

**"REVELATION FOR TODAY: THE BIBLE'S LOST BOOK"**  
**LAST**

2810 9 Sept 96

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008

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Yesterday, Mike & Mary Turner said they're coming to my course on "...The Bible's Lost Book." It confused me, for I'd never thought of Revelation as a lost book. Not till my reading of the announcement this morning did I tumble to the typo. May as well make something of it....

1 "It's lost on me" we sometimes say when we just don't get it. No other book in the Bible qualifies as well as Revelation for this category of "lost." A synonymous expression is "It's all Greek to me." Well, Revelation is in Greek, with Hebrew-Aramaic lying just below the surface (e.g., Aramaic "Marana [Lord], tha! [Come!], 22.20; in 1Cor.16.22, the Aramaic prayer is *on* the surface, as you can see in KJV). ...A 2<sup>nd</sup> category of "lost": Every so often a publisher comes out with THE LOST BOOKS OF THE BIBLE or some such title, but the claim's excessive: what you get is not something recently dug up but merely something that, though long in the scholarly eye, hasn't been (or at least not recently) in the public eye. What you get is a rubbish pile that should increase your appreciation for the canonists, those (I believe) divinely guided editors who kept the Bible from getting too big & bulky, as well as keeping out everything that didn't conform to the "canons" (rules) of inclusion (chiefly, faithful to the Great Tradition of the Bible's Story). The Jesus Seminar pleads that the recently found Gospel of Thomas should be in, as having (they claim) a few "authentic" sayings of Jesus that aren't in the four Gospels; but we canonical Christians demur, asserting that what didn't make it into the Bible shouldn't have made it, isn't important enough to have any significant bearing on the earthly Story of God (however his Story may look to other-earthly conscious creatures, if any)....And a 3<sup>rd</sup> category of "lost": In the early centuries, the Book of Revelation occasionally was dropped out of "canon" (here meaning the list of books in the Bible) & thus lost till finally (late 4th c.) firmly stuck on the end of the 65 books. (All a very human process [as well as Spirit-guided]: sometimes Rev. was physically lost, accidentally falling off a codex [what we call "book," as distinct from "scroll"].)

But what about some wonderful stuff which, though not in the Bible, we Jews & Christians through the centuries have found inspiring: don't they qualify as "revelation"? No, only as "inspiration," as do the sacred scriptures of other religions. But isn't revelation/inspiration a distinction without a difference? No, it corresponds with canonical reality, viz. the need to distinguish, in literature, pieces the community, as represented by the canonists, believes are divinely-provided for community-formation & community-nurture, &, on the other hand, pieces not having this status. NB: The decisive word here is "community"; categorizing pieces on the basis of literary quality is a useful esthetic, not religious, enterprise.

2 What are the **sources** of Revelation, what it'd have in its bibliography if it had one? Supreme, of course, is the OT, which (as I said in §1), lies "just below the surface." Many allusion; but only these quotations (in the order of the OT books): Prov.3.12(Rev.3.19); Is.6.3(Rev.4.8);22.22(Rev.3.7);65.17(Rev.21.2); Dan.5.23 (Rev. 9.20);7.2-7(Rev.13.1-2);7.21(13.7);12.7(Rev.12.14); Hos.10.8(Rev.6.16); Zech.12.10(Rev.1.7). Only Isa & Dan. are qtd. more than once. Dan. is the most quoted, which is not surprising: (1) Dan. is the OT's only book-length apocalypse-revelation; (2) Dan.'s purpose is the same as the NT's only book-length apocalypse-revelation: *to give comfort, courage (encouragement), strength, hope* to believers undergoing persecution--Dan. for late 2nd-c.BC/BCE Jews; Rev. for late 1st.c.AD/CE Christians. **Exercise:** See for yourself how Rev. uses Dan....Another source is Persian religion, both through & beyond Dan....Then there's the whole cultural world of the Aramaic language, which Jesus spoke: Dan.2.4b-7.28 is the Bible's only long Aram. passage (but long enough so we Bible PhDs had to learn the language [close to Hebrew] so we could read it!). (The NT preserves 3 Aram. expressions from Jesus: "talitha, cumi" [Little girl, get up!], "ephphatha" [Be opened!], & "eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani" [My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?])....Traces, too, of Greek influence....Conclusion: *In. the Revelator was historically & multiculturally, as well as spiritually & communally, aware, awake, attentive!*

3 "The twin enemies of **vision** are always complacency and discouragement." The

author of Rev. might have written those words, for (1) vision(s) is what he's offering, esp. as you can see in his letters to 7 beltway\*churches in extreme western "Asia" (now Turkey), (2) a jolt out of complacency & (3) a lift out of discouragement. (The words are Billy Graham's, to state the 1st of "six factors that I believe will determine the future impact of evangelicals. "First, the evangelical future will depend on our vision."--editorial in the 40th-ann. issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, of which he was founder, with Carl Henry as editor; 16 Sept 96, p.15; its support was from Christians "committed to the historic biblical faith, believing it was not only spiritually vital, but socially relevant and intellectually defensible.")

4 What time is it in Rev.? The time is now, the hearer's & reader's now. Now, today, is the time for the jolt & the lift! But at another level, Rev. is about all time as God's time, & past/present/future as humanity's time.

We should avoid two time-errors: (1) Letting the futuric expressions mislead us into thinking that Rev. is primarily about the future; & (2) Thinking that time is treated sequentially (one thing after another), whereas apocalyptic time is impressionistic, overlapping, even sometimes reversed from sequential.

5 While the imagery is complex, the structure (outline) is simple. I could take it from almost any commentary: I took it from my friend Rich. L. Jeske's REVELATION FOR TODAY (Fortress/83), p.viii.

6 Rev. is about what we Christians need in order to keep going with hope & joy. A recent chn.'s book concludes

"Amazing things you would like to see are just off the map [i.e., not really beyond reach if you use your imagination]." No ducking of reality: a pastor wrote to tell me his experience of coming to joyful acceptance of life from my having helped him to face "the painful honesty of the Bible about the ugliness and brokenness of life." "Submission" is another word for acceptance: in 1.17, Jn. collapses in terrified submission to the Lord Jesus (identified in 1.8 as Lord, by alpha/omega crossover in 1.17), & obeys orders by verbal commands through chap.3. Improbable political parallel: Eliz. Dole says (1July96 TIME 32) "God doesn't want worldly successes. He wants my heart in submission. He wants me." And a historical parallel, from AD 73 CE, the Masada leader, in a last speech, for mass suicide: "Long ago we resolved to serve neither the Romans nor anyone other than God Himself, who also is the true and just Lord of mankind."...The hope & joy Jn. offers is for "slaves" (Gk. text after the book's 1st 9 words) of "Jesus Christ," their owner-master-lord--the NT's central submission-analogy, now hated by gender feminists (so, I discovered yesterday, a mainline-church editor had refused 36 times [in a short block of material] to permit an author to use "Lord," to the editor a 4-letter dirty word).

7 The vision/audition is only one type of early Christian religious experience. Jesus as priest (Matt., Heb.), as lover (Jn., 1-3 Jn.), as justifier (Ro.), as compassionate mighty-one (Lk.-Ac.), are some of the other ways of Christian knowing-obeying-following-seeing-hoping-rejoicing....

A I. 1:1-8 The Prologue PROMISE

II. 1:9-20 The Prophetic Call

III. 2:1-3:22 The Prophetic Address: The Letters to the Seven Churches

A. Ephesus, 2:1-7

B. Smyrna, 2:8-11

C. Pergamum, 2:12-17

D. Thyatira, 2:18-29

E. Sardis, 3:1-6

F. Philadelphia, 3:7-13

G. Laodicea, 3:14-22

The ABCDC'B'A' archetectonic is common in ancient literature & visual arts. E.g., Herodotus, the Greek tragedians, Vergil, the Arch of Titus (top: the golden candlestick from the Jerusalem Temple). While the basic movement is linear, broken & concentric circles are woven in--the result being a unique literary architecture.

IV. 4:1-22:5 The Prophetic Vision form of the cathartic journey

A. The Heavenly Court, 4:1-5:14

B. The Seven Seals, 6:1-8:1

C. The Seven Trumpets, 8:2-11:14

D. The Seven Visions of Conflict, 11:15-13:18

1. The Woman with Child, 12:1-2

2. The Great Red Dragon, 12:3-6

3. The War in Heaven, 12:7-12

4. The Dragon vs. the Woman and Her Offspring, 12:13-17

5. The Seven-Headed Beast from the Sea, 13:1-4

6. The War Against the Saints, 13:5-10

7. The Earth-Beast Numbered 666, 13:11-18

E. The Seven Visions of Mount Zion, 14:1-20

F. The Seven Bowls of the Wrath of God, 15:1-16:21

G. The Seven Visions of the Fall of Babylon, 17:1-19:10

H. The Seven Visions of Recompense, 19:11-21:5a

I. The Holy City of God, 21:5b-22:5

V. 22:6-21 The Epilogue FULFILMENT

Ken. Burke traced this pattern in from alienation to

purification to redemption.

Rev. alienates Christians

from Rome (City & Empire),

leads them through

purgatorial persecu-

tion, & brings them at last

to New Jerusalem. Bunyan, in

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, leads

Christian out

of the City of

Destruction through

wastelands of woe

to the Celestial City.

Stages of

life (Gail

Sheehy), stages

of faith

(James Fowler).

10<sup>1</sup>-  
15<sup>4</sup>:  
the  
small  
scroll

C'  
B'  
A'