

# Revelation

Lesson 1



## Preaching from Revelation

“There is little [in Revelation] for the preacher who is in a hurry to get ‘something for Sunday.’

... But for the preacher who will linger in the text until the eyes adjust to the brilliant obscurity, the ears discern the words in trumpet blasts, and the heart is no longer a stranger amid terrible splendor, there is much to be seen and heard and to be proclaimed from the pulpit.”

Fred B. Craddock, “Preaching the Book of Revelation,”

Interpretation

40/3 (July 1986): 271.



# Definition of an Apocalypse

“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.

John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,”

Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre, ed. John J. Collins, *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9.



# Apocalyptic Writings

## Jewish Apocalypses

1. The "Book of the Watchers" (1 En. 1-36)—3rd century BC
2. The "Book of the Heavenly Luminaries" (1 En. 73-82)—3rd century BC
3. The "Animal Apocalypse" (1 En. 85-90)—2d century BC
4. The "Apocalypse of Weeks" (1 En. 93:1-10; 91:11-17)—2d century BC
5. Jubilees 23—2d century BC
6. The Testament of Levi 2-5—2d century BC
7. The Testament of Abraham—1st century BC—2d century AD
8. The Apocalypse of Zephaniah—1st century BC—1st century AD
9. The "Similitudes of Enoch" (1 En. 37-71)—1st century AD
10. 2 Enoch—1st century AD
11. 4 Ezra—1st century AD
12. 2 Baruch—1st century AD
13. The Apocalypse of Abraham—1st-2d century AD
14. 3 Baruch—1st-2d century AD

Christian Apocalypses (Gnostic Christian works are not included in this list.)

1. The Shepherd of Hermas—1st or 2d century
2. The Book of Elchasai—2d century
3. The Ascension of Isaiah 6-11—1st or 2d century
4. The Apocalypse of Peter—2d century
5. 5 Ezra 2:42-48
6. Jacob's Ladder—2d century?
7. The Testament of the Lord 1:1-14—3rd century?
8. The Questions of Bartholomew—3rd century?
9. The Apocalypse of Sedrach—2d-4th century?
10. The Apocalypse of Paul—4th century
11. The Testament of Isaac 2-3a—1st-5th century?
12. The Testament of Isaac 5-6—1st-5th century?
13. The Testament of Jacob 1-3a—2d-5th century?
14. The Testament of Jacob 2-5—2d-5th century?
15. The Story of Zosimus—3rd-5th century
16. The Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian—2d-9th century?
17. The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle 8b-14a—3rd-6th century?
18. The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle 17b-19b—3rd-6th century?
19. The Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary—4th-9th century?
20. The Apocalypse of Esdras—5th-9th century?
21. The Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God Concerning the Punishments—4th-11th century?
22. The Apocalypse of James, the Brother of the Lord—pre-11th century
23. The Mysteries of St. John the Apostle and Holy Virgin—pre-11th century



# Apocalypse

The Greek word apokalypsis, means “revelation.” This is the first word in this book. The word apocalypse then comes from this word and rather than meaning the complete and final destruction of the world means “revelation.”



# Otherworldly mediators

- ◆ Typically, apocalypses contain an otherworldly figure (often an angel) who serves as a mediator of what is being revealed to the earthly recipient.



# Human Recipient

- ◆ In most apocalypses, the human recipient is some important figure from the past such as Abraham, Enoch, Daniel, Ezra, Adam or Elijah.



# Crisis Literature

- ◆ Social and historical settings are often not known.



# Cognitive Dissonance

- ◆ Their preconceived notions about the world and reality did not match the actual situation as they experienced it.

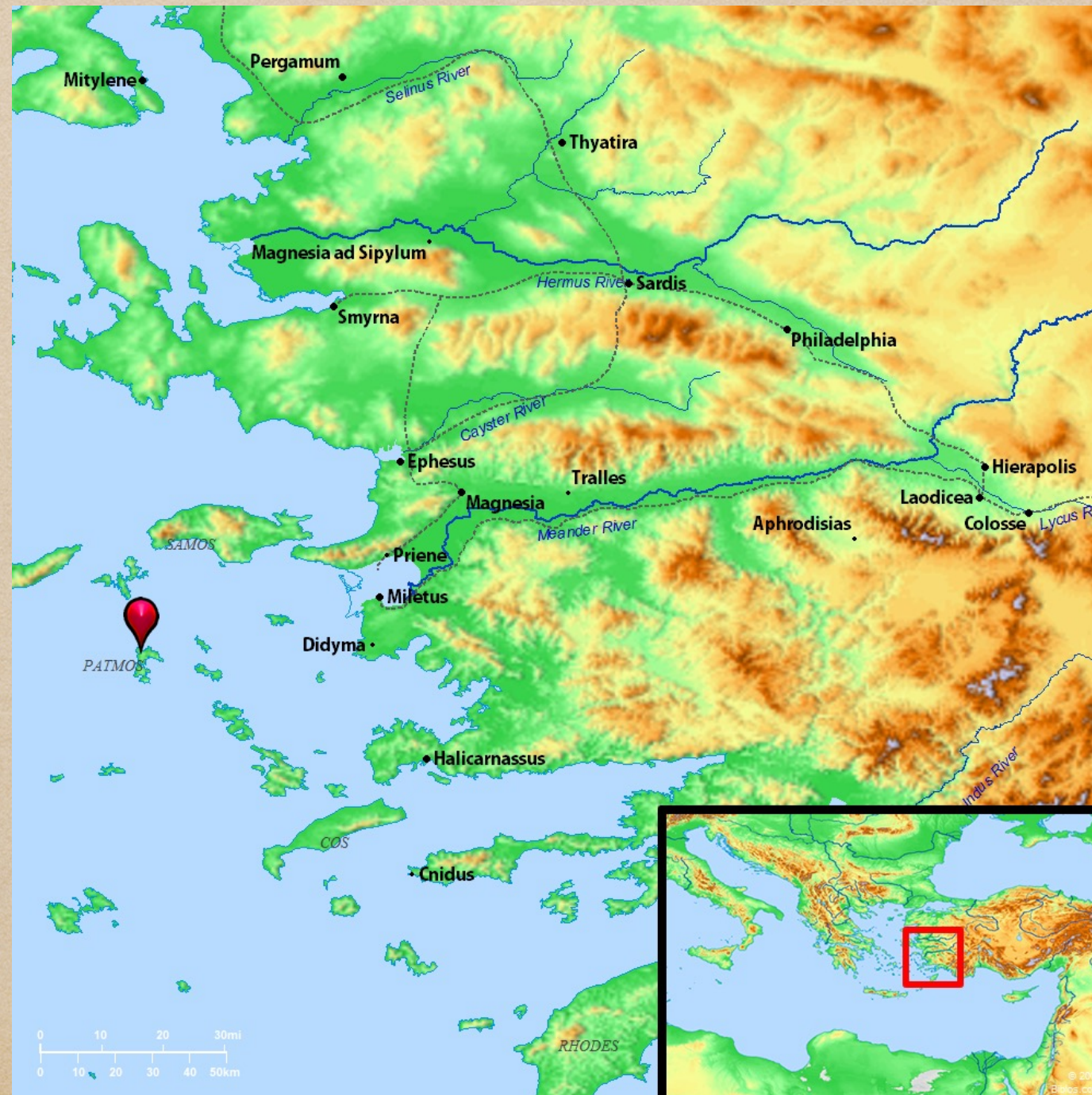


# Purpose

- ◆ Apocalyptic writings offered not only hope and comfort, but they also served as protest literature.



# Island of Patmos





# Pliny the Younger

- ◆ A.D. 112 - Wrote to the emperor Trajan that Christians were “of every age and class, both men and women” (Epistle to Trajan 10.96.9)



# Assimilation

- ◆ Religion
- ◆ Culture
- ◆ Economic
- ◆ Family



# Emperor Worship and Persecution

- ◆ Persecution and emperor worship are often cited as the primary problems addressed in Revelation.



# Roman Emperors of the First Century

Augustus (27 BC–AD 14)

Tiberius (14–37)

Caligula (37–41)

Claudius (41–54)

Nero (54–68)

Galba (June 68–January 69)

Otho (69)

Vitellius (69)

Vespasian (69–79)

Titus (79–81)

Domitian (81–96)

Nerva (96–98)

Trajan (98–117)



# Pliny the Younger

- ◆ A. D. 112 Pliny was sent to Bithynia-Pontus in northwestern Asia Minor as Governor.



# Emperor Worship

- ◆ Chapter 13 pictured as a beast that demands to be worshipped and who exterminates those that refuse.
- ◆ Persecution of Christians for failure to worship the Emperor may not have been widespread in the day of John, but it did occur.
- ◆ John appears to have anticipated that persecution of the church would grow over time.



# Persecution

- ◆ Traditional view is that persecution was widespread at the time John was writing.
- ◆ History does not support this view.



# Irenaeus

The statement of Irenaeus (c. AD 140–c. 202) that the vision of Revelation was seen at the end of the reign of Domitian is the earliest external evidence attesting the date of Revelation (Haer. 5.30.3).



# Authorship

- ◆ John - but which John.
- ◆ Justin Martyr - writing in A.D. 155 identifies the author as John, the son of Zebedee, one of the disciples of Jesus.



# Earliest Commentary on Revelation

- ◆ by Justin Martyr - There was a certain man with us whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believe in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place. (Dial. 81.4)



# Third century challengers to Authorship of Revelation

- ◆ Eusebius records that Dionysius of Alexandria challenged the traditional view of authorship during the 3rd century.



# Prochorus

- ◆ According to a legendary 5th-century writing known as the Acts of John by Prochorus, John was accompanied to Asia Minor by Prochorus, one of the seven people chosen by the Jerusalem church to assist in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:5). In addition to describing other events in the life and work of John, this work narrates John's exile to Patmos. Prochorus accompanied him there and served as his scribe, recording the visions dictated to him by John that became the book of Revelation. Although the story of Prochorus is likely nonhistorical, the traditions are strongly followed in some churches, particularly on the island of Patmos. The memory of Prochorus is celebrated on June 28 in Orthodox churches.



# Structure of Revelation

- ◆ The structure has perplexed New Testament scholars.
- ◆ All commentators recognize the number 7 as important as a structuring device in the book. There are seven messages, seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls.
- ◆ There is not a strictly linear progression of time in the book.

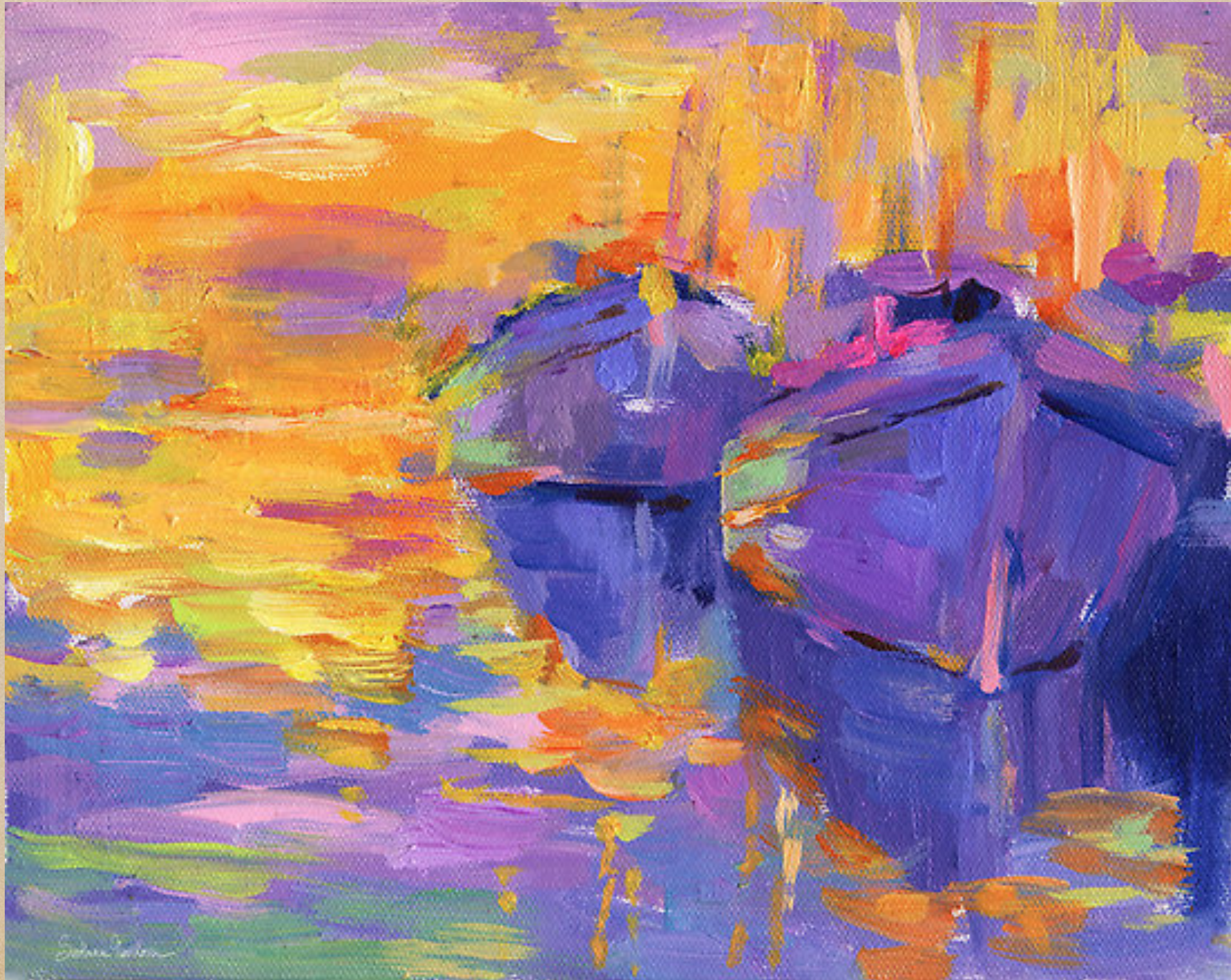


# The Power of Revelation

- ◆ “Exegetes and theologians still have to discover what artists have long understood: the strength of the language and composition of Rev. lies not in its theological argumentation or historical information but in its evocative power inviting imaginative participation. The language and narrative flow of Rev. elicit emotions, reactions, and convictions that cannot and should not be fully conceptualized and phrased in propositional-logical language.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 22.



Impressionistic rather than logical





# Themes

1. The Sovereignty of God.
2. Radical Monotheism.
3. Exalted Christology
4. Salvation - Christ brings salvation to the world.
5. Judgment and warning.
6. Nonviolent lifestyle.
7. Hope



# Sociohistorical Setting of Revelation

- ◆ As we begin to interpret Revelation we must keep in mind the setting of the original audience.



# Genre

- ◆ Apocalyptic Literature
- ◆ Prophecy



# Symbols and Myths

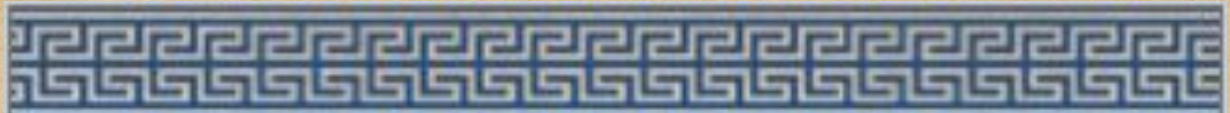
- ◆ Revelation uses *symbolic* and mythical imagery in order to convey truth. It talks about dragons and statues that come to life. There are themes that touch on popular myths.



# Imagination

- ◆ To read Revelation properly one must read it imaginatively. Revelations is like fantasia of sights, sounds, smells and actions.
- ◆ There is not just one meaning to revelation.





SMYTH & HELWYS BIBLE COMMENTARY

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# REVELATION

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