

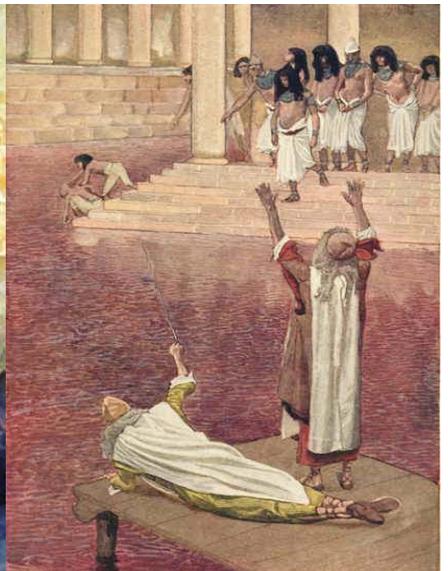
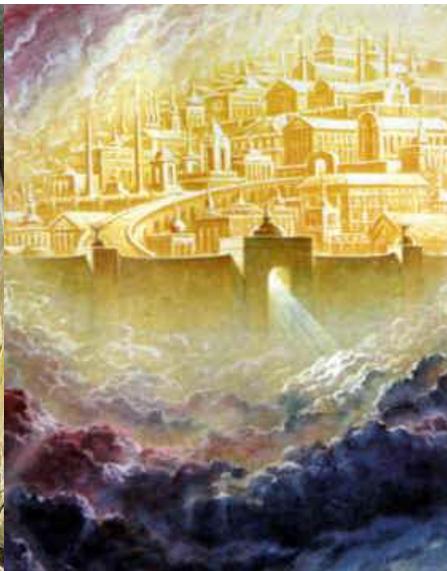


Revealing Revelation



Through the Old and New

Cosmic Pascu, Belfast Bible College



Revelation is impossible to understand without the Hebrew Scriptures

Cosmic Pascu

The book of Revelation is an extraordinary book, however not for those with a mathematical mind nor for those with a logistical or computerised and high-scholars, but for dummies.¹ This book is for uncomplicated people, who under the injustice or oppression of a system, or culture, can understand the interpretation much better than ones who examine the book as a preterist; futurist or historicist views. This book is a guide needed tool for those without help, without hope, without breath. On the other hand, this book is a tool of judgement, where mans power and desire for indulgence in sin, guilds and idolatry are exposed by Christ, the One who sits among the lamp stands. Over the years, this book has become a message without help, without hope and without breath, for those who have made out of it, nothing but a black list of restrictions, which could only be understood by great Scholars or great Preachers, ruling out the ordinary preacher and Christians who struggles with their pressures of life, culture and faith.

In this essay we want to turn the unimaginable to reality by brining the significance² and the message of this book back to the people. Many of those who profess high-quality teaching, will be surprised to find out, that this book could be so well understood by a farmer, who is not only with his head in the book, but with his hands and feet on the ground, experiencing what he reads. In view of this, we want to highlight the understanding of this book within the framework of the Hebrew Scriptures, offering to it an **explored background, a revelation of God and His Son**, and later, a revelation of ourselves, **who are the recipients of this letter**.

I) Exploring the background of Revelation

Much of what has already been written on this subject in the last centuries sprang out a lot of interesting views and themes. Some have been fascinated by numerology or the symbolism in the book; others have interpreted its language literally, while others were even able to predict an end of our age.³ Surprisingly however, proved that all of these approaches have failed to remember, or even consider, one important step when it comes to biblical interpretation, and that

¹ "Like other biblical books, the Apocalypse was intended to be, for the purpose it was meant to subserve, a plain book, to be understood by plain people" Schaff-Herzog – Encyclopaedia of Religious knowledge- Vol. 3, Funk & Wagnall – New York, 1891, p2036 -

² "The major purpose of apocalyptic writings is to reveal mysteries beyond the bounds of normal knowledge: the secrets of the heavens and of the world order, the names and functions of angels, the explanations of natural phenomena, and the secrets of creation, the end days and other eschatological matters, and even the nature of God Himself. " *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Keter Publishers House, Jerusalem, Vol. 3 p179

³ See the comments that Harrington makes from pages 14 to 17, which are under the title of "*Lines of Interpretation*"

is, the background⁴ of this book. Revelation could not be interpreted without the life and activity behind it, without the people and the empire in which and for which was written (Roman Empire). This kind of literary style is not new, and although John is writing to a Greek speaking community, he gives us a strong analogy of the Hebrew Scripture, which means that somewhere in the Scriptures, these events happened before.⁵ For the true believers, to whom he was addressing, these words and images were imprinted in their minds; they remembered their ancestor's stories too. For example, just as the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel needed to be understood in the light of the culture of their day, and similarly Daniel⁶. The same could be said about Revelation. Their message, as John's, was a message that was written for a specific (present) people. In a way, their message was for a future generations too, but it was most immediately relevant to its first reader.⁷ Our mistake when approaching this book is to think that this book is not for today, but it is only for the future. That in itself shows that we are wrong in our approach to understanding the authors of this apocalyptic literature, who are not Greek minded but Jewish (minded). In order to show its relevance to the Hebrew source and meaning, we want to observe three themes, which seemed to be repeating throughout the Scriptures, and even in this book, Revelation:

The Prophets (servants): Provost's comment is really helpful when approaching this theme for he says: *Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were prophets above all because they could be men of their time, particularly sensitive to the social and religious context and particularly clear-sighted about the challenges with which their people were confronted.*⁸

For the people of their time, they were lights when there was no light, they un-wrapped the truth when others have covered and hidden it. These prophets were not just simple messengers, but

⁴ "Domitian's reign is the most likely political background of Revelation. Domitian has been characterised as megalomaniac and tyrannical. He is said to have fostered the imperial cult and encouraged use, in his regard, of the divine title *dominus et deus*. He might be regarded as another Nero. Such assessment made for an assumption that, in his time, there was widespread oppression and persecution of Christians in Asia. This, in turn, was said to account for the anti-Roman stance of Revelation and for the book's emphasis on "tribulation", understood as active persecution." Harrington J W – *Revelation* – The Liturgical Publishers, Minnesota, 1993, p9

⁵ Gonzalez says that "Revelation is more like the books of the ancient prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the rest – who had visions and spoke in images and metaphors, but whose words clearly related to the context in which people lived". Gonzalez L Justo & G Catherine – *Revelation* – WJK Press, Kentucky, 1997 P7

⁶ Keck suggestion is that probably Daniel was "written in the second century BCE at the height of the crisis in Jerusalem under the Seleucid king Antiochus IV, see 1 Maccabees" Keck, p521

⁷"In fact the biblical prophets are far more people of present than of the future. Current events are the primary substance of biblical prophecy" Prevost J-P – *How to read the Apocalypse*, SCM Press, London, 1993 p15

⁸ Prevost, p15

they were the agents through whom God's message of liberation or oppression came through. The same therefore could be said about John.⁹

The message: Like the other apocalyptic writings, each prophet had a message, and in most of the cases, these messages gave an account of the situation in which the people found themselves.¹⁰ One can see the evidence of this in John's letter as he refers to the seven churches (2-3) and later to the Roman Empire (18-19), which is compared with Babylon. This again, shows us strong analogous links with the Book of Daniel (1, 3, and 7), where Babylon became the great enemy or better said: the seat where Satan dwelled. Not only that this message was giving an account of how people lived before God, this also presented them either with blessing or with judgment¹¹, and this could be seen in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, which represent these things through symbols and different images, as John does here with Revelation.

The choice: This could not be advocated or ruled out, for John's approach to this letter remains the same as that which God has initiated at Mount Sinai or at the dedication of the Temple that Solomon build for God in 1 King 9. The approach to this is; that for those who are away or departed from God, they have a choice of coming back to Him, if not judgment will come. This is the same in Jeremiah's and Isaiah (24-27) and Ezekiel's (37-39) case. However, similar to these three books, those who are faithful to God, are also asked to endure to the end (see Rev. 2-3, 22), until Christ will redeem those who are His. These are just three of the many examples that show how this book, which was written by John, was in mutual contact with the Hebrew Scriptures, otherwise, the amount of information that we have in this book would not have been in it. The greatest thing above all is that, in this book, we have even more revelation - which to John, this must have been breath-taking, if one can say that! This again alludes us to Isaiah chapter 6 or 61 where Isaiah's account with the Holy One makes him realize who he is and who God is.

II) Exploring the real Person

Not only does one need to explore the background to discover Scripture's significance but one needs also to reconsider the person of the book. In our case this person is Christ, of whom the

⁹ "*His servant*" Throughout the Old Testament one can see that the word servant means also prophet – see Amos 3:7. In this case, John was God's servant, Christ's voice (prophet) for that world and for those churches from chapter two and three.

¹⁰ "In the Roman period apocalyptic writings dealing especially with the question of national suffering and redemption appeared in increasing number." See Encyclopaedia Judaica, volume 3, page 179

¹¹ "In the messages, each Church hears a verdict based on precise knowledge of its situation, both external and spiritual. There is a praise and blame – usually a mixture of both" Harrington, p17 - See these associations in chapters 2 to 3.

whole Scriptures talks about. This book presents Christ as “**the everything**”, the One who was, who is and who is to come. History may pass or change, but Christ will not, and this will be proven throughout the book. This book unfolds Christ in many ways and here are some key features:

Reveals who He is: (1:1-8) When approaching the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ in terms of who He is, one will soon discover that, in Christ, the whole universe is wrapped in light and awesome glory,¹² the overwhelming love and compassion¹³, He is the Alpha and Omega.¹⁴ Such is the book of Revelation when it comes to the significance of our Lord Jesus Christ, who from the beginning of the Scripture, is pointed to as being the Saviour and the only way that will bring and unify us with the Father.¹⁵ Accounts of God in John’s revelation are present in previous Hebrew Scriptures. When one reads about the sealed scroll, which only Jesus, the lamb that was slain, was able to open.(4-5) We can also see this idea in the Old Testament, when God is revealed to the people by events and not just through words.¹⁶ (See the Exodus 3:16, 4:31; The Mount Sinai and the dedication of Solomon’s Temple in 1Kings 9). This ultimately leads us to His work.

Reveals His work: - In this letter, John depicts the purpose and the work Christ came for. First, we know that He came to represent the truth and to speak the truth.¹⁷ Secondly, we know that He came to make justice by setting the captives free¹⁸; and finally, becoming the lamb who was slaughtered by the human hands as a sacrifice for the whole world. This work is powerfully expressed through the images and the carefully chosen words from the Hebrew Scriptures, such as Isaiah 53, Hosea 6 & 11, Amos 5:1-15 and Jeremiah.

Reveals His Throne – This is another picture that John wants us to see very clearly because it shows us where Christ is and what He does from that Throne.¹⁹ There are a lot of images and activities which are presented before John. Not only do we see Jesus risen and

¹² Revelation 21:23-24 – God gives Light to His new Jerusalem – See also the Song of Zachariah in Luke 1:67-80, for there we can see the significance of Christ as the bearing of light.

¹³ Revelation 21 – 22 – The real relationship between God and Man is reflected in these chapters.

¹⁴ Revelation 1:8-11; 21:6; 22:13; Isaiah 41:4 – 44:6

¹⁵ Genesis 2; Exodus 13-14

¹⁶ Lev.26:42; Psalm 41:13; 132:17; Isaiah 9:2; 42:7; 49:9; Ezek. 16:60; Heb. 6:13-17; 9:14

¹⁷ This resonates the Gospels and the book of Exodus 15, where Christ’s work is manifested in a gloriously song.

¹⁸ See the song of Mary in Luke 1:47-56 and the Song of Zachariah in Luke 1:67-80 and Simeon’s song in Luke 2:25-35

¹⁹ See the images taken also from Psalm 11:4; 45; 103; Isaiah 66:1ff; Jeremiah 3:17; Lam. 5:19; Ezek 1ff; Rev. 4ff; 5ff; 7ff; 21-22.

glorified, but we also see Him as the Ruler of the whole world, ultimately to John and his contemporaries, this would have been a very encouraging theme. Which is why, John spends so many chapters in picturing for us the heavenly Court²⁰ and its throne.²¹ John would have remembered these images and themes from the book of Psalms and the book of Ezekiel and Zechariah. Ultimately, his goal was to encourage those who did not want to buy-in on the idolatrous and sophisticated (and selfish) culture around them.²² His challenge was to help the faithful to move and to help those who wanted to give up on God to be brought back by judging their attitudes and actions.²³

III) Exploring the recipients of this letter

The structure that John used here it is very interesting, for he begins with who God is, then his object is to give us a biography of the seven churches, which are set aside to Christ's work, and then, he moves our attention to the work of Christ in the following chapters (4,5,7). After these chapters, John returns to the Roman system and empire (18-19),²⁴ giving us again, another biography and has attached to that, a final judgment, which will be lead by the judge, by the One who sits on the throne.²⁵ Lastly, John wants us to see the contrast of Christ's rule in the last two chapters of this book; He will create all things new, and rule His kingdom with love and justice (Isaiah 55:113).²⁶ This is a true cosmic and universal challenge to the earthly kingdom.

A letter to the recipients

Revealing who they are - The identity of human power is well reflected in the first few chapters of revelation and later as well. In chp.2-3, we see the human nature and its temptation to gain power and rule without God.²⁷ The background of this immense foolishness is a link to the city of Babylon, where the insanity and the injustice are its primary goals. The long and

²⁰ Revelation chapter: 4; 5; 7; 14; 19; 21-22.

²¹ "The glimpse into heaven, which is such a key part of John's vision from chapter 4 onwards, has its antecedents in the call vision of Ezekiel (1:10) and Isaiah (ch.6) as well as the parallel glimpse of the heavenly court of 1st Kings 22 and Job 1-2" Keck L E – *NIB - Revelation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1998, p520

²² "Apocalyptic writings not only offered hope and comfort, but they also served as protest literature. They were a protest against the prevailing worldview of the dominant culture. Apocalyptic writers encouraged their readers not to accept the beliefs and lifestyles of the world around them, but to remain true to their own convictions. They encouraged their readers not to become subservient to human rulers or institutions, but to remain faithful to God". McElroy K M – *Revelation* – Smyth & Helwys Publishing, USA, 2001, page 29

²³ "John's visions contain strong words of warning and judgment, reminding readers of the stringent demands placed upon those who would be followers of the Lamb. At the same time, Revelation presents a message of comfort, offering images of hope and assurance in the midst of uncertainty and despair." McElroy, page 15

²⁴ Barnett says that "from chapter 12 to 22, John engages in an audacious parodying of Roman society. He does this by setting certain elements of Roman society in negative parallel with elements of the Gospel." Barnett Paul – *Apocalypse now and then* – Aquila Press, Australia, 1989, p11

²⁵ See Revelation 20:8

²⁶ See Isaiah 61-62; 65ff – Here we can see the both sides – blessing and judgement

²⁷ See Isaiah 23 to 3059ff; 63:1-6; Jeremiah, 3to 4ff; 9ff, 11 to 12 – This are harsh words against the earth rule

painful cry as to “*how long*” (6:10) will this oppression go for those who are faithful (martyrs) is the contrast of this book. Here we can see the opposition of two different groups of people.²⁸ Here is the struggle and the ultimate battle of Revelation, which echoes Daniel three and six, dividing what is holy from that which is not holy. Ultimately, this would have reflected upon the imperial Rome and its uncleanness.²⁹

Revealing their work (17-19) – The economic interest of the wicked and their desire of being great and ever greater than God, riches the climax of Revelation. The voices of the Old Testament prophets sprang out through the words of Psalm two, when the heaven sprang up in laughter. From the ordinary things, such as work and guilds, to the imperial rule, in the eyes of the heaven rule, everything on earth was destructive, but this time the heaven could not be silent. As the Lord acted in the past, so God sow the oppression of His people Israel in Egypt. Equally in Revelation, Christ sees the oppression through which His faithful ones are going through. His ultimate goal is to comfort His people as it happened in the past.

Revealing their throne – The earth rulers did not want to be under the Sovereignty of Christ. Therefore, Christ is rejected and in its place, the throne is placed on earth³⁰ (Rev.18-19, compared with Babylon in Daniel 2and 4, and with Tyrus in Ezekiel 26-30). However, under this throne there is no peace, there is no love, no hope, but blood shed, indulgence of sin, exploitation and martyrdom.³¹ Over and over again, the contrast between the God’s kingdom and our kingdom are completely different, and John depicts this in an Old Testament style, borrowing the language of Isaiah³² and Amos.³³

IV) Conclusion

John, like the Old Testament prophets, wants us to see the great Egypt or Babylon of the 95AD, who was under the rule of the Roman Empire. His strong belief was that people will not be discouraged by them; but that they will continue to resist the powers of evil by reminding them that the big battle has all ready been won. In doing that, John’s encouragement to them is to

28 One following the heavenly Christ (the King), with the consequences of huge and unbearable persecution, while the other, following Satan and his worship by enjoying in sin and stunningly, rejoicing while others are suffering. More than that, this group of people are not only indulging themselves, but they pull others to follow them, going that far that they take away the dignity and the humbleness of the weak by exploiting them, and leaving them naked and defend-less. This is what is happening when man wants to rule, chaos takes place.

²⁹ More explanations on this imperial city are found in Revelation 18-19

³⁰ Rev.18-19, compared with Babylon in Daniel 2and 4, and with Tyrus in Ezekiel 26-30

³¹ See the similarities between the book of Exodus, Ezekiel’s 29 and Revelation 18 -19

³² Isaiah 63:1-6

³³ Amos 7:1-17; 8ff; 9:1-10

remember that the promised Kingdom is not like the one on earth.³⁴ John borrows this picture again from the book of Exodus and Joshua, when he thinks of the last two chapters, assuring them about the complete promise of the Promised Land³⁵. With all the added signs and tremendous symbols which announce the fulfilment of God's promise, such as numbers and trumpets, bowls and plagues³⁶, this will not be a book of hope for those who suffer under unimaginable persecution and pain. Without the chapters that depicts to us the heavenly Court and Rule, where each trajectory always brings us back to the ***One who holds all things, knows all things, and judges all things, life will be meaningless***. Without these revelations of Christ Himself and the people whom He loves, this book will be just another story of charm and fantasy. Take Christ and His work out of this book and replace it with the dragons and with the theories behind all, and this book will not be anything but a human voice shouting in the abyss of the earthly realm.

As a final comment, one needs to realise that without the other Scriptures (OT) this book will be very difficult to understand. However, as we have seen above, in this tiny study, the meaning and the understanding of Revelation reveals to us not just one book, but the whole plan of God, the whole creation of God, starting with the Alpha and finishing with the Omega.

Bibliography

Barnett Paul – *Apocalypse now and then* – Aquila Press, Australia, 1989

Encyclopaedia Judaica, Keter Publishers House, Jerusalem, Vol. 3

Gonzalez L Justo & G Catherine – *Revelation* – WJK Press, Kentucky, 1997

Harrington J W – *Revelation* – The Liturgical Publishers, Minnesota, 1993

Keck L E – *NIB - Revelation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1998

³⁴ The transcendent world that had been revealed to them presented clear evidence that in God's ultimate design, evil, pain, suffering, violence, and injustice do not belong. Through their visionary writings, the apocalyptic authors encouraged their readers to resist any worldview that was in conflict with God's ultimate goal for the world.p15

³⁵ See also Amos 9:13-15

³⁶ Images like these are taken from the book of Exodus 11-14 – The great Exodus – The going out in freedom with God.

McElroy K M – *Revelation* – Smyth & Helwys Publishing, USA, 2001

Prevost J-P – *How to read the Apocalypse*, SCM Press, London, 1993

Schaff-Herzog – *Encyclopaedia of Religious knowledge*- Vol. 3, Funk & Wagnall – New York, 1891,