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Damgaard, Neil C. Box 1118
308 B Dr. Toussaint
Argument No. 2

THE ARGUMENT OF THE REVELATION

One of the most baffling, and at the same time marvelous, and in fact pastoral, books of the New Testament, is the Revelation to John. The apocalyptic nature of the writing has thrown many into confusion (it is the only New Testament book not commented on by John Calvin). But it should not be rejected merely because of its symbolism and figures. Each vision has a purpose, and while the symbols are at times unusual, they do depict meaningful happenings. Although it is a fairly lengthy book, its overall structure is not difficult to outline. Revelation 1:19 gives the thrust of the book, "write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things." After the introductory chapter, ("the things . . . seen"), come four series of sevens: seven letters (chs. 2 and 3), seven seals (5:1-8:1), seven trumpets (8:2-11:19), and seven bowls (15:1-16:21). The book includes several interludes within the narrative. It ends with the judgment of Babylon, the apostate civilization, the final triumph and consummation of God's Kingdom, and the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem (chs. 17-21).

I. The Purpose of the Revelation

Much discussion in print has gone on as to the specific purpose of the Book of Revelation. Some apply the book strictly

to the times in which it was written, others view it as wholly futuristic and still others see a dual purpose, both colloquial and futuristic. But regardless of the wide spectrum of opinions available, certain features of purpose are indisputable. First, that the Revelation was designed for a specific audience with specific needs is evident from the second and third chapters. Second, it is clear that these churches were "under the shadow of imperial persecution, whether or not it was a general policy," (Tenney, ZPEB, vol. 5, p. 93), and that the increasing opposition between church and state required attention. Third, the author manifestly desired to encourage his readers by means of the sure second return of Jesus Christ. And finally, the author portrays the overall triumph of right over wrong. R. H. Charles called the book "the Divine Statute Book of International Law," an apt description (Guthrie, NTI, p. 963).

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Bringing these elements together into a cohesive purpose for the book, it is seen that the Revelation is intended as epistolary literature, containing apocalyptic prophesy, with a view to the encouragement of Asian Christian churches concerning the triumph of right over wrong in the triumph of Christ over His enemies. This purpose encompasses the immediate difficulties of first century persecutions, plus the more long-sided problem of final eschatological conquest. The author's argument will be delineated, after an outline for the book is suggested.

II. Outline of the Book of Revelation

- I. 1:1-19 Introduction--the beginning and author of the Revelation

- II. 1:20-3:22 The Internal Need for Encouragement--
the Seven Churches.
- III. 4:1-18:24 The External Need for Encouragement--
the Prophecy.
 - A. 4:1-4:11 The Scene and Central Theme in
Heaven.
 - B. 5:1-7:17 The Book with Seven Seals, plus an
interlude.
 - C. 8:1-11:19 The Seven Trumpets, plus two
interludes.
 - D. 12:1-16:21 The Signs and the Seven Bowls.
 - 1. 12:1-14:20 The Signs.
 - 2. 15:1-16:21 The Seven Bowls.
 - E. 17:1-18:24 The Judgment on the Culture and
City of Babylon.
- IV. 19:1-22:21 The Final Encouragement
 - A. 19:1-20:14 The Conquest of Evil
 - B. 21:1-22:9 The Triumph of Christ
 - C. 22:10-21 Concluding Message.

III. Development of the Argument of the Book of Revelation

I. 1:1-19 Introduction--The Beginning and Author of the
Revelation.

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The first chapter of the book establishes the credibility and authenticity of the vision. It shows that the writing was written under sober circumstances. Although the tone will be apocalyptic and much of the writing including symbolism, it is not the concoction of hallucination. John tells us where (1:9), when (1:10) and why (1:19) the vision was given. And even at the outset of the writing, the supremacy and holiness of

Christ is evidenced. If persecuted Asian Christians received only chapter one, there would even there be great encouragement, because there is the testimony once again that their Lord is risen, and is victorious over death (1:5, 18).

But the chapter also gives the introduction to the whole prophecy, and directs it at the seven churches of Asia. Also, 1:3 probably indicates that the writing was meant for congregational reading.

II. 1:20-3:22 The Internal Need for Encouragement--
The Seven Churches.

By the time of the Revelation's writing, all kinds of difficulties were besetting the Asian churches. Their struggles were internal (as all churches experience in one way or another), and they needed attention. As John was the final apostle, the Lord Jesus gave it to him to bear His message to them. The messages are not generally pleasant, but necessary in the true pastoral intent with which they were given. Alan Johnson (Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 12, p. 431) offers the opinion that each letter to an individual church was apparently also intended for the other six churches as well. If this was true, then chapters two and three contain, as it were, a contemporary pastoral theology of the times, and stands in the writing as a unit. This seems reasonable in that John's purpose (and the Lord's) was to encourage. Their first need in Asia was to give attention to getting their own houses in order.

That is why the letters occur at the beginning of the writing instead of elsewhere. The preservation of a pure church, moral and doctrinal, is the church's greatest task.

An indirect lesson from these chapters (and supportive of the lessons for succeeding chapters), is the transcendence of the Lord Jesus above His churches, and His leadership. The Lord has full knowledge of specific happenings within each church. Knowledge of the Lord's love, even when He knows all about you, cannot help but be encouraging.

III. 4:1-18:24 The External Need for Encouragement--
The Prophecy.

Now, the book turns to its major section. The next fifteen chapters turn the attention from internal affairs to external, cosmological consummation. By the end of the first century, the Church's newness was waning, and it needed (in Asia, at least) some perspective on God's plan for the ages. That provided by the Lord, is not of a cursory nature. It gives in great detail the outline of what will occur in the final days. Though from our perspective of two millenia later, we may wish for details in more areas, for the Asian audience, and all who would read it then, it was sufficient.

A. 4:1-11 The Scene and Central Theme in Heaven.

This chapter focuses on the throne vision and provides the setting for the action of the slain Lamb in chapter five.

From here on, there is a frequent interchange between heaven and earth. With Johnson (p. 461), what happens on earth has its inseparable heavenly counterpart. This section introduces the purely visionary portion of the book, and sets it in perspective. It also sets the time for the worship of the sovereign God (despotes) throughout the book.

B. 5:1-7:17 The Book With Seven Seals, Plus an Interlude.

Again in this section the worthiness of the slain lamb of God is emphasized, i.e., the three hymns (5:9, 12, 13). The purpose of the section is to relate heavenly judgment to earthly affairs. The readers would be encouraged to see that injustice and martyrdom do not go unnoticed. The white robe given to the martyrs of chapter six evidence their righteousness and victory for the faith. The perseverance of the saints is precious to the Lamb! The interlude of chapter seven functions both prospectively and retrospectively.

C. 8:1-11:19 The Seven Trumpets, Plus Two Interludes.

The next series of judgments, carried out by angels rather than Christ, illustrates again His sovereignty over the world as Savior and Judge. The focus seems to change in this section onto individuals and their roles in the end times. The two witnesses play their part and are killed by the dragon. The author here is arguing that as these judgments take place, wickedness is still alive and at work, and God's testifiers are still suffering.

D. 12:1-16:21 The Signs and the Seven Bowls.

Here, the woman Israel comes onto the scene, and is opposed by the dragon. John is showing that God is not yet through with the nation Israel, that it has a special place in His plan (12:6). Also, he shows the ageless struggle between the good and bad angels, and the alienation which will take place in that sphere. The other features of the chapter (temple, the Holy City) are also intended as futuristic and seem the only reasonable interpretation as such. Chapters 12-14 give us some detail of the persecution of God's people by the dragon and the beasts, and the latter's ultimate doom. To the readers this must have been a marvelous encouragement, which again, is the main purpose of the Revelation.

The final series of sevens, the Bowls, occurs in chapter 16. They occur in rapid succession and show the fullness (the number 7 symbolizing) of judgment. John is again writing to show God's sure and righteous judgment that will one day be literally and actually accomplished in this world.

E. 17:1-18:24 The Judgment on the Culture and City of Babylon.

In a real sence, the identity of Babylon controls the interpretation of the whole of Revelation. Typically, the consensus of exegetes has been (according to Johnson, p. 554) to interpret Babylon as Rome. Rather though, it seems better to

Any other purpose?

take it as the "total culture of the world apart from God" (Johnson, p. 554). These two chapters form a continuous unit dealing with, again, God's judgment on wickedness. The particular human perpetrators of wickedness are here being shown to receive their proper judgment. It is a necessary section to the book, and the cosmology that John is giving.

IV. 19:1-22:21 The Final Encouragement.

If ever there was a New Testament writing which might incline one to hold to a dictation theory of inspiration, it might be the Revelation. And yet, the visions and prophecies are fully brought by Christ through John to their full culmination in this last section. The struggles between men, angels, societies and God are brought to their climax in this last transcendent section.

A. 19:1-20:14 The Conquest of Evil.

While we may not be able to answer the question, "Where did evil come from?" we can answer the question "Where will it end?" God is praised here (19:1-5) for His righteous judgment and vindication on evil and evil's servants. What consolation this must have been for late first century Christians, besieged all around by all kinds of wickedness. Chapter 20 describes the millennial happenings, the culmination of thousands of years of believers' anticipation, and the final and complete judgment. This judgment is the last settling of accounts between God

and Satan, and shows the contrast between God's intentions for His own and His enemies.

B. 21:1-22:9 The Triumph of Christ.

The conclusion of the prophecy and the conclusion of special revelation hold the triumph of Jesus Christ, still and forever, the Lamb. John gives the glimpse of eternity with Christ (and with no night, 22:5) and the final exhortation to heed the words today, of the prophecy of the future (22:7, 11).

C. 22:10-21 Concluding Message.

Resounding with divine authority, the Revelation closes with an epistolary benediction. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things for the churches . . ." (22:16). The prophecy is true, and will come to pass. Verse 17 again rings the message of the whole Bible: grace. And while much in Revelation seems terrifying, it is encouraging to read about grace and life at its end. To its first readers, this must also have been comforting and refreshing.

IV. Summary

The Book of Revelation is a difficult book within which to delineate a single argument. John has shown, however, several basic points. He wrote, by the inspiration of Christ, to encourage and exhort his audience about their own state internally and about the world (mostly hostile) around them.

He also wrote more broadly to show the final consummation of Christ's rule and the final defeat of Satan and all evil.

John's heart-intent in the book was to cultivate spiritual life and to lay down principles for conduct for the lives of his readers who were beset by opponents on every side. He has shown that there is cause for perseverance and hope: Christ is surely coming soon!

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Alan F. Johnson, Commentary on Revelation in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Zondervan, 1981.

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Merrill C. Tenney, article on the Book of Revelation in The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Zondervan, vol. 5, 1975.

Paragraph
TITLE

Paragraph
Summary

Mark 11:27-33

Jesus' response on the ^{→ His authority?} posed by the priests, etc. on the origin of the baptism of John.

[You don't fool around w/ Jesus I]
①

12:1-12

Parable: vineyard / vinegrower / son.
Ps. 118:22, 23

[Killers of the Son]
②

12:13-17 "Parable" to Phis & Herodians:

[Jesus and Caesar] OBJECT LESSON - PERPLETION: Denarius w/ Caesar on it.

12:18-27 Sadducees "parable" to Jesus on

[You don't fool around w/ Jesus II] the wife w/ 7 husbands - the resurrection?
Jesus answers about it directly.
Deut. 25:5 ← Ex. 3:6

12:28-34

[The Cⁿ Life's Bottom Line] 1 scribe asks for the foremost commandment. Jesus' response to him is positive.
Deut. 6:4, 5 / Lev. 19:18

12:35-37

[Quality Teaching from Jesus] Jesus teaches on the relationship between Messiah & David. Ps. 110:1 - Jesus teaching was enjoyable. why?

12:38-40

[Scribal Hypocrisy] "Beware of the Scribes"

12:41-44

[The Widow and] Giving out of surplus / or poverty

Rep. of Strategy

CONTRAST

Direct vs. Indirect

INSTRUM.
using tools to comm. truths

Also: Between # 1,2,3,4:
Responsive to opposers
5,6,7,8:
Teaching to sympathizers

CONTRAST

A little HARD TO FOLLOW