "Priesthood: An Overview," *EncRel* 11:528–29). Here (as in 5:10; 20:6) there can be no sacrifice involved and no community to represent, nor are these priests specialists since all who have been freed or ransomed by Christ's death (1:6; 5:10), who have participated in the first resurrection (20:6), have this status. It is possible that the universal application of 'priesthood' is the result of the spiritualization of the notion of 'sacrifice' that characterized early Christianity, for everyone can offer the sacrifice of prayer. The notion of the 'priesthood of believers,' or 'general priesthood' (meaning that every Christian has direct access to God), particularly emphasized in a polemical way by Martin Luther, is distinguished from the ministerial priesthood in Roman Catholicism, which regards the latter as superior to the 'priesthood of the laity' (cf. Schelkle, *Discipleship*, 108–37, and his insistence that πρεσβύτερος, 'elder,' should be translated 'priest' [the English term 'priest' is in fact etymologically derived

priest represented complete dedication of one's life to the service of God, in like fashion believers are to be completely dedicated to the service of God throughout their life.

The expression τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ most likely should be translated as “to His God and Father,” with the His referring back to Christ.<sup>71</sup> This is the proper translation as per the Greek grammar construction.<sup>72</sup> There is nothing in the history of the copying of the Greek text here to signal a basis for “to God and His Father.” It represents a mistaken reading of the Latin Vulgate, *Deo et Patri suo*, that found its way into modern Bible translations. In the five uses of πατήρ in Revelation (1:6; 2:28; 3:5, 21; 14:1), all of them refer to God as the Father of Jesus.<sup>73</sup> What we are being introduced to here is the

from πρεσβύτερος]), while most branches of Protestantism do not (Eastwood, *Priesthood*; see the instructive excursus by N. Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief*, 2nd ed. [Neukirchen: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1986] 108–10). [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 48–49.]

<sup>71</sup>“To his God and Father: the preposition to here is a way of saying ‘serve.’ In the phrase *God and Father*, care must be taken that the two refer to one being, not to two. The possessive *his God* may cause a problem if somehow his seems exclusive—that is, the God of Jesus Christ alone and of no one else. If there is a problem, in some languages it will be helpful to restructure the phrase and say ‘God his Father.’ As for *his ... Father*, there should be no problem, inasmuch as it is clear here and elsewhere in the New Testament that God is the Father of Jesus Christ in a special way. Other ways of translating the whole phrase are ‘to serve God, who is his Father’ or ‘to serve God, who is the Father of Jesus’.” [Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 22.]

<sup>72</sup>Note the translation patterns:

**English.** *unto God and His Father* (KJV, 21cent KJV, DRA); *unto God even his Father* (GNV); *for God his Father* (NLT, VOICE); *to God and to his Father* (WYC); *unto his God and Father* (ASV); *to his God and Father* (ESV, ESVUK, CEB, PHILLIPS, LEB, MOUNCE, RSV, RSVCE); *to His God and Father* (NASB, NKJV, HCSB, NLV); *to serve his God and Father* (GNT, NET, NIV, NIVUK, NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVACE, NRSVCE); *serve God his Father* (CEV, KNOX, NCV).

**Spanish.** *para su Dios y Padre* (LBLA); *de su Dios y Padre* (DHH); *para Dios, Su Padre* (NBLH); *para Dios, su Padre* (NTV, RVC, RVR1960, RVR1995); *para Dios y su Padre* (RVA); *para su Dios y Padre* (BL, BLPH); *de Dios su Padre* (NVI, CST, TLA); *a Dios su Padre* (PDT).

**German.** *vor Gott und seinem Vater* (LUTHER 1545); *vor Gott, seinem Vater* (LUTHER 1984, EU); *die Gott, seinem Vater, dienen* (HOF); *für Gott, seinen Vater* (ZB); *für seinen Gott und Vater* (NGU-DE, SCH1951, SCH2000, MENGE); *die seinem Gott und Vater dienen dürfen* (GNB); *um Gott, seinem Vater, zu dienen* (NL); *seinem Gott und Vater* (EB).

**French.** *de Dieu, son Père* (BDS); *pour Dieu son Père* (LSG, NEG1979, SG21).

<sup>73</sup>This pattern is not unusual throughout the New Testament:

**d. as Father of Jesus Christ**

intimate relationship between Christ and the Heavenly Father that is very unique. And that this Father/Son relationship continues to define their relationship after Jesus ascension to Heaven.

What is then to be given to Christ is ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος, *glory and dominion*. Is this something believers give to Christ through singing and words of praise? Actually not! The doxology is a prayer to be prayed more often than a song to be sung. Foundational it is a confession of faith commitment. But in either instance the point is not to give something verbally to God. Central is that we affirm both our understanding of who God and Christ are and that our desire is for a full disclosure of these qualities to take place either now or else at the final day. The doxology represents our commitment to God, not our gift to Him! Most of all, it is our response to this deeper disclosure of God's nature and being. The contextual settings of the doxologies make this very clear.

The content offered up in doxologies across the New Testament includes ἡ δόξα (Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Gal. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 2 Pet. 3:18), and ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος (1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 1:6). But elsewhere in Revelation this content given to either Christ or God is τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν, *glory and honor and power* (4:11); τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν, *power and wealth and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing* (5:12); ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος, *blessing and honor and glory and dominion* (5:13); ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ ἰσχὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν, *bles-*

*a. in Jesus' witness concerning himself* ὁ πατήρ μου Mt 11:27a; 20:23; 25:34; 26:29, 39, 42, 53; Lk 2:49 (see ὁ 2g and Goodsp., Probs. 81–83); 10:22a; 22:29; 24:49; J 2:16; 5:17, 43; 6:40 and oft. in J; Rv 2:28; 3:5, 21. ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ πατρὸς μου 2 Cl 12:6 in an apocryphal saying of Jesus. ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ ἐν (τοῖς) οὐρανοῖς Mt 7:21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 19. ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος 15:13; 18:35 (Just., A I, 15, 8). Jesus calls himself the Human One (Son of Man), who will come ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ 16:27; Mk 8:38. Abs. ὁ πατήρ, πάτερ Mt 11:25, 26; Mk 14:36 (s. GSchelbert, FZPhT 40, '93, 259–81; response ERuckstuhl, ibid. 41, '94, 515–25; response Schelbert, ibid. 526–31); Lk 10:21ab; 22:42; 23:34, 46 (all voc.); J 4:21, 23ab; 5:36ab, 37, 45; 6:27, 37, 45, 46a, 65 and oft. in J. Father and Son stand side by side or in contrast Mt 11:27bc; 24:36; 28:19; Mk 13:32; Lk 10:22bc; J 5:19–23, 26; 1J 1:3; 2:22–24; 2J 9; B 12:8. WLothouse, Vater u. Sohn im J: ThBl 11, '32, 290–300.

*β. in the confession of the Christians* π. τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Ro 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3a; Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Pt 1:3. π. τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ 2 Cor 11:31. Cp. 1 Cor 15:24; Hb 1:5 (2 Km 7:14); Rv 1:6; 1 Cl 7:4; IEph 2:1; ITr ins 12:2; MPol 14:1; AcPl Ha 2, 33; 6, 34; AcPlCor 2:7 (cp. Just., D. 30, 3; 129, 1 al.).

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 788.]

ing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God (7:12); δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, *glory to the God of Heaven* (11:13); ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, *salvation and glory and power be to our God* (19:1).

The idea of ἡ δόξα, *glory*, is the divine Presence, the Shekinah (שְׁכִינָה, lit. “the dwelling”). It is when God’s presence is disclosed in overwhelming fashion, and all that humans can do in response is to acknowledge this Presence in reverential awe. The other affirmation, τὸ κράτος, *dominion*, is an affirmation of utter control and power that overwhelms. We completely acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of Christ and of God, as affirmed in 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Pet. 4:11, 5:11; Jd. 25, as well as here and in Rev. 5:13.

How long is this overwhelming Shekinah and dominion? The doxology affirms εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *forever*. This very Jewish way of defining eternity, as opposed to the normal Greek expressions, underscored the very different Jewish perspective by the beginning of the Christian era. For the Greeks to step into eternity through death was to step into a completely static, timeless realm where individual consciousness ceased to exist. But for ancient Jews -- and thus early Christians -- eternity was an endless succession of eras of time. The phrase εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων literally means ages stacked on top of ages without end. Within this view individual consciousness continued on but at a higher, better level without the limitations of this material world. Thus eternity is a conscious relationship with this Christ and this God elevated to a higher level of endless enjoyment. The resurrection is the portal through which we enter into such a relationship with Christ and God.

And as the doxology affirms our response should be ἀμήν, *amen*! This ἀμήν signaled the congregational response to Jews worshipping in the Jerusalem temple. When the scripture was read, or the Levites sang one of the psalms, the assembled worshipers in the temple replied in unison, ἀμήν in Greek but actually מֵאֵן in Hebrew.<sup>74</sup>

Thus we move from letter Praescriptio to Doxology of faith confession about this Jesus who has accomplished our deliverance from sin. This then sets us up to hear a couple of prophetic oracles declaring in the tone of the ancient Israelitic prophets the message of Almighty God.

<sup>74</sup>“as expression of faith *let it be so, truly, amen* liturgical formula at the end of the liturgy, spoken by the congregation (cp. 1 Ch 16:36; 2 Esdr 15:13; 18:6; TestSol, TestAbr; TestJob 53:8; GrBar 17:4; ApcEsdr 7 end; ApcMos); hence τὸ ἅ. λέγειν **1 Cor 14:16**, cp. **Rv 5:14**.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 53.]

### III. The **Prophetic Oracles** to the Sovereign God, vv. 7-8.

7 Ἴδου ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν,  
καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς  
καὶ οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν,  
καὶ κόπονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς.  
ναὶ, ἀμήν.

8 Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

7 *Look! He is coming with the clouds;*  
*every eye will see him,*  
*even those who pierced him;*  
*and on his account all the tribes of the earth will*  
*wail.*

*So it is to be. Amen.*

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

As we noted above under the discussion of prophetic oracle<sup>75</sup> in the Literary Genre section, John affirms his label of Revelation as a προφητεία, *prophecy* (1:3), with a pair of declarations using literary forms taken straight from the division of the Prophets out of the Hebrew Bible. Thus he anchors the divine message of the book solidly within the framework of the Israelite prophets from Amos onward in the eighth century BCE.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup>“A message from God delivered through a prophet. This is the primary way in which the word ‘oracle’ (Heb. *massa*) is used in the Bible. The word derives from a Hebrew word for ‘burden,’ implying that it is something placed by God upon the prophet that the prophet must ‘unload.’ The divine inspiration for oracles plays into the Balaam narrative, in which Balaam is hired to curse Israel, but discovers that when he opens his mouth, words of blessing come out instead (Num. 23–24); as a prophet, he is only able to speak what the Lord says through him (cf. Num. 24:13). Mic. 3:11, however, mentions prophets who give oracles for money, assuring rulers of what they want to hear. David delivers an oracle, in which the ‘spirit of the LORD’ speaks through him (2 Sam. 23:1–7). Oracles tend to be proclamations of doom or judgment (against the nations, Isa. 13:1; Nah. 1:1; against Israel, Ezek. 12:10; against Judah, Isa. 22:1). Acts 7:38 says that Moses received ‘living oracles’ from God at Mount Sinai, and Paul says in Rom. 3:2 that ‘the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.’ Heb. 5:2 uses the same expression (‘oracles of God’) as a description of basic Christian teaching.” [Mark Allan Powell, “Oracle” In *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (Revised and Updated), ed. Mark Allan Powell, Third Edition (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 726-27.]

<sup>76</sup>“Although discussions of prophecy in the OT often use the English word ‘oracle’ as a general term for any speech by a prophet, the RSV and other modern translations use it mostly to translate a single Hebrew word, *maššā*. *Maššā* designates a specific type of speech used by ancient Israelite prophets. Thus when translating *maššā*, ‘oracle’ indicates that a prophetic passage or speech belongs to this specific type.

“The OT identifies eighteen passages by means of the Hebrew term *maššā*. The RSV labels all of them with the term ‘oracle.’ These are: 2 Kgs 9:26a; Isa 13:2–14:23; 14:29–32; 15:1b–16:12; 17:1b–11; 19:1b–25; 21:1b–10, 11b–12, 13b–17; 22:1b–14;

His tendency will be to pair up two oracles at various points throughout Revelation: 13:9; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 21:5-8; 22:12-15, 18-20. But he does often introduce a single oracle message elsewhere in the book.

**The first oracle** in verse seven is formed by combining language from Dan. 7:13<sup>77</sup> and Zech 12:10-14,<sup>78</sup> and this is also found in Matt. 24:30.<sup>79</sup> The close affinity of Matt. 24:30 and Rev. 1:7 strongly suggests a common Christian tradition in circulation among the first century communities of believers.<sup>80</sup> But the differences

23:1b-18; 30:6b-7; Ezek 12:11-16; Nah 1:2-3:19; Hab 1:2-2:20; Zech 9:1-11:3; 12:1b-14:21; Mal 1:2-3:24[—Eng 1:2-4:6].”

[Richard D. Weis, “Oracle: Old Testament” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 28.]

<sup>77</sup>**Dan. 7:13.** As I watched in the night visions, I saw one *like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven*. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.

ἐθεώρουν ἐν ὄραματι τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἤρχετο, καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆν, καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες παρήσαν αὐτῷ.†

<sup>78</sup>**Zech. 12:10-14.** 10 And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, *when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him*, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. 11 On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 *The land shall mourn, each family by itself*, the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; 13 the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; 14 and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.

10 καὶ ἐκχεῶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Δαυὶδ καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας Ἱερουσαλημ πνεῦμα χάριτος καὶ οἰκτιρμοῦ, καὶ ἐπιβλέπονται πρὸς με ἀνθ’ ὧν κατοργήσαντο καὶ κόπονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν κοπετὸν ὡς ἐπ’ ἀγαπητὸν καὶ ὀδυνηθήσονται ὀδύνην ὡς ἐπὶ πρωτοτόκῳ.† 11 ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ μεγαλυνθήσεται ὁ κοπετὸς ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ ὡς κοπετὸς ρόωνος ἐν πεδίῳ ἐκκοπτομένου,† 12 καὶ κόπεται ἡ γῆ κατὰ φυλὰς φυλὰς, φυλὴ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες αὐτῶν καθ’ ἑαυτάς, φυλὴ οἴκου Δαυὶδ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες αὐτῶν καθ’ ἑαυτάς, φυλὴ οἴκου Ναθαν καθ’ ἑαυτὴν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες αὐτῶν καθ’ ἑαυτάς,† 13 φυλὴ οἴκου Λευὶ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες αὐτῶν καθ’ ἑαυτάς, φυλὴ τοῦ Συμεων καθ’ ἑαυτὴν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες αὐτῶν καθ’ ἑαυτάς,† 14 πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ αἱ ὑπολειμμέναι φυλὴ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες αὐτῶν καθ’ ἑαυτάς.†

<sup>79</sup>**Matt. 24:30.** Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see *‘the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven’* with power and great glory.

καὶ τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ τότε κόπονται πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὄνουνται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς.

<sup>80</sup>Interestingly this combining of Dan. 7 and Zech 12 continues on in the church fathers, although done in a variety of ways, as Aune illustrates:

A relatively apocoped version, which combines allusions to Dan

also suggest that neither text is directly dependent on the other.<sup>81</sup>

The standard ‘day of doom’ for the OT prophetic oracles exists here, but with a Christian perspective. The return of Christ is pictured with its corresponding reaction of wailing by those seeing Him come.

The first word ἰδοὺ follows the standard meaning consistent in Revelation when introducing discourse material: it is an emphatic validation of what is to be said.<sup>82</sup> Thus what is declared is indeed going to happen.

**The first strophe** of the oracale, ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, *He is coming with the clouds*, stands as a major theme in the book: [ἰδοὺ] ἔρχομαι ταχύ, *Indeed I am coming soon* (3:11); ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης, *Indeed I am coming like a thief* (16:15); καὶ ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ, *and indeed I am coming soon* (22:7); ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ, *Indeed I am coming soon* (22:12). With variations on this core

7:13 and Zech 12:10–12, is still recognizable in *Did.* 16:8:

τότε ὄψεται ὁ κόσμος τὸν κύριον  
Then the world will see the Lord  
ἐρχόμενον ἐπάνω τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ  
coming on the clouds of heaven

A similar combination appears in Justin *Dial.* 14.8:

οἱ δὲ εἰς τὴν δευτέραν αὐτοῦ παρουσίαν  
But others [prophets] refer to his second coming  
ὅτε ἐν δόξῃ καὶ ἐπάνω τῶν νεφελῶν παρέσται  
when in glory and upon the clouds he will appear  
καὶ ὄψεται ὁ λαὸς ὑμῶν  
and your people will see  
καὶ γνωριεῖ εἰς ὃν ἐξεκέντησαν,  
and recognize the one whom they pierced,  
ὡς Ὡσηέ [sic! Zechariah] εἷς τῶν δώδεκα προφητῶν,  
as Hosea [i.e. Zechariah] one of the twelve prophets,  
καὶ Δανιὴλ προεῖπον, εἰρημένοι εἰσι.  
and Daniel have predicted.

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 52–53.]

<sup>81</sup>“The similarities between Matt 24:30 and Rev 1:7 make it highly probable that there is some kind of traditional link between the two, while the differences indicate that neither text is directly dependent upon the other (Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 60–71).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 52.]

<sup>82</sup>“Ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, ‘Indeed, he is coming with the clouds.’ The demonstrative particle ἰδοὺ, derived from the verb ὀρᾶν, ‘to see,’ occurs twenty six times in Revelation. ἰδοὺ, frequently translated ‘behold,’ has two different related meanings (Louw-Nida, § 91.10, 13; the discussion in EDNT 2:173 is overly subtle): (1) It functions as a marker of strong emphasis indicating the validation of the statement it introduces and can be translated ‘indeed, certainly,’ and in Revelation is always used with this meaning in speech (thirteen times: 1:7, 18; 2:10, 22; 3:8, 9[2x], 20; 5:5; 9:12; 11:14; 21:3, 5). (2) It functions as a marker to draw attention to that which it introduces and can be translated ‘look, listen, pay attention.’ In Revelation it is always used with this meaning in narrative (thirteen times: 4:1, 2; 5:6; 6:2, 5, 8, 12; 7:9; 12:3; 14:1, 14; 15:5; 19:11).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 53.]



expression are ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ, *yes I am coming soon* (22:20a) and Ἀμήν, ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ, *Amen, come Lord Jesus* (22:20b). Clearly an allusion to Dan. 7:13 (see above footnote 77), it omits the ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, *as the Son of man*, reference. But this omission is relatively common in early Christian uses of Dan. 7:13.<sup>83</sup>

The coming μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, with the clouds, is distinctive, and reflects John's use of a specific text tradition of Dan. 7:13.<sup>84</sup> This prepositional expression means that the clouds are not the vehicle of His coming; nor is He riding on top of the clouds (ἐπὶ), which is the image (ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) in Matt. 24:30, 26:64 and Mk. 14:62 (ἐν νεφέλαις, Mk. 13:26, Lk. 21:27). Rather the clouds are accompanying Him as a part of His vast army. Thus a variety of images are pictured inside the NT regarding the role of the clouds in the coming of Christ.

The point is to affirm the supernatural and dramatic return of Christ to this world at the close of human history. This will usher in the day of judgment for all humanity. This Christ has absolute control over the natural world and it stands ready to assist Him in making His return.

**The second strophe** καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς, *and every eye will see him*, picks up on Zech. 12:10b with the similar καὶ ἐπιβλέπονται πρὸς με, *and they will look upon me*. Both Mark 13:26 and Luke 21:27 use the Zechariah image, but in distinctive ways: καὶ τότε ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλαις [Luke: νεφέλῃ], *and then they will see the Son of Man coming with clouds* (a cloud in Luke).

The point here is to affirm that every human being will be aware of this coming by Christ. It will not be secretive or limited to only a select few people knowing about it.

**The third strophe**, καὶ οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, *and as many as pierced him*, clearly picks up on the Hebrew text of Zech. 12:10b rather than the LXX common reading of καὶ ἐπιβλέπονται πρὸς με ἀνθ' ὧν κατωρχήσαντο, *and they will look upon me whom they have treated despitely*.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup>Other passages that omit this phrase include Did. 16:8; Justin I Apol. 52.3; Dial. 14.8; 120.4 (see Borsch, *Son of Man*, 48).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 54.]

<sup>84</sup>“The preposition μετὰ, ‘with,’ is found in Theodotion (reflecting the Aramaic preposition ܡܝܝܡ), while the LXX version (only extant in MSS 88 and 967, but reflected in the Syro-Hexapla as well) has ἐπί, ‘on, upon’; see Ziegler, *Daniel*, 169–70. There are several texts that refer to the coming of Christ with clouds (Matt 24:30 = Mark 13:26 = Luke 21:27; Matt 26:64 = Mark 14:62; Did. 16:8; Apoc. Pet. 1; Justin I Apol. 51.9; Dial. 14.8; 31.1; 120.4; see 4 Ezra 13:3).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 54–55.]

<sup>85</sup>“The verb ἐξεκέντησαν is used together with the pronoun

Clearly in John's perspective the piercing of Christ alludes to the cross, although the Zechariah text refers to physical harm done through persecution.

**The fourth strophe**, καὶ κόπονται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς, plays off of Zech. 12:12, and also matches Matthew 24:30. Here all humanity is included in the guilt of crucifying Christ and will recognize in that moment of His coming their guilt and accountability before Almighty God for their actions. The response will be κόπονται, the beginning of ‘wailing’ that is verbal expression of desperation prompted by terror from knowing what lies ahead in divine judgment. It is not repenting from sin, for by that moment no one will be allowed to repent since the time for repenting is over. Rather it is the terror of realizing that an horrible fate awaits and that absolutely nothing can now be done to alter it.

John's response is an emphatic affirmation of the truthfulness of what the oracle contains: ναί, ἀμήν, *yes, amen*. Used three times in Revelation (1:7; 16:7; 22:20) and a fourth time in altered form ναί, *yes* (14:13), the ναί is equivalent to ἀμήν and represents an intensifying of it when used together as in 1:7.<sup>86</sup>

**The second oracle** in verse eight does not have the poetic tones as per the first one. But it plays off a very Hebrew oriented background.

Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, *I am the Alpha and the Omega*, actually reflects a Hebrew structure commonly found in Jewish writings. The Hebrew word for truth, אמת, is made up of the first consonant א, the middle consonant מ, and the final consonant ת of the Hebrew

αὐτόν in Rev 1:7, as well as in John 19:37, where αὐτόν is omitted, though understood (as well as Aquila [σὺν ᾧ ἐξεκέντησαν], Theodotion [ὄν ἐξεκέντησαν] and Lucian [εἰς ὄν ἐξεκέντησαν]; Symmachus has ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεξεκέντησαν), and is therefore closer to the Hebrew text. Jelicoe (Septuagint, 87) claims that the citation from Zech 12:10 in Rev 1:7 reflects a Theodotonic reading, perhaps more accurately described as a proto-Theodotonic reading. Justin reads ‘and your people will see [ὄψεται] and will recognize whom they have pierced [εἰς ὄν ἐξεκέντησαν]’ (Dial. 14.8); cf. I Apol. 52.12: ‘and then they will see the one whom they pierced [εἰς ὄν ἐξεκέντησαν]’ (see Dial. 32.2); this is identical with the Lucianic text. In Dial. 64.7, the allusion to Zech 12:10 is phrased differently: ‘those who pierced him will see him and shall mourn him [ὄν ὄραν μέλλουσι καὶ κόπεσθαι οἱ ἐκκεντήσαντες αὐτόν]’ (see Dial. 118.1).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 56.]

<sup>86</sup>“69.1 ναί: an affirmative response to questions or statements or an emphatic affirmation of a statement—‘yes, yes it is true that, yes it is so, sure, indeed.’ πιστεύετε ὅτι δύναμαι τοῦτο ποιῆσαι; λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Ναί, κύριε ‘do you believe I am able to do this? They said to him, Yes, Lord’ Mt 9:28; ἡ δὲ εἶπεν, Ναί, κύριε, καὶ γὰρ τὰ κυνάρια ... ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ ‘yes, indeed, I am coming soon’ Re 22:20.” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 664.]

alphabet. This was a common way of referring to God. The Greek equivalent was to use the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.<sup>87</sup> This expression will be used two more in Revelation, in 21:6 referring to God and in 22:13 referring to Christ. The point of the expression is the sovereignty of God who controls everything from the first to the last.

The expression λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, *says the Lord God*, combines κύριος ὁ θεός in a way common to Revelation (11 times: 1:8; 4:8, 11; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 18:8; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5, 6) but not found often in the rest of the New Testament (6 times: Mt. 4:7, 10; Mk. 12:29; Lk. 1:16; Jhn. 20:28; usually as *my/your God and my/your Lord*). Who makes this claim of absolute sovereignty? The God is also Lord makes this claim.

And how does He make this claim? As ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, *the one who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty One*. For the discussion of ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος see the same phrase above under *Salutatio*.

The other qualifier ὁ παντοκράτωρ, *the Almighty*, affirms again the sovereignty of God.<sup>88</sup> Used some

<sup>87</sup>Interestingly in the Greek magical papyri writings ΑΩ often function as a secretive divine name that carries supernatural power and authority.

The vowels Α and Ω occur together in the magical papyri as a permutation and abbreviation of the seven vowels (PGM IV.411,528, 992,993, 1224, 2351; V.363, 367; VII.476, 720; XIII.849–59 [twice], 931; XLIV [illustrated with a figure holding a staff with the letters Α and Ω on either side]; see Stanford, *Hermathena* 98 [1964] 43–44). Further, in the magical papyri, the seven vowels often function explicitly as a divine name (PGM XIII.39; XXI.11–14). This seven-vowel divine name can be used in self-predications (perhaps under the influence of Egyptian magic, where the magician pretends to be the deity): “I am ΑΕΗΙΟΥ[Ω ΑΕΗΙΟΥΩ]” (PGM III.661), or in PGM XIII.207: “Lord, I imitate [you by saying] the seven vowels ... Α ΕΕ ΗΗΗ” etc. Occasionally ΑΩ is found in conjunction with another divine name, as in “Abraxas ΑΩ” (PGM V.363, 367; cf. IV.528), or as a divine name (under the supposition that the seven vowels, individually, in various combinations, and collectively symbolize the divine name), e.g., “I call upon you with your name ΑΩ ΕΥ ΗΟΙ” etc. (PGM IV.1182–83; cf. IV. 992–93, 3238–39). Further, the letter aleph was understandably associated with the concept of beginning or ἀρχή: “First origin of my origin, ΑΕΗΙΟΥΩ, first beginning [ἀρχή ... πρώτη] of my beginning” (PGM IV.487–88). The divine name most frequently used in the magical papyri is Iao, a name also used in conjunction with ΑΩ in sequences of vowel permutations functioning as voces magicae, “magic words,” often juxtaposed with series of other divine names (see Aune, “Iao,” *RAC*, 17:1–12).

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 57.]

<sup>88</sup>“The term παντοκράτωρ, referring to God’s supremacy over all creation (from the terms πᾶν, ‘all,’ and κρατεῖν, ‘to rule’), occurs nine times in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22) and is a favorite designation for God found frequently in early Jewish sources, and occasionally in pagan sources (for discussions of this title, see Höfer in Roscher, *Lex.* 3:1558–59; Michaelis, *TDNT* 3:914–15; MM, 478; Beskow, *Rex Gloriae*,

nine times in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), it is a popular reference to God in Jewish writings, and also to pagan deities in the pagan sources.

The one who claims sovereignty is indeed the sovereign ruler over all. And the return of Christ -- to be pictured in the book -- will validate that claim dramatically.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

In this somewhat disjointed second part of the Prologue to Revelation in vv. 4-8, what message is there for us?

**First**, we must recognize both the summary and

295–307; Horsley, ed., *NewDocs* 3:118). In Revelation the term is always used of God (as is ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, etc. in 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17) and occurs nine times (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), though never in the secondary frame of Revelation, i.e., in 1:1–3, 12–20; 2:1–3:22; 22:6–21. The title occurs six times in the fixed invocation κύριε/κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22). Elsewhere in the NT the title occurs only in a quotation from Amos 3:13 in 2 Cor 6:18. The term occurs nearly 170 times in the LXX, most frequently as a translation of the divine titles שְׁבָאֵ־וֹת šēbā-ōt (KB3, 3:934–35; in the transliterated form σαβαοθ [and related spellings], the name occurs frequently in the magical papyri and on magical gems) and שַׁדַּי šadday (often translated *omnipotens* in the Latin Vulgate; see KB, 4:1319–21). παντοκράτωρ occasionally occurs in other Jewish Greek literature also (T. Abr. [Rec. A] 8:3; 15:12; Paral. Jer. 1:5; 9:6; 3 Apoc. Bar. 1:3; Ep. Arist. 185.2; Pr. Man. 2.22.12 [Denis, *Fragmenta*, 115]; Sib. Or. 1.66; 2.330; T. Sol. 3:5; 6:8). It also occurs in four Jewish inscriptions from Gorgippia (Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 136) and in a dedicatory inscription from the Sardis synagogue (Robert, *Sardes*, 48–49; Lifschitz, *Donateurs*, no. 20). παντοκράτωρ occurs with some frequency in the magical papyri, sometimes as the result of Jewish influence (PGM III.218; XIII.761–62), but often clearly not (PGM IV. 272, 1375; VII.668; XII.71, 238, 250; XIV. 17). In the magical papyri, παντοκράτωρ is used of Agathos Daimon (PGM XII.238; XIVa.9; LXXI. 1–5), Typhon-Seth (PGM IV. 272; VII.962; XIVc.17), Albalal (PGM IV.968), Adonai (PGM IV. 1552), Helios (PGM XXIIa. 19), and Hermes (PGM VII.668); cf. Nock, *Essays* 1:383. The title is applied to Helios in an invocation in Macrobius *Sat.* 1.23.21. A relatively close parallel to Rev 1:8 (which includes the title ὁ ὢν) is found in PGM LXXII.3: ὁ ὢν θεὸς ὁ Ἰάω, κύριος παντοκράτωρ, ‘The God who is, Iao, Lord Almighty.’ The title also occurs with some frequency in early Christian texts (LPGL, 1005) such as the Apostolic Fathers (Did. 10:3; 1 Clem. inscr. 2:3; 32:4; 56:6; 60:4; 62:2; Pol. Phil. inscr.; Hermas *Vis.* 3.3.5; Sim. 5.7.4 [var. lect.]; Diogn. 7.2; Mart. Pol. 14.1; 19.2). In Christian magical papyri, the title is most frequently used in connection with other divine titles in invocations (PGM 1.1; 8.1; 9.1; 13a. 1; 21.1, 43–45; 24.1; Kropp, *Koptische Zaubertexte* 2:176, 178, 180; Delatte, *Anecdota Atheniensia*, 15.1, 11, 14; 26.7; 55.13; 409.23; 410.11, 13; 413.25; 477.9–10), where it is frequently applied to Christ. The Greek and Hebrew forms of the title are occasionally juxtaposed as if they represented different titles (Kropp, *Koptische Zaubertexte* 2:181, ‘Pantokrator Sa[baoth],’ and 2:182, ‘Jao Sabaoth Adonai Elohi, Pantokrator’; cf. 2:188).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 57–58.]

the anticipatory nature of this Prologue (vv. 1-8). The foundational images painted with brushes often from the OT prophets captures the essence of the coming Day of the Lord that was central to the messages of Amos and the others from the eighth century on in ancient Israel. These images first put on the table in this beginning section will be repeated and developed all through the document. But most of the images have their roots in the OT and must be interpreted against this backdrop from a Christological perspective in early Christianity.

**Second**, the epistolary *Praescriptio* reminds us of the care and concern of an aged Christian leader for believers that he was writing to in the seven churches of Asia. This literary form, particularly in the expansion elements such as here in the *Salutatio*, affirm a sense of closeness from the sender to the recipients of the document. Some preachers with increased fame and recognition distance themselves from the people God called them to minister to. I know of one Texas Baptist pastor who mostly out of his bloated ego surrounded himself with several body guards so that no one but a small group of select friends and family could get through to him. Nothing could be more opposite than the stance of the apostle John here toward his readers.

**Third**, we need to do a "God check up"! The images of both God and Christ in this text are awe inspiring and push us to bow in humble reverence before such a powerful God. He reigns over the earth from His throne, but yet through His seven-fold Spirit makes His overwhelming Presence felt over all the earth. His Son stands as His main witness affirming that power through His resurrection, and exercising ultimate control over all the kings of the earth. He loves us deeply as affirmed in His sacrificial shedding of His blood for us on the cross. And He is returning to His people in order to bring accountability upon those who have opposed God and His people. Indeed He is the sovereign Almighty over everything and everyone!

**Fourth**, our great spiritual need is that of the Doxology here. We need to fall on our knees in profound confession of this greatness of our God. John through the vehicle of the Doxology calls upon his readers to affirm this nature and character of God. We do not make God to be like this in confession. Rather, we accept and affirm God as being this way in doxological confession of Him.

**Fifth**, we are privileged to stand on the shoulders of the Old Testament prophets, Daniel and Zechariah in particular, to glimpse into a spiritual certainty as sure as the rising of the morning sun! He is coming! To be sure, that coming will spell the doom of those who have opposed and sought to harm Him. But for the people of God who have also suffered at their ungodly hands, this

coming represents justice full and complete. The doom of the wicked is guaranteed by the sovereign Almighty who controls all things. The powerful and the mighty of this world will stand utterly helpless in condemnation before this awesome God. His justice will prevail upon this earth.

Sixth, John has set up us to expect more to come. This Prologue comes as the appetizer letting us know that the heart of the spiritual meal is yet to come. In saturating ourselves with the words of these eight verses we begin catching a glimpse of what remains in the book.

I hope that this excites you as much as it does me! Challenging yes! But interesting yes even more! We can look forward to submerging ourselves in the waters of apocalypticism out of early Christianity and Judaism. They are sometimes a bit choppy but none the less refreshing and exciting.



# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 03

Text: 1:9-11

All rights reserved ©



**QUICK LINKS**

**1. What the text meant.**  
**Historical Aspects:**  
 External History  
 Internal History  
**Literary Aspects:**  
 Genre  
 Literary Setting  
 Literary Structure

**Exegesis of the Text:**  
 A. Where John was physically, v. 9  
 B. Where John was spiritually, vv. 10-11

**2. What the text means.**

**APOCALYPTIC VISION, part one**

Greek NT	Gute Nachricht Bibel	NRSV	NLT
<p>9 Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ. 10 ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος 11 λεγούσης· ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν.</p>	<p>9 Ich, Johannes, euer Bruder, teile mit euch die Bedrängnis und die Hoffnung auf Gottes neue Welt und die Standhaftigkeit, die Jesus uns schenkt. Ich wurde auf die Insel Patmos verbannt, weil ich die Botschaft Gottes verkündet habe, alles, wofür Jesus als Zeuge einsteht. 10 Am Tag des Herrn nahm der Geist Gottes von mir Besitz. Ich hörte hinter mir eine laute Stimme, die wie eine Posaune klang. 11 Sie sagte: »Schreib das, was du siehst, in ein Buch, und schicke es an die sieben Gemeinden in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardes, Philadelphia und Laodizea!«</p>	<p>9 I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."</p>	<p>9 I am John, your brother. In Jesus we are partners in suffering and in the Kingdom and in patient endurance. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and speaking about Jesus. 10 It was the Lord's Day, and I heard a voice behind me, a voice that sounded like a trumpet blast. 11 It said, "Write down what you see, and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."</p>

### INTRODUCTION

This third segment of the larger introduction to the book in chapter one shifts to an apocalyptic vision depicting an image of Christ purely in apocalyptic tones. John has signaled at the outset (1:1) that this document is to be understood as an Ἀποκάλυψις, *apocalypse*. Now he begins using this language in expressing his ideas. This vision is expressed in vv. 9-20 in three parts: vv. 9-11, 12-16, and 17-20. We will take a close look at each of these segments in three successive studies. The first part, vv. 9-11, sets up the vision as to where and when it took place. The second part, vv. 12-16, paints the picture of Christ in apocalyptic terms,

and the third part, vv. 17-20, define John's exemplary reaction to seeing Christ in these apocalyptic contours.

What emerges sequentially here is an initial signal of John's intention for the larger document. The epistolary *Praescriptio* in 1:4-5a injected the element of an ancient letter as being an important part of this document. This will receive substantial expansion in chapters two and three. But the Prophetic Oracle material in vv. 7-8 casts the content of this document in the tones of a "Thus saith the Lord" perspective of the ancient Israelite prophets from the eighth century onward in the Old Testament. The manner of this message coming from God to His people, however, will take on the

tones of the ancient Jewish apocalypse. Mostly likely, this was largely due to the persecution atmosphere of both the composition of the document as well as the situation of his targeted readers. John's move to then present a larger introduction to both the seven letters as well as the remainder of the message from chapter four on to these seven Christian communities is set up in vv. 9-20 in terms of a visionary experience that John had on the island of Patmos.

His insertion of a *Doxology* in vv. 5b-6 comes as his way of underscoring the proper response to this dramatically deeper understanding of God, Christ, and the divine will for God's people. The only way we can respond properly is by reverential awe that affirms complete acknowledgment of God and complete surrender of our lives to this God. We will be privileged to understand the moving of God in human affairs in ways that no non-believer can comprehend. The world in rebellion to this God stands in full ignorance of how God works. But the believing community with its privileged Revelation from this God understands fully what God is up to with the broad strokes of that divine plan being disclosed to His people by God Himself through the apostle John.

Of course, much remains hidden even from the people of God. This divine disclosure paints the movement of God toward finalizing human history with broad strokes, not with intricate, detailed strokes. There remains mystery connected to the disclosure of this plan. We don't know the when and most of the what aspects. But what God does provide is enough understanding for His people to realize that He alone is in charge of this world, and that His intention alone will be realized in the future of this earth. And in that awareness we bow before this great and wonderful God in humble submission of our lives. We entrust ourselves and our eternal destiny into His hands fully confident of His ability to take care of us. The evil rulers of this world may do us great harm and hurt. But even they must give account of themselves to this awesome God and will suffer the same destiny as the Devil and all those following him.

The doxology tone established by this first of seven such expressions scattered through the contents of Revelation periodically remind the reader and hearer of this book to bow in reverential awe in the presence of the Divine in order to affirm our complete surrender to this mighty God.

When did John receive this vision from God? Where was he when it came? The introductory section of vv. 9-20 in the first three verses provides an answer to these questions.

### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Two key time and place markers are present in

this text. John was on the island of Patmos on the Lord's day. These merit detailed consideration under the internal history of the historical aspects. Apart from some rather unusual grammar constructions in these two sentences nothing distinctive surfaces in the literary aspects, apart from these comprising the first two sentences of an apocalyptic vision, which merits special consideration as a literary genre form.

### Historical Aspects:

#### External History.

Regarding sources that John utilized in this first segment of the apocalyptic vision, no direct source can be traced for it, but the literary form and language will reflect significant affinity with a number of OT documents and Jewish apocalypses. More details on this will come under Literary Genre, since this concern provides the better setting for detailed analysis.

In the copying of vv. 9-11, nothing surfaces in regard to variations of wording in these two sentences that the editors of the UBS *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) considered significant enough to impact the translation of the text. Thus no variant readings are listed in their text apparatus.

But this does not mean that no variations in readings are present. The Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) lists ten places where variant readings are found in the text.<sup>1</sup> A careful examination of



#### <sup>1</sup>Offenbarung 1,9

\* κ- 1006. 1841 *M*<sup>K</sup> (συγκοινωνός is replaced with κοινωνός)

\* εν 2053. 2062 (Either ἐν or ἐν τῇ is inserted before βασιλείᾳ)

| εν τη *M*<sup>A</sup>

\* υπ. εν Χριστω A pc (a variety of alternatives eith with or without the preposition ἐν and/or with different combinations of Ἰησοῦ Χριστῶ show up)

| υπ. εν Χρ. Ιησ. (κ<sup>2</sup>) 1006. 1841. 2351 *M*<sup>K</sup> ar h vg<sup>cl</sup>

| υπ. Ι. Χριστου 2329 *M*<sup>A</sup> syh\*\* (sa)

| txt κ\* C P 1611. 2050. 2053vid pc gig vg syph bo

\* δια κ *M* sy (the preposition διὰ is repeated before τῆν μαρτυρίαν)

| txt A C 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053. 2062 pc

\*1 Χριστου κ<sup>2</sup> 1006. 1841. 2351 *M*<sup>K</sup> ar vg<sup>ms</sup> sy<sup>ph,h\*\*</sup> co; Prim (Χριστοῦ is added after Ἰησοῦ)

#### Offenbarung 1,10

\* 3 1 2 4 1006. 1841. 2351 *M*<sup>K</sup> (the word sequence of ὀπίσω μου φωνῆν μεγάλην is shifted)

| 3 4 (1: οπισθεν) 2 A et v.l. al

| txt κ C 1611. 1854. 2329 *M*<sup>A</sup> lat sy

#### Offenbarung 1,11

\* -σαν κ<sup>2</sup> (λεγοῦσης is replaced by λεγούσαν)

\* μοι 1611. 1854 pc h (t) bo; Prim Bea (either μοι or a longer insertion is made after λεγούσης)

each of the variations reveals that the ‘corrections’ were either intended as stylistic updates, or as grammar corrections to wrong case usage. None of the variant readers would change the basic meaning of the text.

Consequently, we can exegete the adopted reading of the Greek text in full confidence that it was the original wording of this passage of scripture.

**Internal History.** *The significant place marker* inside this passage is ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ



Πάτμῳ, on an island called Patmos in v. 9.<sup>2</sup> It was a rather bleak volcanic centered island with few inhabitants. Although mentioned in passing by two Greek and Roman historians (Thucydides, *History* 3:33) and Strabo, *Geography* 10:5), the one moment of fame in its ancient history was the imprisonment of the apostle John on the island at the close of the first Christian century.<sup>3</sup> A

| μοι Ἰωαννῆ 2053. 2062 pc

| ἐγὼ εἶμι το Α και το Ω, ο πρωτος και ο εσχατος, και M<sup>A</sup>

| txt & A C 1006. 1841. 2050. 2329. 2351 M<sup>K</sup> lat sy sa

\* εἰς –ραν A C 046. 1611. 1854. 2050. 2351 pc (εἰς Θυάτειρα is replaced by two alternative readings)

| ἐν –ροις P pc

| txt & M

\* &\* (καὶ εἰς Σάρδεῖς is omitted)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 633.]

<sup>2</sup>“One of the Sporades Islands in the Aegean Sea located off the coast of Asia Minor, 37 miles SW of the city of Miletus and 28 miles S SW of the island of Samos (37°20’N, 26°34’E). The desolate volcanic island is 25 miles in circumference, about 10 miles long N to S and 6 miles wide at its broadest point (the N half). Mt. Elias, the highest point on the island, rises more than 800 feet. On the isthmus at the center of the island a Greek settlement has been excavated.” [Scott T. Carroll, “Patmos (Place)” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 178-79.]

<sup>3</sup>“Roman prisoners and dissidents were often banished to islands, and three islands, in particular, in the Sporades were used for exiles (Pliny HN 4:69–70; Tacitus Ann. 4:30). John was exiled



The Island of Patmos (above ▲)

The Monastery of Saint John (below ▼)



very fanciful legendary text paints an interesting but fictitious account of John’s supposed actions connected to his stay on the island. It is the *Acts of John*, written in the fifth century by an unknown writer.<sup>4</sup> Centuries later

to Patmos, according to early church tradition, in the 14th year (95 C.E.) of the emperor Domitian (Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 3:18–20; see also Irenaeus haer. 5.30.3; Jerome vir. ill. 9).” [Scott T. Carroll, “Patmos (Place)” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 179.]

<sup>4</sup>“The beginning of the book is lost. It probably related in some form a trial, and banishment of John to Patmos. A distinctly late Greek text printed by Bonnet (in two forms) as cc. 1-17 of his work tells how Domitian, on his accession, persecuted the Jews. They accused the Christians in a letter to him: he accordingly persecuted the Christians. He heard of John’s teaching in Ephesus and sent for him: his ascetic habits on the voyage impressed his captors. He was brought before Domitian, and made to drink poison, which did not hurt him: the dregs of it killed a criminal on whom it was tried: and John revived him; he also raised a girl who was slain by an unclean spirit. Domitian, who was much impressed, banished him to Patmos. Nerva recalled him. The second text tells how he escaped shipwreck on leaving Patmos, swimming on a cork; landed at Miletus, where a chapel was built in his honour, and went to Ephesus. All this is late: but an old story, known to Tertullian and to other Latin writers, but to no Greek, said that either Domitian at Rome or the Proconsul at Ephesus cast John into a cauldron of boiling oil which did him no hurt. The scene of this was eventually fixed at the Latin Gate in Rome (hence the St. John Port Latin of our calendar,

in 1088, the *Monastery of Saint John* was constructed at the traditional site of his visions on the island in tribute to the apostle John.<sup>5</sup> Just how long John was exiled to Patmos by the Roman government is not clear. Eusebius (*Church History* 3:18-20) places him going into banishment in 95 AD during the fourteenth year of Domitian.<sup>6</sup> The *Acts of John* asserts that he was released during the reign of Nerva (96 - 98 AD), who was followed by Trajan (98 117 AD). Church tradition claims that, during Trajan's reign, John served as the spiritual leader at Ephesus until his death during this emperor's reign. Just how accurate these traditions are is another

May 6th). We have no detailed account of this, but it is conjectured to have been told in the early part of the Leucian Acts. If so, it is odd that no Greek writer mentions it." ["The Acts of John," *Early Christian Writings* online]

<sup>5</sup>Near the monastery is the *Patmian Theological School* which has been in operation since 1713, and Greek Orthodox seminary students still come here for their training in ministerial duties.

<sup>6</sup>"During the Hellenistic period, Patmos, along with the islands of Lipsos and Leros, were part of the territory of Miletus. The territory of Miletus consisted of the city of Miletus, the surrounding countryside, and the islands (Saffrey, RB 82 [1975] 388-91, with inscriptional evidence). These three islands were also designated as the *φρούρια*, 'fortresses,' of Miletus, since the city was a major maritime power and these islands protected her Aegean side by guarding the entrance to the Latmique Gulf where Miletus was located. Beginning with the second century B.C., Patmos and the other two islands were populated by a garrison of reliable Milesians, called *φρούροι*, whose leader was designated a *φρούραρχος*, or 'commandant,' who functioned as a resident governor for Miletus. Patmos was certainly not a deserted island. In an inscription from Patmos dating to the second century B.C. (SEG 1068.2), a certain Hegemandros was honored by the Association of Torch Runners on Patmos. The inscription mentions the presence of a gymnasium on the island and mentions that Hegemandros was gymnasiarch seven times and that he had funded the erection of a stone statue of Hermes as well as performed other benefits for his fellow citizens and athletes. An inscription from the second century A.D. (G. Kaibel, *Epigrammatica Graeca ex lapidibus collecta* [Berlin: Reimer, 1878] no. 872) honors Bera, a hydrophore, 'priestess,' of Artemis (*ὑδροφόρος* was the Milesian term for such priestesses), and reveals the presence of a cult and temple of Artemis on Patmos, complete with a public feast, a procession, and the recitation of hymns in honor of the goddess (Saffrey, RB 82 [1975] 399-407; cf. Peek, RMP 107 [1964] 315-25). It is also likely that the inhabitants of Patmos had their own tradition of the birth of Artemis on that island (Saffrey, RB 82 [1975] 407-10), which may have influenced the version of the *ApolloLeto* myth used in Rev 12. Miletus, of course, is not one of the seven cities addressed by John, either because he himself was from Miletus and is addressing only other cities, or (more likely) because there was not yet a Christian community at Miletus. In Acts 20:17-38, which narrates Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders at Miletus, there is no hint that a local Christian community existed. A Christian presence there during the first part of the second century, perhaps suggested by 2 Tim 4:20, was certainly in existence by the middle of the second century as reflected in Acts of John 18-19; 37." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 77.]

unsolvable issue.

**One major time marker** in this passage is ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, on the Lord's day. Does this suggest that John's initial vision happened on a Sunday? The adjective κυριακός in the very limited secular use means "imperial" and refers to the emperor. It occurs only twice in the NT: here and in 1 Cor. 11:20 where it means κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, the Lord's supper. This NT usage seems to convey the meaning 'of the Lord' as a qualifying modifier of either ἡμέρᾳ, day, or δεῖπνον, supper. But clearly it is not a synonym of ἡμέρᾳ (τοῦ) κυρίου, the day of the Lord. This phrase is an eschatological term referring to the second coming of Christ in early Christian usage and comes out of the LXX use by the Israelite prophets to refer to the coming doom of God's wrath poured out on first the northern kingdom in 722 BCE with the Assyrian invasion, then the destruction of the southern kingdom in 583 BCE by the Babylonians. During the prophetic activity in the era of the exile, the phrase took on an undefined future reference.

Does the phrase ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ allude to Sunday as the Lord's day? Although very popular, it is almost impossible to prove this meaning for John's use. The earliest unquestionable Christian use of this adjective to refer to Sunday is in the fourth century AD.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere inside the New Testament, namely 1 Cor. 16:2 and Acts 20:7, the first day of the week, μίαν

<sup>7</sup>"The earliest occurrence in the papyri of the term κυριακή (used absolutely) for Sunday is found in a fourth-century document (POxy 3407.15-16; Horsley, New Docs 2:207). This conforms to other expressions such as ἡ Σεβαστή [ἡμέρᾳ], 'the Emperor's day,' and ἡ κρονική [ἡμέρᾳ], 'Cronus' day,' i.e., Saturday, yet it is highly unlikely that the Christian designation κυριακή ἡμέρᾳ was formulated in conscious opposition to the imperial cult as Deissmann contended (Light, 363-66; id., *Bible Studies*, 218-19). The first day of the week has special significance in early Christianity (1 Cor 16:2; Acts 20:7); this day is called the 'eighth day' in Barn. 15:9. The term κυριακή is later used absolutely to refer to Sunday: Did. 14:1; Ign. Magn. 9:1 (κυριακή is contrasted with σαββατίζοντες, apparently contrasting the tendency of some Judaizing Christians to observe the weekly Sabbath, in contrast with Christians who hold a weekly celebration on Sunday); Gos. Pet. 12.50 (ἡ κυριακή replaces μία [τῶν] σαββάτων, 'the first [day] of the week,' found in the Synoptic parallels); Clement Alex. Strom. 17.12. Melito of Sardis, in Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 4.26.2, wrote a treatise entitled Περὶ κυριακῆς, but since only the title survives, the content of the work cannot be known. The expression κυριακή ἡμέρᾳ, 'the Lord's day,' is found in Dionysius of Corinth in Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 4.23.8; Origen *Contra Celsum* 8.22. In Did. 14:1 we find the pleonastic expression κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου συναχθέντες, 'and when you gather on the Lord's (day) of the Lord,' rejected as impossible by Audet (*La Didachè*, 460) and therefore emended by him in agreement with the Georgian version to read καθ' ἡμέραν δὲ κυρίου, 'on the day of the Lord'; he considered κυριακὴν to be a marginal gloss that first interpreted ἡμέραν and later displaced it." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 83-84.]

σαββάτου, gained special importance for Christians because of the resurrection of Christ. But the adjective κυριακός seems to be moving toward specifying Sunday as a special day for Christians in the second century writings of *The Didache* (14:1) and *Ignatius to the Magnesians* (9:1). These documents use κυριακός in contrast to σαββατίζοντες to make the point of proper Christian worship on Sunday rather than Saturday as was being argued by some Jewish Christian groups with Judaizing tendencies.

Much less likely is the view of a few that this phrase refers to Easter Sunday, which evolved into a weekly Lord's day observance.<sup>8</sup> The simplest, and perhaps most likely, understanding is that ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ merely designates a day that John had devoted especially to spend time focusing on the Lord and nothing else. That this day was Sunday has to remain purely a guess that cannot be established.

### Literary Aspects:

As always in biblical interpretation, careful attention needs to be given to the literary qualities of a passage of scripture along side the historical aspects.

**Genre:** Just inside vv. 9-11 no distinctive literary form emerges. But vv. 9-11 are a part of a larger unit in vv. 9-20, which comprises a critically important literary genre called a vision. In this introductory study

<sup>8</sup>“While the meaning of κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ in Rev 1:10 is widely understood to be a new Christian designation for Sunday, some even argue that it refers specifically to Easter Sunday (Strobel, ZNW 49 [1958] 185; Dugmore, “Lord’s Day,” 274–78; Strand, NTS 13 [1966–67] 174–81; arguments against this view are found in Rordorf, Sunday, 209–15, and Bauckham, “Lord’s Day,” 230–31). According to this view, Sunday, the weekly Christian day of worship, developed out of the annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. This is problematic, however, since κυριακῇ never unambiguously means Easter Sunday, and Asia Minor (the region where many crucial texts originated: Rev 1:10; Did. 14:1; Ign. Magn. 9:1; Gos. Pet. 35, 50) was a region in which Easter was celebrated on 14 Nisan from the early second century A.D. on. Though many of the early Christian references to ἡ κυριακῇ (ἡμέρᾳ) could refer either to Sunday or Easter (Did. 14:1; Ign. Magn. 9:1; Gos. Pet. 35, 50), some clearly refer to Sunday (Acts Pet. 29; Acts Paul 7: ‘And Paul cried out to God on the Sabbath as the Lord’s day drew near’ [Schneemelcher, NTA 2:371]). Further, the Gnostic association of the Ogdoad (‘the eighth’) with the Lord’s day assumes the Christian association of κυριακῇ, Sunday, with the ‘eighth’ day (Barn. 15:2; 2 Enoch 33:7; Ep. Apost 18 (Coptic); Clement Excerpta ex Theodoto 63; cf. Bauckham, “Lord’s Day,” 230). A less common view is that κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ in Rev 1:10 refers to the eschatological Day of the Lord, i.e., that John was transported in his vision to the eschaton (Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath, 123–31). Why then did John not use the more common expression ἡμέρᾳ (τοῦ) κυρίου, which occurs frequently in the LXX and the NT?” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, Revelation 1–5, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 84.]

we then need to consider this important literary form that will greatly impact how the entire book of Revelation is understood.

The close connection of 1:9-20 to the seven letters in chapters two and three play an important role in understanding the nature of this text in vv. 9-20. Sometimes the label “prophetic call narrative” is used, but this is highly questionable simply because vv. 9-20 do not contain any of the elements of a divine calling to ministry. The commands ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, *what you see write in a book and send to the seven churches* (v. 11), and γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, *then write what you have seen, and what is, and what is about to happen after these things* (v. 19), do not conform to the divine instructions for ministry given in the callings of most of the Israelite prophets.

What does seem to be the case is that John frames his vision somewhat after the model set up in Ezekiel 2:8-3:7.

2.8 But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. 9 I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. 10 He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

3.1 He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. 3 He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey. 4 He said to me: Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them. 5 For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel— 6 not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. 7 But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. 8 See, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads.

But even here, this text has more in common with Rev. 10:8-11, than with 1:9-20.

What is important to remember is how the prophetic visions were constructed in the OT and Jewish apocalyptic texts. Typically they were anchored around either (1) a visionary dialogue with Yahweh often without a visionary element, or (2) a throne-room vision lacking a dialogical element where the commissioning follows the vision rather than being a part of it.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>“Zimmerli (*Ezekiel* 1:97–100) has distinguished two types of prophetic call narratives in the OT: (1) A visionary dialogue with Yahweh (often lacking a visionary element) in which the prophet’s reluctance is overcome, as in the calls of Moses, Gideon, Saul, and Jeremiah (Exod 3:1–22; 4:1–17; 6:2–12; 7:1–7; Judg 6:15–16; 1



Where was John when this experience took place? In 1:9-20 no clear signal is given regarding where the Son of Man was when He spoke to John. But in 4:1-2 in an allusion back to this voice in 1:9-20, John clearly indicates that the Son of Man was in Heaven when He spoke to John. What John experienced several times as described in Revelation compares to the throne room vision category of the OT prophets, e.g., 1 Kings 22:19-22; Isa. 6:1-8; Ezek. 1:1-3:15; 10:1-22. Whether this compares to Dan. 7:9-13 and 1 Enoch 14:18-22; 46:1-3; 60:1-3, 70-71; 89:52; 90:20-23, 31-33, 37-38 is highly debated, and unlikely.

When a careful literary analysis is made of the contents of vv. 9-20, what emerges is something of a symbolic vision containing the two core elements of the vision (vv. 9-19) and an interpretation of it (v. 20). Something similar surfaces twice more in Rev. 7:1-17 (vision, vv. 1-12; interpretation, vv. 13-17) and in Rev. 17:1-18 (vision, vv. 1-6; interpretation, vv. 7-18). Additionally signals of John's use of language and concepts from Daniel 7:9-14; 10:2-9; and 10:15-17 are present suggesting the borrowing to concepts from this OT model. Even closer are allusions to the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* (6:11-13).<sup>10</sup> What is also interesting is the

Sam 9:21; Jer 1:4-10). (2) A throne-room vision (lacking the dialogical element) in which prophetic commission is given following a vision of the throne of Yahweh, as in the visions of Micaiah ben Imlah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel (1 Kgs 22:19-22 [though Micaiah himself is not called]; Isa 6:1-8; Ezek 1:1-3:15; 10:1-22). Black ("Throne-Theophany," 67-69) suggests that the same type of theophanic prophetic call is found in Dan 7:9-13 (which is dependent on Ezek 1; cf. A. Feuillet, RB 60 [1953] 170-202, 321-46) and in 1 Enoch 14:18-22; 46:1-3; 60:1-3; 70-71; 89:52; 90:20-23, 31-33, 37-38. Yet these texts exhibit much more variety than Black suggests: (1) While Dan 7:9-13 is certainly a throne theophany, it lacks a prophetic commission and hardly fits Zimmerli's typology. (2) 1 Enoch 14:18-22 represents the culmination of a heavenly journey. (3) Enoch's celestial journey, his vision of God upon his throne, and the divine commission are found in 14:8-16:3; 70:1-71:17. (4) 1 Enoch 46:1-8; 60:1-6 are indeed throne visions, but they lack the element of prophetic commission. (5) 1 Enoch 90:20-39 is a throne vision, though the throne is upon earth, and the entire scene is one that focuses on eschatological judgment." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 70-71.]

<sup>10</sup>**Apoc. Zech. 6:11-15.** 11 Then I arose and stood, and I saw a great angel standing before me with his face shining like the rays of the sun in its glory since his face is like that which is perfected in its glory. 12 And he was girded as if a golden girdle were upon his breast. His feet were like bronze which is melted in a fire. 13 And when I saw him, I rejoiced, for I thought that the Lord Almighty had come to visit me. 14 I fell upon my face, and I worshiped him. 15 He said to me, "Take heed. Worship me not. I am not the Lord Almighty, but am the great angel, Eremiel, who is over the abyss and Hades, the one in which all of the souls are imprisoned from the end of the Flood, which came upon the earth, until this day." 6:16-17 provide the interpretation of the vision.

Also containing similarities to Rev. 1:9-12 is the angelic vi-

occurrence of somewhat similar visions in the pagan literature of that time.<sup>11</sup> What can be concluded from these comparisons is that John utilizes literary forms and concepts that were in existence in his day from a variety of sources, although clearly his dominant influence is the Jewish tradition. Although debated among modern scholars as to who is more dominant, John seems to be heavily depending on both Daniel and Ezekiel as models for setting up and depicting his visionary encounter with Christ that 'Lord's day.' In this he is following the established trend of the Jewish apocalyptic writers who did much the same thing.

**Literary Setting:** Our passage of 1:9-11 most importantly stands as a part of the larger apocalyptic vision of 1:9-20. In this first layer of context, it serves to set up the vision which is then described mainly in vv. 12-16 and is followed by a depiction of his reaction to the vision (vv. 17-20). This apocalyptic vision then serves as an introduction to the seven letters in chapters two and three, in that it provides a theological tone and perspective to these letters.

Further 1:9-20 come as the last segment of the introductory material in chapter one. In the Prologue of 1:1-8 John has alerted his readers that this document is fundamentally an Ἀποκάλυψις, *apocalypse* (1:1). In vv. 1-3 the parameters of this apocalypse are set forth in terms of it coming from Jesus Christ. It stands as the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Also it stems from its core nature as a prophecy in the tradition of the ancient Israelite prophets. John then positions the document squarely in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, but reflecting a distinctly Christian understanding of the will of God.

Surprisingly John inserts an epistolary *Praescip-tio* in 1:4-5a in standard Pauline fashion. This signals the personal and clearly defined recipients of the document as the seven churches in the Roman province

in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (11:2-3). Somewhat similar is *Joseph and Asenath* 5:5 and 14:9.

<sup>11</sup>"In the so-called Mithras Liturgy (PGM IV. 475-834), an appearance of Mithras, who comes to the magical practitioner, is described (PGM IV.634-37, 692-704; tr. Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 50-52):

When you have seen this, the rays will turn toward you; look at the center of them. For when you have done this, you will see a youthful god, beautiful in appearance, with fiery hair, and in a white tunic and a scarlet cloak, and wearing a fiery crown.... Now when they [seven additional gods] take their place, here and there, in order, look in the air and you will see lightning bolts going down, and lights flashing, and the earth shaking, and a god descending, a god immensely great, having a bright appearance, youthful, golden-haired, with a white tunic and a golden crown and heaven around, moving upward and downward in accordance with the hour. Then you will see lightning bolts leaping from his eyes and stars from his body.

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 73.]

of Asia. This epistolary marker at the beginning is matched by the epistolary *Conclusio* with apocalyptic tones in 22:8-21. The interpretive importance of this is to signal clearly that John's targeted audience for the entire book, not just the first three chapters, is the members of the churches in the seven cities of Asia.<sup>12</sup>

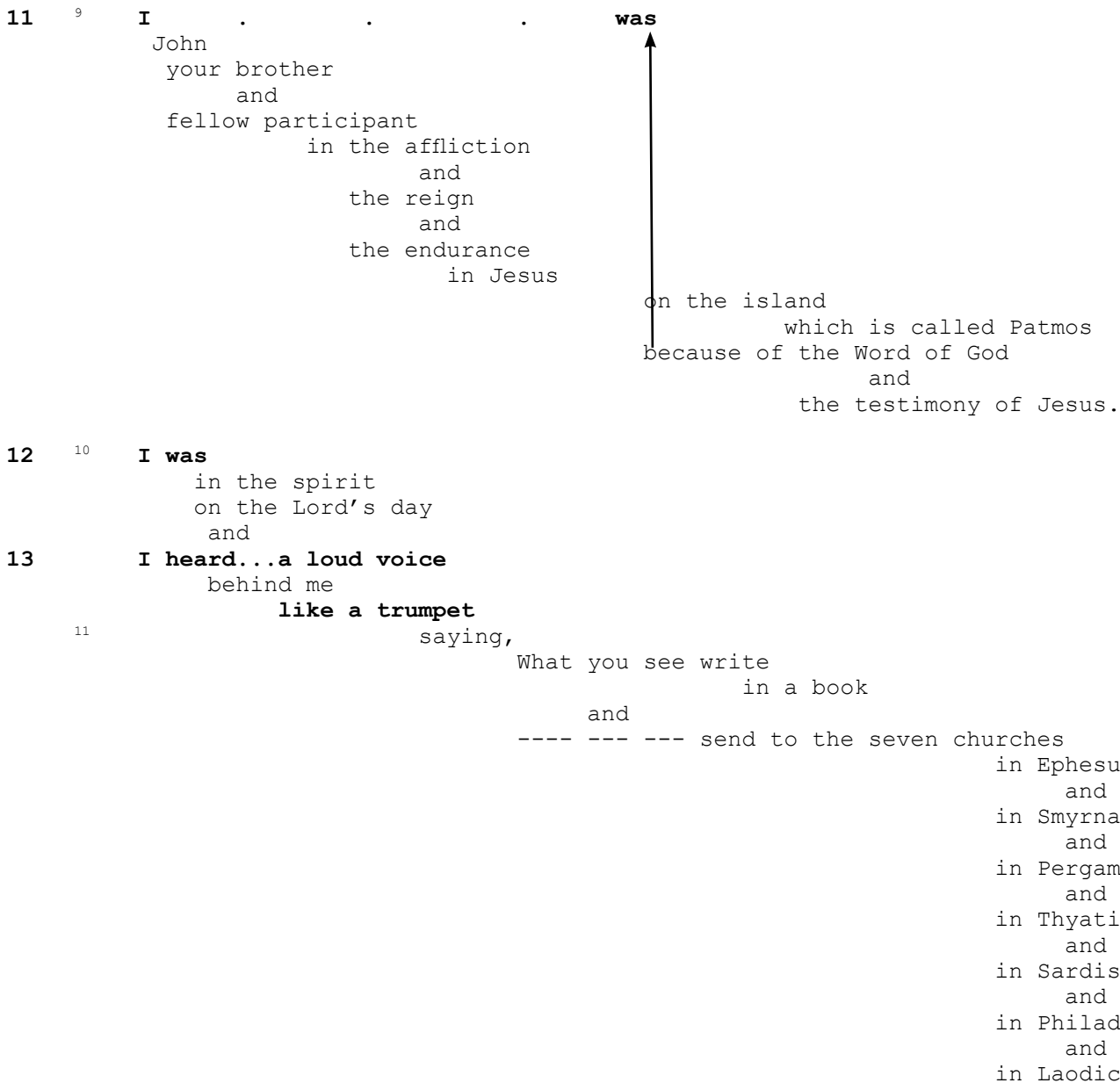
The *Doxology* in 1:5b-6 places in the midst of these introductory markers of the nature of the book a tone of

<sup>12</sup>“The letter format shows that Revelation is to be read contextually. Its visionary contents speak to the congregations identified in its opening salutation. Some interpreters limit Revelation's epistolary aspect to the first three chapters, which deal specifically with the churches in Asia Minor, but this can lead to a non-contextual reading of the rest of the book. Epistolary elements frame Revelation, so that the entire work can be read as a message to the seven churches. This means that interpreters should take the context of Revelation seriously, as they do when interpreting other NT letters.” [Craig R. Koester, “Revelation, Book of,” *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* online]

celebratory reverence and submission to the One who is the source of this spiritual insight. The concluding pair of Prophetic Oracles in 1:7-8 serve to remind us of the OT prophetic insight that serves as the starting point for this Christian interpretation of God's intention for all of humanity, not just His covenant people Israel.

Although sharing commonalities with the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, John's presentation is distinctly Christian in both its theological perspective as well as its utilization of patterns additionally found in early Christian writings. With creative brilliance, he has painted for us a kaleidoscopic portrait of God that signals how the rest of the document will unfold.

**Literary Structure:** The internal arrangement of ideas in the two Greek sentences that make up vv. 9-11 can be best seen in a block diagram. What follows below is a literalistic English translation based on the diagramming of the original Greek text.



### **Analysis of the Internal Structure:**

Statement 11 in verse nine introduces the vision of vv. 9-20 by locating John on the island of Patmos when the vision took place. In the qualifiers of the verb subject John goes to great pains to identify himself with his targeted readers especially at their shared experience of persecution. He lays out the reason for being there on Patmos as because of his preaching of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Statements 12 and 13 in vv. 10-11 position John spiritually for this visionary experience. He was 'in the spirit on the Lord's day' when the Lord unexpectedly came up behind him and spoke in a booming voice with the command to start writing. This divine instruction begins the vision of the Lord that will be described in vv. 12-16.

### **Exegesis of the Text:**

Quite clearly from the structural analysis above the passage divides itself naturally into two segments. The exegetical outline below attempts to capture the essence of these two points.

#### **A. Where John was physically, v. 9**

9 Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

9 I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

The absolute core part of this sentence is Ἐγὼ... ἐγενόμην, which is usually translated into English as "I was." But this English expression is actually closer to the Greek ἐγὼ ἦν than to ἐγὼ ἐγενόμην. The use of the Aorist form of the verb γίνομαι here sets up a special circumstance beyond just defining that one is in some particular situation. The sense seems more to be along the lines of "I came to be."

Two situations are affirmed to have taken place for John: 1) ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ and 2) διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

**First**, John asserts that he was on the island called Patmos. For a detailed discussion of Patmos see the treatment above under **Internal History**. One implication from this verb structure with this place marker modifier of the verb is whether John implies that as he now writes the book that he has moved on from Patmos and is somewhere else. The past time action of the Aorist verb is taken by a few to imply that John is no longer on Patmos at the time of the writing of the book. But to read this implication into the tense form of

the verb is unjustified in light of John's use of the Aorist tense throughout the book of Revelation over against the imperfect tense form, as well as the implications of the Aorist form of γίνομαι (here ἐγενόμην) over against the imperfect tense form (ἐγινόμην).<sup>13</sup> Writing over a couple of centuries later, the church historian Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3:20.8-9) suggests that John was released from banishment to Patmos with the death of Domitian in 96 AD. If this is accurate, then John would have spent only a couple of years in imprisonment on Patmos in the mid-90s.<sup>14</sup> But the solid early church tradition is that Revelation was composed during that time and not afterwards.

**Second**, the reason John was on Patmos is given as διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ, *because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus*. The causal prepositional phrase clearly defines why John was on the island, but leaves open further implications as to why. Did he travel there voluntarily in order to evangelize the inhabitants on the island? Was he there involuntarily due to official Roman action of banishment? Some background on the Roman legal system is necessary to clearly understand why John was on Patmos.<sup>15</sup> What seems to be clear is that the

<sup>13</sup>The aorist and imperfect are primarily used in narrative contexts (the aorist in past contexts as a background narrative tense, while the imperfect is used in past contexts as the foreground narrative tense; cf. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 151), and the author of Revelation exhibits a marked preference for the use of aorist (451 times) rather than the imperfect (20 times)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 77.]

<sup>14</sup>The church father Victorinus of Petau (death in appx. 304 AD) in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (10:3) indicates that John was condemned to work in the mines on Patmos and was able to write Revelation during that time.

<sup>15</sup>Roman legal practice exhibited a dual penalty system (described at length by Garnsey, *Social Status*, 103-80), in that the *dignitas*, 'status,' of the defendant was more important than the crime committed. Members of the upper-class orders (*honestiores*) were usually given more lenient punishments in the courts than were those from the lower orders (*humiliores*). In cases where *humiliores* were given the death penalty, *honestiores* were punished with banishment (A. Berger, *Roman Law*, 633). First of all, the term *exilium* or *exsul*, 'exile,' could refer to voluntary or involuntary departures from a region or country. Voluntary exile was permitted those of higher status who had been condemned to death, but they were usually subsequently deprived of both citizenship and property. There were two primary forms of compulsory expulsion, *relegatio*, 'banishment,' and *deportatio*, perpetual 'deportation,' the former more lenient than the latter. *Relegatio* might be temporary (cf. the three-year term mentioned in Pliny *Ep.* 10.56) or permanent. Further, it could be *relegatio ad* or *in*, 'banishment to,' a place or *relegatio ab* or *extra*, 'banishment from,' a place. (1) Suetonius (*Titus* 8.5) speaks of banishment in *asperimas insularum*, 'to the harshest of islands.' Juvenal alludes to banishment to the island of Gyara in the Aegean sea (*Satires* 1.73). The Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus was confined to this barren island and

apostle John suffered some kind of official Roman banishment that resulted in him ending up on Patmos. It does seem to have been a *relegatio in* type, that is, a banishment to category. At least this is how the church father Jerome depicts it with his “*in Patmos insulam relegatus*.” But at what level of banishment we are uncertain. A *relegatio* could imply the death penalty having been given but because John fell into the *honestiores* category of upper middle class individuals he was given the option of compulsory banishment to Patmos instead of being executed. But if he received a *deportatio* sentence, he could have been sent to Patmos with the loss of all property and any citizenship privileges he may have had. The banishment could have been temporary or permanent -- Roman law provided for both. The *relegatio in insulam* did not normally include loss of property or citizenship rights. Interestingly if he had received a *relegatio ab* type sentence, it meant he was merely banished from what was considered his home at that point in time. The Roman governor could impose this sentence but the others required the approval of the emperor. The Latin church father Tertullian in the late 170s (*De praescrip.* 36) interpreted John’s situation simply in terms of relegation to an island using the Latin expression “*Ioannes... in insulam relgatur*.” The Greco-Roman literature suggests that the *relegatio in/ad insulam* sentence was widely used by Roman governors during this period of time. This gave the individual some personal freedom to receive friends, earn a living etc.

Thus behind the stated cause of being there for having preached the Gospel, John had some liberties which enabled the composition of the book of Revelation. But at the surface level John’s stated reason for being on Patmos was persecution of him for his Christian ministry. The prepositional construction *διὰ* plus the accusative case object can suggest either cause or purpose. But John’s later use (6:9; 20:4) of this construction clearly identifies it as cause, and not purpose. This is consistent with the uniform view of the church worked on a forced labor battalion building Nero’s canal through the isthmus of Corinth. (On *relegatio ad* or *in*, see K. von Fritz, RE 16 [1933] 893–94.) In referring to John’s exile to Patmos, Jerome uses the phrase in *Patmos insulam relegatus*, ‘banished to the island of Patmos.’ (2) On *relegatio ab* or *relegatio extra*, ‘banishment from,’ a person’s home territory, see Digest 47.14.3.3; 48.22.7.10–22. In *De exilo* 604B, Plutarch addresses an exile from Sardis. Dio Chrysostom was exiled from his native Italy by Domitian and was recalled after Domitian’s death, but was free to travel wherever he wanted (Dio Chrysostom Or 13; C. P. Jones, Dio Chrysostom, 45–55). Exile was a subject frequently treated in the writings of such Greek and Roman philosophers as Teles, Musonius, Plutarch, Favorinus, and Seneca. For a list of known places of exile, see Balsdon, *Romans*, 113–15.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 78–79.]

fathers of John being banished by the governmental authorities to Patmos. The parallel expressions of τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (7x) and τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (5x) are common in the book. Especially in combination they designate the Gospel message preached by the apostles in the early church.

The verb subject Ἐγὼ at the beginning of the sentence receives extensive expansion in two ways: personal name and ministry id with his readers. John again inserts his personal name for identification purposes: Ἰωάννης. This is the third time thus far that his name has been mentioned (vv. 1, 4, 9) and each time at the beginning of a distinctive genre unit used generally for introducing documents. The name will not appear again until the beginning of the *Conclusio* section in 22:8, where it is again appropriately inserted.

What moves toward being an epistolary title in a letter *Superscriptio* follows: ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, *your brother and fellow participant in the affliction and kingdom and endurance in Jesus*. This pattern stands in line with Ezekiel’s introductory vision.<sup>16</sup> Also somewhat similar is the introduction to Daniel’s visionary experience in chapter ten.<sup>17</sup>

No claim of authority is present here by John with inserting an official title, but instead there is an affirmation of shared spiritual experience that binds John to his readers. He speaks of being ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν, *your brother*. Whether or not John had visited the seven cities named in verse eleven is unknown. But they surely knew of him and revered him as the aged apostolic leader who lived in the region. Now he was a prisoner of the empire on Patmos, but was reaching out to them through this personal document of Christian hope.

The second id tag is συκοινωνὸς, *fellow participant*. In the ancient business world this term normally meant a business partner. Paul uses the term three times in order to identify with the readers of his letters. The Romans share the Gospel with him (Rom. 11:17) along with the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:23). The Philippians share God’s grace with him (Phil. 1:7). What John’s readers in Asia shared with him is spelled out in an interesting and more complex expression attached to the noun.

<sup>16</sup>**Eze 1:1** In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. 2 On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), 3 the word of the LORD came to *the priest Ezekiel* son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was on him there.

<sup>17</sup>**Daniel 10:1.** In the third year of King Cyrus of Persia a word was revealed to *Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar*. The word was true, and it concerned a great conflict. He understood the word, having received understanding in the vision.

One should note something in the Greek that is almost impossible to translate clearly. The single Greek article τῆ at the beginning links the three experiences together at a common experience. Thus θλίψει, βασιλεία, and ὑπομονή are seen as one experience. And very interestingly all of these take place ἐν Ἰησοῦ, [in Jesus](#). This is, these common experiences take place in spiritual union with Jesus.

These common experiences include θλίψει, [affliction](#). Inside the NT, θλίψις defines an outward experience of extreme trouble normally produced by persecution that causes severe stress and tension. At the heart of the root stem is the idea of imposing high level pressure that causes severe pain.<sup>18</sup> But such intense

<sup>18</sup>“In our lit. (as in LXX, En, Test12Patr, JosAs cod. A; Just., D. 116, 2; Mel.) freq. and in the metaph. sense **trouble that inflicts distress, oppression, affliction, tribulation** (so Vett. Val. 71, 16; Cat. Cod. Astr. VIII/3 p. 175, 5; 178, 8; pl. 169, 2 [s. Boll 134f]; OGI 444, 15 [II or I B.C.] διὰ τὰς τ. πόλεων θλίψεις; BGU 1139, 4 [I B.C.]; POxy 939, 13; PAmh 144, 18). Of distress that is brought about by outward circumstances (Jos., Ant. 4, 108; En, PsSol, Mel.; Did., Gen. 116, 10), in sg. and pl. **Ac 11:19; Ro 5:3b; 12:12; 2 Cor 1:8; 6:4; 8:2; Rv 1:9; 2:9, 22; 1 Cl 22:7 (Ps 33:18); 59:4; 2 Cl 11:4 (quot. of unknown orig.); Hs 7:4ff. ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θ. ἡμῶν 2 Cor 1:4a; 7:4; 1 Th 3:7; ἐν πάσῃ θ. (TestGad 4:4) 2 Cor 1:4b; ἐν (τ.) θ. Ro 5:3a; Eph 3:13; 1 Th 1:6; 3:3. ἐν πολλαῖς θ. καὶ ποικίλαις Hs 7, 4. θ. μεγάλη great tribulation (SibOr 3, 186) Mt 24:21 (1 Macc 9:27); Ac 7:11; Hv 4, 2, 4. Plural Hv 3, 2, 1. ἡ θ. ἡ μεγάλη the great tribulation Rv 7:14; τὸ ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θ. slight affliction 2 Cor 4:17. ἀνταποδοῦναι τινι θλίψιν repay someone w. affliction 2 Th 1:6. W. ἀνάγκη (q.v. 2) 1 Th 3:7. W. διωγμός Mt 13:21; Mk 4:17; Ac 8:1 D; 13:50 D; pl. 2 Th 1:4. W. δεσμά (TestJos 2:4) Ac 20:23. W. ὀνειδισμός Hb 10:33. W. στενοχωρία (q.v.) Ro 2:9. W. στενοχωρία and διωγμός 8:35 (w. λιμός and στενοχωρία Hippol., Ref. 5, 26, 12).—On the catalogue of hardships (peristasis) cp. 1 Cor 4:9–13; 2 Cor 4:8f; 6:4–10; 11:23–28; 12:10; Phil 4:11; s. FDanker, Augsburg Comm. 2 Cor ’89, 89–91; 180f; idem, The Endangered Benefactor in Luke-Acts: SBLSP ’81, 39–48; JFitzgerald, Cracks in an Earthen Vessel ’88; MFerrari, Die Sprache des Leids in den paulinischen Persistenzen-katalogen ’91; MEbner, Leidenslisten u. Apostelbrief ’91.—ἡμέρα θλίψεως day of affliction (Gen 35:3; 2 Km 22:19; cp. En 103:9; TestLevi 5:5) 1 Cl 52:3 (Ps 49:15).—Of the tribulations of the last days (as Da 12:1) Mt 24:21, 29; Mk 13:19, 24. ἡ θ. ἡ ἐρχομένη ἡ μεγάλη the great tribulation to come Hv 2, 2, 7; cp. 2, 3, 4; 4, 1, 1; 4, 2, 5; 4, 3, 6.—Distress caused by war 1 Cl 57:4 (Pr 1:27). θ. θανάτου affliction of death B 12:5. Difficult circumstances 2 Cor 8:13; Js 1:27; συγκοινωνεῖν τῇ θ. show an interest in (someone’s) distress Phil 4:14. Of a woman’s birth-pangs J 16:21.—ὅταν γένηται θ. when persecution comes Hv 3, 6, 5. θλίψιν ἀκούειν hear of persecution Hs 9, 21, 3. θλίψιν ἔχειν J 16:33; 1 Cor 7:28; Rv 2:10; Hv 2, 3, 1; Hs 7:3. εἰς ὑπενέγκη τὰς θλίψεις τὰς ἐπερχομένας αὐτῷ Hs 7:4; cp. 7:6. ἐξέϊλατο αὐτὸν ἐκ πασῶν τῶν θλίψεων αὐτοῦ Ac 7:10. διὰ πολλῶν θ. εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τ. βασιλείαν 14:22. τότε παραδώσουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς θλίψιν Mt 24:9; cp. B 12:5. ἀποστήσεται πᾶσα θ. ἀπὸ σοῦ ... ἀπὸ πάντων ἀποστήσεται ἡ θ. Hs 7, 7.—Of the sufferings of Christ θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ Col 1:24 (s. on ἀνταναπληρῶ and πάθημα 1).**

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer,

suffering is linked to βασιλεία, [the Kingdom](#). That is, the reign of God over our lives and the experiencing of suffering for our faith go together. God’s controlling our lives in no way frees us from suffering pain and discomfort. The reality is actually the opposite, contrary to the heretical preaching of some modern western TV preachers. Both John and his Asian readers knew this well out of their own personal experience. John was on Patmos because of his Christian commitment. The believers in the seven churches in Asia knew well what it meant to live with a government hostile to one’s religious faith.

The third common element in this experience is ὑπομονή, [endurance](#). Pain from persecution because of God’s leadership could push one into a depression of resigned acceptance as one’s fate. But ὑπομονή is in no way defining passive acceptance of a bad situation. The inherent emphasis of the word is an aggressive meeting of the situation with unwavering commitment to remain true to one’s values no matter what. Thus ὑπομονή is usually translated by endurance, fortitude, steadfastness or perseverance more so than by the English word patience which often connotes a passive acceptance.<sup>19</sup>

The foundational spiritual setting for this common experience is ἐν Ἰησοῦ, [in Jesus](#). Thus it is in the common commitment to Jesus in which His values have become our values that we go through such persecution.<sup>20</sup> This John shared with his Asian readers.

Thus in the further introduction, now with apocalyptic tones, John affirms deep identity with his initial readers. It is such a shared experience of enduring persecution together that has made the book of Revelation a favorite NT document to persecuted Christians down through the centuries. When the world around viciously turns on believers, the witness of those who have already gone through such times takes on new meaning and significance.

## B. Where John was spiritually, vv. 10-11

10 ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην

*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 457.]

<sup>19</sup>William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1039.

<sup>20</sup>“The phrase in Jesus means ‘as a follower of Jesus,’ ‘as a believer in Jesus,’ or even ‘as a Christian.’ Another way of expressing this phrase is ‘who as a fellow believer in Jesus share ...’” [Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 25.]

ὡς σάλπιγγος 11 λεγούσης· ὃ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδικεῖαν.

10 I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

The identical core expression in the **first main clause** of the second sentence, ἐγένομην, I came to be, links it back to the first sentence as the exact same experience, but now viewed from a different angle as defined by the qualifying references to this verb.

Again two modifiers are attached to the verb: ἐν πνεύματι and ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ.

**The first modifier**, ἐν πνεύματι, occurs also in 4:2; 17:3, and 21:10.<sup>21</sup> Thus John will be ἐν πνεύματι on several occasions in the narration of the book. What is he talking about? Is he in a trance? In the Spirit? Or what?<sup>22</sup> If πνεῦμα is taken to refer to the human spirit, which it clearly can mean, then the idea of this preposition phrase is connected to being in a religious trance. The absence of the article with the noun in ἐν πνεύματι would point this direction. That is, John's inner consciousness was overwhelmed by God so that he experienced something 'out of body.' On the other hand, πνεῦμα often means the Spirit of God and in this

<sup>21</sup>Rev. 4:2. At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!

Εὐθέως ἐγένομην ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος,

Rev. 17:3. So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι. Καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθήμενη ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

Rev. 21:10. And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με ἐν πνεύματι ἐπὶ ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἰερουσαλήμ καταβαίνουσαν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ

<sup>22</sup>The problem in this passage is whether ἐν πνεύματι (1) indicates an ecstatic state (and is thus analogous to phrases such as ἐν ἔκστασει, 'in a trance,' Acts 11:5; 22:17, or ἐγένετο ἐπ' αὐτὸ ἔκστασις, 'he fell into a trance,' Acts 10:10; cf. Bousset [1906] 192; Müller, Prophetie und Predigt, 49; Sharpe, "Reflections," 119–31), (2) refers to an actual experience of divine inspiration in general apart from ecstatic behavior (Hill, New Testament Prophecy, 73; Jeske, NTS 31 [1985] 452–64), or (3) is strictly a literary appropriation of conventional apocalyptic language used to authenticate fabricated vision reports." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 82.]

perspective John was 'caught up' by God's Spirit to be able to experience this revelatory vision from God. The absence of the article in this case would be understood as stressing the qualitative nature of his experience with the Spirit of God.

Insight from the remainder of the Bible comes mainly from Micah 3:8 in which the LXX renders the Hebrew as ἐν πνεύματι κυρίου, in the Spirit of the Lord. This text provides affirmation of the prophetic authority behind Micah's preaching as coming from the Lord. The difficulty, however, is that the two contexts signal different case functions. In Micah, πνεύματι is clearly an agency expression in the instrumental case or the instrumental dative (depending on whether a five or eight case system is understood). The use of πνεύματι with the verb ἐγένομην argues strongly for a place or location idea (either locative of sphere or locational dative). Only in Rev. 17:3 and 21:10 with the use of the verb ἀπήνεγκέν με, he carried me, is an agency idea possible in Revelation. Paul's use of ἐν πνεύματι, in the Spirit, (Rom. 8:9; 14:17; Eph. 2:18, 22; 3:3–5; 4:3; 5:18; 6:18; Col. 1:8) is locational in terms of being in spiritual union with Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it moves a very different direction than does John's usage.

If by ἐν πνεύματι John intends his readers to understand being in a trance, his language is clearly different than what is found elsewhere in the New Testament clearly describing such an experience: cf. Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17 where the label ἔκστασις, trance, is used.

Yet, by this phrase John does seem to indicate his experiencing a visionary revelation from God in line with what is commonly claimed by the Old Testament prophets.<sup>23</sup> To be sure, he does not mention the standard preparatory rituals of prayer and fasting leading to such an experience, but such may be implied in the very next statement of also being ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, on the Lord's day. The subsequent three instances of ἐν πνεύματι clearly point this direction.<sup>24</sup> One side note

<sup>23</sup>By using the phrase ἐν πνεύματι, John claims to have experienced a vision trance, for nowhere in Revelation does he claim to speak through divine inspiration. The fact that John does not mention ritual preparations for a revelatory experience (e.g., prayer [cf. Dan 9:3; 10:2–3; 4 Ezra 3:1–36; Hermas Vis. 2.1.1] or fasting [cf. 4 Ezra 5:20–30; 6:31–59; 9:23–37; 13:50–51; Hermas Vis. 2.2.1; 3.1.1–2]) or the behavioral modifications that may have accompanied such experiences does not mean that they did not occur." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 82–83.]

<sup>24</sup>The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, 'in the spirit,' occurs four times in Revelation (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Three of these involve responses to an invitation by an angelic being to come (1) to the heavenly world (4:1: ἀνάβα ὦδε, καὶ δεῖξω σοι, 'Come up here and I will show you ...'), (2) to the wilderness (17:1: δεῦρο, δεῖξω σοι, 'Come, I will show you ...'), and (3) to a high mountain (21:9: δεῦρο, δεῖξω σοι, 'Come, I will show you ...'). The term πνεῦμα, 'spirit,' in these passages is commonly taken to refer to the Spirit of

that is important. Given that John is talking about an unusual elevation of his senses to the presence of God through His Spirit, not much distinction between πνεῦμα as human spirit and divine Spirit really exists in this situation. His ‘out of the body’ experience was in reality being completely in the presence of the Spirit of God.

**The second modifier**, ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, is even more challenging to understand than the first. It has been typically translated as “on the Lord’s day” as though it referred to Sunday. But this is highly questionable and has little basis. In part, it appears to be a frequent translation error. The English expression “The Lord’s day” literally means (1) “the day belonging to the Lord” which then by tradition comes to mean (2) Sunday as that special day. The Greek adjective κυριακός, -ή, -όν literally does mean “belonging to the lord or emperor,” which is very similar to meaning (1) of the English phrase.<sup>25</sup> But the English phrase most often is understood in terms of meaning (2), and no evidence exists during the first century to indicate that Christians ascribed such special significance to Sunday. For Jewish Christians of the first century the Jewish sabbath unquestionably remained the holy day with religious meaning. This in large part because across the Roman empire no single day of the week had religious meaning. The work-week was seven days from sunup to God and so is capitalized in modern English translations (AV [1:10 only]; RSV; NEB; NIV), and is so understood by many commentators (Beckwith, 435; Beasley-Murray, 112; Sweet, 114; Mounce, 133; Lohse, 19, 37; Lohmeyer, 44–45). Yet in all four occurrences of the phrase ἐν πνεύματι, ‘in [the] spirit,’ the noun is anarthrous, though that reveals little, since the article can be omitted optionally from nouns following a preposition. Of the seven uses of the term πνεῦμα in the singular in Revelation, ten use the articular form τὸ πνεῦμα, and all but 19:10 (see Comment) clearly refer to the Spirit of God (2:8, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17). Strangely, the phrase ἐν τῷ πνεύματι in the sense of ‘inspired by the Spirit’ occurs just once in the NT, in Luke 2:27, of Simeon (the phrase is twice used in the instrumental sense of ‘by the Spirit’ in Luke 4:1; Acts 19:21; cf. Barn. 11:11). The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, however, does occur several times in very different senses in the NT (Luke 1:17; John 4:23, 24; Acts 1:5; Rom 2:29; 8:9; 1 Cor 14:6; Eph 2:22; 3:5; 5:18; 6:18; Col 1:8; 1 Tim 3:16), often in an instrumental sense (Matt 22:43; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor 14:16). There is, then, no reason for understanding any of these four passages as references to the Spirit of God. The phrase ἐν πνεύματι is an idiom that refers to the fact that John’s revelatory experiences took place not ‘in the body’ but rather ‘in the spirit,’ i.e., in a vision trance (Charles, 1:22; Swete, 13; Kraft, 95). In 1 Cor 14:15, Paul contrasts two states in which Christians can pray, τῷ πνεύματι, ‘with/in the spirit,’ and τῷ νοῖ, ‘with/in the mind.’ Caird (59) correctly and idiomatically translates ἐγένομην ἐν πνεύματι with the phrase ‘I fell into a trance.’ [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 83.]

<sup>25</sup>This meaning is clearly seen in the one other use of κυριακός, ἡ, ὄν inside the New Testament. First Corinthians 11:20 has the expression κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, which clearly means “the Lord’s supper” in the context of this use.

sundown. Their only breaks came with the periodic few days of holiday when one of the Roman religions celebrated some kind of festival. Only the Jews celebrated weekly a day as a special religious oriented day. And this was the Jewish sabbath from sundown Friday evening to sundown Saturday evening.

For Gentile Christians the gathering together in the house church groups typically was virtually a daily experience, along with the Jewish Christians. That the day following the Jewish sabbath had special meaning is seen in the phrase μία σαββάτου / τῶν σαββάτων, *first day of the week*, (literally, *first day after the sabbath*), used in 1 Cor. 16:2 and Acts 20:7.<sup>26</sup> But neither of these texts even hint that gathering together as Christians on Sunday was normative, or distinct from the more common daily meetings.

In the second century, the *Epistle of Barnabas* (15:9) labels the first day of the week as “the eighth day” (τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ὀγδόην), as a meeting day for Christians toward the middle of the second century.<sup>27</sup> This

<sup>26</sup>1 Cor. 16:2. *On the first day of every week*, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come.

*κατὰ μίαν σαββάτου* ἕκαστος ὑμῶν παρ’ ἑαυτῷ τιθέτω θησαυρίζων ὅ τι ἐὰν εὐδοῶται, ἵνα μὴ ὅταν ἔλθω τότε λογεῖται γίνωνται.

Acts 20:7. *On the first day of the week*, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.

Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων συνηγμένων ἡμῶν κλάσαι ἄρτον, ὁ Παῦλος διελέγετο αὐτοῖς μέλλων ἐξίναμι τῇ ἐπαύριον, παρέτεινεν τε τὸν λόγον μέχρι μεσονυκτίου.

<sup>27</sup>*Epistle of Barnabas 15:3-9*. 3 He speaks of the Sabbath at the beginning of the creation: “And God made in six days the works of his hands and he finished on the seventh day and he rested on it and made it holy.” 4 Pay attention, children, what is meant by “he finished in six days.” It means this, that in six thousand years, the Lord will finish everything. For a day with him signifies a thousand years. And he himself testifies to me, saying, “Behold, the day of the Lord shall be as a thousand years.” So then, children, in six days (in six thousand years) the whole shall be completed. 5 “And he rested on the seventh day.” This means upon coming his Son will abolish the time of the lawless one and will judge the ungodly and will change the sun and the moon and the stars. Then he will truly rest on the seventh day. 6 Finally, indeed, surely he says, “You will sanctify it with clean hands and with a pure heart.” Therefore, if what God sanctifies that day now anyone can sanctify by being pure in heart, we have been completely deceived. 7 See that as a result, then, rightly resting, we will keep it holy when we ourselves are able, having been made righteous and having received the promise, when lawlessness exists no longer, but all things have been made new by the Lord, then we will be able to keep the Sabbath holy, ourselves having first been made holy. 8 Finally, indeed, surely he says to them: “Your new moons and sabbaths I cannot put up with.” *Do you see what he means? The present sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but the one I have made in which, having given rest to all things, I will make the beginning of the eighth day which is the beginning of another world. 9 Therefore, we also spend the eighth day in gladness, the day on which also Jesus*

seems to suggest that at least some Christian groups were moving toward a weekly meeting on the first day of the week. But this is not certain. The extremely puzzling phrase Κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου συναχθέντες κλάσατε ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσατε, *according to the Lord's day of the Lord having gathered together, we break and celebrate...*, is difficult to understand what the writer is pointing to. In the context the passage speaks of gathering to celebrate the Lord's supper, but to infer that this took place every Sunday from this text is stretching the text beyond the breaking point. Additionally, in Ignatius' *Letter to the Magnesians* (9:1<sup>28</sup>) the phrase κατὰ κυριακὴν simply refers to the resurrection day of Christ without indicating that the first day of the week had become a regular meeting day.

Much of the remainder of the second century Christian literature is just as ambiguous.<sup>29</sup> Only by the fourth Christian century is it clear that the first day of the week had become the Christian equivalent of the Jewish sabbath. Prior to that some of the Christian literature possibly points this direction, but not conclusively.<sup>30</sup> *rose up from the dead and, being made manifest, ascended into heaven.*"

[*The Apostolic Fathers in English*, trans. Rick Brannan (Logos Bible Software, 2012).]

<sup>28</sup>**Ign. to the Magn. 9:1-2.** 9.1 Therefore, if those who lived in ancient customs came to newness of hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath but living *according to the Lord's day*, on which our life also arose through him and his death, (which some deny) through which mystery we came to believe, and because of this we endure so that we may be found to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our only teacher. 2 How will we be able to live without him, who even the prophets, being disciples in the Spirit, expected him as their teacher? And because of this, the one whom they rightly awaited, when he came he raised them up from the dead.

[*The Apostolic Fathers in English*, trans. Rick Brannan (Logos Bible Software, 2012).]

<sup>29</sup>*Gos. Pet. 12.50* (ἡ κυριακὴ replaces μία [τῶν] σαββάτων, 'the first [day] of the week,' found in the Synoptic parallels); Clement Alex. Strom. 17.12. Melito of Sardis, in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 4.26.2, wrote a treatise entitled Περὶ κυριακῆς, but since only the title survives, the content of the work cannot be known. The expression κυριακὴ ἡμέρα, 'the Lord's day,' is found in Dionysius of Corinth in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 4.23.8; Origen *Contra Celsum* 8.22. In Did. 14:1 we find the pleonastic expression κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου συναχθέντες, 'and when you gather on the Lord's (day) of the Lord,' rejected as impossible by Audet (*La Didachè*, 460) and therefore emended by him in agreement with the Georgian version to read καθ' ἡμέραν δὲ κυρίου, 'on the day of the Lord'; he considered κυριακὴν to be a marginal gloss that first interpreted ἡμέραν and later displaced it." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 84.]

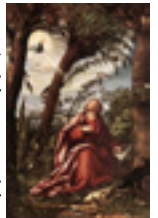
<sup>30</sup>"While the meaning of κυριακὴ ἡμέρα in Rev 1:10 is widely understood to be a new Christian designation for Sunday, some even argue that it refers specifically to Easter Sunday (Strobel, ZNW 49 [1958] 185; Dugmore, "Lord's Day," 274-78; Strand, NTS 13 [1966-67] 174-81; arguments against this view are found in Rordorf, Sunday, 209-15, and Bauckham, "Lord's Day," 230-

What appears to me to be the best alternative meaning ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ in Rev. 1:9 is its literal meaning. That is, John is asserting that he had dedicated a particular day in order to do nothing but focus on Christ and His will, and it was in the midst of this special day that Christ chose to speak to him in the vision. This implies strongly the traditional Israelite prophetic preparation for such experiences through prayer and fasting. Thus John speaks of one special day completely devoted to Christ during which he experienced this heavenly vision. He does not associate this day with any particular day of a week.

When such an association is made centuries later by Christians, it is largely motivated by antisemitism with the desire to be different from the Jewish practices. The church fathers make this point rather clearly.

**The second main clause** is καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος λεγούσης, *and I heard behind me a loud sound like a trumpet saying.*

Once more John uses some unusual grammar constructions. In ancient Greek the verb ἀκούω could be used with direct objects either in the normal accusative case (φωνήν) or also in the genitive case (σάλπιγγος). The significance was that the accusative case object specified some kind of meaningless noise, while the genitive case object defined sound that contained intelligible meaning. Here John uses both forms to signal that the φωνήν was simply a very loud sound,<sup>31</sup> but the comparison to



31). According to this view, Sunday, the weekly Christian day of worship, developed out of the annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. This is problematic, however, since κυριακὴ never unambiguously means Easter Sunday, and Asia Minor (the region where many crucial texts originated: Rev 1:10; Did. 14:1; Ign. Magn. 9:1; Gos. Pet. 35, 50) was a region in which Easter was celebrated on 14 Nisan from the early second century A.D. on. Though many of the early Christian references to ἡ κυριακὴ (ἡμέρα) *could* refer either to Sunday or Easter (Did. 14:1; Ign. Magn. 9:1; Gos. Pet. 35, 50), some clearly refer to Sunday (Acts Pet. 29; Acts Paul 7: 'And Paul cried out to God on the Sabbath as the Lord's day drew near' [Schneemelcher, NTA 2:371]). Further, the Gnostic association of the Ogdoad ('the eighth') with the Lord's day assumes the Christian association of κυριακὴ, Sunday, with the 'eighth' day (Barn. 15:2; 2 Enoch 33:7; Ep. Apost 18 (Coptic); Clement Excerpta ex Theodoto 63; cf. Bauckham, "Lord's Day," 230). A less common view is that κυριακὴ ἡμέρα in Rev 1:10 refers to the eschatological Day of the Lord, i.e., that John was transported in his vision to the eschaton (Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath*, 123-31). Why then did John not use the more common expression ἡμέρα (τοῦ) κυρίου, which occurs frequently in the LXX and the NT?" [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 84.]

<sup>31</sup>Thus the common English translation of φωνὴν μεγάλην as a loud *voice* is highly questionable. The more literal mean of φωνή as 'sound' is more appropriate here in the context. The use of the



a trumpet, ὡς σάλπιγγος, was what carried meaning. Note that the participle λεγούσης, saying, is linked to σάλπιγγος by the common genitive case spelling rather than to φωνῆν in the accusative case. It is the σάλπιγγος rather than the φωνῆν μεγάλην that speaks the words that follow.

What we are reading is the depiction of a prophetic vision framed inside the Israelite prophetic narrative introductions to prophecy.

How does God speak? A variety of depictions exist in scripture especially when a prophetic vision is being presented.<sup>32</sup> That of a trumpet is common shows up extensively beginning with the theophany at Sinai (Exod. 19:16; 20:18). It continues to be depicted in subsequent similar texts such as Isa. 18:3; Joel 2:1; Zech 9:14; Psa. 47:5. Additionally the sound of thunder (Exod. 19:16, 19; 1 Sam. 2:10; Rev. 6:1; 8:5; 11:19; 14:2; 16:18; also Ben Sira 43:17; 2 Esdras 16:10) and sometimes thunder and lightning (e.g., Exod. 19:16).

Here and nineteen more times in Revelation a φωνῆν μεγάλην, loud sound, accompanies the Heavenly voice: 5:2, 12; 6:10; 7:2, 10; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12, 15 (φωναὶ μεγάλαι; pl. form); 12:10; 14:7, 9, 15, 18; 16:1, 17; 19:1, 17; 21:3. The identical expression surfaces almost 50 times in the LXX translation of the OT.<sup>33</sup>

English word ‘voice’ is done purely for simplification purposes. But it covers over what John is attempting to communicate here.

<sup>32</sup>“A number of different metaphors are used in Revelation to capture the loudness of the voices heard by John. The sound of these voices is compared to the blast of a trumpet (as here; cf. *Apoc. Sedr.* 11:19; Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:612:11:13), to the sound of thunder, and to the sound of roaring water. The sound of a trumpet or shofar was part of the Sinai theophany according to Exod 19:16; 20:18 (in both passages the phrase קול שׁוֹפָר, ‘sound of a trumpet,’ occurs). The motif of the sound of the trumpet continued to be used in theophanic contexts (Isa 18:3; Joel 2:1; Zech 9:14; Ps 47:5); it was also used in the Israelite cult (2 Sam 6:15; Isa 27:13; Joel 2:15; Ps 81:3). The use of the shofar in cultic settings could therefore be considered an imitation of the voice of Yahweh (Weiser, “Frage,” 523–24), or the imagery of the Sinai theophany could have been influenced by the use of the shofar in the cult (Beyerlin, *Origins*, 135–36). The voice of Athena is compared to a trumpet in the introductory theophanic scene in *Sophocles Ajax* 17, where the uncommon term used is κῶδων, ‘trumpet or bell of a trumpet’ (Greek tragedies frequently begin with a divine theophany; cf. Comment on 22:20). Thunder is called the trumpet (σάλπιγξ) of Zeus (*Nonnos Dionysiaca* 2.558–59; 6.230–31).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 85.]

<sup>33</sup>“The same phrase occurs nearly fifty times in the LXX, usually in the dative form φωνῆ μεγάλη, three times in the accusative (LXX Gen 27:34; 1 Esdr 3:11; Sir 50:16), and once in the nominative (LXX Esth 1:1). The regular use of the adjective following the noun reflects Hebrew and Aramaic usage. For the idiomatic use



With the combination of φωνῆν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος λεγούσης, a loud sound as a trumpet speaking, we are introduced to the first of several ecstatic experiences of John in which God communicates His will to the apostle.

Importantly the content of the speaking of the Heavenly voice provides John an initial command that will be the first of close to a dozen instances.<sup>34</sup> The core expression is two fold: γράψον, write, and πέμψον, send. The instruction to write positions John in terms of a mediator of the divine message, rather than the author of new ideas. The ideas are given directly to John in a visionary setting with instructions to communicate them in written expression to his targeted readers.

Interestingly what John was to write down is defined as ὃ βλέπεις, what you see, rather than what you hear (τοῦ ἀκούεις). Thus John is not the Lord’s stenographer writing down each word as dictated to him. Rather, John sees a giant picture and then uses his own skills in putting that visual picture into written words describing the picture.

All that John sees is then to be put εἰς βιβλίον, in a book.<sup>35</sup> The βιβλίον is the book of Revelation, and is alluded to in 22:7, 9, 10, 18, 19 (τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου). Of course, what βιβλίον means here is a scroll, not a book in the modern format. In the background of this command from God stands the similar expression in LXX Isa 30:8, γράψον...ταῦτα...εἰς βιβλίον, “write ... these things ... in a book.”<sup>36</sup> But John’s non-Jewish read-

of the dative phrase φωνῆ μεγάλη, ‘with a loud voice,’ see Comment on 5:2. However, in four additional instances in the LXX, the adjective is placed before the noun (1 Esdr 5:64; 9:10; Prov 2:3; 26:25; cf. Rev 16:1). The phrase also occurs in the Greek texts of the Pseudepigrapha (Adam and Eve 5:2; 29:11; T. Abr. 5:9; Paral. Jer. 2:2; 2 Apoc. Bar. 11:3; Sib. Or. 3.669; 5.63).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 85.]

<sup>34</sup>Cf. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; plus 1:19; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5.

<sup>35</sup>It is important to note two separate spellings of βιβλίον and βιβλος with essentially the same meaning. John opts to use βιβλος twice in reference ὁ βιβλος τῆς ζωῆς, the book of life, (3:5; 20:15). But τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς, the book of life, also shows up with reference to the same document in 13:8; 17:8; 21:27. Thus for John the alternative spellings did not signal a different document. What specifies the intended document is the qualifier (τῆς ζωῆς, of life; τούτου, this; ἄλλο, another) that is attached to the word for book.

<sup>36</sup>“Perhaps the closest verbal parallel is LXX Isa 30:8, γράψον ... ταῦτα ... εἰς βιβλίον, ‘write ... these things ... in a book,’ yet in Isaiah the reason is so that written prophecy can be a witness against the people at a later time (Lohmeyer, 16, and Kraft, 43, regard 1:11 as consciously modeled after Isa 30:8). Moses is commanded by God to write, a command probably referring to the ten commandments (Exod 34:27–28). In Deut 31:19, 21 (a passage similar to Isa 30:8), God commands Moses to write down a song (recorded in Deut 32:1–43) so that it will function as a witness against Israel. Again in Deut 31:24–27, the book of the law that Moses wrote was placed in the ark as witness against Israel. In

ers of this book would have clearly understood such a depiction of divine revelation, since similar commands were common in the pagan religious traditions of that period.<sup>37</sup>

Jub. 1:5–7, after the Lord revealed ‘what (was) in the beginning and what will occur (in the future)’ (Jub. 1:4b; tr. Charlesworth, OTP 2:52), Moses is commanded to write so that Israel will know how faithful God has been to them. At the conclusion of Tobit (12:20), the angel Raphael commands Tobias and Tobit ‘to write down everything which has happened in a book’ (γράψατε πάντα τὰ συντελεσθέντα εἰς βιβλίον), thus providing supernatural motivation for the composition of Tobit.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 85–86.]

<sup>37</sup>“Supernatural commands to write the substance of a divine revelation, occasionally found in Judaism (see Isa 30:8; 4 Ezra 14), are much more common in Greco-Roman texts, in which the gods often command people to write books while asleep: Plato *Phaedo* 4.60E–61B; Callimachus *Aetia* 1.1.21–22; *Propertius* 3.3; Cicero *Academica priora* 2.16.51 (quoting Ennius *Annales* 5); *Pausanias* 1.21.2 (Dionysius appeared in a dream to Aeschylus while he was gathering grapes and urged him to write tragedy); Pliny *Ep.* 3.5.4 (Nero Claudius Drusus, who had died in 9 B.C., appeared to Pliny the Elder in a dream urging him to write the history of Germany); Aelius Aristides *Or.* 48.2 (Asclepius had ordered Aristides to write down his dreams; the present account is a summary of his original diary of some 300,000 lines; cf. *Or.* 48.3, 8); Dio Cassius 73.23.2 (the author claims that καὶ μοι καθεύδοντι προσέταξε τὸ δαιμόνιον ἱστορίαν γράφειν, ‘and while I was sleeping the god commanded me to write history’; the present narrative, he claims, is the result); in 79.10.1–2, Dio claims that the deceased Severus appeared to him and ordered him to write about the life of Caracalla; POxy 1381.8.160–70 tells how Imouthes, an Egyptian god associated with Sarapis and identified with Asclepius, orders a devotee to write in praise of the god. These examples (for others, see Stearns, *Studies*, 9–11) suggest that the claim of receiving a divine commission in a dream to write a literary composition had become a stock literary device in which the dream functions as a prelude to the literary work itself (Stearns, *Studies*, 1–7), thus providing divine legitimation for the composition. In Menander *Rhetor* II.17 (Russell-Wilson, *Menander Rhetor*, 207–9), the author recommends that a hymn to Apollo begin with a claim to divine inspiration, another clear indication of the stereotypical literary character of this motif. The earliest full example of this phenomenon in Greek literature (cf. *Iliad* 1.1–7) is found in Hesiod *Theogony* 22–34; cf. West, *Theogony*, 158–61). Though the mechanics are never specified, Apollonius of Tyana is said to have emerged from the oracular cave of Trophonius with a volume [i.e., ‘roll’] filled with the sayings of Pythagoras (Philostratus *Vita. Apoll.* 18.19–20). Lines 1–2 of the Sarapis *aretalogy* from Delos read ὁ ἱερεὺς Ἀπολλώνιος ἀνέγραψεν κατὰ πρόσταγμα τοῦ θεοῦ, ‘The priest Apollonius wrote by the command of the god’ (Engelmann, *Aretalogy*, 7; English translation and commentary in Danker, *Benefactor*, 186–91). Often in magical procedures for procuring divine revelations, the author advises the practitioner to keep a small tablet handy to record whatever the supernatural revealer says (PGM VIII.89–91; XIII.90, 646). In PGM XIII.211, for example, it says ‘when the god comes in, look down and write the things [he] says and whatever name he may give you for himself.’ It is odd that John does not say that he wrote κατ’ ἐπιταγήν or καταπρόσταγμα or ἐλέυσιν, all meaning ‘by command’ and all used in such contexts (Nock,



Thus John conveys to his readers the divine authorization for the contents of the book of Revelation. This then very appropriately takes the place of the missing title of authority in the *Adscriptio* of 1:4. The prophetic visionary nature of what John records in the book more correctly needed to be set forth in this initial apocalyptic vision text of 1:9–20. Thus, the authority of the book grows out of this kind of religious experience by John.

The second command given here is πέμψον, *send*. Clearly what is to be sent is the ὃ βλέπεις, *what you see*, that has been written down in this book. This direct object relative clause picks up on the very similar ὅσα εἶδεν, *as much as he saw*, in 1:2. This, in turn, represents John’s interpretation of τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ* (1:2). This is characterized as ἐμαρτύρησεν, *he witnessed*. That is, John in writing down the visions presents his testimony of what he has personally experienced in these moments of ecstatic religious experience.

Who is he to send this book to? The seven churches, first mentioned in the *Adscriptio* of 1:4 as ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, *the seven churches in Asia*. Now in 1:11, these seven churches are specified by the city they were located in: ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Ἔσσην καὶ εἰς Θυατείραν καὶ εἰς Σάρδις καὶ εἰς Λαοδικεῖαν καὶ εἰς Πάτμον. (Rev. 1:11) [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 86–87.]

Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεῖς καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν.

As the above map indicates, a tracing of a route in their sequence of listing would create a circle bringing on ultimately back to the starting point in Ephesus. The significance of this is to affirm that the message of Revelation is intended for all the churches in Asia with these seven chosen as representative of the complete Christian community of Asia. The various problems treated in the individual letters given in chapters two and three are exemplary of the kinds of problems most all the churches experienced at some point of their existence. And for that matter, they exemplify most of the problems that churches over the duration of Christianity have experienced at one point or another.

In the studies taken from chapters two and three of Revelation the details of both the cities and the Christian community located in each will be treated in detail.

What especially needs to be noted at this point is that John was instructed to γράψον εἰς βιβλίον, *write a book*. And this one document that will contain all seven letters plus chapters 4-22 will be sent to each of the churches. Again, what is not known is whether only a single copy of Revelation was created by John and then each congregation made its own copy as it was brought to them and read before each

house church group in each city (cf. 1:3). Or, whether seven copies of Revelation were made on Patmos and then carried individually to the seven churches. More likely, the former scenario was what happened but we can't be certain.

One thing does become clear. If not already known, all seven Christian communities through this document became aware of issues and problems in the other six churches! Nothing remained hidden; everything -- spiritual warts and all -- was laid on the table openly for all Christians everywhere who read this document to know about. Therein lies an important motivation both by John and for every reader. When our church expe-

riences problems, we can't hide these problems from others. If we try, we are doomed to failure and we only make the problems worse. Fundamental transparency is essential for a congregation to enjoy spiritual health. Realizing that problems will not be swept under the rug helps deter individuals from creating problems in the church.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

Again the ultimate question becomes, What can we learn from this passage to help us today? I think several important lessons emerge here that can guide us better in both interpreting the contents of Revelation

as well as remind us of important spiritual principles.

**Clearly** this introductory section of the prophetic vision in vv. 9-20 define in greater detail what John meant with his labels in vv. 1-3: Ἀποκάλυψις, *apocalypse*; τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, *the Word of God*; τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the testimony of Jesus Christ*; and τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας, *the words of this prophecy*.

Step by step in the subsequent units of vv. 4-8 and 9-20 Jesus has unpacked those labels for his readers. This document will have the personal tones of an ancient letter, i.e., a substitute visit by the apostle himself. But the document in its essential nature is a prophetic vision anchored squarely in

the heritage of the Old Testament prophets of Israel. Out of that basic framework, the contents of the book will be expressed in the ancient Jewish apocalyptic heritage which arises from Israelite prophecy.

**Second**, the language and thought world of that Jewish apocalyptic heritage are going to play a critical role in providing language, imagery etc. for John to present his testimony of Jesus. Already we have observed his heavy dependency on both the OT prophetic writings as well as the Jewish apocalyptic writings in existence by the end of the first Christian century. One can never properly understand the message of Revelation without taking time to become acquainted with this



background heritage for John.

**Third**, by stepping into that ancient Jewish throughout a hugely important discovery is made. The message of God presented in this manner is not just for analytical study. Clearly it always takes surprising twists and turns that are not logical nor expected. We are seeing that even in the increasingly frequent strange grammar used by John as well as the illogical mixing of genre forms in this opening chapter.

Revelation is intended to push us into celebration of the awesomeness of our God. Not just greatly knowledge about Him. This celebration can on some occasions prompt joy and rejoicing, but mostly the signals from within the document push us to the opposite type of celebration, that of overwhelmed silence and speechlessness. It is in such moments when we can say nothing and can only bow before our God that our celebra-

tion reaches its greatest moment. Such transforms and changes us profoundly. Out of such emerges an unshakable confidence in the sovereignty and power of God to move human history to His purposes and goals. We realize

afresh just how powerless evil actually is, in spite of its boasts of supreme power.

**Fourth**, we discover the diverse and creative ways that God used in communicating His will to the biblical writers. John's vision in vv. 9-20 carry us back to Amos and Isaiah in ancient Israel to remind us that God came to His servants often in visionary experiences to orally communicate His will. Their task was to transfer what they had seen into written expression that could be shared with His people. Thus the composition of Revelation came about very differently than the writing of the three letters, and even differently than the composition of the fourth gospel. How God works can never be 'boxed up' into one set pattern that is always followed. God will never be confined to such limitations! Any time we think we have reduced how God works to

such simplistic patterns what we have done is to create a false image of God, an idol, that is not the God that the apostle John experience through a decade or so of writing ministry.

**Fifth**, from this passage in vv. 9-11 and the repetition of much of the terminology all through the rest of the book, especially in the epistolary Conclusio of 22:8-21, we understand that all the contents of the entire book are meant for each of the seven churches. The letter addressed to each congregation in chapters two and three contain the only personalized elements to each congregation. But the sending of the entire document to each of the churches exposes even this personal material to the entire collective Christian community in the province of Asia. Any interpretive approach that contends that chapters two and three stand detached from chapters four through twenty-two is flat out wrong and

misses the mark completely. The document stands as a unitary document with a message for all seven churches who represented the Christian movement in late first century Asia.

Thus every part of the entire document

speaks to all of God's people over all time. Clearly those of us coming after the initial targeted readership of the seven churches in the late first Christian century are privileged readers looking over the shoulders of those first targeted readers. But the timeless truths emerging from this document continue to speak to the spiritual life of God's people of all ages. The promised blessing in the beatitude of v. 3 continues to be available to us today.





# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 04

Text: 1:12-16

All rights reserved ©



**QUICK LINKS**

**1. What the text meant.**

**Historical Aspects:**

- External History
- Internal History

**Literary Aspects:**

- Genre
- Literary Setting
- Literary Structure

**Exegesis of the Text:**

- A. Seeking to see, v. 12a
- B. Seeing the picture, vv. 12b-16
  - 1. The Lampstands, v. 12b
  - 2. The Son of Man, vv. 13-16

**2. What the text means.**

### Greek NT

12 Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἧς ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ, καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς 13 καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὄμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν. 14 ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἕριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρρὸς 15 καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὄμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, 16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

### Gute Nachricht Bibel

12 Ich wandte mich um und wollte sehen, wer zu mir sprach. Da erblickte ich sieben goldene Leuchter. 13 In ihrer Mitte stand jemand, der aussah wie der Sohn eines Menschen. Er trug ein langes Gewand und hatte ein breites goldenes Band um die Brust. 14 Sein Kopf und sein Haar strahlten wie weiße Wolle, ja wie Schnee. Seine Augen brannten wie Flammen. 15 Seine Füße glänzten wie gleißendes Gold, das im Schmelzofen glüht, und seine Stimme klang wie das Tosen des Meeres. 16 Er hielt sieben Sterne in seiner rechten Hand, und aus seinem Mund kam ein scharfes, beidseitig geschliffenes Schwert. Sein Gesicht leuchtete wie die Sonne am Mittag.

### NRSV

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

### NLT

12 When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. 13 And standing in the middle of the lampstands was the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were bright like flames of fire. 15 His feet were as bright as bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. 16 He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was as bright as the sun in all its brilliance.

## APOCALYPTIC VISION, part two

### INTRODUCTION

This third segment of the larger introduction to the book in chapter one shifts to an apocalyptic vision depicting an image of Christ purely in apocalyptic tones. John has signaled at the outset (1:1) that this document is to be understood as an Ἀποκάλυψις, *apocalypse*. Now in 1:9-20 an introductory portrait of Christ in apocalyptic tones is painted in three parts: vv. 9-11 setting up the picture, vv. 12-16 painting the picture, and vv. 17-20 in responding to the picture. In this study we focus on part

two where the portrait of Christ in apocalyptic tones is presented.

The portrait here is dramatically different from the one in 1:5-6. That one depicts Christ as the sacrificial Lamb of God in human terms. This one depicts Christ as the risen Son of Man in Heaven. The first one is theological while the second one is apocalyptic. Both pictures of Christ are true, and neither one gives us any information about the physical appearance of Jesus. Modern western interests want to know what a person



looks like physically. Ancient Christians were only concerned about Jesus from spiritual perspectives. This reflected the Jewish heritage of die-emphasis on physical appearance in favor of the spiritual side of an individual as being the primary point of interest. It is not until centuries later when the side of Greek culture that glorified the physical body prevailed inside the church that physical depictions of Christ begin showing up mostly in art and sculpture but also in the written literature.

What then is it that we are supposed to see from this picture about Christ?<sup>1</sup> Just to see the symbolic picture with its rather gross portrayal of Christ is to miss the point altogether. Symbols are pointers! They do not call attention to themselves, but rather to a deeper reality beyond the symbol itself. For some ways of thinking, getting past the symbol at its surface level meaning is enormously challenging. For others, however, with viv-

<sup>1</sup>An interesting survey of the available graphic art depictions (numbering several hundred) of Christ in Revelation chapter one reveals a huge difficulty in artists down through the centuries, and particularly more recent graphic artists, in being true to the biblical text details, rather than using the standard thirty year old European Jewish face of Jesus that dominates most artistic drawings of Jesus' appearance over the past two centuries. Albrecht Durer (the above graphic) comes closer to the biblical text than most everyone else.

id imaginations getting past the symbol to the deeper meaning is much easier. The challenge here is correctly interpreting the signals contained in the symbol that accurate deeper meaning is perceived. Thus it takes a good balance between imaginative thinking and careful analytical thinking to stay on track in the interpretive process.

Hopefully this very apocalyptic portrait of Christ will come through for you not only in proper understanding but also in the dramatic, emotionally provoking manner that apocalyptic symbolism intends to generate. From this picture we need to see a Christ who reigns supremely but stands also in pastoral concern over all His people in His churches. This awesome power serves to sustain and under gird His people especially in times of their suffering and hardship.

### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

As is usually true but even more significant here, careful analysis of both the historical and the literary aspects of the scripture text is essential for proper understanding of the spiritual truths that emerge from the passage.

#### Historical Aspects:

The historical dimensions of this passage are challenging. Internally, the place markers push us as readers into an apocalyptic world where Christ stands in the middle of seven lampstands while holding seven stars out of the heavens in one hand. When he speaks his voice is so loud that the sound is deafening like that of a flooding sea in the midst of a huge storm. The young man Jesus of Nazareth now stands as a centuries old man like the Ancient of Days portrayed in some of the prophecies of the Old Testament. We, in this portrait, move out of a normal time / place sphere in the natural world into this strange new apocalyptic realm of reality.

Everything in that world possesses heightened reality and the absolute limits of existence in the extremes. For those of us in western culture this apocalyptic reality possesses some of the tones of the science fiction movies that have been popular over the past half century or so. The big difference, however, is that the science fiction world is imaginary, but this apocalyptic picture is reality although clothed in symbolic expression. Comprehending that reality is our challenge.

#### External History.

Regarding possible sources for this material in vv. 12-16, different elements in the picture are drawn from a variety of imagery background coming out of the Old Testament and familiar to Jews in the

first century from having seen such items in the Jerusalem temple before its destruction some twenty to thirty years before the writing of this book. The Jewish longing for the Jerusalem temple “in the good old days” prior to 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed the temple, served as a backdrop for John’s picturing of the Heavenly temple where the Lamb of God reigned supremely at the right hand of the Father. The earthly temple of the Jews had indeed been destroyed by the powerful armies of the Roman emperor, but the Heavenly temple stood completely intact and untouched by any earthly power. Additionally, the prophetic writings will provide another major source for the imagery found in this passage.

The history of the transmission of this text portion reflects a relatively stable reading of the text with few variations surfacing.

The editors of *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) concluded that among the existing variations of wording only one had enough significance to impact the translation of the passage. In verse fifteen the spelling of πεπυρωμένης, *refined*, is altered to πεπυρωμένω or to πεπυρωμένοι.<sup>2</sup> This was prompted by the lack of agreement of πεπυρωμένης in case spelling with anything in the sentence.<sup>3</sup> For these copyists the existing grammar error needed correcting, but they were uncertain as to whether the participle should modify οἱ πόδες, *feet* (πεπυρωμένοι), or whether καμίνω, *furnace* (πεπυρωμένω). Logically the participle goes with either ‘feet’ or ‘bronze.’ The resulting idea is that of *feet like bronze that have been refined in a furnace*. Both the external evidence as well as internal considerations favor the text reading πεπυρωμένης in

<sup>2</sup>{C} πεπυρωμένης A C // πεπυρωμένω κ 205 209 2050 2053 2062 it<sup>ar, eig, h, t</sup> vg cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> arm eth Irenaeus<sup>lat</sup>, arm; Cyprian Maternus Apringius Primasius Beatus // πεπυρωμένοι 1006 1611 1841 1854 2329 2344 2351 Byz [P 046] syr<sup>hmg</sup> Andrew; Victorinus-Pettau Tyconius

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus)*; *The Greek New Testament, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus)* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>3</sup>“Although πεπυρωμένης is without syntactical concord in the sentence, it was preferred by the Committee not only because it is rather well attested (A C Primasius) but chiefly because it best explains the origin of the other readings. In order to remove the grammatical difficulty some copyists read πεπυρωμένω (κ 2053 the ancient versions al), which qualifies καμίνω, and other copyists read πεπυρωμένοι (P 046 most minuscules), which qualifies οἱ πόδες.” [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 663-64.]

spite of its grammatical incorrectness.<sup>4</sup>

In the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed) some fourteen places surface where variations in the wording of the text exist among the existing manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> Careful analysis of



<sup>4</sup>“The variant readings have little significance for translation since the differences are mostly matters of style or grammar rather than of meaning. The feminine genitive participle πεπυρωμένης does not agree in grammatical form with either the noun πόδες (feet) or καμίνω (furnace). But it has rather good manuscript support and best explains the origin of the other readings. In order to remove the grammatical difficulty, some copyists read πεπυρωμένω, which qualifies καμίνω, and other copyists read πεπυρωμένοι, which qualifies οἱ πόδες. (For a more thorough discussion of the grammatical difficulties of the reading in the text, see Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 65–66, 96.)” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 527-28.]

#### <sup>5</sup>Offenbarung 1,12

\* εκει 1006. 1841. 2351 M<sup>K</sup> (The Greek adverb ἐκεῖ is inserted after ἐπέστρεψα)

\* –λησεν 1611 M<sup>A</sup> (The imperfect ἐλάλει [was speaking] is replaced by the Aorist ἐλαλήσεν [spoke] or the present λάλει [speaks])

| λαλει A

#### Offenbarung 1,13

\* μεσον κ (μέσον replaces ἐν μέσω)

\* επτα κ M lat (ἑπτὰ is added before λυχιῶν)

| txt A C P 1611. 2050 al h sy co; Ir<sup>lat</sup> Cyp Vic Prim

\* ομοιωμα A; Ir<sup>arm</sup> (ὅμοιον is replaced by ὁμοιωμα)

\* υιω A C 1006. 1611. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2351 M<sup>A</sup>; Ir<sup>lat</sup> (ὄϊω replaces υἱόν)

| txt κ 1841. 2050. 2329 M<sup>K</sup>

\*<sup>1</sup> μαζοις A 1006. 1841 al (μαστοῖς is replaced by μαζοῖς)

#### Offenbarung 1,14

\* 1 1611 pc (λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν is reduced down to either λευκαὶ or ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν)

| 2-4 2053. 2062 pc

#### Offenbarung 1,15

\* εκ καμινου 2329 h; Cypv.l. Prim (ἐν καμίνω is replaced by εκ καμίνου)

\* –μενω κ 2050. 2053. 2062 pc; Ir<sup>arm, lat</sup> vid (πεπυρωμένης is replaced with either πεπυρωμένω or πεπυρωμένοι)

| –μενοι M sy<sup>hmg</sup>

| txt A C

#### Offenbarung 1,16

\* κ. ειχεν κ\* 2344 pc latt (καὶ ἔχων is replaced either by καὶ ἔχει or καὶ)

| καὶ εχει Ir<sup>lat</sup>

| καὶ A

\* 1 3 2 1006. 1841. 2351 al (δεξιᾶ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ is re-sequenced)

| χ. αυτ. τη δεξ. 046. 2329

\* –ρες P98 A pc (ἀστέραις is replaced with ἀστέρες)

\*<sup>1</sup> 4 1-3 κ (ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει is re-sequenced)

| ὡς ο ηλ. φαινων 1611; Ir<sup>lat</sup>

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 633-34.]

these variations reveals what is usually discovered, they represent either stylistic efforts to correct or improve the Greek expression, or else accidental errors due either to not seeing the original form correctly or from not hearing it pronounced correctly by the scribe reading the text in the copying process.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the text in full confidence that it represents the original wording of the passage.

**Internal History.** As noted above, the internal place and time markers for vv. 12-16 thrust us into the apocalyptic thought world, rather than into the material world on earth. When John turned to see the source of the heavenly voice, he first saw seven lampstands and a very old, strange looking man standing in the middle of them (note the graphic on page two). But from all indications in the text, the voice he heard did not come from the old man he saw. It is not until verse 17 that the old man speaks to John, and repeats what the trumpet like voice had said to John. But more on that in the exegesis below.

The important aspect here is to not forget the nature of this kind of visionary experience. This ancient kind of religious experience will push the individual into a very different realm of experience in which bodiless voices will be seen as well as heard, sur-realistic depictions of spiritual beings are the norm, the astrological heavens can signify things on earth etc. This is especially true of the ancient Israelite description of such experiences all through the Old Testament, and is particularly true of the eighth century prophets onward. And one must never overlook the other aspect that such depictions are found extensively in non-Jewish writings reflecting other religious traditions in the world leading up to the beginning of Christianity. This abundance of writings in the centuries prior to the composition of Revelation provided John with a wealth of terminology, imagery, and writing strategy to utilize in presenting a written description of his own spiritual experience.

These kinds of 'apocalyptic visionary' experiences quickly move beyond the logical and rational, from a human way of thinking.<sup>6</sup> The element of mystery plays

<sup>6</sup>An inherent danger here emerges in the history of interpretation. Later interpreters of the apocalyptic materials in the Bible tend to fall prey to a dogmatism which believes that 'apocalyptic visions' with an inherent lack of logical reasoning constitute a superior form of revelation that bypasses common sense and reason. Ironically through applying "common sense" reasoning to conclude the meaning of the irrational symbols, an elitist interpretive mindset develops with occasional extreme dogmatic claims of exclusive possession of divine truth. Alternative interpretations are then seen as heresy and signals of 'false prophets' who do not know God.

More on this will follow at the end of this series of studies on the biblical text with an overview history of interpretation of the

a significant role in the depiction of such religious experience, which is created in large part by the bizarre imagery, unusual grammar expressions etc.<sup>7</sup> God is far too profound and awesome to ever be limited to strictly rational and logical thinking and action from a human standpoint. Our challenge is to study and analyze as far as is possible, but while realizing that many aspects of the descriptions of visionary experience will jump way beyond human reasoning and logical analysis.<sup>8</sup> This is where skepticism usually sets in with modern western ways of thinking. But to move toward skepticism when we reach the limits of our logical analysis is to take a seriously wrong turn. The appropriate direction to go at this point is celebration and reverence in the presence of a God who is far too big for us to comprehend with our minds. It is here that the bottom line value of the apocalyptic vision is realized. The limited analysis helps some, but we can never grasp what John was trying to help us see by just analyzing his writings. We must embrace willingly the element of mystery always present in these visions.

Thus out of this perspective the time and place markers inside vv. 12-16 will be treated in the Exegesis section below.

### **Literary Aspects:**

Not only introductory history aspects need to be put on the table, but the literary aspects are important as well.

**Genre:** Clearly vv. 12-16 stand as the center point of John's apocalyptic vision in vv. 9-20. Foundational is the prophetic vision out of which usually comes a prophetic oracle.<sup>9</sup> The apocalyptic vision emerges book of Revelation.

<sup>7</sup>Such writing strategy stands in sharp contrast to 'Christian' Gnostic writings beginning in the second century AD. In this later approach attempts to sound profoundly spiritual came through using nonsensical grammar expressions, irrational logic etc. and was intended as a 'covering up' of the mysterious 'gospel' of the Gnostics to outsiders. This supposedly true spiritual message could be understood only by the initiates who had been given the secret gnosis in a highly emotionally charged religious experience that was confirmed by speaking in tongues that no human could understand.

<sup>8</sup>One should clearly distinguish between 'mystery' and 'mysticism' in biblical and theological thinking. "Mystery" is simply a level of reality that transcends normal logical categories of thinking. "Mysticism" is typically a religious movement that prides itself on functioning mostly at the "beyond reasoning" level in an other worldly manner of living. Mystery shows up in scripture, but not mysticism.

<sup>9</sup>"Visions and auditions are reported by the OT prophets (Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1-3; Micah ben Imlah 1 Kgs 22:19-23) though the question of prophetic ecstasy is debated. When the prophets speak in Yahweh's name, there is no identification with God on the part of the prophet, for the formula 'Thus says Yahweh' is clearly a messenger's formula (Gen 32:4). Ezekiel's frequent use of 'like' or 'the likeness of' (esp. chap. 1) in the descriptions of his visions could



from this with special apocalyptic tones and images. The oracle may or may not emerge from the vision; usually less often than in the prophetic vision.

---

be an indication of the ineffability of his experience (cf. Daniel 7, in which the use of 'like' is a literary device). As far as the noetic aspect is concerned, the prophetic experience is certainly thought to mediate a specific kind of knowledge, though evidence does not permit a definite conclusion as to the exact character of the inspirational experience. In some cases the prophets may remain passive, while God speaks to them, but there are also cases when ecstasy is prompted by music (1 Sam 10:5) or when the prophet waits for a message (Hab 2:1; Isa 21:6). Mystics are often reported to quiver; there are also examples of anesthesia or paralysis. One can note Ezekiel's lying immovable for a considerable time (Ezek 4:4) or of passages such as Jer 4:19, which speaks of pain and anguish, but the reaction could just as well refer to the contents of his vision rather than being the result of a mystic experience (cf. Isa 21:3-4). On the whole, the prophets are never described as introspective, and they are always aware of the distance between them and Yahweh. Moreover, the biblical texts do not provide us with adequate information concerning the mental state of the prophets." [Helmer Ringgren, "Mysticism" In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 945.]

**Literary Setting:** The setting of vv. 12-16 is easy to determine. It stands as the center of the apocalyptic vision in vv. 9-20 with vv. 9-11 setting up the vision and vv. 17-20 depicting John's reaction to the vision. This apocalyptic vision comes as the third major element of the introductory chapters with the Prologue in vv. 1-8 first introducing the nature of the book as an Ἀποκάλυψις (vv. 1-3) followed by the epistolary Praescriptio (vv. 4-5a) affirming John's close empathy for his readers, a Doxology of praise to Christ (vv. 5b-6) and two Prophetic Oracles (vv. 7-8) defining another aspect of the nature of the document.

Additionally, this apocalyptic vision serves to set up the seven letters to the churches in chapters two and three. Elements from this vision will be repeated in each of these seven letters.

**Literary Structure:** The internal arrangement of ideas is reflected below in the block diagram of the Greek text so that the inner connection of ideas is visually apparent.

12                   And  
14           **I turned around**  
                  in order to see the sound  
  which was speaking with me,  
                  and  
                  having turned around  
15           **I saw seven golden lampstands,**  
13                   and  
                  in the middle of the lampstands  
16           - --- **(someone)**  
                  like the Son of Man  
                  clothed  
                  down to his feet  
                  and  
                  girded with a golden sash  
                  across his chest.  
  
14                   But  
17           **his head and his hair (were) white**  
  as white wool  
  as snow  
                  and  
18           **his eyes (were)**  
                  as a flame of fire,  
15                   and  
19           **his feet (were)**  
                  like burnished bronze,  
                  refined as in a furnace  
                  and  
20           **his voice (was)**  
                  as a sound from many waters  
16                   and  
                  having...seven stars  
                  in his right hand  
                  and

----- a sharp two-edged sword coming out

and

21 his face (was)

as the sun shines

in its power.

**Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:**

Statement 14 introduces the segment with an emphasis on John turning around in order to see where the voice was coming from. Then statements 15 - 21 describe what he saw after turning around. First, he saw seven golden lampstands (#15) and also an old man looking like the Son of Man (#s 16-21). What follows is a rapid fire description of the appearance of this figure. The description includes his clothes, his head and face along with his feet. His loud voice is included in the description. Obviously this is a highly symbolic depiction of the risen Christ in apocalyptic categories stressing His power and sovereignty.

**Exegesis of the Text:**

The natural division of the text is on (1) John seeking to see the sources of the voice (v. 12a) and (2) what John saw upon turning around toward the sound of the voice (vv. 12b-16). Two central items are described: the seven lampstands (v. 12b) and the Son of Man standing in the middle of them (vv. 13-16). This will form the outline basis for exegeting the scripture text.

**A. Seeking to see, v. 12a**

Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἣτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ,

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me,

Although the NRSV translation renders τὴν φωνὴν as 'whose voice,' the literal meaning is 'the voice.' The translators are assuming a modern perspective by John so that he assumed the voice / sound came from a visible person standing behind him. In reality, the definite article τὴν links φωνὴν here back to the use in verse ten, φωνὴν μεγάλην, a loud sound. The better translation would be "the voice" or "this voice." This is made clear by the relative clause attached to φωνὴν, ἣτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ, a voice, which was speaking with me.

The sudden turning around to face the heavenly voice is not uncommon in visionary experiences.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>“The motif of a sudden turning around in connection with a visionary experience also occurs in John 20:24, Ep. Hippocrates 15 (ἐγὼ δὲ ἐπιστραφεὶς ὄρω ..., ‘Then I, when I turned around, saw ...’ [Hercher, *Epistolographi graeci*, 296]), and Plutarch Lycurgus 23.2–4 (Lycurgus thought he heard the voice of a man behind him, but on turning around found no one there and therefore regarded the voice as a divine message).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 87.]

Accounts of individuals ascending into Heaven in visionary experiences are relatively common in ancient Jewish literature.<sup>11</sup>

But in the subsequent visionary depictions in Revelation a variety of patterns are found.<sup>12</sup> In 4:1-2, John looked up and saw an open door with this same voice calling him to ἀνάβα ὧδε, come up here. He is immediately transformed “in the spirit” (Εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι) and stands in Heaven before God’s throne. John thus moves instantly into an “out of the body” / “in the spirit” realm of reality.<sup>13</sup> Yet in 1:10, which sets the

<sup>11</sup>D. Halperin (“Heavenly Ascension,” 218–20) divides Jewish heavenly ascent literature and references to heavenly ascents into five groups: (1) Rabbinic sources contain several third person accounts of individuals who made heavenly journeys: Alexander the Great (t. Tamid 32b; y. Abod. Zar. 3.1, 42c), R. Joshua b. Levi (b. Ketub. 77b), and Moses (Pesiq. R. 20). (2) Some Jewish apocalypses contain first-person accounts narrating the heavenly ascensions of famous biblical characters such as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Levi, and Baruch. One problem with this literature is the extent to which the ‘I’ of the narrator may be identified with the ‘I’ of the implied author. (3) The hekalot literature (see Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literature*) contains descriptions of heavenly ascents (some in the first person, some in the third), as well as prescriptions for such ascents (often in second person). An example of the latter is the discourse of R. Nehuniah b. ha-Qanah in Hekhalot Rabbati (summarized in G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 9–13). (4) There are supposed experiences of ‘ecstatic mysticism’ associated with Talmudic references to ‘the four who entered *pardes*,’ *merkabah*, and *ma-asah merkabah*. (5) Paul gives an account of his heavenly ascent in 2 Cor 12:1–10, and John describes his heavenly ascent and what he saw in the heavenly court in Rev 4:1–22:9.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 278.]

<sup>12</sup>“There are six scenes in Revelation that center on the heavenly throne room: (1) 4:2–6:17, (2) 7:9–17, (3) 11:15–19, (4) 14:1–5 (here the scene of the Lamb on Mount Zion with the 144,000 in v 1, 3b–5 is juxtaposed with the author’s audition of a heavenly liturgy in vv 2–3a, with an explicit mention of the throne), (5) 15:2–8, and (6) 19:1–8.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 278.]

<sup>13</sup>“εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, ‘Immediately I was in a prophetic trance.’ The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, literally ‘in the spirit,’ occurs four times in Revelation (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Three of these involve responses to an invitation by an angelic being to come: 4:1, ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δείξω σοι; 17:1, δεῦρο, δείξω σοι; 21:9, δεῦρο, δείξω σοι. The term πνεῦμα, ‘spirit,’ in these passages is commonly taken to refer to the Spirit of God, and therefore capitalized in modern English translations (AV [1:10 only]; RSV; NEB; NIV), and is so understood by many commentators (Beckwith, 435; Beasley-Murray, 112; Sweet, 114; Mounce, 133; Lohse, 19, 37; Lohmeyer, 44–45). Yet in all four occurrences of the phrase ἐν πνεύματι, ‘in [the] spirit,’ the noun is anarthrous. Of the seven uses of the term πνεῦμα in the singular in Revelation, ten use the articu-

stage for 1:12 locationally, John is not repositioned in Heaven by being ἐν πνεύματι. Rather, in the state of a trance, he hears a loud noise behind him that issues instructions with the sounds of a blasting trumpet. He now turns around in order to face the sound, since it occurred behind him (ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου, *I heard from behind me*, v. 10; ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν, *I turned around in order to see*, v. 12).

The language of “turning to see the voice” is somewhat unusual.<sup>14</sup> Normal, every day experience would

lar form τὸ πνεῦμα, and all but 19:10 (see Comment) clearly refer to the Spirit of God (2:8, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17). John uses the preposition ἐν, ‘in,’ followed by an articular noun in the dative case seventy times in Revelation, so he exhibits no hesitancy in using such a common Greek construction. Strangely, the phrase ἐν τῷ πνεύματι in the sense of ‘inspired by the Spirit’ occurs just once in the NT in Luke 2:27, of Simeon (the phrase is twice used in the instrumental sense of ‘by the Spirit’ in Luke 4:1; Acts 19:21). The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, however, does occur several times in very different senses in the NT (Luke 1:17; John 4:23, 24; Acts 1:5; Rom 2:29; 8:9; 1 Cor 14:6; Eph 2:22; 3:5; 5:18; 6:18; Col 1:8; 1 Tim 3:16), often in an instrumental sense (Matt 22:43; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor 14:16). There is, then, no compelling reason for understanding any of these four passages as references to the Spirit of God. The phrase ἐν πνεύματι is an idiom indicating that John’s revelatory experiences took place not ‘in the body’ but rather ‘in the spirit,’ i.e., in a vision trance (Charles, 1:22; Swete, 13; Kraft, 95). In 1 Cor 14:15, Paul contrasts two states in which Christians can pray, τῷ πνεύματι, ‘with/in the Spirit,’ and τῷ νοῖ, ‘with/in the mind.’ Caird (59) correctly and idiomatically translates ἐγένονην ἐν πνεύματι with the phrase ‘I fell into a trance.’ [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 283.]

<sup>14</sup>“How is it possible to ‘see’ a voice? The MT of Exod 20:18 reads: והקול את העם ראו וכל העם ראו את הקול *wəkol hā-ā rō-īm .et haggōlot*, ‘and all the people saw the voice.’ There are two passages in the LXX in which φωνή is used as the object of a verb of seeing; the first is LXX Exod 20:18, a literal translation of the MT: καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαός ἑώρα τὴν φωνήν, ‘And all the people saw the sound.’ The second is LXX Dan 7:11: ἐθεώρουν τότε τὴν φωνήν, ‘then I beheld the voice’ (this nonliteral translation of the Aramaic of Dan 7:11 is corrected in Theodotion to ἐθεώρουν τότε ἀπὸ φωνῆς, ‘then I looked because of the voice’). The peculiarity of the LXX Exod 20:18 is commented on by Philo (Mos. 2.213), who refers to commands οὐς ἐθέσπισεν ἄνευ προφήτου ὁ θεὸς διὰ φωνῆς—τὸ παραδοξότατον—ὄρατῆς, ‘which God, without a prophet, proclaimed through a voice which, paradoxically, was visible.’ In *Decal.* 46–47 and *De Abr.* 47–48, Philo further discusses the meaning of the paradoxical expression in Exod 20:18. In *De Abr.* 47–48 he quotes two other related passages, LXX Exod 20:22, ὑμεῖς ἐωράκατε, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λελάληκα πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ‘You have seen that I spoke to you from heaven,’ and LXX Deut 4:12, καὶ ὁμοίωμα οὐκ εἶδετε, ἀλλ’ ἡ φωνήν, ‘and you did not see an image, but a voice.’ For Philo the voice of God is visible because of the power of sight that resides in the soul (*De Abr.* 49–50). Traces of rabbinic speculation on Exod 20:18 are also found in the Mechilta d’Rabbi Simon b. Jochai (ed. J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed [Jerusalem, 1955] 154): בנחה שבועולם אי אפשר לראות את הקולות ... ראו ראו... את הקולות את הקול אבל כן *bnwhg šb-wlm .y .pšr lr-wt .t hql .bl kn ... r.w .t hqwlwt*, ‘Normally it is impossible to see sound, but here

not move along such patterns. But John at this moment is ἐν πνεύματι, *in the spirit*, and thus by being in a trance unusual things are going to become the norm. But unlike much of the Jewish apocalyptic literature, when John turns to take a look at ‘the voice’ (τὴν φωνήν ἣτις ἐλάλει μετ’ ἐμοῦ, *the voice which was speaking with me*), he sees something entirely different. This heavenly voice<sup>15</sup> does not visually form itself in this instance, in spite of such assertions in much of the Jewish and Gnostic literature.

The point of injecting the idea of τὴν φωνήν, *the* the people did’ (tr. Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 100). Several OT prophets refer to ‘words’ that they ‘saw’ (Isa 2:1; 13:1; Jer 23:18; Amos 1:1; Mic 1:1; Hab 1:1; cf. Nah 1:1), though here it is clear that the voice is the figure of speech called synecdoche (the part for the whole). Charlesworth (SJT 39 [1986] 19–41; id., OT Pseudepigrapha and the NT, 128–31) has suggested that in Rev 1:12 ‘the Voice’ should be capitalized since it represents, he claims, a hypostatic heavenly creature. Since a sound or voice cannot be seen, Charlesworth argues that ‘the Voice’ was a hypostatic heavenly creature that could be seen. Since the voice John heard is associated with ‘one like a son of man’ (1:13), Charlesworth argues that the earlier tradition of the hypostatic voice has been both linked with and subordinated to the son-of-man figure in the Johannine redaction. He adduces four texts in which he finds evidence for such a hypostatic Voice (SJT 39 [1986] 29–37): *Apoc. Sedr.* 2:3; *Mart. Isa.* 9:2; *Cologne Mani Codex* 56–57; *Apoc. Abr.* 9:1–10. According to Cologne Mani Codex 57.12–16 (R. Cameron and A. J. Dewey, ed(s). and trs., *The Cologne Mani Codex* [Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979] 44–45), ‘A voice stole in at me, calling from the throne room. It came over to me, took hold of my right hand and picked me up.’ In *Apoc. Sedr.* 2:1, Sedrach ‘invisibly received a voice in his hearing’ (καὶ φωνήν ἀοράτως ἐδέξατο ἐν ταῖς ἀκοαῖς), which claimed that it had been sent by God to carry him to heaven (2:2). However, with the exception of the Apocalypse of Abraham (ca. late first century A.D.), all of these texts are late (late second century A.D. and following). Further, in none of these texts is a voice the object of a verb of seeing, nor does the term ‘voice’ appear in any of them as anything more than a figure of speech, i.e., personification. In short, Charlesworth assumes rather than demonstrates that a belief in a hypostatic Voice existed in early Judaism, and there is nothing in Rev 1:10, 12; 4:1 to lend any support to his hypothesis of a hypostatic voice. There was a tendency in early Judaism to substitute ‘voice’ for ‘voice of God’ or as a surrogate for the name of God to avoid the anthropomorphic conception of God speaking; see Josephus’ use of the term φωνή in this way: *Ant.* 1.85 (Gen 15:13); *Ant.* 2.267–69 (Exod 3:2–4:23); *Ant.* 3.88–90 (Exod 19:16–20:1); *Ant.* 8.352 (1 Kgs 19:9); cf. O. Betz, TDNT 9:290–92. In some Coptic-Gnostic texts there is a clear tendency to hypostatize the Voice, such as the ‘I am the Voice’ sayings in *Thund.* 14.12 and *Trim. Prot.* 42.4 (see also *Trim. Prot.* 40.8–9; 42.9–16). [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 87–88.]

<sup>15</sup>For other instances of φωνή inside Revelation see 1:10, 12, 15; 3:30; 4:1, 5; 5:2, 11, 11; 6:6, 7:2, 10; 8:13; 9:13; 10:3, 4, 8; 11:12, 15, 19; 12:10; 14:2, 7, 9, 13, 15, 18; 16:1, 17, 18; 18:2, 4, 22, 23; 19:5, 6, 17; 21:3. Clear references to this Heavenly Voice are found in 1:10, 12; 4:1; 10:8; 11:12; 14:2, 13; 16:1; 19:5; 21:3. The remaining references refer to the speaking of angels, the Lamb, other earthly beings as well as some heavenly creatures.



voice, into the depiction is to underscore the authoritative speaking of God to John. This voice will provide information and give instructions to the apostle throughout the narrative in Revelation.

### B. Seeing the picture, vv. 12b-16

John turned around expecting to see this Heavenly Voice that was speaking to him. But he did not see it; instead he saw a dazzling picture of seven lampstands and a really old man standing in the middle of them.

#### 1. The Lampstands, v. 12b

καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς

and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,

The first thing that John saw when he turned around to face the voice was ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς. In this context a λυχνία most likely means a menorah, the Jewish lampstand set up in the Jerusalem temple. Note the somewhat similar expression in Rev. 4:5, καὶ ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God. The specific symbolical meaning

of these seven lampstands is given in verse 20: καὶ αἱ λυχνίαὶ αἱ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. But the literal meaning of λυχνία is not given clearly so that we can picture the form of the lampstand. But the Heavenly setting of John's vision via being ἐν πνεύματι (cf. 1:10; 4:2) clearly puts John in the setting of a temple, and the lampstands before the great altar of the Jerusalem temple would have immediately come to mind to John's initial Jewish readers, and most likely reflects the background image in John's vision here.<sup>16</sup> Thus the seven churches

<sup>16</sup>καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς, 'Upon turning around I saw seven golden menorahs.' This imagery suggests that a 'temple' is the ambiance for John's vision, and it is likely that 'the seven torches of fire burning before the throne' (4:5) are heavenly menorahs (at the very least they should be understood as models for the menorahs used in the temple), which, like the one or ones in the temple, were positioned to burn 'before the Lord' (Exod 27:21; Lev 24:2-4; cf. 1 Kgs 11:36). Since 'menorah,' even though it is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew מנורה *mēnōrā* or מנורה *mēnōrā*, 'lampstand,' is a technical term for the sacral lampstand or lampstands that stood first in the wilderness tabernacle and later in the first and second temples, the main question for the interpreter is whether the author intended these seven lampstands to be understood in that tradition. There is no explicit indication that John conceived of these as branched lampstands with seven oil lamps like the traditional Jewish menorah used as a religious symbol. The idea of a group of precisely seven menorahs is unknown from Jewish literature. These seven lampstands are understood as arranged in a circle around the exalted Christ (1:13a; 2:1). In part this vision is based on the vision in Zech 4:1-14 (written shortly before the completion of the second temple in 516 B.C.). There a single lampstand is mentioned, with seven separate lamps (Zech 4:2), allegorically interpreted to represent 'the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth' (Zech 4:10), perhaps even here an astronomical reference to the seven 'planets' of antiquity. The allusion to Zech 4:1-14, together with the redolent Jewish imagery in this passage, suggests that the term λυχνία should be translated 'menorah' (K. Gamber, *Das Geheimnis der sieben Sterne* [Regensburg: Pustet, 1987] 24-26). Zech 4 is also picked up in Rev 11:4, where two lampstands are mentioned as well as two olive trees (mentioned in Zech 4:3, 11-14). Ancient representations of the menorah often show two menorahs flanking the Torah shrine (Yarden, *Tree of Light*, plates 93, 94, 95, 101, 109, 110, 114, 119, 130, 193, 194, 206). The lampstand of Zech 14:2 was in turn inspired by the lampstand that was one of the furnishings of the Jerusalem temple. The Mosaic golden lampstand is described in Exod 25:31-40 and Num 8:1-4 as an important piece of sacred furniture in the tabernacle (cf. Josephus *Ant.* 3.144-46), and is variously described as lit every evening (Exod 30:8), or as extinguished at night (1 Sam 3:3), or as burning continually (Lev 24:1-4). This became a popular view reflected in the magical papyri; cf. PGM IV. 3069-70: 'I conjure [you] by the one in holy Jerusalem before whom the unquenchable fire burns for all time.' Cf. PGM IV.1219-22 (Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 61), 'before whom the unquenchable lamp continually burns, the great God ... who is radiant at Jerusalem.' Josephus claims that three lights burned throughout the day, while the rest were lit in the evening (*Ant.* 3.199). The vessels of the Solomonic temple were reportedly looted by the Babylonians (2 Chr 36:7, 10, 18; Ezra 1:7; Dan 1:2), but only Jer 52:19 explicitly

in the province of Asia are being represented as a sacred instrument of light that is intended to highlight the full Presence of God who stands in their midst as the Son of Man. Thus, just as the lampstand in Zech. 4:6-9 came to ultimately represent the people of God in ancient Israel, John now sees the people of God reflected in the seven lampstands in the presence of Christ in a similar way.<sup>17</sup> The divine light they are to radiate

states that lampstands (note the plural) were taken from the temple immediately prior to its destruction in 586 B.C. The lampstand was stolen in 170 B.C. by Antiochus IV (1 Macc 1:21; Josephus *Ant.* 12.250 refers to lampstands in the plural), and when the sanctuary was purified and rededicated, it was replaced with another one (1 Macc 4:49–50). According to Josephus this one was seen by Pompey (*Ant.* 14.72). The author of 4 Ezra, referring to the plundering and destruction of the second temple by the Romans, says ‘the light of our lampstand has been put out’ (10:22), using the removal of the lampstand as a symbol of the worship life of the temple. A bas-relief depicting Roman soldiers carrying the lampstand from the second temple is found on the Arch of Titus, erected in A.D. 81 (Yarden, *Tree of Light*, plate 4), an event described by Josephus (*J. W.* 7.148; the problematic history of that stolen menorah is traced as far as possible in Yarden, *Tree of Light*, 3–8). Several passages in the OT indicate that Solomon’s temple had ten separate lampstands, arranged in two groups of five, though they are not explicitly described as branched (1 Kgs 7:49; cf. 2 Chr 4:7, 20–21; 1 Chr 28:15); historically these are the earliest forms of the *menorah* (Voss, *Menora*, 17–20). The rabbis tried to harmonize these discordant traditions by proposing that the Mosaic *menorah* was flanked in the temple by five lampstands on either side (b. *Menah* 98b). 1 Chr 28:15 mentions ‘the golden lampstands [מנורות *mēnōrot*] and their lamps’ and a silver ‘lampstand [מנורה *mēnōrā*] and its lamps.’ Josephus transmits the strange tradition that Solomon had 10,000 lampstands made but set only one of them up in the temple to burn all day (*Ant.* 8.90). The temple lampstands seen by Zechariah are accorded cosmic significance in Zech 4:10b, ‘These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.’ Philo regards the golden menorah as a symbol of heaven (*Quaest.* in Ex. 2.73, 81, 95), and the lamps themselves symbolize the stars (*Quaest.* in Ex. 2.73, 104), or the planets (Philo *Quaest.* in Ex. 2.78; Josephus *J. W.* 5.217; Clement Alex. *Strom.* 5.6). According to Philo, the reason is that the seven planets, including the sun, are light-bringers like the lamps on the menorah (Philo *Heres* 216–25). Eupolemus *Fragments* 2.7–8 observes that Solomon had ten golden lampstands constructed (following 1 Kgs 7:49) but adds the detail that seventy lamps were also made, seven for each lampstand (cf. B. Z. Wachholder, *Eupolemus: A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature* [Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College; Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974] 186–87). On the history of the *menorah*, see Sperber, *JJS* 16 (1965) 135–59, and Voss, *Menorah*.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 88-90.]

<sup>17</sup>**Zechariah 4:1-11.** 1 The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. 2 He said to me, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. 3 And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” 4 I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered me, “Do

highlights the glory of God. This will be critical to the divine judgment issued on each of the seven churches in chapters two and three. Each congregation will be measured to a large extent on how well they radiate this divine light.

## 2. *The Son of Man, vv. 13-16*

13 καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν. 14 ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρὸς 15 καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, 16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

13 and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

The other image that John saw was a personage ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, like the Son of Man. Note that υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου is not the direct object of εἶδον, I saw, as is λυχνίας, lampstands. That is, John did not see τὸν υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, the Son of Man. Rather he saw --- ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, (someone) like a Son of Man. This grammar structure reached back to Daniel 7:13, כְּבַר אֱנָשׁ (*kēbar. ʾēnāš*), like a son of man, which is translated from the Hebrew into LXX Greek as ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου -- roughly equivalent to John’s ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου.<sup>18</sup> The unusual construction υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου

you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” 6 He said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts. 7 What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of “Grace, grace to it!” “ 8 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 9 “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. 10 For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel. “These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.”

<sup>18</sup>“The phrase ‘one like a son of man’ (like 14:14) is an apparent allusion to the phrase כְּבַר אֱנָשׁ *kēbar ʾēnāš*, ‘like a son of man,’ in Dan 7:13 (Lietzmann, *Menschensohn*, 56–57; Slater, BT Page 85

over against the synoptic gospels phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου clearly signals John's reaching back to Daniel here rather than to the existing Christian gospels, although it is clear that John is referring to the risen Christ with this term. The prophecy mode of visionary experience pushed John to Daniel and other OT prophets for his terms in order to affirm a connection to this Old Testament depiction.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately the limitations

44 [1993] 349–50). However, the synonymous phrase כדמות בני דאס, 'like a son of man,' occurs in Dan 10:16, continuing an earlier angelophany described in Dan 10:5–6 in a way very similar to Rev 1:13–15. Dalman (*Die Worte Jesu*, 206, followed by Casey, *Son of Man*, 144–45) thought this more likely to be an allusion to Dan 10:5–6, 16, 18. Somewhat surprisingly, there is nothing in the way that the appellation 'son of man' is used in Rev 1:13 or 14:14 to suggest any influence from or even any awareness of the extensive use of the title in the Gospels, for the anarthrous phrase υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου is an allusion to Dan 7:13 (Lietzmann, *Menschensohn*, 56–57). When Justin refers to the son of man mentioned in Dan 7:13, he uses the anarthrous phrase ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου (*I Apol.* 51.9; *Dial.* 31.1, 3; 32.1; 76.1[2x]; 79.2; 100.3 [ὡς lacking]; 126.1), though when he refers to the title in the synoptic Gospels, he uses the arthrous phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (*Dial.* 76.7; 100.3); see Borsch, *Son of Man*, 43; Moule, NTS 41 (1995) 277; Skarsaune, *Prophecy*, 88–90. The phrase in the Gospels and Acts regularly occurs with the definite article: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; the anarthrous phrase υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου occurs in John 5:27 (the only anarthrous occurrence of the phrase in the sayings traditions); Heb 2:6; Rev 1:13; 14:14. Hare (*Son of Man*, 90–96) argues that the anarthrous phrase in John 5:27 expresses a quality or status, i.e., the incarnate status of the Son." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 90.]

<sup>19</sup>"The entire vision is a pastiche of allusions to Jewish epiphany language. The main source of imagery for his epiphany is Dan 10:5–14 (probably a description of the angel Gabriel), with features drawn from the description of God in Dan 7:9 (hair white like wool) and of the mysterious figure in Dan 7:13 ('one like a son of man'). The description of Christ also owes something to ancient grandiose depictions of the appearance of great kings (cf. Jos. *As.* 5:6; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 3.73–85) and Israelite high priests (Josephus *Ant.* 4.154, 171). In Jewish literature, similar epiphanic language is found in Jos. *As.* 14:8–11; *Apoc. Zeph.* 9:12–10:9. Significantly, the exalted Christ is described using imagery drawn from descriptions of God (cf. Ezek 1:26–28, upon which Dan 7 is probably dependent) and prominent angelic figures. Similar descriptions of divine beings seen in epiphanies are found in the Greek magical papyri and in descriptions of divine epiphanies in Greek literary texts. The author uses various visual attributes and verbal attributes from the visions in the descriptions of Christ that form the introductions to the seven letters, thereby linking 2:1–3:22 to the introductory commission vision. The entire scene has enough similarities to various OT epiphanies to make it entirely plausible to the reader familiar with that background. The metaphorical character of what John sees is made obvious in v 20, where the seven stars are interpreted as the seven angels of the churches and the seven menorahs as the seven churches themselves (one of the few passages in Revelation in which allegorical interpretations are presented). The seven menorahs are primarily reminiscent of the seven-branched golden menorah of the tabernacle and temple (Exod 25:31–41), also seen in Zechariah's vision (Zech 4:1–2), which

of English grammar make expressing this distinction impossible to preserve in translation.

The terminology of Daniel 7:13 along with generalized imagery usage play an important role here.<sup>20</sup> The Son of Man and the Ancient of Days figures in Daniel seem to be two distinct figures, although in the text history as well as in some interpretive history, they end up being the same person in several texts and ancient commentators, both Jewish and Christian.<sup>21</sup> Clearly for

today is the religious symbol of Judaism. [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 117.]

<sup>20</sup>**Dan. 7:13-14.** 13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw *one like a human being* coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. 14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

13 ἐθεώρουν ἐν ὄραματι τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο, καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆν, καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες παρῆσαν αὐτῷ.† 14 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς κατὰ γένη καὶ πάντα δόξα αὐτῷ λατρεύουσα· καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτοῦ ἐξουσία αἰώνιος, ἣτις οὐ μὴ ἀρθῆ, καὶ ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ, ἣτις οὐ μὴ φθαρῆ.†

<sup>21</sup>"While in the MT of Dan 7:13 the 'one like a son of man' is presented to the Ancient of Days (thus clearly distinguishing the two figures), here the 'one like a son of man' is described as if he is identical with the Ancient of Days. This identification was not necessarily original with John, but may already be presupposed by the LXX version of Dan 7:13 found in MS 967 (Giessen, Daniel, 108): ἦρχετο ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν (v) παρῆν καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες προσήγαγον αὐτῷ, 'he came like a son of man and like the Ancient of Days was present, and those who were near approached him.' In MS 88 the reading is similar (Giessen, Daniel, 39–40): ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο, καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆν, καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες παρῆσαν αὐτῷ, 'he came like a son of man, and like the Ancient of Days was present, and those who were near were present with him.' The verb παρῆσαν in MS 88 has obviously been influenced by the preceding παρῆν; the superior reading is προσήγαγον as found in MS 967. This reading is found in the only two extant LXX MSS of Daniel, the Codex Chisianus (MS 88, dependent on the Syro-Hexapla) and the incomplete Chester Beatty papyrus codex 967 (late second or early third century A.D.). A third witness is the Syrian translation by Paul of Tella (A.D. 616–17), the fifth column (the LXX) of Origen's Hexapla, the so-called Syro-Hexapla. MS 88, however, is also dependent on the recension of the LXX found in Origen's Hexapla. MS 967 is one of the earliest extant copies of parts of the LXX and constitutes the only extant pre-Hexaplaric text of the LXX (Giessen, Daniel, 17). It identifies the one like a son of man with the Ancient of Days, though it is unclear whether this was intentional or the result of scribal error, or whether this was pre-Christian or reflects Christian exegesis (Bodenmann, Naissance, 73–74 n. 192). A. Yarbro Collins (in J. J. Collins, *CommDaniel*, 103) supposes (plausibly) that ἕως παλαιοῦ ἡμερῶν, 'to the Ancient of Days,' was erroneously transcribed as ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν, 'as the Ancient of Days.' If the change was intentional, the precedent for this exegetical step may have been based on Ezek 1:26, in which Ezekiel saw something like a throne, 'and upon the image of the throne was an image like

John this υἰὸν ἀνθρώπου was also παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν, [the Ancient of Days](#). One important side implication of this linkage in Jewish interpretive history of Dan. 7:13 is the early second century AD rabbinical Jewish identification of this person with the Davidic Messiah.<sup>22</sup> John

a human form.’ The Tg. Ezek. 1:26 reads (Levey, Tg. Ezek., 22) ‘and above the throne was the likeness of the appearance of Adam.’ 1 Enoch 46:1 (composed late in the first century A.D.), however, understands Dan 7:13 to refer to two distinct figures: ‘And there I saw one who had a head of days, and his head (was) white like wool; and with him (there was) another, whose face had the appearance of a man, and his face (was) full of grace, like one of the holy angels’ (tr. M. A. Knibb, Enoch 2:131). This passage alludes both to Ezek 1:26 (which contains the phrase דְּמִוּת כְּמַרְאֵה אָדָם *dēmūt kēmar·ēh ·ādām*, ‘the likeness as the appearance of a man’) and to Dan 7:9, with Dan 7:13 providing the connecting link (Feuillet, RB 60 [1953] 180ff; Quispel, VC 34 [1980] 1–2.)” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 90-91.]

<sup>22</sup>“Rev 1:13–14 may reflect an early stage of the later rabbinical polemic against the ‘two powers’ heresy. Proponents of this heresy, often identified with Christians and/ or Gnostics, interpreted certain biblical texts in such a way that angelic beings or divine hypostases in heaven were understood as equivalent to God (cf. Segal, *Two Powers*, x). This heresy was traced back to Elisha b. Abuya, nicknamed Aher, ‘Other’ (ca. A.D. 110–35). This heresy had an earlier phase, reaching into the first century A.D., in which the two powers were complementary, and a second phase in which the two powers were understood as antagonistic (Segal, *Two Powers*, 17). Dan 7:9–10 appears to have been as important exegetically for the “heretical” view as it was to the rabbinic defense against it. One passage that may reflect the time of Akiba (early second century A.D.) is b. Hag. 14a (I. Epstein, tr., *Babylonian Talmud*):

One passage says: “His throne was fiery flames” (Dan. 7:9) and another passage says: “Until thrones were placed; and One that was ancient of days did sit”—there is no contradiction; One (throne) for Him, and one for David: this is the view of R. Akiba.

“If authentic, this suggests that early second century A.D. rabbinical authorities identified the ‘son of man’ figure in Dan 7:13 with the Davidic Messiah (cf. Midr. Ps. 21:5). In the continuation of the passage quoted from b. Hag. 14a, the two figures of Dan 7:9–13 are understood as God’s two aspects of mercy and justice. This identification is also reflected in the formulation of a new messianic name עֲנַנִּי *·nny*, ‘Cloud-Man,’ and בֶּרַךְ נִפְלִי *br nypli*, ‘Son of the Cloud’ (G. Vermes in Black, *Aramaic*, 327–28). If the rabbis were antagonistic to any tradition of a manlike figure in heaven beside God (Segal, *Two Powers*, 52), it is striking that Rev 1:13–14 also avoids interpreting Dan 7:9–13 in terms of two figures. This polemic based on Dan 7:9–10 is correlated in rabbinic sources with references to God as first and last (Isa 44:6; 41:4); cf. Rev 1:17b, with the elaborate interpretation of the divine name (Segal, *Two Powers*, 33–34):

I was in Egypt.  
I was at the Sea.  
I was in the past,  
I will be in the future to come.  
I am in this world,  
I am in the world to come.

This is comparable to the divine name in Rev 1:8: “who is and who was and who is to come,” and with an emphasis on God as one who raises people from the dead based on Deut 32:39: “See now that I,

is very well adopting this perspective and affirming that Christ is that very person. In Rev. 14:14, this expression ὁμοιον υἰὸν ἀνθρώπου is used for the second and last time by John in Revelation:

Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ νεφέλη λευκή, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν νεφέλην καθήμενον ὁμοιον υἰὸν ἀνθρώπου, ἔχων ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ στέφανον χρυσοῦν καὶ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ὄρεπτανον ὄξύ.

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!

Both instances clearly reach back to the experience of Daniel in 7:13, which is not some distant future experience but as a present reality taking place now.

What becomes important in John’s depiction of this υἰὸν ἀνθρώπου is his appearance, which is given in great detail with a seven fold depiction.

**First are his clothes:** ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν, [clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest](#). Elsewhere in Revelation only seven angels appear clothed in a similar manner (cf. 15:6): καὶ ἐξῆλθον οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι [οἱ] ἔχοντες τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἐνδεδυμένοι λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν καὶ περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσᾶς, [and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, with golden sashes across their chests](#).

The two articles of clothing highlighted by John in 1:13 are a ποδήρη and a ζώνην. The first, the ποδήρη, is a bit unusual in that the word is literally an adjective meaning “reaching to the feet.”<sup>23</sup> Very likely this unusual reference draws upon Daniel 10:5<sup>24</sup> and/or Ezekiel 9:2

even I, am He. I kill and I revive” (Segal, *Two Powers*, 84). These texts are all based on speculation on the significance of the divine name and, when combined with allusions to Dan 7:9–13, suggest that John is preserving a Jewish polemic against understanding Daniel as referring to the two powers.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 92-93.]

<sup>23</sup>**ποδήρης, ες** (πούς+ήρης ‘fit’) **reaching to the feet** (Aeschyl. et al.; LXX; EpArist 96; Philo, Fuga 185) subst. ὁ ποδ. (sc. χιτῶν; used w. χιτῶν X., Cyr. 6, 4, 2; Paus. 5, 19, 6; Ex 29:5; Jos., Ant. 3, 153. Without χιτ. Appian, Liby. 66 §296; Ex 25:7; 28:4; Ezk 9:3; EpArist 96; Philo, Leg. All. 2, 56; Jos., Bell. 5, 231; TestLevi 8:2) **a robe reaching to the feet Rv 1:13**; B 7:9.—DELG s.v. πούς and -ηρης. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 838.]

<sup>24</sup>**Dan. 10:5. I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist.**

καὶ ἦρα τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μου καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ ἄνθρωπος εἶς ἐνδεδυμένος βύσσινω καὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν περιεζωσμένος βυσσίνω, καὶ ἐκ μέσου αὐτοῦ φῶς,†



from the LXX translation.<sup>25</sup> Although the fabric of this robe is not identified specifically here, it is labeled as λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν, *pure shining linen*, in Rev. 15:6. A variety of Greek words designated this fabric: σινδῶν (cf. Mt. 27:59, Jesus' burial cloth); ὀθόνιον (cf. Jhn. 19:40, John's term for Jesus' burial cloth); βύσσινος, ἡ, ον (cf. Rev. 18:12, 16; 19:8, 14, designation of expensive clothes); βύσσος (cf. Lk. 16:18 & Rev. 18:12 alt. txt; another designation of expensive clothes); λίνον (only in Rev. 15:6 as term for linen clothes). The implication of the robe is that it is of fine quality and thus proper for a person in authority to wear. If made of linen rather than the more common wool, it was even more a mark of prominence.

The tendency of the LXX to use ποδήρης, ες in reference to the robes worn by the high priest in both the tabernacle and the later temple worship meetings<sup>26</sup> points toward this picture of Christ in John 1:13 as being in the role of the great high priest of God in the Heavenly temple. This is not absolutely clear, but the evidence seemingly points this direction. However, Aune in the *WBC* is not so persuaded and makes strong arguments against this association.<sup>27</sup> These ar-

<sup>25</sup>“The phrase ‘wearing a long robe’ may be an allusion to the vision of Dan 10:5, in which the revelatory angel is described as ‘clothed in linen’ (LXX: ἐνδεδυμένος βύσσινον), or to the vision of Ezek 9:2, which also describes an angelic being as ‘clothed in linen’ (LXX: ἐνδεδυκὼς ποδήρη).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 93.]

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Exod. 25:6; 28:4, 27; 29:5; 35:8; Ezel. 9:2-3; Zech. 3:4. This idea is given messianic tones in intertestamental Jewish writings: cf. Wisdom of Solomon, 18:24; Sirach 27:8; 45:8.

<sup>27</sup>“One of the problems in interpreting vv 13–16 is determining the significance of the imagery used to depict the exalted Christ. One common, but unfounded, view is that Christ is presented in priestly garments (cf. Wolff, NTS 27 [1980–81] 189). The term ποδήρης occurs twelve times in the LXX and always refers to a garment worn by the high priest, though the term is used to translate five different Hebrew words, so that the Greek term ποδήρης can hardly be understood as a technical term: (1) חֹשֶׁן *hōšen*, ‘breastplate,’ found only in the Priestly writer and most often translated λογείον, ‘oracle breastplate’ (e.g., Exod 28:15, 22), but translated ποδήρης in Exod 25:7; 35:9; (2) מַעֲיִל *mē'il* in Exod 28:4; 29:5; (3) אֶפֶד *ēpōd*, ‘ephod,’ in Exod 28:31; (4) בַּד *bad*

guments are persuasive to me. Other commentators look at these details much too superficially and without the detailed, careful analysis that is required in order to make a strong case for the priestly association.

But as was typical in the ancient world, and the first century Roman world in particular, the mark of real distinction was not so much the kind of outer garment worn by the man, but the insignia etc. layered on top of this outer wrap around garment. Thus the sash layered around his chest is the real mark of distinction: περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν, *with a golden sash across his chest*. What is very interesting is that the picture painted of a golden sash diagonally placed across the chest is rather common in the Greco-Roman literature as symbolic attire for kings and gods.<sup>28</sup> While the term ζώνη normally signifies a belt worn around the waist in order to hold the wrap around

in Ezek 9:2, 3, 11; and (5) מַחְלָאֶסוֹת *mahālāsōt* in Zech 3:4. Actually, the most common Hebrew term for the robes of the high priests and priests in the OT is כִּתְוֹנֶת *kētōnet*, which is usually translated χιτών (e.g., Exod 28:4, 39, 40; 29:5, 8; 35:19; 39:27; 40:14; Lev 6:3). ποδήρης is also used of the high priest's robe in Wis 18:24; Sir 27:8; 45:81; Ep. Arist. 96 (the vestments of the high priest are described in 96–98); Josephus *Ant.* 3.153; and Philo *Leg. All.* 2.56. In *T. Levi* 8:2–10, which contains a list of priestly vestments intended for the heavenly consecration of Levi, his robe is called ἡ στολή τῆς ἱερατείας, ‘the robe of the priesthood.’ Philo *Mos.* 2.109–10 uses the term ὑποδύλης, which he distinguishes from the ἐρωμῖς, ‘ephod.’ Philo describes the purple robe, using the alternate term ποδήρης, in some detail (*Mos.* 118–21). Robes and belts (which gathered the robes at the waist) were basic articles of clothing in the ancient Mediterranean world used by both men and women (cf. *Odyssey* 6.38). Since the ‘one like a son of man’ is wearing only a long robe and a golden sash, these two garments by themselves cannot be claimed to be priestly vestments. Nothing is said about the rest of the vestments (the ephod, the trousers, the turban, the crown, and so forth), nor are the material and color of the robe specified. There is therefore no clear intention on the part of the author to conceptualize the appearance of the exalted Christ in priestly terms.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 93–94.]

<sup>28</sup>“The epiphanic language of Greek poetry often emphasizes the golden appearance of the garments and accoutrements of the gods (cf. Williams, *Callimachus*, 39). The epiphanies of Zeus in *Iliad* 8.41–46 and of Poseidon in *Iliad* 13.20–27 (both passages nearly identical verbally) became the model for the use of gold in divine epiphanies. Callimachus *Hymn to Apollo* 32–35 is representative: ‘Golden is the tunic of Apollo and golden his mantle, his lyre and his Lyctian bow and his quiver; golden too are his sandals; for rich in gold is Apollo’ (tr. G. R. Mair, LCL). This epiphanic language could also be applied to the description of heroes, as in Vergil *Aeneid* 1.589–94, where Aeneas is described as ‘splendid in bright light, grand as a god,’ for Venus had ‘made his eyes shine out with power and joy-like ivory carved to beauty, like some work of silver or Parian marble chased with gold’ (tr. Copely, Vergil, 19–20). In *Odyssey* 9.544–45, Circe is depicted as wearing a golden girdle (ζώνην ... χρυσεῖην).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 94.]



outer garment in place,<sup>29</sup> the specific details here, περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς, clearly portray this as a sash attached diagonally across the chest rather than around the waist. Against this ancient pagan backdrop, this individual in 1:13-16 stands as a kingly deity with royal authority and responsibility.



**Emperor Domitian**

What then is the message of the robe and the sash? Clearly John reaches back into his Jewish heritage to portray Christ in the kingly role of power and authority. That the image presented by his dress communicated a similar message out of John's contemporary non-Jewish world helps reinforce the portrait of Christ as king and ruler standing in the midst of His people with complete authority to protect and to discipline them as needed. With images of emperor Domitian being set up by the early 90s in the cities of Asia portraying him in full array as the most powerful ruler on the earth and as divine, these readers of Revelation were reminded that their first loyalty was to the Ruler over the kings of the earth. And this Ruler stood as their protector and guarantor of eternal life. Domitian could never provide what the risen Christ was already giving them.

**Second is his head:** ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός, **His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire.**

The first depiction of the head paints an unusual image of an extremely old man whose skin and hair have turned snow white. In remembering that Jesus was a dark skinned middle eastern Jew, this contrast stretches our understanding. This image comes

<sup>29</sup>ζώνη, ἡς, ἡ (Hom. et al.; Kaibel 482, 3; pap, LXX, EpArist, Philo, Joseph., Test12Patr, JosAs; Mel., Fgm. 8b 24 'zone', loanw. in rabb.) **belt, girdle**, in our lit. only of a man's belt or girdle, unless the ref. is to heavenly beings (Rv). Of the Baptist ζ. δερματίνη (4 Km 1:8= Jos., Ant. 9, 22) **Mt 3:4; Mk 1:6**; GEb 13, 79 (s. DBuzy, Pagne ou ceinture?: RSR 23, '33, 589-98 and on Ἰωάννης 1). Of Paul **Ac 21:11ab**. Of the Human One (Son of Man) περιεζωσμένος πρὸς τ. μαστοῖς ζ. χρυσᾶν **Rv 1:13**; sim. of angels περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζ. χρυσᾶς **15:6** (cp. 4 Km 3:21 περιεζωσμένοι ζ.—The golden belt or girdle as Ps.-Callisth. 2, 21, 17). λύειν τὴν ζ. loose, i.e. remove the belt (Hyperid., Fgm. 67) MPol 13:2. This belt is also used to hold money (Plut., Mor., 665b ἀνθρώπου ... ζώνην δὲ χαλκοῦς ἔχουσαν ὑπεζωσμένον; PRyl 127, 32 [29 A.D.] ζ. ἐν ἧ κέρματος (δραχμαὶ) δ'; 141, 22) **Mt 10:9; Mk 6:8**.—B. 434. DELG s.v. ζώνη. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 431.]

straight out of Dan. 7:9 in picturing God as the Ancient of Days (παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν), and John now applies it to Christ.<sup>30</sup> This was a popular image in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition as well.<sup>31</sup>

The image of Christ as an extremely old man plays off the ancient near eastern respect for the elderly. Those with white hair on their head are assumed to be wise and insightful, and thus worth of respect and esteem and honor. Thus John saw Christ standing as the very epitome of wisdom and understanding. His judgments to be made regarding the spiritual condition of the seven churches will be correct and insightful since they come from His infinite wisdom.

Also in connection to his head come the depiction of the eyes of this Ancient of Days: καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός, **his eyes were like a flame of fire.** Again Dan. 10:6 seems to be the source of this image.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup>**Dan. 7:9.** As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and **the hair of his head like pure wool**; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.

ἐθεώρουν ἕως ὅτε θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν, καὶ παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν ἐκάθητο ἔχων περιβολὴν ὡσεὶ χιόνα, **καὶ τὸ τρίχωμα τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔριον λευκὸν καθαρὸν**, ὁ θρόνος ὡσεὶ φλόξ πυρός,†

<sup>31</sup>“The same metaphor in which the hair of God is mentioned and its whiteness compared with wool is mentioned in the theophany described in 1 Enoch 46:1; 71:10 (the so-called Parables of Enoch in 1 Enoch 37-71, probably no earlier than the late first century A.D.) and is certainly dependent on Daniel as well: ‘his head was white like wool.’ In Apoc. Abr. 11:2, it is said of the angel Iael that ‘the hair of his head [was] like snow.’ The son of Lamech was born with hair white like wool (1 Enoch 106:2, 10), which is understood as characteristic of angels (1 Enoch 106:5-6). The metaphor of comparing the head of an old man to snow also occurs in Jos. As. 22:7 (a description of the aged Jacob). In keeping with the ancient Near Eastern attitude toward the elderly, this metaphor conveyed such notions as respect, honor, wisdom, and high social status. The mention of both the head and the hair is at first sight problematic, for only the hair could be white. The καὶ is therefore exegetical or explanatory, i.e., ‘his head, that is, his white hair, was like white wool,’ using the order of the general and the specific. The repetition of the adjective λευκός is awkward. The detailed description of ‘one like a son of man’ in vv 14-15 begins with the head and eyes and then turns to the feet, a stereotyped pattern of description often found in ancient sources (e.g., Philostratus Vitae. soph. 552).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 94-95.]

<sup>32</sup>**Dan. 10:5-6.** 5 I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. 6 His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, **his eyes like flaming torches**, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude.

5 καὶ ἤρα τοὺς ὀφθαλμοῦς μου καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος εἷς ἐνδεδυμένος βύσσινον καὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν περιεζωσμένος βυσσίνῳ, καὶ ἐκ μέσου αὐτοῦ φῶς,† 6 καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ θαρσις, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ὄρασις ἀστραπῆς, **καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ λαμπάδες πυρός**, καὶ οἱ βραχίονες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πόδες ὡσεὶ χαλκός ἐξαστράπτων, καὶ φωνὴ λαλιάς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ φωνὴ θορύβου.†

Also such an image is found often in the Jewish apocalyptic literature as well; and also in the Greco-Roman literature.<sup>33</sup> Eyes of fire was understood in the ancient world to signify deity and consequently sharp or piercing vision that could see clearly and profoundly. The latter repetition of this image in 19:12, οἱ δὲ ὄφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός, for the ‘rider on the white horse’ re-enforces this understanding since there this portrait of eyes is in connection to Christ as Judge and Warrior leading the armies of Heaven in battle against evil.

**Third are his feet:** καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, **his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace.**

John now turns to the feet with the depiction of them not as flesh and bones, but as looking like bronze. Clearly this is not a fashion conscious description!

Again John is appealing to Dan. 10:6 where the Ancient of Days possesses arms and legs that appear like bronze: οἱ βραχίονες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πόδες ὡσεὶ χαλκὸς ἐξαστράπτων, **his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze.** John only picks up on the οἱ πόδες segment of the description. What is interesting is that this individual is barefoot, but with feet like this who would need shoes!<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup>“In 1 Enoch 106:5–6, the newborn son of Lamech has ‘eyes like the rays of the sun,’ understood to be a characteristic of angels. It is said of Jacob the patriarch that ‘his eyes (were) flashing and darting (flashes of) lightning’ (Jos. As. 22:7). In Greek tradition the eyes of the gods were thought to have a special quality, which was usually described as bright and shining (*Iliad* 3.397; *Hymn to Aphrodite* 1.181; cf. Mussies, “Identification,” 4). According to Apollodorus 2.4.9, Herakles ‘flashed a gleam of fire from his eyes [πυρὸς δ’ ἐξ ὀμμάτων ἔλαμπεν αἴγλην],’ an indication that he was a son of Zeus. The comparison of eyes with fire is a frequent metaphor in Greek and Latin literature (*Iliad* 13.474; 19.366; *Odyssey* 19.446; *Ps.-Hesiod Scut.* 72; Euripides frag. 689 [Nauck, *Tragicorum graecorum*]; Herodian 1.7.5; Apollodorus 2.4.9; Vergil *Aeneid* 6.300; 12.102; cf. Neuer Wettstein, ad Rev 1:14), used in contexts where humans are described in ways that are characteristic of the gods (Statius *Silv.* 1.1.103 [the eyes of Domitian’s equestrian statue]; Suetonius *Augustus* 79.2 [the eyes of Augustus]).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 95.]

<sup>34</sup>“The ‘one like a son of man’ described here is apparently barefoot, and it is worth noting that Israelite priests apparently wore no special footwear when officiating in the tabernacle or temple. In *Acts of John* 90, in the context of a retelling of the transfiguration of Jesus, his feet are described as being whiter than snow. The famous Prima Porta statue of Augustus portrays the emperor, rather atypically, as barefoot. According to Hannestad (*Roman Art*, 51), this is generally understood as an indication that the individual depicted is in the sphere of the divine, and that the statue of Augustus portrays the deceased and deified emperor. Similarly, one panel of the Ravenna reliefs depicts four deceased members of the imperial family including Augustus, and perhaps Antonia (Claudius’ mother), Germanicus, and Drusus, all barefoot (Hannestad, *Roman Art*, 100–101 fig. 63). The Vatican statue of Claudius as Jupiter also portrays the emperor as barefoot (Hannestad, *Roman Art*, 104

One very real difficulty here is in understanding the word χαλκολιβάνῳ, found only here and in 2:18 in repetition of 1:14. It is not the normal Greek word for bronze, either χαλκίον (Mk. 7:4), χαλκοῦς (Rev. 9:20), or χαλκός (Rev. 18:12).<sup>35</sup> But these three terms also mean copper as well. In the minting of Roman coins, the term ὀρείχαλκος (an alloy of copper and tin, i.e., bronze) is commonly used. One of the challenges to John’s term is the second part of this compound term: -λιβάνῳ, which comes from λίβανος and means ‘frankincense.’ The signal that the term doesn’t literally mean a ‘copper scented frankincense’ is the qualifier attached to it: ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, **like that refined by fire in a furnace.** Clearly the reference is to a hard metal that has been created by a refining process. Consequently different translations will assume different metals, mostly either brass or bronze.<sup>36</sup> That confusion should

fig. 65). According to Fraenkel (Horace, 204 n. 4), in the literary presentation of divine epiphanies in Horace and in Greek poetry, the appearance of the god, anticipated in prayer, is frequently described in detail, and ‘special attention was paid to the god’s gait, and sometimes also to the manner in which he was to set his feet on the ground and to his footwear’ (e.g., Sophocles *Antigone* 1144; Aristophanes *Frogs* 330–31; *Persians* 659–60; Catullus 61.9–10; Vergil *Georgics* 2.7–8). In the brief description of the Great King of Persia in Aeschylus, *Persians* 660–62, only his sandals and royal tiara are mentioned (i.e., he is described ‘from head to foot’). In Callimachus *Hymn* 2.3, the feet of Apollo are described in epiphanic language as καλῶ ποδί, ‘with beautiful foot.’ In PGM XIII.705, the magical practitioner is advised to look at the feet of the god when he appears, not his face. Bare feet were also required in certain ritual situations, such as the procession that bore the ashes of Augustus (Suetonius Aug. 100.4), and for Pythagoreans, who sacrificed and entered temples (Iamblichus *De vita Pyth.* 85, 105). In the brief theophanic description in Exod 24:9–11, only the feet of God are seen on a pavement of sapphire.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 95–96.]

<sup>35</sup>A difficulty in translation is distinguishing between brass (an alloy of copper with zinc) and bronze (an alloy of copper with tin). The commonality of copper pushes the Greeks to use χαλκο- in compound forms, but not in clear distinction between the two alloys of brass and bronze mentioned above.

<sup>36</sup>Note the translation patterns:

**English:** *like unto burnished brass* (ASV); *like burnished bronze* (RSV, RSVCE, ESV, ESVUK, Mounce, NASB, NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVACE, NRSVCE); *like bronze* (CEV, EXB, NCV, NIV, NIVUK); *like bronze metal* (NIRV); *like glowing bronze* (GW); *like fine bronze* (HCSB, LEB); *as the finest bronze glows* (Phillips); *both feet furnace-fired bronze* (Message); *like polished bronze* (NET, NLT); *like brightly polished bronze* (Voice); *like unto fine brass* (KJV, DRA, 21st Cent.KJV, CEB, ERV, GNV1599); *like fine brass* (NKJV); *like brass* (GNT); *like orichalc* (Knox); *like shining brass* (NLV); *like burnished brass* (WEB); *like to latten [and his feet like to dross of gold, or latten]* (WYC).

**Spanish:** *semejantes al bronce* (BLP, BLPH); *semejantes al bronce bruñido* (LBLE, RVR1960); *brillaban como bronce pulido* (DHH); *brillaban como el bronce* (TLA); *eran como bronce pulido* (NTV); *eran semejantes al bronce pulido* (RVC, RVR1995);

exist between the two metals is not surprising given their appearance in raw form. Note the bronze on the left and the brass on the right graphics.



Some translations seem to miss the point of the qualifier: ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, *as having been fired in a furnace*. These feet have been hardened into this tough metal by the suffering and pain of a refining process. These are not dainty, pleasant to look at feet. Instead, they are tough, hard as metal feet made so by the suffering of the Son of Man. Thus they possess strength and power to support the judgments of their owner, the Son of Man.

The point of walking around barefooted with feet looking like hardened brass or bronze was to stress the doing of sacred duties on a solid footing of power and authority. His feet were solid and needed nothing between them and the ground for either protection or comfort. No one could challenge His authority. One step by this gigantic figure with these feet would crush any enemy instantly.

**Fourth is his voice:** καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, *and his voice was like the sound of many waters*.

Once again the OT prophets provide the background for John's expression. Note especially Dan. 10:6 and Ezek. 43:2.

**Dan. 10:6.** His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, *and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude*.

**LXX.** καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ θαρσις, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ὄρασις ἀστραπῆς, καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ λαμπάδες πυρός, καὶ οἱ βραχίονες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πόδες ὡσεὶ χαλκὸς ἐξαστράπτων, *καὶ φωνὴ λαλιᾶς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ φωνὴ θορύβου.*†

**Ezek. 43:2.** *And there, the glory of the God of Israel seemed al bronze bruñido (NBLH); parecían bronce al rojo vivo (NVI, CST); eran como bronce brillante (PDT); pies semejantes al latón fino (RVA)*

**German:** *gleichwie Messing, das im Ofen glüht (LUTH1545); wie Golderz, das im Ofen glüht (LUTH1984); gleich Golderz, wie im Ofen geglüht (ZB); glänzten wie flüssiges Gold im Schmelzofen (HOF); glänzten wie gleißendes Gold, das im Schmelzofen glüht (GNB); glänzten wie Golderz, das im Schmelzofen glüht (NGU-DE); wie schimmerndes Erz, im Ofen geglüht (SCH1951); wie schimmerndes Erz, als glühten sie im Ofen (SCH2000); gleich glänzendem Erz, als glühten sie im Ofen (EB); glichen dem Golderz, als wären sie im Schmelzofen glühend gemacht (Menge); glänzten wie Golderz, das im Schmelzofen glüht (EUB); glänzten wie im Feuer gereinigtes Erz (NLB).* [Messing=brass; Golderz=gold ore; Erz=ore/bronze]

**French:** *étincelaient comme du bronze incandescent (BDS); étaient semblables à de l'airain ardent (LSG, NEG1979); étaient semblables à du bronze ardent (SG21).*

rael was coming from the east; *the sound was like the sound of mighty waters*; and the earth shone with his glory.

**LXX.** καὶ ἰδοὺ δόξα θεοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἤρχετο κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν τῆς πύλης τῆς βλεπούσης πρὸς ἀνατολάς, *καὶ φωνὴ τῆς παρεμβολῆς ὡς φωνὴ διπλασιαζόντων πολλῶν*, καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐξέλαμπεν ὡς φέγγος ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης κυκλόθεν.†

The general contours of these OT prophetic images in connection to the speaking of God gives John the image for the speaking of this Ancient of Days.<sup>37</sup> When this God speaks His voice is so overpowering that it deafens.<sup>38</sup> This same OT prophetic background provides the imagery source for similar expressions in the Jewish *Apocalypse of Abraham* in 17:1 and 18:1.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the voice of this Ancient of Days speaks with overwhelming authority and power that goes way beyond human ability to speak.

**Fifth is his right hand:** καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ, *In his right hand he held seven stars*.

One should note the very awkward grammar structure here. The depiction of his head, his hair, his feet and his voice in vv. 14-15 are straight forward as-

<sup>37</sup>Also in this background is **Ezek. 1:24.** *When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army; when they stopped, they let down their wings.*

**LXX.** καὶ ἤκουον τὴν φωνὴν τῶν περυγῶν αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι αὐτὰ ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτος πολλοῦ· καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐστάναι αὐτὰ κατέπαυον αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν.†

<sup>38</sup>Just as Dan. 10:6 ends with mention of the roar of the 'Son of man's' voice, so the portrayal of v 15 concludes, although the actual language describing the voice is taken from the MT of Ezek. 1:24 and 43:2, where God's voice is compared to the roar of many waters. God's voice in Ezek. 43:2 is located near the end-time temple of chs. 40-48, and Jewish writings located it in Israel's temple itself (*Midr. Rab. Gen. 3.4; Pesikta de Rab Kahana 21; Midr. Ps. 104.4; and Midr. Rab. Lev. 31.7*). The Son of man's voice is also set in a heavenly temple context (see also on 1:12, 16), which underscores further Christ's divine attributes." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 210.]

<sup>39</sup>**17.1-3.** And I said to the angel, "Why have you now brought me up here, because my eyes cannot now see distinctly, and I am growing weak, and my spirit is departing from me?" And he said to me, "Remain close by me and do not fear, for the One whom you cannot see is now coming towards us *with a great voice of holiness*, even the Eternal One who loves you. But you yourself cannot see Him. But you must not allow your spirit to grow faint on account of the choirs of those who cry out, for I am with you to strengthen you."

**18.1-3.** And while he was thus speaking fire came all about us, and there was a voice within the fire *like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the sea in violent motion*. And I desired to fall down there and worship, and I saw that the angel who was with me bowed his head and worshiped, but the surface of the high place where I seemed to be standing changed its inclination constantly, rolling as the great waves on the surface of the sea.

sertions with the verb of being assumed rather clearly. The depictions of the sword and his face in v. 16b-c resume this same grammar structure. Tucked between is the participle phrase *καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων*, and having in his right hand seven stars. John inserts this trait by using an attributive participle phrase. The attributive participle from the verb ἔχω occurs some 60 times in Revelation, and thus is not out of the ordinary for this document, although unusual in Greek writings generally in this form. In a limited way the shift in grammar construction provides a break from the listing, and possibly highlights emphasis on the image of the right hand.

This image stretches the mind dramatically. This Ancient of Days has a right palm that is large enough to hold seven stars.

In the ancient world such imagery for a powerful ruler was relatively common, and the seven stars could refer to a variety of heavenly bodies.<sup>40</sup> These stars or

<sup>40</sup>According to ancient sidereal lore, seven stars could represent (1) the seven planets, (2) Ursus Major (a constellation with seven stars), or (3) the Pleiades (another constellation of seven stars); each of these possibilities requires a short discussion.

“(1) In antiquity, the ‘seven stars’ are often used to represent the seven ‘planets’ (Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Venus, and Saturn). Though these seven planets were almost universally accepted in the Hellenistic and Roman world, there were three different planetary orders (Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 1–11): (a) The order based on distance from the earth has two variants (because the positions of Venus, Mercury, and the Sun cannot be determined relative to each other): (i) the older ‘Egyptian’ order: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Sun, and Moon, and (ii) the later ‘Chaldean’ order, which came to dominate late Hellenistic astronomy (note the position of the Sun in the center): Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon. (b) The astrological, horoscopic order (probably originally based on distance, though priority was given to the Sun and Moon for other reasons): Sun, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. (c) The Mithraic ‘grade’ order: Saturn, Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. In some of the depictions of Mithras slaying the bull, the presence of seven stars in the field symbolizes the seven planets (Vermaseren, *Mithraica III*, 9 [plate IV], 12 [plate XII], 37; Vermaseren, *CIM-RM*, 1127B, 1206, 1216, 1727, 2244, 2354, 2359). Clement Alex. (Strom. 5.6) compares the menorah in the Jewish temple with the planets (see Comment on 1:12) and compares the light in the middle and in the highest position with the sun, following the ‘Chaldean’ order.

“(2) Seven stars can also represent the stars that form the constellation Ursa Major, known as ἡ Ἄρκτος, ‘the Great Bear’; the Septentriones, the seven plowing oxen; ἡ Ἄμαξα, ‘the Wain’; or (in the United States) the Big Dipper (Aratus Phaen. 26–27; Corp. Herm. frag. 6.13 [Scott, *Hermetica* 1:412–13; A. J. Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste* 3:37]; Vettius Valens 13.27; see Job 9:9; 38:32, where the Hebrew term *בְּיָדָי* *ayiš* is translated ‘Bear’ in the RSV and NRSV and ‘Great Bear’ in KB3, 778).

“(3) In addition, since there are seven stars in the constellation Pleiades, this sidereal group could be alluded to (Malina, *Revelation*, 70). This constellation was apparently known to the author of Job 38:31, where the Hebrew term *כִּמָּה* *kimā* refers to ‘das Sie-

planets were typically considered to be gods of some sort that possessed supernatural power. For John to picture the Ancient of Days holding these seven stars in his right hand of power underscored the immense authority of this figure. And additionally when these seven stars are identified with the seven churches in v. 20 it is an additional affirmation of supernatural authority being expressed by these stars through the churches.

Again John seems to have drawn mostly from Dan. 12:3, 6-7<sup>41</sup> for this image which reflects in Daniel much of the above understanding.<sup>42</sup> Additionally Zech. 4 may be playing some role in the shaping of this image.<sup>43</sup> At least in later Jewish interpretive tradition after the first century, Zechariah and Daniel are linked up in

---

bengestirn,’ i.e., Pleiades (KB3, 450).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 97-98.]

<sup>41</sup>**Dan. 12:3, 6-7.** 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, *like the stars* forever and ever. . . .

6 One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, “How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?” 7 The man clothed in linen, who was upstream, raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven. And I heard him swear by the one who lives forever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished.

<sup>42</sup>“In light of the influence from Daniel 10 observed so far, there is reason to view the metaphor of ‘stars’ as originating also from Daniel (for the close association of ‘stars’ with the heavenly man cf. Dan. 12:3, 6–7 in both LXX and Theod.). The heavenly ‘man’ ‘above the waters’ in Dan. 12:6ff. is the same figure as in Daniel 10, and the ‘stars’ (ἀστέρες) in 12:3 symbolize the ‘wise’ among Israel who have been resurrected to heavenly glory. Rev. 1:20 identifies the stars with ‘angels’ (see the comments there). The point is that Christ is the priestly ruler not only of the church on earth but also of its heavenly counterpart (‘hand’ being metaphorical for sovereignty).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 210-11.]

<sup>43</sup>“Like the seven lampstands, the number of the ‘seven stars’ may also have arisen in part from the ‘seven lamps’ of Zechariah 4 (see below). In Jewish writings the Zech. 4:2 lampstand is said to symbolize the righteous in Israel and is equated with the wise who will shine like the stars in Dan. 12:3 (*Midr. Rab. Lev.* 30.2; *Sifre Deut.* 10; *Pesikta de Rab Kahana* 27.2; *Pesikta Rabbati* 51.4). McNamara sees the Palestinian Targum to Exod. 40:4 as the background for 1:20a, where the ‘seven lamps’ of the tabernacle are viewed as ‘corresponding to the seven stars, which resemble the just that shine unto eternity in their righteousness,’ the latter phrase being a clear allusion to Dan. 12:3!<sup>123</sup> The Zechariah lampstand and the stars of Dan. 12:3 were thus equated in Jewish writings, so that their combination in Rev. 1:20 is natural and may suggest that the ‘stars,’ even if angelic, represent the church’s heavenly existence and the ‘lampstands’ its earthly existence.<sup>124</sup>” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 211.]

a common understanding. Whether this was true in the first Christian century is another matter that cannot be claimed with any evidential basis.

The tendency of modern interpreters to see this image of the stars in the right hand as either John's polemic against mythological-astrological teachings of the ancient world or as derived solely from the OT prophets represents a false dichotomy of viewpoint. The issue here is not an 'either/or' choice. Instead, it is the standard reaching by John into the OT prophets for sources of imagery that affirm the absolute sovereignty of this Ancient of Days over any and all claims to power -- either human or divine -- in his late first century world.

**Sixth is his mouth:** καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὄξεια ἐκπορευομένη, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword.



This image, when pictured visually, is indeed strange. And is obviously symbolic in meaning. But

what meaning?<sup>44</sup> Why did John need to specify a two-

<sup>44</sup>“**sword**, a close-range weapon composed of a metal blade, which was usually bronze or iron in the biblical period, and a wood or bone handle (Judg. 3:22). The sword is distinguished from the dagger on the basis of length; the former designation is normally applied to weapons that are over one foot long. Depending upon its function (i.e., slashing or stabbing), the blade was single or double-edged (Judg. 3:16; Ps. 149:6), curved or straight, pointed or blunt. Since swords were so common in the ancient world, the biblical writers provided few descriptive details about these weapons. Fortunately, archaeologists have recovered many swords and daggers from virtually every period of antiquity; this makes it possible for readers of the Bible to obtain some understanding of the weapons mentioned in particular biblical episodes.

“Between the third millennium B.C. and the Greco-Roman period (333 B.C.-A.D. 324), the sword evolved through a variety of shapes, lengths, and levels of durability. The earliest swords were made of bronze and averaged only about 10 inches in length; blades were double-edged, straight, and pointed. While this daggerlike weapon was used primarily for stabbing, the longer sickle-sword was made for slashing. Through the centuries, numerous changes were made in blade production and in the method of attaching the blade to its hilt, but the major change in the development of swords took place when iron-working became widespread. Archaeological and biblical evidence points to the Philistines' early monopoly on the military use of this superior metal (1 Sam. 13:19-22). With the arrival of the Iron Age ca. 1200 B.C., the straight, long sword was developed as a formidable weapon for the first time in history. Since iron possesses greater hardness and strength than bronze, iron was ideal for the forging of longer blades and more durable cutting edges. The double-edged, pointed sword reached a length of 30 inches, and this weapon was strong enough for thrusting and slashing. Although the long sword was improved and used throughout the Mediterranean region until relatively modern times, Greek and Roman soldiers also used shorter swords. The typical sword of Roman soldiers in NT times was the *gladius*, a lightweight, well-balanced weapon with a blade about 2 feet long (see Eph. 6:17: ‘sword of the Spirit,’ Lat. *spiritus gladius*).

“Between the first biblical reference to the sword, the mysterious ‘flaming sword’ in Gen. 3:24, and the final mention of this weapon, the sword of judgment in Rev. 19:21, the term ‘sword’ appears in the Bible well over four hundred times, making the sword the most frequently mentioned weapon in Scripture. References to swords occur in accounts from every biblical period. Most passages refer to the literal weapon of war, but the sword also symbolizes aggression (Jer. 2:30; Matt. 26:52), disharmony (2 Sam. 2:26; Matt. 10:34), deceit (Ps. 55:21), divine assistance (Ezek. 30:21-25), God’s word (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12), and divine wrath (Isa. 34:5-6; Jer. 50:35-37; Ezek. 21:9-20; Hos. 11:6). Since the sword was normally kept in a sheath (1 Sam. 17:51), the drawn sword signified war (Judg. 8:10). The prophets allude to the drawn and sheathed sword to symbolize the threat of God’s judgment (Jer. 47:6; Ezek. 21:3-5, 28-30). Highly figurative are the book of Revelation’s references to the sword of judgment that protrudes from the Lord’s mouth, a probable reference to the power of his words of judgment (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). Above all of this military terminology stands the hope that an age of peace will eventually eliminate the need for swords (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3; see Joel 3:10, where this situation is reversed).”

[Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Page 93

edged sword?<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, this element of the apocalyptic image seems to be derived more from the general prevalence of swords in the ancient world, rather than from specific apocalyptic images in the Jewish tradition, although some scattered references to similar imagery exists in these writings.<sup>46</sup>

The grammar structure again is quite unusual here with the noun ῥομφαία, *sword*, qualified by δίστομος ὀξεῖα, *sharp, two-edged*, but no definite article, which is demanded when other qualifies are attached to a noun. An irregular pattern surfaces several times with the use of ῥομφαία elsewhere in the book of Revelation: 1:16; 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21.<sup>47</sup> Only in 2:12 is a further reference made to a sharp, two-edged sword: ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα.<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere the depiction is either that of just a sword or a sharp sword (ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, 19:15) coming out of his mouth.

Clearly in the context of usage of ῥομφαία for sword here signals the message of divine judgment coming from the mouth of the Ancient of Days. This can be derived from two sources. First, the sword typically represents the tongue in speaking across the ancient world.<sup>49</sup> Particularly prominent in this background im-

Harper & Row, 1985), 1002-03.]

<sup>45</sup>One should note that the most commonly used term for sword in the NT is μάχαρα, which was a short sword or dagger (29 of the 36 NT references to a sword).

<sup>46</sup>**First Enoch 62:1-2.** 1 And thus the Lord commanded the kings and the mighty and the exalted and those who possess the land, and he said, “Open your eyes and lift up your horns, if you are able to recognize the Chosen One.” 2 And the Lord of Spirits seated him upon the throne of his glory; and the spirit of righteousness was poured upon him. And *the word of his mouth will slay all the sinners*, and all the unrighteous will perish from his presence.

**Second Esdras (=IV Ezra) 13:8-10.** 8 After this I looked and saw that all who had gathered together against him, to wage war with him, were filled with fear, and yet they dared to fight. 9 When he saw the onrush of the approaching multitude, he neither lifted his hand nor held a spear or any weapon of war; 10 but I saw only *how he sent forth from his mouth something like a stream of fire, and from his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue he shot forth a storm of sparks.*

<sup>47</sup>Some assume this signals different composition times for different parts of the book, but this is very difficult to establish with any degree of certainty. The better option is to view this unusual pattern as another of the frequent irregularities of grammar etc. that typify the composition of the document. No apparent reason can be legitimately deduced as to why this was done.

<sup>48</sup>“The term ῥομφαία was normally used to refer to a large sword used both for cutting and piercing, while μάχαρα was used for a short sword or a dagger (the somewhat arbitrary rule of thumb for archaeologists is that the latter is sixteen inches or shorter). The Roman legionary carried a *gladius*, a straight sword.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 98.]

<sup>49</sup>“That the sword issues from the mouth of Christ suggests that the sword is a metaphor for the tongue, i.e., for the words he speaks. Speech is frequently compared to a sword or dagger,

agery is the idea of words of judgment or sentencing of individuals. This is particularly the case when modifying terms such as ‘sharp’ and/or ‘double-edged’ are attached. Second, the remaining uses of ῥομφαία in 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21 reflect the Son of Man speaking words of judgment and condemnation as though these words were cutting and destroying like such a sword would do in battle.<sup>50</sup>

**Seventh is his face:** καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ, *and his face was like the sun shining with full force.*

This final depiction points most directly to the deity of this Ancient of Days. His face is more bright than the noonday sun and thus cannot be looked at directly.

Here is John seems to be reaching back to the transfiguration experience of the earthly Jesus record-

and the emphasis on sharpness suggests the effectiveness or power of the words (4Q436= 4QBarēki Napši. [tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 437]: ‘You will place my mouth like a sharpened sword’). This is the case in Ahiqar 100b (2.18) = tr. Porten-Yardeni, *Textbook*, 2:37: ‘Soft is the speech of a king (yet) it is sharper and mightier than a [double-] edged knife’ (cf. Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:500). Reason, effective speech, and the word of God are often compared with a sword or dagger (Pss 52:2; 57:4; Wis 18:15–16; Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12; the term μάχαρα is used in the last two references). It is possible that v 16a is based on an allusion to Isa 49:2, where in the context of the second Servant Song, the speaker says ‘He [God] made my mouth like a sharp sword,’ perhaps in combination with Isa 11:4, ‘he shall smite the earth with the rod [MT: שֶׁבֶט; LXX: τῷ λόγῳ] of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked’ (see Comments on 19:15, 21. In Heb 4:12, the word of God is said to be ‘sharper than any two-edged sword.’ In all these passages, the ‘sword’ is clearly a metaphor for judgment (A. T. Hanson, *Wrath*, 166–67). In the Jewish magical text entitled ‘The Sword of Moses,’ the term ‘sword’ is apparently a metaphor for the Ineffable Name of God (see M. Gaster, ‘The Sword of Moses,’ in *Studies and Texts* [New York: Ktav, 1971] 1:288–337). Note that the phrase בפי הרב *bēpī hereb* or ἐν στόματι ῥομφαίας, literally ‘with the mouth of the sword,’ is an idiom for ‘with the edge of the sword’ (e.g., LXX Josh 6:20; 8:20; Judg 1:8, 25; 4:15, 16; 20:37; 21:10; 1 Kgs 15:8; 22:19; T. Levi 6:5; Jos. As. 26:5), so that the phrase ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία, ‘the sword from his mouth,’ could be construed as a play on words. The swords (κινδύμη *kydynym*) described at some length in IQM 5:11–14, for use in the eschatological struggle by the sons of light, are scimitars (i.e., curved swords) with a single edge. In Cleanthes’ famous hymn to Zeus, the thunderbolt wielded by Zeus is called two-edged in line 10 (ἀμφήκη ... κεραιβόν), suggesting the analogy with a two-edged sword.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 98-99.]

<sup>50</sup>Interestingly Paul uses a somewhat similar image in **2 Thess. 2:8.** *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.*

καὶ τότε ἀποκαλυφθήσεται ὁ ἄνομος, ὃν ὁ κύριος [Ἰησοῦς] ἀνελεῖ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργήσει τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ,

ed in Matt. 17:2.

And he was transfigured before them, **and his face shone like the sun**, and his clothes became dazzling white.

καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν, **καὶ ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος**, τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς.

Although the metaphor ὡς ὁ ἥλιος, **as the sun**, could imply beauty in some ancient expressions, in the widely used tradition of ancient Judaism and early Christianity such a comparison was to assert deity and divine authority.<sup>51</sup> Clearly this is John's point here with this more detailed image. This Ancient of Days as God Himself has such a bright appearance that no one can look directly at Him. The appropriate response is that of Moses at the burning bush experience:

He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." **And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

If we thought we understood Jesus of Nazareth from the four gospel accounts, we now realize that our highly limited understanding has not been able to see Him from a Heavenly perspective. John now introduces us to the risen Christ with apocalyptic depiction that expands our perspective enormously.

This Son of Man is the one coming on the clouds in triumphant return (v. 7), and He indeed is the sovereign God whose existence is eternal (v. 8). These prophetic oracles prepare us to have our eyes opened wide so as to catch a glimpse at this One. John in eloquent

<sup>51</sup>“καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ, ‘and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.’ This may be an allusion to Dan 10:6, where it is said of the angelic revealer that ‘his face [was] like the appearance of lightning.’ In the description of the angel in Rev 10:1, it is said that ‘his face was like the sun.’ The face could be compared with the sun as a metaphor for beauty (Wis 7:29; Jos. As. 14:9; 18:9), but more frequently as a metaphor for sanctity, divinity, or transcendence, often in theophanies or angelophanies (e.g., the transfiguration in Matt 17:2, ‘his face shone like the sun,’ a phrase not found in Mark or Luke; see also Rev 10:1; 2 Enoch [rec. J and A] 1:5; 19:2; 4 Ezra 7:97, 125; Apoc. Zeph. 6:11; cf. 1 Enoch 14:21; 106:2).

“There is also a widespread Judeo-Christian tradition that emphasizes the brightness of the faces of the righteous, often comparing their faces with the radiance of the sun or the stars (Matt 13:43; 4 Ezra 7:97, 125; T. Job 31:5; b. Ber. 17a; cf. Exod 34:29; Dan 12:3; 1 Enoch 38:4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 51:3; for references to rabbinic literature, see Str-B 1:752; 3:790; Stone, 4 Ezra, 245 n. 46). In Jos. As. 14:9 (tr. Charlesworth, OTP 2:225), ‘his face was like lightning, and his eyes like sunshine, and the hairs of his head like a flame of fire of a burning torch.’ The phrase ‘in full strength’ (literally ‘in its might’) refers to the brightness of the sun unimpeded by clouds (cf. Judg 5:31).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 99.]

apocalyptic language paints a glorious picture of this Christ who stands in the midst of His churches both in authority and protection of them. No Roman emperor, no matter how splendid his garb and how pompous his triumphant parades through the streets, could begin to compare with this Ancient of Days in the midst of His people.

In presenting this kind of picture of Christ to his readers, John sought to reassure them of the rightness of their religious commitment to Christ. The pagan gods and goddesses including the emperor of that late first century world possessed no power comparable to that of this Son of Man.

One of the clear messages of such a portrayal of Christ is that of coming judgment. The picture of Christ in vv. 13-16 affirms in the strongest of language that the Son of Man has both the authority and the divine power to exercise judgment over all, including His own people.

In this epiphany of Christ in vv. 13-16 John reached out to a huge treasure of terms, imagery, and religious understanding from the Old Testament prophets along with the Jewish apocalyptic tradition of the intertestamental era.<sup>52</sup> He skillfully selected appropriate elements

<sup>52</sup>“The vision itself (vv 11–20) was experienced in a state of trance, i.e., ‘in the spirit’ (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), perceived to be a normal vehicle for receiving prophetic and apocalyptic revelations. The vision consisted of an epiphany of the heavenly Christ, framed by the command that John write what he will see (and hear) in a scroll to be sent to the seven churches (vv 11, 19), a functional equivalent of the OT messenger formula ‘go and tell.’ On turning around, John first saw seven golden menorahs (interpreted in v 20 as symbolizing the seven churches), and in their midst stood “one like a son of man” (an allusion to Dan 7:13 with no hint of influence from the Son of Man traditions in the Gospels), with white hair, eyes like fire, feet like polished bronze, and a voice like the roar of ‘rushing waters’ (NIV). Using this combination of imagery, which originally referred to two figures in Dan 7:9–14, one ‘like a son of man’ (Dan 7:13) and the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9), the author has virtually equated the two figures. He held seven stars in his right hand (interpreted in v 20 as the angels of the seven churches), a sharp sword issued from his mouth, and his face shown like the sun. John responds in a manner typical for characters in such vision reports: he falls down paralyzed with fear. The awesome figure utters an oracle of assurance urging John not to be afraid and identifies himself with a series of descriptive phrases that leave the reader no doubt that this is none other than the exalted Jesus. In vv 17b–18, he not only describes himself with the divine titles ‘the First and the Last,’ also used in 2:8; 22:13 (a divine title drawn from Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), and ‘the Living One’ (titles that were appropriate only for God), but he also refers to his death and resurrection and to the fact that he possesses the keys to Death and to Hades. According to the ancient mythical view, both heaven and the underworld were linked to this world by doors or gates. In Hellenistic Anatolia, the ancient goddess Hekate was accorded universal sovereignty as mistress of the cosmos and was popularly thought to hold the keys to Hades. John therefore portrays Christ as usurping the authority of Hekate as well as that of every other

from that treasure house of ideas and crafted them together in eloquent portrayal of the risen Christ as the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days. By drawing upon this background imagery and language familiar to most of his readers, the message came through to John's intended readers, but seemed confusing and senseless to any outsiders who might examine the document.

One of the roles of this apocalyptic vision in vv. 9-20 is to prepare the readers for the seven letters that follow in chapters two and three. Elements of this depiction in vv. 13-16 will be repeated in each of these seven letters as the basis of Christ's thorough examination of each community of believers. On the basis of this divine authority demands will be made; warnings of being put out of existence will be given; appeals to repentance and straightening out one's spiritual life will be laid before each congregation. But also promises of eternal life and divine blessing will be issued to those who are faithful to this Christ on the basis of His divine authority.

The other role of this apocalyptic vision will be to prepare the readers for the second phase of John's vi-

---

natural or supernatural authority. The command to write in v 19 involves just two subjects: 'what you see, namely' (1) 'the present' and (2) 'the imminent future,' a modification of the widespread Hellenistic tripartite prophecy formula that emphasized the past, present, and future.

"The entire vision is a pastiche of allusions to Jewish epiphany language. The main source of imagery for his epiphany is Dan 10:5-14 (probably a description of the angel Gabriel), with features drawn from the description of God in Dan 7:9 (hair white like wool) and of the mysterious figure in Dan 7:13 ('one like a son of man'). The description of Christ also owes something to ancient grandiose depictions of the appearance of great kings (cf. *Jos. As.* 5:6; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 3.73-85) and Israelite high priests (Josephus *Ant.* 4.154, 171). In Jewish literature, similar epiphanic language is found in *Jos. As.* 14:8-11; *Apoc. Zeph.* 9:12-10:9. Significantly, the exalted Christ is described using imagery drawn from descriptions of God (cf. *Ezek.* 1:26-28, upon which Dan 7 is probably dependent) and prominent angelic figures. Similar descriptions of divine beings seen in epiphanies are found in the Greek magical papyri and in descriptions of divine epiphanies in Greek literary texts. The author uses various visual attributes and verbal attributes from the visions in the descriptions of Christ that form the introductions to the seven letters, thereby linking 2:1-3:22 to the introductory commission vision. The entire scene has enough similarities to various OT epiphanies to make it entirely plausible to the reader familiar with that background. The metaphorical character of what John sees is made obvious in v 20, where the seven stars are interpreted as the seven angels of the churches and the seven menorahs as the seven churches themselves (one of the few passages in Revelation in which allegorical interpretations are presented). The seven menorahs are primarily reminiscent of the seven-branched golden menorah of the tabernacle and temple (*Exod.* 25:31-41), also seen in Zechariah's vision (*Zech.* 4:1-2), which today is the religious symbol of Judaism."

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 116-17.]

sion when he is transported into Heaven itself in this vision and stands before the very throne of God.<sup>53</sup> Some of the qualities of the Son of Man are also the qualities belonging to God Himself. Here John turned around in order to see this Son of Man. In part two, he looks up into Heaven to experience the extension of the vision (cf. 4:1-2). The continuation of this vision introduced in 1:9-11 will pick back up in 4:1 and extend through chapter twenty-two. Thus John's vision pulls together the entire experience of now and then into a unified picture of experiencing spiritual reality not possible through mere sensory experience and understanding. One can only grasp such deep spiritual reality through the visionary experience that John had.

The lingering question coming at me repeatedly through this study has been: How clearly do you understand who Jesus is? The fourth gospels paint one picture of the Son of Man in compassionate ministry -- a very important picture to have. But John's vision here introduces us to another equally important picture of the Son of Man as the coming Judge of all humanity!

One of the continuous challenges to the followers of Christ is balance. Our understanding of Christ must be inclusive of who He is in every aspect of His being. We dare not focus on just one element to the neglect of the others. The picture of the Good Shepherd as painted in more modern times appeals to us. But that is only one small part of who Christ is. This apocalyptic picture of Christ in vv. 13-16 discloses to us another hugely important aspect: Christ is the coming Judge!

Not only is our biblical understanding and religious doctrine at stake here in maintaining a balanced picture. Our very spiritual health depends upon this balanced understanding of our Christ. In fact, our spiritual life will be vibrant and healthy only to the extent that we achieve and maintain this balanced perspective of Christ.

May God help us see Jesus clearly. And before we see Him coming with the clouds!

<sup>53</sup>“John's divine commission narrated in 1:9-20 introduces not only the proclamations to the seven churches dictated to him by the exalted Christ (2:1-3:22) but the main part of Revelation as well (4:1-22:5). This is a commission for a particular task (i.e., to write what he will see and hear), not a report of the inaugural vision calling him to a prophetic vocation (like those of many OT leaders and prophets; cf. *Exod.* 3:1-12; *Judg.* 6:11-17; *Isa.* 6:1-13; *Ezek.* 1:1-3:11). Part of John's inaugural vision may be preserved in 10:8-11, itself modeled after part of Ezekiel's inaugural vision in *Ezek.* 2:8-3:4 (much as the commission of Ezra in 4 Ezra 14 is modeled after that of Moses in *Exod.* 3:1-12). The purpose of this visionary commission to write is to provide divine legitimation for a controversial message.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 115.]





# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 05

Text: 1:17-20

All rights reserved ©



**QUICK LINKS**

**1. What the text meant.**  
**Historical Aspects:**  
 External History  
 Internal History  
**Literary Aspects:**  
 Genre  
 Literary Setting  
 Literary Structure

**Exegesis of the Text:**  
 A. John fainted, v. 17a  
 B. Jesus reassured him, vv. 17b-20

**2. What the text means.**

### Greek NT

17 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός, καὶ ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ’ ἐμὲ λέγων· μὴ φοβοῦ· ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος 18 καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου. 19 γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. 20 τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὓς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς· οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσὶν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαί αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν.

### Gute Nachricht Bibel

17 Als ich ihn sah, fiel ich wie tot vor seinen Füßen zu Boden. Er legte seine rechte Hand auf mich und sagte: »Hab keine Angst! Ich bin der Erste und der Letzte. 18 Ich bin der Lebendige! Ich war tot, doch nun lebe ich in alle Ewigkeit. Ich habe Macht über den Tod und die Totenwelt. 19 Schreib alles auf, was du soeben gesehen hast und was dir noch offenbart wird über die Gegenwart und über das, was in Zukunft geschehen wird. 20 Du siehst die Sterne in meiner rechten Hand und die sieben goldenen Leuchter. Ich sage dir, was sie bedeuten: Die sieben Sterne sind die Engel\* der sieben Gemeinden und die sieben Leuchter sind die Gemeinden selbst.«

### NRSV

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

### NLT

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave. 19 Write down what you have seen -- both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen later. 20 This is the meaning of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

## APOCALYPTIC VISION, part three

### INTRODUCTION

The focus of this final segment in vv. 9-20 is on John's response to seeing the risen Christ. He finds reassurance and instruction from this Christ. Technically the Greek text contains a single sentence with two core sections (main clauses), ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ... καὶ ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ’ ἐμὲ (I fell at his feet...and he placed His right hand on me) serving as foundational to a temporal clause introduced by ὅτε (when) and a participle clause (λέγων) introducing direct discourse (vv. 17b-20). Thus the interaction here is between John and the Son of

Man, who does all the talking. John's reaction to seeing the Son of Man in this apocalyptic vision (vv. 13-16) is to faint and drop to the ground.

John's very typical response to such a theophany as this reflects both the genuineness of his experience as well as reminds us of the overpowering presence of God. In this initial encounter with the risen Christ we can anticipate the way John will respond during the unfolding of this lengthy vision at several points through chapters two through twenty-two.

## 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Central to proper understanding of any ancient document, and scripture texts in particular, is to first seek to understand the intended meaning by the writer to his targeted audience in his own world. How did the readers of this text in the Christian communities of these seven cities in Asia understand what John was saying? This is the exclusive basis for drawing any legitimate conclusion about the meaning of this passage for our day and time. Bypass this step, and the interpretive conclusions made are nothing but garbage!

### Historical Aspects:

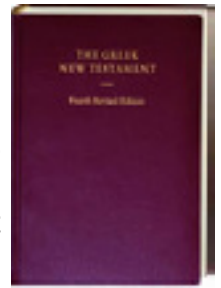
**External History.** Again regarding sources, John will turn somewhat to his Jewish heritage in the Old Testament prophets for examples and terminology.<sup>1</sup> This heritage gave John the imagery and terms

<sup>1</sup>“The stereotypical responses of recipients of visions upon the appearance of supernatural revealers constitute recurring literary themes in revelatory literature and are of two main types, both involving fear and prostration (Bauckham, *NTS* 27 [1980–81] 323–24). In one type the visionary is extremely frightened and involuntarily prostrates himself or herself (Rev 1:17; Isa 6:5; Ezek 1:28; Dan 8:17; 10:9–11; Luke 24:5; 1 Enoch 14:14, 24; 2 Enoch 1:7; Apoc. Abr. 10:2; Jos. As. 14:10), while in the other type the prostration is the result of reverential awe (Josh 5:14; Rev 19:10; 22:8; see Comment on 19:10; 4 Ezra 4:11; cf. the voluntary kneeling for prayer in *Hermas Vis.* 1.1.2; 1.2.1). In the first type the simile of death as a response to a divine epiphany, as in Rev 1:17, is less common. The reference to death can simply be a way of saying that the visionary fainted, or it can allude to the cataleptic state associated with trance experiences. According to Matt 28:4, those guarding the tomb of Jesus became ὡς νεκροί, ‘as dead men,’ a consequence of the terror caused by an angelic appearance. In *T. Abr.* [A] 9:1 (tr. Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:886), when Michael appeared to Abraham, the latter ‘fell upon his face on the ground as one dead.’ When Uriel appeared to Ezra, the seer ‘lay there like a corpse’ (4 Ezra 10:30). That this death simile plays a literary function greater than simply a stereotypical response to a divine epiphany is suggested by the reassuring words of the risen Lord in Rev 1:18, where he says ‘I was dead, and behold I am living forever.’ Further, there is a traditional connection in ancient Judaism between revelation and death; see Exod 20:19: ‘Let not God speak with us lest we die.’ A similar perspective is reflected in Deut 5:22–27 and was taken up in the later Midrashim (*Exod. Rab.* 29:4; 34:1; *Cant. Rab.* 5.16.3; *Num. Rab.* 10:1; *b. Šabb.* 88b see Chernus, *Mysticism*, 33–57). Further, in admittedly late rabbinic traditions, “the mystic who accepts this self-annihilation will be resurrected by the dew of life which God will pour upon him” (Chernus, *Mysticism*, 40). Thus the lethal dangers that must be faced in the quest for divine revelation, particularly in Jewish Merkavah mysticism, can be overcome by divine intervention. It is possible that the terror experienced in connection with a theophany was eventually transformed into the theme of danger in revelatory ascents (see Gruenewald, *Apocalyptic*, 37; J. Maier, “Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der Jüdischen Apokalyphtik und ‘Gnosis,’” *Kairos* 5 [1963] 18–40). The close association between death and trance is found in a number of different cultures; see J. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983)

for describing his personal experience with the risen Christ.

In the history of the copying of this passage, no variation of wording surfaces among the existing manuscripts of Revelation that the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) considered sufficiently important so as to impact the translation of this text into modern languages.

But this does not imply that no variations in wording do not exist among these manuscripts. The text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (UBS 27th rev. ed.) lists fifteen places where alternative readings are found in these verses of scripture.<sup>2</sup> But close examination of each of the variations reveals that no meaningful change in meaning is created by any of the copies. The majority of the variations are attempts to update the language to a more current form at the time of the



29–32.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 99–100.]

#### <sup>2</sup>Offenbarung 1,17

\* εις κ 2053. 2062. 2329 pc (the preposition πρὸς is replaced by the preposition εις)

\* επεθ– κ 2050. 2329 al h; Cyp (ἔθηκεν is replaced by ἐπέθηκεν)

\* χειρα κ<sup>2</sup> M<sup>A</sup> sy; Bea (χειρα is added after αὐτοῦ)

\* κ\* 2053. 2062 pc (μὴ φοβοῦ is omitted in some mss)

\*<sup>1</sup> πρωτοτοκος A (πρῶτος is replaced by πρωτότοκος)

#### Offenbarung 1,18

\* gīg vg<sup>mss</sup>; Prim (καὶ ὁ ζῶν is omitted by some mss)

\* αμην κ<sup>1</sup> M sy (ἀμήν is inserted after αἰώνων in some mss)

| txt κ\* A C P 1611. 1854. 2050. 2053. 2062 pc latt co; Irlat

\* 4 2 3 1 M<sup>K</sup> (θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ἄδου is resequenced)

#### Offenbarung 1,19

\* 2050 al (οὖν is omitted in some mss)

\* δει μελλειν κ\* (C) pc (μέλλει is replaced by δεῖ μελλεῖν)

| δει 2050 latt

\* γιν– κ<sup>2</sup> A 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2351 M<sup>A</sup> (γενέσθαι is replaced by γινέσθαι)

| txt P<sup>98vid</sup> κ\* C P 046. 2050 pm

#### Offenbarung 1,20

\* ὦν 1006. 1841. 2351 M<sup>K</sup> (οὖς is replaced by ὦν)

\* εν τη δεξια μ. A 1611 pc (ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου is replaced with ἐπὶ τῆς λυχνίας or with ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ μου)

| επι της λυχνιας 2329

\* αι (–κ\* pc) επτα λ. (+ αι χρυσαι 2050) κ\* 1854. 2050. 2053. 2062. 2351 al (αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ is replaced by one several alternatives)

| αι λ. επτα C

| αι επτα λ. ας ειδες M<sup>A</sup> syp<sup>h bo</sup>

| txt A 046. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2329 pm latt

\* 2329 pc ar h; Prim (ἑπτὰ is omitted)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 634]

copying of the text.

**Internal History.** The time and place markers inside these verses focused on John's experience are very limited. John fainted and fell down at the feet of the risen Christ: ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός. Physically John was on the island of Patmos when this happened. But by being in a trance through his visionary experience he was projected into another realm so that he was also at the feet of the Son of Man. And He was standing in the middle of seven lampstands in this other worldly realm.

Consequently the markers in vv. 17-20 define location and time inside this reality beyond the physical realm. As such they become important signals of spiritual reality more than of physical reality.

### Literary Aspects:

**Genre:** These verses stand as part three of the apocalyptic vision contained in vv. 9-20. Consequently what was described in the two preceding studies continues to apply here as well.

In the Jewish apocalyptic literature, visionary experience revolves around a visionary dialogue with God or else a visionary throne room encounter with God. Both of these kinds of religious experiences center on a divine call to some kind of action in behalf of God.<sup>3</sup> These experiences grow out of the more general OT theophany encounters with God by both the prophets and other leaders in ancient Israel.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Zimmerli (Ezekiel 1:97–100) has distinguished two types of prophetic call narratives in the OT: (1) A visionary dialogue with Yahweh (often lacking a visionary element) in which the prophet's reluctance is overcome, as in the calls of Moses, Gideon, Saul, and Jeremiah (Exod 3:1–22; 4:1–17; 6:2–12; 7:1–7; Judg 6:15–16; 1 Sam 9:21; Jer 1:4–10). (2) A throne-room vision (lacking the dialogical element) in which prophetic commission is given following a vision of the throne of Yahweh, as in the visions of Micaiah ben Imlah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel (1 Kgs 22:19–22 [though Micaiah himself is not called]; Isa 6:1–8; Ezek 1:1–3:15; 10:1–22). Black ("Throne-Theophany," 67–69) suggests that the same type of theophanic prophetic call is found in Dan 7:9–13 (which is dependent on Ezek 1; cf. A. Feuillet, RB 60 [1953] 170–202, 321–46) and in 1 Enoch 14:18–22; 46:1–3; 60:1–3; 70–71; 89:52; 90:20–23, 31–33, 37–38. Yet these texts exhibit much more variety than Black suggests: (1) While Dan 7:9–13 is certainly a throne theophany, it lacks a prophetic commission and hardly fits Zimmerli's typology. (2) 1 Enoch 14:18–22 represents the culmination of a heavenly journey. (3) Enoch's celestial journey, his vision of God upon his throne, and the divine commission are found in 14:8–16:3; 70:1–71:17. (4) 1 Enoch 46:1–8; 60:1–6 are indeed throne visions, but they lack the element of prophetic commission. (5) 1 Enoch 90:20–39 is a throne vision, though the throne is upon earth, and the entire scene is one that focuses on eschatological judgment." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 70–71.]

<sup>4</sup>John's response to the vision in v 17a follows the fourfold

Determining the type of vision which John depicts in vv. 9-20 is somewhat more challenging, simply because of the distinctives of John's description. Clearly it is apocalyptic visionary depiction.<sup>5</sup> The 'call' elements come in vv. 11 and 19 with the command to write down what John has seen. Whether John's experience was a visionary dialogue or a throne room encounter depends on the determination of the setting of the encounter. This initial vision does not clearly define a setting. But the repetition of the encounter in 4:1-2 clearly places the setting in Heaven before the throne of the Almighty:

4.1 Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη ἦν ἤκουσα ὡς σάλπιγγος λαλοῦσης μετ' ἑμοῦ λέγων· **ἀνάβα ὧδε**, καὶ δεῖξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα.

2 Εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, **καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ**, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος,

4.1 After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "**Come up here**, and I will show you what must take place after this."

2 At once I was in the spirit, and **there in heaven stood a throne**, with one seated on the throne!

John clearly links this vision to the initial one described in 1:9-20. This would point toward this continuing vision beginning in chapter one and continuing through chapter twenty-two as basically a throne room vision with a calling from God to record what he has seen and then to send copies of this record to each of the seven churches.

**Literary Setting:** The context here is simple. Verses 17-20 comes as the third and final segment of the apocalyptic vision in 1:9-20. It has something of a climatic role in depicting John's reaction to seeing the pattern found in Daniel 8 and 10: the prophet observes a vision, falls on his face in fear, is strengthened by a heavenly being, and then receives further revelation from that being, which is introduced by a form of λαλέω ('speak'). This is another clue further identifying John and his message with OT prophetic authority (cf. 1:10)." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 213.]

<sup>5</sup>One fortunate aspect for John was that he was transported into the heavenly throne room simply by God's power. Ezekiel had a slightly different experience (Ezek. 8:1-3):

1 In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there.

2 I looked, and there was a figure that looked like a human being; below what appeared to be its loins it was fire, and above the loins it was like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming amber. 3 **It stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head; and the spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem**, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, to the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy.

Son of Man. He then reaches out to John with encouragement and instructions.

This vision in vv. 9-20 comes both as the climax to the introductory materials in chapter one and as an introduction to the seven letters in chapters two and three. Additionally it will be picked up again and expanded as foundational to chapters four through twenty-two.

Thus vv. 17-20 play an important role in the narration of the apostle John.

### Literary Structure:

The two-fold structure of these verses is clearly visible through the block diagram of the text below, which reflects a very literal translation of the underlying Greek text. Although a few grammar irregularities are present in the biblical text, the structural sense of the passage is quite clear and can hopefully be grasped more easily from this visual representation of it. What surfaces is a rather typical apocalyptic response to encountering the overpowering presence of God.

---

17                   And  
                      when I saw Him,  
22           **I fell**  
                      at His feet  
                      as dead,  
                      and  
23           **He put his right hand**  
                      on me,  
                      saying,  
  
A                   **Stop being afraid;**  
B                   **I am the first**  
                                  and  
                                  **the last**  
                                  and  
                                  **the living one**  
                                  and  
C                   **I became dead**  
                                  and  
                                  behold  
D                   **I am living**  
                                  forever and ever  
                                  and  
E                   **I hold the keys of death and Hades.**  
  
19                   Therefore  
F                   **write what you saw**  
                                  and  
                                  **what is**  
                                  and  
                                  **what is going to be**  
                                  after these things.  
  
G 20               **The mystery of the seven stars**  
  which you saw  
  in my right hand  
  
                                  and  
H                   **the seven golden lampstands:**  
I                   **the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches**  
                                  and  
J                   **the seven lampstands are the seven churches.**

### Analysis of structural arrangement of the Text

Clearly the text falls into two clearly defined segments. Statement 23 describes John's reaction to turning around and seeing the image of the Son of Man (vv. 12-16). His reaction is to be overwhelmed to the extent of fainting and falling down at the feet of the risen Christ.

Statement 24 depicts the response of the risen Christ to John. His touching of John revives him and encouraging words are then offered to John by Christ. He is told to not be afraid because of the overpowering presence of this Son of Man (#s A-E). The second set of words come as instructions for John to write (# F). The third set (#s G-J) stand as an interpretive explanation

tion of some of the symbolism contained in the vision described in vv. 12-16.

### Exegesis of the Text:

The exegesis of the passage is naturally divided into the two parts of the text as demonstrated by the block diagram above.

#### A. *John fainted, v. 17a*

Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός,

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

The very core expression is the verb ἔπεσα, I fell down. Modifiers specify when, where, and how he fell. The **temporal marker**, ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, when I saw Him, links John's falling down to the moment of seeing the risen Christ in this glorious apocalyptic vision. Consistently throughout the Bible such epiphany experiences of encountering God's presence in overpowering ways produces dramatic responses by the humans. Rather consistent in the apocalyptic encounters the heightened sense of the presence of God tends to "knock the human off his feet" with absolute 'overwhelmedness.' Thus for one to "fall on their face" before the Almighty is standard reaction: cf. Josh. 5:14; Ezek. 1:28, 3:23, 43:3; Dan. 8:17, 10:9-11; Luke 24:5; also 1 Enoch 14:14, 24; 2 Enoch 1:7; Apoc. of Abraham 10:29; Joseph and Asenath 14:10.<sup>6</sup>

The **where aspect** is defined as πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, at His feet. Usually the depiction specifies, in some way, the individual falling down in front of the divine figure. Note Rev. 19:10, καὶ ἔπεσα ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ, And I fell down at his feet in order to worship him. Here we have explicitly the motive for falling down in front of the divine figure: προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ, to worship him. This experience of overwhelming awe in the presence of the divine points toward submission to the absolute control of the divine person in the experience.

The **how dimension** is in the sense of manner: ὡς νεκρός, as dead. This qualifier can either specify fainting or entrance into the cataleptic state associated with trances.<sup>7</sup> Most likely from a purely human perspective,

<sup>6</sup>"It is striking that the stereotypical motif of inadequacy or insufficiency, frequently included in OT prophetic call narratives (Hafemann, Suffering, 90-98; id., Paul, 39-62), is conspicuous by its absence both here in Rev 1:9-20 and in 10:1-11." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, Revelation 1-5, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 100.]

<sup>7</sup>"In the first type the simile of death as a response to a divine epiphany, as in Rev 1:17, is less common. The reference to death can simply be a way of saying that the visionary fainted, or it can allude to the cataleptic state associated with trance experiences. According to Matt 28:4, those guarding the tomb of Jesus became

it would best be described as fainting. But that more than a mere physiological reaction to seeing the Son of Man is obviously taking place in this experience.

John's experience was not quite so dramatic as that of Daniel.<sup>8</sup> But it possesses the same essential

ὡς νεκροί, 'as dead men,' a consequence of the terror caused by an angelic appearance. In T. Abr. [A] 9:1 (tr. Charlesworth, OTP 1:886), when Michael appeared to Abraham, the latter 'fell upon his face on the ground as one dead.' When Uriel appeared to Ezra, the seer 'lay there like a corpse' (4 Ezra 10:30). That this death simile plays a literary function greater than simply a stereotypical response to a divine epiphany is suggested by the reassuring words of the risen Lord in Rev 1:18, where he says 'I was dead, and behold I am living forever.' Further, there is a traditional connection in ancient Judaism between revelation and death; see Exod 20:19: 'Let not God speak with us lest we die.' A similar perspective is reflected in Deut 5:22-27 and was taken up in the later Midrashim (Exod. Rab. 29:4; 34:1; Cant. Rab. 5.16.3; Num. Rab. 10:1; b. Šabb. 88b see Chernus, *Mysticism*, 33-57). Further, in admittedly late rabbinic traditions, 'the mystic who accepts this self-annihilation will be resurrected by the dew of life which God will pour upon him' (Chernus, *Mysticism*, 40). Thus the lethal dangers that must be faced in the quest for divine revelation, particularly in Jewish Merkavah mysticism, can be overcome by divine intervention. It is possible that the terror experienced in connection with a theophany was eventually transformed into the theme of danger in revelatory ascents (see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 37; J. Maier, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der Jüdischen Apokalyptik und 'Gnosis,'" *Kairos* 5 [1963] 18-40). The close association between death and trance is found in a number of different cultures; see J. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 29-32." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 99-100.]

<sup>8</sup>Dan. 10:4-14. 4 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris), 5 I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. 6 His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude. 7 I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; the people who were with me did not see the vision, though a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled and hid themselves. 8 So I was left alone to see this great vision. **My strength left me, and my complexion grew deathly pale, and I retained no strength.** 9 Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, **I fell into a trance, face to the ground.** 10 **But then a hand touched me and roused me to my hands and knees.** 11 He said to me, "Daniel, greatly beloved, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you. Stand on your feet, for I have now been sent to you." So while he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. 12 He said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. 13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me twenty-one days. So Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia, 14 and have come to help you understand what is to happen to your people at the end of days. For there is a further vision for those days."

Dan. 8:15-18. 15 When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried

qualities.

**John:** Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός, and when I saw Him, I fell at his feet as dead (1:17)

**Daniel:** καὶ οὐκ ἤκουσα τὴν φωνὴν λαλιᾶς αὐτοῦ, ἐγὼ ἤμην πεπτωκῶς ἐπὶ πρόσωπόν μου ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν.<sup>9</sup> Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a trance, face to the ground. (Dan. 10:9)

What John's experience tells us is important. And it is that the heightened experience of being in God's presence entails certain danger and risk. As Aune correctly points out (above footnote), death is linked to divine presence all through the Bible. At the heart of this is the indescribable purity of a holy God absolutely destroying everything with impurity that it comes in contact with. Only in Christ is it possible to come somewhat close to this total purity of God and survive it, since Christ stands as a shield for us as believers in Him. But even in the full presence of Christ there comes much of the same dynamic of destruction. It will be only by divine intervention in behalf of the servant of God that he or she can survive the encounter, and even profit from it.

I think that this is a biblical reality largely lost to the modern western world. We have little ability to grasp such reality. And perhaps for this reason, God tends to never make Himself known to us in such powerful ways, although believers in other parts of our world readily testify to such encounters with God. Our western world seeks a "Coke-machine" god whom we can manage and manipulate, not a God to blasts us off our feet in absolute power and authority.

But if we are to understand the contents of Revelation properly and correctly, we must begin with this awe inspiring vision of Almighty God and thus respond appropriately with awe and reverence to Him.

### **B. Jesus reassured him, vv. 17b-20**

17b καὶ ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐμὲ λέγων· μὴ φοβοῦ· ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος 18 καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ἄδου. 19 γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες

to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man, 16 and I heard a human voice by the Ulai, calling, "Gabriel, help this man understand the vision." 17 *So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate.* But he said to me, "Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end." 18 *As he was speaking to me, I fell into a trance, face to the ground; then he touched me and set me on my feet.*

<sup>9</sup>Literally, ἐγὼ ἤμην πεπτωκῶς ἐπὶ πρόσωπόν μου ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν means "I was fallen on my face on the ground." πεπτωκῶς here and ἔπεσα in Rev. 1:17 come from the same Greek verb, πίπτω (I fall).

καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. 20 τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὓς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς· οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσὶν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαί αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν.

17b But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

In these kinds of apocalyptic encounters with God, one of the uniform patterns is God reaching out to the individual in compassion and instruction. The background imagery for John here is Dan. 10:10, 18.<sup>10</sup> Such divine action makes the difference between surviving and not surviving the encounter.

The Son of Man both touches John and then speaks to him. 1) ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐμὲ, He placed His right hand on me. The touch was immensely important in an ancient Jewish culture extremely concerned with ritual purity as essential to worshiping God. For God then to extend an arm and touch John, especially with His right hand that initially was holding the seven stars, had profound significance. It affirmed acceptance from and acceptability to God.

2) Christ's words of instruction took several directions (see above diagram for clear visual presentation of this). **First came words of reassurance:** μὴ φοβοῦ. Literally, the meaning is "Stop being afraid." It was sheer fright that caused John to faint. These words were fairly commonplace in Jewish religious tradition.<sup>11</sup>

Quite often with such divine assurances, a basis is

<sup>10</sup>**Dan. 10:10.** But then a hand touched me and roused me to my hands and knees.

καὶ ἰδοὺ χεῖρα προσήγαγέ μοι καὶ ἤγειρέ με ἐπὶ τῶν γονάτων ἐπὶ τὰ ἴχνη τῶν ποδῶν μου.

**Dan. 10:18-19.** 18 Again *one in human form touched me and strengthened me.* 19 He said, "**Do not fear,** greatly beloved, you are safe. Be strong and courageous!"

18 καὶ προσέθηκε καὶ ἤψατό μου ὡς ὄρασις ἀνθρώπου καὶ κατίσχυσέ με† 19 καὶ εἶπέ μοι Ἄνθρωπος ἐλεεινὸς εἶ, μὴ φοβοῦ, ὑγίανε· ἀνδρίζου καὶ ἴσχυε. καὶ ἐν τῷ λαλήσαι αὐτὸν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἴσχυσα καὶ εἶπα Λαλησάτω ὁ κύριός μου, ὅτι ἐνίσχυσέ με.†

<sup>11</sup>"The μὴ φοβοῦ is found also separately in Isa. 44:2; Matt. 14:27, 17:7; Luke 1:13, 30, etc. It is used to give comfort (cf. Matt. 14:27 = John 6:20; Acts 27:24), and to remind the Seer that He that is seen is no unknown one (Spitta)." [R.H. Charles, vol. 1, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 31.]

given for the admonition to not be afraid.<sup>12</sup>

What follows in vv. 17c-18 is a series of “I am” declarations.<sup>13</sup> Collectively these claim full deity for the Son of Man as well as assert qualities about Him as being divine.

**a) ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, I am the first and the last.** Very likely this is taken from Isaiah, as is illustrated in these references:<sup>14</sup>

**Isa. 44:6.** Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: **I am the first and I am the last**; besides me there is no god.

Οὕτως λέγει ὁ θεὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ὁ ῥυσάμενος αὐτὸν θεὸς σαβαωθ **Ἐγὼ πρῶτος καὶ ἐγὼ**

<sup>12</sup>“Again, contextual links consisting of catchword phrases and common pictures have given rise to reflection on Isa. 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12: (1) the Isa. 41:4 context contains a picture of God’s servant defeating the enemy with a sword (41:2) and the key phrase μὴ φοβοῦ (‘do not fear’), immediately followed by divine words of comfort that God will ‘strengthen’ and ‘uphold’ the righteous one with his right hand (41:10); (2) the Isa. 44:6 context also has the phrase μὴ φοβοῦ (cf. 44:2); (3) Isa. 48:12 is directly followed by a picture like that of Isa. 41:10; Dan. 12:6–7; and Rev. 1:17, which is expressed by ‘Surely my hand founded the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens’ (48:13). These common elements provided the associative bridge leading from the Daniel 10 picture of prophetic comfort to that of the three Isaiah passages concerning Yahweh’s comfort of Israel.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 214.]

<sup>13</sup>“The *ego-eimi* or ‘I am’ self-predication formula occurs five times in Rev (1:8, 17; 2:23; 21:6 [textual problem]; 22:16), always with a predicate in the nominative case. The *ego-eimi* formula occurs a total of forty-eight times in the NT, almost always attributed to Christ or God and therefore of christological or theological interest. It occurs five times in Matthew (14:27; 22:32; 24:5; 26:22, 25), three times in Mark (6:50; 13:6; 14:62), four times in Luke (1:19; 21:8; 22:70; 24:39), twenty-four times in John, six times in Acts (9:5; 10:21; 18:10; 22:3, 8; 26:29), and five times in Revelation. The ‘I am’ formula is particularly important for Johannine studies (see Brown, *John* 1:533–38; Schnackenburg, *John* 2:79–89). The ‘I am’ formula in Revelation is uttered exclusively by God (1:8; 21:6) and Christ (1:17; 2:23; 22:16) and is used to make divine predications of the speaker.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 100-01.]

<sup>14</sup>“The formula ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ‘the first and the last,’ was probably derived from Deutero-Isaiah: (1) Isa 44:6, ἐγὼ πρῶτος καὶ ἐγὼ μετὰ ταῦτα, literally ‘I am first and I am after these things’; (2) Isa 41:4, ἐγὼ θεὸς πρῶτος, καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐπερχόμενα ἐγὼ εἰμι, ‘I, God, am first, and with regard to what is to come, I am He’; and (3) Isa 48:12, ἐγὼ εἰμι πρῶτος, καὶ ἐγὼ εἰμι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ‘I am first, and I am forever.’ The fact that the divine predicate ‘the first and the last’ occurs three times in Deutero-Isaiah suggests its importance in that composition, though the attempt of R. P. Merendino to organize Isa 40–48 around the theme of ‘the first and the last’ is overdone (*Der Erste und der Letzte: Eine Untersuchung von Jes 40–48*, VTSup 31 [Leiden: Brill, 1981]).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 101.]

**μετὰ ταῦτα**, πλὴν ἐμοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν θεός.

**Isa. 41:4.** Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? **I, the Lord, am first, and will be with the last.**

τίς ἐνήργησεν καὶ ἐποίησεν ταῦτα; ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὴν ὁ καλῶν αὐτὴν ἀπὸ γενεῶν ἀρχῆς, **ἐγὼ θεὸς πρῶτος, καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐπερχόμενα ἐγὼ εἰμι.**

**Isa. 48:12.** Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called: I am He; **I am the first, and I am the last.**

Ἄκουέ μου, Ἰακωβ καὶ Ἰσραὴλ ὃν ἐγὼ καλῶ· ἐγὼ εἰμι πρῶτος, **καὶ ἐγὼ εἰμι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα,**

This phrase will be repeated in 2:8, Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν, thus says the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life. Elements of this introductory vision in 1:9-20 will be repeated at each of the seven letters in reference to Christ. Additionally this phrase will be repeated in the epistolary *Conclusio* to the book of Revelation in 22:13, ἐγὼ τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος, **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.** Combined with the other two declarations in 22:13, an even greater assertion of the sovereignty and eternal existence of Christ is made. For John’s readers living in Asia with the Greco-Roman religious traditions deeply embedded into life there, this expression would have had an echo in some of the poems of praise offered in the numerous temples dedicated to the gods Zeus and Apollo, but with a powerfully important different twist.<sup>15</sup> God is the one who exists forever, and not the pagan gods.

**b) καὶ ὁ ζῶν, and the Living One.** This second affirmation plays off the first one and also picks up on a common OT reference to God as the living God: **אלהים חַי, elōim ḥayyim, θεὸς ζῶν.**<sup>16</sup> The claim by this

<sup>15</sup>“Yet this formula is also found in Greek literature (van Unnik, *Het godspredikaat*, 74–76): Hesiod *Theog.* 34, σφᾶς δ’ αὐτὰς πρῶτον τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν ἀεῖδειν, ‘But always to sing of themselves [i.e., the Muses] both first and last’ (the same is said of Zeus in *Theog.* 48). In *Theog.* 1.3, the elegist addresses Apollo: ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον ἔν τε μέσοισιν ἀεῖσω, ‘but always will I hymn [you] first and last and in the middle.’ It is also found in *Hymni Homerici* 21, where it is said that to Apollo the odist ‘always sings first and last’ (πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν ἀεῖδει); cf. 1.18. Yet these three references refer not to ‘First and Last’ as a divine predicate but to the honor paid to the Muses or Apollo by singing hymns to them at the beginning and end of their poems.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 102.]

<sup>16</sup>“The verb ζῶν, meaning ‘to live (again),’ is used of Jesus only here and in 2:8, a statement that refers back to this predicate. In Jewish tradition, God is often designated **אלהים חַי, elōim ḥayyim**; LXX: θεὸς ζῶν, ‘the living God’ (Deut 5:26; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; Jer 10:10; 23:36; Dan 6:27 [Aram.: אלהים חַי, *l-elōhā, ḥayyā*]; LXX: θεὸς ζῶν). A parallel phrase, first found in Hosea, is **אל חי, el ḥay**, ‘living God’ (Hos 2:1 [Eng. 1:10]; Pss 42:3; 84:3; Josh 3:10). The phrase ‘the living God’ also occurs in early Jewish literature (Bel 14:5, 25; 3 Macc 6:28; Jub. 1:25; 21:4) and is frequently found in the NT (Matt 16:16; 26:63; John 6:57 [ὁ ζῶν πατήρ, ‘the living

Son of Man is the claim to be God. This stood in stark contrast to the phony claims made by ancient writers in regard to many of the Greco-Roman deities to be alive.

**c) καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοῦ<sup>17</sup> ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever.** This third affirmation by the Son of Man to John flows out of Christ's death and resurrection, giving it a distinctly Christian orientation via the death-resurrection contrast. The second part of the antithetical affirmation, ἰδοῦ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, is repeated four times in Revelation in reference to God: 4:9, 10; 10:6; 15:7. But here it refers to Christ. In reference to God, this has parallels in the LXX Old Testament.<sup>18</sup>

**d) καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.** This final affir-

Father,<sup>9</sup> occurs only here in the NT]; Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26; 2 Cor 3:3; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Tim 4:10; Heb 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; Rev 7:2; 2 Clem 20:2; Hermas Vis. 2.3.2; 3.7.2; Sim. 6.2.2). The related phrase 'the living Lord' is comparatively rare and occurs only in LXX Esth 16:16; 2 Macc 7:33; 15:4. The predicate 'the Living One,' however, is not found in the OT, though it does begin to appear in early Judaism (Sir 18:1: ὁ ζῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 'the One who lives forever'; 2 Apoc. Bar. 21:9, 10; Sib. Or. 3.763); a frequent OT oath formula is 'as the Lord lives' (Judg 8:19; Ruth 3:13; 1 Sam. 14:39; 2 Sam 15:21; 2 Kgs 2:2).

"In pagan religious literature, particularly the Greek magical papyri, the phrase 'the living god' occurs several times in various combinations: ὁ θεὸς ὁ ζῶν, 'the living god' (PGM IV.959; cf. the Christian magical papyri PGM 5a.11; 5b.25; 5c.5); ὁ μέγας ζῶν θεός, ὁ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, 'the great living god who is eternal' (PGM IV.1039); ὁ ζῶν θεός, 'the living god' (PGM XII.79); θεὸς ζῶν, 'the living god' (PGM IV.559; VII.823); ὀρκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ παντοκράτορος θεοῦ ζῶντος ἀεὶ, 'I adjure you by the almighty god who lives forever' (PGM IV.1550–52).

"At the same time, Christ lives because he has been raised from the dead, a fact that is spelled out in the next clause in v 18."

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 102.]

<sup>17</sup>"The phrase καὶ ἰδοῦ, 'and behold,' is a Septuagintism that occurs twelve times in Revelation (1:18; 4:1, 2; 6:2, 5, 8; 7:9; 12:3; 14:1, 14; 19:11; 22:7); on ἰδοῦ, which occurs twenty-nine times, see Comment on 1:7a. Here it functions as a marker emphasizing the truth of the statement that immediately follows (Fiedler, Formel, 42)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 103.]

<sup>18</sup>"There are parallels to this phrase in the OT (Theod Dan 4:34, τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 'to the One who lives forever'; LXX Dan 6:27, θεὸς μένων καὶ ζῶν εἰς γενεὰς γενεῶν ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος, 'God who abides and lives from generation to generation, even for ever'; Theod Dan 6:27, θεὸς μένων καὶ ζῶν εἰς γενεὰς γενεῶν ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος, 'God who lives and abides for ever'; LXX Dan 12:7, ὡμοσε τὸν ζῶντα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα θεόν, 'he swore by the God who lives for ever') and in early Judaism (1 Enoch 5:1, 'He who lives for ever' [here the Greek text, expanded by a doublet (Knibb, Enoch 2:65), reads θεὸς ζῶν ἐποίησεν αὐτὰ οὕτως, καὶ ζῆ εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶνας, 'the living God made them thus and he lives for ever'])." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 103.]

mation is climatic and is built on the preceding affirmations. This image is rather unusual in the ancient world and has a distinctive tone in this single use in Revelation.

Hades, of course, was a Greek god who controlled the underworld in Greek mythology, and thus much was written about him in ancient Greek and Latin literature. But he is never pictured as possessing keys to open doors and thus exercise control over those doors.<sup>19</sup>

The mention of Christ possessing keys calls to mind 3:7 where Christ possesses the key of David: ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυιδ.<sup>20</sup> The image there is further defined by ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει, **the One who opens and no one shuts, and who shuts and no one opens.** The basic point here is exclusive authority that no one else can usurp. This exclusive power to open and close has its roots in Isa. 22:22.<sup>21</sup> This idea is in the background to some extent in 1:18, where Christ's possession of the keys of death and Hades asserts exclusive authority over these realms and no one else can challenge that power.<sup>22</sup>

The precise meaning of death and Hades depends in part on the grammatical understanding of the Genitive case forms τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου.<sup>23</sup> If taken

<sup>19</sup>"Death is never described in ancient texts as possessing keys, and very few attribute keys to Hades (cf. Pausanias 5.20.3, where, in a brief ekphrasis ['description of a work of art'; cf. Form/Structure/Setting in Rev 17], Pausanias describes how Ploutos, often an alias of Hades, is shown holding the key that he has just used to lock up Hades [in *Orphic Hymns* 18.4, Ploutos is described as possessing 'the keys of the entire earth'])." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 103.]

<sup>20</sup>Note also **Rev. 9:1b**, he was given **the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit**. καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου **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. Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ.

<sup>21</sup>**Isa. 22:22**. I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; **he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open.**

καὶ δώσω τὴν δόξαν Δαυιδ αὐτῷ, **καὶ ἄρξει, καὶ οὐκ ἔσται ὁ ἀντιλέγων.**

<sup>22</sup>The other image of Christ possessing keys surfaces in **Matt. 16:19**, with a different emphasis:

I will give you **the keys of the kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

δώσω σοι **τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν**, καὶ ὃ ἐάν δήσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἐάν λύσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

<sup>23</sup>"The genitives τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου, 'of Death and of Hades,' could be either objective or possessive genitives (i.e., 'the keys to Death and Hades' [as above] or 'the keys belonging to Death and Hades'). If construed as objective genitives, Death and Hades must be understood spatially, as in Rev 20:13. But if understood as possessive genitives, they must be understood as person-



as personifications, Death and Hades, as in Rev. 6:8, then the possessive function is understood. But if taken as spatial designations as in Rev. 20:13, then they are objective Genitive case functions.

In general the underworld was not conceptualized as having doors in the ancient world.<sup>24</sup> One exception to that is in the *Odes of Solomon* 42:17 where the dead cry out wanting the door of death unlocked so they can exist death. Quite interestingly in the Roman province of Asia a popular legend developed concerning the Hellenistic goddess Hekate who supposedly possessed the keys to the gates of Hades.<sup>25</sup> But in the

ifications, as in Rev. 6:8. They must be objective genitives since Death is never described in ancient texts as possessing keys, and very few attribute keys to Hades (cf. Pausanias 5.20.3, where, in a brief ekphrasis [“description of a work of art”; cf. Form/Structure/Setting in Rev 17], Pausanias describes how Ploutos, often an alias of Hades, is shown holding the key that he has just used to lock up Hades [in Orphic Hymns 18.4, Ploutos is described as possessing ‘the keys of the entire earth’]). Later rabbinic sources mention keys that belong to God alone and are not entrusted to angels (Ginzberg, *Legends* 6:318–19; only a few of the references are mentioned in Bousset [1906] 197; Charles, 1:33). According to some sources, God retains three keys for himself that he does not entrust to an angel: the keys of rain, of childbirth, and of the revival of the dead (b. Ta’an 2a; Gen. Rab. 73.3; Deut. Rab. 7.6; Midr. Ps. 78.5). Tg. Neof. Gen 30:22 refers to four keys that God alone possesses: the key of rain, the key of provision, the key of graves (מפתח דקבריה; cf. Sokoloff, DJPA, 473), and the key of barrenness (a similar list is found in Tg. Yer. Deut 28:12). However, b. Sanh. 113a reports that the key of rain was given to Elisha, and Midr. Ps. 78.5 reports that the key of barrenness was given to Elisha and the key of resurrection to Elijah. The possessive genitive is often understood as implying the tradition of the *descensus ad inferos*, ‘(Christ’s) descent to Hell,’ for if the keys formerly belonged to the personified Death and Hades, they must have been forcibly taken from them (Kroll, *Gott und Hölle*, 10–11; Bousset [1906] 198; for references to this conception in Coptic-Gnostic documents, see *Teach. Silv.* 104.114; 110.19–30; *Trim. Prot.* 36.4; *Testim. Truth* 32.24–33.8 [here the language of the harrowing of “Hades” is a metaphor for the world]). For a discussion of Death and Hades as personifications, see Comment on 6:8.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 103-04.

<sup>24</sup>But note πύλαι ᾗδου, gates of Hades, in Matt. 19:18.

<sup>25</sup>“The image of Jesus as keybearer in Rev 1:18 appears to be derived from the popular Hellenistic conception of the goddess Hekate as keybearer. Hekate both originated in Asia Minor and was very popular there during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. She is the primary mythological figure associated with the possession of the keys to the gates of Hades. *Hekate trimorphos*, ‘having three forms or shapes,’ was given a cosmic significance connected with her threefold identity as Juno Licina, Trivia, and Luna (Catullus 34.9) or Selene/Luna (= moon) in heaven, Artemis/Diana on earth, and Persephone/Proserpina in Hades (cf. Hesiod Theog. 412–17, 427; Orph. Hymni 1.2; Servius Comm. in Verg. Aen. 4.511; Scholia in Aristophanem Plutum 594). In PGM IV.2836–37, after Hekate is explicitly identified with Mene, Artemis, Persephone, and Selene, we read, ‘Beginning anti end [ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος] are you, and you alone rule all. For all things are from you, and in you do all things,

Jewish heritage of John one does find related images that served to popularize the image of keys over death and Hell.<sup>26</sup> Out of this background, John’s image here

Eternal one, come to their end.’ The tendency to elevate important regional divinities like Hekate to the role of cosmic queen can be seen in the similar claim that Aphrodite controls the three cosmic zones of heaven, earth, and sea (Orphic Hymns 55.5; the du-Stil, ‘thou style’: καὶ κρατεῖς τρισσῶν μοιρῶν). The *Orphic Hymns* (probably written in Asia Minor during the second century A.D.) describe Hekate as ‘the keybearing mistress of the entire cosmos’ (1.7). Hekate is frequently given the epithet κλειδοῦχος, ‘keybearer’ (*Orph. frag.* 316; *Orphic Hymns* 1.7; cf. Kohl, RE 11[1921] 593–600). Persephone, with whom Hekate is often identified, is said to command the gates of Hades in the bowels of the earth (*Orphic Hymns* 29.4). Other divine beings are also thought to have custody of various keys. Pindar (Pyth. 8.1–4; cf. C. M. Bowra, Pindar [Oxford: Clarendon, 1964] 85) claims that the goddess Ἡσυχία, Quiet, ‘holds the last keys of counsel and war.’ Proteus holds the keys of the sea (*Orphic Hymns* 25.2), and Zeus holds the keys to joy and sorrow (*Orphic Hymns* 73.6). Parmenides describes the goddess Dike (‘Justice’) as holding κληιδας ἀμοιβούς, ‘rewarding keys,’ because the keys that open and close both reward and punish (L. Taran, Parmenides [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965] 15). The Egyptian deity Anubis is frequently associated with keys; in PGM IV. 1466, Anubis is called ‘key-bearer and guardian,’ and in PGM IV.341–42 is called ‘the one who has the keys to Hades’ (cf. S. Morenz, “Anubis mit dem Schlüssel,” in *Religion und Geschichte des Alten Ägypten* [Cologne; Vienna: Böhlau, 1975] 510–20). The leontocephaline god of Mithraism (sometimes identified with Saturn or Aios) is sometimes depicted holding keys, but no text explains what this symbol means (CIMRM, 78, 103, 125, 168; cf. indices s.v. “Aion,” 1:333; 2:403); a brief discussion of this symbol is found in L. A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*, EPRO 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 352–53. It is likely that the keys were thought to control access to the astrological or planetary gates through which souls descend to embodiment and ascend to salvation (H. M. Jackson, “The Meaning and Function of the Leontocephaline in Roman Mithraism,” *Numen* 32[1985] 17–45; Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 63). Another Mithraic figure, Cautes, is sometimes depicted holding up a key (CIMRM, 1110, 1163), perhaps symbolizing his ability to unlock the gates of heaven for rain.

“In both texts and iconography, keys symbolize the power held by the respective deities over various aspects of life. The angel Michael is described in *3 Apoc. Bar.* 11:2 as the holder of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Aeacus is also described as the keeper of the keys of Hades (*Apollodorus*, 3.12.6; CIG 3:933, no. 6298; G. Kaibel, *Epigrammatica Graeca* [Berlin, 1878] 262–63, no. 646; cf. Isocrates *Euagoras* 15). Elsewhere he is described as keeping the gate of Hades (Lucian Dial. mort. 6[20]. 1).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 104-05.]

<sup>26</sup>“*Targ. Pal. Deut.* 28:11–12 asserts that God and no one else holds ‘the key of life and of the tombs,’ which John would not see as inconsistent with his depiction of Christ, since he views Christ as a divine being. *2 En.* 42:1 refers to demonic ‘guardians of the keys of hell.’ *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 6:11–15 portrays a heavenly figure like that depicted in Rev. 1:13–15, who ‘is over the abyss and Hades,’ where ‘all the souls are imprisoned.’” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 215.]

clearly communicated the exclusive authority of Christ over death and Hell.

What did John mean by τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾗδου, of death and Hades? The difficulty of answering this question precisely is very high, because a variety of viewpoints existed in the Judaism of that world, and some of this diversity seems to have found some acceptance inside the New Testament. And this diversity is evidently present inside the book of Revelation itself.

The concept of death, θάνατος, in the Greek is rather clearly derived from the Old Testament idea of Sheol. Death is the cessation of life in the physical realm, but theologically it becomes more.<sup>27</sup> It stands as an enemy which Christ destroys by His own dying and resurrection.<sup>28</sup> All humanity enter into death, but will not remain permanently in death due to the resurrection. Whether temporary torments follow death and precede the resurrection was debated in first century Judaism, and the New Testament is not all that clear on

<sup>27</sup>“In the NT ἀποθνήσκειν (perf.: τέθνηκα without ἀπο-) and τελευτᾶν are first and most often used for the process of dying (pres. ‘to be dying,’ aor. ‘to die,’ perf. ‘to be dead’), and θάνατος (once τελευτή, Mt. 2:15)60 means dying (e.g., Hb. 7:23) or being dead (e.g., Phil. 1:20). Death is the lot of all men,<sup>61</sup> being remote only from God and His world (1 Tm. 6:16; 1 C. 15:53 f.). It is a dreadful thing<sup>62</sup> which man fears<sup>63</sup> and which he will seek only in the most terrible circumstances (Rev. 9:6). It is never portrayed in heroic terms, and if Paul recognises that there may be heroic death and that this stands in some analogy to Christ’s death (R. 5:7), Christ’s death is not interpreted as a heroic achievement (→ 18), nor is the sacrifice of death which the apostle brings for others (2 C. 4:12), nor the faithfulness of martyrs unto death (Rev. 2:10; 12:11). For it is not suggested that the one who makes the offering neutralises death so far as he personally is concerned. It is characteristic that suicide is never treated as a problem.<sup>64</sup> Death is always the terrible thing which makes ζωὴ improper ζωὴ (→ ζωὴ, II, 863)65 and the work of Christ is to have destroyed death (2 Tm. 1:10; → 19). Death is the ἔσχατος ἐχθρός with whose definitive destruction the work of salvation is fully accomplished (1 C. 15:26; Rev. 20:14).” [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 3:14.]

<sup>28</sup>“No attempt is made to interpret death as a natural process and thus to neutralise it. Even where it is seen to be defeated by the resurrection and death and resurrection are described in terms of an analogy from nature (1 C. 15:36; Jn. 12:24), it is no more regarded as a natural process than is the resurrection. The process in view in the analogy is not to be regarded as a natural process in the sense of Greek science. The Whence? and Wherefore? of death can be understood mythologically with death as a demonic person (1 C. 15:26; Rev. 6:8; 20:13 f.) or the devil as the lord of death (Hb. 2:14; on both → ζωὴ, II, 858). But the point of these mythologoumena,<sup>66</sup> which are not aetiological, is to express the fact that death is opposed to life as the true being of God (→ ζωὴ, II, 863) and therewith also that sin and death belong together.” [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 3:15.]

this topic.<sup>29</sup>

The meaning of θάνατος varies across the pages of the book of Revelation. Sometimes what we would term physical death, or dying physically is clearly in view: 2:23; 9:6; 12:11; 21:4 (?). Death signals being in the realm of the dead, much like the Jewish Sheol: 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14. Often in these references death is also personified. Then there is the ‘second death’ (ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος), which points to the eternal punishment of the wicked: 20:6, 14; 21:8. Thus θάνατος can refer to the end of physical life, existing among the realm of the dead, or being banished to eternal torments. What we come up against is the rich diversity of understanding that dominated the ancient world, and that Jesus and the apostles addressed it more from the religious angle than from an anthropological perspective. Central to all of this is the core idea of separation: separation of life from the body; separation from God; separation from this world. Also critical to the New Testament is the destructive power that θάνατος exerts.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup>“There is not complete unanimity in NT statements on the question how far death finds its true character in the fact that it destroys, and how far in the fact that it involves future torment. Sometimes traditional Jewish conceptions of the punishments of hell predominate (Mk. 9:48; Lk. 16:23 etc., → ᾗδης, γέεννα). In any case, however, it is accepted that God or Christ is the κριτὴς ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν (→ ζωὴ, II, 862), that physical death is not the final end but is followed by the judgment (Hb. 9:27) and that physical death is thus either reversed by the resurrection or, if only the resurrection of the righteous is expected, it is followed by a period of torment in hell.<sup>72</sup> Pl. seems to have expected more than a resurrection of the righteous, for, though 1 C. 15:22–24; 1 Th. 4:15 ff. could be taken in that sense, it is refuted by R. 2:5–13, 16; 2 C. 5:10. On the intermediate state between death and the resurrection the NT gives us no explicit information. It is thought of as a sleep (→ n. 60) unless the various authors suggest other conceptions.<sup>73</sup> In any case physical death becomes quite definitively death through God’s judgment. Hence we sometimes find the expression δεύτερος θάνατος (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).<sup>74</sup> Implied are the torments of hell (Rev. 21:8: ἐν τῇ λίμνῃ τῇ καιομένῃ πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ). Where these are regarded as the true judgment of death, they are never depicted along the lines of Jewish or Orphic conceptions of the underworld. The true curse of death is always destruction, and φθορὰ καὶ ἀπώλεια characterise this end.<sup>75</sup>” [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 3:16–17.]

<sup>30</sup>“More important is the fact that the destructive power of death is thought to rule life even now and to rob it of its true quality (→ ζωὴ II, 863). The death which awaits us holds life in φόβος (Hb. 2:15; R. 8:15) and those to whom Jesus is sent are regarded as καθημένοι ἐν χώρα καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου (Mt. 4:16; Lk. 1:79 quoting Is. 9:1). Life is always a life ‘for’ (→ ζωὴ, II, 863)—whether for God or for death (R. 6:13–23). Only of the believer is it true that he lives and dies to the Lord (R. 14:7). But θάνατος finally reigns over what is carnal (R. 8:6), so that where there is no hope grounded in Christ the slogan is: φάγομεν καὶ πίωμεν, αὔριον γὰρ ἀποθνήσκομεν (1 C. 15:32). The uncertainty of the morrow makes all concern useless (Mt. 6:25–34). No one knows whether he will

In Rev. 1:18, θάνατος is focused on the realm of the dead, much in the pattern of Sheol (לִישׁוֹן, šē'ōl) in ancient Israel.<sup>31</sup> The claim then becomes that Christ, in holding the keys over death, possesses absolute power and control over all who have died and entered into this realm of existence called θάνατος.

When then does ἄδης, Hades, signify?<sup>32</sup> Again,

be alive tomorrow (Lk. 12:16–21). Death stands not only behind hope and care but also behind the λύπη of the κόσμος (2 C. 7:10), and all the works of men are from the very first νεκρά (Hb. 9:14, → ζωή, II, 863). Thus men may be described in advance as νεκροί (Mt. 8:22 and par.). For they are sinners,<sup>76</sup> so that Pl. can say V 3, p 18 in R. 7:10: (ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς ἐντολῆς) ἡ ἀμαρτία ἀνέζησεν, ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπέθανον, and in 7:24 he can call his σῶμα a σῶμα τοῦ θανάτου. Again, in 1 Jn. 3:14 it can be said of the false Christian who has no love that he abides in death. Men are dead outside revelation (Jn. 5:21, 25).” [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 17-18.

<sup>31</sup>“Several terms are used to denote the abode of the dead in the Hebrew Bible, and they often occur in parallelism to one another. The most common is šē'ōl. Both šē'ōl and māwet, ‘Death’ are often used in Hebrew to refer to the realm of death as well as to the personified chthonic power behind death and all that is associated with it. See MOT. Hebrew 'ereš is simply ‘earth’ yet, as with Ug 'ars and Akk eršetu, it too can designate the netherworld. The words šahat and bōr both refer to the abode of the dead as the ‘Pit.’ Hebrew 'ābaddōn is another poetic name for the underworld usually translated ‘Perdition’ or ‘(place of) Destruction.’” [Theodore J. Lewis, “Dead, Abode of the” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 101.]

<sup>32</sup>ἄδης, ου, ὁ (w. var. spellings Hom.+)

**1. Orig. proper noun, god of the nether world, ‘Hades’, then the nether world, Hades as place of the dead, Ac 2:27, 31** (Ps 15:10; Eccl 9:10; PGM 1, 179; 16, 8; Philo, Mos. 1, 195; Jos., Bell. 1, 596, Ant. 6, 332). Of Jonah’s fish ἐκ τοῦ κατωτάτου ἄδου. In the depths, contrasted w. heaven ἕως (τοῦ) ἄδου **Mt 11:23; Lk 10:15** (PsSol 15:10; cp.; Is 14:11, 15); ἐν τῷ ἄδῃ **16:23**; ἐν Ἄιδου ApcPt Rainer. Accessible by gates (but the pl. is also used [e.g. Hom., X., Ael. Aristid. 47, 20 K.=23 p. 450 D.] when only one gate is meant), hence πύλαι ἄδου (II. 5, 646; Is 38:10; Wsd 16:13; 3 Macc 5:51; PsSol 16:2.—Lucian, Menipp. 6 the magicians can open τοῦ Ἄιδου τὰς πύλας and conduct people in and out safely) **Mt 16:18** (s. on πέτρα 1b and πύλη a); locked ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ἄδου **Rv 1:18** (the genitives are either obj. [Ps.-Apollod. 3, 12, 6, 10 Aeacus, the son of Zeus holds the κλεῖς τοῦ Ἄιδου; SEG VIII, 574, 3 (III A.D.) τῶ τὰς κλεῖδας ἔχοντι τῶν καθ’ Ἄιδου (restored)] or possess.; in the latter case death and Hades are personif.; s. 2). ὠδίνες τοῦ ἄδου (Ps 17:6) Pol 1:2; **Ac 2:24** v.l. (for θανάτου). εἰς ἄδου (sc. δόμους B-D-F §162, 8; Hom. et al.; Bar 3:11, 19; Tob 3:10; En 102:5; 103:7; Ar. 11, 3) **Ac 2:31** v.l.; I Cl 4:12; 51:4 (Just., D. 99, 3 ἐν ἄδου μένειν; Mel., Fgm. 8b, 44 τοῖς ἐν ἄδου νεκροῖς; Iambl., Vi. Pyth. 30, 179 ἐν ἄδου κείσθαι τὴν κρίσιν; Hierocles 14, 451 τὰ ἐν ἄδου κολαστήρια; Simplicius in Epict. p. 108, 14 punishments for sinners ἐν ἄδου).

**2. Hades personif.** (perh. derived fr. OT usage, cp. מוֹת , s. JHealey, Mot: DDD 1121–32), w. θάνατος (cp. Is 28:15; Job 38:17; Mel., P. 102, 782 ἐγὼ ... ὁ καταπατήσας τὸν αἴδη) **Rv 6:8; 20:13f; 1 Cor 15:55** v.l.—GBeer, D. bibl. Hades: HHoltzmann

across the pages of the New Testament ἄδης refers mostly to the realm of the dead as in the Hebrew Sheol (לִישׁוֹן, šē'ōl): Lk. 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31. Or, it can rarely allude to a place of punishments for sin and function somewhat interchangeably with γέεννα, Hell: 1 Pet. 3:19.<sup>33</sup> In the four instances of ἄδης in Revelation (1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14) it signals the realm of the dead either as Sheol or in personification.<sup>34</sup> Thus the phrase used in 1:18 is more the sense of “keys of death which is Hades.”<sup>35</sup> The claim is clear: Jesus controls the realm of the dead and can ‘unlock’ the gates for those in Hades to come to life in order to face God in judgment. This will be ‘fleshed’ out in the subsequent pages of

Festschr. 1902, 1–30; ERohde, Psyche4 I 54ff; 309ff; ADieterich, Nekyia 1893; Bousset, Rel.3 285f; 293ff; Billerb. IV 1016–29; AHeidel, The Gilgamesh Epic and OT Parallels2, '49, 173–91; LSullivan, Theological Studies (Woodstock, Md.) 10, '49, 62ff; JBremmer, DDD 725f. S. also s.v. πνεῦμα 2 and 4c.—B. 1485. Frisk s.v. Ἄιδης. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 19.]

<sup>33</sup>“According to Jeremias (TDNT 1:147–49) Hades sometimes denotes the abode of both the godly and the wicked (Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; cf. Ant 18.14; JW 2.163). At other times (1 Pet 3:19; cf. JW 3.375) it appears to be a designation of the abode only of the ungodly, with the righteous residing in paradise or some similar environment (Luke 16:9; 23:43; cf. 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; Heb 12:22; Rev 6:9; 7:9). Where Hades denotes the abode of all the dead, it is described as a temporary holding place until the resurrection, when Hades gives up its dead (Rev 20:13).” [Theodore J. Lewis, “Dead, Abode of the” In, in, vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 104.]

<sup>34</sup>The NRSV only translates ἄδης in Revelation as Hades with the capital form signaling personification.

<sup>35</sup>“I have the keys of Death and Hades: keys are the symbol of authority, and by having been raised from death, the glorified Christ has the power over death and the world of the dead; he has the power to leave people in death or to open the gates of Hades (see Isa 38:10; Matt 16:18 [RSV footnote]) and let its inhabitants leave. This, of course, is a figure for the power to bring the dead to life. In some languages it will be possible to keep the symbol keys and say, for example, ‘I have the keys that give me the power to open the place where dead people are (the land of the dead) and bring them to life again.’ In cultures where keys do not exist, one may say ‘the things that open or close doors’ or ‘the power to open doors.’ *Death*: in languages where one cannot talk about ‘power over death,’ one may say ‘power to raise people from death’ or ‘power to cause dead people to be alive again.’ *Hades* (also 6:8; 20:13, 14) is the Greek equivalent of Sheol, the Hebrew word for the world of the dead, which was sometimes pictured as an underground city, whose locked gates prevented the dead from leaving. It should not be translated ‘hell,’ that is, the place of punishment, which in the New Testament is called ‘Gehenna.’ SPCL has joined the two terms, ‘I have the keys of the kingdom of death,’ which a translation may choose to imitate.” [Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 33-34.]

Revelation.

**Second, following the reassurance (vv. 17-18), comes the demand made to John:** γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, **Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this.** This is an expanded version of the previous command in verse eleven, which came from the Heavenly Voice:

ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεῖς καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν.

Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

This second emphasis in v. 19 is built off the same core: γράψον ἃ εἶδες, **write what you saw**, with the one difference: ὁ βλέπεις, **what you see** (Present tense) now becomes ἃ εἶδες, **what you saw** (Aorist tense), which picks up on ὅσα εἶδεν, **as much as he saw**, in verse two. The shift in narrative perspective with the different tense forms of the same verb reflect whether John is describing the scene from the perspective of as he experiences it (present tense) or viewing it from the later writing down of what he saw (past time of Aorist tense). Such variation is stylistic and contains no hidden significance.<sup>36</sup>

As noted in the previous study covering verse 11, this was a divine command given to John to take the heavenly vision given to him by God in images and then turn that into written depictions. In subsequent reflection and recollection of what he had witnessed in the apocalyptic vision, John reached out to his Jewish religious heritage, especially the prophetic and apocalyptic sides, to find appropriate language and images that could accurately describe what he had seen.

<sup>36</sup>“The phrase ἃ εἶδες, ‘what you see,’ could refer to the vision that John saw in vv 12–20, yet since he is still ‘within’ this vision when he writes v 19, this seems both artificial and unlikely. ἃ εἶδες seems to refer to the first commission to write in v 11: ὁ βλέπεις γράψον, ‘write what you see.’ In v 19, John uses the aorist verb εἶδες primarily because he is adapting the tripartite prophecy formula (see below) and needs to refer to past time. Further, the neuter plural relative pronoun ἃ refers to the substance of his vision no less than the neuter singular relative pronoun ὁ; John uses ὁ instead of ὃ in v 19 because it conforms to the neuter plural definite article, which tends to be used in the tripartite prophecy formula. V 19, therefore, seems to constitute a kind of double entendre; the tenses conform to the necessity of referring to the past, present, and future in the tripartite prophecy formula, but the author is using εἶδες as an epistolary aorist; i.e., while the visions he was about to record were yet to be seen by him, from the standpoint of the reader they belong to the past. This sentence can therefore be understood ‘Write what you see, namely [taking καὶ as expegetical], the events of the present and of the future.’” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 105-06.]

Although the core admonition is the same, it is the details which vary between the two expressions of γράψον ἃ εἶδες. In verse eleven the simple command is extended with the instruction to send what has been written down to the seven churches, which are then named individually: πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις.... This is the distinctive part of the first command to write.

In verse nineteen, however, some distinctive modifiers surface that are not found in the first instance of the command. They are attached as an explanatory definition of ἃ εἶδες: καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, **both what is and what is going to happen after these things.**

What John saw in the visions is connected to the present and the immediate future at the time of the writing of the book. Thus what was being revealed to John for him to pass on to his readers in Asia provided affirmation of the present concerns of God for them and reassurance that He was moving in their behalf, and would continue moving for them.

What is covered by this expression καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα? The basic, correct answer is everything from chapter two through chapter twenty-two? Is it legitimate to divide out καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν referring to chapters two and three while καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα refers to chapters four through twenty-two? Absolutely not! Such is completely false interpretation.<sup>37</sup> First, we are dealing with apocalyptic visionary perspective. Concepts of time and forward movement often don’t work in this perspective like they do in human history. There will be logical progression, but this may or may not (mostly) imply progression temporally. Second, the present and the future in chapters 2 through 22 are mixed in together, rather than separated out into a nice package of present (chaps. 2-3) and fu-

<sup>37</sup>“In the main clause, John refers to just two subjects, i.e., ‘what you see, namely,’ (1) ‘the present’ and (2) ‘the imminent future.’” It has often been supposed that this passage, translated differently, provides the reader with an outline of Revelation. ‘What you saw’ supposedly deals with the vision he has just received (1:9–20), ‘what is’ covers the situation as it exists in each of the seven churches (chaps. 2–3), and ‘what is about to happen after these things’ deals with future, i.e., the eschatological events in Rev 4:1–22:5 (Swete, 21; Bousset [1906] 198; Charles, 1:33; Lohse, 22; Vielhauer, *Geschichte*, 496–97). Aside from the fact that this division reveals nothing of the structure of the extensive section in chaps. 4–22, it does not appreciate the fact that some of the ensuing visions in chaps. 4–22 deal with the past (e.g., Rev 12), just as sections of chaps. 2–3 focus on the future (Beasley-Murray, 68; Roloff, 45; Sweet, 19; Caird, 26: ‘a grotesque over-simplification’). Therefore it is best to take this verse as a modification by John of the widespread Hellenistic tripartite prophecy formula in which he appears to refer to the past, present, and future, but in actuality means to emphasize only the present and future (see below on ἃ εἶδες).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 105.]

ture (chaps. 4-22). The content of these chapters make this abundantly clear. Any interpretive approach that splits them out into such a 'neat' package has obviously misunderstood the contents of these chapters.

Regarding the second half of this pair of explanatory expressions, καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, the grammatical structure first asserts what will happen shortly after ἃ εἰσὶν.<sup>38</sup> The certainty of these things (ἃ) taking place in the near future is highlighted by the NRSV translation "what is to take place," which is a major meaning of the verb μέλλω.<sup>39</sup>

The expression μετὰ ταῦτα shows up in 4:1 (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα) and 9:12 (μετὰ ταῦτα) where they imply the next thing sequentially.<sup>40</sup> Also the larg-

<sup>38</sup>The verb μέλλω with an infinitive indicates greater certainty of occurrence, normally in the near future as opposed to a remote future. Hence the usual translation of "about to be." For examples in the NRSV inside Revelation see 3:16; 8:13; 10:4; 12:4; 17:8. Here μέλλω in the present tense verb form is used with the Aorist infinitive γενέσθαι which is rare. The Aorist infinitive projects an event taking place rather than a series of events over an extended period of time, which would require the present tense infinitive.

The aorist inf. is rare with μέλλω (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι, Ro. 8:18; Gal. 3:23, though ἀποκαλύπτεσθαι in 1 Pet. 5:1). So ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν (Rev. 3:2). Cf. Rev. 3:16; 12:4.

[A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Logos Bible Software, 1919), 857.]

### <sup>39</sup>2. to be inevitable, be destined, inevitable

**a. w. pres. inf. to denote an action that necessarily follows a divine decree is destined, must, will certainly** ... μ. πάσχειν he is destined to suffer **Mt 17:12; B 7:10; 12:2; cp. 6:7.** μ. σταυροῦσθαι must be crucified **12:1.** μ. παραδίδοσθαι **Mt 17:22; Lk 9:44; 16:5.** ἔμελλεν ἀποθνήσκειν **J 11:51; 12:33; 18:32.** ἐν σαρκὶ μ. φανεροῦσθαι **B 6:7, 9, 14.** Cp. **Mt 16:27; 20:22; Ro 4:24; 8:13; Rv 12:5.** οὐκέτι μέλλουσιν ... θεωρεῖν they should no more see ... **Ac 20:38.** τὰ μ. γίνεσθαι what must come to pass **26:22;** cp. **Rv 1:19.** διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν those who are to inherit salvation **Hb 1:14.** μέλλομεν θλιβεσθαι that we were to be afflicted **1 Th 3:4.**—**Mk 10:32; Lk 9:31; J 7:39; Hb 11:8.** ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἣ ἔμελλε θηριομαχεῖν on the day on which Paul was to fight the wild animals **AcPI Ha 3, 9.** ὡς μελλούσης τῆς πόλεως αἰρεσθαι in expectation of the city's destruction 5, 16. ἄνωθεν μέλλω σταυροῦσθαι I (Jesus) am about to be crucified once more 7, 39.

**b. w. aor. inf. ἀποκαλυφθῆναι that is destined** (acc. to God's will) to be revealed **Gal 3:23.**

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 628.]

<sup>40</sup>"The phrase μετὰ ταῦτα, 'after this,' usually begins clauses, sentences, or units of text in Revelation; only here and in 4:1; 9:12 (see Notes there) is it used at the end of a sentence. The entire phrase ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα in 1:19 is in fact closely paralleled to the recurring phrase ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι [μετὰ ταῦτα/ἐν τάχει] (1:1; 4:1; 22:6). There is a relatively close linguistic parallel in LXX Isa 48:6, ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι (Swete, cxlii; Kraft, 49), where the MT reads simply תְּהִיחֶן *ūnešurōt*, "and hidden things," though

er phrase ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα is paralleled by the almost identical phrases ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (what must happen quickly; 1:1), ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα (what must happen next; 4:1); ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (what must happen quickly; 22:6).<sup>41</sup>

All four expressions have their linguistic foundation in Isa. 48:6.

ἠκούσατε πάντα, καὶ ὑμεῖς οὐκ ἔγνωτε· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀκουστά σοι ἐποίησα τὰ καινὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν, ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι, καὶ οὐκ εἶπας.

You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forward I make you hear new things, *hidden things* that you have not known.

The NRSV translation "hidden things" for ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι in the LXX is based more on the Hebrew text, תְּהִיחֶן *ūnešurōt*, "and hidden things," than on the LXX. The LXX with its ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι interpreted the Hebrew to mean the things just beyond seeing but certainly going to be revealed to the prophet. Out of this OT conceptualization comes then the declaration to John that he is going to see the things not yet known but clearly going to be revealed to him.

**Third follows the interpretation** (v. 20): τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὓς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς· οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσὶν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαὶ αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν.

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

The grammatical structure is unusual with the first part not being constructed as a sentence, but more as a header.<sup>42</sup> Whether originally written this way or written as a later insertion, the role remains the same: to introduce the seven letters in chapters two and three.

The interpretive link established here clearly connects the apocalyptic Son of Man in vv. 13-16 to the one sending each of the seven letters with elements of this portrait typically reproduced as a part of each

---

the context certainly involves divine revelation. This indicates the redactional character of 4:1 (see Comment there)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 106.]

<sup>41</sup>Also of importance is the similar phrase μετὰ τοῦτο, *after this*, in 7:1, 9; 11:11; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; 20:3. This phrase comes uniformly at the beginning of a sentence with either sequential or sometimes temporal significance. The sense is 'the very next thing to take place.'

<sup>42</sup>"The peculiar grammatical character of this verse clearly indicates that it is a gloss (Kraft, 49), though one that the author himself has inserted in order to link the commission vision of 1:9-20 to the proclamations to the seven churches in Rev 2-3. Malina argues that, since allegorical interpretation is essentially foreign to Revelation, v 20 is a later interpolation (Revelation, 75)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 106.]

letter *Praescriptio* (2:1 [7 stars in right hand, walking among the lampstands]; 2:8 [1st & last; dead / come to life]; 2:12 [sharp 2 edged sword]; 2:18 [flame of fire eyes; burnished bronze feet]; 3:1 [holds 7 spirits & stars]; 3:7 [holy, true one with key of David]; 3:14 [the Amen, faithful & true witness, source of God's creation].

**The header:** τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὓς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς, *the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands.*

The meaning of the seven stars and the seven lampstands is termed a μυστήριον, *mystery*.<sup>43</sup> This is

<sup>43</sup>“The term μυστήριον (the Aramaic term ܡܝܫܬܪܝܢ *mīšṭārīn*, ‘mystery,’ is a Persian loanword found in biblical Aramaic, not biblical Hebrew), literally ‘mystery,’ was a quasi-technical term in both prophetic and apocalyptic texts in early Judaism and early Christianity. The term occurs four times in Revelation (1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7). In the OT, a dream was sometimes a revelatory medium whose message was a ܡܝܫܬܪܝܢ, ‘mystery,’ requiring interpretation (Dan 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47 [2x]; 4:9 [MT: 4:6]). The biblical commentaries from Qumran indicate that the members of that community regarded OT prophecies (like dreams) as mysteries requiring interpretation (the transference of the techniques of dream interpretation to the exegesis of biblical texts is discussed by Finkel, *RevQ 4* [1960] 357–70). 1QpHab 7:4–5 (tr. M. Horgan, Pesharim, 16): ‘the interpretation [ܦܫܪܘܢ *pšrw*] of it concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets [ܚܝܢ ܕܒܪܝܢ *rzy dbry .bdyw hnb .ym*].’ In the *Qumran Pesharim* the Hebrew term ܡܝܫܬܪܝܢ *raz* occurs just three times (1QpHab 7:5, 8, 14). In Qumran, then, the term ܡܝܫܬܪܝܢ *raz*, ‘mystery,’ concerns things about the community and the situation in which they found themselves that were hidden in the prophetic writings and not fully known to the prophet. The ܦܫܪܘܢ *pešer*, ‘interpretation,’ which corresponded to the ܚܝܢ *raz*, ‘mystery,’ could not be understood by unaided human wisdom but was revealed by God to specially chosen human interpreters. The term μυστήριον is used as a mystery formula to introduce eschatological scenarios (Aune, *Prophecy*, 250–52, 333). μυστήριον occurs twice in the Greek text of 1 Enoch 103:1; 104:12 (the term also occurs in the Ethiopic text of 104:10, where there is a lacuna in the Greek text). In all three contexts the term is used to introduce an eschatological scenario: 103:1, ‘I understand this mystery [ἐπίσταμαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο];’ 104:12, ‘And again I know a second mystery [καὶ πάλιν γινώσκω μυστήριον δευτέρων];’ 104:10 (tr. Knibb, Enoch), ‘And now I know this mystery.’ In *Paral. Jer.* 9:29, Jeremiah’s prophetic visions are called ‘mysteries,’ i.e., the secret plans of God (Wis 2:22), on analogy with earthly kings who keep their counsels and intentions secret (Tob 12:7, 11; Jdt 2:2; 2 Macc 13:21): ‘Now Jeremiah transmitted all the mysteries which he saw [τὰ μυστήρια ἃ εἶδε] to Baruch.’ Paul uses μυστήριον (which refers both to the secret as well as its disclosure) to introduce an eschatological scenario in 1 Cor 15:51–52: ‘Behold! I tell you a mystery [μυστήριον].’ The mystery formula also occurs in Rom 11:25–26: ‘I want you to understand this mystery [μυστήριον] brethren.’ A close parallel is found in the eclectic pagan document *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.16 (called *Poimandres*): τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ κεκρυμμένον μυστήριον μέχρι τῆσδε τῆς ἡμέρας, ‘This is the mystery concealed until this day.’ In the NT, ‘the mystery of God hidden for ages but now revealed’ and close variations occur with some frequency (cf. 1 Cor 2:7; Rom 16:25–26; Eph 3:5, 9–10; Col 1:26–27; 2 Tim 1:9–10; Titus 1:2–3; 1 Pet 1:20; cf. Lührmann, *Paulus*, 113–17; N. A. Dahl,

not some esoteric knowledge hidden and thus made available only to a select few. Instead, this is understanding of the meaning to two images presented in an apocalyptic vision. This meaning is given to John who in turn is to communicate it to his readers.

In the background here probably lies Daniel 2:19 and 45, since close affinities with verse nineteen are possibly also present.<sup>44</sup>

**Dan. 2:19.** τότε τῷ Δανιηλ ἐν ὄραματι ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ νυκτὶ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ βασιλέως ἐξεφάνθη εὐσήμως· τότε Δανιηλ εὐλόγησε τὸν κύριον τὸν ὑψιστοντ

Then *the mystery* was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night, and Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

**Dan. 2:45b.** ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας ἐσήμανε τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰ ἐσόμμενα ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν, *καὶ ἀκριβὲς τὸ ὄραμα, καὶ πιστὴ ἡ τούτου κρίσις.*

The great God has informed the king what shall be hereafter. *The dream is certain, and its interpretation trustworthy.*

What Daniel was given to know was what God planned to do in exerting His rule over the earth. The dream is given in vv. 31-35 with the interpretation given in vv. 36-45a. Just as John was to do, Daniel was given understanding of what King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed and also the religious meaning of that dream: vv. 25-30. The reason God gave this understanding to Daniel was for him to communicate this to the king: v. 30. John’s mission was easier: to communicate this understand-

“Formgeschichtliche Beobachtungen,” 3–9). Hatch (*Essays*, 59–62) points out that in the Christian apologists the term μυστήριον is used with such synonyms as σύμβολον, τύπος, and παραβολή, all meaning ‘symbol’ or ‘symbolic representation.’ Examples: (1) Justin I Apol. 27, the serpent in false religions is understood as a σύμβολον μέγα καὶ μυστήριον, ‘a great symbol and mystery.’ (2) Justin Dial. 40.1, τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ προβάτου ... τύπος ἦν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ‘the mystery [i.e., ‘symbol’] of the lamb ... was a type of Christ.’ (3) Justin Dial. 68.6, τὸ εἰρημένον πρὸς Δαυεὶδ ὑπὸ θεοῦ ἐν μωστηρίῳ διὰ Ἡσαίου ... ἐξηγήθη, ‘What was spoken to David by God symbolically was explained through Isaiah’ (cf. Justin Dial. 44.2; 78.9).”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 106–07.]

<sup>44</sup>“μυστήριον (‘the mystery’) occurs in the LXX versions of the Hebrew OT books only in Daniel (and 12 times in books of the Apocrypha). μυστήρια (‘mysteries’) precedes ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι (‘what must come to pass’) in Dan. 2:28 and 29, and τὸ μυστήριον follows in v 30. Brown sees a ‘connection’ between Rev. 1:20a and Daniel 2 because of the similarity of usage, and Swete sees an explicit allusion to the ‘mystery’ of Dan. 2:29 in v 20a, but neither sees an allusion to Dan. 2:28ff. in Rev. 1:19c.<sup>132</sup> The margin of Kilpatrick’s edition of the Greek NT is the only source indicating an allusion to Dan. 2:29ff. in both v 19c and v 20a. Since ‘mystery’ occurs with an eschatological sense only in Daniel, the appearance of the word in such a context in Rev. 1:20 confirms its link to Daniel.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 216–17.]

ing of the divine will to seven churches in Asia.

What we are dealing with here in v. 20 is the divine intention to clearly define the meaning of two key elements in the apocalyptic vision in vv. 13-16. The assumption is that John could clearly understand the other details of the vision of the Son of Man. But the meaning of the stars and the lampstands, οὓς εἶδες (which you saw), was less obvious.

**The interpretation:** οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσίν. *the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

Notice that the interpretive methodology followed here is simply: **this equals that**. It is not stated “this is like that” or “this looks like that.” Sometimes such interpretive approaches are labeled allegorical interpretation, but they are such only in a mild sense along the lines of Jesus’ interpretation of his parable of the tares (parable, Mt. 13:24-30; interpretation, 13:36-43) and Paul’s equating of Hagar with legalistic Judaism and Christianity with Sarah in Gal. 4:21-5:1. Central here is the fact that the same person making the comparison provides his own interpretation of his intended meaning of the comparison.

In no way does this equal the extremes of allegorical interpretation found among the Greeks with Homer’s works, or the later church fathers’ approach to the biblical texts. In both instances centuries later, interpreters were attaching their own arbitrary meanings to the symbols and comparisons made in the previously written source texts.

Here in Rev. 1:20 the risen Christ did the exact same thing that the historical Jesus had done with the parable of the tares. Our later interpretive challenge is to be sure we understand correctly Christ’s interpretation of the symbols. Of the two interpretations made by Christ the second one is rather easy to understand, while the first one poses serious challenges to correct understanding.

**Interpretation one:** οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν, *the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.* This alludes back to the element in the vision of vv. 12-16 at verse sixteen: καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ, *and*

*holding in His right hand seven stars.* In the natural, ‘this world,’ meaning of the term is to refer to a luminous body in the sky.<sup>45</sup> Seven such heavenly bodies usual-

ly specified seven planets seen as stars in the sky.<sup>46</sup> These typically in ancient cultures were the Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Venus, and Saturn although understood in differing sequential listings of importance.<sup>47</sup>

But in this image in vv. 12-16, the risen Christ asserts in v. 20 that ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ, *seven stars* (v. 16) equals ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν, *angels of the seven churches* (v. 20). Modern readers are very much inclined to then ask: What is the logical connection between an ἀστήρ, *star*, and an ἄγγελος, ‘angel’? This largely grows out of a post-enlightenment assumption of some sort of logical connection existing between two items which are linked in some manner or another. The problem with this connection in v. 20 is that it flows out of the ancient allegorical patterns, not a modern western mind set. In that ancient way of interpreting texts such connections more often than not are purely arbitrary and have little or no logical connection whatsoever. The connection is made by the ancient interpreter more on the basis of his perception of a point of functional commonality, rather than some logical connection.

In this background lies a world view, eine Weltanschauung, that is utterly different from ours. As the graphic below illustrates, the canopy across the earth that we

**star, single star, planet**” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 145.]

<sup>46</sup>“According to ancient sidereal lore, seven stars could represent (1) the seven planets, (2) Ursus Major (a constellation with seven stars), or (3) the Pleiades (another constellation of seven stars).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 97.]

<sup>47</sup>“In antiquity, the ‘seven stars’ are often used to represent the seven ‘planets’ (Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Venus, and Saturn). Though these seven planets were almost universally accepted in the Hellenistic and Roman world, there were three different planetary orders (Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 1–11): (a) The order based on distance from the earth has two variants (because the positions of Venus, Mercury, and the Sun cannot be determined relative to each other): (i) the older ‘Egyptian’ order: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Sun, and Moon, and (ii) the later ‘Chaldean’ order, which came to dominate late Hellenistic astronomy (note the position of the Sun in the center): Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon. (b) The astrological, horoscopic order (probably originally based on distance, though priority was given to the Sun and Moon for other reasons): Sun, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. (c) The Mithraic ‘grade’ order: Saturn, Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. In some of the depictions of Mithras slaying the bull, the presence of seven stars in the field symbolizes the seven planets (Vermaseren, *Mithraica III*, 9 [plate IV], 12 [plate XII], 37; Vermaseren, *CIM-RM*, 1127B, 1206, 1216, 1727, 2244, 2354, 2359). Clement Alex. (Strom. 5.6) compares the menorah in the Jewish temple with the planets (see Comment on 1:12) and compares the light in the middle and in the highest position with the sun, following the ‘Chaldean’ order.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 97.]

<sup>45</sup>“A luminous body (other than the sun) visible in the sky,

# Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

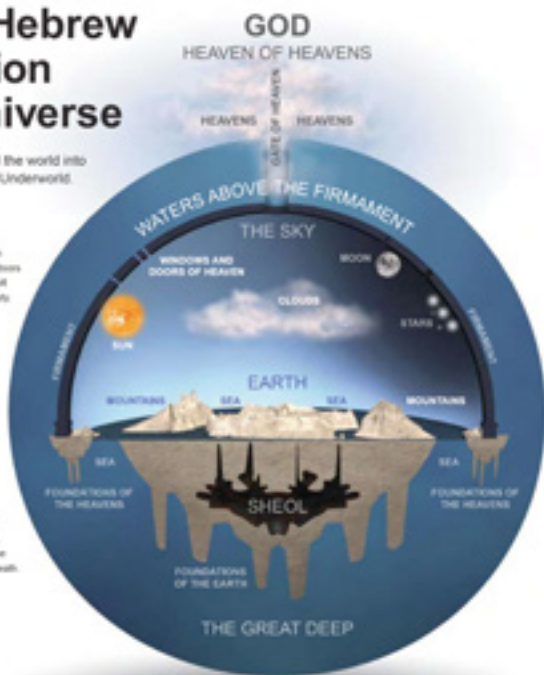
The ancient Israelites divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea, and the Underworld.

They viewed the sky as a vault resting on foundations—perhaps mountains—with doors and windows that let in the sun. God dwelt above the sky, hidden in cloud and mystery.

The world was viewed as a disk floating on the waters, secured or held in place by pillars. The earth was the only known domain—the water beyond it was considered unknown.

The Underworld (Sheol) was a valley or dark prison from which no one returned. Regarded as a physical place beneath the earth, it could be reached only through death.

GRAPHIC BY HANSEL BALTACON, COPYRIGHT BY EXCLUSIO BIBLE SOFTWARE



call sky was seen as a boundary line between this world and the dwelling place of God on the opposite side of this canopy. In this way of viewing the created world, the stars served as windows into that place where God dwells. They shined simply because they were reflecting the glory of the Almighty. One should note clearly that this was the view of the Israelite people.

Among the Greeks and the majority of the rest of the ancient world, the stars represented individual gods who exerted power and influence over those on earth. Thus they were viewed as deities. Most of the English names for the planets are actually derived from Latin words specifying common names for these deities.

If any logical connection between ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ, **seven stars** (v. 16) and ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν, **angels of the seven churches** (v. 20), it must be understood against this ancient world backdrop.

But before exploring this possibility, another challenge must be addressed. It centers in the word ἄγγελος, that literally means ‘messenger.’<sup>48</sup> Inside the NT ἄγγελος often specified a human messenger: Lk. 7:24, 9:52; Jas. 2:25, particularly God’s prophets (Mt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 7:27). Also the term ἄγγελος specifies a supernatural messenger, i.e., an angel, in most

<sup>48</sup>This Greek word ἄγγελος is derived from a word group that denotes the idea of commissioned delivery of a message. This personal noun ἄγγελος specifies the individual commissioned to deliver the message. The abstract noun ἀγγελία specifies the message to be delivered. The verb ἀγγέλλω, along with a number of compound forms -- ἀν-, ἀπ-, δι-, ἐξ-, κατ-, προκαταγγέλλω -- specify the giving of the authorized message. The two most popular terms inside early Christian usage are compound derivatives from the root ἀγγελ- stem: ἐπαγγελ- (ἐπαγγελμα, **promise**) and εὐαγγελ- (εὐαγγέλιον, **Gospel**; εὐαγγελίζω, **I preach**).

of the 175 NT uses. Inside the book of Revelation the term ἄγγελος is used some 69 times in either the singular or plural forms. In chapters four through twenty-two the meaning of ἄγγελος is clearly defined by context as a supernatural messenger sent from God. Three exceptions to this surface. In 9:11 Satan is defined as an ἄγγελος and in 12:7, 9 his followers are referred to as ἄγγελοι, **angels**.

This leaves us with eight references in chapters two and three also including this one in 1:20. The question becomes: Who are the ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν, the ‘angels’ of the seven churches? Are they angels sent by God to watch over each of the seven churches? This is a commonly understood view, but it doesn’t make sense. As we will see in the studies of these seven letters in chapters two and three, each letter is addressed to one of these ἄγγελοι with the standardized Hebrew/Aramaic letter *Adscriptio* formula: Τῷ ἀγγέλω τῆς ἐν... ἐκκλησίας γράψων, **To the angel of the church in \_\_\_ write**. Cf. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14. Why would God use John to instruct an angel to deliver a specific message to a Christian congregation located in the province of Asia? If such is the case, it is completely unique in the biblical history of how God communicates with people on this planet.

David Aune (WBC) wisely reminds us of several contextual factors to include in the process of coming to an interpretive conclusion about who these ἄγγελοι are:

Before reviewing the various interpretations that scholars have proposed, let us first consider some specific implications of relevant portions of the text of Revelation that must be taken into account in any solution to the identity and function of these seven ἄγγελοι. **(1)** *Each of the seven proclamations addresses the “angel” of each church directly as an individual entity complete with second person singular pronouns and verb forms.* A close reading of the seven proclamations in Rev 2–3 clearly suggests that this is a literary fiction, which the author is simply not able to maintain consistently. Sometimes the address shifts to the second person plural, a shift that occurs when a particular group within the church is addressed. Three examples will suffice: (a) “Do not fear what you will suffer [μέλλεις πάσχειν; second person singular finite verb]; behold the devil will cast some of you [ἐξ ὑμῶν; plural pronoun] into jail” (2:10). (b) “But I have against you [σου; singular pronoun] that you have [ἔχεις; second person singular verb] there those who hold [κρατοῦντας; plural substantival participle] the teaching of Balaam” (2:14; same construction in v 15). (c) “I know where you dwell [κατοικεῖς; second person singular verb] where the throne of Satan is ... Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you [παρ’ ὑμῖν; plural pronoun]. **(2)** *The ἄγγελος of each church is addressed as if he is the church; i.e., each one functions as the alter ego of each congregation.* The angel-church can be commended for acceptable behavior (2:2–3, 6) but rebuked for unaccept-



able behavior (2:4–5). While the first command given to the author to write a revelatory book specifies that he sent it to the seven churches, with no mention of the fictive angelic recipients (1:11), and the message of each proclamation is clearly said to be spoken by the Spirit ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, “to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), the addressee of each of the proclamations is the ἄγγελος to which that message is directed (2:1, 7, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), suggesting the equivalency of churches and angels. **(3)** *Several important characteristics of these ἄγγελοι are evident in Rev 1:20:* **(a)** The fact that the first occurrence of ἄγγελοι in 1:20 is anarthrous indicates that the author did not assume that his audience was familiar with these figures (e.g., they cannot be identical with the seven archangels of 8:2 or the seven bowl angels of 15:6). That these ἄγγελοι were created by the author is in part confirmed by the fact that there are no parallels in the literature of early Judaism or early Christianity that provide insight into how these figures should be interpreted. **(b)** Since the seven stars are interpreted as the angels of the seven churches, and the seven menorahs as the seven churches, it appears that the angels and the churches are not identical. **(c)** The seven angels appear to constitute a particular group, alongside other groups of seven angels in Revelation, i.e., the seven archangels who function as trumpet angels (8:2) and the seven bowl angels (15:6). The first mention of these last two groups is articular, suggesting that the author assumed that they were known to his audience. **(4)** *The seven ἄγγελοι, either individually or collectively, are not mentioned elsewhere in Revelation (though note other groups of seven angels in 8:2; 15:6).* **(5)** *All references to these ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν occur in the final edition or version of Revelation.* **(6)** *There is no indication that these ἄγγελοι are present in heaven.* **(7)** *The phenomenon of addressing a group as if it were an individual and using second person singular verb forms and pronouns is a widespread literary phenomenon (address to the daughter of Zion in Zeph 3:14–20; speech to Tyre in Ezek 27), though in Hos 9:16; 14:1–3, Israel is initially addressed in singular pronouns and verb forms, which then switch to plural forms. In early Christian epistolary literature, which is usually addressed to particular churches, the verbs and pronouns are always second person plural in form (this also occurs in prophetic speeches, e.g., Zeph 2:1–5).* **(8)** *Early Christian letters are characteristically addressed to churches of a particular geographical location, and only exceptionally to individuals or to groups who were part of those communities.*<sup>49</sup>

What we are thus looking at with these eight references to ἄγγελοι is something different than what either ἄγγελος, *angel*, or ἄγγελοι, *angels*, will mean in the remainder of the book of Revelation. It doesn't seem likely that ἄγγελος, *angel*, is equated with ἐκκλησία, *church*, even though a very close inner connection between the two is made obvious in these two chapters. For example, when John is instructed to write a let-

ter to the ἄγγελος of each church (e.g., 2:1), the risen Christ addresses technically the ἄγγελος with words like οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου..., *I know your works* [2nd singular reference grammatically going back to τῷ ἄγγέλῳ]..., but clearly He is describing what is characteristic of the entire congregation (cf. Aune's point 2 above). The ἄγγελος of each church is so identified with the church that the two seem almost interchangeable. But other signals clearly suggest that they are not two ways of referring to each church.

Over the centuries of study of this issue three categories of interpretive understand have emerged: the ἄγγελοι are 1) supernatural beings, 2) human beings as spiritual leaders of the churches, or 3) heavenly bodies. Numerous variations of each of these categories surface in the literature.<sup>50</sup> As Aune correctly notes

<sup>50</sup>**(1)** The first category, *supernatural beings*, can be subdivided into three further possibilities: (a) guardian angels who guide and protect each congregation, (b) personified heavenly counterparts to the earthly Christian communities, (c) visionary counterparts of the community prophets.

**(a)** The term ἄγγελος is used in various texts (primarily Jewish apocalypses) to refer to heavenly representatives of earthly nations, and by extension this has suggested to many scholars that the ἄγγελοι in question refer to the angelic guardians or representatives of the earthly churches (W. J. Harrington, *Apocalypse*, 80–81; Beasley-Murray, 68–70; Karrer, *Brief*, 185–86). One of the earliest traces of this conception is found in LXX Deut 32:8: ‘he [God] established the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the angels of God [ἀγγέλων θεοῦ].’ The same view may also be reflected in Sir 17:17: ‘He appointed a ruler for every nation, but Israel is the Lord’s own portion.’ Michael is the champion or the prince of the nation of Israel (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; cf. 1 Enoch 20:5). This conception appears to be transferred to the Christian church in Hermas, *Sim.* 8.3.3, where Michael is referred to as ‘the one who has power over this people and governs them.’ Daniel also refers to angelic patrons, or ‘princes,’ of Persia (Dan 10:13, 20) and the prince of Greece (Dan 10:20). This conception of guardian angels, which can guide and protect nations (Bousset-Gressmann, *Religion des Judentums*, 324–25; Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 87–107), may be related to the notion of heavenly guardians or guides for individuals; i.e., individuals can also have angelic patrons (Str-B 1:781–83; 2:707–8; 3:437–40). The earliest references to guardian angels who protect individuals are found in Jubilees and Tobit. Jub. 35:17 refers to ‘the guardian of Jacob’ as being stronger than ‘the guardian of Esau.’ Raphael, one of the seven archangels (Tob 12:14), was sent from heaven to protect Tobias and heal Tobit (Tob 2:16–17; 5:4–5a). Gabriel, the angel who appeared to Daniel, was the guardian angel of Darius the Mede (Dan 11:1). Guardian angels are mentioned just twice in the NT (Matt 18:10; Acts 12:15; two other passages sometimes cited, 1 Cor 11:10; Heb 1:14, are irrelevant). The various means and occasions whereby good angels protect people from destruction are discussed in *Pirqe R. El.* 15 (for another reference to angels who protect individuals see *Acts of Paul* 7). Many early Christian thinkers regarded the angels of the seven churches as the heavenly guardians of the churches (Gregory Naz., *Or.* 42; Origen *Hom.* on Luke 23; Basil *Comm.* on Isa. 1.46; Hippolytus *De ant.* 59; Eusebius *Comm.* on Ps. 47, 50; Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 192 n. 6). In what may

<sup>49</sup>David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 109–10.

be a Christian development of the Jewish conception of the angels of the nations, *Asc. Isa.* 3:15 refers to the descent of ‘the angel of the church which is in the heavens.’ Wink thinks that the angels of the churches represent the corporate character or Gestalt of each Christian community but is reluctant to speak of the possible metaphysical reality of such figures (*Unmasking the Powers*, 70–78), and so his view merges with those who see the angels of the communities as heavenly counterparts to the earthly congregations.

(b) The term could also refer to heavenly or spiritual counterparts of earthly communities (Ramsay, *Letters*, 69–70; Bousset [1906] 201; Charles, 1:34–35; Lohmeyer, 20; Holtz, *Christologie*, 113–16; Satake, *Gemeindeordnung*, 150–55; Ford, 386–87; Beasley-Murray, 69–70; Sweet, 73). The suggestion that the Persian *fravashis* are a parallel phenomenon (first suggested in Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible* 4:991, and picked up by Swete, 22, has been elaborated by Beasley-Murray [69] into the ‘heavenly counterparts of earthly individuals and communities’) is a phenomenological parallel providing little enlightenment (see G. Gnoli, ‘Fravashis,’ *EncRel* 5:413–14). The *fravashis*, ‘spirits of the just,’ originated as spirits of the dead (Söderblom, *RHR* 39 [1899] 229–60, 373–418) who were a combination of ancestral spirits, guardian spirits, and transcendental doubles of the soul. A different, more proximate background for the conception of heavenly counterparts to earthly communities is *Asc. Isa.* 3:15, which contains an enigmatic reference to ‘the angel of the church which is in heaven,’ by which is meant the angelic representative of the celestial Church, the heavenly counterpart to the earthly Church. The origins of this conception are problematic.

(c) The term has also been construed to mean the visionary, counterpart of such a community prophet (Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 145–46; Enroth, *NTS* 36 [1990] 604).

(2) *The ἄγγελοι as human beings.* This category can be further subdivided into three different possibilities: (a) Human messengers or emissaries, (b) Christian prophets, perhaps members of a prophetic guild represented in each of the seven communities, perhaps prophetic messengers sent by John from Patmos to each of the churches (Spitta, 38–39; Kraft, 50–52; Talbert, 17), or (c) the bishops or leaders of each of the seven communities (Grotius, *Annotationes* 8:251; Zahn, 1:209–17; Str-B 3:790–92; Müller, 101; Hughes, *Revelation* 30–31; for a survey of this view, see Satake, *Gemeindeordnung*, 151–55). It is of course also possible to maintain that the ἄγγελοι of the seven churches represent the local leadership of the communities without specifying a specific type of leader (H. W. Günther, *Der Nah- und Enderwartungshorizont in der Apokalypse des heiligen Johannes* [Würzburg: Echter, 1980] 151–52).

(a) ἄγγελος can be a designation for a human messenger or emissary. In the LXX, ἄγγελος is occasionally used of human emissaries of God. According to Mal 2:7, the Jewish priest is regarded as a מלאך יהוה צבאות מלאך *mal.ak YHWH šēbā.ōt* (LXX: ἄγγελος κυρίου παντοκράτορος), ‘a messenger of the Lord Sabaoth.’ Hecataeus of Abdera (late fourth century A.D.), quoted in Diodorus Siculus 40.3.5–6, speaks of the Israelite high priest ‘as a messenger [ἄγγελος] to them of God’s commandments; at their assemblies and other gatherings, they say, he proclaims the commandments of God’ (Walton, *HTR* 48 [1955] 255–57).

(b) Since the term ἄγγελος is used of human messengers of God (see above), then it is arguable that the ἄγγελοι of Rev 2–3 are Christian prophets, perhaps even members of a prophetic guild. The term ἄγγελος means ‘messenger,’ whether human or divine. Josephus observed that the Jews had received the holiest

of their laws ‘through messengers [δι’ ἀγγέλων] from God’ (*Ant.* 15.136); here he could be referring to angels (see Jub. 1:27–29; 2:1; 5:6, 13; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2; Hermas *Sim.* 8.3.3), though W. D. Davies has argued that prophets are intended (*HTR* 47 [1954] 135–40). Hag 1:13 refers to ‘Haggai the messenger of the Lord [MT: הַגַּי מַלְאָךְ *mal.ak YHWH*; LXX: ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου].’ The term is also used of a prophetic messenger in LXX Mal 1:1; 3:1. The term ἄγγελος is frequently used to translate the Hebrew מַלְאָךְ *mal.āk*, ‘messenger’ (see Isa 42:26; Hag 1:12–13 [Ἀγγαῖος ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου, ‘Haggai the messenger of the Lord’]; 2 Chr 36:15–16. In the Midrash *Wayyiqra Rabba* (ed. M. Margolies [Jerusalem, 1953] 3), R. Yohanan states that ‘the prophets were called מַלְאָכִים [*ml.kym*, i.e., ἄγγελοι].’ Josephus regarded himself as a prophet (Aune, *Prophecy*, 139–44, 153) but speaks of himself as a ‘messenger’ (*J. W.* 3.392, ἐγὼ δ’ ἄγγελος ἦκω σοι, ‘I, a messenger, have come to you’). In a disputed passage (*Ant.* 15.136), Josephus says, ‘we have learned the noblest of our doctrines and the holiest of our laws from the messengers sent by God [δι’ ἄγγέλων παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ].’ Epictetus stated that ‘the true Cynic must know that he is a messenger [ἄγγελος] sent from Zeus to people’ (*Discourses* 3.22.23). Several scholars have argued that the ἄγγελος mentioned here are prophets, not angels (Hill, *New Testament Prophecy*, 30). The *Abot R. Nat.* 34 contains a list of synonyms for ‘prophet’ (Golden, *Fathers*, 34): ‘By ten names were prophets called, to wit: ambassador, trusted, servant [עבד *.bd*], messenger [חֵלֶם *šlīh*], visionary, watchman, seer, dreamer, prophet, man of God’ (מלאך *ml.k* is noteworthy for its absence). Lülsdorff (BZ 36 [1992] 104–8) argues convincingly that the ἄγγελοι of 1 Tim 3:16 (cf. 5:21) is used for human messengers of God, the apostles who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus.

(c) Some commentators assert that each ἄγγελος to which a proclamation is directed is a human being, either a bishop or presiding officer of the church addressed. According to Billerbeck (Str-B 3:790–91; cf. Lülsdorff, BZ 36 [1992] 106; Ysebaert, *Amtsterminologie*, 22), since the ἄγγελοι of the seven churches are the recipients of letters, it is presupposed that they are on earth, and that they should be understood as humans rather than angels. Some have found a parallel in the שְׁלִיחַ שְׁבִיר *šlīh šbūr*, ‘synagogue messenger’ (Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae* 2:90–95; Str-B 3:790–92), though such a subordinate position cannot seriously be proposed for the role of the ἄγγελος in each of the seven churches. This view founders on the identification of the seven stars with the angels of the seven churches in 1:20, for it is highly unlikely that such emissaries could represent each community so exclusively (Hemer, *Letters*, 33), so those who hold this view must deny that the ἄγγελοι of 1:20 are the angels of the seven churches (Zahn, *Introduction* 3:413, appeals to the absence of the article with ἄγγελοι; but see Note 1:20.b.). Since the ἄγγελοι of each church receives blame and condemnation as well as praise, proponents of this view argue that it is ludicrous to suppose that these are good angels sent by God (Zahn, 1:211).

Each of the seven proclamations concludes with the stereotypical proclamation formula ‘Let the one with ears hear what the Spirit announces to the churches.’ This formula means that each of the seven proclamations is intended to be read by all the congregations. It also indicates that the Spirit is addressing the churches; i.e., even though each proclamation is addressed to the angel of that congregation, it is clearly addressed to each church, so that the angels must be understood as surrogates for the churches.

(3) *Heavenly bodies.* Some scholars have proposed that the seven stars (= angels) represent the (seven) stars of Ursa Minor or

the precise meaning of ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν is extremely difficult to determine with certainty.

Here are the certainties emerging from the context of 1:20 with chapters two and three. **1)** These ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν are clearly functioning as divinely commissioned messengers to each of the seven churches individually. **2)** They are so closely connected to each church that the ἄγγελος, *angel*, and the ἐκκλησία, *church*, are almost interchangeable. The one point at the end of each letter prevents making them synonyms of each other: Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, *the one possessing ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches*. Although formulaic in structure, the point is made that it is God's Spirit who speaks the content of each letter to the churches, and not the ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν. **3)** The secular background of οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες, the seven stars, points us in the direction of supernatural agents acting in close connection to the churches. But these οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες are also ἄγγελοι so closely connected to the churches that they receive accusation and blame for spiritual failure along with the churches in each of the letters. **4)** We should not lose sight of this material depicting apocalyptic reality rather than regular historical reality.<sup>51</sup>

Thus it seems to me that in some way these ἄγγελοι represent a bridge from the normal world of these seven churches to the apocalyptic reality being described here. As ἄγγελοι they become channels of divine communication to the members of each of the seven churches. In somewhat typical apocalyptic depiction the risen Christ will instruct John to write down in letter format the message that these ἄγγελοι are to then deliver to each church. The end product of this document, called Revelation, becomes that message both individually and collectively to these seven churches. And it stands as the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit then speaks to each church member with willingness to hear what He is saying.

Is there clear, simple logic in this very complex

---

the Pleiades (Bousset [1906] 196; Kraft, 46). 1 Enoch 18:1.3–16; 21:1–6 mention seven fallen stars, which represent angels (on the star = angel equation, see Comment on 9:1). 2 Enoch 30:2–3 (cf. 27:3, MS J) mentions seven stars created by God: the sun, moon, and five planets, i.e., the most important and influential of the heavenly bodies, a view held by Wojciechowski (BN 45 [1988] 48–50), who proposes a correlation between each of the seven proclamations and the symbolism or properties attributed by the ancients to the sun, moon, and five planets.

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 110–12.]

<sup>51</sup>A fifth certainty is that any commentator who dogmatically says the angels clearly mean this or that reveals that he doesn't know what he is talking about. And thus he should be disregarded as having any legitimate understanding of this text.

picture? Absolutely not! In large part, because we are dealing with apocalyptic reality while we still function in historical reality. Our comprehension is therefore going to be severely limited.

But what we can grasp is that God set up a definite line of communication between Heaven and each of the churches. It was effective and through its implementation His Word came through with powerful impact on the members of the churches. From this comes hope and reassurance of God's presence and compassion for His people suffering oppression on earth.

**Interpretation two:** καὶ αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν, *and the seven lampstands are the seven churches*.

This interpretive link of αἱ λυχνίαι, *the lampstands*, being αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι, *the seven churches*, is simple and clear.<sup>52</sup> These lampstands are for holding light, and the number seven most likely is modeled after the Jewish menorah, which symbolized the full light of God to the Jewish people (cf. Zech. 4). But now for the risen Christ the lampstands which possess the full light of God are the seven churches targeted by this document.



In each of the letters the churches discover a rather stern accountability from God for how they handled that divine light, granted to them, in both their belief and practices. This tone of divine accountability imposed on the people of God is generally signaled by just the genre of apocalyptic vision coming out of the OT prophetic visions. But this implicit tone here becomes detailedly explicit in the seven letters of chapters two and three. And even more explicit in the resumption of the vision beginning in chapter four all the way through chapter twenty-two.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

What can we learn from this third segment of the apocalyptic vision of John? Numerous things!

**First**, never forget that the full presence of God is absolutely overwhelming to us mortals. When John saw the apocalyptic image of the Son of Man he fainted dead away. The presence of the divine was that over-

<sup>52</sup>One grammar issue present here relates to the modification of αἱ ἑπτὰ, seven, in the statement αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν. The literal sense of this statement is “*the seven lampstands are seven churches*.” This anarthrous construction for the second ἑπτὰ highlights the ‘lamp holding’ responsibility of the seven churches while obviously alluding back to ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις in verse 11. Some copyists were troubled by the sequence αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ, *the seven seven*, and thus either dropped one of the numbers or shifted sequencing around to avoid these two numbers appearing side by side. While not the highest quality of Greek writing, John clearly follows standard patterns for adjective modification in the listing of both numbers.

powering to him. When we are tempted to treat God's presence superficially or like God is our guest at a party, that signals unquestionably that God is not present. If He were, the atmosphere would instantly change in the direction of John's experience.

**Second**, this encounter with God by John reminds us that God's presence is an objective reality not defined by whether or not we 'feel like He is present.' Clearly the scriptural perspective is that God is present everywhere and at all times. On special occasions He chooses to disclose greater levels of His presence to selected individuals. The determination of that presence has nothing whatsoever to do with our feelings. Our emotions of 'overwhelmedness' flow out of our conscious awareness of Him being present where we are. And consistently when such theophanies as this vision of John take place, the individuals are literally 'knocked off their feet' by the power of that presence. Feelings come into the picture at the point of one's utter sense of unworthiness to stand in such presence of a God.

**Third**, only God can determine when He will disclose Himself in such overpowering manner. There is absolutely nothing that any human being can do to coerce God into revealing Himself in this way. One slips over into heresy to even think that he or she can command God to show Himself in these heightened ways.

The huge danger here in modern church life is the phony attempt to use music and other worship activities in order to whip up the emotions of people so that they 'feel the presence of God.' If one carefully studies the pattern of these theophany kinds of visions of God's presence, not once do the humans present 'celebrate' the presence of God. Awe and silence are the uniform reactions. In tabernacle and subsequently in temple worship God's people celebrated the actions of God in their behalf, but not His presence. Heightened disclosure of God's presence was too frightening and fearful for celebration to be appropriate.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup>It is interesting to compare the reaction of the Jerusalem church to the divine punishment of death imposed on Ananias and Sapphira for their deception in Acts 5:11, *καὶ ἐγένετο φόβος μέγας ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας ταῦτα*, **And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things**. In this momentary display of the heightened presence of God in the church, the people were frightened by God's display of overwhelming power.

And this unusual display of divine presence continued for some time which created an interesting dynamic, described by Luke in Acts 5:13-14, *13 τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμα κολλᾶσθαι αὐτοῖς, ἀλλ' ἐμεγάλυνεν αὐτοὺς ὁ λαός. 14 μᾶλλον δὲ προσετίθεντο πιστεύοντες τῷ κυρίῳ, πλήθη ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν, 13 None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women*. Outsiders were fearful of joining the Christians because of this overpowering presence of

**Fourth**, when God moves in unusual display of His power and presence, it is because He has a job for individuals to do. Divine commands to the individual or individuals in these visionary experiences are normative. Also, on occasion words of encouragement, especially the almost formulaic expression, *μὴ φοβοῦ*, **stop being afraid**, are found as well. God does not disclose Himself at this level to individuals without a specific objective in mind. Central to this objective is 'mission,' rather than encouragement. The latter can be given, but the former is always uppermost.

Finally, with this final study on chapter one, a brief review of the contents of Revelation in the first chapter are in order. The chart below summarizes the function of the contents in chapter one to the remainder of the book.



In a very unusual manner John stitches together several pieces of introductory material for a variety of ancient genres: apocalypse, letters, prophetic oracles, apocalyptic vision. He begins with a formal Prologue that names the document of Revelation as an apocalypse (vv. 1-3). With further defining of his intended meaning of Ἀποκάλυψις in these verses, he then inserts a standard Greek letter Praescriptio in 1:4-5a following the typical Pauline letter Praescriptio. A doxology (vv. 5b-6) and a pair of Prophetic Oracles (vv. 7-8) follow it to form a unit of introductory materials. Then lastly he returns to the apocalypse form with an introductory Apocalyptic Vision (vv. 9-20), which will then launch the contents of the rest of the book. The epistolary element re-surfaces in chapters two and three, but not in the tradition of the Greek letter. Instead, the ancient Hebrew / Aramaic letter form is followed as more reflective of letters within an apocalyptic pattern

At first, this cafeteria mixture of forms and patterns seems odd. But with more careful study, one begins to realize the skilled painter of written portraits that John becomes in alerting us in advance of his intentions for the book. He is an apocalyptic painter *extraordinaire!*

God. Yet at the same time the convicting power of God's presence pulled them into the church in large numbers in spite of their fears.