

REVELATION

GRANT R. OSBORNE



Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

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To my mentors:

Wes Gerig
Richard Longenecker
Clark Pinnock
I. Howard Marshall

My deepest appreciation for taking the rough granite of my life
and sculpting what I am today



Contents

Map vi

Series Preface ix

Author's Preface xi

Abbreviations xiii

Transliteration xix

Introduction to Revelation 1

- I. Prologue (1:1–8) 50
- II. Churches Addressed (1:9–3:22) 77
 - A. Inaugural Vision (1:9–20) 78
 - B. Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1–3:22) 104
- III. God in Majesty and Judgment (4:1–16:21) 218
 - A. God's Sovereignty in Judgment (4:1–11:19) 219
 - B. Great Conflict between God and the Forces of Evil (12:1–16:21) 451
- IV. Final Judgment at the Arrival of the Eschaton (17:1–20:15) 603
 - A. Destruction of Babylon the Great (17:1–19:5) 605
 - B. Final Victory: The End of the Evil Empire at the Parousia (19:6–21) 669
 - C. The Thousand-Year Reign of Christ and Final Destruction of Satan (20:1–10) 696
 - D. Great White Throne Judgment (20:11–15) 719
- V. New Heaven and New Earth (21:1–22:5) 726
 - A. Coming of New Heaven and New Earth (21:1–8) 728
 - B. New Jerusalem as the Holy of Holies (21:9–27) 745
 - C. New Jerusalem as the Final Eden (22:1–5) 768
- VI. Epilogue (22:6–21) 777

Works Cited 801

Index of Subjects 825

Index of Authors 828

Index of Greek Words 834

Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Writings 835

Series Preface

The chief concern of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (to be known as BECNT) is to provide, within the framework of informed evangelical thought, commentaries that blend scholarly depth with readability, exegetical detail with sensitivity to the whole, attention to critical problems with theological awareness. We hope thereby to attract the interest of a fairly wide audience, from the scholar who is looking for a thoughtful and independent examination of the text to the motivated lay Christian who craves a solid but accessible exposition.

Nevertheless, a major purpose is to address the needs of pastors and others involved in the preaching and exposition of the Scriptures as the uniquely inspired Word of God. This consideration affects directly the parameters of the series. For example, serious biblical expositors cannot afford to depend on a superficial treatment that avoids the difficult questions, but neither are they interested in encyclopedic commentaries that seek to cover every conceivable issue that may arise. Our aim, therefore, is to focus on those problems that have a direct bearing on the meaning of the text (although selected technical details are treated in the additional notes).

Similarly, a special effort is made to avoid treating exegetical questions for their own sake, that is, in relative isolation from the thrust of the argument as a whole. This effort may involve (at the discretion of the individual contributors) abandoning the verse-by-verse approach in favor of an exposition that focuses on the paragraph as the main unit of thought. In all cases, however, the commentaries will stress the development of the argument and explicitly relate each passage to what precedes and follows it so as to identify its function in context as clearly as possible.

We believe, moreover, that a responsible exegetical commentary must take fully into account the latest scholarly research, regardless of its source. The attempt to do this in the context of a conservative theological tradition presents certain challenges, and in the past the results have not always been commendable. In some cases, evangelicals appear to make use of critical scholarship not for the purpose of genuine interaction but only to dismiss it. In other cases, the interaction glides over into assimilation, theological distinctives are ignored or suppressed, and the end product cannot be differentiated from works that arise from a fundamentally different starting point.

The contributors to this series attempt to avoid these pitfalls. On the one hand, they do not consider traditional opinions to be sacrosanct, and they are certainly committed to do justice to the biblical text whether or not it supports such opinions. On the other hand, they will not quickly abandon a long-standing view, if there is persuasive evidence in its favor, for the sake of fashionable theories. What is more important, the contributors share a belief in the trustworthiness and essential unity of Scripture. They also consider that the historic formulations of Christian doctrine, such as the ecumenical creeds and many of the documents originating in the sixteenth-century Reformation, arose from a legitimate reading of Scripture, thus providing a proper framework for its further interpretation. No doubt, the use of such a starting point sometimes results in the imposition of a foreign construct on the text, but we deny that it must necessarily do so or that the writers who claim to approach the text without prejudices are invulnerable to the same danger.

Accordingly, we do not consider theological assumptions—from which, in any case, no commentator is free—to be obstacles to biblical interpretation. On the contrary, an exegete who hopes to understand the apostle Paul in a theological vacuum might just as easily try to interpret Aristotle without regard for the philosophical framework of his whole work or without having recourse to those subsequent philosophical categories that make possible a meaningful contextualization of his thought. It must be emphasized, however, that the contributors to the present series come from a variety of theological traditions and that they do not all have identical views with regard to the proper implementation of these general principles. In the end, all that really matters is whether the series succeeds in representing the original text accurately, clearly, and meaningfully to the contemporary reader.

Shading has been used to assist the reader in locating salient sections of the treatment of each passage: the introductory comments, the discussion of structure, and the concluding summary. Textual variants in the Greek text are signaled in the author's translation by means of half-brackets around the relevant word or phrase (e.g., "Gerasenes"), thereby alerting the reader to turn to the additional notes at the end of each exegetical unit for a discussion of the textual problem. The documentation uses the author-date method, in which the basic reference consists of author's surname + year + page number(s): Fitzmyer 1981: 297. The only exceptions to this system are well-known reference works (e.g., BAGD, LSJ, *TDNT*). Full publication data and a complete set of indexes can be found at the end of the volume.

Moisés Silva

Author's Preface

The purpose of this commentary is not only to provide the reader with exegetical and background information on the text but to help the reader trace the theological threads that tie the book together. Therefore, there is a great deal of intertextual data in the book, and on key words I provide the reader with an overview of the term and related terms throughout the Apocalypse (I use “Apocalypse” and “Revelation” interchangeably for variety) along with theological commentary on the theme in the book.

Also, I want to make this a resource so that students can know where scholarship divides on key issues. Thus I often have fairly lengthy lists of scholars with the various options on an exegetical debate. When I do so, I do not name the date and page number on which their view will be found, unless there is only one to a view or it is an article where the page number is needed (then I follow the standard author-date format). The reason is twofold: (1) in commentaries it is easy to find where a view is stated by looking up the discussion of the relevant verse, and (2) it would be unnecessarily long and tedious to place all those dates and page numbers in a list of (at times) ten or twelve names. It clutters up the page and intimidates the reader.

I have so many people to thank that it is difficult to know where to begin. First, I wish to thank Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for giving me a sabbatical for this project. I also appreciate the kindness and thoughtful critique of my Baker editors, especially Wells Turner and Moisés Silva. Deep appreciation is due my teaching assistants who worked so hard helping with research, compiling lists, and looking up material: Sung-Min Park, Ben Kim, Dana Harris, Love Sechrest, Christine Poston, and Bill Myatt. It is impossible to say how many hours of work they saved me. Finally, I want to say thanks for the secretarial assistance of Judy Tetour, Heidi Harder, Susanne Henry, and Arlene Maas.

Grant R. Osborne

Abbreviations

Bibliographic and General

- ABD** *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by D. N. Freedman et al., 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
- ASV** American Standard Version
- BAGD** *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979)
- BDAG** *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
- BDF** *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)
- BEB** *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, edited by W. A. Elwell, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988)
- DJG** *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by J. B. Green and S. McKnight (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992)
- DLNT** *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, edited by R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997)
- DPL** *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993)
- EDNT** *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by H. Balz and G. Schneider, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93)
- HDB** *A Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by J. Hastings, 5 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1909)
- ISBE** *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by G. W. Bromiley et al., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88)
- JB** Jerusalem Bible
- KJV** King James Version
- LXX** Septuagint
- MM** *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, by J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan (reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976)
- MT** Masoretic Text
- NA²⁶** *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed., edited by [E. and E. Nestle], K. Aland, M. Black, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger, and A. Wikgren (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979)
- NA²⁷** *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th rev. ed., edited by [E. and E. Nestle], B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993)
- NASB** New American Standard Bible
- NEB** New English Bible

- NIDNTT* *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, and H. Bietenhard; English translation edited by C. Brown, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–86)
- NIDOTTE* *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997)
- NIV New International Version
- NJB New Jerusalem Bible
- NKJV New King James Version
- NLT New Living Translation
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version
- NT New Testament
- OT Old Testament
- OTP* *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983–85)
- PHILLIPS *The New Testament in Modern English*, by J. B. Phillips
- REB Revised English Bible
- RSV Revised Standard Version
- RV Revised Version
- SB *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, by H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, 6 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1922–61)
- TDNT* *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)
- TEV Today's English Version
- TR Textus Receptus
- UBS³ *The Greek New Testament*, 3d corrected ed., edited by K. Aland, M. Black, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger, and A. Wikgren (New York: United Bible Societies, 1983)
- UBS⁴ *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., edited by B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1993)

Hebrew Bible

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hos.	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esth.	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	Ps.	Psalms	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

Greek Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col.	Colossians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom.	Romans	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon	Rev.	Revelation

Other Jewish and Christian Writings

Adam and Eve	Books of Adam and Eve	Jdt.	Judith
Add. Esth.	Additions to Esther	Jos. As.	Joseph and Aseneth
Apoc. Abr.	Apocalypse of Abraham	Jub.	Jubilees
Apoc. Dan.	Apocalypse of Daniel	Let. Arist.	Letter of Aristeas
Apoc. Elijah	Apocalypse of Elijah	Let. Jer.	Letter of Jeremiah
Apoc. Mos.	Apocalypse of Moses	1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
Apoc. Pet.	Apocalypse of Peter	Mart. Pol.	Martyrdom of Polycarp
Apoc. Zeph.	Apocalypse of Zephaniah	Odes Sol.	Odes of Solomon
Asc. Isa.	Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah	Pol. <i>Phil.</i>	Polycarp, <i>Letter to the Philippians</i>
As. Mos.	Assumption of Moses	Pr. Azar.	Prayer of Azariah
Bar.	Baruch	Pr. Man.	Prayer of Manasseh
2 Bar.	2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch	Ps. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
3 Bar.	3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch	Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
Barn.	Barnabas	Sir.	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Sus.	Susanna
<i>Bib. Ant.</i>	<i>Pseudo-Philo, Biblical Antiquities</i>	T. Abr.	Testament of Abraham
1–2 Clem.	1–2 Clement	T. Asher	Testament of Asher
Did.	Didache	T. Ben.	Testament of Benjamin
Diogn.	Diognetus	T. Dan	Testament of Dan
<i>Eccl. Hist.</i>	<i>Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History</i>	T. Gad	Testament of Gad
1 Enoch	1 (Ethiopic) Enoch	T. Isaac	Testament of Isaac
2 Enoch	2 (Slavonic) Enoch	T. Iss.	Testament of Issachar
1 Esdr.	1 Esdras	T. Jacob	Testament of Jacob
2 Esdr.	2 Esdras	T. Job	Testament of Job
Herm. <i>Man.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Mandate(s)</i>	T. Jos.	Testament of Joseph
Herm. <i>Sim.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Similitude(s)</i>	T. Judah	Testament of Judah
Herm. <i>Vis.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Vision(s)</i>	T. Levi	Testament of Levi
Ign. <i>Eph.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Letter to the Ephesians</i>	T. Moses	Testament of Moses
Ign. <i>Magn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Letter to the Magnesians</i>	T. Naph.	Testament of Naphtali
Ign. <i>Phld.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Letter to the Philadelphians</i>	T. Reub.	Testament of Reuben
Ign. <i>Rom.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Letter to the Romans</i>	T. Sim.	Testament of Simeon
		T. Sol.	Testament of Solomon
		T. Zeb.	Testament of Zebulun
		Tob.	Tobit
		Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

Josephus and Philo

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>On Abraham</i>	<i>Jos.</i>	<i>On Joseph</i>
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>	<i>J.W.</i>	<i>The Jewish War</i>
<i>Alleg. Interp.</i>	<i>Allegorical Interpretation</i>	<i>Life</i>	<i>The Life of Josephus</i>
<i>Anim.</i>	<i>On Animals</i>	<i>Migr. Abr.</i>	<i>On the Migration of Abraham</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>	<i>Mos.</i>	<i>On the Life of Moses</i>
<i>Chang. Nam.</i>	<i>On the Change of Names</i>	<i>Plant.</i>	<i>On Noah's Work as a Planter</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>On the Cherubim</i>	<i>Post. Cain</i>	<i>On the Posterity and Exile of Cain</i>
<i>Conf. Tong.</i>	<i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i>	<i>Prelim. Stud.</i>	<i>On the Preliminary Studies</i>
<i>Cont. Life</i>	<i>On the Contemplative Life</i>	<i>Prov.</i>	<i>On Providence</i>
<i>Creat.</i>	<i>On the Creation</i>	<i>Quest. Exod.</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Exodus</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>On the Decalogue</i>	<i>Quest. Gen.</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Genesis</i>
<i>Dreams</i>	<i>On Dreams</i>	<i>Rewards</i>	<i>On Rewards and Punishments/On Curses</i>
<i>Drunk.</i>	<i>On Drunkenness</i>	<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain</i>
<i>Etern. World</i>	<i>On the Eternity of the World</i>	<i>Sobr.</i>	<i>On Sobriety</i>
<i>Flacc.</i>	<i>Flaccus</i>	<i>Spec. Laws</i>	<i>On the Special Laws</i>
<i>Flight</i>	<i>On Flight and Finding</i>	<i>Unchang.</i>	<i>On the Unchangeableness of God</i>
<i>Gaius</i>	<i>On the Embassy to Gaius</i>	<i>Virt.</i>	<i>On the Virtues</i>
<i>Giants</i>	<i>On the Giants</i>	<i>Worse Att. Bet.</i>	<i>The Worse Attacks the</i>
<i>Good Free</i>	<i>Every Good Person Is Free</i>		
<i>Heir</i>	<i>Who Is the Heir of Divine Things</i>		
<i>Husb.</i>	<i>On Husbandry</i>		
<i>Hypoth.</i>	<i>Hypothetica/Apology for the Jews</i>		

Rabbinic Tractates

The abbreviations below are used for the names of tractates in the Babylonian Talmud (indicated by a prefixed *b.*), Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud (*y.*), Mishnah (*m.*), and Tosepta (*t.*).

‘ <i>Abod. Zar.</i>	‘ <i>Aboda Zara</i>	<i>Kel.</i>	<i>Kelim</i>
ʔ <i>Abot</i>	ʔ <i>Abot</i>	<i>Ker.</i>	<i>Keritot</i>
‘ <i>Arak.</i>	‘ <i>Arakin</i>	<i>Ketub.</i>	<i>Ketubot</i>
<i>B. Bat.</i>	<i>Babaʔ Batraʔ</i>	<i>Kil.</i>	<i>Kiʔayim</i>
<i>B. Meš.</i>	<i>Babaʔ Mešiʔaʔ</i>	<i>Maʔaš.</i>	<i>Maʔašerot</i>
<i>B. Qam.</i>	<i>Babaʔ Qammaʔ</i>	<i>Maʔaš. Š.</i>	<i>Maʔašer Šeni</i>
<i>Bek.</i>	<i>Bekorot</i>	<i>Mak.</i>	<i>Makkot</i>
<i>Ber.</i>	<i>Berakot</i>	<i>Makš.</i>	<i>Makširin</i>
<i>Besa</i>	<i>Besa</i>	<i>Meg.</i>	<i>Megilla</i>
<i>Bik.</i>	<i>Bikkurim</i>	<i>Meʔil.</i>	<i>Meʔila</i>
<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Demaʔi</i>	<i>Menaḥ.</i>	<i>Menaḥot</i>
‘ <i>Ed.</i>	‘ <i>Eduyyot</i>	<i>Mid.</i>	<i>Middot</i>
‘ <i>Erub.</i>	‘ <i>Erubin</i>	<i>Miqw.</i>	<i>Miqwaʔot</i>
<i>Giṭ.</i>	<i>Giṭṭin</i>	<i>Moʔed Qaṭ.</i>	<i>Moʔed Qaṭan</i>
<i>Ḥag.</i>	<i>Ḥagiga</i>	<i>Nazir</i>	<i>Nazir</i>
<i>Ḥal.</i>	<i>Ḥalla</i>	<i>Ned.</i>	<i>Nedarim</i>
<i>Hor.</i>	<i>Horayot</i>	<i>Neg.</i>	<i>Negaʕim</i>
<i>Hul.</i>	<i>Hullin</i>	<i>Nid.</i>	<i>Nidda</i>

ʿOhol.	ʿOholot	Suk.	Sukka
ʿOr.	ʿOrla	Ṭ. Yom	Ṭebul Yom
Para	Para	Taʿan.	Taʿanit
Peʿa	Peʿa	Tamid	Tamid
Pesaḥ.	Pesaḥim	Tem.	Temura
Qid.	Qiddušin	Ter.	Terumot
Qin.	Qinnim	Ṭohar.	Ṭoharot
Roʿš Haš.	Roʿš Haššana	ʿUq.	ʿUqšin
Šab.	Šabbat	Yad.	Yadayim
Sanh.	Sanhedrin	Yeb.	Yebamot
Šeb.	Šebiʿit	Yomaʿ	Yomaʿ
Šebu.	Šebuʿot	Zab.	Zabim
Šeqal.	Šeqalim	Zebaḥ.	Zebaḥim
Soṭa	Soṭa		

Midrashim

Midrashim on the biblical books are indicated by the abbreviation Midr. appended in front of the usual abbreviation for the biblical book (see the above list). The names of other midrashim (e.g., *Sipra*, *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, *Pesiqta Rabbati*) are spelled in full.

Targumim

Targumim on the Writings and Prophets are indicated by the abbreviation Tg. appended in front of the usual abbreviation for the biblical book (see the above list). In the place of Tg., targumim on the Pentateuch use one of the following abbreviations:

Frg. Tg.	Fragmentary Targum
Tg. Neof. 1	Targum Neofiti 1
Tg. Onq.	Targum Onqelos
Tg. Ps.-J.	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

Qumran / Dead Sea Scrolls

References follow the numbering system found in Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2d ed., translated by Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

1QH	Thanksgiving Hymns/Psalms (<i>Hôdāyôt</i>); reference numbers in parentheses reflect the older eighteen-column division
1QM	War Scroll (<i>Milḥāmā</i>)
1QpHab	Commentary (<i>Pesher</i>) on Habakkuk
1QS	Manual of Discipline (<i>Serek Hayyahad</i> , Rule/Order of the Community)
1QSa	Rule of the Congregation (1Q28a, appendix A to 1QS)
1QSB	Rule of the Blessings (1Q28b, appendix B to 1QS)
4QFlor	Florilegium (4Q174)
4QP Bless	Patriarchal Blessings (4Q252)
4QpGen ^a	Commentary (<i>Pesher</i>) on Genesis (4Q252)
4QpIsa ^d	Commentary (<i>Pesher</i>) on Isaiah (4Q164)
4QMMT	Halakhic Letter (<i>Miqsāt Maʿāšē Tôrā</i>)
4QpPs ^a	Commentary (<i>Pesher</i>) on Psalms (A) (4Q171; formerly 4QpPs37)
4QŠirŠabb ^a	Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (<i>Serek Šîrôt ʿÔlat Haššabbāt</i>)

4QTest	Testimonia (4Q175)
5QNJ	Description of the New Jerusalem (5Q15)
11QMelch	Melchizedek text (11Q13)
11QTemple ^a	Temple Scroll (11Q19)
CD	Damascus Document

Greek Manuscripts

Sigla for Greek manuscripts and other text-critical abbreviations basically follow the pattern in UBS⁴, pages 4*–52*, and NA²⁷, pages 50*–76*. The original hand of a manuscript is indicated by an asterisk (Ⲙ*), successive correctors by superscript numbers (Ⲙ¹, Ⲙ², etc.).

Greek Transliteration

α	a	ζ	z	λ	l	π	p	φ	ph
β	b	η	ē	μ	m	ρ	r	χ	ch
γ	g (n)	θ	th	ν	n	σ ζ	s	ψ	ps
δ	d	ι	i	ξ	x	τ	t	ω	ō
ε	e	κ	k	ο	o	υ	y (u)	ʹ	h

Notes on the transliteration of Greek

1. Accents, lenis (smooth breathing), and *iota* subscript are not shown in transliteration.
2. The transliteration of asper (rough breathing) precedes a vowel or diphthong (e.g., $\acute{\alpha}$ = *ha*; $\acute{\alpha}\iota$ = *hai*) and follows ρ (i.e., $\rho\acute{\eta}$ = *rh*).
3. *Gamma* is transliterated *n* only when it precedes γ, κ, ξ, or χ.
4. *Upsilon* is transliterated *u* only when it is part of a diphthong (e.g., αυ, ευ, ου, υι).

Hebrew Transliteration

א	ʾ	אֲ	ā	qāmeṣ
ב	b	בֶּ	a	pataḥ
ג	g	גֶּ	a	furtive pataḥ
ד	d	דֶּ	e	səgôl
ה	h	הֶ	ē	šērê
ו	w	וֶ	i	short ḥîreq
ז	z	זֶ	i	long ḥîreq written defectively
ח	ḥ	חֶ	o	qāmeṣ ḥāṭûp
ט	ṭ	טוֹ	ô	ḥôlem written fully
י	y	יֹ	ō	ḥôlem written defectively
כ	k	כּוֹ	û	šûreq
ל	l	לֶ	u	short qibbûṣ
מ	m	מֶ	û	long qibbûṣ written defectively
נ	n	נֶה	â	final qāmeṣ hêʾ (נֶה = âh)
ס	s	סֵי	ê	səgôl yôd (סֵי = êy)
ע	ʿ	עֵי	ê	šērê yôd (עֵי = êy)
פ	p	פֵי	î	ḥîreq yôd (פֵי = îy)
צ	ṣ	צֶ	ă	ḥāṭēp pataḥ
ק	q	קֶ	ě	ḥāṭēp səgôl
ר	r	רֶ	ô	ḥāṭēp qāmeṣ
ש	ś	שֶׁ	ě	vocal šēwāʾ
שׁ	ś	שֶׁ	–	silent šēwāʾ
ת	t			

Notes on the transliteration of Hebrew

1. Accents are not shown in transliteration.
2. Silent *šēwāʾ* is not indicated in transliteration.
3. The unaspirated forms of א ב ג ד ה פ כ ל נ are not specially indicated in transliteration.
4. *Dāgeš forte* is indicated by doubling the consonant. *Dāgeš* present for euphonious reasons is not indicated in transliteration.
5. *Maqqēp* is represented by a hyphen.

Introduction to Revelation

The Apocalypse is a difficult book to interpret, though easier on the whole than the Gospels. This is because there are few source-critical problems to fight through. The primary problems in studying the Apocalypse are four: the symbolism; the structure of the book; the debate among historicist, preterist, idealist, and futurist interpretations; and the use of the OT in the book. The function of the symbolism is greatly debated, especially in terms of its relation to the past (apocalyptic mindset behind the book), present (the events of John's day), and future (future events in the history of the church or at the eschaton). This is, of course, closely related to the schools of interpretation regarding the book. The one area of general agreement among most commentators is that the background is to be found in the common apocalyptic world of John's day. No one has yet come up with any outline that approaches consensus. There are two further problems: the relation between the seals, trumpets, and bowls, and the lengthy interludes that interrupt the seals, trumpets, and bowls (7:1–17; 10:1–11:13; 12:1–14:20); these have not been adequately accounted for in current structural hypotheses.

The consensus interpretation among nonevangelicals is preterist. In the SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) seminar it is assumed that the book uses a future orientation not to describe future reality but to challenge the situation of the original readers. However, conclusions must come via study of the apocalyptic genre. Do ancient Near East, OT, and intertestamental apocalypses take a futuristic or a preterist point of view? I am convinced of two things: first that they are predominantly futuristic in perspective, and second that it is a disjunctive fallacy to take an either-or stance. A basic element in defining apocalyptic is its pessimism toward the present and the promise of restoration in a sovereignly controlled future. However, this does not mean that there is no preterist element, for the message regarding God's sovereignty over the future is intended to call the church in the present to perseverance, and many of the symbols in the Apocalypse are borrowed from the first-century situation, for example, the Roman Empire in chapters 17–18. The Antichrist and his forces are depicted as the final Roman Empire, but there is a twofold message in this: the current empire will be judged by God, and the final empire will be defeated and destroyed. In short, the book is both preterist and futurist in orientation.

The definitive work on the use of the OT in the Apocalypse has yet to be written. It has no actual quotation yet far more allusions than any other NT book. These allusions are as essential to understanding the book as the symbolism. Virtually every point made comes in some way via an OT allusion. Contrary to popular opinion, the Book of Daniel is not the key to the Apocalypse. Isaiah, Zechariah, and Ezekiel are found almost as often. The key interpretive element is typology. As in the Gospels with Jesus, now the current time of trouble and the final conflagration are presented as reliving and fulfilling the prophecies of the OT.

Authorship

Internal Evidence. The author of the book identifies himself as “John, the slave of (Jesus/God) . . . (exiled) on the island of Patmos” (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), and he is the recipient of a series of visions sent from God for the churches of the Roman province of Asia. He is to provide prophetic “witness” to these churches of the message God is sending to them through him (1:2). Yet the identification of this “John” has led to centuries of disagreement on the part of scholars, for he never identifies himself as the “apostle” but simply calls himself “slave” (1:1), “prophet” (1:3; 22:9), and one among his “brothers the prophets” (22:9; cf. 19:10). There have been several suggestions: (1) John the apostle; (2) the elder John; (3) John Mark; (4) John the Baptist; (5) another John; (6) Cerinthus; and (7) someone using the name of John the apostle as a pseudonym.

Three can be dismissed rather quickly. Dionysius the Great, bishop of Alexandria in the mid-third century, thought it possible that John Mark may have been the author but dismissed it as unlikely on historical grounds (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 7.25). The only one to suggest that John the Baptist was the author was Ford (1975b: 28–41, 50–56), who believed John and his followers produced it in three stages: first, chapters 4–11 as visions given to the Baptist before Jesus began his ministry; then, chapters 12–22 by one of his disciples before A.D. 70; and, finally, chapters 1–3 by a final editor. However, no one has followed her because it is difficult to explain how such a work on the periphery of Christianity would be accepted into the Christian canon. Also, the Gnostic Cerinthus was proposed by two groups who opposed the Montanists: the Alogoi of the late second century and Gaius, a Roman presbyter of the early third century. It seems their entire purpose was to oppose Montanism and the Book of Revelation that was so important to that movement. There is no serious evidence to suggest such a connection except that Cerinthus was a millenarian (see Aune 1997: liii).

External Evidence. Justin Martyr in the mid-second century wrote that the apostle John was the author (*Dialogue with Trypho* 81.4), and this became the accepted view (so also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.11; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.14.3; Clement of Alexandria,

Paedagogus 2.108; Origen, *De principiis* 1.2.10). Helmbold (1961–62: 77–79) points out that the Apocryphon of John, a likely mid- to late-second-century work, also attributes the book to the apostle John. The first to reject apostolic authorship was Marcion, the second-century Gnostic who rejected all non-Pauline books (apart from an edited version of Luke) because of their Jewish influence. Dionysius also doubted the apostolic authorship of Revelation, and he was followed by Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Chrysostom. Dionysius is particularly important because he was the first to develop a series of arguments for his position, focusing on three problems: the absence of a claim to be an apostle or eyewitness, the different structure and thought patterns of Revelation from the other Johannine writings, and the difficult Greek of the book (see below).

Dionysius believed that “another (unknown) John” wrote Revelation, and he pointed to two tombs at Ephesus said to be John’s as evidence (also the view of Sweet, Krodell, Wall, Aune; Beasley-Murray, *DLNT* 1033). A version of this view believes that John’s Gospel, the Johannine epistles, and the Apocalypse were all the product of a Johannine “school” or circle of prophets, perhaps originating with the apostle himself (so Brown, Culpepper, Schüssler Fiorenza). This is certainly a possibility but rests on the larger decision as to whether the differences between the Gospel and Revelation are so great as to demand separate authors (see below).

Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, believed that the answer to the authorship of Revelation lay in Papias’s mention of “John the Elder”: “And if anyone chanced to come who had actually been a follower of the elders, what Andrew or what Peter said . . . or what John (said); and the things which Aristion and John the elder, disciples of the Lord, say” (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.2–4). Eusebius believed there were two Johns at Ephesus, with the apostle writing the Gospel and the elder the Apocalypse. However, two comments must be made. First, it is indeed possible that these are not two Johns but one, with the past “said” linking John with the apostles of the past and the present “say” linking him with those witnesses still alive in the time of Papias (so Smalley 1994: 38). Gundry (1982: 611–12) argues strongly that Papias equated John “the elder” with “the Lord’s disciple” on the grounds that Papias was writing before A.D. 110 and was more likely referring to first-generation witnesses rather than second-generation elders. If he was speaking of the second generation, one would have expected him to speak of the elders receiving the traditions from the disciples. Therefore, Eusebius must have interpreted it as two different witnesses because of his own bias against Revelation, and Papias equated John the elder with John the apostle. Second, even if these were two separate Johns, there is no evidence that the one wrote the

Gospel and the other the Apocalypse. This is a theory that cannot go beyond speculation.

Another common view (though more frequent in the 19th century) is that Revelation is a pseudonymous book, similar to others widely seen as written under the pseudonym of a famous “hero” (e.g., 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, the Pastorals, 1–2 Peter). However, this does not fit the ancient apocalyptic characteristic that pseudonymous authors were long in the past. Moreover, one would expect a more explicit identification if a later writer were doing so, for example, “John the apostle” (so Beale 1999: 34). Also, it is uncertain whether pseudonymity was practiced in the early church (see Guthrie 1990: 1015–23; Carson, Moo, and Morris 1992: 367–71).

Differences from the Fourth Gospel. The primary reason why many scholars reject Revelation as a Johannine creation is the alleged differences from the Gospel of John. First, the Greek differs greatly. Guthrie (1990: 939) provides a good summary: the author “places nominatives in opposition to other cases, irregularly uses participles, constructs broken sentences, adds unnecessary pronouns, mixes up genders, numbers and cases and introduces several unusual constructions.” Several explanations are possible for the differences in Greek, however, such as an amanuensis who helped smooth out similar rough Greek in the Gospel, or (perhaps more likely) the apocalyptic form itself and the effects of the visions on John as he wrote. It is commonly conceded that there is a type of Hebraic Greek in the Apocalypse (so S. Thompson 1985 passim; Aune 1997: clxii; though see below on “Language”). Moreover, many of the solecisms appear deliberate, perhaps due to theological emphasis (see on 1:4) or the visionary experience. Such powerful experiences as the ecstatic visions would naturally affect one’s writing style. Thus after his extensive discussion of syntax and style, R. H. Charles (1920: 1.xxx–xxxvii) sees as many similarities as differences between John and Revelation.

More important are the so-called differences in theology between Revelation and the Fourth Gospel. The tone of the two books seems radically different, with the God of John a God of love who seeks the conversion of the “world” (e.g., John 3:16; cf. 1 John 4:9–10), while the God of Revelation is a God of wrath and judgment. Yet this is a false contrast, for judgment is also central to the Gospel (5:22, 30; 9:39), and in Revelation God also seeks repentance (see on 9:20–21; 14:6–7; 16:9, 11). Also, while John’s Gospel has a soteriology centering on belief and conversion, Revelation seemingly has no such purpose. I argue below (“Theology”), however, that there is a mission theology that does resemble that of the Fourth Gospel in some ways. Furthermore, certain terms common to both the Gospel and the Apocalypse are used differently, such as “lamb” or “Word.” Yet there may well be an apocalyptic as well as a pas-

chal aspect to the “lamb” of John 1:29, 34 (see Carson 1991: 149). There is certainly a distinct difference between Jesus as the Word in John 1:1–2 (where he is the living revealer of God) and in Rev. 19:13 (where “his name is the Word of God” connotes the proclamation of judgment), but in both places λόγος (*logos*) connects Jesus with the Father and highlights the oneness between them. In fact, only in these two books is Jesus called λόγος in the NT. The differences are due to genre rather than authorship. Smalley (1988: 556–58) argues that the three main christological titles—Word, Lamb of God, and Son of Man—are so similar between the Gospel and the Apocalypse that they suggest unity of authorship. Similarly, the Spirit is the “Paraclete” in John 14–16 but the “seven spirits of God” in Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6. Yet again the differences can be accounted for in the purposes of the two books. In the Gospel the Spirit is “another paraclete” following in the train of Jesus (14:16), while in the Apocalypse he is the perfect “sevenfold Spirit.” The function is quite similar, however, as the Spirit challenges the church and convicts the world in both works (cf. John 16:8–15 and Rev. 2:7; 5:6; etc.). Finally, the realized eschatology of John is seen to be incompatible with the final eschatology of Revelation; but it has long been recognized that the actual eschatology of the Gospel is inaugurated, with a final aspect in John 5:28–29 and 14:2–3, and again the differences are the result more of emphasis than final content.

The problems of the authorship of Revelation are indeed formidable, for the author makes no explicit identification of himself with John the apostle, and there are distinct differences between it and the Fourth Gospel (the authorship of which is also widely debated). Yet there are good reasons for upholding the viability of Revelation as penned by the apostle John and for downplaying the differences between it and the Fourth Gospel. First, there is sufficient evidence of acceptance from the early church fathers (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria) to support apostolic authorship. Second, the similarities between the Gospel and the Apocalypse are sufficient to support that decision. The only two books in the NT to argue for the deity of Christ on the basis of the “oneness motif” between God and Jesus are John and the Apocalypse (see below on “Theology”). Also, there is a similar mission theme between them, as God seeks to bring the world to repentance. Mounce (1998: 14) mentions that Zech. 12:10 is quoted in John 19:37 and Rev. 1:7 “using the same Greek verb (*ekkenteō*), which in turn is not used by the LXX and is found nowhere else in the NT.” Ozanne (1965) finds a series of terms common to John and the Apocalypse: “conquer,” “keep the word,” “keep the commandments,” “dwell,” “sign,” “witness,” “true”; and Swete (1911: cxxx) concludes that the linguistic and grammatical data support a close affinity between John’s Gospel and the Apocalypse. In short, the internal evidence supports the exter-

nal witness of the earliest fathers; and of the options noted above, Johannine authorship makes the best sense.

Date

Carson, Moo, and Morris (1992: 473–74) state that four dates were proposed by early Christian writers: the reigns of Claudius (A.D. 41–54, by Epiphanius), Nero (A.D. 54–68, by the Syriac versions), Domitian (A.D. 81–96, by Irenaeus, Victorinus, Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen), and Trajan (A.D. 98–117, by Donotheus, Theophylact). Of these, most contemporary scholars opt for either Nero or Domitian. Aune (1997: lviii) points out that the Domitianic date prevailed from the second through the eighteenth centuries and again in the twentieth century, while the Neronic date dominated the nineteenth century (Aune himself believes that the first edition appeared in the 60s and the final in the mid-90s). To determine which view is best, several issues must be discussed.

Emperor Worship/Imperial Cult. It is clear in Revelation that one of the primary problems of the believers in the province of Asia is some form of emperor worship (13:4, 14–17; 14:9; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). In the Roman world this began early on with the deification of Julius Caesar and Augustus, followed by Claudius and Vespasian. But the practice was to deify the emperor after he died rather than to worship a living emperor. Caligula demanded to be worshiped, but he was not recognized as divine by the senate. Tiberius and Claudius refused deification while they were alive. More important for the issue here is that Nero was not deified, though there is some evidence that he wished to be. However, there was no widespread demand that he be recognized as such. Domitian may have wished to be recognized as *deus praesens* (present deity) and to be called “our lord and god,” and coins show him enthroned as “father of the gods” (Jones, *ABD* 5:807). To be sure, as Giesen (1997: 28–30) states, the emperor was seen not so much as a god but more as the earthly representative of the gods, a mediator between the gods and the people. Yet this role was popularly seen as divine, as evidenced by the temples and idolatrous images/statues. But this theory regarding Domitian’s demand to be recognized as a god has been challenged by L. Thompson (1990: 101–15; so also Warden 1991: 207–8, 210–11), who argues that Domitian’s critics (Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio Cassius) were biased against him and so painted him in a bad light because it was politically expedient to do so in the early years of Trajan. Thus Domitian was not a megalomaniac but was on the whole a good emperor beloved by his provincial subjects. There was no true persecution of the church during his reign.

However, Beale (1999: 6–12) argues that Thompson has overstated his case, and that while there was no policy regarding worshiping Domitian as a god, the title was expected as a form of flattery and that the neg-

ative evaluation of his reign has some basis in fact. Indeed, Janzen (1994: 643–49) points out that the coins of the 90s prove Domitian’s megalomania; they show that even his wife was called the mother of the divine Caesar. While it is debated how much persecution was attributable to a refusal to participate in the imperial cult, some limited persecution did probably occur. However these issues are resolved, the imperial cult was apparently much more developed and prominent in Domitian’s day than it was in Nero’s time. Botha (1988: 87–91) states that there was no single “imperial cult” but rather each city developed its own rituals. While the cult was voluntary, it was part of the benefactor system, with the emperor especially chosen by the gods and thus a portent of deity that should be worshiped. As such it gave great stability to the empire and was a sign of the status quo of Pax Romana. This reappraisal of Domitian’s role is summarized by Slater (1998: 234–38): the evidence does show that Domitian was loved by the people in the provinces because he curbed the economic exploitation caused by the governors, and as a result the elite disliked Domitian. Also, historians like Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius did write under Trajan when it was politically advantageous to exalt the new dynasty at the expense of the Flavians (Vespasian, Titus, and especially Domitian). But there is still good evidence for the growth of the imperial cult under Domitian’s reign. This evidence is provided by Biguzzi (1998a: 280–89): Asia was the epicenter of the imperial cult, and cities competed for the privilege of erecting a temple. In 29 B.C. Pergamum was the first to erect a temple, and Smyrna the second in A.D. 21 after a vigorous competition. Ephesus was the third, and it was especially linked with establishing the Flavian dynasty in Asia. A seven-meter statue of Titus (some think Domitian) was erected in the temple, and worship of the emperor was meant to bind the province of Asia together under the Pax Romana. Brent (1999: 101–2) believes that John was seen as the counterpart to the *theologos* or pagan official who guided the ritual, with Revelation the counter to the mysteries of Roman idolatry. While this is overstated, the importance of the imperial cult for Revelation will be noted often in the commentary.

Persecution of Christians. Revelation speaks of a certain stability in the situation of the churches but yet a fair amount of persecution (so 1:9; 2:2–3, 9–10, 13; 3:8, 10). Most of the persecution was Jewish (2:9; 3:9), however, and the martyrdom of Antipas (2:13) was in the past. There is little evidence in the book for official Roman persecution at the time of writing, and only two of the letters mention affliction (Smyrna and Thyatira), although the letter to Philadelphia presupposes it. The perspective of the book is that most of the oppression is yet to come (6:9–11; 12:11; 13:7, 10, 15; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:4). A number of scholars have questioned the evidence for official persecution under

Domitian (Yarbrow Collins 1984: 69–73; L. Thompson 1990: 105–9), and the general feeling is that very little had yet occurred (Aune 1997: lxiv–lxix; Barr 1998: 165–69). Thus Bell (1979: 96–97) believes that this favors a date around A.D. 68 following Nero’s death, arguing that Nero is the fifth emperor in 17:9–11 (with Galba the sixth—see on that passage). But the prophetic stance of the book regarding imminent persecution (if it is written during Domitian’s reign) did come to pass, as Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan in A.D. 110 demonstrates (Pliny, *Letters* 10.26–27, reproduced in Barr 1998: 166–68). L. Thompson and Aune argue again that the reports of widespread persecution in Tacitus, Suetonius, and others were the result of “a relatively tight circle of politician-writers associated with the senatorial aristocracy with which Domitian was frequently in conflict” (Aune 1997: lxvii). Thus he may have been placed in an unfairly harsh light for political reasons. If this is true (see also the previous section), the intense persecution under Nero could provide a better setting, for there is absolute evidence of a terrible persecution instigated when Nero blamed Christians for the burning of Rome to shift the blame from himself (A.D. 64–68). Wilson (1993: 604–5; see also Lipiński 1969; and Moberly 1992: 376–77) argues for a pre-A.D. 70 date on three grounds: the only true persecution occurred under Nero; the “one who is” in 17:10 is either Galba or Nero; and the temple was still standing according to 11:1–2. But the Neronian persecution was limited to Rome as far as the data tell us, and there is no evidence for it extending to the province of Asia at that time. Also, 11:1–2 is symbolic and does not demand a literal temple.

Moreover, the data does not show that there was no persecution, only that it was not as yet instigated officially from Rome. Also, such problems were beginning in the time of Domitian. First Clem. 1.1 (late 1st century) speaks of “sudden and repeated calamities” that had fallen upon the church, and in 7.1 Clement says “we are in the same arena, and the same struggle [as in the time of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul] is before us” (see Beale 1999: 13). In addition, the increasing public expectation of participation in the imperial cult described above would make such persecution likely. DeSilva (1992: 274–77) points out that while no evidence of widespread persecution exists, the relation between the state and Roman religious life put tremendous pressure on all citizens to participate in the official religion. Every aspect of civic life, from the guilds to commerce itself, was affected. Also, Asia Minor was known for its pro-Roman zeal, especially in terms of the imperial cult. Therefore, the relationship of Christians to the imperial cult there was a decisive test, and local persecution was likely. Reddish (1988: 85) goes so far as to describe the church there as “threatened by official persecution and martyrdom.” But Ford (1990: 144–46; 1993: 246–47) is closer to the truth that this is not systematic persecution under Domitian but the

daily oppression and social ostracism that resulted from Christians refusing to participate in the life of the Roman cult. In an earlier work L. Thompson (1986: 147–49) points out that the theme of tribulation dominates several of the visions and even attributes this to a sociopolitical situation stemming from pagan persecution. This seems more likely than his later view. Slater (1998: 240–48, 251) notes that while the primary emphasis in the seven letters is on internal problems, three passages deal with the external difficulties (2:8–11, 13; 3:8–10) and all center on persecution. This can also be demonstrated in the great NT emphasis on the problem of persecution (Acts 24:5; 28:22; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 2:14–16; 1 Pet. 2:20; 4:12–5:11) and the emphasis on suffering in Revelation itself. Finally, Roman authors like Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny show how despised Christians were. In short, persecution is a major aspect of the book; while the emphasis on persecution can fit either Nero or Domitian, and while there are problems with both views, the Domitianic date provides a slightly better fit for the data.

Background of the Churches. The historical references to the situation of the churches in the seven letters (chaps. 2–3) must also be considered. It is this aspect that first convinced me to change my earlier view of a Neronian date. Several authors (Hemer 1986: 4–5; Guthrie 1990: 948–55; Aune 1997: lx–lxv) note events reflected in the letters that point to a later date than the 60s: (1) the unaided recovery of Laodicea (3:17) best fits the earthquake and subsequent reconstruction of the city in A.D. 80; (2) their great wealth reflects better the 90s than the 60s; (3) “do not harm the oil and the wine” (6:6) most likely refers to an edict of Domitian in A.D. 92 restricting the growing of vines in Asia; (4) the “synagogues of Satan” (2:9; 3:9) can best be situated in conflicts that took place under Domitian; (5) the church of Smyrna (2:8–11) may not have existed in the 60s; (6) the idea of the beast’s “mortal wound that is healed” (13:3, 12, 14) may well reflect the Nero redivivus legend that developed in the 80s and 90s. Of course, these can also be interpreted to fit a date in the 60s, and two aspects could favor the earlier date: (1) if the temple of 11:1–2 is to be taken literally it could favor a pre-A.D. 70 date, when the Jerusalem temple was still standing; and (2) if the eight kings of 17:9–11 are Roman emperors and one begins with Augustus (the first one named emperor), the sixth king who “is” would be Galba, who reigned A.D. 68–69. So the data is not conclusive, but altogether the later date better fits the historical background (see on 11:1–2 and 17:9–11 for answers to both these aspects).

All in all, the date must remain uncertain. Good arguments can be made for an origin under either Nero or Domitian. When all the data is examined and the two options are considered, however, it seems probable that a date in the mid-90s under Domitian has better evidence (for a good brief summary of this position, see Giesen 1997: 41–42).

Social Setting and Purpose

One's conclusion regarding the imperial cult and the extent of persecution (discussed under "Date") makes a great deal of difference in terms of one's conclusion about the social situation behind the book. For instance, Yarbro Collins (1984: 141–60; cf. also L. Thompson 1990: 27–28) believes that there was little persecution, so the feelings of alienation were within the Christians rather than imposed from outside. The people did not perceive the crisis, so the apocalypticist was trying to awaken their understanding to the actual situation. Thus the details of the visions were intended to heighten their awareness and then to draw them to the transcendent reality through which they could face the situation. Yarbro Collins (1981b: 4–7) finds four areas of social tension within this crisis: church and synagogue, the Christian in a pagan society, hostility toward Rome, and rich versus poor. Thus the purpose (Yarbro Collins 1992a: 302–5) is the struggle against the "economic exploitation and cultural imperialism" of Rome. The apocalypse constructs a symbolic universe under the control of God with true Christians as God's priests who do not bow to Roman pressure and become God's rulers in his future reign. L. Thompson (1986: 169–70) says that their identification with the crucified king separated them from society. Thus the author created a "feed-back loop" by developing an alternative symbolic world in which they were the victors.

Similarly, Barr (1998: 178–80) believes that the intention of the book was to provide a "mythic therapy" that transforms the perspectives of the readers and reorders their world by enabling them to assimilate Christ's defeat of the dragon and thereby find victory in the struggle between "Roman culture and Christian conviction." Thus it provides a "catharsis" (Barr 1984: 49–50) that gives the readers a new worldview in which the victims become the victors. For Schüssler Fiorenza (1985: 187–99) the key is the "rhetorical strategy" of the book, as a new "symbolic universe" is opened up that enables the readers to enter that world and alienate themselves from Roman power and accept the "deprivation and destitution" that goes with it. They do this by the construction of a new social reality in the book, a world of future possibility in the midst of present oppression, a world where God is supreme. Kraybill (1999: 37–38) states that the problem is not persecution but compromise. Too many Christians had gotten "cozy with a pagan world," and so the book calls them to choose allegiance to Christ or to the emperor. Le Grys (1992: 77–79) says the issue is not external but internal, a crisis of prophetic authority. The warnings relate to the future, namely the danger of the opponents, the Nicolaitans (2:6), and their influence on Christian compromise. In a similar vein Giesen (1996b: 61–63; 1997: 34–36) argues that the book is not encouraging as much as warning against the insidious nature of the imperial cult, telling Christians not to associate

with it. The danger is not martyrdom but attraction to the pagan world. Koester (1992: 248–49) summarizes this approach by noting three threats: seduction by a false teaching that calls for assimilation to the Roman culture; conflict with the local synagogue and the threat of being denounced to the local authorities; and complacency due to prosperity (especially in Sardis and Laodicea).

These depictions of the social world described in the book contain a great deal of truth. However, there is also much more to it than this. It is clear that the seven churches were in a hostile environment from two directions—the Jewish world and the Roman world. The “synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9) had turned against them. Relations between church and synagogue, never good from the start, deteriorated in the last couple of decades of the first century, and Revelation reflects that situation. Judaism had a special privilege that the Romans allowed only them, freedom from worshiping the Roman gods and participating in the Greco-Roman cults. Christianity was considered part of Judaism at least through the Jewish War (A.D. 66–70) and also benefited from this privilege. However, Judaism tried more and more to separate itself from Christianity and get the Roman Empire to recognize that Christianity was not exempt. This probably caused some of the pressure reflected in the book. Bredin (1998: 161–64) points to the Judean tax that the Romans imposed on Jews for the rebuilding of the Capitoline temple. It was this tax that allowed the Jews freedom from participation in the imperial cult. Christians refused to pay this tax; thus the Jews denounced Christians as not being true Judeans and as being troublemakers.

While there was no official Roman persecution, Christians felt a great deal of economic and social pressure to participate in Roman life, including the trade guilds with their idolatrous feasts and cultic practices as well as the imperial cult. Beale (1999: 30) describes the pressure to compromise with the guilds, especially the annual feast honoring each guild’s patron deities as well as the emperor (the Nicolaitan cult gave in to these pressures). When Christians refused to do so, a great deal of antipathy was naturally directed against them. This situation is reflected in the seven letters, in the “affliction” they were experiencing (2:9), and in the imminent intensification of that affliction to the point of imprisonment and death (2:10; cf. 13:10). While there is no developed persecution in the book, there was a great deal of daily opposition as well as signs of intensification on the near horizon.

Therefore, Yarbro Collins’s thesis overstates the situation. There is more than a perceived crisis, for difficulties have actually begun. Still, her basic point is correct, for Revelation presents a counterreality to the prevailing reality of the Roman world, a transcendent realm in which the people of God are part of a counterculture and are willing to suffer for it. As deSilva (1992: 301–2) points out, the church is called on to

maintain its *communitas* in the midst of societal pressure and alienation, to resist temptation for compromise and accommodation to society. For him (1993: 56–57) the worldview is a new set of standards apart from the Roman majority that not only resists accommodation but embraces rejection by society in allegiance to Christ. Thus he calls the book an “honor discourse” (1998a: 80–87) written to persuade the readers to take action against pressures to conform to pagan ways, encouraging the faithful to persevere, and warning the weak against compromise. Yet it must be added that John also writes to encourage the persecuted believers to remain true and to promise them that God would vindicate them for their suffering.

Apocalyptic Genre and Mind-Set

It is universally recognized that Revelation is composed of three genres:¹ apocalyptic, prophecy, and letter (in the order of the terms in 1:1–4; so Carson, Moo, and Morris 1992: 478, following Beasley-Murray). Yet Barr (1986: 244–50) argues strongly that the book is not just literary but oral, seen in the techniques of numbering (7, 3, 2), place and image (heaven-earth, the churches), the voices (angels, prophets) that carry messages for Jesus, and so on. He believes it was meant to be read in a lengthy liturgical service, probably as part of the eucharistic celebration. Thus the primary theme is proper worship of God.

Still, the three genres are critical (see Mathewson 1992: 206–7). Helpful but least important is that it is an epistle. The formula “John to the seven churches . . . grace and peace” (1:4–5) uncharacteristically follows the prologue, but there is also a brief benediction at the close (22:21) to show that John considers this a letter and not just a treatise. Moreover, the seven letters of chapters 2–3 are written to specific churches and show that the visions are addressing problems that the churches are currently experiencing. Aune (1997: lxxii, following Vanni) believes that the epistolary character of the book was partially intended “to facilitate its reading within the setting of Christian worship.” He also points out (lxxiii–lxxiv) that it was common in the ancient world to encase divine revelation and proclamations of judgment in a “prophetic letter.” The value of this identification cannot be overstated—it helps the reader to realize that the book is not just a casebook for identifying future events but more a theological workbook addressing the church in the present through the prophecies of the future. John expected his readers to see themselves and their current situation through the lens of

1. Vorster (1988: 119–20) argues correctly that genre in and of itself cannot produce meaning, for content and function do not constitute genre. Both classification and interpretation are needed. As a classification tool, however, genre still has value in aiding interpretation (see Osborne 1983: 1–27).

this book and to realize that as the church of the last days, they were corporately identified with the church at the end of the age.

It is impossible to distinguish ultimately between prophecy and apocalyptic, for the latter is an extension of the former (see Ladd 1957: 192–200; Bauckham 1993a: 2 calls it “apocalyptic prophecy”). Certain differences do in part distinguish the two forms: prophecy tends to be oracular and apocalyptic visionary, and prophecy has a certain optimistic overtone (if the nation repents, the judgment prophecies will not occur), while apocalyptic tends to be pessimistic (the only hope lies in the future rather than the present). However, both center on salvation for the faithful and judgment for the unfaithful. John calls his work a prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19), and he was probably the leader of a group of prophets who ministered to the churches of Asia (22:6, 9). John was commissioned to his prophetic ministry in a way reminiscent of Ezekiel (10:8–11; see Ezek. 2:8–3:3); his ministry was described as prophesying “against many peoples, nations, languages, and kings” (Rev. 10:11). First-person prophetic oracles addressed to the churches from Jesus through John are found in 1:8, 17; 16:15; 22:7, 18–19. The letters to the churches are in third-person form (Jesus as “the one who”) but also contain prophetic material, especially in the call to hear and the promise to the overcomers. The value of recognizing the prophetic nature of the book underscores that John is not merely producing his own epistle (like Paul or Peter) but is the prophetic channel of a message directly from God and Christ. The origin of this book is not his fertile imagination but God himself. Some (e.g., Giesen 1997: 24–34) believe this is primarily a prophetic book. Schüssler Fiorenza (1980: 121–28) sums up the issue well: Revelation is “a literary product of early Christian prophecy” that took place in Asia Minor and was influenced by the post-Pauline ideas of that part of the church. At the same time, it is also the product of early Christian apocalyptic traditions as taught by the prophetic circle led by John.

Revelation is of course best known as apocalyptic,² though certain aspects of apocalyptic are not true of the book—it is not pseudonymous (Jones 1968: 326–27 thinks this is enough to declassify Revelation as apocalyptic), and ultimate victory is not centered just on the future inter-

2. Malina (1995: 10–18) has challenged this classification; he believes that the idea that Revelation is apocalyptic has arisen through “spurious information” derived from the nineteenth century and that the ancients would have regarded it as “astral prophecy.” The contents therefore are “visions of the sky, celestial visions, of celestial beings” (14). Thus the book must be understood from the standpoint of cosmic symbolism. Malina is certainly correct regarding the great amount of astral symbols (portents in the sky, comets, volcanic eruptions, celestial beings), but he has greatly overstated his case when he makes this the key to the book rather than one aspect among many. As Aune (1997: lxxxix) argues, “apocalypse” is not anachronistic and was part of the title in more than one ancient work. Astral imagery is not more central than OT imagery or Jewish or Hellenistic backgrounds.

vention of God but on the “past sacrifice of Jesus Christ, ‘the Lamb that was slain’” (5:5; 7:14; 12:11; cf. Carson, Moo, and Morris 1992: 479). Still, J. Collins (1977b: 330–37) argues correctly that the similarities between Revelation and Jewish apocalyptic are too close, and the basic definition of apocalyptic fits the book well:

Apocalyptic entails the revelatory communication of heavenly secrets by an otherworldly being to a seer who presents the visions in a narrative framework; the visions guide readers into a transcendent reality that takes precedence over the current situation and encourages readers to persevere in the midst of their trials. The visions reverse normal experience by making the heavenly mysteries the real world and depicting the present crisis as a temporary, illusory situation. This is achieved via God’s transforming the world for the faithful. (Osborne 1991: 222)

Apocalyptic is both a formal type of literature and a mind-set of the group that follows the apocalyptic beliefs. The literature (for an excellent discussion of these works, see L. Thompson 1990: 19–22) flourished from 200 B.C. to A.D. 100. Yet there were also biblical prototypes like Isa. 24–27, Ezek. 37–39, Zechariah, and especially Daniel (for the origins of apocalyptic, see Osborne 1991: 232–34). In Revelation most of these features are present, especially the form of visions set in a narrative framework. While scholars debate the exact plot structure of the book, none doubts that such a structure exists. There are several “otherworldly journeys” by the author, for example, the throne room vision in chapters 4–5 or the heavenly visions of chapters 7, 14, 19, 21–22. There is an angelic mediator who guides the seer through the images and functions as interpreter (5:5; 7:13–14; 11:1–2; 17:6b–18; 21:9–22:11; cf. Ezek. 40; Zech. 1; Apoc. Abr. 10). Through this angel key elements of the visions are explained, and these become hermeneutical keys for understanding the rest. There are also discourse cycles in which recapitulation controls the narrative flow (the seals, trumpets, and bowls; see below) and a distinctive use of the OT as typological symbol. The esoteric symbolism demands a separate section (below) but is a key element in apocalyptic writings. Royalty (1997: 601–3) and Johns (1998: 763–68) discuss the rhetorical strategy of the Apocalypse and argue that it is primarily epideictic, that is, an attempt to challenge and change the worldview of the readers through praise and blame. The author is trying to persuade the members of the seven churches to recognize the situation and act on it, to change their values accordingly (deliberative rhetoric). The strategy employed was to wake them up by giving “praise to the Lamb and invective against the beasts and the whore of Rome to move his readers to embrace his values” (Johns 1998: 784).

There is also an apocalyptic mind-set. The fundamental perspective of the book is the exhortation to endure persecution on the basis of the

transcendent reality of God's kingdom in the present as grounded in God's control of the future. Therefore the temporal world of temptation and pressure to conform to secular demands can be endured when one realizes that God is "the one who is and who was and who is to come" (1:4b), that is, the same God who controlled the past and will control the future is still in control the present, even though it does not seem like it. The judgment of the wicked and the vindication of the saints are important elements in apocalyptic and dominate Revelation as well. In light of this, the ethical mandate to persevere or overcome is essential, for apocalyptic is ethical at heart and demands faithfulness on the part of the people of God. The recurring theme of the letters is repentance, for only this makes it possible to be an overcomer. The basis of it all is the determinism of the book. God is triumphant; he is "Lord God Almighty" (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), the one who is omnipotent and in control of all things. The so-called dualism of the book is only partial, for while the battle between good and evil dominates, it is not an equal battle. Satan has already been defeated at the cross, and even the death of the saints (13:7) becomes their triumph over him (12:11).

Interpretation of the Symbols

Obviously, interpretation is the heart of the issue. Approaches believing that to read a biblical book is automatically to understand it still dominate inductive Bible studies today. However, that view can rarely get back to the original meaning of a book, especially Revelation. As Friesen (1995: 306–14) says, we must wed social history to the text itself, that is, allow the real social situation to inform our understanding. That is especially true of the use of symbols in the book. Schüssler Fiorenza (1986: 125–30) says the symbols have a special communicative function in addressing the social world of the original readers, thus opening up a new symbolic world for them. It is our task to uncover that symbolic world. When I was in high school, Revelation was my favorite book, and I was an avid follower of the "prophecy school" of interpretation. So I took the "newspaper approach" and looked for all the current events that "fulfilled" the symbols of Revelation and the other apocalyptic portions of the Bible. I believed that limestone was being quarried in Indiana to rebuild the temple and that there was a computer in Belgium called "the Beast" that would help the Antichrist (who would arise from Lebanon and take over the European Commonwealth and then the world). The problem with all of this was twofold: none of the rumors happened to be true, and the entire approach was hermeneutically very weak. It is highly unlikely that God gave these visions to speak only to Christians of the last fifty years or so (after Israel became a nation). There is a false dichotomy between "literal" and "symbolic" in many cir-

cles. Those who call themselves literal are only selective in doing so. For Hal Lindsay and others the locust plague refers to helicopters, the demonic horsemen to tanks, and the many-headed beast is a world leader who will be quite distinguished looking. Elements like the lion and the lamb of chapter 5, the golden censer of chapter 8, the swallowed scroll of chapter 10, and the woman of chapter 12 must be taken symbolically. Every interpreter must ask the same two questions: What does each symbol portray in the literal world of history, and what background knowledge do I utilize to determine its meaning?

Beale (1999: 50–52) argues that John deliberately uses *ἑσήμανεν* (*esēmanen*, made known, the verb cognate of the noun “sign” in John’s Gospel) in 1:1 because of its parallels with Dan. 2:28–30, 45, where God “signifies” truths through pictorial or symbolic visions. Thus it means to “communicate by symbols” and connotes the need to interpret the reality behind the symbol. Revelation is a symbolic book, but that does not mean the symbols do not depict literal events, like the “great tribulation” (7:14) as well as the various depictions of the “three and a half” years in chapters 11–13 as symbols for the final period of history or the “beast” for the Antichrist. It is likely that God has chosen esoteric symbols from the common store of apocalyptic symbols in the first century in order to turn the reader away from exactly what he is going to do and toward the theological meaning of how he is going to do it. We do not know what is going to happen behind the pictures of locust plagues, meteor showers, volcanic eruptions, and horrible storms. Some may happen literally, many will not. It is important to realize that we know no more about the second coming than Jesus’ Jewish disciples did about the first. They too thought they were reading the Scriptures rightly.

Thus in interpreting the symbols of the book, we first need the “hermeneutics of humility” to realize we “see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror” (1 Cor. 13:8 NLT). We are to center on the purpose of the text and note the theological thrust, leaving what will actually happen with God. Moreover, we no longer need to guess what modern events may be prophesied, for every symbol was understandable to the first-century reader. Therefore, we seek the “language of equivalents” and use background knowledge from the first century to unlock the tensive symbols and to see what the original readers would have understood when they read them. This is not a perfect science, of course, and scholars debate the background behind each symbol. Beale (1999: 52–53) speaks of four levels of communication: the linguistic level, comprising the exegetical study of the text; the visionary level, considering John’s experience; the referential level, centering each symbol in its historical referent; and the symbolic level, asking what is connoted by each symbol. Symbols are metaphorical utterances that are meant to be understood first pictorially and then referentially. There is a referential dimension to metaphor (see Soskice

1985: 51–53), but we find the meaning through the picture that is connoted. The sources for interpreting them come from the OT, intertestamental literature, and the Greco-Roman world—in other words, in the common world of the original readers in the province of Asia. We have to sift the various possibilities and see which background best fits the context. For instance, the twelve jewels that are the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem in 21:18–21 have been variously identified as the signs of the zodiac or the jewels on the ephod of the high priest (Philo and Josephus combined the two and believed the jewels on the ephod were the signs of the zodiac). In the context the signs of the zodiac are unlikely (the theme does not fit well and there are too many differences in the lists), and the jewels on the breastplate are closer to the list in the text (see the discussion of that passage). It probably connotes a priestly aspect and the magnificence of the city.

To illustrate this, let us consider the meaning of numbers in the book (see Bauckham 1993b: 29–37; Giesen 1997: 33; Beale 1999: 58–64). There are four major numbers from which the vast majority of numbers derive—4, 7, 10, 12. While some (Seiss, Walvoord, Thomas) tend to consider them literally, they are forced to some creative interpretations, for example, regarding the 144,000 who are sealed in 7:4–8. Walvoord (1966: 143) believes this means that 12,000 of those converted out of each tribe will be kept alive through the tribulation period, while Thomas (1992: 478) believes the 12,000 sealed in each tribe are those selected to be God’s special witnesses through the tribulation period. But it seems more likely that the numbers in the book are meant symbolically, as was common in ancient apocalypses. Each of the numbers tends to signify wholeness or completeness throughout Scripture, as in the four corners of the earth or the four winds, the use of seven throughout Scripture, or the twelve tribes and twelve apostles. Bauckham (1993b: 29–37) has done an extensive study of the language of the book and has shown how often terms and ideas occur four times (four corners [7:1; 20:8]; four winds [7:1]; fourfold division of creation [8:7–8; 14:7; 16:2–3]; fourfold designation of the nations [see below]; “the one who lives forever and ever” [4:9, 10; 10:6; 15:7]) or seven times (the seven spirits; sevenfold doxologies; seven seals, trumpets, and bowls; seven beatitudes; several titles of God [Lord God Almighty, the one who sits on the throne] or Christ [Christ; Jesus—14 times; Jesus as “witness;” Christ’s “coming;” Lamb—28 times]; the nations as “peoples, tribes, languages, and nations”; the Spirit—14 times; prophecy) in the book. As Bauckham (1993b: 35–36) concludes, all these cannot merely be coincidental. It seems likely that John has written his book carefully to signify the perfect plan of God and the completeness of his work. This does not mean that no number can be literal. There were of course twelve tribes and twelve apostles, but even that number was chosen by God for theological reasons. We cannot insist on a literal meaning

for the three and a half years of the tribulation period or the thousand years of the millennium. They could be literal, but the numbers function symbolically in the book and probably signify a lengthy period of time that is under God's control.

Methods of Interpretation

Perhaps more than for any other book, our understanding of the meaning of Revelation depends on the hermeneutical perspective we bring to bear on it. For instance, does the beast of chapters 11 and 13 refer to Nero, world empires, the pope (the view of the Protestant Reformers), Hitler, or a future Antichrist? Is the three and a half years of 11:2–3; 12:6, 14; and 13:9 the destruction of Jerusalem, the church age, or a final period of “tribulation” at the end of history? These and other issues depend on which method of interpretation one chooses. But how does one choose among the interpretive options? There is a twofold answer: study ancient apocalyptic literature and see which best fits the genre as a whole, but especially let the details of Revelation itself guide you to the proper method.³ There are, of course, many different ways to define the interpretive schools.⁴ However, most scholars summarize the options under four headings.

Historicist. This approach began with Joachim of Fiore in the twelfth century. He claimed that a vision had told him the 1,260 days of the Apocalypse prophesied the events of Western history from the time of the apostles until the present. The Franciscans followed Joachim and like him interpreted the book as relating to pagan Rome and the papacy (due to corruption in the church). Later the Reformers (e.g., Luther and Calvin) also favored this method, with the pope as the Antichrist (see Beckwith 1919: 327–29; Johnson 1981: 409). Classical dispensational thinking took this approach with regard to the letters to the seven churches, believing that the letters prophesied the seven periods of the church age.⁵ Also, the

3. For the history of interpretation see Beckwith 1919: 318–36; and esp. G. Maier 1981 *passim*.

4. Court (1979: 1–17) lists chiliastic, Alexandrian, recapitulation theory, historical, eschatological, contemporary-historical, literary, and comparative approaches.

5. In a lengthy excursus Thomas (1992: 505–15) notes the three views held by dispensational scholars. Some (Bullinger, Welch) have taken an entirely prophetic approach, arguing that the seven letters did not refer to the historical cities but rather prophesied the seven ages of the church. The majority hold to a historico-prophetic view (Lange, Gaebelein, Ironside, J. Smith, Walvoord), stating that while they addressed problems in the actual churches of John's time, they also looked forward to seven ages in the history of the church. The primary argument is suitability, that the descriptions in the letters fit the periods of the church age. As Thomas brings out, however, there are serious problems with the prophetic view, for its proponents see church history through the lens of the seven letters. Most historians would see quite a different development of church history. Moreover, this is based only on *Western* church history, while the church is and always has been a worldwide movement. Thus most recent dispensational scholars (Thomas, Saucy, Blaising, Bock) agree with the majority view, that the letters are entirely historical and not a prophecy of the church age.

so-called prophecy movement, those preachers who see every detail in OT as well as NT apocalyptic symbolism as fulfilled in current events (the “newspaper approach” to prophecy), would be aligned with this school. Proponents of this method have tended to take Rev. 2–19, including the seals, trumpets, and bowls as well as the interludes, as prophetic of salvation history, that is, the development of church history within world history. Thus the beast/Antichrist has been variously identified with the pope, Napoleon, Mussolini, or Hitler. Because of its inherent weaknesses (its identification only with Western church history, the inherent speculation involved in the parallels with world history, the fact that it must be reworked with each new period in world history, the total absence of any relevance for John or his original readers; see also Beale 1999: 46), few scholars today take this approach.

Preterist. This approach argues that the details of the book relate to the present situation in which John lived rather than to a future period. Thus the symbols refer to events in the first-century world as experienced by the original readers, and John is telling them how God would deliver them from their oppressors. There are three basic approaches to the book from within this school of thought. The two most popular relate the book to the situation of the church in the Roman Empire. The first (taken by critical scholars like R. H. Charles, Sweet, and Roloff) views the book as written about Roman oppression and the fall of the Roman Empire. Due to the development of the imperial cult, pressure to conform and the resultant persecution have become serious threats to the church. The beast thus would be the Roman Empire or the Roman emperor, and the seals, trumpets, and bowls are contemporary judgments God is pouring (or soon will pour) upon Rome itself. Thus the book describes the conflict between church and state, between faithfulness to God and compromise with the pagan world.

The second is taken by many modern critics (Yarbro Collins, L. Thompson, Krodel, Barr) who argue that there was little persecution and a perceived crisis rather than a real one. The church is still called out from the “world” to follow God, but it is an internal spiritual crisis rather than external persecution. Osiek (1996: 343–44) says the eschatology of the book is not a timetable for the future but a reinterpretation of the present. It provides a spatial interaction between the earthly and the heavenly so as to give new meaning to the present situation. In this case the symbols provide alternative worlds that the readers have to choose between, the transcendent realm of God and the church or the alternative secular world of Rome. The problem of the book then is compromise, as seen in the Nicolaitan cult, and the solution is true worship of Christ (see esp. Krodel).

A third option is to take the book as written before A.D. 70 and prophesying the fall of Jerusalem as God’s judgment upon apostate Israel for

rejecting the Messiah and persecuting the church (so Gentry, Chilton). The beast is Rome, the kings from the east are the Roman generals who brought the Roman army from the eastern boundary of the empire to destroy Jerusalem, and Armageddon is the siege of Jerusalem itself. For Kraybill (1999: 32–35) the white horse of 6:1–2 is Rome and the red horse of 6:3–4 is the Jewish War of A.D. 66–70.

This third approach is least viable, not only because it necessitates an early date of writing but because it limits the universal language of the book (all “peoples, languages, tribes, and nations”) to the Jewish people. Nevertheless, the first two are also problematic because they would involve an error of prophecy (which many critical scholars state openly) since final judgment and the end of the world did not come with the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century.

Idealist. This popular approach argues that the symbols do not relate to historical events but rather to timeless spiritual truths (so Hendriksen, Hoekema, P. Hughes). As such it relates primarily to the church between the advents, that is, between Christ’s first and second comings. Thus it concerns the battle between God and evil and between the church and the world at all times in church history. The seals, trumpets, and bowls depict God’s judgments on sinners at all times, and the beast refers to all the anti-Christian empires and rulers in history. Thus the book describes the victory of Christ and his people down through history. The millennium in this approach is not a future event but the final cycle of the book (so Hendriksen) describing the church age. There are certain strengths in this view: the centrality of theology for the book, the relevance for the church at all times, the symbolic nature of the book. But it has certain weaknesses as well: the absence of historical connections, the failure to see the future nature of many of the prophecies or to connect them in any way with history (as it seems the text does in several instances).

Futurist. This was the method employed by some of the earliest fathers (e.g., Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus), but with the triumph of the allegorical method (taking a spiritual approach to the book) after Origen and of the amillennial view after Augustine and Ticonius, the futurist method (and chiliasm) was not seen again for over a thousand years. The first to develop once more a literal view of the book was Franciscus Ribeira, a Spanish Jesuit who wrote in the late sixteenth century to counter the Reformation antipapal interpretation. While he was not truly a futurist, he turned the attention back to the early fathers, and after him that view returned to prominence and stands alongside the others as equally viable.

Futurism believes that chapters 4–22 refer primarily to events that will take place at the end of history and usher in the eschaton. There are two forms of this approach, dispensationalism and what has been called

“classical premillennialism.” Dispensationalists believe that God has brought about his plan of salvation in a series of dispensations or stages centering on his election of Israel to be his covenant people. Therefore, the church age is a parenthesis in this plan, as God turned to the Gentiles until the Jewish people find national revival (Rom. 11:25–32). At the end of that period, the church will be raptured, inaugurating a seven-year tribulation period in the middle of which the Antichrist will make himself known (Rev. 13) and instigate the “great tribulation” or great persecution of the 144,000 and others among Israel who have become Christians. At the end of that period will come the parousia as Christ returns in judgment, followed by a literal millennium (20:1–10), great white throne judgment (20:11–15), and the beginning of eternity in heavenly bliss (21:1–22:5). Classical premillennialism is similar but does not hold to dispensations. Thus there is only one return of Christ, after the tribulation period (Matt. 24:29–31; cf. Rev. 19:11–21), and it is the whole church, not just the nation of Israel, that passes through the tribulation period. Also, dispensationalists view themselves as literalists on the symbols, while the second school would take many of them to be symbolic (see above). There are some weaknesses of this school as well: it can develop a perspective that would remove its applicability to first-century Christians (see above on the “prophecy” movement), and it can often deteriorate to mere speculation cut off from first-century backgrounds. If all we have are events without symbolic/theological significance, much of the power of the book can be lost.

Eclectic. Many scholars in the last few decades (Morris, Johnson, Giesen, Mounce, Beale) prefer to combine more than one of the views above. While the historical approach has very limited (if any) value, the other three can be profitably combined to capture how John probably intended his book to be understood. Harrington (1993: 16) calls the futurist approach “gross misinterpretation . . . unsavory and even dangerous. . . . The idea of an elect minority being shunted to the safe regions of the upper air while a vengeful Lamb destroys the inhabitants of the earth is scarcely Christian.” Of course, this is a gross caricature of the futurist position, but some tendencies at the extreme edges come close to this. All of the approaches can be dangerous when taken to the extreme.

The solution is to allow the preterist, idealist, and futurist methods to interact in such a way that the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses minimized. Beale, for instance, calls his method “a redemptive-historical form of modified idealism” (1999: 48). He takes the symbols in an inaugurated sense as describing the church age from the present to the future. For instance, the beast of 13:1–8 refers both to the “many antichrists” throughout church history and to the final Antichrist at the end of history (1999: 680–81). The approach of this commentary is sim-

ilar, but the futurist rather than the idealist position is primary. My study of ancient apocalyptic and of the Book of Revelation has led me to believe that John's visions (esp. chaps. 4–22) were primarily intended to describe the events that will end world history. The saints in these chapters are believers alive in that final period, and the beast is the Antichrist who will lead the “earth-dwellers”/unbelievers in a final pogrom against all the people of God. The seals, trumpets, and bowls symbolize a final series of judgments by which God will turn the evil deeds of the nations back upon their heads (the Roman legal principle of *lex talionis*, the law of retribution) to prove his sovereignty once and for all and to give them a final chance to repent (9:20–21; 11:13; 14:6–7; 16:9, 11). But the preterist school is also correct, because the visions use the events of the future to address John and his readers in the present. Most of the imagery used to describe the beast and Babylon the Great comes from actual first-century parallels. The beast is a final Nerolike figure, and Babylon is the final unholy Roman Empire. One of my definitions for apocalyptic is “the present addressed through parallels with the future.” John's readers were being asked to identify with the people at the end of history and gain perspective for their present suffering through the future trials of God's people. This leads us to the idealist position, also intended in the text, for these final events are also timeless symbols meant to challenge the church in every era. The three-and-a-half-year great tribulation provides models for the similar tribulations of the saints down through history. Therefore, this commentary is quite similar to Beale's except for the centrality of the futurist approach (also similar to Ladd, Beasley-Murray, Michaels, and Mounce).

Text

Due to restraints in the length and purpose of this commentary, I have not tried to discuss every textual problem but rather have restricted myself to the important ones. Revelation has an interesting textual history; a number of church fathers rejected the book because of the chiliast debate and its use by the Montanists. Therefore, there are fewer extant manuscripts than for any other NT book and a great number of textual difficulties. Indeed, until the magisterial studies of Hoskier (1929) and Schmid (1955–56), it was thought virtually impossible to determine the original text. As Aune (1997: cxxxvi–clvi) points out, there are five types of evidence: (1) papyri (P¹⁸, containing 1:4–7, from the 3d–4th century; P²⁴, containing 5:5–8 and 6:5–8, from the early 4th; P⁴³, containing 2:12–13 and 15:8–16:2, from the 6th–7th; P⁴⁷, containing 9:10–17:2, from the 3d; P⁸⁵, containing 9:19–10:2, 5–9, from the 4th–5th; and P⁹⁸, containing 1:13–20, possibly from the 2d); (2) uncials, with three complete manuscripts (S, from the 4th century, A from the 5th, and 046 from the 10th), three with just a single page (0163 from the 5th century, 1069 from the

4th, and 0207 from the 4th), and several with much of the book (C from the 5th century; P from the 9th; 051 from the 10th; 052 from the 10th); (3) minuscules (293 total); (4) patristic quotations (including most of those named in the section below on “Canonicity”); and (5) the versions (Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Syriac).

While scholars feel more confident than ever that we can get close to the original text of Revelation, it is not an easy task due to the nature of the manuscripts. The student must watch closely not only the quality of the manuscripts and the internal criteria for evaluating the strength of a reading but also scribal tendencies in trying to harmonize the difficult grammatical constructions (see below on “Language and Grammar”). As Aland and Aland (1989: 247) point out, while \mathfrak{P}^{47} and \mathfrak{S} are normally superior to A and C, in Revelation they are not, so decisions must be made with great care.

Canonicity

The Apocalypse seems to have been accepted almost from the beginning in the Western church (see the excellent discussion in Swete 1912: cvii–cxix; Giesen 1997: 45–48). It appears to have been recognized by Papias (as stated in the commentary on the book by Andreas in the sixth century) and may be reflected in Ignatius (A.D. 110–17; *Eph.* 15.3 = Rev. 21:3; *Phld.* 6.1 = Rev. 3:12) and the Epistle of Barnabas (A.D. 130–31; Barn. 6.13 = Rev. 21:3; Barn. 21.3 = Rev. 22:10), though there is considerable doubt as to the viability of the connection. As already stated, it was accepted by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. It was included in the earliest list of canonical works, the Muratorian Canon, in the latter part of the second century. There was some opposition, but that stemmed from Marcion, who rejected all NT books that used the OT, and from Gaius and the Alogoi, who rejected it because of its use by the Montanists. They argued that the symbolism of the book did not edify the reader and that there were factual errors (e.g., there was no church at Thyatira in the late second century). These arguments were answered by Epiphanius and Hippolytus, and the book was generally accepted in the West (though Jerome later had some doubts).

The Eastern church was a different case. There Origen’s pupil, Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria from 248 to 264 (see Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 7.24–25), opposed the chiliastic views of Nepos, a bishop in Egypt, and believed that linguistic differences with the Gospel of John as well as differences in thought and style meant that the apostle John was not the author. His influence led to serious doubts in the East. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea early in the fourth century, said Revelation was written by John the Elder and refused to consider it canonical. Other Eastern fathers who doubted it were Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, Theodore of

Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrus. As a result it was not in the canonical list at the Council of Laodicea in 360, was not included in the lectionaries of the Eastern church, and was omitted from the Peshitta, the Syriac Bible. Athanasius accepted it completely, however, and it is in the official canonical list at the Council of Carthage in 397. Somewhat as a result of the Greek commentaries of Oecumenius and Andreas in the sixth century, Revelation gradually gained favor in the East and in 680 was given canonical status at the Council of Constantinople.

Language and Grammar

Everyone agrees that the Greek of Revelation is the most difficult of the NT. This is due not only to the apocalyptic tone of the book but also to its theology and its use of the OT. For instance, in 1:4 the phrase “the one who is and who was and who is about to come” is in the nominative case even though it follows the preposition *ἀπό* (*apo*, from) and should have been in the genitive. John clearly wants the reader to see it as a divine title and to reflect on the implications of its theology for his book (see the commentary below).

There have been several monumental studies of the grammar of the book (see R. Charles 1920: 1.cxvii–cxlix; Mussies 1971; Mussies 1980; S. Thompson 1985; Aune 1998: clx–ccvii). The solecisms or seeming grammatical irregularities have been attributed to many different reasons. It is commonly stated that they are due to Semitisms and awkward Aramaisms (see esp. S. Thompson 1985; Mussies 1980: 170–71; R. Charles 1920: 1.clii says the author is often thinking in Hebrew as he writes the Greek). Newport (1986; 1987) argues that prepositions in the book show “significant Semitic influence.” Porter (1989) challenges this prevailing assumption that they are Semitic and argues that the clumsy grammar lies within normal Greek usage, so that each problem must be studied individually. He says that the Greek could stem from a Jewish-Christian dialect in first-century Palestine (1989: 583–84; see also Trudinger 1966: 84–88). The Greek of Revelation is not a hybrid but falls “within the range of possible registers of Greek usage of the first century” (Porter 1989: 603). D. Schmidt (1991: 596–602) believes that most anomalies are due to Septuagintal influence with its translation-Greek style, and Beale (1999: 100–101) believes that they usually signal OT allusions and carry over the grammar of those allusions (see also Bauckham 1993b: 286–87). For instance, the unusual “eternal gospel to proclaim” in 14:6–7 could be a reflection of Ps. 96:2b, “Proclaim his salvation from day to day.” Callahan (1995: 456–57) adds that the solecisms are deliberate and are used to draw the reader to important truths (e.g., the nominatives in 1:4, 5; 2:17). In a sense most of the above can be incorporated into a general covering statement: the solecisms of Revelation are due more to Septuagintal influence but also betray some Semitic features at times;