

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION'S NATURE AND ITS SOTERIOLOGY

Being a Draft Chapter of the similarly Draft Study:

*Revolutions in Salvation: The Upheavals of Judaeo-Christian Soteriologies*

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## **Bibliography of this Chapter's footnotes**

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## The nature of the Book of Revelation

## THE NATURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

### Revelation is a letter (epistle), a circular letter addressed to specified churches

Revelation, like most of the books of the New Testament, was written in the form of an epistle. It has the traditional opening and close common to nearly all of the biblical epistles. After a brief introduction, which speaks of John in the third person (1:1-3), we find the true beginning of the epistle: “John, to the seven churches which are in Asia.” This resembles, in form, the opening of every one of the Pauline Epistles, as well as those of James, Peter, and Jude.

That the book was a letter intended for a specific contemporary audience is seen, for example, in 1:11:

“What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

The close of the book, too, is typical of a biblical epistle: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Every epistle of Paul’s, as well as Hebrews, closes with an equivalent well-wishing.

Thus the first step toward gaining a correct understanding of Revelation is to recognize that it is an epistle to a particular group of Christians, aiming to address their specific needs at the time it was written. This requires that we should seek first to discover how it applied to and would have been understood by its original readership, as we would seek to do with any other biblical epistle. Only secondarily do we transfer truths to our own modern circumstances. This is how responsible readers approach 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, James, or any other New Testament book, and it is also the most responsible way to approach the epistle known as *The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*.<sup>1</sup>



The whole book of Revelation is a circular letter addressed to seven specific churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (1:11; cf 1:4; 22:16).

**Revelation 22:16** “It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches.”

They are probably named in the order in which they would be visited by a messenger starting from Patmos and travelling on a circular route around the province of Asia. But many misreadings of Revelation, especially those which assume that much of the book was not addressed to its first-century readers and could only be understood by later generations, have resulted from neglecting the fact that it is a letter.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Revelation, four views*, pages 9-10

<sup>2</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 12

## **The Apocalypse of John was not written to modern readers**

The Apocalypse of John was not written to modern readers, but to seven Christian churches at the end of the first century. This does not mean that it cannot be usefully read and applied by communities of faith in the twenty-first century, but rather that accurate interpretation requires the foundational awareness that even if the text, by extension, was written for us, it was not written to us.<sup>3</sup>

## **To biblical writers, “the world” often was limited in scope**

In Revelation we read frequently of “all those who dwell on the earth” and of events affecting the “whole world.” Because of these and similar expressions, our first impression is likely to be that the judgments described in the book are global in extent. ...

In the Old Testament (and, arguably, in the New as well) the gentile nations are symbolically called “the sea” in contrast to “the land” (i.e., Israel). Thus, phrases like “those who inhabit the earth (or land)” and “kings of the earth (or land)” might be references to the people of Israel and their rulers, respectively. ...

Likewise “the world” normally speaks to us of the planet earth. But to biblical writers it often was limited in scope to the Mediterranean world or the Roman Empire (see Luke 2:1; Col. 1:6). Similar passages that employ language that sounds universal but where the scope is actually limited to the Roman Empire would include Daniel 7:23, Acts 2:5, and Colossians 1:23. Thus in Revelation, a statement about “the time of trial which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10) may refer to an empire-wide crisis, which will especially place stress upon those who dwell in Israel.<sup>4</sup>

## **The author, John, was a Jewish Christian prophet**

Virtually all we know about John, the author of Revelation, is that he was a Jewish Christian prophet. Evidently he was one of a circle of prophets in the churches of the province of Asia (22:6), and evidently he had at least one rival: the Thyatiran prophetess whom he considers a false prophet (2:20).

Thus to understand his book we must situate it in the context of early Christian prophecy. John must normally have been active as a prophet in the churches to which he writes. The seven messages to the churches reveal detailed knowledge of each local situation, and 2:21 presumably refers to an earlier prophetic oracle of his, addressed to the prophetess he calls Jezebel at Thyatira. John was no stranger to these churches but had exercised a prophetic ministry in them and knew them well.<sup>5</sup>

## **John possibly went to Patmos to receive the revelation**

It may not have been just because he could not be with his churches in person that he wrote this prophecy. He wrote from Patmos (1:9), an inhabited island not far from Ephesus. It has most often been assumed that 1:9 indicates he was exiled there, whether in flight from persecution or legally banished to the island. This is possible, but it is also possible that he went to Patmos in order to receive the revelation.<sup>6</sup>

## **Revelation was written during a time of intense persecution**

Revelation was *written during a time of intense persecution of believers*. Suffering has been a recurrent feature of the history of the people of God. Some scholars have referred to apocalyptic works in general as “tracts for hard times.” Revelation was clearly written at just such a time of difficulty for Christians. The author describes himself as his readers’ “companion in the tribulation” (1:9). One of the recipient churches had lost a member to martyrdom (2:13), and others were warned of impending tribulation, imprisonment, and testing (2:10; 3:10). One of the main themes of the predictive portion of the book is that great suffering lies ahead, and martyrdom is a recurring theme.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 4

<sup>4</sup> *Revelation, four views*, pages 22-23

<sup>5</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, pages 2-3

<sup>6</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 4

<sup>7</sup> *Revelation, four views*, page 10

To understand any New Testament book, it is valuable to establish the time it was written and to sketch pertinent features of its historical and cultural context. ... The Book of Revelation was written during a time of persecution and trial for the recipient churches. It seems to have been written with a mind to encourage the believers that, though they may be called upon to suffer, or even die, for their faith, yet their vindication (and the doom of those who persecute them) is sure and not far off. ... Most commentators believe that the magnitude of the crisis described in Revelation requires that we identify it with one of the Imperial persecutions of the Roman emperors.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Book of Revelation is an *apocalypse*, which means it “reveals”**

Jewish apocalypses, insofar as they continued the concerns of the Old Testament prophetic tradition, were typically concerned with the apparent non-fulfilment of God’s promises, through the prophets, for the judgment of evil, the salvation of the righteous, the achievement of God’s righteous rule over his world. The righteous suffer, the wicked flourish: the world seems to be ruled by evil, not by God. Where is God’s kingdom? The apocalyptists sought to maintain the faith of God’s people in the one, all-powerful and righteous God, in the face of the harsh realities of evil in the world, especially the political evil of the oppression of God’s faithful people by the great pagan empires. The answer to this problem was always, essentially, that, despite appearances, it is God who rules his creation and the time is coming soon when he will overthrow the evil empires and establish his kingdom. John’s apocalypse in important ways shares that central apocalyptic concern.<sup>9</sup>

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*Revelation was written as apocalyptic literature, a style of writing popular in John’s time, but obscure to modern readers. Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary points out that “the word *apocalypsis* is a Greek word meaning ‘revelation.’ . . . Apocalyptic literature is a special kind of writing that arose among Jews and Christians to reveal certain mysteries about heaven and earth, humankind and God, angels and demons, the life of the world today, and the world to come.”*“ No other book of the New Testament was written in this style, but between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, Jewish writers produced a large number of noncanonical books which, because of their similarities to this book, are now referred to as *apocalyptic* (e.g., *The Book of Enoch, The Apocalypse of Baruch, The Book of Jubilees, The Assumption of Moses, The Psalms of Solomon, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Sibylline Oracles*, etc.).<sup>10</sup>

### **The Greek name of the *Book of Revelation* means "unveiling"**

**Apocalyptic:** A type of biblical literature that emphasizes the lifting of the veil between heaven and earth and the revelation of God and his plan for the world. Apocalyptic writings are marked by distinctive literary features, particularly prediction of future events and accounts of visionary experiences or journeys to heaven, often involving vivid symbolism. Later apocalypses often build upon and elaborate the symbolism employed by earlier ones. This is particularly the case in the Book of Revelation, in which not only earlier apocalypses but the whole Old Testament is plundered for ideas and symbols. Readers need to be alert to discern allusions.

It has often been argued that apocalyptic is a response to distress, enabling suffering people to see that God is in control of their circumstances and that ultimate deliverance is assured. There is certainly truth in this. However, as a total explanation it may be questioned. ... The apocalyptic movement seems to have flourished also at times when particular suffering was not experienced. It is not clear, for instance, that Revelation is a response to suffering, although suffering is predicted in it (2:10; 13:10). Sociologically, it seems better to say that apocalyptic is the product of a prophetic movement, which claims to reveal the way things really are, both in heaven and on earth (the term "apocalypse," the Greek name of the Book of Revelation, means "unveiling"). ...

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<sup>8</sup> *Revelation, four views*, page 14

<sup>9</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 9

<sup>10</sup> *Revelation, four views*, page 10

The fundamental conviction of apocalyptic is that the world may be understood, but only by revelation that enables understanding. The mode of revelation varies. Daniel usually receives visionary dreams in his sleep (2:19; 7:1), but he also has day-time visions (10:4-5) and is able to pass on words from God like a traditional prophet (5:25-28). John receives his revelation while "in the Spirit" (Rev 1:10), which seems in his case to indicate an out-of-body journey to heaven (4:1) something claimed in other apocalypses of the period). ...

One interesting difference between Revelation and all other apocalypses is the extent to which it leaves visions unexplained. The usual pattern, both in Daniel and in the extrabiblical apocalypses, is that a vision is followed by an explanation of the symbolism (Dan 7:15-27; Zech 1:7-21). ...

This is only occasionally the case in Revelation. In 7:13 a heavenly figure actually asks John for an explanation of what he has just seen (but then provides it for him). In most cases the visions are just related, so that the reader is challenged to provide the interpretation, as in the case of the majority of Jesus' parables.<sup>11</sup>

### **Revelation is a prophetic apocalypse**

John's work is a prophetic apocalypse in that it communicates a disclosure of a transcendent perspective on this world. It is prophetic in the way it addresses a concrete historical situation – that of Christians in the Roman province of Asia towards the end of the first century AD – and brings to its readers a prophetic word of God, enabling them to discern the divine purpose in their situation and respond to their situation in a way appropriate to this purpose. This contextual communication of the divine purpose is typical of the biblical prophetic tradition. But John's work is also *apocalyptic*, because the way that it enables its readers to see their situation with prophetic insight into God's purpose is by disclosing the content of a vision in which John is taken, as it were, out of this world in order to see it differently. Here John's work belongs to the apocalyptic tradition of visionary disclosure, in which a seer is taken in vision to God's throne-room in heaven to learn the secrets of the divine purpose (cf., e.g., 1 Enoch 14-16; 46; 60:1-6; 71; 2 Enoch 20-1; Ap. Abr. 9-18).<sup>12</sup>

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Revelation as an apocalyptic-prophetic work focuses more on the source of revelation than does prophetic literature. The origin of revelation is the throne room of God in the heavenly temple. This is a feature that forms a part of prophetic genre (e.g., Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1–2), but in Revelation it becomes the dominating focus in order to underscore the divine, heavenly source of the revelation sent to the seven churches.<sup>13</sup>

### **Revelation is an apocalypse, a prophecy, and a letter**

Revelation combines aspects of three different kinds of writing — apocalyptic, prophecy, and epistle. The word "apocalyptic" comes from the Greek word for "revelation" and can refer to literature concerned with detailing events of the end times. Many apocalyptic books were written before, during, and after the time of the NT, most coming from Jewish circles rather than from Christians. Some scholars dismiss Revelation as just another of these wild and fanciful portrayals of the last days. Though there are many definitions of apocalyptic, it is best to understand apocalyptic as an intensification of prophecy.<sup>14</sup>

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The opening verses of Revelation seem to indicate that it belongs not to just one but to three kinds of literature. The first verse, which is virtually a title, speaks of the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. ... The word 'revelation' or 'apocalypse' (*apokalypsis*) suggests that the book belongs to the genre of ancient Jewish and Christian literature which modern scholars call apocalypses. ...

However, 1:3 describes Revelation as a *prophecy* intended to be read aloud in the context of Christian worship, and this claim to be a prophecy is confirmed by the epilogue to the book. ...

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<sup>11</sup> *APOCALYPTIC*: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/apocalyptic/> (accessed 21 December 2017)

<sup>12</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 7

<sup>13</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 5

<sup>14</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 4

**Revelation 1:1-3 (NRSV)**

The revelation of Jesus Christ,  
which God gave him  
to show his servants  
what must soon take place;

he made it known  
by sending his angel  
to his servant John,  
who testified to the word of God  
and to the testimony of Jesus Christ,  
even to all that he saw.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy,  
and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in  
it; for the time is near.<sup>15</sup>

But then 1:4-6 can leave no doubt that Revelation is intended to be a *letter*. Verses 4-5a follow the conventional form of letter-opening used by Paul and other early Christian leaders. ...

**Revelation 1:4-5a (NRSV)**

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is  
to come,

and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the  
dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.<sup>16</sup>

Thus Revelation seems to be an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. ...

The habit of referring to chapters 2-3 as the seven ‘letters’ to the churches is misleading. These are not as such letters but prophetic messages to each church. It is really the whole book of Revelation which is one circular letter to the seven churches. The seven messages addressed individually to each church are introductions to the rest of the book which is addressed to all seven churches. Thus we must try to do justice to the three categories of literature – apocalypse, prophecy and letter – into which Revelation seems to fall.<sup>17</sup>

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*Unlike other biblical epistles, Revelation is a prophecy, as it repeatedly affirms itself to be (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19).*<sup>18</sup>

**Apocalyptic motifs were a tool to help audiences contextualise what Christ was saving people from**

Christian biblical authors used the apocalyptic genre to help contextualize the meaning of salvation for their audiences. ... Apocalyptic gave biblical authors the ability to make statements about what salvation was salvation from.<sup>19</sup>

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Apocalyptic imagination gave early Christians a context for seeing what the salvation of the cross was salvation from.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Direct quotations are from the NRSV. Underlining is supplied.

<sup>16</sup> Underlining supplied

<sup>17</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, pages 1-2

<sup>18</sup> *Revelation, four views*, page 10

<sup>19</sup> *Framing Salvation*, page 1

<sup>20</sup> *Framing Salvation*, page 2

To the evangelists, apocalyptic motifs were a tool for helping their audiences understand what it was that Christ was saving people from. These motifs allowed the evangelists to demonstrate the sinful orders of society—political, economic, religious—that Christ’s self-sacrificial love was meant to overcome.<sup>21</sup>

**Overlaps between apocryphal Acts and apocryphal Apocalypses**

The distinction between apocryphal acts<sup>22</sup> and apocryphal apocalypses is not always particularly sharp. The apocryphal acts contain a number of apocalyptic or revelatory passages, where the information disclosed is mediated through a heavenly being, often the risen Jesus, and discloses a transcendent reality.

Similarly, a number of the so-called apocryphal apocalypses centre on a single apostolic figure, who becomes the focus of the revelatory actions in the text. Thus, while the latter category may place more emphasis on revelatory communications that pertain to the eschatological era, there are overlaps in generic features with apocryphal acts. ...

Texts that are considered a representative sample ... include the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *First Apocalypse of James*, and the *Apocalypse of Thomas*.<sup>23</sup>

**Revelation reworks hundreds of OT passages**

The book has been called “a rebirth of images,” since it takes imagery familiar from hundreds of Old Testament passages and reworks them into new applications. For example, the symbol of “the two olive trees” as a designation for the two witnesses in chapter 11 is an echo of Zechariah 4:3, 11-14, where the two olive trees are evidently Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest. Yet Revelation, while taking the identical phrase, gives it a different application.

Unlike most other books of the New Testament, Revelation does not contain even one direct quotation from the Old Testament. However, there are hundreds of allusions to familiar images and phrases from the Old Testament, and from the New Testament as well (especially the other writings of John). It has been calculated that concepts and imagery are drawn from Isaiah (79 times), Daniel (53 times), Ezekiel (48 times), Psalms (43 times), Exodus (27 times), Jeremiah (22 times), Zechariah (15 times), Amos (9 times), and Joel (8 times).

The principal historical matrices from which the images frequently are taken are: a) the Exodus, b) the Babylonian exile, and c) the life of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

**Revelation is permeated by the OT**

No other book of the NT is as permeated by the OT as is Revelation. Although its author seldom quotes the OT directly, allusions and echoes are found in almost every verse of the book.<sup>25</sup>

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The imagery is drawn almost exclusively from the OT.<sup>26</sup>  
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<sup>21</sup> *Framing Salvation*, page 15

<sup>22</sup> The article discusses: *Acts of Andrew* AD 150, perhaps in Alexandria; *Acts of Peter* AD 180–90, perhaps in Rome; *Acts of Paul* AD 185–95, perhaps in Asia Minor; *Acts of John* AD 200–50, perhaps in Eastern Syria; and *Acts of Thomas* AD 200–50, perhaps in Eastern Syria.

(*Christology and Soteriology in Apocryphal Acts and Apocalypses*, page 2, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199644117.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199644117-e-35> accessed 23 November 2017)

<sup>23</sup> *Christology and Soteriology in Apocryphal Acts and Apocalypses*, page 17, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199644117.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199644117-e-35> accessed 23 November 2017

<sup>24</sup> *Revelation, four views*, page 20

<sup>25</sup> *NT use of the OT*, page 1081

<sup>26</sup> *NT use of the OT*, page 1081



It is generally recognized that Revelation contains more OT references than does any other NT book.<sup>27</sup>

### Revelation's heavy reliance on OT sources

John leaves almost no OT stone unturned in the course of Revelation, but six OT books in particular have overarching conceptual significance for the composition of his work. The creation/fall accounts of Genesis are foundational for Revelation, in terms of both antithesis (the dissolution of the created order in John's visionary material) and fulfillment (the blessings of the new Jerusalem as eschatological fulfillment of Eden). The accounts of the plagues in Exodus are the source of some of the most startling imagery in Revelation, and the theme of liberation from oppressive rulers is the predominant motif in both books.

In regard to the prophets, Isaiah and Ezekiel contribute significantly to John's vision of the heavenly throne room in Rev. 4-5, and the promises of eschatological blessing in Isa. 40-66 permeate the vision of the new heaven and new earth (itself an Isaianic phrase) in Rev. 21-22. Ezekiel provides the primary background for John's prophetic self-understanding (see esp. Rev. 1 : 10, 17; 10:9-11), and John models his narrative of the final battle, judgment, and new Jerusalem precisely on Ezek. 37-48. Zechariah provides some crucial imagery for John, notably the four horseman, the lampstands, and (in one of the rare OT quotations in Revelation) the statement that "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him" (Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10).

Finally, the book of Daniel—chapter 7 in particular—provides a mother lode of material for John (e.g., it is likely the dominant influence in the vision of Rev. 4-5). Revelation's central theme of faithful witness in the midst of persecution derives directly from the stories in Daniel, as does the particular note that these witnesses triumph over the beast (Dan. 7; Rev. 13). John's themes of judgment and the reign of the saints, though present elsewhere in the OT, arguably find their closest parallels in the vision of Dan. 7.<sup>28</sup>

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John uses OT themes of creation, covenant faithfulness, end-time redemption, and judgment, which lie at the heart of the book of Revelation.<sup>29</sup>

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There is a consensus that the plagues of the "trumpets" in Rev. 8:6-12 and those of the bowls in 16:1-9 follow the paradigm of the exodus plagues (Exod. 8:12), although creatively reworked and applied.

All of the foregoing proposed OT models have woven within them allusions from other parts of the same OT book and from elsewhere in the OT corpus, and many of these are based upon common themes, pictures, catchphrases, and so on. Often these other references serve as interpretive expansions of an OT prototype. They are used in an "already and not yet" sense to indicate either indirect typological fulfillment or fulfillment of direct verbal prophecy. Sometimes they refer exclusively to fulfillment yet in the future.<sup>30</sup>

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It is difficult to understand Revelation without understanding the OT. John identifies himself as a prophet (1:3) in the line of the OT prophets, speaking the word of the Lord in both judgment and promise. Scholars estimate that as many as 278 out of 404 verses in Revelation contain references to the OT and that over five hundred allusions to OT texts are made in total (compared with less than two hundred in all of Paul's letters).<sup>31</sup>

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A quick look at just some of the OT allusions in the first chapter will illustrate our point. In 1:5 John alludes to Ps. 89:27; in 1:6 to Exod. 19:6; in 1:7 to Zech. 12:10; in 1:13-15 to Dan. 7:13-14 and 10:5-

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<sup>27</sup> *NT use of the OT*, page 1082

<sup>28</sup> *NT use of the OT*, page 1082

<sup>29</sup> *NT use of the OT*, page 1086

<sup>30</sup> *NT use of the OT*, page 1087

<sup>31</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 1

6; in 1:15 to Ezek. 1:24; and in 1:16 to Isa. 49:2. OT prophecy called the people to a renewal of commitment to God and His law and to turn away from the pagan practices tempting them to compromise.<sup>32</sup>

Rev. 1:5 From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Psalms 89:27 I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

In Rev. 1:1, John deliberately uses the language of “signify” from Dan. 2:45 in part to portray that what God has been showing him is likewise symbolic. Most of the things that are about to unfold are not to be taken literally (lions, lambs, beasts, women, etc.), but each refers symbolically to another reality or set of realities. The symbolic use of *sēmainō* in Daniel 2 defines the use in Rev. 1:1 as referring to symbolic communication and not mere general conveyance of information. Therefore, John’s choice of *sēmainō* (“signify”) over *gnōrizō* (“make known”) is not haphazard but intentional.<sup>33</sup>

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Revelation has more allusions to the OT than all other books of the NT put together. It should be noted that these are allusions rather than direct quotations. Most, however, are either clear allusions, where the wording is almost identical to an OT text, or probable allusions, where the wording is not quite as close but the idea is still directly and uniquely traceable to a text in the OT. Some larger OT passages seem to serve as a pattern for similarly substantial portions of Revelation. For instance, patterns from Daniel 2 and 7 are found repeatedly in Revelation 1, 4, and 5. Sections of Ezekiel influence Revelation 4 and 5, as well as other passages, including most of ch. 6 and part of ch. 18. The earlier trumpet and bowl plagues (Rev. 8:6-12; 16:1-14) follow the pattern of the Exodus plagues (Exodus 7-14). Revelation also develops certain OT themes in a general way, examples being end-time judgment and salvation, Daniel’s concept of the abomination of desolation, and the OT concept of earthquake as a sign of the end.<sup>34</sup>

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John’s use of the OT should not, therefore, be seen as abuse of its true meaning. John simply understands the OT as prophetically pointing forward to the events of the NT and to Christ, and he does so in the same way that Jesus Himself and all the other NT writers did. The true people of God are now seen to be those who trust in the Savior promised in the OT, and believers from every nation, Jew and Gentile alike, constitute God’s new covenant people, the continuation of true Israel. It was likewise prophesied in the OT that such people would be those upon whom God would in the latter days pour out His Spirit and upon whose hearts He would write His law. History is united by the plan of a sovereign God. In this history, the latter part (the work of Christ) interprets what has gone before, yet cannot be understood properly without it.<sup>35</sup>

### **Apokalypsis (“apocalypse”) at Revelation 1:1 is part of an allusion to Dan. 2**

[Revelation] 1:1 – The word *apokalypsis* (“apocalypse”) is part of an allusion to Dan. 2, since the whole of 1:1 is patterned after the broad structure of Dan. 2:28-30, 45-47 (cf. e), where *apokalypsa* (“reveal”) appears five times (cf. also 2:19, 22), *bade’ genesthai* (“what must come to pass”) three times, and *semainō* (“signify”) twice (cf. also 2:23 LXX). The words *en tachei* (“quickly”) are a conscious substitution for Daniel’s “in the latter days” (e.g., Dan. 2:28) and connote the definite, imminent time of fulfillment. But whereas Daniel expected this fulfillment to occur in the distant future, the “latter days: John expects it to begin in his own generation. Indeed, it has already started to happen, as the references to beginning fulfillment of OT prophecy in chapter 1 bear out (cf. 1:5, 7, 13, 16).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 1

<sup>33</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 11

<sup>34</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, pages 17-18

<sup>35</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 20

<sup>36</sup> *NT use of the OT*, page 1088

### **What Daniel had expected to occur in the distant “latter days”, John expects to begin “quickly,” in his own generation**

Daniel 2 and Revelation 1 are describing the same reality, and that what is prophesied in Daniel is beginning to be fulfilled in Revelation. The events prophesied are actually occurring or beginning to occur. The death and resurrection of Christ have brought about the inauguration or beginning of the kingdom of God prophesied in Daniel.<sup>37</sup>

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Daniel’s phrases “in the latter days” (Dan. 2:28) and “after this” (in Theodotion’s translation, “after these things,” exactly as in Rev. 1:19) are identical in meaning. The phrase “after this” (in the Hebrew text) or “after these things” (Theodotion) refers in Dan. 2:29 to something lying far off in the future, to which the phrase “in the latter days” also refers.

However, in Revelation they allude to something which is already beginning to happen. ... Rev. 1:1 replaces “in the latter days” with “shortly,” and v. 3 adds the nuance “near,” meaning “at hand.” The phrase “after these things” in 1:19, therefore, is not a reference to events only of the future but to events that are already unfolding in these last days, since “after these things” is to be identified with the “latter days” in Dan. 2:28-29, which have been inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

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Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 153, notes that ‘John understands Daniel’s reference to a distant time as referring to his own era, and he updates the text accordingly. What Daniel expected to occur in the distant “latter days”—the defeat of cosmic evil and the ushering in of the divine kingdom—John expects to begin “quickly,” in his own generation, if it has not already begun to happen.’<sup>39</sup>

### **John saw God’s actions with Israel in the past continuing with his current activities and promises in Christ**

Even though the book of Revelation is saturated with allusions to the Hebrew Bible, there are few explicit references to events in that history. John draws from the Old Testament figures of Balaam and Jezebel in his characterization of opponents in Pergamum and Thyatira (Rev 2:14; 20). The reference to Christ as the lion of the tribe of Judah and the root of David (Rev 5:5; 22:16) present Jesus as the consummation and fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chr 17:11-14; 2 Chr 6:16; cf. Gen 49:10). Jesus also possessed the key of David (Rev 3:7). God’s mystery, his making of a new creation for his people to inhabit, was announced beforehand to the Hebrew prophets (Rev 10:7), and the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel (Rev 21:12). The agony and birth pains of the woman in labor leading up to the birth of the Messiah (Rev 12:2) reflect back on the suffering of God’s people in the Old Testament and Second Temple period while they waited for the Messiah to come.

These references to God’s activity in the Old Testament along with the allusions to the Old Testament throughout the Apocalypse clearly demonstrate that John saw continuity between the actions and activity of God in the past in relation to Israel, his present activity in Christ, and the promise of his future activity to judge and remake the world.<sup>40</sup>

### **An online list of OT references in Revelation**

It’s a fact widely acknowledged that the book of Revelation contains more references to the Old Testament than any other New Testament book. Indeed, some scholars have found as many as 635 echoes and allusions in John’s apocalypse.

As a Jew who was thoroughly versed in the ancient Scriptures, it seems that John couldn’t help but make associations with God’s previous revelations as he himself was given the climactic vision of

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<sup>37</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 30

<sup>38</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, pages 30-31

<sup>39</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 101 (ftnt. 39)

<sup>40</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 96

## The nature of the Book of Revelation

God's redemptive plan. Granted, sometimes those associations seem to be less of a conscious action on John's part, and simply reflect the way his mind was furnished so entirely by Israel's sacred texts. But sometimes his allusions do reflect a conscious parallel, calling on an OT passage in order to say "This is that!" in some way or another.

Whether conscious or unconscious, however, John's many echoes and allusions constitute our single greatest aid in understanding the way that he, the seer, understood his own vision. If we want to see things through John's eyes and understand his vision the way he understood it, therefore, we should pay close attention to the many references he has left for us.

[Matthew Hartke] compiled the ... list of OT references in Revelation by combing through G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson's *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, a fantastic resource that really should be in every Bible student's library.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.fifthacttheology.com/blog/2015/7/7/a-super-nerdy-list-of-old-testament-references-in-revelation> (accessed 1 December 2017)

# THE SOTERIOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## **The Book of Revelation contains many profound truths and encouragements concerning Christian life and discipleship**

One of the great tragedies in the church in our day is how Revelation has been so narrowly and incorrectly interpreted with an obsessive focus on the future end time, with the result that we have missed the fact that it contains many profound truths and encouragements concerning Christian life and discipleship. The prophetic visions of Revelation can easily disguise the point that it was written as a letter to the churches, and a letter which is pastoral in nature.<sup>42</sup>

## **The Book of Revelation encourages God's people to persevere, because their final reward is certain**

The goal of Revelation is to bring encouragement to believers of all ages that God is working out His purposes even in the midst of tragedy, suffering, and apparent Satanic domination. It is the Bible's battle cry of victory, for in it, more than anywhere else in the NT, is revealed the final victory of God over all the forces of evil. As such, it is an encouragement to God's people to persevere in the assurance that their final reward is certain and to worship and glorify God despite trials and despite temptations to march to the world's drumbeat.<sup>43</sup>

## **Revelation has a focus on the church's conduct**

The focus of the revelation John received from God is how the church is to conduct itself in the midst of an ungodly world. The heavenly revelation gives an entirely different perspective from that offered by the world. Believers are faced with the choice of lining their lives and conduct up with one perspective or the other, and their eternal destiny depends on that choice. ...

The events of the book deal with the real-life situation of the church in every age, not just that of the end-time future. Believers are always facing the threat of compromise in one form or another. They must submit to the message as John has brought it, or face God's judgment. How sad it is when the study of Revelation in today's church regards it merely as futurology rather than setting in place a redemptive-historical mindset or worldview for the church!<sup>44</sup>

## **John's overall goal was to unite the churches behind him**

John's overall goal was to unite the churches behind him ... His strategy consisted of two specific rhetorical moves. The first involved developing (or exacerbating) a sense of crisis between his churches and the outside world ... John's second rhetorical move consisted of connecting his rival 'Jezebel' to the outside enemy 'Babylon.'<sup>45</sup>

## **Revelation is a letter (epistle) giving instruction on godly living**

Revelation is also written as an epistle, a letter to the seven churches, in which instruction on godly living is given to the believers who received it. It begins and ends as a typical letter would. Like the other NT letters, Revelation addresses the situation and problems of the believers who receive it. John appeals to them, on the basis of all they have in Christ and all they will yet inherit not to forsake the faith by compromising with the world. Not only the specific addresses of chs. 1–3 but also the visions of chs. 4–21 convey truth and direction from God as to the nature of the battle raging in the heavenlies and how believers are to respond to this battle, not at some undetermined date in the future but in their lives here and now, and to do so not simply by an intellectual belief that events will unfold in a particular way but by concrete moral choices on the basis of the issues God faces them with in the present.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 1

<sup>43</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 1

<sup>44</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 6

<sup>45</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 18

<sup>46</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, pages 6-7

Revelation, like the other letters of the NT, is a pastoral letter written to believers. As in the other letters, grace is spoken over believers at the beginning and the end of the letter (1:4; 22:21).

**1:4** John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace ...

**22:21** The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Like the other letters, Revelation deals with pastoral issues facing the churches and carries an appeal to believers to live for Christ. Like the other letters, it offers the hope to believers that, if they persevere in faithfulness to Christ, they will receive an eternal reward. This means that the content of the visions must have real and present relevance to all believers who read the book, no matter what age they live in.<sup>47</sup>

### **John wrote to motivate his hearers to change their thinking and their behaviour**

John primarily wrote in order to motivate his hearers to change their thinking and behavior, not to give a cryptic timeline of distant future events with little to no bearing on their present existence.<sup>48</sup>

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Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 39, in discussing the genre, notes that the purpose of the book is 'to motivate the audience to change their behavior in the light of the transcendent reality of the book's message.'<sup>49</sup>

### **Those who respond positively to John's call to repentance, worship, witness, perseverance, and obedience would be saved**

Soteriology is the primary motivating factor in the argumentation of the Apocalypse. Throughout the Apocalypse, John presents salvation as a future event that would not decisively culminate until Christ's return in order to motivate his hearers to overcome in the present through complete faithfulness to Jesus unto death. Those who responded positively to his call to repentance, worship, witness, perseverance, and obedience would be saved with God's people in the final day of salvation and judgment, while those who did not respond appropriately would be judged with God's enemies.<sup>50</sup>

### **Throughout the Apocalypse, John seeks to motivate his hearers to overcome**

Throughout the Apocalypse, John seeks to motivate his hearers to overcome. This 'overcoming' serves to describe a range of responses John is trying to elicit which include repentance, worship, witness, perseverance, and obedience.<sup>51</sup>

### **Hearers are exhorted to overcome in order that they *might* be saved**

Hearers are not exhorted to overcome because they *had been* saved but in order that they *might* be saved. This way of stating the issue is not the result of a prior systematic-theological position but derives from the evidence of John's actual argumentation.<sup>52</sup>

#### **Revelation 3:20-21 (NRSV)**

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;  
if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and  
eat with you, and you with me.

To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my  
throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father  
on his throne.

<sup>47</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 27

<sup>48</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 1

<sup>49</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 2 (ftnt. 3)

<sup>50</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, pages 5-6 (underlining supplied)

<sup>51</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 6

<sup>52</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 205

## **If they obey God's voice and keep his covenant they will be his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation**

The most striking way the Apocalypse presents the present possession of salvation by the believing community draws upon descriptions of the people of Israel who had just been delivered from Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb. In God's first words to the people at Sinai he promised that if they obeyed his voice and kept his covenant they would be his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (Exod 19:5-6). John draws upon this language to describe the current status of the community of believers in 1:5-6 and 5:9-10.

### **Revelation 1: 5-6 (NRSV)**

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

### **Revelation 5:9-10 (NRSV)**

You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slaughtered  
and by your blood you ransomed for God  
saints from every tribe and language  
and people and nation;  
you have made them  
to be a kingdom and priests  
serving our God,  
and they will reign on earth.

These passages have three parallel parts which describe: (1) the love (Rev 1:5) and violent death of Christ (Rev 5:9); (2) the loosing of the hearers by Christ's blood (Rev 1:5) and their redemption from all mankind by the blood of the lamb (Rev 5:9); (3) the present existence and constitution of John's hearers as a kingdom and priests to God with Rev 5:10 emphasizing their future reign on the earth.<sup>53</sup>

### **Chiastic structures**

John structured his book chiastically.<sup>54</sup>

### **The book's "prophecy" includes divine precepts for living in the present**

G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 555, notes that, 'the book's "prophecy" includes divine precepts for living in the present about which the readers must make a decision.'<sup>55</sup>

### **Only by conquering may the members of the churches enter the New Jerusalem**

The call to Revelation's readers or hearers to 'conquer' is fundamental to the structure and theme of the book. It demands the readers' active participation in the divine war against evil. Everything else that is said in the seven messages to the churches has this aim, expressed in the promise to the conquerors that concludes each (2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 12, 21): to enable the readers to take part in the struggle to establish God's universal kingdom against all opposition.

The eschatological content of the promises, as well as the single promise to the conquerors which matches them at the climax of the whole book in 21:7, shows that it is only by conquering that the members of the churches may enter the New Jerusalem (cf. 22:14). The visions that intervene between

<sup>53</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 182

<sup>54</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 14

<sup>55</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 1 (fnt. 2)

the seven messages to the churches and the final vision of the New Jerusalem are to enable the readers to move from one to the other, to understand what conquering involves.<sup>56</sup>

### **Believers must remain faithful to Christ in spite of present sufferings**

One of the main goals of the book, therefore, is to exhort believers to remain faithful to Christ in spite of present sufferings and in spite of the temptation to engage in idolatry represented by compromise with the world-system, because this faithfulness will eventually be rewarded in the heavenly kingdom.<sup>57</sup>

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After the portrayal of the heavenly kingdom in 21:1–22:5, the final words of the book revert to the command to remain faithful. The heavenly visions serve as motivators for Christians now suffering in adversity to hold to the glorious promises of God and not to fall away.<sup>58</sup>

### **Believers must obey the exhortation to overcome, persevere and remain faithful**

To overcome or conquer is the condition in each of the seven letters for inheriting the promise of salvation. Believers must obey the exhortation to persevere and remain faithful if they wish to be heirs of the divine promise.

Although the promises are phrased differently in each letter, they are all versions of the final promise of the book to the conquerors, which is generally stated in 21:7 as “he who overcomes shall inherit these things.”

The inheritance there is immediately explained to be the enjoyment of God’s covenantal presence among His people (so also 21:3). This is precisely the force of the promise in 2:7. To eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God is alluded to again at the conclusion of the book as a picture of forgiveness, where it is a clear reference to the restoration of mankind to its original unfallen state, the tree of life standing for the presence of God (22:1-3).<sup>59</sup>

### **The redeemed had not defiled themselves with women, they follow the Lamb, are lie free, and blameless**

Rev 14:3-4 describes the character of the redeemed: they had not defiled themselves with women, they follow the Lamb wherever he goes, they are lie free, and blameless. These characteristics are not presented as the cause of redemption but are a description of the redeemed. The symbolic description of the 144,000 as male virgins indicates purity, perhaps in light of holy war traditions (Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 230-31), and should not be read as indicating male soteriological priority or literal celibacy. Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 190-91.<sup>60</sup>

### **God rewards according to what a man has done**

Jesus’s ... assertion in [Rev. 22:] v. 12, “My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done”, is an allusion to Isa. 40:10, “Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him” (cf. similar language in Isa. 62:11). This refers to God’s work of bestowing blessings of salvation on His faithful people, though judgment of the unfaithful is likely implicit. That the “reward” and “recompense” focus on salvation is apparent in that Isa. 40:10 is the content of the good news of Isa. 40:9 and a result of God’s forgiveness of “iniquity” (40:2).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 88

<sup>57</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 32

<sup>58</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 32

<sup>59</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 59

<sup>60</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 184 (ftnt. 14)

<sup>61</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 517



### **The broader New Testament bears witness to the necessity of works, sanctification, or perseverance in the attainment of final salvation**

The broader New Testament bears witness to the necessity of works, sanctification, or perseverance in the attainment of final salvation. See Matt 25:31-46; John 8:31; 15:5-6; Rom 2:6-10; 8:12-14; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 9:24-27; Gal 5:19-21; 6:7-8; Eph 5:5-10; Phil 2:12-13; Col 1:21-23; 1 Thess 4:1-7; 2 Thess 2:13-17; Heb 12:14; 2 Pet 1:10-11; 1 John 1:6; 2:3, 4, 9, 15, 29; 3:1-3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; Jude 20-24; Rev 2:10-11. Cf. Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*; Owens, *The Doctrine of Sanctification with Respect to Its Role in Eternal Salvation*.<sup>62</sup> Serious warnings against falling away and not gaining final salvation fill the pages of the NT (Matt 10:32-33; Luke 8:11-14; Rom 8:12-13; 1 Cor 9:23-27; 15:1-2; Gal 5:2-6; 6:7-10; Col 1:21-23; Heb 2:1-4; 3:1-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:12-29). These warnings are predicated, as in the Apocalypse, on an understanding of salvation as a process (a process of overcoming) that will not reach its fulfillment until God's final day of salvation and judgment.<sup>62</sup>

### **There is no exhortation in the Apocalypse to believe in God or Jesus in order to be saved**

Does John's emphasis on motivating a human response of 'overcoming' indicate that salvation is not dependent upon faith alone? One will look in vain in the Apocalypse for exhortations to believe in God or Jesus in order to be saved. Instead the Apocalypse contains exhortations to action: overcome through repentance, worship, witness, perseverance, and obedience.

Does this mean that faith or belief was not important for John in his understanding of a Christians' experience and relationship to God? Does John promote a works-based salvation? This impression might be strengthened by the repeated emphasis upon a final judgment in accordance with works (Rev 2:23; 18:6; 20:12, 13; 22:12; cf. Rev 14:13).

Such a conclusion, however, would be premature and wide off the mark. Belief in God's sovereignty and Christ's ability and willingness to save function as the unstated assumption behind John's conception of the human response and reception of God's salvation. It is taken for granted that the actions associated with overcoming would be based on belief. ...

Works are not soteriologically optional but are an integral component of a holistic believing human response to God's saving initiative.<sup>63</sup>

### **Sin and bondage are dealt with by Christ's blood**

Sin and bondage are dealt with by Christ's blood (Rev 1:5; 5:9), while death awaits its final defeat just prior to the consummation of salvation: resurrection life in God's new creation (Rev 20:14; 21:4).<sup>64</sup>

### **Through his death and resurrection, Christ has already won his decisive victory**

Fundamental to Revelation's whole understanding of the way in which Christ establishes God's kingdom on earth is the conviction that in his death and resurrection Christ has already won his decisive victory over evil. This conviction is portrayed in chapter 5, which is the continuation of the foundational vision of God's rule in heaven in chapter 4.<sup>65</sup>

### **God's messiah reconstituted the people of God on the basis of repentance, allegiance, and bearing witness**

The Apocalypse of John does not elaborate or explain how things went wrong or how evil entered and corrupted God's good creation. God's promises to his people were fulfilled and the end times begun by the violent death of God's messiah who, through his death, reconstituted the people of God on the basis of repentance and allegiance to himself.

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<sup>62</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 199 (ftnt. 45)

<sup>63</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, pages 200-201, 202; Underlining added)

<sup>64</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 179

<sup>65</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 73

The people of God in this final period of history carry God's seal and must overcome by bearing witness to Christ's lordship and worshiping God alone—actions that will certainly result in increased persecution and death. This final period of history would soon end with the return of Christ, the resurrection of all people, final judgment, and God's creation of a new heaven and earth in which his people will dwell. This narrative stands in continuity and full dependence on the Old Testament narratives and brings the Old Testament narratives to a final and fitting conclusion.<sup>66</sup>

### **Real spiritual struggles are going on behind the scenes of apparently insignificant earthly events**

There is also emphasis on this heavenly perspective so that the churches will be reminded that real spiritual struggles are going on behind the scenes of what appear to be insignificant earthly appearances or events. Indeed, the reason for addressing churches through their representative angels is to remind them that they have already begun to participate in a heavenly dimension and that their real and eternal home is in that dimension of the new heavens and earth (see 4:4; 21:1–22:5), inaugurated through Christ's death and resurrection (see 3:14). Such a reminder should motivate them not to place their ultimate security in the old world, as do unbelieving, idolatrous "earth-dwellers" (see 6:17).

The focus on the heavenly perspective also makes the churches aware that their victory over the threat of idolatrous compromise comes ultimately from the heavenly sphere, where the Lamb and God sitting on the throne are centrifugal forces exerting their power on earth through the Spirit. The "lamps" of the Spirit give power to the ecclesiastical "lampstands" to shine their light of witness throughout the earth (see 1:4, 12-13; 4:5; 5:6). One of the ways the church is to remember this heavenly perspective is by modeling its worship on the heavenly liturgy communicated in the apocalyptic vision (see 4:4).<sup>67</sup>

### **The Apocalypse has a focus on ethical instruction**

The Apocalypse has a focus on ethical instruction, not just on eschatological prediction. Thus, in the letters we note criticisms, cautions, counsels, and commands that have ethical significance. (Olutola K. Peters, *The Mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John*, 141)<sup>68</sup>

### **John primarily employs soteriology as motivation**

John primarily employs soteriology as motivation in the Apocalypse; that is, John presents full and final salvation as a future event that would not decisively culminate until Christ's return in order to motivate his hearers to overcome in the present through complete faithfulness to Jesus unto death. Those who responded positively to his call to overcome through repentance, witness, worship, perseverance, and obedience would be saved with God's people in the final day of salvation and judgment, while those who did not respond appropriately would be judged with God's enemies.<sup>69</sup>

### **Soteriology and eschatology have begun, they are inaugurated**

In general, John's eschatology, and thereby his soteriology, could be described as inaugurated; that is, it is both 'now' or 'already' and 'not yet' at the same time—it is inaugurated but not yet consummated, begun but not yet finished.<sup>70</sup>

### **Christians *have been saved, are being saved, and finally, will be saved***

Christians *have been saved* (Rom 8:24; Eph 2:5, 8; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5), *are being saved* (1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15; 1 Pet 1:9; 3:21), and finally, *will be saved* (Matt 10:22; 24:13; [cf. Luke 21:19]; Rom 5:9-10; 13:11; 1 Cor 3:15; 5:5; 1 Thess 5:8-9; 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pet 1:5; 2:2). This past, present, and future diversity is found in other soteriological terms and concepts as well: the kingdom of God that has come (Matt 12:28; Luke 17:21) and will come (Matt 6:10; 25:34; Luke 19:11; 21:31; Acts 14:22; 2 Thess 1:5; 1 Cor 15:50); redemption is possessed (Rom 3:24; Eph

<sup>66</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, pages 107-108

<sup>67</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 5

<sup>68</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 2

<sup>69</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 205

<sup>70</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 180

1:7; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Heb 9:12) and yet hoped for (Luke 21:28; Rom 8:23; Eph 1:13-14); eternal life is both eschatological (Mark 10:29-30) and a present possession (John 5:24; 6:47, 54; 1 John 5:11-13); adoption is completed (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5) and yet waited for (Rom 8:23); justification is declared in the present (Luke 18:14; Rom 3:24; 4:5; 5:1, 9; 1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:7) and still waited for in the future (Matt 12:37; Rom 2:13; Gal 2:17; 5:5)<sup>71</sup>

### **John's hearers are released from their sins, redeemed, are among the people of God, a kingdom and priests**

Christ's sacrificial death is the means by which John's hearers are loosed from their sins, redeemed from mankind, included within the people of God, and made to be a kingdom and priests to God—God's people are divinely sealed, measured, nourished, and protected in the present time period of tribulation and distress. In their worship God's people on earth participate in the heavenly worship of God and anticipate their future day of deliverance and vindication in God's new creation.<sup>72</sup>

### **The eschatological victory of Jesus Christ has already been won**

In the theology of Revelation it is foundational that the eschatological victory of Jesus Christ has already been won, and its immediate result, in constituting a people of God drawn from all nations, is a kind of realization of God's kingdom in the sense that this people already acknowledges God's rule. The emphasis on future eschatology comes from the recognition that this is not the goal of God's purpose. The sense in which God's kingdom has not yet come is that the powers which dominate the world do so in defiance of God and his righteousness.

The church does not exist for itself, but in order to participate in the coming of God's universal kingdom. The victory the Messiah has already won is the decisive eschatological event, but it cannot have reached its goal until all evil is abolished from God's world and all the nations are gathered into the Messiah's kingdom. This is indeed a Jewish apocalyptic perspective on the Christian salvation-event, but it is an entirely necessary counterweight to a kind of realized eschatology which so spiritualizes the kingdom of God as to forget the unredeemed nature of the world.

Revelation's future eschatology serves to keep the church orientated towards God's world and God's future for the world.<sup>73</sup>

### **A present salvation along with a future salvation that is a full and final event**

The Apocalypse advocates what might be called inaugurated soteriology. The hearers were saved in the sense that they had been loosed from their sins, redeemed, and had been included within God's people; they had been made a kingdom and priests. This identity as God's people, however, only represents an inauguration of the salvation God has in store for his people—it is partial, incomplete, and liable to forfeiture based upon a failure to overcome. Those who overcome will inherit final and full salvation in God's new creation—at that point they would be past the danger of sin, temptation, and compromise and would be fully and finally secure.

In the Apocalypse, initial salvation is invisible, spiritual (loosing from sins), individual, and incomplete, while final salvation is concrete, visible, physical, political and corporate, cosmic, and complete. ...

Throughout the Apocalypse's argumentation, John presents full and final salvation as a future event that would not decisively culminate until Christ's return in order to motivate his hearers to overcome in the present through complete faithfulness to Jesus unto death. Those who responded positively to his call to overcome would be saved with God's people in the final day of salvation and judgment, while those who did not respond appropriately would be judged with God's enemies.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 199 (ftnt. 44)

<sup>72</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 189

<sup>73</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 162

<sup>74</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 203

## Revelation's prophecy for the "latter days"

John's statement in 1:1 ("The Revelation ... which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place") is taken from Dan. 2:28, 29, 45, where God shows Daniel what must take place "in the latter days" or "after these things": "He has made known ... what will take place in the latter days" (Dan. 2:28) "... what would take place after this" (Dan. 2:29) "... what will take place after this" (Dan. 2:45) "to show ... the things which must shortly [or quickly] take place" (Rev. 1:1)

If we compare Rev. 1:1 with the passages in Daniel, the thought is almost identical. The significant difference in what God speaks to John involves the replacement of "the latter days" or "after this" (years yet far off to Daniel) with "shortly" or "quickly," thus implying that Daniel's "latter days" (= "after this") are on the brink of unfolding, in fact beginning to unfold. What was far off to Daniel is staring John in the face. In 1:3, John says that the time is "near," using a word similar to that spoken by Jesus in Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God at hand." It is likely that "the kingdom of God is at hand" is parallel with and a further explanation of "the time is fulfilled." If so, the idea of "near" is a close synonym of "fulfilled." The Greek verb for "nearness" has the sense of "about to arrive" or "beginning to arrive." It will not be happening far off in the future: it is beginning to happen now, and much more is around the corner.<sup>75</sup>

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In Luke 20:18 Jesus equates the "stone" of His ministry with the end-time rock of Daniel's last-days kingdom. To Jesus, the prophetic words of Daniel are on the verge of fulfillment. And John is no different from Jesus in his understanding.<sup>76</sup>

## John's Foundational Narrative: The Future

God and Christ are coming again soon to visit the earth (Rev 1:1, 3, 4, 7, 8; 2:16; 3:11; 6:16-17; 10:6; 16:15; 19:11-16; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20) and to establish their visible kingdom there (Rev 11:15, 17; 15:4; 19:6) on the great day (Rev 6:17; 16:14). This visit will result in the final eschatological battle (Rev 16:12-16; 17:14a; 19:19-21; 20:7-10), resurrection (Rev 20:4-6, 12-13), judgment (Rev 3:10; 6:12-17; 11:18; 14:8-11, 17-20; 16:19-21; 17:14; 18:1-24; 19:1-3, 15; 20:11-15; 21:8, 27; 22:12, 15) and the making of a new creation (Rev 21:1, 5). Those who overcome will experience never-ending life in this new creation without suffering, sickness, death, or pain (Rev 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 27-28; 3:4, 5, 12, 21; 5:10; 7:15-17; 14:1-5; 19:7, 9; 21:2-4, 6-7; 9-26; 22:1-5, 14, 17).<sup>77</sup>

## Full salvation still lies ahead

Full, final, and complete salvation is reserved for the future day when the kingdoms of this world will become in concrete reality the kingdom of God and his Christ (Rev 11:15). This future time period of God's ultimate victory and the saints' ultimate vindication and salvation is preeminently described in the descent and description of New Jerusalem in Rev 22:1-22:5, the marriage of the Lamb and his bride (Rev 19:7-9; 21:2, 9). God will make a new heaven and earth for his resurrected people to inhabit (Rev 21:1, 5), and he will dwell with his people and intimately wipe away all tears and abolish death, mourning, crying, and pain (Rev 21:3-4; 22:3-4). God's people will have access to springs of living water (Rev 21:6; 22:1), the tree of life (Rev 22:2, 14, 19), and the safety and security of life in and as the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2, 922:5).

This final salvation is described in the proclamations to the seven churches in the promises to the overcomer: the right to the tree of life (Rev 2:7); the crown of life (Rev 2:10); immunity from the second death (Rev 2:11); the hidden manna and white stone with a new name on it (Rev 2:17); authority over the nations (Rev 2:26); the morning star (Rev 2:28); white clothing (Rev 3:4); permanent solidarity with God's temple as a pillar (Rev 3:12); sitting with Christ on his throne (Rev 3:21).

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<sup>75</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, pages 29-30

<sup>76</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 30

<sup>77</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 106

The final salvation of God's people is further described in the visionary sections of the book: they will reign on the earth (Rev 5:9; 20:4-6; 22:5); God will dwell among them and the lamb will perfectly shepherd them (Rev 7:15-17); they will sing a new song on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-5); those who die will experience rest (Rev 14:13; cf. Rev 6:11). Salvation finds its origin and belongs to God (Rev 7:10; 12:10; 19:1) who will send it to his creation and his people with the return of Christ on the clouds (Rev 1:7).<sup>78</sup>

### **The “not yet possessed” dimensions of John’s soteriology form the grounds for his motivation**

It is striking that the inaugurated dimensions of John’s soteriology (being loosed from sins, redeemed, made a kingdom and priests, and sealed) play only a minor role in John’s motivation while the not yet possessed dimensions of John’s soteriology repeatedly form the grounds for John’s motivation.<sup>79</sup>

### **Christ will soon return to judge and punish sinners and bring salvation to his people**

John’s motivational strategy is thoroughly grounded in his foundational narrative. Christ will soon return to judge and punish sinners and bring salvation to his people. In light of that future day, John exhorts his hearers to make choices that will result in their participation in final salvation, entrance into the New Jerusalem, and to avoid choices that would lead to their exclusion from final salvation.

Soteriology surfaces as the primary explicit and implicit motivating factor in John’s argumentation. For John, believers were not secure in their final salvation until they had demonstrated faithfulness unto death. Until that point there was still a need to overcome in light of the danger that they might fail to overcome.<sup>80</sup>

**Rev. 22:7** “See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

**Rev. 22:12** “See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

**Rev. 22:20** The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

**Rev. 1:11-12** I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it.

I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

### **Christ’s coming is repeatedly said to be near at hand**

For example, the church in Philadelphia was promised: “Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Rev. 3:11). On two other occasions he makes the identical promise: “Behold, I am coming quickly!” (Rev. 22:7, 12).<sup>81</sup>

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At least twelve times (possibly more) the Book of Revelation promises or warns that Christ is going to “come.” In most cases, the impression is given that his coming will not be very far distant.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, pages 189-190

<sup>79</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, pages 195-196

<sup>80</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 176

<sup>81</sup> *Revelation, four views*, page 25

<sup>82</sup> *Revelation, four views*, page 23

### Three times in the epilogue, Jesus himself promises, “I am coming soon”

The same issue which we have discussed in the last section has a further aspect which is worth noticing, if only because modern readers frequently find it problematic. This is the imminent expectation, which Revelation shares with most of the New Testament documents. John’s prophecy is a revelation of ‘what must *soon* take place’ (1:1; cf. 1:3; 22:10: ‘the time is near’). This cannot mean only that the great conflict of the church and the Empire is soon to *begin*, for the parousia itself is also said to be soon. Three times in the epilogue, Jesus himself promises, ‘I am coming soon’ (22:7, 12, 20; cf. 2:16; 3:11 ).<sup>83</sup>

### Christ’s judgment at the parousia is the divine judgment, as was his sacrificial death

Seven times in Revelation, Christ himself declares ‘I am coming’ (*erchomai*: 2:5, 16; 3:11; 16:15; 22:6, 12, 20). His judgment at his coming is emphatically God’s. For example, Revelation 22:12 follows common early Christian practice in quoting an Old Testament prophecy of God’s coming to judgment (Isa. 40:10; 62:11) with reference to the parousia of Christ, and expands it with the well-known principle of divine judgment (‘to repay according to everyone’s work’), drawn here from Proverbs 24:12 (cf Matt. 16:27; 1 Clem. 34:3; 2 Clem. 17:4).

But if Christ’s judgment at the parousia is the divine judgment, the same also must be said of his sacrificial death, which we shall see is also central to the theology of Revelation. When the slaughtered Lamb is seen ‘in the midst of the divine throne in heaven (5:6; cf 7:17), the meaning is that Christ’s sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world*. The symbol of the Lamb is no less a divine symbol than the symbol of ‘the One who sits on the throne’.<sup>84</sup>

#### Revelation 19:11-16, NRSV

Then I saw heaven opened,  
and there was a white horse!  
Its rider is called Faithful and True,  
and in righteousness he judges and makes war.  
His eyes are like a flame of fire,  
and on his head are many diadems;  
and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself.  
He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood,  
and his name is called The Word of God.  
And the armies of heaven,  
**wearing fine linen, white and pure,**  
were following him on white horses.  
From his mouth comes a sharp sword  
with which to strike down the nations,  
and he will rule them with a rod of iron;  
he will tread the wine press of  
the fury of the wrath  
of God the Almighty.  
On his robe and on his thigh  
he has a name inscribed,  
"King of kings and Lord of lords."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 157

<sup>84</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 64

<sup>85</sup> Revelation 19:11-16, NRSV

### **The robes of fellow-partakers have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb**

The idea of an inaugurated end-time tribulation in Rev. 7:14 is compatible with the way “tribulation” (Greek *thlipsis*) is used elsewhere in the NT. The great tribulation, therefore, began with the sufferings of Jesus and is now shared in by all believers, who are, with John, fellow-partakers “in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus” (1:9).

The fact that they are those who have come out of the great tribulation accounts for the whiteness of their robes, which have been washed ... in the blood of the Lamb, an OT metaphor which speaks of the forgiveness of sins (Isa. 1:18; Zech. 3:3-5).

Jesus Himself is described in Rev. 19:13 as clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and so their robes express the fact that these saints have followed Jesus faithfully in the way of the cross.

In 6:9-11, those who were slain were given a white robe because they had maintained their testimony to Christ. Despite resistance, they continued believing in and testifying to the Lamb’s death on their behalf, which has taken their sin away and granted them salvation. Conversely, those in the church who compromise and do not witness to Christ because of trials have “soiled their garments” (3:4). Tribulation has only served to refine and purify the faith and character of the saints.<sup>86</sup>

### **The establishment God’s kingdom on earth is a work of salvation and judgment**

The role of Christ in Revelation is to establish God’s kingdom on earth: in the words of 11:15, to turn ‘the kingdom of the world’ (currently ruled by evil) into ‘the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah’. This is a work of both salvation and judgment. ... Salvation and judgment are inevitably the two sides of a single coin. It is also a process which begins with his earthly life and death and ends with his parousia.

The victory he has already achieved in his death and resurrection is decisive, but needs to be continued by his Christian followers in the present and completed at his parousia in the future.<sup>87</sup>

### **The contrast between the 144,000 Israelites and the innumerable multitude**

The 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4-8) contrast with the innumerable multitude from all nations (7:9), but the two images depict the same reality. They are parallel to the two contrasting images of Christ in 5:5-6: the 144,000 Israelites are the followers of the Davidic Messiah, the Lion of Judah (note that the tribe of Judah is listed first), while the innumerable multitude are the people of the slaughtered Lamb, ransomed from all the nations (5:9). ...

There is a further contrast between the 144,000 Israelites and the innumerable multitude which makes the parallel with 5:5-6 exact. The 144,000 are an army. This is implicit in the fact that 7:4-8 is a census of the tribes of Israel. In the Old Testament a census was always a reckoning of the military strength of the nation, in which only males of military age were counted. The twelve equal contingents from the twelve tribes are the army of all Israel, reunited in the last days according to the traditional eschatological hope, mustered under the leadership of the Lion of Judah to defeat the Gentile oppressors of Israel.

But the multitude who celebrate their victory in heaven, ascribing it to God and the Lamb (7:9-10), ‘have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (7:14). This means that they are martyrs, who have triumphed by participating, through their own deaths, in the sacrificial death of the Lamb.<sup>88</sup>

### **The few who have been faithful will walk with Christ in white**

Only a few of the Sardian Christians had not “soiled their garments” [Rev. 3:](v. 4), a phrase which refers to some kind of compromise with pagan or idolatrous practices. The word “soiled” occurs also

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<sup>86</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, pages 158-159

<sup>87</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 67

<sup>88</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, pages 76-77

in 14:4, where it refers to those “not defiled with women,” which, in context (see 14:8 on the concept of idolatrous fornication with Babylon) refers not so much to literal sexual immorality (though that might be involved) as to involvement with pagan or idolatrous activity.

The likelihood is that the Christians in Sardis had for the most part fallen into a stupor of compromise and fear of the consequences of a bold witness for Christ. [Rev. 3:]4 The few (literally, the “few names”) who have been faithful, however, will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. They are worthy because they have not soiled their garments, and these factors together become the basis for the future reward of walking with Christ in unsoiled clothes.

That this concerns a reward for perseverance through suffering is further evident from 7:14, which refers to “the ones coming out of the great tribulation” and to those who “have washed their robes” and “made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” That this is the significance of the overcomers receiving white garments is also evident from 6:9-11, where “those who had been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained” were given a “white robe.” Again the role of witness is echoed in the reward of the white garments. [Rev. 3:]5-6 These faithful saints are the ones who have overcome through a life of faithful witness, and (the promise is repeated) they will be dressed in white: He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments.<sup>89</sup>

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White clothes in Revelation, when worn by the saints, always signify a gift from God given to those with tested and purified faith (3:5-6, 18; 6:11; 7:13-14; in 3:18, the idea of buying the clothes from Christ is used to encourage believers to identify with Christ’s clothes in 1:13-14, which means to identify with Him and not with the compromising world). Therefore, the white clothes are not merely the saints’ righteous acts but the reward for or result of such acts. This emphasizes God’s justifying or vindicating action.<sup>90</sup>

### **Christ will not erase the faithful saint’s name from the book of life**

Christ will not erase the faithful saint’s name from the book of life. The book of life appears five other times in Revelation (13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27), and contains the names of believers written in it before the foundation of the world.<sup>91</sup>

#### **Revelation 7:9-10 (NRSV)**

I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God  
who is seated on the throne,  
and to the Lamb!”

#### **Rev. 12:10-11, NRSV**

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,

“Now have come the salvation  
and the power and the kingdom  
of our God and the authority of his Messiah,  
for the accuser of our comrades  
has been thrown down,

<sup>89</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 80

<sup>90</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 404

<sup>91</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 80



## The soteriology of the Book of Revelation

who accuses them day and night  
before our God.

But they have conquered him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony,

for they did not cling to life  
even in the face of death."

### **Revelation 19:1-2 (NRSV)**

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great  
multitude in heaven, saying,

"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power  
to our God,

for his judgments are true and just."

### **Christ is the only One worthy to be accepted before God**

Rev. 5:9-10, which says that Christ is the only One worthy to be accepted before God and that He was slain and redeemed by His blood people from their sins so that they also could be considered worthy.<sup>92</sup>

### **Rev. 5:8-10 (NRSV)**

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

They sing a new song:

"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,

for you were slaughtered  
and by your blood

you ransomed for God  
saints from every tribe and language and  
people and nation;

you have made them to be a kingdom  
and priests  
serving our God,

and they will reign on earth."

### **Can Christians Lose Their Salvation?**

John's motivational strategy naturally raises the common question: Can Christians lose their salvation? This question fails from the start on two points. First, it betrays a failure to think and talk about salvation in accord with how John thought and talked about it. In the Apocalypse, salvation belongs to God and Christ and will come fully and finally to God's creation in his great day of salvation and judgment. It is cosmic in scope and is possessed by God who will bring it to his people in his new creation; this is the 'not yet' of salvation. Second and conversely, the question fails because it seems to superficially equate salvation with conversion-initiation; the 'now' of salvation. A full-bodied New Testament soteriology includes past, present, and future dimensions—with many texts,

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<sup>92</sup> *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, page 517

particularly rhetorically motivational texts, emphasizing the future non-possessed aspects of salvation.<sup>93</sup>

### **Images used by John seem to convey the loss of something already attained**

In one sense it is not quite accurate to describe the danger confronting John's hearers in terms of Christians losing their salvation because 'salvation' is not yet something that is fully possessed. On the other hand, the images used by John seem to convey the loss of something already attained: the lampstand could be removed (Rev 2:5); the crown could be taken (Rev 3:11); the name could be blotted out of the book of life (Rev 3:5); they, as God's people, could be judged with his enemies (Rev 18:6; cf. Rev 2:16, 23); they could lose access to the tree of life (Rev 22:19). Using the language of the Apocalypse this would not be considered a loss of salvation since *σωτηρια* is only ever attributed to God in settings of worship in the Apocalypse. God cannot fail to possess and bring salvation to his people and his creation. The potential danger consists in being excluded from membership and participation in the people of God who will be saved in that final day. Soteriology is thus closely linked to ecclesiology in the Apocalypse; not an ecclesiology based on denominational affiliation, sacraments, or outward appearances, but based upon allegiance, worship, and witness to the true God and his Christ—in a word—overcoming.<sup>94</sup>

### **The expected Messiah of David is reinterpreted by the image of the Lamb**

Jesus really is the expected Messiah of David (22:16). But insofar as the latter was associated with military violence and narrow nationalism, it is reinterpreted by the image of the Lamb. The Messiah has certainly won a victory, but he has done so by sacrifice and for the benefit of people from all nations (5:9). Thus the means by which the Davidic Messiah has won his victory is explained by the image of the Lamb, while the significance of the image of the Lamb is now seen to lie in the fact that his sacrificial death was a victory over evil.<sup>95</sup>

### **What Christ does, God does**

It is also notable that many times when [John] is talking most deliberately about God he does not call God 'God' either. He says far more about the deity of God by calling him 'the Alpha and the Omega' than he does by calling him 'God', and he also calls Jesus 'the Alpha and the Omega'. The importance of John's extraordinarily high Christology for the message of Revelation is that it makes absolutely clear that what Christ does, God does.<sup>96</sup>

### **God as "the one who is and was and is to come" is an interpretation of the Name "YHWH"**

The description of God as "the one who is and was and is to come" is an interpretation of the name "YHWH," based on reflection on Exod. 3:14 together with twofold and threefold temporal descriptions of God in Isaiah (cf. Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12), which themselves likely are reflections on the divine name in Exod. 3:14. The name in Exod. 3:14 was also expanded in a threefold manner by later Jewish tradition, most notably *Targum Psalms-J. Deut. 32:39*, "I am he who is and who was, and I am he who will be." The first element, "the one who is" (*ho On*), derives from Exod. 3:14 LXX (*ego eimi ho on*), and although the preposition *apo* calls for the genitive, John keeps *ho an* in the nominative in order to highlight it as an allusion to Exodus (for a full account of the phrase, see McDonough 1999).<sup>97</sup>

### **The Present Activity of God, Christ, and Satan**

God is presently reigning on his throne (Rev 4:2-3, 9-10; 5:1, 7, 13; 7:15) with Christ (Rev 3:21; 7:17) and with the seven spirits before the throne (Rev 1:4; 4:5), being worshipped continuously by heavenly beings (Rev 4:8-11; 5:11-14). Jesus is presently reigning as the ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev 1:5).

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<sup>93</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, pages 197-199

<sup>94</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 200

<sup>95</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 74

<sup>96</sup> *Theology of Revelation*, page 63

<sup>97</sup> *NT use of the OT*, page 1089

In addition to sitting on God's throne, Jesus, in his transformed and exalted body (Rev 1:13-16), walks among the churches (Rev 1:13; 2:1), speaks through the Apocalypse to them (Rev 1:19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), judges and punishes (Rev 2:5, 16, 21-23; 3:3, 16), and reproves, disciplines, and helps his people (Rev 3:8, 19, 20). The messages to the churches are presented as the direct speech of the Spirit to them (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).<sup>98</sup>

### **The main differences between John and the authors of the Old Testament centre on Jesus**

The main differences (extensions) between John and the authors of the Old Testament center on (1) John's identification of the Messiah as Jesus, (2) the redefinition of the people of God based on allegiance to the slain and resurrected Messiah instead of ethnicity, and (3) the belief that in Christ's death and resurrection the last days had begun.<sup>99</sup>

### **Summaries: Keys to understanding the Book of Revelation.**

- The whole book of Revelation is one letter.
- That letter was to be taken by a courier and read out aloud in churches along a road that ran from Ephesus to Laodicea. The author was very familiar with each of the churches.
- Those Christians were experiencing intense persecution.
- The letter was designed to encourage these first-century Christians to "overcome". It told them that the end was imminent ("soon") and they had to remain faithful, to the point of being prepared to losing their lives.
- John had gone to Patmos in order to compose ("receive") the message. He put his words into the mouth of Jesus, and others.
- Very cleverly, John employed the lurid imagery of apocalyptic writing in order to support the Christians while at the same time using the symbolism to hide the messages from their persecutors. This technique had been used by the 2nd century BCE writer of the Book of Daniel when Antiochus Epiphanes was persecuting Jews. John relied heavily on the Book of Daniel.
- None of John's expectations came to pass. He got it wrong
- John did not write the Apocalypse in order to provide a detailed timetable of events that would unfold thousands of years in the future. Instead, John wrote to affect and move his hearers at the end of the first century, to motivate them to reject idolatrous compromise with the surrounding cultural and political institutions and to overcome through repentance, worship, witness, perseverance, and obedience.

<sup>98</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 103

<sup>99</sup> *Soteriology in the Apocalypse*, page 108 (fnt. 50)

The opening (Rev. 1:4) and closing (22:21) of the biblical Book of Revelation show that it is a letter. It is written to a series of communities along a road running from Ephesus to Laodicea by a man who is very familiar with them and who is deeply concerned for them. So he writes a circular letter that is to be read out aloud (1:3) in each community. His overriding concern is for them to survive, to be saved despite the inordinate pressures they are experiencing.

To achieve this, John employs the vehicle of apocalyptic and revelatory treatises. It was a style of writing they were familiar with. Several such treatises have survived, including: The Apocalypse of Peter, The Apocalypse of Paul, The Shepherd of Hermas; The Secret Book of John, and so on. The book of 1 Enoch figures prominently throughout the New Testament writings. In writing his messages to his beloved communities, John drew on imagery from within Judaism and beyond.

Mark 13, Matthew 24, 25 and Luke 21 are known as the "little apocalypses". They supposedly predict the future destruction of Jerusalem's temple and the fate of Jesus' followers. These too, were not intended as prophecies, but were intended to provide assurance to those who remained faithful. Each of these chapters was written after Jerusalem's destruction. In this way they repeated the actions of the second-century BCE Jews who wrote the Book of Daniel to provide comfort to their community at the time it was being persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes. They wrote Daniel as if predicting the regions' dominant nations whereas in fact they wrote it after the fact.

Being concerned for his communities' salvation, John encourages them to persevere, to overcome, and to keep the commandments. He tells them they will survive, even if they are killed. They will be victorious, and most importantly he repeats that it will be over "very soon", for Jesus is "coming quickly", even within 1,260 days.

"Salvation" for John and for those communities meant: obedience, perseverance, and overcoming. John's concept of "salvation" is different from the ideas created by Paul's imaginative mind. Paul's form of following Jesus was not the only one. Each Jewish sect claimed to follow Jesus and his directives, yet they did not fully agree with one another. Nothing has changed.

These writers had no more predictive insights than anyone else. Throughout the centuries, the abject failure of fulfilments has generated any number of explanations and interpretations. All have failed miserably, yet people continue to create contemporary solutions.

The lesson that history teaches is that people do not learn the lesson that history teaches, and they keep on repeating the same mistake over and over again.

John, the writer of the biblical Book of Revelation, employed the apocalyptic style of writing in order to create and sustain strength and commitment within the communities he deeply cared about and was committed to. He was not predicting the course of Western civilization's history.