

Revelation

Apocalypticism



Literary World of Apocalyptic

- Revelation along with Daniel represent apocalyptic literature in the scripture
- Other apocalyptic literature in the Bible includes Mark 13, Matt. 24-25, Luke 21
- non-canonical apocalyptic literature was very common from about 200 BCE - 200 CE, including writings of Essenes found in the Dead Sea Scrolls
- "Apocalypse" comes from a Greek word meaning revealed or uncovered

Literary World (cont.)

- Apocalyptic literature characterized by:
- ecstatic visions
- rich, often complicated and bizarre symbolism
- dualisms of time (this age and the next), morality (good vs. evil), being (heavenly creatures vs. creatures of chaos)
- God's judgment
- final battle between good and evil

Historical World of Revelation

- Author is John of Patmos
 - Patmos was a penal colony where John exiled for preaching the word of God (1:9)
 - John may have been related to Johannine community because he shares several key terms, e.g., logos and lamb, but the Greek is inferior to that of the gospel and Johannine letters
- Probably written during reign of Domitian around 90 CE, when there was persecution of Christians, especially in Asia Minor (where the 7 churches are)
- The use of apocalyptic as subversive literature designed not to be detected by authorities

Revelation - Literary World

- 1:8 -- "Alpha and Omega" -- first and last letters of Greek alphabet signifying that Christ/God is first and last (also 2:8)
- 2:1-3:22 -- letters to seven churches of Asia Minor in prophetic mode, calling each church to faithfulness

Seven Seals

- 4:1-11:9 -- Visions from heaven assure the readers that God is in control of all that is about to happen as bad as it might be
- First four seals release four horsemen of apocalypse (conquest, war, food shortages, and death) given authority over 1/4 of world
- Fifth seal reveals those martyred for their faith, the sixth cosmic disasters and salvation of 144,000 (representing 12 tribes of Israel) then a great multitude from every nation
- Seventh seal is opened and there is silence, then seven trumpets sounded

The Woman, the Dragon, the Beast and the Plagues

- Ch. 12 -- who is the woman?
 - Some scholars suggest Israel (crown of 12 stars) who produced (gave birth to) the messiah
- Dragon with 7 heads, 10 horns, & 7 crowns is identified as Satan and expelled from heaven by Michael
- The beast from the sea with 7 heads, 10 horns, 10 crowns with blasphemies against God -- a symbol of Rome, embodiment of Satan

Beast (cont.)

- The beast from the earth, requiring people to worship first beast, deceived world with miracles, placing mark on right hand or forehead of each person, 666 (616), which is the numerical value of a man's name
- *gematria* was common form of symbolism (see p. 419-21)
- letters represented numbers in Greek, Hebrew and Latin (Roman numerals), so anyone's name had a numerical value by adding together the letters
- Nero--supposedly suicided in 68, but popular view of the Sibylline Oracles was that he was alive in hiding (like Elvis today)
- numerical value in Aramaic of Nero Caesar is 666 (when Nero is spelled as Neron, the common form), and 616 when spelled without the final "n" (see p. 473)

Three Methods of Interpretation (from Stephen Harris)

- Revelation was written for a first century audience that would be familiar with the symbols used, relating them to contemporary events
- Revelation is predicting things in our future, and in conjunction with Daniel, and other apocalyptic pieces provides clues for determining how and when the world will end
- Recognizes the truth of first method, but also see in Revelation themes that apply to our time as well, e.g., the threat of evil to overtake the world and God's ultimate triumph over evil

Concluding Point of Revelation

- After an account of Christ's millennium reign, and the lake of fire (Hades), the book culminates with image of a wedding of the Lamb and the heavenly city come to earth -- a new creation with God dwelling among humankind
 - inspiration of "beatific vision"
