



The Revelation to John

a.k.a.

The Apocalypse



A CONTROVERSIAL BOOK

The book of Revelation was accepted by the early church fathers, e.g. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Melito of Sardis, Clement of Alexandria, all who wrote between 150-200 CE. In the same time period the book of Revelation became a heavy favorite with a group calling itself “The New Prophecy” (a.k.a. Montanism) that expected the New Jerusalem to descend in the Phrygian town of Pepuza. Church leaders opposed the movement believing that its founders were possessed by evil spirits.

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (ca. 260-339 CE) produced a 10 volume work called *Church History* documenting the development of the Christian church up to 324 CE. He includes the book of Revelation in his list of “spurious books” noting that some reject it, others accept it (III. 25). He writes:

Some of our predecessors rejected the book altogether, criticizing it chapter by chapter as unintelligible, illogical, and its title false. They say it is neither John’s nor a “revelation” in any sense, since it is veiled by its thick curtain of incomprehensibility, and its author was neither an apostle nor saint nor even church member (VII.25).

Eusebius demonstrates that (1) the book of Revelation cannot be understood in a literal sense, and (2) its author could not have been the apostle John who produced the Gospel and Letters of John. A comparison of the book of Revelation with the Gospel of John shows two different authors using different concepts, words and syntax.

Revelation is completely different from these writings [i.e. Gospel & Epistle of John] and has hardly a syllable in common with them, so to speak. Nor does the Epistle or Gospel contain any concept of the Revelation....The style too shows the difference. The Gospel and Epistle are written not only in errorless Greek but also with high literary skill in diction, logic and syntax....I will not deny that the other saw revelations and received prophecy, but his style and use of Greek is inaccurate, and he uses barbarous idioms and occasional solecisms (VII.25).

The inclusion of the book of Revelation in the Christian scriptures was opposed by Marcion (~150 CE), Caius of Rome (~200 CE), Dionysius of Alexandria (~250 CE), Cyril of Jerusalem (350 CE), and the Synod of Laodicea (360 CE).

While the Eastern Orthodox churches eventually included the book of Revelation in their Bibles, it remains the only New Testament book never read during the Divine Liturgy.

Martin Luther regarded the book of Revelation as “neither apostolic or prophetic,” saying “I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it.” (*Preface to the Revelation of St. John*, 1522).

PREPARING TO READ REVELATION

Christians today typically read the book of Revelation in one or more of the four following ways:

- All of History: as a calendar of world history from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ, often trying to correlate certain events of world history with the visions of Revelation. With the passing of time the interpretive scheme needs to be revised.
- The End of History: as a calendar of the last period of history, often trying to correlate the visions of Revelation with current events in an effort to predict when Jesus will return. Sometimes connected with “rapture theology” invented by John Nelson Darby in the 1830’s.
- Above History: as a religious book with a message that is valid in every age. As such its message is metaphorical, symbolic and/or allegorical inspiring the reader to have courage and hope in the ongoing spiritual and social struggle between good and evil.
- In History: as a book containing specific forms of literature produced in a particular time and place, addressing a particular community of faith with particular religious, social, economic and political concerns, i.e. its focus is 1st century CE Asia Minor under Roman imperial rule.

This study will approach Revelation primarily from the “in history” and “above history” perspectives. Specifically we will pay attention to:

- the historical context in which the book was produced and which it sought to address.
- the literary nature of the book as a letter, as “apocalyptic,” and as “astral prophecy.”
- the author’s theological understanding of God’s dream for creation and Christ’s role in it.
- how God’s Spirit speaks through the message of Revelation to create and maintain our faith.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Author: John of Patmos (not the same person as the Apostle John)

- The opening verses, written in the third person by an unknown scribe, identify the author as John, a servant of Jesus Christ (1:1-2). John identifies himself as a visionary and prophet exiled to the island of Patmos (1:9).
- John of Patmos was a Christ-follower of Jewish origin, well versed in the scriptures and traditions of Israel. He writes with a “Semitic accent” indicating that Greek was not his mother tongue. He was probably a native of Judea/Palestine who immigrated to Asia Minor, perhaps a refugee of the first Judean revolt against Rome (66-73 CE). His familiarity with the seven churches on the mainland imply that he was a well-known itinerant prophet/preacher.
- When he mentions the apostles, it is as authoritative figures of the past (18:20; 21:14).

Date: 70-95 CE

- The book of Revelation appears to contain references to Emperor Nero who
 - (1) ordered Christ-followers in Rome to be burned at the stake as punishment for allegedly starting the great fire that burned most of the city in 64 CE (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44)
 - (2) was assassinated or committed suicide in 68 CE, giving rise to rumors that he would return from the dead.

- Nero's death was followed by a civil war (The Year of the Four Emperors 68-69 CE) that coincided with the first Jewish revolt (66-73 CE). The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE was a massive calamity for Jews and Jewish-Christians throughout the Roman Empire.

Location: Asia Minor (modern Turkey) as in the map below.

- Emperor Vespasian, and his sons Titus and Domitian (ruled from 68-96 CE) were popular, efficient and generous administrators. It was a time of patriotic enthusiasm expressed in terms of religious veneration for the imperial leaders who were hailed as “savior,” “benefactor,” and “son of God.”



Audience:

- John writes to the “seven churches in Asia” (1:4) because he, “your brother” has been instructed to “write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches...” (1:11). Chapters 2-3 consist of letters that are addressed to the “angel” of each of these churches (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).
- Was this book intended to be read to the members of these seven churches? Would ordinary people in the ancient world have understood this book? Possibly not. Malina and Pilch¹ suggest that John's letter was intended for his “brothers” (1:9), i.e. a select circle of Jesus-group prophets and leaders who knew Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and *1 Enoch*. It would have been the task of these “angels”/prophets/leaders to interpret John's visions for their faith communities.
- Greek speaking Jewish/Judean leaders (and members?) of Jesus-groups living in communities fervently patriotic to the very same emperors who destroyed God's temple and the city of Jerusalem. Active witness to Christ and/or failure to participate in “normal” social and patriotic displays could/would result in suspicion, harassment, and persecution.

¹ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, (Augsburg Fortress, 2000), pp. 12-13.

LITERARY CONTEXT

Apocalypse

- The Greek word *apokalypsis* refers to a disclosing, uncovering or unveiling what was previously hidden, making known what had been secret.
- A genre or type of Israelite/Judean literature that includes Isaiah 6, Ezekiel, Daniel, 1 & 2 *Enoch*, *Esdras* and *Baruch*. Common features of these books include:
 1. narrative accounts of their heroes' visionary experiences through a journey to heaven or some spiritual discipline
 2. vivid descriptions of a heavenly world populated by frightening celestial beings
 3. cryptic revelations of events to come
- These apocalypses were premised on the notion that what happens on earth is a reflection of things that have already occurred in the heavens.
- Common characteristics of apocalyptic literature include:
 1. Universality: all nations/peoples on earth & all spirit beings in the heavens are engaged in conflict with Israel/church caught in the middle
 2. Cosmic Dualism: a material, visible world vs. an invisible spiritual/demonic world
 3. Chronologic Dualism: a current wicked era vs. a future age or perfection
 4. Ethical Dualism: humanity is divided into two camps — those who walk in spiritual darkness and are doomed vs. the spiritually enlightened/the saved
 5. Predestination: history is running in a straight line toward a predetermined end
 6. Exclusivism: faithfulness to God requires a total rejection of ordinary goals, ambitions, social attachments and other pursuits of unbelieving society.
 7. Limited Theology: everything is black and white, no shades of gray.
 8. Portrait of a Violent God: God achieves victory through a cataclysmic battle with a formidable opponent, necessitating the destruction of much of creation.
 9. Eschatological preoccupations: speculation on the posthumous fate of people, i.e. the afterlife
 10. The Use of Symbols and Code Words: times of crisis and persecution encouraged the use of terms and images that would be understood by insiders only.

Celestial/Astral Prophecy

- Malina & Pilch suggest that John's prophecy may be best described as a form of celestial or astral prophecy that draws on astronomical/astrological knowledge. In other words, the prophet John was "reading the sky." In their words, "... what is distinctive of John as prophet is that he read the sky as a Jesus-group prophet in the traditions of Israel with Hellenistic sky lore (astronomy) of the period" (p. 8). Characteristic of astronomy was a concern for numbers!

Sources

Amy-Jill Levine & Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), p.464;

Stephen L. Harris, *The New Testament - A Student's Introduction, Fourth Edition* (McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2002), pp. 397-399.

Bruce M. Metzger & Michael D. Coogan, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, (Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 651-655.



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READING REVELATION

1. Read Revelation 1:1-3.

Written in the third person by an unknown scribe, the first sentence functions as a title presenting the essential contents of the book. What is it about? What can we expect to find and learn?

Verse 3 reflects ancient practices — the book would have been read aloud when the church was assembled. Hearing it read aloud is how the majority of people in the early church would have encountered the book and its contents. What blessing will come to those who read, hear and do what the book instructs?

2. Read Revelation 1:4-8.

The beginning of John's work. It turns out to be a letter from John to seven "churches". The letter continues through to 3:22, picks up again in 20:11-22:21, in between are a number of other visions of John.

On behalf of whom does John greet the seven churches? What does he say about these persons/beings? What do we learn about them from John's words?

Alpha and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. John is here engaging in "alphabet mysticism" (a.k.a. grammatology) in which the letters of the alphabet were thought to reveal hidden mysteries of the universe. Malina and Pilch point out that the 24 letters of the Greek alphabet were commonly related to the zodiac and the seven Greek vowels to the seven planets visible to the ancients. So the letters had both spiritual and astronomical/astrological significance.

3. Read John 1:9-20

John's first vision reveals where Jesus is and what his role is in the universe.

As a reminder: "visions" are visual and/or auditory experiences that occur in altered states of consciousness, e.g. while sleeping (dreams), meditating, praying, or in a trance state. They are involuntary, i.e. the person cannot make the experience happen. They are messages from God. They almost always require interpretation. Often the meaning of the vision does not become clear until much later.

These experiences are not hallucinations. They are not drug/alcohol induced. They are not symptoms of mental illness or other pathological states. See work by Andrew B. Newberg, e.g. *Why God Won't Go Away* (2001).

What does John hear and see in his vision?

Significance of the number 7: It symbolizes completeness and totality, hence the 7 churches represent the entire church. It is rooted in the creation narrative — 7th day is the day of completion, of Sabbath, of rest and peace. Malina and Pilch, point out that in the ancient Mediterranean world, 7 is related to the 7 planets — the sun, moon, Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, Mercury and Venus - that were visible to the human eye and believed to influence events on earth.

4. Believing that God's Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Scriptures to create and maintain our faith and fellowship for service to the world, what might God be saying to us? How is this passage relevant to us today?



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READING REVELATION - CHAPTER 1 - SUMMARY

Chapter 1 begins with a 3rd person introduction describing the nature of the book as a revelation/disclosure of things that will soon take place. This revelation was given by God to Jesus Christ to show his servants, specifically Christ sent his messenger to his servant John who testified to what he heard and saw. The introduction closes with a blessing for one who reads aloud the prophecy, and for those who hear and keep (observe) its instructions: knowing what is to come they can be prepared.

John's letter to the seven churches of Asia begins at verse 4 and runs through 3:22 (and picks up again in 20:11-22:21). The seven churches were located in seven prominent cities in the Roman province of Asia (western Turkey). They are all within 100 miles of Ephesus, the capital city. John greets the churches in the name of God, the seven spirits before God's throne, Jesus Christ. We learn a lot about John's theology from his descriptions of these persons.

God: the one "who is and who was and who is to come" (verse 4). This is a name for God that derives from Exodus 3:14. It points to divine immortality while simultaneously emphasizing the forthcoming visitation of God.

The Seven Spirits: the seven archangels. The author of 1 *Enoch* names them as Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Remiel, Saraqael.

Jesus Christ: faithful witness in proclaiming God's message; firstborn of the dead emphasizes his resurrection/victory; ruler of the kings of earth points to his forthcoming role as universal sovereign (see Philippians 2:10 for a similar idea).

The greeting is followed by a doxology (a word of praise) directed to Christ for loving us, freeing us from our sins, and making us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God & Father (verses 5-6). Two oracles conclude the letter's introduction. The first describes Christ's anticipated coming using the words from Daniel 7:13 (verse 7). In the second, God identifies God's self as "the Alpha and Omega" (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (verse 8), signifying that God is the beginning and end of all things; perhaps that God contains all things within God's self.

Verses 9-20 are a report of the vision John received while in the spirit on the Lord's Day (Sunday) on the island of Patmos. He first hears a voice telling him to write what he sees and send it to the 7 churches. When he turns he sees 7 lamp stands, in the midst of which stand a figure whose attributes include both those of the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13) and the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9). This figure holds 7 stars in his right hand, while a sharp two-edged sword comes from his mouth. The figure identifies itself as Jesus Christ: the first and the last, the one who died but is now alive forever, and holds the keys of Death & Hades. The seven stars = angels/messengers of the churches; the lamp stands = the seven churches. This is *Christos Pantokrator* - Christ Ruler of All - a vision intended to give comfort and assurance.

READING REVELATION 2-3

These chapters consist of dispatches from the *Christos Pantokrator* figure to the “angels” of the seven churches. These “angels” are heavenly guardians/counterparts of the earthly Christian communities. The dispatches take the form of imperial edicts, i.e. proclamations used to regulate the behavior or attitudes of a population subject to the emperor. Each edict contains praise, blame, demand for repentance, a threat of judgment, promise of rescue and reward.

Church/City	Praise	Blame	Judgment	Reward
Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7) Symbol = temple of Artemis built around “tree of life.” Place of refuge for outlaws.				
Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) Symbol = crown. “smyrna” = myrrh used to anoint & embalm the dead.				
Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17) Temples of Zeus Soter & Asklepios.				
Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-28) home of bronze smiths, potters and textile makers.				
Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6) housed the royal archives & registries of citizens.				
Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13) earthquakes resulted in living “outside.”				
Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22) main water source = 5 mile long stone aqueduct; famous for black fabrics & eye medications.				

REVELATION 2-3, COMMENTS & DEFINITIONS

Nicolaitans (2:6, 15): an unknown Jesus-group that adopted a line of conduct the churches should/have avoided. In 1st century Mediterranean cultures, “***hate***” would mean something along the lines of “dis-attachment,” “non-attachment,” or even “indifference.” It was primarily about attitude and behavior that may or may not include feelings of repulsion.

Satan: a Persian word that refers to the role/function of a secret service agent whose task is to test the loyalty of the king’s servants/guards by putting forward probing questions, and then reporting the disloyal to the king for punishment (see Job 1:6-12). In post-exilic Israel, Satan was understood to have led a “palace revolt” against God, and was subsequently thrown out of heaven with his followers. In this text, Satan designates groups & practices that the author disapproves of, e.g.

Synagogue of Satan (2:9; 3:9): assemblies of Gentile God-fearers who claim an affiliation with Judaism. They say they are Jews, but they are not. These may be Gentile congregations established by the apostle Paul; they would be rivals to John’s Jewish Jesus-groups.

Satan’s Throne (2:12): may refer to the proconsul’s judgment seat, to Pergamum as a center of the imperial cult, the Great Altar of Zeus-Soter which had images of snakes on it, and/or the healing center of Asklepios (also associated with images of snakes).

Deep Things of Satan (2:24): an ironic reference to misguided teaching

Second Death (2:11): annihilation following the resurrection of all people and the final judgment (see Revelation 20: 6, 14; 21:8 for its peculiar take on this notion).

Balaam (2:14): seer who led Israel to intermarriage and idolatry (Numbers 22:15-24:25); used here as a pseudonym for a rival Jesus-group prophet who permits the eating of *eidolothuta* and sexual immorality. A likely caricature of the Gentile Christ-groups established by Paul.

Jezebel (2:20): name of King Ahab’s queen who patronized the Baal-cult (1 Kings 16:31; 19:1-20), used here as a pseudonym for a rival Jesus-group prophet who allows eating *eidolothuta* and sexual immorality. A likely caricature of the Gentile Christ-groups set up by Paul.

Eidolothuta = food dedicated to idols. Animals were slaughtered in temples so that the life/spirit of the animals could be returned to God/gods who in accepting the sacrifice, enabled worshippers to share food with the deity. City feasts invariably involved sacrifices to the protecting deities. Meat offered at butcher shops came from temple sacrifices. Participating in these events was problematic for Jews and for Christ-followers (see Acts 15:29; 1 Corinthians 7-8).

Sexual Immorality — fornication and adultery — in biblical/prophetic speech generally refers to idolatry which was viewed as equivalent to cheating on or two-timing God.

Morning Star (2:28): the bright planet Venus, a messianic symbol (Numbers 24:17; Matthew 2:2, 10), a title given to the Emperor Domitian, and a title given to Christ (Revelation 22:16).



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READING REVELATION - CHAPTERS 2 & 3 - SUMMARY

Church/City	Praise	Blame	Judgment	Reward
Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7) Symbol = temple of Artemis built around "tree of life." Place of refuge for outlaws.	works & endurance; do not tolerate evildoers; tested & exposed false apostles; "hate" Nicolaitans	abandoned the "love" (= attitudes/behavior) they had at first; do the works you did at first	removal of the lamp stand, i.e. the church (end of community)	permission to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God
Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) Symbol = crown. "smyrna" = myrrh used to anoint & embalm the dead.	affliction & poverty; victims of slander from other Jesus groups (i.e. Gentile Christ-followers claiming to be Jews)		no judgment, but a warning of continued suffering	crown of life, and a promise not to be harmed by the second death (i.e. death of the soul/spirit after the death of the body)
Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17) Temples of Zeus Soter & Asklepios.	not denying their faith even though they live where "Satan's throne" is & have experienced persecution	following "Balaam" in eating food sacrificed to idols & fornication (= idolatry); tolerating Nicolaitans	Son of Man will make war against them with the sword of his mouth; i.e. the word of God	hidden manna & a white stone with a new secret name written on it
Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-28) home of bronze smiths, potters and textile makers.	love, faith service & patient endurance; last works are greater than the first	following "Jezebel" in fornication/adultery (= idolatry) & eating food sacrificed to idols	distress & striking dead "Jezebel's children" (i.e. followers)	authority to rule over the nations; the morning star (Jesus?)
Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6) housed the royal archives & registries of citizens.	have a name for being alive (good reputation); but only a few have not "soiled their clothes" (= done evil works)	are really dead; need to wake up and strengthen what remains	Son of Man will come like a thief in the night	given white robes (= declared righteous); names will not be blotted out of the book of life
Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13) earthquakes resulted in living "outside."	little power, but have kept Jesus' word & not denied his name; patient endurance			other Jesus groups will bow at their feet; will be a pillar in God's temple; will have Jesus/God/city's name written on them
Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22) main water source = 5 mile long stone aqueduct; famous for black fabrics & eye medications.		not cold or hot, only lukewarm; material prosperity blinds them to their spiritual poverty & blindness	will be spit out; need to turn to Jesus to be purified (refined with fire) and healed of their spiritual blindness; open the door to Jesus....	Jesus will come in & eat together with them & will give them a place beside him on his throne.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who has revealed himself to be in charge of the heaven and earth, death and hades (Revelation 1:9-20), John of Patmos addresses each of the seven churches. He apportions praise and blame, warns of judgment and promises reward. Although it is impossible to reconstruct exactly what was happening in each community, his message in general condemns compromises with the dominant Greco-Roman culture of Asia Minor. In other words the author is arguing for a sectarian stance that rejects not only the dominant culture, but also Jesus groups/followers who compromise with that culture. This includes Gentile Christ-followers who do not convert fully to Judaism ("synagogues of Satan"), as well as groups that follow the apostle Paul's instructions concerning food sacrificed to idols.

Believing that God's Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Scriptures to create and maintain our faith and fellowship for service to the world, what might God be saying to us? How are we being called to respond to the situation and the dominant culture in which we live today?

Here are some options about what we and/or the world needs now:

- **Conversion:** individuals/communities need to acquire a new inner subjective orientation, i.e a change of heart.
- **Introversion:** individuals/communities must abandon society by becoming hermits and/or creating an alternative society (e.g. Amish).
- **Magic/Miracles:** individuals/communities cannot do anything about the situations in which they find themselves, but must hang in there until God rescues them
- **Reform:** God is calling individuals/communities to work within society to change social structures that are obstacles to human flourishing.
- **Utopia:** God is calling individuals/communities to abandon society and to build a new society/world in such a way that there will not and cannot be evil.
- **Revolution:** society/world is so evil that it must be destroyed; therefore God is calling individuals/communities to participate in this process.

Based on what you know about the life and ministry of Jesus, from the Gospels, which responses best describe what his mission was about?

Based on what you know about the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, which responses best describe what he thought his mission was about?

Based on the opening chapters of Revelation, which responses best describe John of Patmos thinks his mission is about?

READING REVELATION - CHAPTER 4

Malina and Pilch entitle this section of their book, "Sky Trip." While "in the spirit" John of Patmos is carried up to heaven and gets a glimpse of God's throne room. What does he see? What seems to be the point of this vision?

READING REVELATION - CHAPTER 5

This chapter is a continuation of the scene in God's throne room. Verses 1-7 answer the question "who is worthy of a revelation?" Verses 8-14 focus on the presentation of God's champion, the lamb.



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READING REVELATION - CHAPTERS 4 & 5 SUMMARY

These chapters are the beginning of John of Patmos' "sky trip." He is invited to pass through the vault of the skies/heavens. To help us picture this, let's try imaging in the universe as the ancients did: the earth is a sphere surrounded by a sphere of rotating planets in their own pathways and a rotating vault of fixed stars that encapsulates the whole (Malina & Pilch, p. 77). John of Patmos ends up on the other side of this vault, so he is able to see what is on the other side and to see the earth, planets and stars from the vantage point of the other side.

Chapter 4 is a description of what John of Patmos sees above the vault of the star-studded sky:

- a throne on a "sea of glass" (i.e. the vault of the sky/heaven)
- a circle of 24 lesser thrones on which are seated "elders" who worship God, submit their crowns to God, sing songs of praise to God, are privy to God's plans and can share them with prophets (5:5).
- 7 flaming torches (= 7 spirits of God) burning in front of the throne
- 4 living creatures (seraphs) are around the throne singing night and day without ceasing

Chapter 5 begins with a search for a being in heaven or on earth or under the earth who is worthy to open the scroll that is in the right hand of God. No one is found to be worthy until the Lamb appears standing as if slain in the midst of the circle created by the throne, the creatures and the enthroned elders. At the appearance of the Lamb a new song begins in the heaven, marking the beginning of a new era. The slaughter and resurrection of the Lamb ransom for God "saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" to be a kingdom and priests serving God. The scene ends with every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea glorifying and praising the Lamb.

A.J. Levine & M.Z. Brettler point out that one of the functions of Jewish & Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature was to reveal that worship prospered in heaven, by God's very throne, by the hands of angels, according to the stringent precepts of the Torah, regardless of the historical abominations that might be afflicting the Temple in Jerusalem. The Qumran Essenes, for example, saw themselves as actively participating in this heavenly worship through their Sabbath Songs. Revelation offers detailed images of heavenly worship that would have been common sights in the political religions of Asia Minor.

What might we take away from this scene of the heavenly throne room?

- On a very practical level, notice that the lyrics of the songs that are sung in heaven are all part of our liturgy, and were also part of the liturgy of the early church.
- The inclusivity of the company of saints: people from every tribe, language, people and nation.
- The universality of the worship of the Lamb: every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea.

READING REVELATION - CHAPTER 6

In this chapter, the Lamb opens the seven seals, thereby unleashing what is happening and will soon happen in the days of John of Patmos. The chain of command in this scene: the Lamb opens a seal, one of the seraphs gives an order, and a celestial phenomenon passes over the land of Israel. The outcome is something negative for the land of Israel and its inhabitants.

Key to understanding this (and later) scenes:

- horses, trumpets and bowls are all types of comets and/or stars
- ancients regarded natural phenomena, e.g. lightning, tornados, thunder, sudden cloudbursts, shooting stars, comets, and the like to be communications from God/gods, directives, threats, decisions that impacted the land and its residents, over which the phenomena occurred.
- Malina & Pilch: “Nothing could possibly happen in the sky that did not in some way impact a segment of earth and its inhabitants” (p. 113). So being able to read the sky was (1) an important way to be prepared for forthcoming events, and (2) afforded the opportunity to fend off calamities through prayer.

The first 4 seals unleash 4 horses & riders.

- The lion faced seraph (the constellation Leo) calls forth a white horse from the east, whose rider wears a crown = a king whose goal is to conquer (the planet Jupiter).
- The ox faced seraph (the constellation Taurus) calls forth a red horse from the south, whose rider takes away peace and brings war in its stead (the planet Mars).
- The human faced seraph (the constellation Scorpio) calls forth a black horse from the north, whose rider carries a balance in his hand (the constellation Libra) and announces exorbitant prices for wheat and barley (15 times normal price), signaling food shortages due to economic breakdown, famine and/or hoarding for the purpose of profiteering,
- The eagle face seraph (the constellation Pegasus/Thunderbird) calls forth a pale green horse whose rider is Death, is accompanied by Hades, and has the power to kill people by the sword, famine, disease, and wild animals.

The fifth seal reveals the location of the martyrs (direct and indirect victims of the Jewish Revolt and its aftermath?) under the altar in the heavenly throne room.

The sixth seal reveals the sun, moon and stars falling, earthquakes, etc. heralding a day of wrath. N.B. In the ancient world “wrath” is not so much about anger or rage, as it is about re-establishing one’s honor and worth after one has been insulted, humiliated, offended by someone else. Often gets acted out as revenge.

Significance for us?

READING REVELATION: CHAPTER 7

A pause or intermission in the opening of the 7 seals to enable God's messengers to "seal" God's servants on earth. The 144,000 from the Holy Land represents the anticipated and desired restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel. A countless multitude from every nation, all tribes, peoples and languages represents Gentiles devoted to God and Christ.

The "seal of the living God" = a signet ring used to indicate ownership and to provide protection.

To "seal" God's servants can refer to religious branding usually done on the forehead (see Ezekiel 9:1-11), symbolic branding, e.g. wearing amulets or tefillin, and/or ritualized symbolic branding as in Christian baptism, Ash Wednesday, etc.

Significance for us?

READING REVELATION: CHAPTER 8

The opening of the 7th seal turning to be something like a series of Matryoshka dolls — the 7th seal contains another set of seven, 7 angels with 7 trumpets (i.e. comets) that pass over the land of Judea unleashing:

- 1st Trumpet - hail, blood, fire, so that a third of the trees and all grass are burnt.
- 2nd Trumpet - a fire mountain falls into the sea; it becomes blood.
- 3rd Trumpet - a great star falls into rivers and wells so that they become bitter.
- 4th Trumpet - a third of the sun, moon and stars are darkened

Significance for us?



The Revelation to John
a.k.a.
The Apocalypse



READING REVELATION - CHAPTERS 6-8 SUMMARY

These chapters are a continuation of John of Patmos' "sky trip" — visionary experience — of passing through the vault of the sky. He sees and experiences what is on the other side of the vault as well as what happens among the planets and stars. Movements among the stars and constellations unleash disasters on the earth, specifically in the lands over which these phenomena occur. Malina and Pilch (p. 69) see these visions "telling how the God of the universe has recently dealt with Israel." So the vision of the 4 horses and riders (6:1-8) points back to the historical experience of the Jewish Revolt of 66-73 CE which resulted the deaths of about one million Judeans. Hence the concern for the fate of their souls (6:9-11), and the vision promising their restoration of Israel's twelve tribes (7:1-8), accompanied by a multitude too great to count from every nation, tribe, people and language (7:9-17).

Reminder: we are reading Revelation "in history," i.e. as a book that emerged from and sought to address a particular historical situation helps us see how these visions might have brought comfort to persons who had been traumatized by war, and were mourning the loss of their homeland while living as refugees in the midst of what was for them an alien culture.

As a text that is "above history" we can see that the experiences of war, economic disaster, famine, and disease symbolized by the four horses and riders are recurring events in our world. In the face of the suffering that results from these experiences we too may find comfort in the promise of the restoration of God's people.

A note: The countless multitude (7:9-10) are "they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). This is a paradoxical metaphor referring to the forgiveness of sins through the atoning death of Jesus. The great ordeal, then, is the death and resurrection of Jesus in which believers participate ritually in the sacrament of Holy Baptism, and spiritually through the lifelong process of transformation from sinner to saint that follows. Living faithfully into God's kingdom in the midst of the kingdoms of Herod and Caesar becomes the great ordeal for all believers.

READING REVELATION - CHAPTERS 8-10

Chapter 8 takes us back into the action of Israel's disaster as the Lamb opens the 7th seal, and sets in motion another sequence of seven. This time seven angels are given seven trumpets (8:2). Trumpets were instruments used both in Temple worship and in war. Here the context is heavenly worship as indicated by the golden censer, the altar, the incense and the prayers of the saints (8:2-4). The throwing of fire from the altar to the earth is a prelude of what is about to happen (8:5) as the angels blow their trumpets (unleash comets in the sky) that herald a recurrence of the plagues that accompanied God's rescue of Israel from Egypt in the days of Moses.

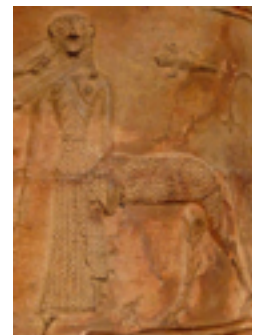
1st Trumpet (8:7): hail, fire and blood recall the 7th plague upon the Egyptians (Exodus 9:23-25)
 2nd Trumpet (8:8-9) : sea becomes blood recalls the first plague (Exodus 7:20-21)
 3rd Trumpet (8:10-11) : “Wormwood” - in Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15 it is punishment for idolatry
 4th Trumpet (8:12): darkness over the land recalls the 9th plague (Exodus 10:21-23)

The eagle crying “woe” (8:13): the eagle was the symbol of Rome — vehicle of Israel’s catastrophe (& the object of God’s wrath?); “woe” = a cry of lamentation and sorrow



5th Trumpet (9:1-12): a star falling from heaven opens the portal to the underworld allowing the escape of underworld demons in the form of locusts, recalling the 8th plague (Exodus 10:12-15). They look like a cross between flying centaurs and scorpions. Fantastic cross species hybrid creatures were not uncommon in ancient mythology and iconography.

The bottomless pit ruled by Abaddon/Apollyon is a synonym for Sheol (Hades).



6th Trumpet (9:13-19): releases four angels who had been previously bound (i.e. fallen angels, or evil angels) at the Euphrates River, the eastern most boundary of the Roman Empire, and symbol of Israel’s enemies in the east. The angels command 200 million cavalry.

9:20-21 finally inform us of about the reason for all this cosmic carnage (remember it all happens in the sky at this stage): the failure to repent of idolatry, murder, magic, fornication and theft. Similar reasons were given by the prophet Ezekiel for the destruction of the 1st Temple (Ezekiel 8-9). The destruction of the 2nd Temple in John’s day was for similar reasons.

Chapter 10 is a kind of interlude: a giant angel announces that the imminence of the 7th trumpet. Cloud and thunder recall the pillars of cloud and fire in Exodus 13:21-23.

The appearance of imagery connected with the story of Exodus may suggest that “In John’s view, God’s people are experiencing a new Exodus, ‘not in Egypt but in the heart of the Roman empire’.... If Revelation is a new Exodus, then Jesus is the new Moses, leading his followers out of captivity to death and into the new Promised Land of life and healing. Christians are called to ‘come out’ of empire and injustice, just as the Israelites were called to come out of slavery in Egypt.”²

Chapter 10 is a kind of interlude: a giant angel announces that the imminence of the 7th trumpet. Cloud and thunder recall the pillars of cloud and fire in Exodus 13:21-23.

Significance for us? How does God speak through these texts to create and maintain our faith and fellowship for the sake of the world?

² Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed - The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, (Basic Books, 2004), p. 124.



The Revelation to John

a.k.a.

The Apocalypse



READING REVELATION - A RECAP OF OUR JOURNEY THROUG THE TEXT SO FAR

- 1:1-3 Introduction — describes the content of the book as a revealing of things that must soon take place.
- 1:4-3:22 A Letter to Seven Churches in Asia Minor — the formal opening of the letter (1:4-8) is followed by a vision report describing Jesus Christ in his cosmic role as *pantokrator* (1:9-20). The body of the letter consists of edicts issued by the cosmic Christ to the “angels,” i.e. the celestial guardians of the churches. The main issue appears to be how to live faithfully, in holiness and purity, in the midst of an alien, polytheistic culture, e.g. idolatry, food sacrificed to idols, etc.
- 4:1-7:17 John of Patmos’ Sky Trip, Part 1, begins with a vision of God enthroned over the cosmos (4:1-11), holding a scroll that represents God’s will for Israel (5:1-7). The Lamb of God who enacts God’s will (5:8-14) by opening the seals on the scroll, which in turn unleash movements of stars and comets in the vault of the sky that bring war, economic breakdown, famine, and death-dealing disease (6:1-17). These trouble point to the recent past and the experience of the Jewish Revolt of 66-73 CE which resulted the deaths of about one million Judeans. The opening of the seals is interrupted by a vision promising the restoration of Israel’s twelve tribes (7:1-8), accompanied by a multitude too great to count from every nation, tribe, people and language (7:9-17).
- 8:1-10:11 John of Patmos’ Sky Trip, Part 2, begins with the opening of the 7th seal which in turn introduces 7 angels whose trumpet blasts unleash catastrophes reminiscent of the plagues in the book of Exodus (chapters 8-9). This imagery suggests that John of Patmos was trying to encourage his hearers/readers to see their current difficulties as a new Exodus occurring in the midst of the Roman Empire. Another interlude follows in which a giant angel announces the imminence of the 7th trumpet and John of Patmos is invited to eat a scroll, i.e. accept a commission to prophesy (10:1-11).

READING REVELATION - CHAPTER 11:1-19

Read John 11:1-14

John of Patmos is instructed to **measure** the temple in Jerusalem. This is a prophetic symbolic act (e.g. Ezekiel 40:3-42:20). The act of measuring has been variously interpreted to denote an appreciation of divine perfection, or as a metaphor for preservation. Malina and Pilch suggest that since the outer court, i.e. the court of the Gentiles, is not to be measured, the act of measuring is a kind of census that intentionally does not include “the nations” who will trample the holy city for 42 months. Again a possible reference to the recent past when Jerusalem was

indeed trampled by Roman legions. The Jewish Revolt broke out in May 66 CE, Jerusalem was besieged from April through August 70 CE. The temple was destroyed August 10, 70 CE.

The two witnesses (verse 3) are prophetic figures possibly Enoch and Elijah or Moses and Elijah. Dressed in sackcloth to indicate that they are grieving, they will prophesy for 1,260 days, the same length of time the temple's courts were trampled by the nations.

The beast from the bottomless pit (verse 7) is a symbol of a tyrannical ruler.

The great city that is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt is none other than the holy city of Jerusalem where the Lord was crucified (verse 8). The label "Sodom" was first applied to Jerusalem 500+ years earlier by Ezekiel (16:46-56) as an indictment of inhospitality and violence. Egypt represents the place of Israel's slavery. The treatment of the two witnesses in such a place is no surprise.

Question: have these things already happened, or will they happen soon? To find out read Revelation 11:15-19.

Finally the 7th trumpet reveals what? Pay attention to the verb tenses!

The third woe = destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE. In Jewish end-times speculation that was supposed to indicate the end. The end of what — the universe, the world, an era of history....?

What does the opening of God's temple in heaven (verse 19) signify?

READING REVELATION: CHAPTERS 12-16

A new set of visions that are intended to answer the "why" question — why are we (John and his Jesus group) in their present situation?

Read 12:1-17

The clue to the time frame, according to Malina and Pilch, is that "the great Dragon, the ancient Serpent, identified with the Devil and Satan (12:9), is still in the sky when it attempts to devour the Pregnant Woman's offspring (12:4); it is then thrown down to the earth with its sky servants, awaiting the creation of the first human beings" (p. 153). Its already present in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve are created (Genesis 3:1-24).

If Malina and Pilch are correct in surmising that this vision points to the time before creation, how does it answer the why question? What does it tell us about God and Christ, and Satan.

Read 13:1-18 What are the consequences of the Dragon's presence on earth? How does it exercise power and control over the earth's population?

What does the 1st beast rising out of the sea represent?

What does the 2nd beast rising out of the earth represent?

Verses 16-17: branding people in order to control their buying and selling. As a historical precedent see 3 Maccabees 2:29 which describes how Ptolemy Philopater forced all inhabitants of Alexandria to be enrolled in a census and "branded by fire on their bodies with an ivy leaf, the emblem of Dionysus."

Verse 18: Before the invention of numerals in the 8th century CE, the letters of the alphabet did double duty as numerals. So every name was also a set of numerals and every set of numerals might equal a name. Six hundred and sixty-six might represent the name Caesar Nero.

Malina & Pilch (p. 177) also note that it is a "triangular number," the sum of all numerals from one to thirty-six, which is itself a triangular number the sum of all numerals from one to eight. Hence they propose that it points to a constellation called Deltoton (Triangle). Additionally there is a Hebrew word for dragon that also adds up to this six hundred, sixty-six.

How does this help answer the why question?

Read 14:1-20

Verse 4: the 144,000 attendants of the Lamb who had defiled themselves with women - possible references include:

- "the sons of God" - a special category of angel who did not cross cosmic boundaries (see Genesis 6, and Enoch - The Book of Watchers)
- ancient Israelite holy war practices as outlined in Exodus 19:15; Deuteronomy 23:10-15 and the War Scroll from Qumran Cave 1

Babylon: in Hebrew "Babel" - the first human city built after the flood (Genesis 11). What was Babel's "fornication"? What are the consequences? Read 15:1-16:20



The Revelation to John

a.k.a.

The Apocalypse



READING REVELATION - SUMMARY OF EVENTS THROUGH CHAPTER 19

4:1-11:19 Is a single unit of visionary material oriented to recounting how the God of the universe has recently dealt with Israel. As the drama of the 7 seals, culminating in 7 angels blowing 7 trumpets unfolds in the sky Israel experiences war, economic breakdown, famine, death-dealing disease (6:1-17), and the destruction of the holy city Jerusalem (11:13). All this points to the Jewish Revolt of 66-73 CE.

The good news in this section comes in chapters 7 & 11 where John sees a vision of the restoration of Israel's twelve tribes (7:1-8), accompanied by a multitude too great to count from every nation, tribe, people and language (7:9-17). The section concludes with the proclamation: "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah" (11:15), and the vision of God's temple in heaven being opened with the ark of the covenant on display (11:19).

The point seems to be that the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple are not the end of the world, but the beginning of Christ's rule over the earth. The final vision indicates the renewal of the God's covenant now rooted in the celestial temple and open to all to whom the open sky is visible. The final proclamation and vision are intended to inspire commitment, loyalty, endurance among John's hearers.

12:1-16: The visions in this section seek to explain **why** John and his Jesus group are in the situation that they find themselves in, i.e. as refugees of war living now in a foreign land and alien culture.

The visions in chapter 12 describe a great conflict in the sky/heavens before the creation of life on earth. A pregnant sky-woman (Virgo) is attacked by a Dragon/Serpent/Devil/Satan. Her newborn son is swept up to safety on the other side of the vault of heaven, while the archangel Michael and his angels go to battle against the Dragon. The Dragon and his angels are thrown down to earth where he pursues the earthly/human children of the sky-woman.

The visions in chapters 13-16 look to the interval in human history before and up to the flood in Genesis 8.

In chapter 13 we learn that the Dragon exercises its power through two "beasts." The sea-beast that makes war and has authority over and is worshipped by every tribe, people, language and nation represents the concept/reality of

EMPIRE. The land-beast that performs great signs, makes images of the sea-beast, forces people to worship the sea-beast, and brands people to control their buying and selling REPRESENTS the concept/reality of IMPERIAL RELIGION.

In chapter 14, the Lamb and his entourage appear on Mount Zion. The entourage is made up of 144,000 personages who had not defiled themselves with women (14:4). In Israelite pre-history these would be the “sons of God” (i.e. angels) who did not follow the fallen angels in taking human wives (Genesis 6:1; 1 Enoch - The Watchers). These 144,000 were “servants devoted to God” (not “first fruits”). They might be seen as “holy warriors” among the Israelites, who were required to maintain celibacy (Deuteronomy 23:9-14; 1 Samuel 21:5-6).

An angel appears proclaiming “aeonic good news,” i.e. the dawning of a new era in time (14:6-7).

A second angel proclaims the fall of “Babylon the great” (14:8). The Greek word translated as “Babylon” is “Babel” in Hebrew. In Genesis 11 immediately after the flood, the first common project of humanity, of all ethnic groups is the building of the city called Babel (Genesis 11). Babylon is also the empire that destroyed Solomon’s temple in 587 BCE. Babylon becomes a code name for Rome after the Roman destruction of the 2nd Temple in 70 CE. Babel/Babylon/Rome’s “fornication” is idolatry, the worship of the two beasts: EMPIRE & IMPERIAL RELIGION. A third angel proclaims the fate of all who drink this wine (14:9-10). The judgment (harvesting) is carried out by “one like the Son of Man” seated on a cloud, wearing a golden crown, and carrying a sharp sickle (14:14-20).

In chapter 15, a vision of 7 angels about to unleash 7 plagues is interrupted by a vision of “those who had conquered the beasts and its image and the number of its name” worshipping in heaven (15:2-4). They play harps and sing the song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-18) and the Lamb - an indicator that John sees the current situation as a new exodus. The seven angels are given 7 bowls containing 7 plagues (16:1-16). The scene concludes with the great city being split into three parts, while every island and mountain disappears (16:17-20).

Malina and Pilch see in this set of visions a recapitulation of pre-history when our human ancestors were created by God, interacted with the Dragon who had been thrown down from heaven, were ejected from Eden, had sexual relations with angels, became increasingly wicked until they were destroyed by the Flood (with the exception of Noah and his family). After the Flood the first common task of surviving humankind was to build a city, Babel, with the purpose of climbing beyond the vault of heaven (p. 153).

The point of these visions is that “forces unleashed in the past continue to affect the present” (Malina and Pilch, p. 199).

17:1-18:24 Opens with a vision of the great city — Babel/Babylon/Rome — pictured here as a woman dressed in scarlet and purple, wearing gold, jewels and pearls, sitting on a scarlet beast with 7 heads and 10 horns (i.e. the sea-beast of 13:1). She is called “the mother of whores and of earth’s abominations” (17:5). In the Bible,

sexual immorality frequently functions as a synonym for idolatry, here it serves as a metaphor for political and religious subservience to the agenda of empire, including its ideology of economic exploitation (18:3).

The “city” as a symbol of imperial exploitation plays on the reality of life in the ancient Mediterranean. 90% of the population lived in rural villages and worked the land. Cities were large, central places where properly pedigreed, well-born owners of large estates gathered to display their unbelievable wealth and engage in competitions for honor and prestige. Cities were populated by elite members of society and those who worked for them — extended family, slaves, clients — or supplied goods and services they needed (merchants and artisans). Imperial cities were associated with taxes and violence. Taxes were used to benefit the elite, not those who paid the taxes. The Roman amphitheater symbolized the elite’s dedication to the physical pain, torture, mutilation and death of subjugated populations.

A voice from heaven urges “my people” to leave the city, so that they do not take part in the city’s and its elite citizens’ sins which are against God, and will result in double retribution (18:4-8). Kings and merchants, shipmasters and seafarers will mourn the destruction of the city (18:9-19), while the saints, apostles and prophets are urged to rejoice (18:20). The scene ends with a mighty angel throwing a millstone into the sea, symbolizing the destruction of Babel/Babylon/Rome.

19:1-10 The judgment and destruction of the “great whore” is met with rejoicing and praise in the heaven as these events signal that the “marriage of the Lamb has come” (19:7).

EXCURSUS ON **LAMB POWER**

(a notion borrowed from Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed - The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, Basic Books, 2004).

We first meet the Lamb right after hearing that “lion of the tribe of Judah...has conquered, so that he can open the scroll” (5:5). The “lion” turns out to be a “lambkin” (Greek word = *arnion*) standing as if it had been slaughtered (5:6). This Lamb is worshipped and praised “for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation...” (5:9). The Lamb opens the seven seals (6:1; 8:1). In chapter 7 the gathered multitudes cry out that “salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb” (7:10). The holy angels in Michael’s army conquer “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (12:11). The Lamb appears on Mount Zion with his entourage of 144,000 holy ones (14:1-5). All the action leads up to the marriage feast of the Lamb which is announced in chapter 18 and consummated in chapter 21.

Rossing’s comments:

- No other apocalypse ever pictures the divine hero as a Lamb — Revelation is unique among apocalyptic writings in this image (p. 111).
- ...the Lamb of Revelation became the victor not by militaristic power and slaughter but rather by **being slaughtered**. From beginning to end, Revelation’s vision of the Lamb teaches a

“theology of the cross,” of God’s power made manifest in weakness.... Evil is defeated not by overwhelming force or violence but by the Lamb’s suffering love on the cross (p. 111).

- God’s people are called to conquer not by fighting but by remaining faithful, by testifying to God’s victory in self-giving love (p. 111).
- the heart of Revelation’s story is the opposition between two kinds of victory, the beast’s and the Lamb’s (p. 115).
- John’s labeling of God’s people as “victors” or “conquerors” right from the outset of the book [see chapters 2-3]...sets up the book’s program of challenging Rome’s imperial theology of victory (p. 117).
- The presence of evil in our world is due to Satan’s temporary presence on earth, Revelation explains.... We live in the time between his expulsion from heaven and the time when he is thrown into the abyss in chapter 20 (p. 118).
- God’s people are to conquer Satan in two ways, Revelation tells us, “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” (p. 118).
- To follow the model of Jesus means that we conquer not by attacking anyone or shedding others’ blood — but rather by identifying with Jesus’ own blood that was shed when he was crucified by the Romans.... Revelation does not advocate the use of violence or bloodshed. Revelation is more a book about terror **defeated** than terror inflicted... (p. 119).
- The second way that God’s people “conquer” Satan...is by giving our word of testimony and being willing even to give our lives.... we conquer by putting the unjust empire on trial and telling the truth about it (p. 120).
- War is something done **against** God’s people by evil beasts...not something that God’s saints or the Lamb practice in this book. Two verses in Revelation do indeed refer to Jesus as “making war” — Revelation 2:16 and 19:11 — but the **way** he makes war is crucial. Jesus makes war not with a sword of battle but “by the sword of his mouth.” The word is Jesus’ only weapon... (p. 121).



The Revelation to John

a.k.a.

The Apocalypse



READING REVELATION - SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 17-20

17:1-18:24 Opens with a vision of the great city — Babel — pictured as a woman dressed in scarlet and purple, wearing gold, jewels and pearls, sitting on a scarlet beast with 7 heads and 10 horns (i.e. the sea-beast of 13:1). She is called “the mother of whores and of earth’s abominations” (17:5). Her sexual immorality is a metaphor for political and religious subservience to the agenda of empire, including its ideology of economic exploitation (18:3). The scene ends with a mighty angel throwing a millstone into the sea, symbolizing the destruction of Babel.

This is the fate of the first human city — Babel — which symbolizes all the great cities in human history that have been or become associated with empire imperial religion: e.g. Babylon. In the time of John of Patmos this would include Jerusalem which has recently been destroyed, and Rome whose destruction is desirable to his community.

19:1-10 The judgment and destruction of the “great whore” is met with rejoicing and praise in the heaven as these events signal that the “marriage of the Lamb has come” (19:7).

The city that is the agent of the earthly agent of the sea-beast and the land-beast has been destroyed but the dragon and his minions the sea-beast and the land-beast are still at work. John of Patmos sees a new vision that describes their fate.

READ REVELATION 19:11-21

Who is the one who deals with the sea-beast and the land-beast? How? What happens to the sea-beast and the land-beast (here is he called the false prophet as in 16:13)?

READ REVELATION 20:1-15

Who deals with the Dragon/Devil/Satan? What happens to him?

John introduces a strange innovation: 1st resurrection, Christ & martyrs reign for 1000 years, Satan released, gathers army which is consumed by fire from heaven, Satan is thrown into the lake of fire together with sea-beast and land-beast/false prophet, 2nd resurrection and judgment.

Excursus: Ancient and Moderns Views of Cosmic Process (Malina & Pilch, pp. 237-239)

Contemporary Euro-American culture is built on an evolutionary model of the world and society. The majority of people (even biblical literalists) are committed to the story of progress: development, new and better technology, the value of study for a better future, children who are stronger and better prepared, continuous betterment in spite of detours.

In the ancient Mediterranean cultures of John's time, the prevailing view of the world was devolution. They viewed the time of creation as a golden age that gradually grew tarnished as it devolved into silver, bronze and clay. This view was common among Greeks, Romans and Judeans. Here are some Israelite examples.

The youth of this world has passed away, and the power of creation is already exhausted, and the coming of the times is very near, [indeed] has passed by (2 Baruch 85:10).

For the age has lost its youth and the times begin to grow old (2 Esdras 14:10).

All ancient Mediterranean peoples believed that the world was running down — devolution — and a gradual collapse of the cosmos and of society. That is what is being acted out in the drama seen in the skies. Astronomers/astrologers believed that they could determine the date of the “Conflagration,” i.e. the earth will burn whenever all the planets converge in Cancer, and whenever the planets converge in Capricorn there will be another Great Flood (quoting from *Naturales Questiones* 3.29.1).

So the point of all that John reveals in his visions is that all the bad stuff that is happening in the world, reflects what is happening in the skies and that both are part of the pattern of cosmic devolution: the old sky/heaven and the old world are coming to an end in order to make way for a new sky/heaven and a new earth.

READ REVELATION 21:1-22:7

What are the main features of the new heaven and the new earth that John sees? Where and when is it?

The city is a cube measuring 1,380 miles per side, the length of the Great Wall of China. It would cover half of the United States and reach to the height of 260 Mt. Everests. The cube symbolizes the earth, i.e. the new Jerusalem and the new earth are identical.

The “marriage” of the Lamb is a poetic way of referring to a celestial conjunction between two constellations in the sky.

The ancient concept of the “revolving year,” i.e. the length of time it takes for all the stars to return to the positions they were in at the beginning of creation/time. When that happens the constellation Aries (the Lamb) will be the head of the cosmos, and everything in heaven and earth will repeat itself.

READ REVELATION 22:8-21 - How does the book end?