

“This fresh and lucid work is written in an accessible style. Stevens presents a coherent history of apocalyptic and interpretive history, and places Revelation in its proper Jewish and Roman contexts. Through deep exploration and engaging analysis, the reader is invited to a Christocentric reading of Revelation in light of Jesus’ incarnation and passion. This passion-millennial approach reconfirms Revelation’s canonical place and authority. A ‘must read’ for scholars, clergy, and laypersons alike.”

—**Renate Viveen Hood**

Professor of Christian Studies, The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

“Gerald Stevens offers a reading of Revelation that confronts and counters centuries of misinterpretation; simultaneously, he demonstrates the relevance of the Apocalypse for every generation. Rooted firmly in the context of the Seer of Patmos and of the believers in the seven churches, the interpretation offered here is both a sound, credible exegesis of Revelation and an example of the faithful application of hermeneutics to a challenging text.”

—**R. Warren Johnson**

Professor of Religion, East Texas Baptist University

“Gerald Stevens writes with students in mind. In a clear and understandable manner, Stevens makes the history of John’s Apocalypse accessible from its apocalyptic origins, through its original context, and across its interpretation for twenty centuries. Stevens ‘recanonicalizes’ the historic message of Revelation rooted in the gospel message of the cross in a way that is significant, relevant, and largely unheard today.”

—**Jeff Cate**

Professor of Christian Studies, California Baptist University

REVELATION

REVELATION

The Past and Future of John's Apocalypse

Gerald L. Stevens

☞PICKWICK *Publications* • Eugene, Oregon

REVELATION

The Past and Future of John's Apocalypse

Copyright © 2014 Gerald L. Stevens. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Pickwick Publications
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

ISBN 13: 978-1-62564-549-4

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Stevens, Gerald L.

Revelation : the past and future of John's apocalypse / Gerald L. Stevens.

xxxii + 633 p. ; 23 cm. Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 13: 978-1-62564-549-4

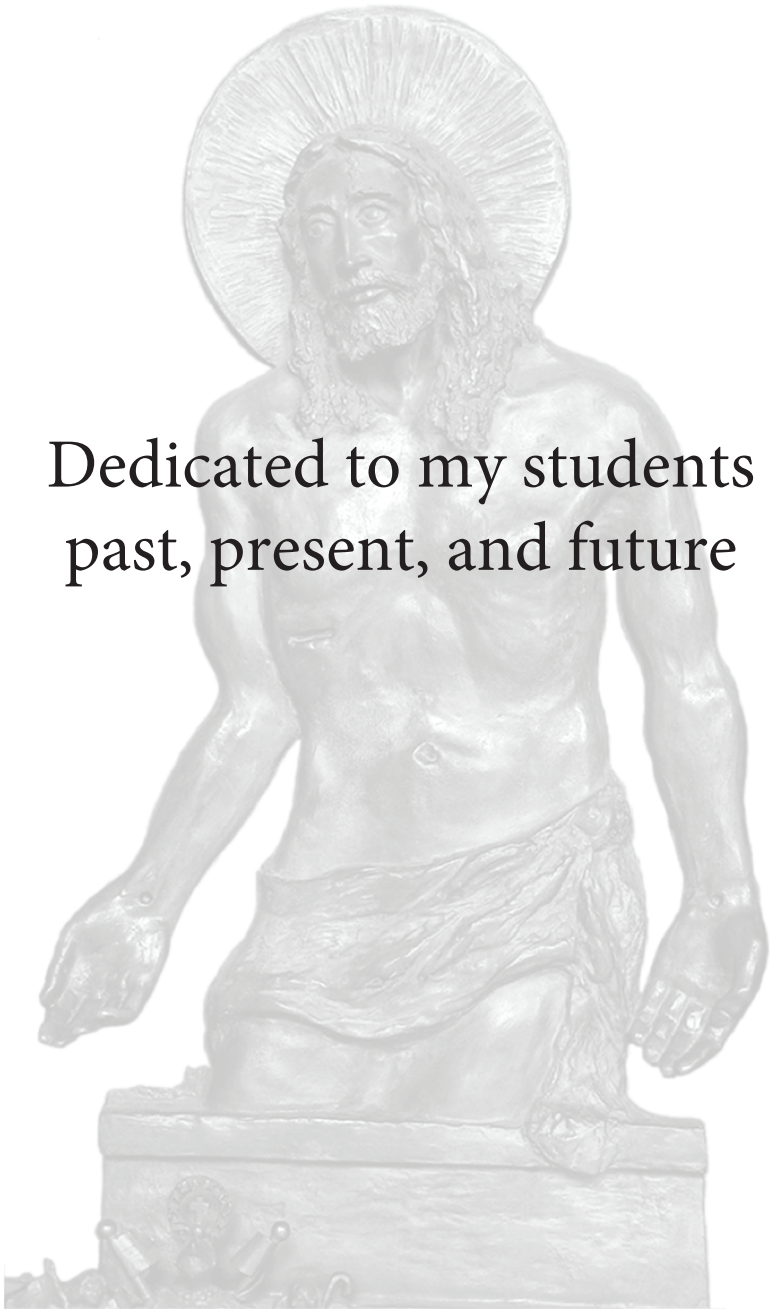
1. Bible. N. T. Revelation—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Bible. N. T. Revelation—Commentaries. I. Title.

BS2825.53 S77 2014

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

Cover Image: "Christ's Last Judgment" by Coppo di Marcovaldo, in the ceiling of the Battistero di San Giovanni, Florence, Italy. The imagery is allusive to Christ's last judgment parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46). At the right hand are the rewards of the saved as they leave their tombs; at the left hand, the punishments of the damned.

Dedicated to my students
past, present, and future



Credits and Permissions

In the pursuit of learning, we never walk alone, and we always stand on others' shoulders. This book is the result of many contributions, known and unknown, large and small, of many individuals over a lifetime. I thank students, colleagues, former teachers, pastors, family, friends, and Bible study leaders for their input into my understanding of God's Word. Especially assisting the production of this volume have been my wife, Jean M. Stevens, my legal counsel, Joseph W. Looney, and my doctoral assistant, Allyson R. Presswood.

Bar Kokhba Silver Tetradrachm, derived from Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., [www://www.cngcoins.com](http://www.cngcoins.com). Used by permission. Creative Commons license. All rights reserved.

Bede, *On the Reckoning of Time*, illumination of folio 53r from MS Hunter 85. Used by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. All rights reserved.

Cartography, unless indicated otherwise, is derived from *Accordance*, ver. 10.1.5. OakTree Software, Inc. 498 Palm Springs Drive, Suite 100, Altamonte, Fla. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Codex Sinaiticus, Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, England OX2 6DP, for the image of Codex Sinaiticus on p. 561 from Helen and Kirsopp Lake, *Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus: The New Testament, The Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, Preserved in the Imperial Library of St. Petersburg, Now Reproduced in Facsimile From Photographs by Helen and Kirsopp Lake, with a Description and Introduction to the History of the Codex by Kirsopp Lake* (The Clarendon Press, 1911).

Die Luther-Bibel von 1534, Vollständiger Nachdruck, Taschen GmbH, Hohenzollernring 53, D-50672 Köln, Germany. Abbreviated as Taschen.

viii Credits and Permissions

Doré woodcuts, from *Doré's Illustrations of the Crusades*, Gustave Doré, 1997. Dover Publications Inc., 31 East 2nd Street, Mineola, N.Y. 11501. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Douce Apocalypse (Ms 180) Illuminations, Copyright © *Akademische Drucku. Verlagsanstalt Graz*, Austria (ADEVA), A-8042 Graz, St. Peter Hauptstraße 98. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Abbreviated as ADEVA.

Hildegard, Antichrist illumination, *Scivias* 3.11, from Eibington Abbey codex 1, a modern copy of the lost Rupertsberg manuscript (late twelfth century). Scanned from the reproductions included in Lieselotte Saurma-Jeltsch's 1998 study, *Die Miniaturen im "Liber Scivias" der Hildegard von Bingen: die Wucht der Vision und die Ordnung der Bilder* (Wiesbaden: Reichert).

Joachim, *Figurae*, illumination of three ages, from CCC MS 255A fol. 7v. Used by permission of the President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. All rights reserved.

Koresh, David. Image available from Wikimedia, Creative Commons, taken to be in the public domain.

Late Great Planet Earth paperback cover, Taken from *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey, with C. C. Carlson. Copyright © 1970 by Hal Lindsey. Use by permission of Zondervan. www.zondervan.com.

The New Scofield Reference Bible; Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version (Oxford University Press, 1967), image of the title page. By permission of Oxford University Press, USA. All rights reserved.

Photograph by Mark A. Gstohl, Copyright © 2014 Mark A. Gstohl, 3725 Tall Pines Drive, New Orleans, Louisiana. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Photograph by Renate Viveen Hood, Copyright © 2014 Renate Viveen Hood, 3310 Elmer King Road, Belton, Texas. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Photograph by Rzuwig, taken 2012, of ancient Perge main boulevard with canal available through Wikipedia Commons under the Creative Commons license.

Photographs, unless indicated otherwise, are by Gerald L. Stevens, Copyright © 2014 Gerald L. Stevens, 3777 Mimosa Ct., New Orleans, Louisiana. All rights reserved.

Photographs by Jean M. Stevens, Copyright © 2014 Jean M. Stevens, 3777 Mimosa Court, New Orleans, Louisiana. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Roman merchant ship model, Science and Society Picture Library, Image #10422383, SCMG Enterprises Ltd., Science Museum Group, Exhibition Road, London SW7 2DD. Used by permission. © Science and Society Picture Library.

Scripture quotations unless marked otherwise are the author's own translation.

Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) Copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are from the *New American Standard Bible* Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the *New International Version* Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

Smith illustrations from Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation: The Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy; a Verse by Verse Study of These Important Books of the Bible*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1897.

Vespasian Coin, sestertius, copper alloy, A.D. 71, obverse laureate Vespasian with reverse goddess Roma, AN0417709001. British Museum. Used by permission. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Wikipedia Common images of Bede, Augustine, Book of Mormon, British Stamp Act, Czechoslovakia map, John Nelson Darby, Martin Luther, William Miller, Plague Victims, Charles Russell, Mount Carmel in flames, C. I. Scofield available through Wikipedia Commons under the Creative Commons license.

Wycliffe, John. Public domain. Image available at <http://www.graven-image.co.uk/2011/09/wycliffe/>

Contents

List of Figures • xiii

Preface • xxiii

Abbreviations • xxv

PART 1

Apollyon and Armageddon: Revelation's Apocalyptic Traditions and Their Interpretation in History

- 1 Tributaries of Tradition: Jewish Sources of John's Apocalyptic Traditions • 3
- 2 A Strong River: Historical Developments to the Reformation • 25
- 3 Swept Away Downstream: Reformation to the American Revolution • 53
- 4 A Mighty Flood: The Nineteenth-Century Deluge • 71
- 5 A Hermeneutical Swamp: Problematic Readings • 99
- 6 A Glassy Sea: Learning from History • 139

PART 2

Beyond Apollyon and Armageddon: Setting Hermeneutical Foundations for the Interpretation of Revelation

- 7 Interpretive Decisions: Genre, Prophecy, Judgments, Millennium • 145
- 8 Theological Decisions: Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology • 173
- 9 Contextual Decisions: Historical and Literary Settings • 201

PART 3

Apocalypse of Jesus Christ: Reading John's Vision of a Future Anticipated from the Past

- 10 Judgment of the Church: The Son of Man and His Churches • 249
 - 11 Judgment of the World: The Sovereign God and His World • 377
 - 12 Hope of Heaven: God and Christ and Their Victory • 525
- Epilogue: The Future of John's Apocalypse • 569

Bibliography • 577

Scripture Index • 591

Ancient Documents Index • 607

Modern Authors Index • 611

Subject Index • 613

Figures

- Figure P-1 Signorelli's Judgment Angels • xxii
- Figure 1.1 Ishtar Gate of Babylon • 4
- Figure 1.2 Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives • 4
- Figure 1.3 Jerusalem Temple Model • 5
- Figure 1.4 Signorelli's Resurrection of the Flesh • 6
- Figure 1.5 Cyrus Cylinder • 6
- Figure 1.6 Reproduction of a Qumran Scroll • 8
- Figure 1.7 Tel Megiddo's Overview of the Jezreel Valley • 8
- Figure 1.8 Alexander the Great Coin • 9
- Figure 1.9 Damned Taken to Hell and Received by Demons • 10
- Figure 1.10 Raphael Instructs Tobit on Demon Exorcism • 11
- Figure 1.11 Domitian Coin • 12
- Figure 1.12 Ephesus: Domitian Altar Frieze • 12
- Figure 1.13 Smith: The Great World Kingdom Image • 13
- Figure 1.14 Antiochus IV Coin • 14
- Figure 1.15 Pompeii Fresco of Pig Sacrifice • 14
- Figure 1.16 Roman Imperial Coins • 15
- Figure 1.17 Jerusalem Bronze, 11 B.C. • 15
- Figure 1.18 Qumran Caves • 16
- Figure 1.19 The Burnt House • 17
- Figure 1.20 Roman Civil War • 18
- Figure 1.21 Damaged Jerusalem Street • 19
- Figure 1.22 Judea Capta Sestertius • 19
- Figure 1.23 Mamertine Prison Plaque • 20
- Figure 1.24 Triumphal Arch of Titus • 20

- Figure 1.25 Arch of Titus: Jewish Menorah Relief • 21
- Figure 1.26 Tributaries of Tradition • 23
- Figure 2.1 Bar Kokhba Coin • 26
- Figure 2.2 Chiliasm and Premillennialism • 27
- Figure 2.3 Hierapolis of Asia Minor • 29
- Figure 2.4 Frontinus Gate of Hierapolis • 29
- Figure 2.5 Phrygia of Asia Minor • 30
- Figure 2.6 Battle of Milvian Bridge • 31
- Figure 2.7 Arch of Constantine • 32
- Figure 2.8 Venerable Bede • 33
- Figure 2.9 Saint Augustine in Prayer • 35
- Figure 2.10 Colosseum • 36
- Figure 2.11 Plague Victims Blessed by Priest • 38
- Figure 2.12 Bede Illumination, *On the Reckoning of Time* • 39
- Figure 2.13 Signorelli's Deeds of the Antichrist • 41
- Figure 2.14 Louis IX Attacks Damietta, 1249 • 42
- Figure 2.15 Hildegard Antichrist Illumination • 43
- Figure 2.16 Joachim, Three Ages Illumination • 45
- Figure 2.17 Douce Apocalypse at Rev 9:17 • 47
- Figure 3.1 Czechoslovakia in 1928–1938 • 54
- Figure 3.2 John Wycliffe (d. 1384) • 55
- Figure 3.3 Martin Luther (d. 1546) • 56
- Figure 3.4 New Testament Contents, *Luther Bible*, 1534 • 58
- Figure 3.5 Angers Apocalypse Tapestry • 59
- Figure 3.6 Rev 11 Illustration, *Luther Bible*, 1534 • 60
- Figure 3.7 Rev 17 Illustration, *Luther Bible*, 1534 • 60
- Figure 3.8 St. Lambert's Church Steeple • 63
- Figure 3.9 Colonial Millennialism • 65
- Figure 3.10 British Stamp Act • 67
- Figure 3.11 Development of Traditions • 69
- Figure 4.1 Book of Mormon Title Page, 1830 • 72
- Figure 4.2 William Miller (d. 1849) • 73
- Figure 4.3 Uriah Smith (d. 1903) • 77
- Figure 4.4 "The World Tomorrow" Broadcast • 79
- Figure 4.5 "GTA" Broadcasts • 81
- Figure 4.6 Charles T. Russell (d. 1916) • 81
- Figure 4.7 David Koresh (d. 1993) • 83
- Figure 4.8 Mount Carmel in Flames • 84

- Figure 4.9 John Nelson Darby (d. 1882) • 85
- Figure 4.10 Darby's Seven Dispensations • 87
- Figure 4.11 Cyrus I. Scofield (d. 1921) • 94
- Figure 4.12 *The New Scofield Reference Bible* • 95
- Figure 4.13 *The Late Great Planet Earth* • 96
- Figure 5.1 Example Modern Insecurities • 108
- Figure 5.2 88 Reasons • 120
- Figure 5.3 Smith Illustration A of Dan 12:4 • 133
- Figure 5.4 Smith Illustration B of Dan 12:4 • 134
- Figure 7.1 Revelation's Complex Genre and Corollaries • 146
- Figure 7.2 Assyrian Winged Bull • 146
- Figure 7.3 Woodcut of Rev 1 • 149
- Figure 7.4 The Epistolary Binding of Revelation's Genre • 152
- Figure 7.5 Ancient Corinth • 153
- Figure 7.6 Ancient Ephesus • 154
- Figure 7.7 Prophecy as Foretelling in Revelation • 157
- Figure 7.8 Historicist Periodizing Methodology • 159
- Figure 7.9 Composite Futurist Chart • 160
- Figure 7.10 Idealist View • 161
- Figure 7.11 Linear Judgments • 162
- Figure 7.12 Telescopic Judgments • 163
- Figure 7.13 Recapitulation Judgments • 164
- Figure 7.14 Millennium Theories • 166
- Figure 8.1 Herculaneum Eatery • 177
- Figure 8.2 Cave Entrance at Panias • 179
- Figure 8.3 Roman Soldiers • 184
- Figure 8.4 Roman Merchant Ship • 187
- Figure 8.5 Two-Age Jewish Apocalyptic • 194
- Figure 8.6 Vasari's *The Last Judgment* • 197
- Figure 8.7 Fresco of Fra Angelico • 199
- Figure 9.1 Map of the Island of Patmos • 206
- Figure 9.2 Panorama of Patmos • 207
- Figure 9.3 Cave of the Apocalypse Mosaic • 209
- Figure 9.4 Seven Churches • 210
- Figure 9.5 The Aeneas Legend • 212
- Figure 9.6 Zoilos Remembrance Monument • 213
- Figure 9.7 Aphrodisias Theater and Temple of Aphrodite • 213
- Figure 9.8 Aphrodisias Stadium and Bouleuterion • 214

- Figure 9.9 Grave Stele, Supervisor of the Linen Workers • 214
- Figure 9.10 Antonius Claudius Demetrious • 215
- Figure 9.11 Claudia Antonia Tatiana • 216
- Figure 9.12 Leading Citizen • 217
- Figure 9.13 The Goddess Aphrodite • 218
- Figure 9.14 Drawing of the Sebastion Entrance • 219
- Figure 9.15 Sebastion of Aphrodisias • 220
- Figure 9.16 Sebastion Friezes, North Second Story • 221
- Figure 9.17 Sebastion Frieze, ETHNOUS IOUDAIŌN • 221
- Figure 9.18 Emperor and Roman People • 222
- Figure 9.19 The Goddess Hemera and the God Oceanus • 223
- Figure 9.20 Roma and Earth and Victory of the Emperors • 224
- Figure 9.21 Tiberius, Captive; Claudius Conquers Britannia • 225
- Figure 9.22 Nero and Agrippina • 226
- Figure 9.23 Claudius, Master of Land and Sea • 227
- Figure 9.24 Imperial Cult Priest, Ephesus • 228
- Figure 9.25 Temple of Trajan, Pergamum • 229
- Figure 9.26 Dedicatory Imperial Inscription • 230
- Figure 9.27 Apollo Playing Cithara • 230
- Figure 9.28 Palatine Hill • 231
- Figure 9.29 Goddess Roma Seated on Seven Hills of Rome • 232
- Figure 9.30 Actor Dressed as Papposilenus • 235
- Figure 9.31 Theater at Aspendos • 236
- Figure 9.32 *Scaenae Frons* of Perge Theater • 237
- Figure 9.33 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 13:1–2 • 240
- Figure 9.34 Revelation’s “Big Picture” • 243
- Figure 10.1 Revelation, Act 1 • 249
- Figure 10.2 Apocalypse Tapestry, Reader • 254
- Figure 10.3 Victorious Hadrian (d. 138) • 269
- Figure 10.4 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 1:9–20 • 273
- Figure 10.5 Grammar and Structure of Rev 1:19 • 277
- Figure 10.6 Seven Letters—Sevenfold Structure • 281
- Figure 10.7 Seven Letters—Verse Structure • 282
- Figure 10.8 Seven Letters—Contents • 283–86
- Figure 10.9 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 2:1 • 287
- Figure 10.10 Ephesus, Domitian Temple • 288
- Figure 10.11 Ephesus, Domitian Statue • 288
- Figure 10.12 Ephesus, Harbor Decree • 289

- Figure 10.13 Polemaeanus, Proconsul of Asia • 289
- Figure 10.14 Ephesus, Temple of Artemis • 290
- Figure 10.15 Ephesus, Terrace Homes • 291
- Figure 10.16 Colosseum of Rome • 295
- Figure 10.17 Gladiator Mosaic • 295
- Figure 10.18 Bronze Coin, Reverse of Roman Standards • 296
- Figure 10.19 Gladiator Grave Stele • 296
- Figure 10.20 Gladiator Graffiti at Ephesus • 296
- Figure 10.21 Modern Izmir • 299
- Figure 10.22 Fragments of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* • 299
- Figure 10.23 Caesarea Maritima • 300
- Figure 10.24 Sepphoris and Scythopolis • 300
- Figure 10.25 Smyrna, Agora Arch and Keystone • 301
- Figure 10.26 Damokkaris Inscription • 302
- Figure 10.27 Smyrna Imperial Coin • 302
- Figure 10.28 Synagogue Lintel Inscription • 304
- Figure 10.29 Attalos III of Pergamum • 307
- Figure 10.30 Pergamum, Temple of Trajan • 308
- Figure 10.31 Pergamum, Zeus Altar Foundation • 308
- Figure 10.32 Pergamum, Statue of Zeus • 309
- Figure 10.33 Pergamum Zeus Altar, West Front • 310
- Figure 10.34 Pergamum Zeus Altar Frieze, East Side, Hekate • 310
- Figure 10.35 Library of Pergamum • 311
- Figure 10.36 Asklepion Votive • 311
- Figure 10.37 Asklepios Statue • 312
- Figure 10.38 Asklepion of Pergamum • 313
- Figure 10.39 Bithynia and Pontus • 315
- Figure 10.40 Ancient Thyatira • 321
- Figure 10.41 Pagan Worship • 323
- Figure 10.42 Roman Bed • 327
- Figure 10.43 Pompeii Amphorae • 329
- Figure 10.44 Aphrodite Coin • 330
- Figure 10.45 Aphrodite Figures • 331
- Figure 10.46 Sardis Acropolis • 332
- Figure 10.47 Sardis Synagogue • 333
- Figure 10.48 Sardis Synagogue Items • 334
- Figure 10.49 Sardis Synagogue Inscription • 334
- Figure 10.50 Sardis Bathhouse Complex • 335

- Figure 10.51 Sardis Synagogue Courtyard • 335
- Figure 10.52 Sardis Marble Hall • 336
- Figure 10.53 Sardis, Temple of Artemis • 336
- Figure 10.54 Sardis Priest Inscription • 337
- Figure 10.55 Hills of Philadelphia • 342
- Figure 10.56 Philadelphia, Saint John's Basilica • 344
- Figure 10.57 Saint John's Basilica Inscription • 344
- Figure 10.58 Seven Letters Chiasm • 345
- Figure 10.59 Hour of Trial • 347
- Figure 10.60 Didyma, Apollo Temple Aerial • 349
- Figure 10.61 Didyma, Apollo Temple • 349
- Figure 10.62 Apollo Temple Drawing • 350
- Figure 10.63 Apollo Temple Workmanship • 350
- Figure 10.64 Laodicea Stadium • 352
- Figure 10.65 Laodicea, Syria Street • 353
- Figure 10.66 Syria Street Tile Work • 353
- Figure 10.67 Laodicea, Central Temple Complex • 353
- Figure 10.68 Water Distribution Terminal 1 • 354
- Figure 10.69 Terracotta Pipe System • 355
- Figure 10.70 Colossae Tel • 355
- Figure 10.71 Laodicea, West Theater • 356
- Figure 10.72 Cliffs of Hierapolis • 356
- Figure 10.73 Ancient Hierapolis Drawing • 357
- Figure 10.74 Cliff View of Lycus Valley • 357
- Figure 10.75 Frontinus Gate of Hierapolis • 358
- Figure 10.76 Syrian Gate of Laodicea • 358
- Figure 10.77 Imperial *Neokoros* Coin of Laodicea • 359
- Figure 10.78 Priestess of Isis • 360
- Figure 10.79 Medical Instruments • 361
- Figure 10.80 Herculaneum, House of the Telephus Relief • 362
- Figure 10.81 Herculaneum, House of the Black Salon • 362
- Figure 10.82 Herculaneum, House of the Corinthian Atrium • 363
- Figure 10.83 Herculaneum, House of the Saminte • 364
- Figure 10.84 Herculaneum Worship Shrine • 366
- Figure 10.85 Herculaneum, House of the Augustals • 367
- Figure 10.86 Herculaneum Augustals Plaque • 367
- Figure 10.87 Clothing Finery • 368
- Figure 10.88 Herculaneum Triclinium • 370

- Figure 11.1 Revelation, Act 2 • 377
- Figure 11.2 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 4 • 381
- Figure 11.3 Griffin Artwork • 383
- Figure 11.4 Inscription, Praise of God Hymn • 384
- Figure 11.5 Scroll in Hand • 386
- Figure 11.6 Ancient Seals • 387
- Figure 11.7 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 5:6 • 392
- Figure 11.8 Douce Apocalypse, Rev 5:6 • 393
- Figure 11.9 Roman Incense Altar • 396
- Figure 11.10 Imperial Inscription, Sardis • 399
- Figure 11.11 Judgment Cycle (Rev 6–20) • 401
- Figure 11.12 Seals and Mark 13 • 402
- Figure 11.13 Luther Bible, Rev 6:1–8 • 403
- Figure 11.14 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 7:9 • 406
- Figure 11.15 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 8:2 • 409
- Figure 11.16 Trumpets and Egyptian Plagues • 409
- Figure 11.17 Herculaneum, and Pompeii Victim • 410
- Figure 11.18 Trumpets: Three Woes • 411
- Figure 11.19 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 9:1 • 412
- Figure 11.20 Apollo Inscription • 412
- Figure 11.21 Hour of Trial • 417
- Figure 11.22 Elijah on Mount Carmel • 418
- Figure 11.23 Michelangelo's Moses • 418
- Figure 11.24 Trumpet 7 and Dragon Cycle • 421
- Figure 11.25 The Dragon Cycle • 422
- Figure 11.26 Revelation 12 Intercalation • 423
- Figure 11.27 Marriage of Zeus and Leto • 424
- Figure 11.28 Douce Apocalypse, Rev 12:6 • 426
- Figure 11.29 Douce Apocalypse, Rev 12:7 • 427
- Figure 11.30 Rev 13 and Dan 7 • 431
- Figure 11.31 Sea Beast Parody of Christ • 432
- Figure 11.32 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 13:1 • 433
- Figure 11.33 Land Beast Parody of Christ • 435
- Figure 11.34 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 13:15 • 437
- Figure 11.35 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 14:1–6 • 442
- Figure 11.36 Second Angel's Babylon Announcement • 443
- Figure 11.37 Luther Bible, Rev 14:14–20 • 446
- Figure 11.38 Apollo Kylix • 450

- Figure 11.39 Plague Parallels • 451
- Figure 11.40 Pollio Aqueduct • 452
- Figure 11.41 Aqueduct at Antioch of Pisidia • 452
- Figure 11.42 Nymphaeum at Perge • 453
- Figure 11.43 Trevi Fountain of Rome • 454
- Figure 11.44 The Euphrates River • 456
- Figure 11.45 Kidron Valley • 460
- Figure 11.46 Bowl Judgments—Perspectives • 462
- Figure 11.47 Claudius, Master of Land and Sea • 463
- Figure 11.48 Babylon and Zion, New Jerusalem • 463
- Figure 11.49 Theban Dionysus • 465
- Figure 11.50 Luther Bible, Rev 17 • 466
- Figure 11.51 Roman Gold Jewelry • 467
- Figure 11.52 Pompeii Aristocratic Woman • 467
- Figure 11.53 Injured Aeneas • 468
- Figure 11.54 Hadrian Military Cuirass • 469
- Figure 11.55 Domitian's *Damnatio Memoriae* • 470
- Figure 11.56 The Seven Kings of Rev 17 • 471
- Figure 11.57 Literary Form of Rev 18 • 475
- Figure 11.58 Ephesus Ivory Panel Relief • 476
- Figure 11.59 Luxuries of an Empire • 477
- Figure 11.60 Roman Glass Perfume Bottles • 478
- Figure 11.61 Relief of the Conquered Galatian • 479
- Figure 11.62 Roman Glass Vase • 480
- Figure 11.63 Douce Apocalypse, Rev 18:21 • 482
- Figure 11.64 Roman Street Players • 483
- Figure 11.65 Roman Millstone at Pompeii • 483
- Figure 11.66 Roman Glass and Alabaster Krater • 484
- Figure 11.67 Roman Bronze Lamp • 484
- Figure 11.68 Roman Sarcophagus • 484
- Figure 11.69 Parallel Structure • 491
- Figure 11.70 Triumphal Quadriga (Horses of St. Mark) • 493
- Figure 11.71 Gold Myrtle Wreath Crown • 493
- Figure 11.72 Arch of Septimius Severus • 495
- Figure 11.73 Olive Press • 496
- Figure 11.74 Second Crusaders Find First Crusader Remains • 497
- Figure 11.75 Douce Apocalypse, Rev 19:19 • 498
- Figure 11.76 Luther Bible, Rev 20:2 • 503

- Figure 11.77 Millennium Intercalation • 509
- Figure 11.78 Gog and Magog as the Hour of Trial • 511
- Figure 11.79 Douce Apocalypse, Rev 20:7–8 • 513
- Figure 11.80 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 20:9–10 • 516
- Figure 11.81 Judgment of the World • 518
- Figure 11.82 Fresco of Christ’s Judgment of the World • 520
- Figure 11.83 Mosaic of Christ’s Last Judgment • 521
- Figure 12.1 Revelation, Act 3 • 525
- Figure 12.2 Oceanus, Roman Sea God • 527
- Figure 12.3 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 21:2 • 528
- Figure 12.4 A Tale of Two Cities • 531
- Figure 12.5 Relief of Assyrian Assault on Lachish • 532
- Figure 12.6 Masada Fortress • 533
- Figure 12.7 Roman Siege • 533
- Figure 12.8 Triple Arch Gate of Thyatira • 534
- Figure 12.9 Triple Arch Gate of Antioch of Pisidia • 534
- Figure 12.10 Erastus Inscription at Corinth • 535
- Figure 12.11 Babylonian Ziggurat Model • 536
- Figure 12.12 Precious Stone Necklace • 537
- Figure 12.13 Jerusalem Temple Model • 538
- Figure 12.14 Sunrise on Cadillac Mountain • 539
- Figure 12.15 Apocalypse Tapestry, Rev 22:1 • 541
- Figure 12.16 Perge Canal • 542
- Figure 12.17 Date Palms of Galilee • 543
- Figure 12.18 Bronze Relief, Creation of Adam and Eve • 544
- Figure 12.19 Epistolary Genre *Inclusio* • 547
- Figure 12.20 Motif Connections • 548
- Figure 12.21 *Cave Canem* • 552
- Figure 12.22 Tomb of David • 553
- Figure 12.23 Temple of Aphrodite • 555
- Figure 12.24 Heavenly Rider Motif • 555
- Figure 12.25 Herculaneum Fountain • 556
- Figure 12.26 Ancient Scribes • 557
- Figure 12.27 Church of the Holy Sepulcher • 559
- Figure 12.28 Codex Sinaiticus at Rev 22:21 • 561
- Figure 12.29 Berea Paul Shrine • 563
- Figure 12.30 Paul and Laodicea • 563
- Figure E-1 Revelation: A Three-Act Play of God’s Judgment • 569

- Figure E-2 Gladiator Helmet • 570
- Figure E-3 Griffins Galore • 570
- Figure E-4 Emperor Trajan (98–117) • 572
- Figure E-5 Apollo Inscription • 573
- Figure E-6 The Risen Christ • 575



FIGURE P-1. Signorelli's Judgment Angels. Signorelli's fresco masterpiece (1499–1502) depicting scenes of the Apocalypse in the chapel of the Madonna di San Brizio in Orvieto, Italy. This scene is over the doorway exiting the chapel nave back into the main auditorium of the Orvieto Cathedral. Tour guides love to point out the “death rays” of the angels of divine judgment, apparently under the spell of having seen one too many Star Trek movies. Signorelli's images and scenes, while a Renaissance masterpiece, inadvertently reveal the serious problem in art and in theology in trying to understand the operation of the judgment of God. The matter becomes acute in preconceived ideas of our own age that we unthinkingly and automatically import into our reading of the book of Revelation that take us so far afield of John's meaning we lose the canonical and gospel moorings of his message.

Preface

Over my years of teaching the book of Revelation, my students have begged me to write what I taught. “Why?” I protested. “We have great commentaries.” I was quite serious. Twenty-five years ago we had a dearth of academic commentaries, but today, the plethora of resources is embarrassing. Their answer was disarmingly simple. “We do not want another commentary. We want your thoughts and reflections.” I did not have an answer for that one. I do have some thoughts that they find challenging. I know because I see and hear their reaction in and out of class. Thus was born this publication. I capitulated.

I have two points about the book of Revelation. First, we must re-canonicalize the book. False prophets, failed prophecies, and feckless interpreters have made the book a joke for late night comedians, a word to be ignored, and the playground of fools. We have to be careful not to eviscerate the authority of the book with bogus “signs of the times” preaching that is oblivious to the history of the interpretation of the book, which shows without any question the absolute absurdity of such a superficial grasp of the meaning of the visions. We have to bring the authority of the book back, but I most certainly am not talking about making a movie about the hell of Antichrist nor the horrors of Armageddon. How do I envision reclaiming the authority of the book if we do not have the prophetic pyrotechnics of Jesus burning eyeballs out of their sockets with his thermonuclear power rays at the Second Coming? That is my second point.

If Revelation is not about the gospel, the book is not Christian. I insist that my students demonstrate New Testament concord with any interpretive scheme they put forward. I insist that if the book does not

preach Jesus Christ crucified, its pages never should have found their way into the New Testament. Christ crucified is the only gospel—the only way, the only truth, the only life, and the only future. I tell my students the only future in Revelation is the future you can know from the past. I am not amillennial, premillennial, or postmillennial. I am passion-millennial. I will have to unpack the thought later in the book. You can get a sneak peak of the trajectory I will plot for the prophecies of Revelation in the two essays I wrote in the earlier publication that I edited.¹

As I wrote previously, my journey into eschatology began as a teenager absorbing the dispensationalism of my first study Bible, the *Scofield Reference Bible*, and a Texas radio preacher telling me how the events in the news that week had fulfilled some end-time prophecy. This “signs of the times” reading of this week’s headlines at first was exhilarating, especially to think that Antichrist already was out there just waiting for his apocalyptic moment in the sun. As the weeks and months passed, though, I began to perceive the buffoonery of constant revisions of what was said only a few weeks ago. My (dispensational) premillennial days of high school and college gave way to the amillennial days of seminary and ministry. (Full disclosure: the third option, postmillennialism, never had a rational chance in my thinking given the tragic realities of two world wars in the twentieth century and the horrors of the slaughter of millions by mustard gas, Holocaust ovens, and nuclear bombs.) When I returned to my alma mater to teach, my journey continued in reflecting on Revelation’s visions. The history of interpretation makes me wonder if John never realized how encoding the gospel in apocalypse was going to spin so wildly out of hermeneutical control. Even so, I hope to show that Revelation is a great book with which to end the Bible. My own reading of John’s Apocalypse is that he anticipates the church’s finest hour. I hope to tell that story in this book.

Gerald L. Stevens
New Orleans, Louisiana
Easter 2014

¹Stevens, *Essays on Revelation*.

Abbreviations

ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
BEC	The Bible Exposition Commentary
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BRS	The Biblical Resource Series
CCSNS	Cincinnati Classical Studies, New Series
CIS	Copenhagen International Seminar
CJ	The Classical Journal
ESV	English Standard Version
EGT	The Expositor's Greek Testament
GNT ⁴	<i>Greek New Testament</i> , 4th Edition
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
INTF	Institute for New Testament Textual Research
IVPNT	InterVarsity Press New Testament
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement
JSPSS	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBC21	New Bible Commentary: 21 st Century Edition
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NET	New English Translation
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament

NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTIC	The New Testament in Context
NTL	New Testament Library
NTM	New Testament Message: Biblical-Theological Commentary
OHE	The Oxford History of England
PBTM	Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs
PC	Proclamation Commentaries
PCCS	Paul in Critical Contexts Series
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
SBG	Studies in Biblical Greek
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPNT	Studies on Personalities of the New Testament.
TCS	TEAMS Commentary Series
TJ	Trinity Journal
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WGRWSS	Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series

SCRIPTURE

OLD TESTAMENT

Gen	Genesis	Neh	Nehemiah
Exod	Exodus	Esth	Esther
Lev	Leviticus	Job	Job
Num	Numbers	Ps (<i>pl.</i> Pss)	Psalms (Psalms)
Deut	Deuteronomy	Prov	Proverbs
Josh	Joshua	Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Judg	Judges	Song	Song of Solomon
Ruth	Ruth	Isa	Isaiah
1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel	Jer	Jeremiah
1–2 Kgs	1–2 Kings	Lam	Lamentations
1–2 Chr	1–2 Chronicles	Ezek	Ezekiel
Ezra	Ezra	Dan	Daniel

Hos	Hosea	Nah	Nahum
Joel	Joel	Hab	Habakkuk
Amos	Amos	Zeph	Zephaniah
Obad	Obadiah	Hag	Haggai
Jonah	Jonah	Zech	Zechariah
Mic	Micah	Mal	Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT

Matt	Matthew	1–2 Thess	1–2 Thessalonians
Mark	Mark	1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Phlm	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb	Hebrews
Rom	Romans	Jas	James
1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Pet	1–2 Peter
Gal	Galatians	1–2–3 John	1–2–3 John
Eph	Ephesians	Jude	Jude
Phil	Philippians	Rev	Revelation
Col	Colossians		

APOCRYPHA

1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees
2 Esd	2 Esdras
Tob	Tobit

PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch</i>
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>

OTHER ANCIENT SOURCES

CHURCH FATHERS

<i>1–2 Clem.</i>	<i>1–2 Clement</i>
<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	<i>Against Heresies</i>
<i>Adv. Marc.</i>	<i>Against Marcion</i>

xxviii Abbreviations

<i>Apology</i>	<i>The First Apology</i>
<i>Baptism</i>	<i>On the Mysteries. II. Of Baptism</i>
<i>Cat. Lect.</i>	<i>Catechetical Lectures</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>Embassy</i>	<i>Embassy for the Christians (Presbeia peri Christianōn)</i>
<i>Eph.</i>	<i>To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Mart. Poly.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i>
<i>Panarion</i>	<i>The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>To the Philippians</i>
<i>Praes. Haer.</i>	<i>De Praescriptione Haereticorum</i>
<i>Quis Dives</i>	<i>Quis Dives Salvetur</i>
<i>Tr. John</i>	<i>Tractates on John</i>

AUGUSTUS

<i>Res Gestae</i>	<i>Res Gestae Divi Augusti</i>
-------------------	--------------------------------

ARISTIDES

<i>To Rome</i>	<i>Encomium of Rome</i>
----------------	-------------------------

CICERO

<i>Epis. Att.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Atticum</i>
<i>Epis. Fam.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Familiares</i>

DIO CASSIUS

Dio Cassius	<i>Historia Romana (Roman History)</i>
-------------	--

EPICETUS

<i>Disc.</i>	<i>The Discourses</i>
--------------	-----------------------

EUSEBIUS

<i>H.E.</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica (Church History)</i>
-------------	--

HERODOTUS

<i>Hist.</i>	<i>The Histories</i>
--------------	----------------------

HORACE

Car. Saec. *Carmen Saeculare*
Epistles *Epistularum liber secundus*

JERUSALEM TALMUD

Ta'anit *Moed Ta'anit*

JOSEPHUS

Ant. *Jewish Antiquities*
J.W. *The Jewish War*

LACTANTIUS

Institutes *Divine Institutes*
Persecutors *On the Manner in which the Persecutors Died*

LIVY

Livy *History of Rome*

MARTIAL

Epig. *Epigrams*

PLINY THE ELDER

Nat. Hist. *Natural History*

PLINY THE YOUNGER

Letters *Epistulae*

PLUTARCH

Quaes. Gr. *Quaestiones Graecae (The Greek Questions)*
Antony *Life of Antony, Parallel Lives*

PROPERTIUS

Eleg. *Elegies*

SIBYLLINE ORACLES

Sib. Or. *The Sibylline Oracles*

STRABO

Geog. *Geographica*

SUETONIUS

Dom. *Domitianus, De Vita Caesarum*

Nero *Nero, De Vita Caesarum*

TACITUS

Annals *The Annals of Tacitus*

VIRGIL

Aen. *Aeneid*

Ecl. *Eclogae*

Georg. *Georgics*

MUSEUMS

AAM	Antalya Archeoloji Müzesi, Antalya, Turkey
AMA	Aphrodisias Müzesi, Aphrodisias, Turkey
AMAC	Archeological Museum of Ancient Corinth, Greece
ASM	Attalos Stoa Museum, Athens, Greece
BHM	Burnt House Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
BMB	Bergama Müzesi, Bergama, Turkey
BML	British Museum, London, England
EMS	Ephesos Müzesi, Selçuk, Turkey
GPM	Great Palace Mosaic Museum, Istanbul, Turkey
HAM	Hatay Archeoloji Müzesi, Turkey
HAMH	Hierapolis Archeoloji Müzesi, Hierapolis, Turkey
IAM	Istanbul Archeoloji Müzelerleri, Istanbul, Turkey
IAMI	Izmir Archeoloji Müzesi, Izmir, Turkey
IMJ	Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
KAM	Konya Archeoloji Müzesi, Turkey
LP	The Louvre, Paris, France

MCA	Museo Civico Archeologico, Orvieto, Italy
MMM	Manisa Müze, Manisa, Turkey
NAMA	National Archeological Museum of Athens, Greece
NNAM	Naples National Archeological Museum, Italy
PMB	Pergamon Museum, Berlin, Germany
ROM	Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada
SMS	Side Müzesi, Side, Turkey
TAM	Thessaloniki Archeological Museum, Greece
TMT	Tarsus Müze, Tarsus, Turkey
YMY	Yalvaç Müze, Yalvaç, Turkey

PART 1

Apollyon and Armageddon

*Revelation's Apocalyptic Traditions
and Their Interpretation in History*

1

Tributaries of Tradition

Jewish Sources of John's Apocalyptic Traditions

HELPFUL IN KNOWING where you are is knowing where you have been. In interpreting the book of Revelation, a good question to ask is, Where have we been? Part 1 of this book seeks to answer this question. We want to explore the interpretation of the book of Revelation through the centuries in order to have some perspective on where we are today. Although John innovated numerous traditions in his composition, Jewish apocalyptic was his main source. Our focus first will be on Jewish historical periods that generated the primary sources of John's apocalyptic traditions. We then will survey major developments of John's apocalyptic traditions through the centuries.¹

The mighty Mississippi River that divides the United States east and west and has had a major role in our nation's history is really the confluence of numerous tributaries. Likewise, the primary tributary flowing into John's apocalyptic is Jewish. Jewish apocalyptic developed in direct response to four dramatic periods in Jewish history. This history is tied up with the ebb and flow of four empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. These developments challenged Jewish

¹The PBS video, "Apocalypse! The Story of the Book of Revelation," presents Revelation's apocalyptic traditions, their Jewish sources, and their interpretation and development throughout the church age. This video was produced right before the turn of the millennium, since so much attention was focused on millennial speculation at the time. The attention surrounding the turn of the millennium at the time actually is paradigmatic with one of the main problems of interpreting the book of Revelation—so much focus on a chronology trigger.

faith in God. Apocalyptic literature was an attempt to reassure Jewish faith by adjusting Jewish thought in the harsh light of new historical realities for the Jewish people. What were these developments following the history of these four empires?

BABYLONIAN PERIOD

The first development was the tragic loss of the Jewish state. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians destroyed both Jerusalem and its temple and sent the Jews into captivity. In this humiliating exile, the glorious kingdom of David had come to a bitter and cataclysmic end. Two powerful images in Jewish apocalyptic thought derive from this Babylonian period. One comes from the Jewish struggle upon return to rebuild their beautiful city of old, and the other image from exposure to Babylonian culture and thought.



FIGURE 1.1. Ishtar Gate of Babylon. This magnificent gate built by Nebuchadnezzar II in 575 B.C. is on the Processional Way through which statues of deities were paraded on New Years (PMB).



FIGURE 1.2. Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. The view is of the old walls of the plateau on which the ancient temple stood.

New Jerusalem

As the Jews endured their exile, they mourned the loss of their nation, their homeland, and their way of life. “How deserted lies the city, once so full of people” (Lam 1:1, NIV). The total destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its great temple caused Jews to wonder, “Is all lost for us as a nation among the nations? Will we ever have another city and

temple?” The prophet Ezekiel answers with a yes by realigning Jewish thought under the rubric of a “New Jerusalem” that would have its own equivalent new temple. Against the backdrop of Mosaic and Davidic traditions, however, Ezekiel’s New Jerusalem was oddly configured, and his new temple was even more bizarre—not Mosaic in its architecture, personnel, or service. Ezekiel’s prophetic visions were obtuse and entirely confusing to many Jews. Yet, in spite of these idiosyncrasies, Ezekiel’s “New Jerusalem” image took traction in Jewish thought, inspired the imagination about a future place filled with God’s presence in his city, and flowed into John’s apocalyptic world.



FIGURE 1.3. Jerusalem Temple Model. Ancient Jewish temple mount as rebuilt by Herod the Great on scale of 1:50 (Holyland Model of Jerusalem, IMJ).

Resurrection

The prophet Ezekiel gave Jewish traditions another shot in the arm with his arresting vision of the valley of dry bones, Ezekiel’s answer to the Babylonian exile (Ezek 37). The Jewish nation would reconstitute itself; i.e., the vision was about the Jewish nation, not individuals. The Persians conquered the Babylonian empire and brought Zoroastrian religion into Jewish thought with its already fully developed doctrine of resurrection. Jews began to synthesize Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones with the Persian idea of the resurrection of individuals. We see Jewish resurrection ideas on their way to becoming doctrine in 2 Macc 7:14, “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!” Since 2 Maccabees is written by a Pharisee around 130–120 B.C., we are witnessing how the idea of resurrection especially found a home in the teaching of the Pharisees as reflected in

the New Testament. Not all Jews, however, accepted such Pharisaic innovations. The Sadducees rejected this new teaching (cf. Acts 23:8).

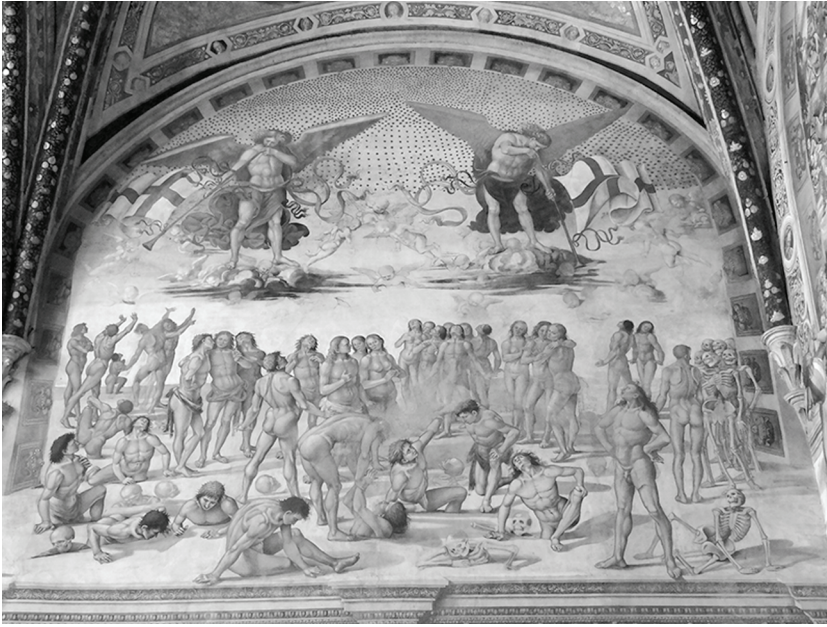


FIGURE 1.4. Signorelli's Resurrection of the Flesh. Signorelli's masterpiece (1499–1502) from the frescos depicting scenes of the Apocalypse in the chapel of the Madonna di San Brizio in Orvieto, Italy.

PERSIAN PERIOD

The second historical development was the renewal of the Jewish state. Cyrus I of Persia had conquered the Babylonians in 540 B.C. In the Bible, he is described as God's anointed "messiah," according to Isa 45:1. Cyrus was lenient and allowed the

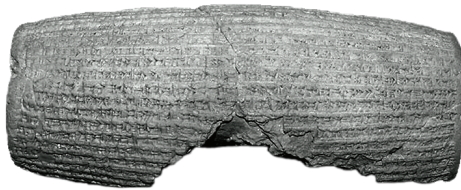


FIGURE 1.5. Cyrus Cylinder. Records deeds of the Persian king Cyrus who repatriated displaced peoples, including Jews (BML). Credit: Renate Viveen Hood.

Jews to return to their homeland. Jews who returned brought back with them their exposure to Persian religious thought, especially Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster was a sixth century B.C. Iranian prophet who attempted to reform Persian religion with an emphasis on a form of

dualism and his own brand of monotheism. His teachings are thought to have had significant impact on the major Western religious traditions. In addition to developed reflections on resurrection doctrine, two other important Persian contributions were an emphasis on the religious metaphor of light and darkness and a dramatic story of the final apocalyptic battle between the forces of good and evil that eventuates in the arrival of the kingdom of God on earth.

Light and Darkness

The language of light and darkness was a central feature of Zoroastrian religion due to its dualism. This symbolism integrally was tied to the concept of earth as a cosmic battleground between good, the forces of light, and evil, the forces of darkness. While the concepts of light and darkness can be found as religious metaphor in many religious writings around the world, the key in the Zoroastrian framework is the use of this metaphorical language to describe opposing forces of good and evil in a cosmic conflict worked out on the stage of human history that will continue worsening until consummated in a final war that brings about a new age. While Jewish religious thought properly is not dualistic, the ideas of two ages, an age of evil followed by an age of good, of cosmic conflict of opposing forces of good and evil, and of a final battle, can be traced in Jewish writings that emerge during this time of exposure to Persian thought flowing into the first century. One can note how John styles his first vision of the Apocalypse as a vision in the night, with his seven lampstands, which are the churches. The only light in the dark world of pagan empire comes from Christ and his churches (Rev 1:9–20).²

Final Battle

One of the most enduring images that developed in apocalyptic literature to fire human imagination is that of the Zoroastrian final battle, or, as Saddam Hussein described the original Gulf War of 1991, “the mother of all battles.” Zoroaster invented apocalyptic war language, which then flowed into many streams. His language of apocalyptic war seems evidenced particularly at Qumran, a Jewish sectarian group that

²See Stevens, “A Vision in the Night,” *Essays on Revelation*, 1–15.

separated from what they considered to be Jerusalem’s corrupt temple cultus in the Roman Period. Their martial document, *The War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness*, details that final apocalyptic showdown. This battle would feature the inhabitants of Qumran as key participants. Their priestly army would bring in the kingdom of

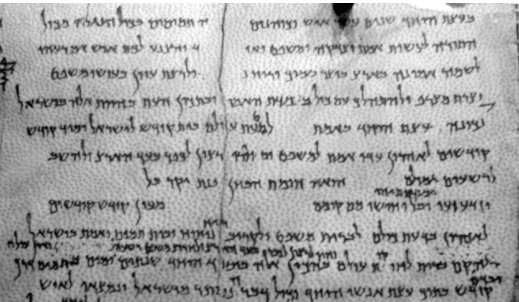


FIGURE 1.6. Reproduction of a Qumran Scroll.
(Qumran National Park, Israel).

God by defeating pagan oppressors of Israel and purifying the corrupt Jerusalem cult and its worship. They decided the Jewish revolt that broke out against Rome in A.D. 66 was their anticipated final battle. They marched out of their desert commune

in battle array to defeat, with God’s expected intervention, the advancing Roman legions under Vespasian coming down from Galilee. They were slaughtered out of human memory until their scrolls were rediscovered nearly two thousand years later bringing to light their community and their story.

In Revelation, this war imagery acutely and powerfully is summarized in one famous word that has entered into the mainstream of American popular jargon—Armageddon (Rev 16:16). Tour groups to Israel often are taken to the top of Tel Megiddo to be told with dramatic flair the Jezreel Valley or Plain of Esdraelon before them is to be the scene of the “greatest battle of all history.”



FIGURE 1.7. Tel Megiddo’s Overview of the Jezreel Valley. This valley is the supposed location of the final showdown of God and evil, Revelation’s battle of Armageddon.

In contemporary popular culture, one has the fictional efforts of the “Left Behind” series of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, which has garnished significant commercial success dramatizing this supposed

end-time plot of Antichrist and his war with Christ. The series even has been transformed into cinematic drama.³ Of course, LaHaye and Jenkins did not invent the modern prophecy novel genre. Already in the 1930s we have publication of a similar piece in Oilar's novelette, *Be Thou Prepared, for Jesus is Coming*.⁴

GREEK PERIOD

The third development was Hellenism. Alexander the Great (336–323 B.C.) conquered the world with his armies and revolutionized society and culture with his cosmopolitan vision. Alexander thought all civilization should be Greek (“Hellenistic”). Alexander’s “Hellenism” eventually became a giant social, religious, and cultural melting pot in which various traditions, including those of the Jews, began to interact together.



FIGURE 1.8. Alexander the Great Coin. Imaged in lion's mane as a conqueror (PMB).

Ideas that percolated in this potent brew included angels and demons on the Greek side and images of empire on the Jewish side.

Angels and Demons

The book of *1 Enoch* is a composite Hellenistic Jewish work, but its main traditions can be dated back to about 250 B.C. Enochian traditions illustrate new and developing Jewish ideas in the interaction with Hellenistic traditions. One such tradition is the development of a sophisticated hierarchy of angels and their story world. In one legend a head angel is cast down to earth. Such an idea is reflected in John's Red Dragon cast down to earth (Rev 12:9). Another tradition involved

³LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, 1995; cf. *Left Behind: The Movie*, directed by Victor Sarin, 96 minutes, 2000. Nicolas Cage and Lea Thompson star in the 2014 remake, *Left Behind*, directed by Vic Armstrong.

⁴Oilar, *Be Thou Prepared, for Jesus is Coming*, 1937. See the discussion in Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, 106.

the idea of devils. These stories feature a dramatic victory of God over forces of evil, along with a concrete idea of heaven and hell.



FIGURE 1.9. Damned Taken to Hell and Received by Demons. Luca Signorelli's masterpiece (1499–1502) of frescos depicting scenes of the Apocalypse in the chapel of the Madonna di San Brizio in Orvieto, Italy.

Pharisees in Jesus' day, for example, had absorbed and developed angelic traditions during the intertestamental period and effectively communicated these ideas to the general Jewish populace in popular Pharisaic literature, such as the book of Tobit, written in the second century B.C. As the story is told, Tobit is the father of Tobias, who has to send his son on a journey of which Tobias is unacquainted with the way. So, Tobias has to find a guide. God sends an angel for this task, but Tobias seems unaware of the special identity of his chosen companion: "So Tobias went out to look for a man to go with him to Media, someone who was acquainted with the way. He went out and found the angel Raphael standing in front of him; but he did not perceive that he was an angel of God" (Tob 5:4).

In this narrative, God's angel Raphael, whom Tobit believes is his kinsman Azariah, instructs Tobit in making a potion from the organs of a fish Tobit just caught. This potion is for the exorcism of a demon and healing of eyes. The language of exorcism and healing suddenly

sets us up on familiar ground. Such topics are dominant features of our Gospel stories. This episode is given prominent early position in Tobit's trip, because he will need the potions later. So, the story illustrates a clear trajectory in our Jewish traditions that will become integral to the story of Jesus and the early church.

Here is this interesting narrative from the book of Tobit.



FIGURE 1.10. Raphael Instructs Tobit on Demon Exorcism. Painting exposed to heat and humidity in an exterior hallway (San Marco Convent, Florence, Italy).

Then the young man went down to wash his feet in the Tigris river. Suddenly a large fish leaped up from the water and tried to swallow the young man's foot, and he cried out. But the angel said to the young man, "Catch hold of the fish and hang on to it!" So the young man grasped the fish and drew it up on the land. Then the angel said to him, "Cut open the fish and take out its gall, heart, and liver. Keep them with you, but throw away the intestines. For its gall, heart, and liver are useful as medicine." So after cutting open the fish the young man gathered together the gall, heart, and liver; then he roasted and ate some of the fish, and kept some to be salted. The two continued on their way together until they were near Media. Then the young man questioned the angel and said to him, "Brother Azariah, what medicinal value is there in the fish's heart and liver, and in the gall?" He replied, "As for the fish's heart and liver, you must burn them to make a smoke in the presence of a man or woman afflicted by a demon or evil spirit, and every affliction will flee away and never remain with that person any longer. And as for the gall, anoint a person's eyes where white films have appeared on them; blow upon them, upon the white films, and the eyes will be healed" (Tob 6:3–9, NRSV).

Another example that shows these broader ideas in the culture taking root in Jewish tradition is the concept of Abaddon, the place of death and destruction (Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12). Abaddon personified

becomes a satanic, demonic figure of destruction in Jewish traditions. John takes up this Jewish figure for use as a destroyer image in Revelation, but John strikingly renames Revelation's correlate with the "Apollyon" appellation, which is made up, but probably based on the Greek verb for "destroyer" (*apollymi*). In Revelation's story he is the destroyer angel of the Abyss (Rev 9:11). Whatever the derivation, John's designation comes off as a deliberate, almost provocative, play on the Greek name Apollo, the Greek god whom the Roman emperor Domitian claimed to be, or to be related to, among other gods as well, such as Minerva.



FIGURE 1.11. Domitian Coin. Minerva with long spear, victory shield on the ground. A thunderbolt in her right hand represents divinity, closely associating Domitian with the gods (HAM).



FIGURE 1.12. Ephesus: Domitian Altar Frieze. Evidence for the emperor cult in Ephesus, this frieze is part of the base of the altar for the worship of the emperor Domitian in Ephesus (EMS).

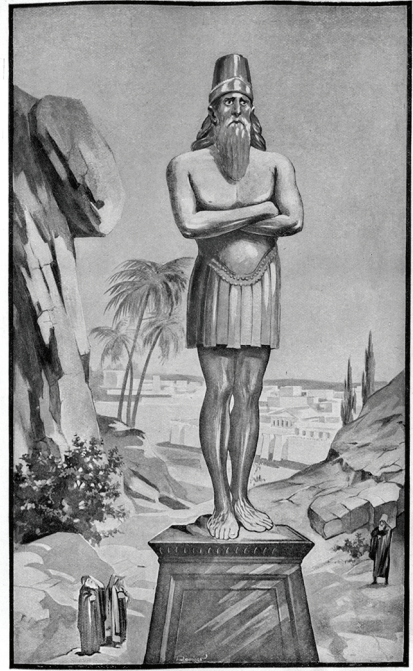
Images of Empire

The biblical book of Daniel, irrespective of the arguments of date, clearly is written for the context of the Maccabean Revolt (167 B.C.). This revolt represented the Jewish struggle against the enforced

Hellenism of Syrian overlords.⁵ Daniel is important for understanding the on-going development of apocalyptic traditions, especially the idea of God's sovereignty over pagan world empires. The story is a dream.

In the story, the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had had a disturbing dream. The central feature in Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a colossal statue of mixed material composition; none of his soothsayers could divine the dream. Daniel, however, illuminated by God's wisdom, was able to give the king the interpretation. The dream was the story of four successive world empires (Dan 2:31–45), beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's own kingdom. The end of the story was the coming of God's own kingdom, which would break into pieces all the previous kingdoms and would stand forever. This dramatic, colossal statue depicts God's sovereignty over all pagan empires. Daniel's imagery of the shattered statue evoking the end of world empires (and, hence, logically, the end of history) is meant to communicate that the time of the oppressed people of God would come. God's dominion over the kingdoms of the world would be established.

Daniel's message to faithful Jews of God's ultimate sovereignty, even over pagan world empires, as set in the context of Babylon's King



THE GREAT WORLD-KINGDOM IMAGE
DAN. 2: 31-34

FIGURE 1.13. Smith: The Great World Kingdom Image. An illustration in Uriah Smith's 1897 Adventist publication, *Daniel and the Revelation: the Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy*.

⁵The issue of the historical context of Daniel and the application of its prophecy, especially the dispensational perspective, will be treated later in the discussion.

Nebuchadnezzar (605–562), came home to Jews living in Judea in the enforced Hellenism of the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.). This king was infamous among Jews, especially due to his claim as *Epiphanes* (“God manifest”), that is, the visible representation on earth of the gods (1 Macc 1:10).

He minted coins with this claim. Jews among themselves changed one letter of the name to convert this title in derision to *Epimanes*, which meant “mad man.”

Antiochus IV also was infamous for his sacrifice of a pig on the Jewish altar in Jerusalem to enforce his Hellenization in 167 B.C. This pagan sacrilege left the Jewish altar desolate for three years until reconsecrated by Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C. (1 Macc 4:36–61). The literal three years of abomination became a symbolic three and a half year period in Jewish apocalyptic literature on the symbolic pattern of half of a significant number (as in 2 Esd 14:12; Dan 7:25; 12:7).

Daniel’s message, whether to Jews oppressed by pagan kings like Nebuchadnezzar or by Antiochus IV, is the same: hold fast, God will deliver, and soon. Jewish apocalyptic forever would carry Daniel’s heritage of Jewish rejection of all pagan empire claims to ultimate power and authority.

The spirit of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Syrian Antiochus IV would be revisited in later Roman emperors such as Caligula (37–41), Nero (54–68), and Domitian (81–96). No matter how powerful their earthly throne nor majestic their present rule, the apocalyptic response to such sovereign claims of all pagan kings was consistent and



FIGURE 1.14. Antiochus IV Coin. Zeus seated, holding Nike and scepter. The inscription is BASILEŌS ANTIOXOU, THEOU EPIPHANOUS, NIKĒPHOROU (HAM).



FIGURE 1.15. Pompeii Fresco of Pig Sacrifice. Pig sacrifice was a standard part of religious ritual in many Hellenistic religions in the Greco-Roman world (NNAM).

clear: ultimate destiny is under God's sovereignty as Lord of Lords. In apocalyptic images of empire, the statue always is shattered: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!" (Rev 18:2).



FIGURE 1.16. Roman Imperial Coins. Left to right: Caligula, 37–41; Nero, 54–68; Domitian, 81–96 (MCA, PMB).

ROMAN PERIOD

The fourth development was Roman patronage. As the Jews under the Maccabees were regaining their independence from the Syrians from 167–140 B.C., the shadow of Rome already was advancing on the entire Mediterranean world. The Maccabean dynastic heirs were the Hasmoneans (140–37 B.C.), who had to deal with this rising Roman power now controlling events in Judea (1 Macc 14:40–41). They ruled as client kings under a Roman patronage system. Thus, rulers in Judea had to show loyalty to Rome. This Roman client kingship came to fullest expression in the reign of Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.) after transition from the Hasmonean to the Herodian dynasty. Some Jews

supported Roman patronage, particularly Sadducees, with their vested interests in preserving the political status quo as a way of maintaining their key institution of the temple in Jerusalem. Other Jews, on the other hand, despised Herod as a usurper to the Jewish throne and Herod's



FIGURE 1.17. Jerusalem Bronze, 11 B.C. Rome gave client kings the right to mint coins. Herod the Great minted this coin a few years before Jesus was born (PMB).

Roman overlords as the epitome of pagan empire attempting to rise up against God's sovereign claims over Israel and the nations.

Roman Collusion

For some Jews, the Jewish temple in Jerusalem no longer was a sign of God's presence in Israel. Rather, the temple and its Sadducean controllers were a sign of collusion with Roman overlords. Jews protested. One such protest movement was Qumran. These desert dwellers had separated themselves from Jerusalem and its elite, priestly cultus. They followed a charismatic leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, about a century and a half before the time of Jesus. Among their library of writings, known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, their commentary on the prophet Habakkuk illustrates an important "pesher" method that all readers of Revelation would do well to understand. This way of reading the text is



FIGURE 1.18. Qumran Caves. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the caves surrounding the settlement at Qumran. The center entrance in this picture is to Cave 4, the most famous, repository of 200 books and fragments, of which 122 were biblical.

simple: contemporize the prophetic text by completely ignoring the original historical context of the prophet and his audience. Instead, simply equate *any* given prophetic text with *any* current news. In this way, the inhabitants at Qumran could convert any verse in Habakkuk into today's news about the Romans and their lackeys, the Hasmonean client kings so despised who controlled the high priesthood. In terms of Revelation's apocalyptic traditions, one can witness this "pesher" way of reading today's headlines back into prophetic texts repeating itself over and over throughout the centuries of church history, and especially today on Internet websites.⁶

Other protests against Roman patronage were registered by John the Baptist and Jesus. John preached national repentance out in the

⁶For more on this "pesher" style hermeneutic at Qumran, consult Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 27–28.

desert, probably because he rejected the city of Jerusalem as polluted by the presence of a pagan occupying army, and Jerusalem's temple as polluted by the service of a fully corrupt priesthood that offered daily sacrifice on behalf of the Roman emperor and Sadducean high priests who had sold their souls to Rome under Annas and his family. Jesus as well made a dramatic and prophetic condemnation of the temple's Sadducean authorities by throwing out their money changers, whose commercial activities in the Court of the Gentiles not only lined Sadducean pockets but, as well, polluted any chance for Gentiles to worship the God of Israel in an honorable place of sanctity and holiness. In the face of Jewish collusion with Roman overlords, both John the Baptist and Jesus preached an apocalyptic message of the imminent, in-breaking kingdom of God. While neither John the Baptist nor Jesus show any direct dependence on the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Scrolls illustrate similar reaction and revulsion on the part of some Jews to the detested Roman occupation of Judea and all Jewish groups in collusion with their Roman patrons.

First Jewish War

Jews eventually revolted against Rome in the First Jewish War (A.D. 66–70). Jewish rebels in Jerusalem threw out the Sadducean high priests and installed their own. The purification of Jerusalem and her priesthood was on, as in the days of old with the famous warrior Judas Maccabeus.

With the outbreak of hostilities, some Jews naturally concluded the final battle had arrived that presaged the arrival of God's kingdom on earth. God and his holy angels would defeat



FIGURE 1.19. The Burnt House. Excavated 1969–1982, this priestly home near the ancient Jerusalem temple belonged to the wealthy Kathros family and was destroyed by the Romans in the final conflagration a month after the destruction of the temple and Lower City. The Romans killed the last surviving remnants of the wealthy aristocrats of the Upper City, who already were ravaged by disease and starving to death, and burned everything in a furious fire (BHM).

Israel's enemies. Inhabitants at Qumran were convinced the final war was on, but were wrong. Though annihilated as a Jewish sect, they left the power of their apocalyptic light and darkness language, with its images of a final conflict fought by God against all evil forces arrayed against God's people, to be absorbed and invoked by later apocalyptic writers, including the Jewish authors of *2 Baruch* and *2 Esdras*—and John of Patmos. With its “pesher” method of interpreting the prophets in light of contemporary events, Qumran reflects the perpetual apocalyptic impulse to make one's own time the end time. In a way, they are precursors of historicist periodizers and futurist “signs of the times” preachers beguiling gullible audiences but constantly contradicted.



FIGURE 1.20. Roman Civil War. Imperial coins of Galba, June–January, 68–69, Otho, January–April, 69, and Vitellius, April–December, 69 (PMB).

General Vespasian conducted most of the campaign against the Jews in Judea on behalf of Emperor Nero. However, Nero's suicide in 68 threw Rome into political chaos. Civil war ensued among three successive emperors in eighteen months (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius). Vespasian's eastern legions, however, acclaimed him as emperor. He returned to Rome, ousted Vitellius, and started a new dynastic imperial family. His son, General Titus, was left to finish the siege of Jerusalem. The city resisted to the point of severe famine and desperation, but finally fell in the spring of A.D. 70 with great loss of life. Still visible today is the street damage in the southwest corner of the ancient walls where paving stones on the street below were crushed by the falling upper structures of the temple walls near Robinson's Arch. This destruction is silent testimony to how truly horrible the final end of Jerusalem and its temple must have been. Thousands of Jews were killed in those last, desperate hours. Jesus' words, “not one stone will be left here upon another,” tragically were fulfilled.⁷

⁷Matt 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6.



FIGURE 1.21. Damaged Jerusalem Street. First Jewish War damage still visible today.



FIGURE 1.22. Judea Capta Sestertius. Judea captured by the Romans; obverse: laureate head Vespasian; reverse: JVDEA CAPTA; date palm emblem of Judea center; bound Jew, left; mourning Jewess seated right. Struck to commemorate the Roman victory in First Jewish War; extremely rare (MCA).

Jerusalem fell in part because she was in chaos inside the walls of the city. Various factions of Jews vied for power and fought amongst themselves for control of the city. Simon ben Giora was one of these factional leaders. Simon fought on for a brief time in the Upper City even after the capture of the Lower City and the temple. Eventually, he

was captured in the final days of the city's destruction by the Romans. He was taken to Rome, led in a triumphal march, and then executed. The Jewish menorah and other spoils of the temple were paraded down Rome's streets and carved into the Arch of Titus.

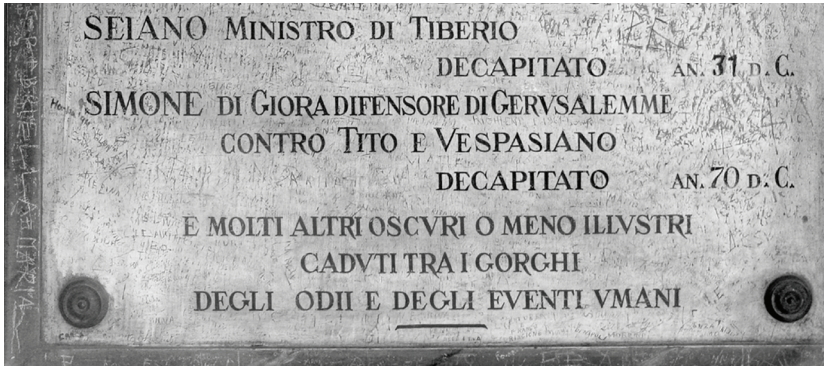


FIGURE 1.23. Mamertine Prison Plaque. Roman incarceration often was a temporary holding cell awaiting execution. War prisoners were held, then humiliated in chains in the Roman general's victory parade down Rome's streets, then executed. On this plaque is the name Simon ben Giora, Jewish Zealot leader inside Jerusalem in the First Jewish War, who was captured, taken to Rome, paraded, and executed.



FIGURE 1.24. Triumphal Arch of Titus. This arch at one end of the Roman Forum near the ancient Colosseum celebrates the Roman victory over the Jews in the First Jewish War under the Roman general Titus in the spring of A.D. 70.

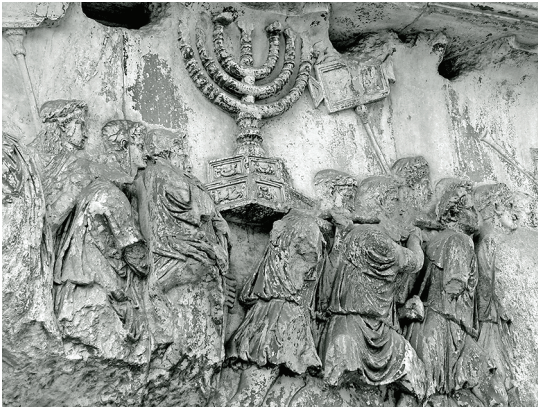


FIGURE 1.25. Arch of Titus: Jewish Menorah Relief. Roman war booty from the First Jewish War included precious items from the Jewish temple. One notable item was the Menorah, depicted here as part of the triumphal parade in a relief on the interior of the Arch of Titus.

Many Christians at the time interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple as the apocalyptic prelude to the kingdom. This judgment of God meant the end of the world was just around the corner. Luke writes *Luke-Acts* to suggest something else is going on with the “kingdom of God” that requires a gospel mission (Acts 1:6–8).

Jews also struggled to interpret the significance of these dramatic and life-changing events. The postwar period of A.D. 70–100 also saw a flurry of new Jewish apocalypses trying to interpret the disastrous results of the First Jewish War. A good example is *2 Esdras*.⁸ Often quoted in the early church fathers, received as Scripture in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and preserved in Roman Catholic traditions, the text was included in early King James editions. Stylistic patterns in *2 Esdras* reoccur in *Revelation*. Note this symbolic language:

But if the Most High grants that you live, you shall see it
thrown into confusion after the third period;
and the sun shall suddenly begin to shine at night,
and the moon during the day.
Blood shall drip from wood,
and the stone shall utter its voice;
the peoples shall be troubled,
and the stars shall fall.
And one shall reign whom those who inhabit the earth do not
expect, and the birds shall fly away together; and the Dead Sea

⁸Naming conventions for this work are confusing because of the complex history of composition and the transmission in Latin versions across the centuries. All or parts of the work have received designations of 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 *Ezra*. The designations 2 *Esdras* or 4 *Esdras* derive from Latin traditions related to the work of Jerome, which came into English Bible translations.

shall cast up fish; and one whom the many do not know shall make his voice heard by night, and all shall hear his voice. There shall be chaos also in many places, fire shall often break out, the wild animals shall roam beyond their haunts, and menstruous women shall bring forth monsters. Salt waters shall be found in the sweet, and all friends shall conquer one another; then shall reason hide itself, and wisdom shall withdraw into its chamber (2 Esd 5:4–9, NRSV).

Another example of the shared imagery between the Jewish apocalypse of 2 Esdras written within the same timeframe as the book of Revelation is the symbolic use of the number seven. Even a cursory reading shows the author of 2 Esdras's penchant for the symbolic use of seven (cf. 7:80, 91, 101; 9:23).

A final example of shared imagery is use of a woman as symbol for a city. In 2 Esdras, the visionary is confronted by a strange woman in an open field. Ensuing conversation with her makes clear that the burden of the conversation is the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of its temple (10:20–21). Dramatically, this strange woman suddenly is transformed before the seer's eyes into that glorious city (10:27). In Revelation, likewise, a woman is a symbol for a city, but, in this case, a negative symbol. She is "Babylon," the mother of harlots. So, the genus of the old empire, eternal nemesis of Judaism, literarily rises again. Daniel is reprised. This evil "Babylon" is destroyed by God precipitously (Rev 14:8; 16:9; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21).

John of Patmos

John of Patmos is another negative reaction to Roman patronage, but from within the Christian world of the late first century. We have clear evidence for the pervasive presence of the imperial cult in the provinces of Asia Minor where we find all of Revelation's seven churches. Significantly, emperor worship in these provinces had grown dramatically under Vespasian's second son, Domitian (d. 96).⁹ In the context of the popularity of the emperor cult in Asia Minor at this time, John interpreted conditions in his own churches in western Asia as rank compromise with Rome and intolerable. We will illustrate the Roman imperial background and John's imagery at a later stage of the book.

⁹See the excellent summary in Johnson, "Confronting the Beast: The Imperial Cult and the Book of Revelation," 130–41.

John's powerful imagery applied to Rome, but his point actually was not Rome. The Inaugural Vision of the Son of Man and the seven lampstands (Rev 1:9–20) makes clear his point was the church. As the following history of interpretation will show, John was the victim of his own success. As the writer of an apocalypse, he had mastered allusion, symbol, and metaphor. Unfortunately for John, the images of his visions that fired the imaginations of later readers were not those of the Son of Man and the lampstands. Rather, they were those of the beasts, Apollyon, Armageddon, and millennium. John's visions were interpreted as suggesting that the fall of Rome was imminent. The failure of this expectation might explain why the book of Revelation was ignored almost completely in Christendom in its area of origin in the east for almost a hundred years. Ironically, attention in the east was by the heretic Montanus (A.D. 172) in his failed attempt to predict the "New Jerusalem" arriving near Pepuza in Phrygia of Asia. While John made clear the beast was Rome, to read him canonically, we have to recognize he was talking more about the church than about the beast.

Tributaries of John's Apocalyptic Traditions			
Period	Development	Sources	Ideas
Babylonian Exile	Destruction	Ezekiel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Jerusalem • resurrection
Persian Return	Restoration	Zoroaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • light/darkness • final battle
Greek Conquest	Hellenization	Daniel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • angels/demons • empire images
Roman Empire	Patronage	2 Baruch 2 Esdras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collusion • First Jewish War

FIGURE 1.26. Tributaries of Tradition. Major Jewish apocalyptic traditions deriving from four major periods of Jewish history flow into the writing of John's Apocalypse.

SUMMARY

Numerous tributaries flow into John's powerful apocalyptic river. Various empires against which Jewish history was written became the watersheds for these tributaries of apocalyptic developments in Jewish thought. The tragic loss of the Jewish state in the Babylonian period produced the powerful and evocative imagery of a New Jerusalem and

resurrection. The renewal of the Jewish state in the Persian period saw Jews returning to their homeland impacted by the symbolic language of light and darkness and an apocalyptic war decisively concluding the spiritual struggle of good and evil. Hellenism's global spread in the Greek period permeating every element of society introduced highly developed ideas of angels and demons and inspired Jewish images of pagan empire overthrown by God's sovereign power. Rome eventually became the supreme embodiment of that pagan empire. Her seductive patronage system was despised by various groups of Jews who struggled against this collusion with Rome that was embedded into the very fabric of Jewish political and religious life. The struggle exploded into the First Jewish War and the cataclysmic destruction of Jerusalem and her temple by the Romans—as had happened with the Babylonians—inspiring the production of numerous Jewish apocalypses in response.

Onto this storied and dynamic literary stage our John of Patmos emerges writing his own visions. We watch him incorporating these Jewish apocalyptic traditions, but he does so in such bold and radical strokes. He is unconstrained, fully innovating their use for his own purposes according to his Christian conviction and his laser focus on the Christ event. He writes to meet the needs of beleaguered churches of Asia Minor hard pressed internally by heresy and externally by emperor worship. That original historical context gave the visions their original historical meaning. John's visions, however, took on a life of their own in the interpretive history of Revelation long after the original seven churches and their very real struggles had faded from our memory. The inevitable appropriation of John's apocalyptic traditions for new challenges of later generations continued after John. To that strange and fascinating story we turn in the following chapters.

2

A Strong River

Historical Developments to the Reformation

JOHN NEVER MAY HAVE REALIZED the massive interpretive floodgates he would open with his heavily symbolic portrayals of controversy with heretical teachings and compromise with the Roman emperor cult in first-century Asia Minor churches. The simple truth is, he spoke beasts into existence and released them on Christian imagination for millennia. Wainwright distinguishes interpreters and prophets of the Apocalypse. Interpreters are those attempting to understand contents. Prophets, on the other hand, are those who inspire movements.¹ As we survey these interpreters and prophets, our focus will be on the principal developmental periods in which apocalyptic traditions that John bequeathed to the church sprang forth in vigorous, new forms.

DEVELOPMENTAL PERIODS

Patristic Apocalyptic

Understanding the period of patristic apocalyptic requires that we clarify the concept of chiliasm.² Ancient chiliasm of patristic writers must be distinguished from the premillennialism of post-Reformation writers. Patristic chiliasm is a literal understanding of the millennium

¹He provides an excellent summary of the history of Revelation's interpretation in the first part of *Mysterious Apocalypse*, "Part One: The Millennium and History," 21–103.

²The word "chiliasm" derives from the Greek word for thousand (χίλιοι, *chilioi*).

as evidenced in those second to fourth-century Christian writers with a focus on speculations about the materialistic aspects of a millennial reign of Christ, often based on the imagery of Isa 66. A good example would be Justin Martyr's (d. 165) following comments:

as the elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, related that they had heard from him how the Lord used to teach in regard to these times, and say: The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in each one of the shoots ten thousand dusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretes of wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, "I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me." In like manner [the Lord declared] that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears, and that every ear should have ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds of clear, pure, fine flour; and that all other fruit-bearing trees, and seeds and grass, would produce in similar proportions.³

This chiliasm of early church fathers should be distinguished carefully from later Reformation views referred to as premillennialism for at least three reasons.



FIGURE 2.1. Bar Kokhba Coin. Simon bar Kokhba was hailed as messiah, "son of a star," (Num 24:17) by Rabbi Akiba, the most famous rabbi of the day. Silver tetradrachm; obverse: temple façade, ark of the covenant inside, star above; reverse: lulav with etrog (Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.).

1. *Traditionally*, chiliasm is Jewish in origin. Patristic chiliasm is the influence of hyperliteralistic and obsessively materialistic strands of Jewish apocalyptic traditions that fueled failed Jewish insurrections, such as the Bar Kokhba revolt of A.D. 133–35. Jews swore off apocalyptic literature after this failed revolt. The only reason

³Justin Martyr *Dial.* 33.3.

we have Jewish apocalypses is because Christians preserved them. Post-Reformation premillennialism, though literal like chiliasm, does not wade in the stream of these particular Jewish apocalyptic traditions. Since the post-Reformation construct does not derive directly from these Jewish apocalyptic traditions, this form of millennialism is not inherently hyperliteralistic nor obsessively materialistic like patristic chiliasm.

- 2. *Hermeneutically*, chiliasm anticipates only *one* future advent of Christ and the tribulation *before or after* the millennium. In stark contrast, all forms of post-Reformation premillennialism teach a tribulation period *before* the millennium.⁴ Further, one mutation of premillennialism from the nineteenth century teaches *two* future advents: one advent is secret (the so-called “rapture”), and the other is public before the millennium (“second coming”).
- 3. *Historically*, chiliasm is a patristic phenomenon from the period of the early church fathers. Premillennialism, on the other hand, is a sixteenth-century phenomenon from the period of the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation eventually finding permanent root in American apocalyptic in writers such as Joseph Priestly (d. 1804), Edward Bickersteth (d. 1850), and Thomas Birks (d. 1883).⁵

Chiliasm	Premillennialism
100s–300s	1500s

FIGURE 2.2. Chiliasm and Premillennialism. Historically, these two eschatological constructs derive from two entirely different periods of church history.

Thus, in short, second-century chiliasm and sixteenth-century premillennialism, traditionally, hermeneutically, and historically are not the same animal, although they both center on the basic idea of a “literal” thousand year reign of Christ on earth.⁶

⁴Hence, the “pre” in premillennial for some systems not only is about the sequence of the second coming, but, in fact, also about the sequence of the tribulation. When distinctions are made about the timing of the second coming within this tribulation scheme, one encounters “pre-tribulation,” “mid-tribulation,” and “post-tribulation.”

⁵Cf. Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 81–82.

⁶In millennial arguments the term “literal” is rendered useless by linguistic ignorance and rhetorical abuse. Postmillennialism is just as “literal” as premillennialism.

Further, just positing evidence of a generalized literal concept of the millennium in the early patristic fathers is not enough to establish a continuous *historical* line from second-century chiliasts to the post-Reformation premillennialists. The desire to assert such a connection often is based upon the attempt to build a canonical argument that the chiliasm of early church fathers, who were close historically to the teaching of the apostles themselves, inevitably has to be, by default, the apostolic view of the millennium, hence, inspired and authoritative. Thus, if post-Reformation premillennialism is in the direct, continuous, historical line of chiliasm, then premillennialism has to be the apostolic—read, only correct—understanding of the millennium. Yet, even *if* such a theoretical historical line could be established, however unlikely, we still would have the more pressing hermeneutical issue of having to critique the traditions of the church fathers. Just because the church fathers taught something does not, *de facto*, make that teaching apostolic. Especially is this hermeneutical caution necessary when what is asserted about particular New Testament passages only can be *inferred* between the lines of admittedly ambiguous texts, none of which are as explicit in and of themselves as the eschatological superstructures built upon them.

Chiliastic Apocalyptic (c. 130)

A review of the writings of the early church fathers does not reveal significant development of Revelation's traditions. These writers are acquainted with Revelation, but show hyperliteralism and apologetic use. A curious historical irony is that John's apocalyptic writing was ignored almost completely in Eastern Christendom, its place of origin, for almost a hundred years. The church at Rome was a different story.

Our earliest testimony of acquaintance with the book shows up in the West. Papias (c. 130), the bishop of Hierapolis and connected to Rome's patriarchate, apparently knew the work, according to both

The existence of the church on earth is just as "literal" for a postmillennialist as the existence of a Jewish nation in ancient Judea is for a premillennialist. Likewise, the reign of the church on earth is no less literal for a postmillennialist than the reign of a king on a throne in Jerusalem is for a premillennialist. In postmillennialism, the reign of Christ simply is not conceived in *monarchial* terms, that is, in terms of Jewish nationalism, with its incumbent political and militaristic overtones.



FIGURE 2.3. Hierapolis of Asia Minor. Papias (c. 130) was bishop of Hierapolis. The city was connected to the patriarchate in Rome. Epaphras, Paul's associate in the work in Ephesus, apparently helped establish the church in Hierapolis (Col 4:12–13).

Irenaeus (d. 202, *Adv. Haer.* 5.33.3–4) and Eusebius (d. 339, *H.E.* 3.39.12). Papias seems to have focused mostly on advancing the literal character of the millennial reign. Justin Martyr (d. 165, *Dial.* 80–81),



FIGURE 2.4. Frontinus Gate of Hierapolis. Erected by Julius Frontinus in honor of emperor Domitian, c. A.D. 83, so often misnamed Gate of Domitian. Led to the main street of the city, which was a thermal spa built by Eumenes II, king of Pergamum in the Lycus valley near Colossae and Laodicea. Remains of the main street are first century. The bishop Papias hailed from this city.

an early apologist in Rome who was martyred, referred to the work, but only to buttress apologetic arguments defending the doctrine of resurrection and the concept of a thousand-year reign in a restored Jerusalem. Irenaeus (d. 202, *Adv. Haer.* 5.32–36), bishop of Lugdunum (Lyon) in France, also understood Revelation's millennial reign literally. As with Justin, Irenaeus's emphasis was on the materialistic aspects of this millennial period. These early church fathers are called "chiliasts," from the Greek word for a thousand. The chiliasm of these

early church fathers tended to show hyperliteralistic and materialistic readings into the concept of the millennium of Rev. 20:4, as well as the New Jerusalem of Rev. 21:2. For example, Tertullian (d. 220) reported that pagan Roman soldiers had recurrent visions of the heavenly New Jerusalem in suspension above the city of Jerusalem that would appear and then vanish over a period of a number of days (*Adv. Marc.* 3.24.4).

These hyperliteralistic tendencies can be understood within the context of persecution and martyrdom in the Roman Empire. The images of Revelation provided an assured future hope for the faithful in the midst of dire circumstances. The hyperliteral readings in part were a direct function of mental relief of severe social distress. Such readings were not, however, necessarily the product of considered exegetical and historical interpretation of the texts from which they derived.

Montanus Apocalyptic (c. 172)



FIGURE 2.5. Phrygia of Asia Minor. The territory of Phrygia in Asia Minor is where the prophet Montanus was active. The exact location of the ancient town of Pepuza, the city he predicted would be the location of the New Jerusalem, is lost in obscurity.

The first extended development of Revelation's traditions is in the teachings of Montanus (c. 172), a prophet in the Roman province of Phrygia in Asia Minor. Unfortunately for Revelation's reputation, this development, while initially tolerated, eventually was to be declared heretical. Montanus was declared a heretic on the basis of his strange

teachings about the new revelatory activity of the Spirit, as well as announcing New Jerusalem's imminent arrival in Pepuza. Montanus interpreted a serious plague of his day as a sign of the end. He is our first signal of the serious use of Revelation in Christian circles after its composition for interpreting current events through various visions. Montanus, then, begins a long line in the history of the interpretation of Revelation of the struggle to interpret and apply John's visions. The book of Revelation's authority came under attack by the "Alogi" and Gaius of Rome (c. 210); they were attempting to undercut the obvious pneumatic excess of the Montanist movement by denying to them their main text. The story of Montanus is a harbinger of Revelation's future canonical and interpretive history: a book that always is highly controversial in its attempted contemporary application even from the first sustained use of which we have record in Christendom.

Constantinian Apocalyptic (d. 337)



FIGURE 2.6. Battle of Milvian Bridge. Constantine defeats Maxentius. Painted by Giulio Romano (1520–24) and held in the Apostolic Palace, Vatican City, Rome.

The next serious development of Revelation's traditions was catalyzed by Constantine. Diocletian's successors vied for control of Rome after he stepped down, but focus was on the two generals, Constantine and Maxentius. Constantine won the decisive Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312. He attributed the victory to the sign of the cross, converted, and declared Christianity legal in the Edict of Milan in 313. Overnight, the world was turned on its head: former enemies were declared allies. Suddenly, interpreting Rome as the beast of Revelation, formerly so pertinent and powerful under the persecutions by a succession of cruel

Roman emperors, no longer was tenable. How did the church react to this stunning, unexpected development? Various options were taken.



FIGURE 2.7. Arch of Constantine. The Arch of Constantine, spanning the Via Triumphalis and situated between the Colosseum and Palatine Hill, was erected by the Roman senate to commemorate Constantine's victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge (312). After this victory, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan (313), which changed the interpretation of Revelation overnight.

Greek Orthodox. In the Eastern Church, Revelation simply was ignored. The content already was considered too radical and violent; the visions were too obscure and dangerous; heresy too easily lurked in the murky depths of its thought. A Syriac translation of the book of Revelation did not exist until the sixth century, half a millennium after the book was written! We do have a few Eastern writers, such as Oecumenius (unclear date) and Andreas, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (d. 637), who did write commentaries on Revelation contemporizing the book in plagues, natural disasters, and politics. This meager result in the Eastern Church is ironic, since the book had its origins in the East (Asia Minor). Even today the Greek Orthodox Church does not use Revelation for doctrine or liturgy. The book is in the canon but hardly is treated with any canonical authority.

Roman Catholic. The church in the West, in contrast, found itself unable to let go of the book so easily. The most important consideration was the book already was well on its way to canonical status, even though questioned in the Eastern patriarchate. Necessity is the mother of invention. New hermeneutical strategies arose in response to the surprising, unexpected historical realities of this post-Constantine era, both focused rhetorically on reconfiguring the *topos* of time.⁷ The two strategies were deferred timing and symbolic timing.

⁷*Topoi*, a term originally derived from rhetoric, are commonplace themes, ideas, or recurring elements in literature. A powerful way to analyze apocalyptic thought is to gain an understanding of the basic *topoi* of this genre of literature. Time is one of the basic *topoi* of apocalyptic thought.

Deferred timing.⁸ This strategy was simple: maintain the reading of the millennium as literal and earthly, but *defer* the timing. If one could shift timing of prophecy fulfillment by centuries, one effectively could eliminate or defuse contemporary agitation. One starts counting from creation. The idea was to elaborate an “in the year of the world” concept of religious time (*Anno Mundi*), with its related “sabbatical” millennium, based on the analogy of the seven days of the creation story in conjunction with Ps 90:4 (a day as a thousand years). Current history was interpreted as in the “sixth millennium”; one only needs to calculate the beginning of creation to anticipate the end of the world, that is, the beginning of the “seventh millennium” (also, “sabbatical millennium”). The accepted calculation placed the seventh millennium not beginning before A.D. 500, which, at the time of Constantine, was almost two centuries away. Now, you have to admit, two centuries seemed like a long time at the time. Time, however, just has this infuriating way of marching on, in spite of our calculations.

This deferred time solution, of course, was an interim strategy only. The effort worked only until the year A.D. 500 actually became imminent. Then, counterproductively, the solution itself eventually spawned even more intense apocalyptic fervor. Recalculation was necessary. The English monk Bede (d. 735) came to the rescue. Bede reset the beginning point and recalculated the end. He thus came up with a new date of A.D. 800. His recalculation, however, played right into the hands of the

political maneuverings of Charlemagne (d. 814), the French ruler who consolidated the Carolingian dynasty of his father by uniting all Euro-



FIGURE 2.8. Venerable Bede. From the Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493 (CLVIIIv), ancient illustrated world history.

⁸A brief summary of this strategy is found in O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric*, 48–50. O’Leary’s resource for this material is Landes, “Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled,” 137–211.