



# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 01

Text: 1:1-3

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**1. What the text meant.**

**Historical Aspects:**  
 External History  
 Internal History  
**Literary Aspects:**  
 Genre  
 Literary Setting  
 Literary Structure

**2. What the text means.**

**QUICK LINKS**

**Exegesis of the Text:**  
 I. The Revelation, vv. 1-2  
 II. The Blessing, v. 3

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

### Greek NT

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### 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 as 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; *Epiphanius 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 an 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 ἔκβαλε ἔξωθεν καὶ μὴ αὐτὴν μετρήσῃς, ὅτι ἐδόθη τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν πατήσουσιν μῆνας τεσσαράκοντα [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 (*Casius 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>15</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 al) 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 8\* (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 8 046. 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. [alwas; 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 θύραις 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 ἀμαρτίας; Sir 11:27; 22:22; 41:26 v.l.; TestAbr A 6 p. 83, 27 [Stone p. 14]; GrBar, ApcEsdr 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** (Porphyr., 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.

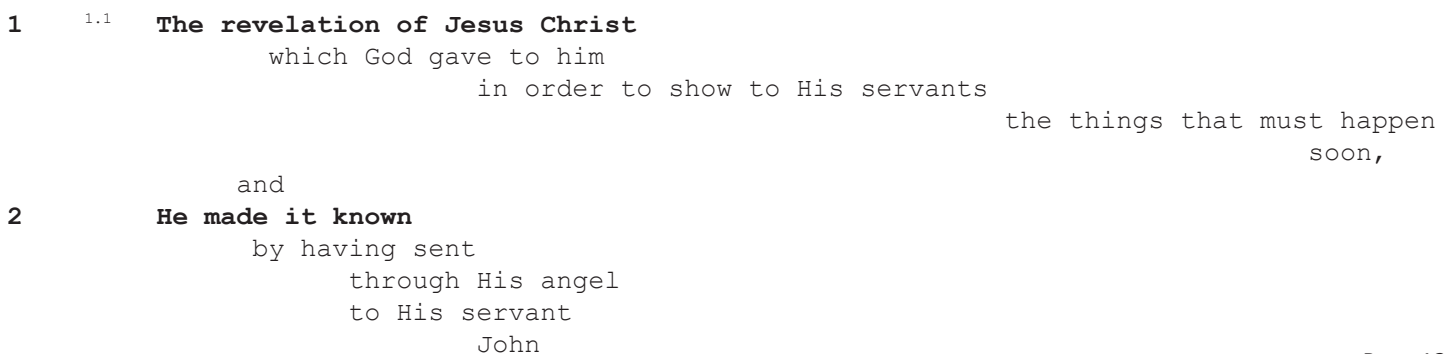
The second phrase καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ

<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 (א, 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 a limited group such as prophets.<sup>41</sup> Thus John affirms

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.]

<sup>41</sup>“The phrase τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ (‘to his servants’) refers to

## Revelatory Process

### Revelaton 1:1-2



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 Ἀποκάλυψις to an angel who then passed it on to John. Thus the basic meaning of ἀγγελος as ‘messenger’ is

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.]

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 is in reality τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, **the Word of God**. Now this is not referring to the Bible, but rather to the orally

<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.

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 in God’s plan to culminate it at the end of human history. It is a message that comes from God and from

<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.]

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



The language of μαρτυρέω, *I testify*, and μαρτυρία,

<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.

*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 συγκοινωνὸς 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. Be-



tween 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 ἰδοὺ 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 of either scripture or authoritative Christian writings, one of the major activities of Christian gatherings would

<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 βλέπωσιν 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.*

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 φιλιῶν 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 depiction of Revelation parallels that in 22:7, τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου, *the words of the*

<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.]

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 ἐπιθῇ

ἐπ' 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.]

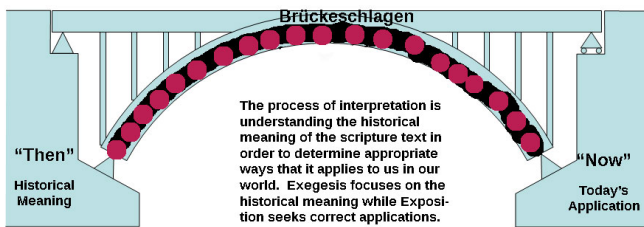
<sup>52</sup>“The statement seems to have come from the standard Jewish messianic expectations of the day. In Mark 13 Jesus warned his disciples that many would come in his name claiming to be the promised Messiah (v. 5). A bit later in the chapter he spoke of the time of his return, telling them to 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. 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, Page 19

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

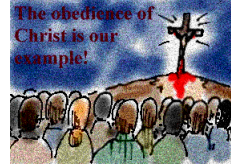
MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 43-44.]

<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.

<sup>54</sup>These verses discourage 'futurist' views of Revelation. Cer-

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

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.]