

BEYOND THE MILLENNIUM

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I. Some axioms of interpretation of Revelation

- A. The book is a letter
 - 1. It is written in typical letter format (1:4; 22:21)
 - 2. We are reading someone else's mail; consider how we interpret other New Testament letters
 - 3. It is an exhortation to be heeded (1:3)
- B. The time was near
 - 1. Shortly to come to pass (1:1; 22:6)
 - a. Dictionaries define in terms of speed, quickness, swiftness, haste
 - b. Other passages: Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Romans 16:20; 1 Timothy 3:14
 - 2. Time near (1:3; 22:10)
 - a. Dictionaries confirm
 - b. Other passages: Matthew 26:18; John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55
 - 3. Contrast between Daniel 8:26 and Revelation 22:10. Daniel 8 was to be sealed because it referred to 400 years in the future; Revelation 22 was not to be sealed for the time was near (see McGuiggan)
- C. The language is symbolic
 - 1. Possibly the significance of the term "signified" in 1:1
 - 2. 1:20 gives a paradigm just like Jesus gave an interpretive model for the parables with the explanation of the sower and the tares
 - 3. Symbolic use of numbers; see Beale and Bauckham for intricate examples
- D. John wrote what he saw (1:19)
 - 1. Imagine John in a theater watching a drama
 - 2. We need to sit beside him and see what he saw
 - 3. Then we must ask what it means
- E. The book should be studied in its own light
 - 1. Revelation shows amazingly detailed structure, development of themes and depth
 - 2. Before attempting to correlate with history or even with other Scriptures, the book needs to be analyzed in its own terms

II. Important themes

- F. Efforts of the devil to destroy Christians
 - 1. Preliminary indications of the sufferings of Christians (1:9; 2:9-10, 13)
 - 2. Central crisis of the book

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- a. Cry of souls underneath the altar (6:9-11)
 - 1) Based on concept of sacrifice
 - a) The blood represents the life/soul (Leviticus 17:10-11)
 - b) Blood of sacrificial animal was poured out at base of the altar; these brethren were sacrificed for His cause (Exodus 29:12; Leviticus 4:7)
 - 2) The injustice of their execution cries out for vengeance (see Genesis 4:10; Job 16:18)
 - 3) They were promised that their blood would be avenged after a little while
 - b. Many later references: 9:13; 14:18; 16:5-7; 17:6; 18:20,24; 19:2-3; 20:4-6
3. Prayers of the Christians
 - a. Offered (5:8; 8:1-5)
 - b. Answered (8:5; 15:5-16:1)
 - 1) Link with one of four living creatures (5:8; 15:7)
 - 2) Golden bowl (5:8; 15:7)
 - 3) Seven angels (8:1-5; 15:6)
 - 4) Smoke of incense (8:4; 15:8)
 - 5) Judgment thrown to the earth (8:5; 16:1)
 - 6) We should thus see the bowls of wrath as being God's answer to the bowls of prayers
 4. Many references to persecution: 7:14; 11:7; 12:12-17; 13:7, 15-17; 17:6
 5. The devil uses three key allies in his fight
 - a. Sea beast representing persecution (Roman Empire)
 - b. Earth beast representing false religion (emperor worship)
 - c. Babylon/harlot representing immorality and greed (Rome)
 6. The devil's attacks on Christians are especially fierce because (Revelation 12)
 - a. He has been defeated and is enraged
 - b. He has lost his ability to accuse the brethren before God so all he can do is try to get them to defect
 - c. The intensity of the persecution proves not the strength of the devil but the greatness of his defeat
- G. Christ's victory over the devil
1. Pictures of the greatness of Christ (1:12-20; 4-5)
 2. Weapons in God's arsenal: four horses (6:1-8; see Zechariah 1:7-11; 6:1-8)
 3. Trumpets of warning leading to the execution of God's judgment against the persecutors
 4. In the last half of the book especially, the camera zooms in on the devil's defeat from many different angles
 - a. Headlines of coming judgment (14:6-13)
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- 1) Hour of judgment has come (14:6-7; cf., chs. 15-16)
 - 2) Babylon has fallen (14:8; cf., chs 17-18)
 - 3) Torment of beast's followers (14:9-11; cf., chs 19-20)
 - 4) Rest for the faithful (14:12-13; cf., chs 21-22)
 - b. Preliminary judgments (14:14-20)
 - c. Outpouring of bowls of wrath (15-16)
 - d. Detailed examination of fall of each of the forces of evil
 - 1) Babylon (17-18)
 - 2) Sea beast and false prophet (19)
 - 3) Devil (20)
 - 4) Notice that the story of their fall is recounted in reverse order to their introduction, forming a structural chiasm
 - H. Victory for God's people
 1. Predicted in the promises to the overcomers in 2-3
 2. Promised in 6:9-11
 3. Sketched out in the resurrection of the two witnesses in 11
 4. Headline in 14:12-13
 5. Implied in 18:20-19:10
 6. Depicted in fullness in 21:1-22:5

III. Overview of Revelation 20-22

- I. Defeat of the devil (20:1-3)
 1. He has masterminded the efforts to destroy Christians
 2. Bound for 1000 years
 - a. 1000 years is certainly figurative
 - b. McGuiggan sees 1000 years as a figure of completeness of the defeat
- J. Martyrs raised to sit on thrones (20:4-6)
 1. This picture is the answer to the cry of 6:9-11
 2. The victory of the martyrs and the binding of Satan are two sides of the same coin
 3. Note the idea of resurrection as a symbol of victory (Ezekiel 37) and notice that the resurrection in this context indicates that the souls that were underneath the altar have been "raised" up to sit on thrones
 4. Key elements of dispensational view of this text are missing
 - a. Second coming of Christ
 - b. Resurrection of bodies
 - c. Earth

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- d. 1000 year reign of Christ; this 1000 years is the time the martyrs share with Christ in His reign; He was already reigning before and continues to reign after
 - e. Jerusalem, Jews, Israel
- K. Satan released to be defeated again (20:7-10)
- 1. Gog and Magog symbolize the mythical powers of evil (Ezekiel 38-39)
 - 2. Shows that the binding of Satan did not represent the absolute elimination of evil
 - 3. Shows that Christ will win no matter how powerful the devil's allies might be
- L. Judgment scene (20:11-15)
- 1. Symbolizes the defeat of the people who were on Satan's side
 - 2. While a reference to the final judgment is not impossible here, I believe it is better to see the primary reference as the defeat of the persecutors in the first century
 - a. The time references in the book (1:1,3; 22:6,10)
 - b. Parallels with Daniel 7:9-12 which relates to the defeat of the fourth beast
- M. Perfect fellowship (21:1-8)
- 1. New heavens and new earth: new way of life following the period of affliction and persecution
 - 2. New Jerusalem
 - a. What a change in God's woman from chapter 12!
 - b. Whereas the devil's woman, Babylon, was defeated; God's woman is victorious
 - c. Peace, security, joy, presence of God
 - d. Those excluded (21:8)
- N. Perfect protection (21:9-27)
- 1. Note that he is being shown a people, not a place, though described as a city
 - 2. Appearance of the city (21:9-14)
 - a. Picture of the church having come out of the great tribulation
 - b. 12 apostles as foundation stones confirms the notion that this refers to God's people (Ephesians 2:20)
 - 3. Measurement of the city (21:15-17)
 - a. A store that used gold shoe horn instead of a plastic one has extremely valuable shoes
 - b. Perfect cube was foreshadowed by the Holy of Holies
 - c. In literal terms would be 250 times taller than Mount Everest
 - 4. Material of the city (21:18-21)
 - 5. Internal features of the city (21:22-27)
 - a. Security; no need to hastily close the gates because of approaching enemy
 - b. Typical prophetic picture
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O. Perfect provision (22:1-5)

P. Conclusion (22:6-21)

IV. Supplementary studies

Q. Tale of two women/cities

1. I believe that one of the main themes of the last half of Revelation is the contrast between the devil's woman and God's woman
2. The devil's woman is defeated and God's woman is victorious
3. The devil's woman is Babylon representing his own people, immorality and greed and specifically the city of Rome
4. God's woman is His people
5. Note the following comparisons
 - a. Shown by one of seven bowl angels (17:1; 21:9)
 - b. John was carried away in the Spirit to see (17:3; 21:10)
 - c. Seen in the desert (17:3; 12:6,14)
 - d. John worshipped angel at close of picture (19:10; 22:8-9)
6. Note the following contrasts
 - a. Great city/holy city (17:18; 21:2,10)
 - b. Harlot/bride (17:1; 21:2,9)
 - c. Seated on many waters/coming out of heaven (17:1; 21:10)
 - d. Clothing of gaudiness/purity (17:4; 21:11)
 - e. Name on forehead (17:5; 22:4)
 - f. Mother of abominations/nothing abominable enters (17:5; 21:27)
 - g. Dwelling place of demons/God (18:2; 21:3,22)
 - h. Exhortation to flee/blessing for entering (18:4; 22:14)
 - i. Slaughter/healing and life (17:6; 18:24; 22:1-2)
 - j. Source of glory is self/God (18:7; 21:11,23)
 - k. Moral influence on the nations (17:2; 18:3,23; 21:24)
 - l. Wine/water of life (14:8; 17:2; 18:3; 21:6; 22:1-2)
 - m. Earth reaching to heaven/heaven reaching to earth (18:5; 21:2)
 - n. Kings of earth destroy/bring glory into (17:15-18; 21:24)
 - o. Wealth of nations is temporary/permanent (18:12-17; 21:24-26)
7. Conclusions
 - a. The devil's city/woman was glamorous, haughty, impressive; yet was destroyed in one hour
 - b. The Lord's city/woman was persecuted, mistreated; yet overcame and was glorified

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- R. Revelation 20-22 manifests the fulfillment of the promises to the overcomers
1. Tree of life (2:7; 22:2,14)
 2. Not hurt by second death (2:11; 20:6)
 3. New name (2:17; 3:12; 22:4)
 4. Authority over the nations (2:26; 3:21; 20:4; 22:5)
 5. Morning star (2:28; 22:16)
 6. Clothed in white (3:5; 21:2; 22:14)
 7. Book of life (3:5; 21:27)
 8. Pillar in temple (3:12; 21:9ff)
 9. New Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2,10)
- S. Revelation 21-22 is filled with the language the prophets use to describes the blessings of the Messianic age. This makes it difficult to demand that these texts refer to the church in heaven
1. New heaven and earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22)
 2. New Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:18-19)
 3. Bride adorned for her husband (Isaiah 61:10)
 4. Tabernacle of God with men (Ezekiel 37:27-28; Zechariah 2:10-11)
 5. No death, mourning, pain, tears (Isaiah 25:8; 30:19; 35:10; 51:11; 61:1-3; 65:19-20)
 6. Everything becomes new (Isaiah 42:9; 43:18-19; 48:6)
 7. Water of life (Isaiah 41:17; 49:10; 55:1; Joel 3:18)
 8. Glory of God (Isaiah 60:1-3)
 9. Gates of city (Ezekiel 48:31-34)
 10. Measuring of city (Ezekiel 40-42; Zechariah 2:1-2)
 11. City foursquare (Ezekiel 48:16-20)
 12. Walls of jewels (Isaiah 54:11-12)
 13. God as the only light (Isaiah 24:23; 60:19-20)
 14. Nations walk in its light (Isaiah 2:3; 60:14; Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 8:20-23)
 15. Gates never close (Isaiah 60:11)
 16. No night (Isaiah 30:26; 60:19-20; Zechariah 14:6-7)
 17. Glory and honor of the nations (Isaiah 45:14; 49:22-23; 60:5,11-14; 61:6)
 18. Nothing unclean comes into it (Isaiah 35:8-10; 52:1; Ezekiel 44:9)
 19. River of life (Isaiah 41:17-20; 43:20; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Zechariah 14:8)
 20. Tree of life (Ezekiel 47:12)
 21. No curse (Zechariah 14:11)
 22. Throne of God (Jeremiah 3:17)
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23. Reign for ever (Daniel 7:18,22,27)
- T. Triple fulfillment of this prophetic language
1. For many of the figures used in Revelation 20-22 one can cite references to show a general fulfillment in the Messianic age, references in Revelation to show a specific fulfillment in the victory over the beast, and other references to show an ultimate, ideal fulfillment in heaven
 2. For example
 - a. Fall/binding of Satan
 - 1) In Christ (Matthew 12:29; Luke 10:18)
 - 2) In victory of Revelation (20:1-3)
 - 3) Ultimate (Matthew 25:41)
 - b. New heavens and earth
 - 1) In Christ (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22)
 - 2) In victory of Revelation (21:1)
 - 3) Ultimate (2 Peter 3:13)
 - c. Absence of mourning
 - 1) In Christ (Isaiah 25:8; 30:19)
 - 2) In victory in Revelation (21:4)
 - 3) Ultimate (7:17)
 - d. Resurrection
 - 1) In Christ (Romans 6:3-5)
 - 2) In victory in Revelation (20:4-6)
 - 3) Ultimate (1 Corinthians 15)
 - e. The Lord's reign
 - 1) In Christ (Acts 2:36; Matthew 28:18)
 - 2) In victory in Revelation (20:4-6; see Daniel 7)
 - 3) Ultimate (1 Corinthians 15:27-28)
- U. Conclusion ties to introduction
1. To show bondservants (1:1; 22:6)
 2. Things which must shortly take place (1:1; 22:6)
 3. By angel (1:1; 22:6)
 4. John saw (1:2; 22:8)
 5. Blessed is the one who heeds the words (1:3; 22:7)
 6. The time is near (1:3; 22:10)
 7. To the seven churches (1:4; 22:16)
 8. Grace to you (1:4; 22:21)
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9. Faithful witness/words true (1:5; 22:6)
10. Released from sin/washed robes (1:5; 22:14)
11. He is coming (1:7; 22:7)
12. Amen (1:7; 22:20)
13. Alpha and Omega (1:8; 22:13)

V. Garden of Eden revisited

1. Death reversed (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:19; Revelation 21:4)
2. Pain (Genesis 3:16; Revelation 21:4)
3. River (Genesis 2:10; Revelation 22:1)
4. Tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24; Revelation 22:3,14, 19)
5. Curse (Genesis 3:14-19; Revelation 22:3)
6. Presence of God (Genesis 3:8-11; Revelation 22:4)
7. Expelled from garden/reign for ever (Genesis 3:22-24; Revelation 22:5)
8. Devil's deception (Genesis 3:1-6; Revelation 20:3)
9. Entrance closed/entrance open (Genesis 3:24; Revelation 21:24)
10. Use of garden of Eden in the prophets (Isaiah 35; 51:3; Ezekiel 28:13; 36:35; 31:8-18)

V. **Conclusions**

- W. I think it is best to see Revelation 21-22 as the victorious state of the church following the defeat of first-century persecutors
1. Fits best with the notion of things to come to pass shortly
 2. Fits best with the two women contrast in the book
 3. Gives the book practical meaning for the churches addressed
- X. But the practical message of comfort and inspiration is nearly the same regardless of the approach taken in interpreting the symbols of Revelation 21-22

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Selected Bibliography

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- Beale, G.K. *The Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. There is a lot of information in this commentary (1157 pages of text). It is actually fairly readable, too.
- Beasley-Murray, George Raymond, *The Book of Revelation*. London: Oliphants, 1974. Worth scanning.
- Hailey, Homer. *Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979. This is a good, safe commentary. Hailey is not as insightful as some, and he is wrong on several specific points (in my view), but the commentary is easy to read and worthwhile.

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- Johnson, Alan F. "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981. Premillennial, but still worth reading, in a series that is possibly the best modern series among denominational scholars.
- McGuiggan, Jim. *The Book of Revelation*. Lubbock: Montex Publishing Company, 1978. This is probably the best commentary on chapters 20-22. It is generally good on the rest of the book too, although occasionally I believe he misses it (e.g., white horse in ch. 6).
- Morris, Leon. *The Revelation of St. John*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969. This is a solid, concise commentary.
- Mounce, Robert H., *The Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977. A very well written, well informed commentary. Despite being mildly premillennial, Mounce has written one of the best commentaries on the book.
- Summers, Ray. *Worthy is the Lamb*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951. This is a very good, concise commentary on Revelation, though I disagree with his futurist view of 20:11-22:5.
- Wall, Robert W. *Revelation*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. This is worth scanning.