

Revelation Overview

- a. **Author**
- b. **Audience**
- c. **Date**
- d. **Apocalyptic Literature**

The Portrait of Jesus in Revelation

1. Images of Jesus in Revelation (Borchert, pp 160-79)

a. The _____ and _____

b. The _____

c. Lord of _____ and King of _____

2. Questions for Reflection (Borchert, p 179)

- a. After reading the author's analysis of the Gospel of John and Revelation, do you think that the portraits of Jesus in both books might be related? Could one author have possibly written two such different books? Explain the reason(s) for your view.
- b. What pictures of Jesus are the most captivating for you? Why?
- c. What pictures of Jesus do you find the most unlikeable? the most encompassing?
- d. How would you evaluate Dr. Borchert's organization of the book of Revelation? Is it helpful?
- e. How did you react to the way he treated the Seven Churches of Revelation?
- f. What is your opinion of the way he handled the issue of the millennium?
- g. What did you think of this author's treatment of Revelation as a dramatic presentation? Have you been able to recognize its dramatic features?
- h. Are you comfortable with the idea of using your imagination to interpret the various sections of Revelation? Does such a methodology help or detract from your understanding of Scripture? Explain.
- i. As you now reflect on the book of Revelation, how has this treatment of the book enabled you to read it with more (or less) confidence?
- j. How does the treatment presented here compare with what you have heard/studied previously? With what you have experienced in church?
- k. Finally, are you prepared to meet this Jesus *today*?

Homework

1. Read Borchert chapter 7, pp 187-93.
2. Which portraits of Jesus were new or the most insightful for your understanding of Jesus, his life, and mission?
3. Integrate the various portraits of Jesus painted by the New Testament writers into a composite portrait. Based on your composite portrait answer the following questions:
 - Who is Jesus?
 - What are we trying to communicate to people about God today?
 - How convinced are we in God's transforming power through this message?
 - Where is Jesus in relation to our lives, our possessions, and our conversations as well as in our church sermons and lesson plans?
 - How will we present Jesus to a growing biblically illiterate generation?
4. How has the insight that our daily walk (Hb., *halak*) with Jesus is more important than just following rules (Hb., *halakah*) affected you personally?
5. How will you live and share your portrait of Jesus with others as you await the coming of the Lord in power and glory?

Portraits of Jesus

A Portrait of Jesus in Revelation

A. Revelation Overview

1. Author

- a. **Read Rev 1:1-8.**
- b. The sender of the letter is identified as “John” (1:4), who is traditionally considered to be the Apostle John, one of Jesus’ disciples.
 - 1) By tradition, John became a leader in the church at Ephesus and in Asia Minor and was exiled by the Emperor Domitian to the Island of Patmos for his faith.
 - 2) While on Patmos, John experienced the powerful presence of the Lord who gave him a message of hope for believers which he recorded in Revelation.
- c. The ultimate source of Revelation is Jesus: “The revelation from Jesus Christ” (1:1).

2. Audience

- a. Have you seen the film *Cast Away* that came out in 2000 starring Tom Hanks?
 - 1) If you were marooned on a desert island, what two things would you most want to have with you? How would these items give you a sense of hope?
 - 2) Revelation was written to encourage Christians to remain faithful and true to God as they faced persecution from the world. It is a message of hope to those in seemingly hopeless situations.
- b. The original recipients of Revelation were generally “servants (Gk., *doulos*)” (1:1) of Jesus and more specifically “the seven churches in the province of Asia” (1:4), that is Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (cf., individual letters in Revelation 2-3).
- c. However, this book has been a source of hope for Christians through the ages and still is today.

3. Date

- a. John was most likely in his eighties when he wrote Revelation during his exile on the Island of Patmos. Since John was one of the youngest of the disciples, this would place the date of Revelation near the end of the first century CE.
- b. The time of writing was most likely near the end of the rule of the Emperor Domitian (CE 81-96). Domitian persecuted Christians and claimed the title “Lord and God.”
- c. The late first century followers of Jesus were understandably discouraged. Was it really true that Jesus would save them in the end? What about believers who had died as martyrs? What about the promise of Jesus’ return? From John’s opening sentences, suffering saints were encouraged by the reminder that Jesus, not Domitian, was “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5).

4. Apocalyptic Literature

- a. The Book of Revelation is prophecy (Gk., *propheteias*) (1:3).
 - 1) John’s prophecy is similar to some of the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.
 - 2) He both foretold the future but also focused on forth-telling in the present. His prophecy is a mixture of both divine predictions of the future as well as divine exhortations for God’s people living in the present time of persecution.
 - 3) John delivered his prophecy using two primary literary forms: 1) epistle/letter (i.e., letter to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3); and 2) apocalyptic.

- b. The Book of Revelation (Gk., *apokalupsis*), which means “revealing” or “unveiling,” contains a large amount of the unique literary form known as apocalypse.
 - 1) Apocalyptic writing was popular among the Jews from around 200 BCE to CE 200 and appeared especially during times of persecution or threat. It was a written code that their persecutors could not understand.
 - 2) Apocalyptic contains vivid, sometimes grotesque images utilizing animals, numbers, and other unusual objects as symbols. Numbers are critical. For example, the number 7 appears 45 times in Revelation to indicate perfection or completion.
 - 3) Apocalyptic goes beyond simple allegory, where images stand symbolically for something else. It contains exaggerated images that contemporary readers would have understood but which we often do not fully understand.
 - 4) Because of the apocalyptic images in Revelation, which are not unlike those in Daniel and Ezekiel, Christians have found this book to be somewhat frightening.
- c. Revelation is first and foremost about Jesus Christ. John wanted to make Jesus Christ known by painting a portrait of Jesus as the ultimate hope for believers.

B. The Portrait of Jesus in Revelation

- After reading the author’s analysis of the Gospel of John and Revelation, do you think that the portraits of Jesus in both books might be related? Could one author have possibly written two such different books? Explain the reason(s) for your view.
- What pictures of Jesus are the most captivating for you? Why?

1. Images of Jesus in Revelation (Borchert, pp 160-79)

a. The Alpha and Omega

- 1) “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty (Gk., *pantokrator*)’” (1:8).
- 2) Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last letter.
- 3) In Rev 1:17 Jesus declares that he is “The First and the Last” which is the same as his claim of being the Alpha and Omega. He was at the beginning of creation and will be at its end as well. He is constant and unchanging.
- 4) The statement “who is, and who was, and who is to come” also reminds us of God’s claim to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:14) and Jesus’ claims in John’s gospel to be the “I am” (Hb., *Yahweh*; Gk. *ego eimi*).
- 5) Borchert says, “Jesus is indeed the all-encompassing one (the Alpha and Omega), the almighty (*pantokrator*, perhaps the most powerful word in Greek; 1:8)” (Borchert, 161).
- 6) This claim of Jesus appears as a book-end (i.e., *inclusio*) at the beginning of Revelation (1:8) and at its end: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (22:13).

b. The Lamb

- 1) Revelation 4 is a wondrous description of God the Father on his heavenly throne.
- 2) Revelation 5 continues this vision with focus moving to Jesus, the Lamb in heaven.
- 3) **Read Rev 5:1-14.**
- 4) Jesus is both “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah” (cf., Rev 5:5; Ge 49:8-10; Isa 11:1-10) and also the “Lamb.”
- 5) How do these images of a powerful animal, a mighty lion, and a seemingly weak animal, a slain lamb (cf., Jn 1:29, both describe Jesus?

- 6) Borchert writes, “This picture is obviously another stunning Johannine Portrait of King Jesus, who was crucified at Passover time but then raised from the dead The world expected a Lion but is given a Lamb! Yet the Lamb is not weak; this Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes (the symbols of complete power and complete knowledge). Only this Lamb is able to receive the scroll from the enthroned God (5:6-7)” (Borchert, 165).
- 7) Donald Guthrie concludes, “Even a cursory glance through the book of Revelation shows that ‘the Lamb’ is the dominant title for Jesus. It occurs no fewer than 29 times, whereas Jesus Christ occurs only seven times and Christ four times. Since it is so dominant the title Lamb must provide an important clue for determining the purpose and meaning of the whole book” (“The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation” by Donald Guthrie in *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981) 64).
- The Lamb is first mentioned and worshiped in the vision of heaven in Revelation 5 prior to the opening of the scroll containing the judgments of the earth.
 - The wrath of the Lamb is released on the earth with the breaking of the 6th seal (Rev 6:16).
 - There are four mentions of the Lamb in Rev 7:9-17 as heaven rejoices over his judgment of sin on the earth.
 - The triumph of the saints over the Dragon (i.e., Satan) is attributed to “the blood of the Lamb” in the praise chorus of heaven (Rev 12:11).
 - The Lamb stands with and leads his faithful followers in Rev 14:1-5.
 - The Lamb is mentioned (Rev 14:10) and praised (Rev 15:3) as the final seven plagues are released in judgment of fallen Babylon and her followers.
 - The triumph of the Lamb over fallen Babylon is proclaimed in Rev 17:14.
 - There is great rejoicing at the “wedding supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:1-10).
 - The Lamb is at the center of the closing vision of the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21:1-22:5) – “In this section the Lamb is mentioned seven times, more than in any other single passage. His preeminence in the new community is undeniable” (Guthrie, 70).

c. The Lord of lords and King of kings

- 1) The Lamb comes in final judgment of the evil one and his allies.
 - a) John writes, “They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers” (Rev 17:14).
 - b) In his analysis of this verse, Borchert writes, “These emperors along with their understudies that follow them into battle are then contrasted with their sworn enemy, the mighty Lamb, who is their conqueror and who is ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’” (17:12-14).
- 2) **Read Rev 19:11-21.**
 - a) As the time of judgment comes to its ultimate conclusion, Jesus is pictured as a victorious warrior king riding on a white horse on the clouds.
 - b) He is known as “Faithful (Gk., *pistos*) and True (Gk., *alethinos*)” (cf., Rev 1:5 initial vision of Jesus and Rev 3:14 in his letter to church at Laodicea). Jesus is the personification of faithfulness and truth.
 - c) Those who suffer persecution are encouraged by the message of Revelation to not give up hope but to remain faithful and true to the one who is Faithful and True.

- d) “On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev 19:16). Note the inclusio with 17:14 as the time of war ends with the victory of the Lamb.
- 3) As Lord of lords and King of kings, Jesus is the righteous judge who calls everyone to account for what they have done.

a) **Read Rev 20:11-15.**

b) “In the final scene of this Judgment section, John makes it evident that facing the supreme tribunal will be an intimidating experience because, at the sight of this judge, even the earth and sky will scatter (20:11). Before this divine judicial bench, the dead from all ages must appear. Then the records concerning their lives will be opened and the actions of each person will be revealed (20:12). Hiding one’s deeds from this court is impossible, and authentic judgment on what one has done is guaranteed. And who could escape such a judgment? But wait a moment! There is one more book—the Book of Life—and that book is crucial: if one’s name is not inscribed in it, that person will follow the Devil into the eternal fiery lake along with its conclusion of death and the grave (20:14-15).

2. Questions for Reflection (Borchert, p 179)

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C. Homework

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