

On Reading, Interpreting, and Proclaiming The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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The following is material not contained in my *Discipleship On The Edge: An Expositional Journey Through The Book of Revelation*. It was felt that all this was ‘too technical’ for the tone and format of the book.

A word about the phrase “discipleship on the edge”

“And though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators.”

(G.K. Chesterton, 1908, in *Orthodoxy*)

“The Apocalypse of John is a work of immense learning, astonishingly meticulous literary artistry, remarkable creative imagination, radical political critique, and profound theology.”

(Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, ix)

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1.0. We must honor the **genre(s)** in which the book is written.

a. Letter (1:1-8; 22:8-21)

b. Prophecy (1:3; 22:10)

c. Apocalypsis (1:1)

i. A definition

“‘Apocalypse’ is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world”.

J.J.Collins (“Introduction: Towards the Morphology
Of a Genre”, *Semeia* 14 (1979), p.9)

Word is mis-used in contemporary media!

ii. The purpose of apocalyptic literature

a. To set the present moment (with all its ambiguity) in light of the **unseen realities of the future**.

b. To set the present moment (with all its ambiguity) in light of the **unseen realities of the present**.

2.0. We must honor the **title** of the book: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”

- 2.1. Not “Revelations”
- 2.2. Not “the Revelation”
- 2.3. Not “the Revelation of St. John”
- 2.4. But “The Revelation **of Jesus Christ**”
of ...about...by

What we learn about Jesus in the book:

Chapter 1

Chapters 2-3

Chapters 4-5

Chapters 6-7

Chapters 8-11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14- 15:4

Chapter 15:5 – 19:10

Chapter 19:11 – 20:15

Chapters 21-22

3.0. In the book we are **not given** any new truth; what we are given is the truth-already-revealed in a new way.

“I do not read The Revelation to get additional information about the life of faith in Christ. I have read it all before in law and prophet, in gospel and epistle. Everything in the Revelation can be found in the previous sixty-five books of the Bible. The Revelation adds nothing of substance to what we already know. The truth of the gospel is already complete, revealed in Jesus Christ. There is nothing new to say on the subject. But there is a new way to say it. I read the Revelation not to get more information but to revive my imagination. St. John uses words the way poets do, recombining them in fresh ways so that old truth is freshly perceived. He takes truth that has been eroded to platitude by endless usage and set in motion before us in an ‘animated impassioned dance of ideas.’”

Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988, p. xi-xii).

- 3.1. A “rule of thumb” – any ‘truth’ discovered in book will have already been revealed somewhere else in Scripture; if it not somewhere else it is likely not the ‘truth’.
- 3.2. The new way is the way of imagery. Why?
 - Intellect
 - Emotion
 - Imagination
- 3.3. The Political cartoon (G. Beasley-Murray)
- 3.4. The source of the imagery
 - Roman propaganda
 - Folk religion
 - but mostly the Bible
- 3.5. Principle: look for an **OT reference first**. John is describing the Patmos experience through the lens of the Great Story.
- 3.6. The transforming power of the way of **imagery**.

“We have already noticed the unusual profusion of visual imagery in Revelation and its capacity to create a symbolic world which its readers can enter and thereby have their perception of the world in which they lived transformed. To appreciate the importance of this we should remember that Revelation’s readers in the great cities of the province of Asia were **constantly confronted with powerful images** of the Roman vision of the world. Civic and religious architecture, iconography, statues, rituals and festivals, even visual wonder of cleverly engineered ‘miracles’ (cf. Rev. 13:13-14) in the temples – all provided visual impressions of Roman imperial power and of the splendor of pagan religion. In this context, Revelation provides **a set of Christian prophetic counter-images** which **impress** on its readers a different vision of the world: how it looks from the heaven to which John is caught up in chapter 4. The visual power of the book effects a kind of **purging** of the Christian imagination, **refurbishing** it with **alternative visions** of who the world is and will be.” (My bolding).

“John’s images echo and play on the facts, the fears, the hopes, the imaginings and the myths of his contemporaries, in order to transmute them into elements of his own Christian prophetic meaning”.

Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*
(Cambridge: University Press, 1993,p.17, 19).

- 4.0. John is describing the **symbols** (of the revelation/apocalypse), not the reality the symbols symbolize. (See Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code*)
- 5.0. The word “**open**” is a key to the structure of the book.
 - 5.1. The word “open” and the word “apocalypse”.
 - 5.2. The specific references.

4:1 – “And after these things I looked, and behold, a door
open in heaven”.

11:19 – “And the temple of God which is in heaven was **opened**..”

15:5 – “After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was **opened**”.

19:11- “And I saw heaven **opened**”.

5.3. The chiastic structure determined by “open”

1:1-8 Prologue

Coming
Near
Must
I Am

1:9

1:9-3:22

Jesus – in the middle – robe & sword

Seven messages
Hear
Overcomes

4:1 – open

4:1-11:18

Throne
Scroll
Overcome (5:5)
Lamb
Seven seals
Seven trumpets
(Seven peals of thunder)

11:19 – open

11:19 – 15:4

Sign (12:1)
Sign (12:3)
Overcome (12:11)
Beasts
Sign (15:1)
Overcome (15:2)

15:5 – open

15:5 – 19:10

Seven bowls

17:1 – “come up here and I will show you
the judgment of the harlot”

17:3 – “and he carried me away in the
Spirit into a wilderness”

19:10 – “and I fell at his feet to worship him”

19:10 – “do not do that ...worship God”

19:11 – open

19:11 – 22:5

Jesus – on a horse – robe & sword

Saw
“The one who overcomes shall inherit these things” (21:7)

21:9 – “come up here and I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb”

21:10 – “and he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain”

22:8 – “I fell to worship at the feet of the angel”

22:9 – “do not do that ...worship God”

22:6-21 Epilogue

Coming
Near
Must
I Am

6.0. The question to ask as we read through the book is not “what happens next?,” but “what did John **see next?**” Michael Wilcox, *I Saw Heaven Opened* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975).

6.1. The scenes are not given in chronological order; they are given in the order in which John saw them. The book “does not unfold in a straightforward sequential way. Many times the action of the visions takes us back over territory we have already covered, introducing new information, changed perspectives and surprising twists of plot” – Paul Spilsbury, *The Throne, The Lamb & The Dragon* (Downer Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002, p.50).

6.2. Thus we have the words “saw/see” throughout the book.

1:2 - “Who bore witness to...all he saw”.

1:11 - “Write in a book what you see”.

1:12 - “I saw seven golden lampstands;”

1:17 - “And when I saw Him...”

1:20 - “The seven stars which you saw in My right hand..”

4:1 - “I looked, and behold..” etc.

6.3. Example of this fact of the book.

12:1-12 - when does/did this scene take place?

6.4. Recapitulation

6.5. This explains why we seem to come up “the end” so many times only to start over again.

7.0. The **numbers** in the book are symbols, not statistics.

7.1. We cannot treat some numbers as statistics and others as symbols; the text does not anywhere lead us in such a direction.

7.2. The numbers.

7.3. Examples of how this affects interpretation.

8.0. Running through the whole book is **the call to discipleship**, expressed in various ways, all pointing to the issue of loyalty under pressure.

8.1. The context for discipleship.

1:9 - “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus”.

hupomone – perseverance (or, patient endurance)

1:9; 2:2; 2:3; 2:19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12

tereo – keep

1:3; 2:26; 3:3; 3:8; 3:10; 12:17; 14:12; 16:15; 22:7; 22:9

metanoceo – repent

2:5; 2:16; 2:21; 2:22; 3:3; 3:19; 9:20; 16:9; 16:11

krateo – hold fast

2:13; 2:25; 3:11

nikao – overcome

2:7,11,17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21 (2x); 5:5; 12:11; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7

8.2. The good news in all this:

2:23 – “I am He, the One Who searches the minds and hearts”.

9.0. The **most frequent command** of the book (and, therefore, its major pastoral burden) is “look!” – “behold!” or “lo!”. The second most frequent command is “do not be afraid”. We can obey the second by obeying the first.

9.1. “Do not be afraid”

9.2. “Look!” – idou

10.0. The whole vision is **bracketed** (enveloped) by four key affirmations.

10.1. “coming” (nb – present tense) – 1:7 and 22:7, 12, 20

10.2. “near” – 1:3 and 22:10

10.3. “must” – 1:1 and 22:6

10.4. “I Am” sayings

Prologue ends with God saying

“I Am the Alpha and the Omega”(1:8)

Vision begins with Jesus saying

“I Am the first and the last” (1:17)

Vision ends with God saying

“I Am the Alpha and Omega,
the beginning (arche) and end (telos)” (22:6)

Epilogue begins with Jesus saying

“I Am the Alpha and the Omega,
the first and the last,
the beginning (arche) and the end (telos)” (22:12).