

Revelation Intro 1
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Apocalyptic literature as a genre

Opening greetings ...at the risk of confusing everyone this evening we will be starting our conversation on and journey through the book of revelation by having a brief introduction to the style of writing the genre of writing known as apocalyptic literature. And we will be examining that style of writing by looking at books that belong to that style in the Old Testament. The reason for this is that there are many examples of this in Old Testament writing. The book of revelation comes to us as an anomaly.

The Book of revelation gets its name from the Greek word Apocalypse *αποκαλύψεις* which is generally translated appearing, coming, manifestation and of course revelation. It conveys the idea of revealing or unveiling something that was hidden. In our modern world this word carries with it an ominous and frightening connotation which has been exacerbated by media and film presenting anything connected with the word apocalypse as dark, terrifying and hopeless. If you were to ask most people what the word apocalypse meant they would probably respond by saying it had something to do with the end of the world and some might make the connection to the book of revelation. Now there is no question that the end of the world theme or motif is present in the book of revelation but while it is the case that this idea or picture is connected to the work it is most assuredly not the whole picture of what the book of revelation is about. However, before we can get to what Revelation is about, we need to take a big step back and look at this work as a member of a larger group to which it belongs and the genre they compose. Yes, like the Law, the prophets, the writings, the gospels and the epistles general or Pauline revelation also belongs to a genre of writing which has been aptly named Apocalyptic literature. Our time this evening will be devoted to an introductory presentation of that genre.

Which brings us to our primary question, “What is apocalyptic literature?”

the earliest known use of the word Apocalyptic was scene first in John Lightfoot’s writings. Lightfoot was a Hebraist and Biblical scholar who lived during the 17th Century. This term was later adopted by the German scholar Gottfried Christian Friedrich Lücke. Lücke introduced the term in to scholarly discussion on the literary structure of Revelation in connection with other books that seemed to have a similar theme, structure or style. This is not an endorsement just a reference for future inquiry and study on the part of those listening.

These books include Daniel, 1st Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2nd and 3rd Baruch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, the Shepard of Hermes and the apocalypse of Peter to name a few.

These are not all canonical books but remember they are not connected by their canonicity but rather their writing style. There are four or five major genres in literature poetry, fiction, non-

fiction and drama. Prose is often cited as a fifth category. In this context a book can belong to the genre whether biblical or otherwise as long as it meets the criteria of that genre.

There are also books which have apocalyptic imagery such as Zachariah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Joel and Isaiah.

The Oxford handbook of Apocalyptic literature has this working definition. A work that is intended to interpret present earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world of the future and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.

Within this definition there are several themes that we will look at within the body of apocalyptic books to show patterns and connections that lay the foundation and frame work of what makes an apocalyptic book.

1. Earthly circumstances with Divine lenses.
2. Supernatural realities and future events
3. Divine revelation that informs understanding
4. Divine revelation that informs behavior

Books list Daniel / Ezekiel / Zechariah / and Isaiah.

Why these four books? What unifies them and why is that unity pertinent to our discussion. These books came through prophets who were all living in political National and physical duress. the nation of Israel is either enduring judgment or being forewarned about the coming of judgment. The Nation's spiritual state is in chaos and is in much need of God's intervention to deliver and restore His people. And the nations who are hostile toward the LORD and His people seem to have or be gaining the upper hand in victory. When we open these books, we find God's people in a very precarious situation. Even without a preoccupation or general interest in studying prophecy we can see the relevancy to our own times the background these books hold. We know what it's like to live in a world of danger, uncertainty and evil. A world where governments are untrustworthy, tyrannical and even malevolent. Where the spiritual landscape is as desolate and hopeless as the political one. A time and place where divine intervention is needed more than ever. And it is into this state of affairs in to this context that we see that intervention take place. Not in the small every day acts of kindness between strangers or the faithfulness of God's people person to person, no but in huge vivid and magnificent visions; in powerful otherworldly displays of omnipotence and in divine manifestations of God Himself and those who serve him beyond the gaze of man behind the metaphysical vale, that barrier between the natural world and the supernatural world. This is the pulse the scope and the nature of apocalyptic literature.

The Book of Daniel

Daniel is divided into two primary sections. The first section consists of chapters 1 through 6 while the later consists of 7 through 12. The first 6 chapters give us a narrative about Daniel's life while the last 6 contain the prophetic visions of Daniel along with various interpretations which are given to Daniel by God through heavenly intercession. Daniel has had the most profound impact on this genre and is usually the first book to come up in academic discussion when the topic is broached.

The Book of Ezekiel

Ezekiel is in exile like Daniel and receives visions of heavenly beings who usher him into the presence of God where he experiences God's sovereign power

The Book of Zechariah

Zachariah is in the land after the exile but faces a defeated and dejected Israel who are also being seduced and or tempted by false worship and apostasy. The prophet receives visions of heavenly beings and sees into God's throne room where the LORD defends Joshua the high priest from Satan. Zechariah is given vision of the coming Messiah, a restored Israel and the Messianic age.

The Book of Isaiah

In the midst of political and national turmoil prompted in part by the death of the king Isaiah goes to the temple to worship where he encounters the manifested presence of God and His heavenly court before receiving commands to go forth and speak on the LORD'S behalf.

The Daniel John Connection

Daniel and John, the apostle had very similar ministries as well as over-lap in their life experiences. Daniel lived under a totalitarian gentile government in Babylon just like John did under the empire of Rome. Daniel was called the beloved prophet and John was the disciple Yeshua loved. Daniel was given an apocalyptic vision of the world in which he saw the eschatological fate of the universe just as did John. Daniel had an attempt made on his life by sentencing him to be feed to the lions. Church history tells us that John's enemies attempted to martyr him by boiling him alive in oil. In both cases God intervened and the two men were miraculously spared. Daniel was living in exile when he recorded his apocalypse and John was in exile on the island of Patmos when he recorded the book of Revelation.

Just from a glance we can see very similar language themes and images running through all of these books – talk about them with respect to their visions.

For a deeper insight let's take a look at just one passage in particular in Daniel chapter 7.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. ² Daniel declared, ³ "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ⁴ And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ⁵ The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. ⁶ And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' ⁷ After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁸ After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ⁹ I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

The Ancient of Days Reigns

⁹ "As I looked,

thrones were placed,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames;
its wheels were burning fire.

¹⁰ A stream of fire issued
and came out from before him;
a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.

¹¹ "I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

The Son of Man Is Given Dominion

¹³ “I saw in the night visions,

and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

Daniel's Vision Interpreted

¹⁵ “As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me^{bl} was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. ¹⁷ ‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’

¹⁹ “Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, ²⁰ and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. ²¹ As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

²³ “Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast,

there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth,
which shall be different from all the kingdoms,
and it shall devour the whole earth,
and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

²⁴ As for the ten horns,
out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise,
and another shall arise after them;
he shall be different from the former ones,
and shall put down three kings.

²⁵ He shall speak words against the Most High,

and shall wear out the saints of the Most High,
and shall think to change the times and the law;
and they shall be given into his hand
for a time, times, and half a time.

²⁶ But the court shall sit in judgment,
and his dominion shall be taken away,
to be consumed and destroyed to the end.

²⁷ And the kingdom and the dominion
and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;
his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,
and all dominions shall serve and obey him.’¹⁶¹

²⁸ “Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart.”

1. Earthly circumstances with Divine lenses.

In all of these examples we see real world events taking place which challenge God’s people as they try to maintain hope and stand against oppression and evil. In Daniel’s time we see Israel in exile under Gentile rule first with Babylon then Medi- Persia. The land is not inhabited by the Jews. The Gentiles are in authority and practicing wickedness. Iniquity abounds and God’s people desperately look for hope in a seemingly hopeless situation. It is into this dark and discouraging environment that God reveals Himself to Daniel and shows the prophet that all the geopolitical movements of the pagan nations are not devoid of His hand or presence, rather they are being orchestrated for His glory and Israel’s benefit.

2. Supernatural realities and future events

The events the prophets are experiencing are being affected and guided by supernatural forces which are either benevolent or malevolent. The conflict which is taking place because of the opposition of these forces one against another will not last forever but will culminate in a final climactic crescendo in which the LORD will be recognized by all in worship and His Messiah will be given dominion over all creation.

3. Divine revelation that informs understanding

Because of this revelation by the LORD, we “God’s people” are freed from concern or worry and our peace is reenforced by confidence in God’s divine plan for the ages.

4. Divine revelation that informs behavior

Because we have confidence in God's plan which He has revealed to us in advance we act out our confidence by living in light of what He has declared will come to pass.

And what has God declared? He has declared that the pagan rebellious nations will be defeated. He will destroy evil forever and establish His kingdom for eternity. His people and all those who believe on Him will benefit from act of restoration and enjoy the frute of His labor without end.

Not everyone agrees about the nature of these connections between apocalyptic books or what they mean in the realm and study of prophecy. So, in order for us to see the connection more clearly there is a principal form scripture we need to implement when we study.

1 Peter 1:20-21

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Peter makes it clear that the singular voice behind all prophecy is the Holy Spirit of God regardless of the tools and vessels being utilized to bring it about. This conviction that we hold to be true cements the fact that this genre can and should be viewed this way. Viewed as a body of literature which encompasses the primary message of prophecy that God will be triumphant and all will be set right in its appointed time.

The Book of Revelation is God's appointed time to deal with all of creation all of human history all that has taken place both good and evil. In our study of the Book of Revelation we get a front row seat and a backstage pass to all of this. In the coming weeks Just like in Daniel we will see nations rise in the earth like great carnivorous beasts to destroy and devour all who oppose them. We will see Gods response to those nations and the chaos they bring as the LORD deals out swift and terrible judgment against the wicked. We will see God's people being given divine insight into the workings of events both physical and supernatural and we will stager in awe at the vindication power and glory of God's chosen anointed servant, His Messiah the savior of Israel and of the whole world.