

— THE — APOCALYPSE



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The Apocalypse

Healing leaves

In Eden, the tree of life confers immortality (Gen 2:9; 3:22-24). The New Jerusalem picks up on the tree of life motif, but there it has a different purpose. In the New Jerusalem the leaves have medicinal properties (Rev 22:2). And that goes back to Ezekiel's new Edenic vision (Ezk 47:12).

The reason for the difference is presumably twofold:

i) In Revelation, eternal life is conferred by the atonement of Christ.

ii) Eden is an unfallen world, so the tree's function is to extend nature. By contrast, the New Jerusalem is a world fallen and redeemed, so the tree's function is restorative. Not to prolong the status quo permanently, but to reverse it and cure it.

Earthy amillennialism

i) At the risk of oversimplification, premils interpret Revelation more literally, but think the bulk of the action takes place at the tailend of church history while amils interpret Revelation more symbolically, but think the bulk of the action takes place throughout the church age.

To some extent these are irreconcilable positions. As such, the amil/premil debate will remain at an impasse. But to some extent I think it poses a false dichotomy.

ii) I think many amils are repelled by the "materialism" or "carnality" of the premil reading. Repelled by cartoonish depictions of Armageddon in pop dispensationalism. Repelled by the suggestion that Revelation is describing real physical warfare in the future. Real bloodshed. Flesh-and-blood combatants attacking each other.

Amils react by etherializing, privatizing, and even secularizing the text. That it's basically about the history of world missions, and sanctification (i.e. the battle between good and evil within the human heart).

That, however, generates an internal tension in amil hermeneutics. For if Revelation is, in fact, describing church history in general, then church history includes real warfare. For instance, during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Catholic authorities tried to exterminate the Protestant movement. That led to civil wars and armed resistance. So if, as amils, we think the descriptions in Revelation apply to church history, then some of the martial imagery could and should be taken more literally. For church history is often gritty, grisly, and gory. That's unfortunate, but that's a fact.

iii) This also goes to the nature of the symbolism. For instance, the OT contains some mythopoetic descriptions of the Exodus (e.g. Ps 74:13-15; Isa 51:9-10). Yet these correspond to an actual event. Likewise, we have a couple of back-to-back accounts of OT battles, where the first version is prosaic while the second version is poetic (Exod 14-15; Judg 4-5).

A symbolic account doesn't imply that what the account stands for is a different kind of event. To the contrary, it can be the same kind of event.

I don't think an angel opens a hatch in the firmament and empties a bucket of brimstone onto the earth below. And I doubt John thought that either. But the OT depicts real natural disasters, real celestial portents and prodigies. As such, there's no reason to preempt an interpretation of the Apocalypse in terms real natural disasters, astronomical phenomena, angelic apparitions, &c. There's ample precedent for that in OT history and literature.

When, therefore, Revelation contains battle scenes, the fact that these are couched in symbolic imagery doesn't necessarily mean they stand for something other than actual battles. Although that's possible, the mere fact that the descriptors are metaphorical doesn't entail that conclusion.

iv) Revelation naturally depicts warfare in archaic terms. Yet in theory, even that could be fairly realistic. If the power grid was destroyed by cyberterrorists or EMP devices, our hitech society would revert to more primitive technology.

I happen to think that's a clunky way to interpret futuristic prophecy. But I make that observation for the sake of

argument, as a limiting case.

v) In addition, the OT records numerous conflicts that include supernatural elements: angels, miracles, natural disasters (e.g. Gen 19:11,24; Exod 10:21-23; 14:19-20; Josh 5:13-15; 10:11-14; Jdgs 5:20-23; 2 Kgs 6:17; 19:35; 20:8-11; Isa 38:7-8; Dan 3:25,28; 6:22). Once again, there's ample precedent for the possibility that the descriptions in Revelation are more realistic than amil exegesis typically allows for.

vi) In church history, miracles are reported in connection with Christian persecution (e.g. the Covenanters, the Camisards). If Revelation depicts recurring kinds of events in the course of church history, then the supernatural elements in the Revelation narrative may well have church historical counterparts.

vii) In my opinion, the imagery in Revelation is flexible. Although it sometimes denotes specific events (e.g. the life of Christ, the final judgment), it more often denotes particular kinds of events rather than particular events. Kinds are repeatable. That dovetails with the cyclical action we find in Revelation.

It's possible that if the conflict escalates towards the end of the church age, church history will more closely resemble OT history in terms of open supernaturalism. To that extent, one can agree with amils on the scope of Revelation, but agree with premils on the physicality or supernaturalism of the referents. Amils view the plot of Revelation as a spiral, combining repetition with progression. And a spiral and pick up the pace towards the end—as it narrows.

Ironically, many premils are cessationists, which generates a degree of tension between their cessationism and their

supernaturalistic reading of Revelation. Apparently, cessationism is suspended towards the end.

My point is not to take a firm position on how to correlate Revelation with future events. My point, rather, is to expand our interpretive repertoire.

Models of visionary revelation

1. Some books of the Bible draw heavily on visionary revelation (e.g. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Revelation). It's striking to me that scholars who write commentaries on these books rarely spend much time on the psychology of visionary revelation. They discuss genre, symbolism, schools of interpretation, rules of interpretation, yet they rarely explore the experience of visionary revelation, and how that might impact interpretation.

2. In theory, visionary revelation could employ two different modes of image-processing:

i) Movie theater model

Visionary revelation might be analogous to watching a movie. The viewer is stationary, while the scenery is in motion (or the illusion of motion). Like a movie theater, where you sit still, in front of a screen, watching a series of rapid fire images. One scene after another.

ii) VR model

Visionary revelation might be analogous to a VR program. Unlike watching a movie, this would be an immersive, interactive experience. The scenery is stationary while the observer is in motion (or the illusion of motion).

This is also analogous to those time-travel dramas where you can dial up a particular date in the past or future, maybe see a preview, step through a portal, and there you are—right in the thick of things.

The moviegoer model is an extension of looking at a still picture. The observer remains outside the picture.

The VR mode is like stepping right into the picture. The observer finds himself inside the picture.

3. Does Scripture give any indication which of these models is closer to the truth? It's possible that God uses both modalities at different times.

Visionary revelation includes revelatory dreams. Dreams are immersive, interactive. That would fit with the VR model. Likewise, in Ezk 40-48, the prophet is given a guided tour of the temple complex. He seems to be moving through the temple complex. That, too, would fit the VR model.

This may be dream-like, where certain details are fuzzy. Perhaps he doesn't describe the temple ceiling, if there is a ceiling, because he doesn't look up.

4. In Rev 19-20 we have a battle, followed by the "Millennium," (and the binding of Satan) followed by another battle. Premils regard this as a continuous action.

Some amils, based on recapitulatory parallelism, regard 20 as a new cycle. I agree with amils that Revelation contains recapitulatory parallelism, but I'm not convinced that there's a hard break between 19 and 20. So it's possible that 20 is a continuation of 19.

Amils also draw attention to the parallels between the battle scenes in 19 and 20. Both are literarily indebted to Ezk 38-39.

Consider a thought-experiment. Suppose we view the battles scenes in 19:11-21 and 20:7-10 as two sides of the

same panel, while 20:1-6 is the hinge. If you swing the panel to the right, that displays 19:11-21. If you swing the panel to the left, that displays 20:7-10.

Which is the front and which is the back? That depends on the direction in which you approach the panel. If you approach the panel from one side, that's the side you're facing. If you approach the panel from the other side, that's the side you're facing.

In that respect, which battle is before or after the other depends on where you are standing in relation to the panel. The Apocalypse is written in a particular sequence, in part because writing is inherently linear.

But John's visionary experience may have been more spatial. Simulated locomotion. He moves from scene to scene. The battle scenes in 19:11-21 and 20:7-10 may have similar features because these are two sides of the same panel.

Clock time

Alan Kurschner solicited my comments on this argument:

<http://www.alankurschner.com/2014/08/27/when-does-the-binding-of-satan-for-a-thousand-years-begin-revelation-1911-203-supports-premillennialism-not-amillennialism-ep-3/>

We've had some amicable banter via email. I'm posting my side of the exchange (thus far).

1. I think the inference involves a level-confusion. For the deeper question, or preliminary question, isn't so much how 19 and 20 are related to each other, but how the narrative was meant to map onto reality. The key issues isn't how these scenes are internally related but externally related.

If, say, someone (like myself) views Revelation as an allegory (e.g. **PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, THE DIVINE COMEDY**), then even if we thought the narrative was linear, that doesn't resolve the larger question of how to match the allegorical story with real-world referents.

And if there's evidence that the structure is more like a spiral than a line, then that further complicates attempts at directly correlating the narrative with real-world events.

Put another way, the question is how to synchronize 19-20 with external events. That involves more than how the scenes are interrelated within the narrative. That involves how the narrative is related to the world outside the narrative. That question operates at a different level.

I myself don't think Revelation has a single timeline, although there's an overarching direction.

At best, your argument could be one element in a cumulative case for premillennialism.

2. In a book like Revelation I think it's important to distinguish between historical causation and dramatic logic. I think the sequence you describe follows dramatic logic. There's a distinction between those who take orders and those who give orders.

The foot soldiers have both a defensive and offensive function. They attack the people of God. But they also protect the ringleaders—like bodyguards.

In dramatic logic, first defeat the foot soldiers, in part as a way of getting to the ringleaders. Capture and punish the ringleaders after eliminating their security detail. You have to go through the phalanx to reach the commanders.

Satan is saved for last because he's the ultimate ringleader. He comes in for special treatment.

Orders come from the top down. Defeating the enemy reverses the process by working up the chain of command. That's dramatic logic rather than historical causation.

By the same token we need to distinguish between chronological time and narrative time. For instance, even though the Gospels are historical accounts, narrative time is not the same thing as historical time. Gospel writers take liberties with chronology, viz. narrative compression, thematic sequencing.

4. There's the familiar problem of where Satan gets his army for round 2 (20:8-9), since his army was destroyed in round 1 (19:21). That suggests recapitulation.

This is one reason I'm hesitant about reducing the action to a single timeline. There's a certain back-and-forth in Revelation.

Of course, premils can posit that the millennium itself creates a new generation to resupply Satan's depleted ranks. There's nothing inherently wrong with that postulate. But it's not specified by the text.

5. I don't know the specifics of your overall position. So I'll take a stab at it, and you can correct me.

It's my impression that you think Revelation is basically a historical narrative written ahead of time. Not just that it refers to real future events. But that in terms of *genre*, it's essentially a history book, like Genesis, Chronicles, or Acts. The difference is that unlike ordinary historical narratives, which record the past or present, this is about the future—given the author's advance knowledge of things to come. So you think Revelation is fairly prosaic and chronological, like other historical narratives. What makes it different from a typical historical narrative is not the genre but the timeframe.

Likewise, given your view of Biblical supernaturalism, it's my impression that you don't think Revelation is nearly as symbolic as amils typically take it to be. That is to say, the surreal elements could well be realistic. The grotesque monsters aren't symbolic. Rather, given Biblical supernaturalism, why can't reality be like that?

I'm also assuming you think 4-22 is chronological. And I assume you think that jumps ahead to the endgames, in contrast to the 1C setting of 1-3.

Again, correct me if I'm wrong.

Assuming that's correct, I'll say a few things for now, and save the rest for later.

Regarding the grotesque monsters, there are various possibilities or interpretive options:

i) John could be using zoological analogues for advanced technology. Maybe they represent predator drones. Writing for an ancient audience, John must use imagery that's intelligible to his audience.

ii) The monsters could be real zoological organisms. But perhaps they are bioweapons. Bioengineered by the Dragon or the Antichrist, as part of their army of darkness.

iii) The monsters could be occultic entities who are able to assume grotesque physical form.

Speaking for myself:

i) My default position is to regard them as literary composites, based on OT antecedents. Their hybrid features symbolize the abilities we associate with fearsome animals.

ii) However, I'm certainly open to the possibility (perhaps more than a possibility) that these are occultic entities who are able to assume that form. Just recently I was reading about an Eskimo village on the North Slope of Alaska. Due to coastal erosion, it relocated. The new site was built on

old Eskimo burial grounds—which included the graves of Eskimo "shamans" (witch doctors).

From time to time, residents reported sightings of a black, winged wraithlike entity that terrorized the community. Of course, that could just be a tall tale. However, I'm willing to entertain to the possibility or probability that this was the ghost of a witchdoctor. A damned soul haunting the village for disturbing its grave.

On a related note, M. Scott Peck was trained (at Harvard) in secular psychiatry, yet later in his career, two patients were referred to him whom he diagnosed as possessed. Indeed, according to him, when the possession manifested itself, they'd take on a reptilian appearance. Cf. **GLIMPSES OF THE DEVIL**.

iii) To take a comparison, the seraphim/cherubim in Ezekiel's visions are tetramorphs. But they aren't literary composites. Rather, that's what Ezekiel actually saw. I don't know if it was a subjective or objective vision. But in any event, that's how they manifested themselves to him.

iv) Preterists and amils typically regard the chronological gap which premils posit between 1-3 and 4-22 as ad hoc. Now, I myself don't think 4-22 has exclusive reference to the distant future.

However, I don't think positing a chronological gap is necessarily ad hoc. John didn't know the duration of the interval between the first and second advents. And the question is what would be **the next big event** in redemptive history. Arguably, the next big event is the cluster of events involving the return of Christ and the final

judgment. So it wouldn't be out of the question to have a lengthy gap.

4. I think you're conditioned to counterattack a conventional version of amillennialism which isn't identical to my position. I think you're responding to something like this:

i) The structuring principle of Revelation is recapitulatory parallelism. This is a systematic structuring principle.

19 belongs to the 6th cycle, while 20 belongs to the 7th cycle. 20 begins a new cycle. The narrative isn't continuous from 19 through 20.

20 refers to the first advent of Christ. The "first resurrection" is the new birth. The binding of Satan is Christ's 1C defeat of Satan's kingdom, illustrated by dominical exorcisms.

ii) You object to this partly on the grounds that it's anachronistic. If 19 is about the second advent of Christ, then it does violence to the narrative flow to make 20 about the first advent of Christ.

Speaking for myself:

i) I do think Revelation exhibits a fair amount of recapitulatory parallelism. However, I doubt that's a systematic structuring principle. I think that imposes a degree of artificial symmetry on the book. So I'm dubious about making a hard break between 19 and 20 based on recapitulatory parallelism.

ii) I agree with you that the first resurrection doesn't refer to the new birth. One reason is because I think Revelation

describes public events. External phenomena. Not private, inner experiences.

iii) That said, I classify Revelation, not as historical narrative, but fictional narrative. Allegory. There are different kinds of fictional narrative. There's historical fiction, which is based on real people and real events. Fiction set in the past. With accurate period detail. There's supernatural fiction. And there's time-travel fiction, where the protagonist travels back into the past to change the past, with a view to changing the future, then returns to the new future. Often he's dissatisfied with the results, so he keeps going back in time to change the past until he either gets the results he's hoping for or gives up trying.

I think Revelation has elements of all three fictional genres. Like historical fiction, it refers to real agents and real events. Sometimes in the past, or John's own time, but also in the future. Like supernatural fiction, it has supernatural characters and miraculous events—which stand for real agents and real events.

And like time-travel fiction, it's repetitious in the sense that the story restarts several times, reaches the denouement ("It's the end of the world!"), circles back and starts over again—but each time it's different.

Revelation has a series of narratives within the overarching narrative. Narrative units that have a chronological sequence (a beginning and ending), but the next unit doesn't begin where the last unit ended. Rather, the next unit begins where the last unit began. Like a row of snowglobes. A self-enclosed world within a world. Each with its own, internal timeline.

I think this periodicity is there to show us that no matter when you live, you can expect the same kinds of challenges as a Christian believer.

iv) I don't mean the whole book is cyclical. Revelation is like a passenger ship. Passengers are moving backward and forward, up and down, although the ship itself has a definite direction. In that respect, the passengers are going where the ship is going, even if they are going in all directions on deck.

v) We should also resist the inclination of imposing our sense of clock time on the text. Our modern obsession with punctuality. From my reading, ancient and/or primitive cultures don't have that rigorous sense of clock time. They don't live by the clock. They don't operate with that rigid schematization of time or causality. They operate by event time rather than clock time.

This consideration is reinforced by the fact that John received his visions in an altered state of consciousness. Precognition and retrocognition flatten the perception of temporal succession.

The gates of hell shall not prevail

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. 7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

What does the binding of Satan stand in contrast to? How does Satan unbound behave compared to Satan bound? Well, in one respect, Satan bound can't "deceive the nations." But what does that amount to?

According to 20:7-8, to "deceive the nations" means to recruit an army against "the saints." His deceptive ability enables him to rally the troops. That's consistent with premillennialism.

But it's also consistent with amillennialism. Notice that v8 depicts the assault on a global scale. A worldwide military campaign.

During the church age, Satan is bound in the sense that he's unable to mount a concerted attack on global Christianity. He can wage and win regional battles. But although the church is dying in some localities, it is spreading to other localities. And even persecution can backfire. An underground church movement may be bigger, more vigorous than fair-weather churches. He loses by winning. Satan can attack the Christian community at different times and places, but he can't snuff it out.

The Day of the Lord

There are some who maintain that the Day of the Lord will be a literal twenty-four hour day, mostly those holding to a variant of posttribulationism, as well as amillennialism.

In contrast, the prophets often used "day" to denote the epochal time when God would break into history in glory and judgment, bringing the ungodly to account. In those contexts, it is clearly a figurative expression denoting an epoch of [millennial blessings, not a twenty-four hour day.

<http://www.alankurschner.com/2011/12/04/the-day-of-the-lord-is-not-a-literal-24-hour-day/>

i) I agree with Alan that *yom* has a wider semantic range. Same applies to its NT counterparts, which carry over from OT usage.

Also, it's not the meaning of *yom* in isolation, but the meaning of *yom* in a stereotypical phrase ("day of Yahweh")—which may be idiomatic.

ii) I think "epoch" is misleading. Even making allowance for the semantic range of *yom*, "epoch" has different connotations than "day."

iii) In the OT, a "day" can denote a "time" of deliverance, judgment, disaster, &c. There it's synonymous with an "event."

iv) An interesting example is Jn 8:56, where "my day" seems to be equivalent to the inauguration of the Messianic age.

v) I don't see how amillennialism entails that the day of the Lord must be a 24-hour period. In amil theology, the following things happen when Jesus returns:

a) Christians who are alive on earth at the time of his return will be glorified.

b) Christ will decisively and finally subjugate his enemies (unbelievers).

c) The general resurrection

d) The final judgment.

I don't think amillennialism requires all those things to happen within a 24-hour interval. Rather, I think "the Day of the Lord" has an *inceptive* sense. If Jesus literally returns, then by definition, he will return on a calendar day. So I think the "Day of the Lord" marks a *terminus ad quo*, but not a *terminus ad quem*—in the sense of a 24-hour span of time. When will these things happen? When Jesus returns. They are time-indexed to his return.

vi) To take one example, Scripture doesn't spell out the mechanics of the final judgment. Will that involve a past life regression in which your life is replayed like a movie? Will it select for your private sins? Will that be on display for everyone to see? Will every human be judged in that sense, or only unbelievers?

Even if it's confined to unbelievers, that's a somewhat time-consuming event, although it might be a psychological

experience, like a dream, where the passage of time is accelerated. If this is a serial judgment, where everybody is judged one at a time by that process, it would be extremely time-consuming. There are billions of unbelievers, past and present, to judge.

Perhaps separate concurrent judgments are in view. And maybe the point is not that spectators see this unfold in real time, but that there's a public record. A record that's available for viewing. For instance, consider all the things that Josef Mengele did behind closed doors. Things that few people, except his victims, ever witnessed.

vii) I think the larger point Alan is angling at is that in amil eschatology, the final events at the Parousia are synchronized so that all these things either overlap or happen in rapid succession. They needn't be strictly simultaneous. But they cluster in a brief interval, all triggered by the return of Christ.

In premillennialism, by contrast, the same events are spaced out. That's because premils use Revelation as a chronological framework. Events must happen in that sequence. Other endtime events not recorded in Revelation are intercalated in the framework.

In amil eschatology, it could take longer than a single day. Point is, though, premil eschatology *requires* a lot of extra time in a way that amil eschatology does not. It's not so much that the interval can't be longer on an amil timetable, but that the interval can't be shorter on a premil timetable.

There is, though, another sense in which, in amil eschatology, endtime events are spread out over the course of the church age. The first advent of Christ *inaugurates* the final phase of world history.

So to some extent it's a question of where to put these events. When they begin. In amillennialism, the countdown begins sooner. In premillennialism, it's more backloaded.

In amillennialism, it starts out slow but picks up speed at the end. The pace accelerates heading into the final stretch. The key events take place close in time. In premillennialism, by contrast, the countdown begins much later, but once the stopwatch clicks, there's more spacing between events.

The sky vanished

The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place (Rev 6:14).

i) What kind of astronomical phenomenon would ancient readers associate this with description? Modern commentators aren't very helpful here, because they don't ask that kind of question. They're more into literary allusions or literary parallels. They treat the text as a mural rather than a window.

ii) I asked a Christian astronomer, who suggested that I consult ancient commentators on that passage. But the ancient commentators aren't very helpful in that regard, for they interpret the passage allegorically. The earliest extant commentary is by Victorinus, who construes the passage allegorically:

6:14. "And the heaven withdrew as a scroll that is rolled up." For the heaven to be rolled away, that is, that the Church shall be taken away.

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0712.htm>

Tychonius takes a similar view, according to which it symbolizes the underground church, which withdraws from public view during times of persecution. Oecumenius thinks it refers to angels.

Andrew of Caesarea construes it allegorically:

"That heaven is rolled out like a scroll symbolizes either that the second coming of Christ is unknown...or that even the heavenly powers grieve for those who have fallen from the faith as though they experience a certain rolling out through sympathy with grief. However, this image symbolizes also that the substance of heaven does not disappear. but as though by a kind of unrolling changes into something better."

William C. Weinrich, ed. Revelation (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture), 98-99.

So none of them construe the astronomical image realistically.

iii) One might try to cut the knot by saying the passage is figurative. But even if that's the case, we still need to ask what figurative image the passage is meant to conjure up in the minds of the reader.

iv) Moreover, I doubt it's accurate to say the passage is figurative overall. The bit about the scroll is figurative, but that's epexegetical. The simile is used to illustrate the prosaic statement that "the sky vanished." If, therefore, the vanishing sky is compared to a metaphor, the vanishing sky is not, itself, a metaphor.

v) Admittedly, this is something John saw in a vision. So it may not be realistic. It may be dream-like. But there's still the question of what John saw.

vi) Moreover, the vision has a referential dimension. It signifies real-world events of some sort or another. That may or may not be astronomical in reality, but the question is worth exploring.

viii) Since, in Bible history, God does sometimes use real prodigies, we shouldn't rule that out.

ix) The Greek verb is ambiguous. It could mean the sky was "split" apart or split in two. Is one rendering preferable to another in context?

x) To say the sky "vanished" (or "disappeared") could either mean the sky ceased to exist or else the sky ceased to be visible. On the latter interpretation, the sky still existed, but could no longer be seen.

xi) Liberal scholars suppose ancient Jews and gentiles thought the sky was a solid dome. Let's play along with that identification for the sake of argument. On that view, to say the sky "vanished" might mean God removed the dome separating what's under the dome (the earth) from what's behind the dome.

What would be the consequences of that action? Well, on that view, wouldn't removing the dome cause everything above it to come crashing down? The cosmic sea would empty onto the earth. The celestial palace or temple would fall to earth. Likewise, earthbound observers could see God, the saints, the angels, and so forth.

But Rev 6 doesn't say that's the effect of v14. And, indeed, if all that happened, there wouldn't be much left to recount after the dust settles.

xii) On that view, the sky splitting has similar consequences. If the dome split apart or split in two, everything behind the dome would become visible. The cosmic sea would inundate the earth. But that's not the aftermath of what happens in Rev 6. So much for the solid dome.

xiii) Perhaps it means the sky disappeared from view. It was still there, but invisible to the naked eye. Is so, what does that mean?

There's a bit of a paradox here. If they can't see the sky, what do they see in its place?

We might start by asking what makes the sky visible in the first place. Illumination and contrast. Seeing the sky in relation to the horizon.

You can't see the sky in a blizzard. You can't see the sky on a foggy day.

Likewise, if you look in a mirror, you don't see the mirror itself, but whatever it reflects. If the sky became reflective, you'd see the earth when you gaze overhead. But the text doesn't say that.

By the same token, you don't see clear glass; rather, you see through clear glass. If the sky became transparent, it would become a window. You could see everything beyond the sky. But the text doesn't say that.

Another possibility is if the sky goes dark because the sun, moon, and stars go dark. If God were to miraculously shield the earth from their light (or at least the visible spectrum), then the sky would disappear from view. Indeed, the entire earth would be plunged into darkness—apart from firelight (or electrical lighting, if we construe this futuristically).

And that could be a realistic scenario. Perhaps God will block out the light.

xiv) What about the sky splitting in two? That could be the opposite effect. If something brighter than the sky appeared in the middle of the sky, like a brilliant band, it would visually bisect the sky. Because the sky would be darker on either side of the luminous boundary, it would appear as though the sky was splitting apart (or splitting in two), to reveal something behind the sky. An optical effect. Something emerging from the sky, like a bright line or crease in the sky. The edge of something incoming. Long and luminous.

Nowadays, we're used to seeing contrails. That's another, albeit modern, atmospheric phenomenon that bisects the sky.

The upshot is that we don't know for sure what the text depicts. But we can consider a range of options.

The churches of Revelation

i) In Revelation, why are "letters" addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor? (I put "letters" in scare quotes because that classification is disputable.)

How we answer that question has potentially larger significance for how we interpret Revelation.

ii) There are a number of fine scholars who concentrate on the 1C setting of Revelation (e.g. Aune, Bauckham, Hemer, Keener, Metzger, Thompson, Yamauchi). That's a useful perspective. However, that interpretation tends to select for scholars who are Classicists or historians by training and temperament. Their aptitude creates a hermeneutical bias.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with that. It's good to have scholars with different abilities. There is, however, a danger when the aptitude, expertise, and interests of the scholar controls the interpretation. For the interpretation may be oriented by the scholar rather than the text.

Clearly, that's a risk of any scholar, which is why it's helpful to have different scholars with different skill sets. They offset each other's one-sidedness.

iii) In addition, some scholars focus on the 1C setting because they don't think John could really foresee the distant future.

iv) One popular explanation, originally proposed by Ramsey, is that these churches (or cities) lay along the same road. He also postulated that these were postal sites.

However, scholars like Aune say that theory lacks archeological confirmation. They say Ramsey essentially began with the seven churches, then drew a road—rather than beginning with evidence for a road connecting the seven churches.

v) A number of scholars point out that the seven churches are arranged in a horseshoe pattern, and the order in which they are addressed in Revelation follows that circuit. So that's a logical route which a messenger or letter-courier would take.

That's certainly intriguing. If, however, these churches didn't lie on the same road, then it's unclear how that literary sequence has any intrinsic or logistical significance.

vi) In addition, there's no evidence that these letters ever circulated separately. Rather, these letters are integral to the structure of Revelation. Each church would read all seven letters. Indeed, each church would read the entire book. The letters weren't sent individually to each respective church. In that event, the route seems to lose practical significance. Addressing a letter to each church may be a literary device.

vii) Moreover, there's evidence for more than seven churches in Asia Minor at the time John wrote. Paul mentions churches at Colossae, Hierapolis (Col 1:2; 4:13), and Troas (2 Cor 2:12), while Luke seconds the reference to a church in Troas (Acts 20:6-12). And Ignatius writes to churches in Tralles and Magnesia. Obviously, the Ignatian churches antedate his letters to the Ignatian churches.

It's possible that these additional churches didn't exist at the time of Revelation. It depends, in part, on when Revelation was written. But whether earlier or later, there's

probably some chronological overlap with at least some of the additional churches.

viii) An obvious general explanation for John's selection-criteria is his numerology. Seven is a significant, oft-repeated symbolic figure in Revelation. Indeed, I think that's the primary criterion, even apart from other considerations.

ix) One objection to that explanation is that while it would explain why John chose seven churches, it fails to explain why he chose those seven churches in particular. By way of response:

a) If the figure is determined by numerology, then the choice is bound to be somewhat arbitrary.

b) But this also depends on whether we think those letters are about those seven churches. There are scholars (e.g. Hemer) who think the content of each letter targets the specific situation of each church. But there are other scholars (e.g. Koester, Michaels) who think the letters use generic imagery which is transferable to other churches. The conditions are not unique to each church.

There's a certain circularity in the method of scholars like Hemer. Is the evidence driving the date? Or is the presumptive date selecting for the relevant evidence?

Unless you already know when the book was written, and unless you already know that the letters address the distinctive situation of each church, the parallels you adduce to date the book or interpret the letters has the theory driving the evidence rather than the evidence driving the theory.

x) If, in fact, the letters are more generic, the selection-criterion is largely numerological, and seven churches function as a representative sample-group, then the significance of their historical particularity recedes into the background. Even though these were real 1C churches, they stand for churches generally. They are used to illustrate certain characteristic virtues and vices. They function as an encouragement or admonition to Christian churches at anytime and place.

In that event, the letters are not about a particular church at a particular time and place (i.e. 1C Anatolia). Even though, as a literary device, the "letters" are written to these individual churches, they are really written for Christian communities throughout church history.

xi) Assuming that's the case, then this conditions how we should understand the threat of Jesus coming back in judgment to some of these churches. That refers, not to the second advent, but to interadventual events.

Supervolcano

Here's a provocative post:

<http://www.alankurschner.com/2015/05/19/you-tell-me-what-will-cause-the-world-to-faint-with-fear-apocalyptic-skies-causing-celestial-disturbances-or-mark-biltzs-benign-lunar-eclipses/>

That's very interesting. However, I don't think the scientific or exegetical evidence justifies the conclusion:

- i)** To ancient readers, wouldn't a blood red moon automatically connote a lunar eclipse? Isn't that the association it would ordinarily trigger?
- ii)** In principle, there are different things that can block sunlight. However, when sun and moon are paired, with unusual optical effects attributed to both, surely that would suggest a solar and lunar eclipse.

And that's an accurate description of both. In a solar eclipse, the sun turns black (except for a fiery halo or annulus), while the moon turns red.
- iii)** As for volcanic eruptions, how would volcanic ash have a differential effect on sunlight and moonlight? It would block out both, right?
- iv)** Even assuming, moreover, that it had a differential effect, if it's thick enough to block out sunlight, it will be more than thick enough to block out moonlight. The sun is far brighter than the moon, so what blocks sunlight will certainly block moonlight—which is dimmer to begin with.

And if it's thin enough to let some light filter through, that would be sunlight rather than moonlight.

v) Although the NASA pictures are spectacular, they don't show a blackened sun and a reddened moon.

vi) Didn't ancient people regard solar and lunar eclipses as very ominous (in both senses of the word). They took celestial prodigies seriously.

vii) Perhaps Alan's unstated objection is that it's physically impossible to have a solar and lunar eclipse simultaneously, inasmuch as sun, moon, and earth must occupy different relative positions respectively:

In a solar eclipse, the moon comes between the sun and the earth: sun>moon>earth

In a lunar eclipse, the earth comes between the sun and the moon: sun>earth>moon

But that just means the imagery isn't realistic. It's stock, eschatological imagery. Indeed, John saw this in a vision.

viii) Finally, I'll conclude with some eyewitness accounts of volcanic ash:

http://www.yakimaherald.com/news/local/ash-and-aftermath-of-mount-st-helens-our-readers-remember/article_9d5e133a-fc6a-11e4-969a-37af86c094a1.html

SUSAN LA RIVIERE, YAKIMA

Once the new year of 1980 hit, seismologists and volcanologists became alerted to steam coming out of

Mount St. Helens' dome. Small earthquakes were noted and citizens were warned that there might be a volcanic eruption within the year. Here in Yakima, we were not warned about emergency precautions to take if an eruption happened. Although volcanic activity was part of our conversations, no one seriously considered that the mountain would explode.

On Sunday morning, May 18, 1980, I was on the phone talking long distance to my parents who were visiting relatives in south Louisiana. I said, "It looks like a terrible dust storm is coming from the west. The sky is black in that direction and it isn't yet noon. I also heard some thunder so we might get ... Mom? Dad? Are you there?" All phone connections were cut off. I heard a loud clap of what sounded like thunder, the windows shattered and a storm of darkness surrounded the house. We could not see the street lamp at the corner of Barge and North 36th Avenue.

The television was not working, but KIT radio announcers came in clearly with news about the volcanic eruption of Mount St. Helens. We were told to fill the bathtub with water because it was unknown if the ash was radioactive. Farmers were warned to shelter their animals, and owners of domestic animals were instructed to bring all the pets into the house. The sky rained sand the rest of May 18.

Water did not wash the sand from roofs. Instead, the sand absorbed the water and the combined weight caused many roofs to collapse. Yakima was buried in sand and the sky was filled with powdered ash for many months.

GLENN RICE, YAKIMA

On May 18, 1980, my family was on the way to a summer home in the Cascades. As we approached the "Y" at the intersection of Highway 12 and State Route 410, the sky became dark with clouds, wind, dust, thunder and lightning. This was different because the air also smelled of sulfur. I said, "Turn the radio on; something is happening." And indeed it was! We turned around, and it took an hour and a half to return to Yakima because of poor visibility. The sun seemingly set in the east, it was dark, the streetlights came on, the birds were silent and the crickets were out.

RAMONA MURRAY, SELAH

May 18, 1980, looked like the beginning of a beautiful spring day in the Wenas Valley. The hay fields looked good on our cattle ranch and our cattle were grazing on the other side of the hill.

Suddenly, the sky turned black with red and green lightning and something was falling from the sky. We thought it was rain, but it was ash. Mount St. Helens had erupted. The sparrows clustered by our rooftop near the porch light. Thank goodness the power stayed on and radio station KIT kept us informed.

In the afternoon, my husband, Austin, and our son Dave tied kerchiefs over their noses, took flashlights and left in the pickup to see about our cattle. The cattle had broken down the fence and were coming home. One cow died.

My daughter Valerie and I went to bed for a while. At about 7:30 p.m., the ash stopped falling and the sky was light. We stepped outside. It smelled like a chemical lab and it looked like the moon. Everything was gray. A red tailed hawk was searching in the sky, cawing. The little bantam rooster was crowing. These were welcome sounds.

NANCY M. BURGESS, YAKIMA

I went out to take the covers off the tomatoes, and when I went in, I told my wife, "There's a big storm coming. A really black cloud in the southwest is heading our way." Later, at church, we were sitting in the choir, and the ash started falling like rain on the slanted window above us. Our priest told us not to worry. He had been in Italy during World War II and Mount Vesuvius had erupted. He said this was not nearly as bad. He was the only one who didn't make it home.

When we got home, I went next door to check on my 80-year-old mom. I was worried she would be frightened. Instead, she had set out all of her candles and filled the bathtub with water.

My sister in New York told me later that she had tried to call our mom when she heard about the eruption. The operator told her that all circuits were down and that Yakima had been wiped out. She was frantic before she finally got through to me.

I was in the State Patrol. It was my day off, but all off-duty personnel had been called in to work. They sent me out to the Naches junction to turn back any cars heading up toward the mountains. We stopped one car, and the man said his kids were camping up that way and nobody was going to keep him from going to find them. We let him pass. Lightning was flashing all around us, but it wasn't like it usually is. This lightning flashed horizontally. The hair on our heads was standing straight up. It was really pretty scary. We finally went into the gas station to get out of the ash and wind.

Dark skies

This is a surrejoinder to Alan's rejoinder:

But to answer Steve's question, no, it would not automatically connote a lunar eclipse since I presume ancient people could easily distinguish between a lunar eclipse that causes a reddish color and something more dramatic such as a nearby volcano causing severe atmospheric conditions.

To begin with, most ancient people never witnessed a volcanic eruption. You must live where there are active volcanoes. And even then, volcanic eruptions are rare. By contrast, a lunar eclipse is far more common.

The biblical description—and this was a point in my article—conveys a cluster of heavenly and terrestrial events happening in conjunction with each other (e.g. Joel 2, Mt 24, Luke 21, Rev 6). Not piece meal. Which explains why it terrifies the wicked. Meteorites, volcanoes, and perhaps some other catastrophe most certainly will cause this.

i) On what exegetical basis does he conclude that volcanoes (in conjunction with other phenomena) "most certainly" will cause this. None of his prooftexts specifies volcanos. At best, that's a possible way to explain the imagery.

ii) Moreover, none of his prooftexts says the wicked are terrified by volcanic eruptions (in conjunction with other phenomena).

this is not some normal eclipse that lasts mere moments or minutes,

A lunar eclipse can last for 100 minutes, not "mere moments" or a few minutes.

it conveys a universal phenomenon, not a local region

A volcanic eruption is a local, regional phenomenon—not a universal phenomenon.

At best, Alan can postulate a supervolcanic eruption with global atmospheric effects. But that's reading something into the text rather than reading something out of the text. At best, that would be consistent with the text, not an implication of the text.

"Then the kings of the earth..."

i) To a modern reader, "the earth" will trigger a planetary perspective, but it would be anachronistic to impute that outlook to John's audience.

ii) In addition, taking refuge in mountains and caves indicates a local, regional perspective. Many parts of the world don't have mountains or caves.

iii) Another problem with taking a global perspective is that endtime prophecy is typically set in the Mideast. What was the known world to the original audience.

If, however, we're going to broaden that out to include North America, South America, Japan, Iceland, Indonesia, &c., then why assume the Middle Eastern locale for endtime events is literally intended? Why not view that as a placeholder for events which may, in fact, occur in different capitals, with different superpowers? There's that tension in dispensational hermeneutics.

But volcanic ash can cause the moon to have a reddish color.

But in that event an observer would see the sun as well as the moon. Indeed, the sun would be more clearly visible than the moon-give the superior brightness of the sun.

Steve is assuming some constant effect as well as only being perceived in a single, local region. The way the sun and the moon will appear to someone in say America will likely be perceived at a greater or lesser degree in Europe.

I don't see how that rescues Alan's argument. If the volcanic ash is thick enough to obscure the sun, it will be thick enough to obscure the moon. If, conversely, it's thin enough to emit filtered moonlight, then it's thin enough to emit filtered sunlight. Although the effect may be localized, it will be the same effect depending on the locality. If the fallout is thick in that region, it will obscure sun and moon alike. If it's thin in that region, it will filter sun and moon alike.

Indeed, it could filter sunlight but opaque moonlight since moonlight is dimmer than sunlight—whereas Alan's theory requires the reverse. That's his quandary.

Sure it did, at least the sun.

I have doubts about Alan's interpretation of the NASA pictures:

i) To begin with, what they clearly show is not the sun or moon, but a landscape floodlit by red illumination.

ii) Alan doesn't point to what he has in mind, but I guess he identifies the fireball directly above the volcano as the sun. If so, I question that identification. To begin with, it would be unusual for the sun to rise or set right over a mountain. If a mountain is located in the north or south, it will never be in the vicinity of sunrise or sunset.

And even if a mountain is located in the east or west, it would only be during a few days of the year that the sun might rise or set right over the mountain.

iii) Volcanos generate plasma clouds and St. Elmo's fire. They eject fiery particles into the atmosphere directly above the volcano.

In addition, clouds above the volcano will be underlit by the lava and magma in the crater. That's not the sun. Rather, that's a reflection.

iv) Moreover, the pictures don't show the moon at all.

Further, the thicker the clouds of ash, the more it would block out the moon, the lighter the more likely to give it a red tint.

Again, though, Alan's dilemma is that sun and moon are paired prophecy. Ash that's thick enough to block sunlight will block moonlight, while ash that's thick enough to filter moonlight will filter sunlight. So he needs to explain how his theory is consistent with reddish moonlight but opaquing sunlight.

Lunar eclipses do not cause the reaction we see in the Bible from the celestial disturbances (notice the plural).

That's not an exegetical conclusion. Alan is projecting what he thinks the observer will find fearful.

God's eschatological harbinger will not be an atomized luminary event—it will be a cluster of events warning the wicked of his impending wrath.

You can have a cluster of events involving a meteor shower, solar eclipse, and lunar eclipse. You can have a sequential solar and lunar eclipse.

Not sure what Steve's point is. Ancient as well as modern people regard them as ominous.

Modern observers don't typically regard a solar or lunar eclipse as an omen.

I am sure Steve is not a preterist. I am almost certain he interprets the celestial disturbances in Mt 24 happening in the future. So not sure how "ancient people" is relevant since this is a prophetic description of a *future* people's reaction.

i) When we interpret an ancient text, we must consider for what that would mean to the original audience.

ii) Moreover, even prophecies about the distance future are couched in imagery familiar to the ancient audience, viz. calvary, archers, warhorses, fortified cities, siege warfare. So that's the interpretive point of entry.

John saw a vision of a harbinger that God will use to warn the world of his impending wrath. This harbinger is obviously nature, where John uses imagery to describe a unique cluster of heavenly-terrestrial events that will happen just before the day of the Lord.

If the imagery is symbolic, then we must ask what it stands for. For instance, what about Zechariah's vision of a lying scroll and winged women (Zech 5:1,9). Does Alan think that's literal?

What about Joseph's dream of the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him (Gen 37:9). Does he think that's literal?

I think it's useful to explore how eschatological imagery could be physically realistic. But I don't regard that as the default meaning. There's no presumption that it must be physically realistic. That's just one of the interpretive options.

Steve selectively left out eyewitness accounts of seeing a reddish moon caused by volcanic ash.

Alan keeps evading the conundrum of moonlight without sunlight. How does volcanic ash obscure the sun without obscuring the moon?

So my point is that no one can read the biblical accounts of the harbinger in Joel 2, Mt 24, Luke 21, and Rev 6 and walk away thinking that there is going to be a single, isolated lunar eclipse.

No doubt the eschatological imagery is far more varied.

Faint with fear

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev 6:12-17).

I'd like to give a bit more attention to the interpretation of this passage, in reference to Alan's post:

<http://www.alankurschner.com/2015/05/19/you-tell-me-what-will-cause-the-world-to-faint-with-fear-apocalyptic->

skies-causing-celestial-disturbances-or-mark-biltzs-benign-lunar-eclipses/

i) What's the relationship between the initial earthquake and subsequent events? Is there a consistent cause-and-effect relationship? Does the earthquake directly trigger these events?

To a modern reader, there's no causal relationship between earthquakes and shooting stars. Perhaps, though, someone would argue that if ancient people believed in the three-story universe, then an earthquake might shake things loose from the sky. The land would be equivalent to the floor or foundation, and the sky to the roof or ceiling.

If so, one problem with that argument is that there's no correlation between earthquakes and shooting stars. Earthquakes occur without shooting stars and shooting stars occur without earthquakes. Ancient people were keen observers of the natural world. So there's no reason to think they'd connect the two. Indeed, there's reason to think they wouldn't connect the two, given the absence of any correlation. In their experience, earthquakes didn't trigger meteor showers.

ii) There's the question of what the second clause in v14 envisions. With reference to mountains, it seems to suggest landslides. The earthquake leveled mountains.

Islands can also be shaken by earthquakes. Question is whether the verb means "moved" or "removed." As we know, earthquakes can generate tsunamis and tidal waves. It's possible that that's alluded to here, although text doesn't say that or imply that.

Islands can also be susceptible to volcanic destruction. The Minoan eruption is a famous case. The Mt. Tabor eruption is another case in point. Likewise, the Krakatau eruption. Once again, though, the text doesn't say that or imply that. It's just a wild guess.

iii) Then there's the question of whether we should construe the imagery literally or figuratively.

a) On the one hand, the OT records God using actual natural disasters in divine judgment. So it's certainly possible, perhaps even probable, that natural disasters will figure in the final judgment.

b) On the other hand, Beale has documented that stars, mountains, and islands can symbolize human and heavenly powers. In addition, the same end-of-the-world imagery recurs in subsequent chapters. But, of course, the world can only end once.

Furthermore, I assume any earthquake of sufficient magnitude to level mountain ranges would annihilate life on earth.

c) In addition, v14 is literally inconsistent with vv15-16. If the earthquake leveled the mountains, then people couldn't take refuge in the mountains after the earthquake. By then the mountain ranges would be heaps of rubble. Vv15-16 presume that the mountains are still intact (*pace* v14). So the imagery is flexible.

d) However, it's possible that the choice between literal and metaphorical is a false dichotomy. Maybe the specific imagery is figurative, but that's used to as placeholders to indicate real natural disasters. In other words, perhaps the text employs stock imagery for natural disasters. These

don't describe the natural disasters. Rather, they are conventional synonyms for natural disasters. Paradigm examples of familiar kinds of natural disasters. So there could be real natural disasters, but not necessarily the specific catastrophes denoted by the stock imagery.

It's hard to say if the language refers to actual physical cataclysms. Only time will tell.

iv) Contrary to Alan's interpretation, the text doesn't say the people were terrified by the natural disasters. Rather, they were terrified by Jesus returning in judgment.

Indeed, they are so horrified by the prospect of facing him that they'd rather be buried alive in collapsing caves and crumbling mountains (cf. Lk 23:30). Although the natural disasters are undoubtedly horrendous, they pale in comparison with Jesus himself, as the eschatological judge.

v) Another problem with Alan's interpretation is that if these cascading disasters were triggered by volcanic activity, why would they head for the hills? Why take refuge in mountains to escape volcanic activity when volcanoes are mountains? Would they not be motivated to put as much distance as possible between themselves and nearby mountains or mountain ranges? Do people who fear the forest fire seek refuge in the forest?

vi) Incidentally, both Aune and Koester document how Greco-Roman literature identified the solar/lunar imagery with solar/lunar eclipses, and attached ominous significance to these phenomena. So that would be a natural association for the original audience to make.

The cosmography of Revelation

i) Dante is famous for his landscape of hell. Although he wrote a trilogy, it suffers from the dubious distinction that most readers find his imaginative depiction of hell to be far and away the most compelling section. The raw materials for Purgatory and heaven were less promising. He did the best he could, but what ought to be a climax is more of a letdown.

Likewise, scholars have popularized a notion of Gen 1 as a three-story universe. As I've discussed on many occasions, I think that reflects a deskbound interpretation that's out of touch with the world which an ancient audience would actually experience. They spent lots of time out of doors. The details of the three-story universe don't comport with what they were in a position to know, as a matter of common observation.

Despite scholarly preoccupation with the alleged cosmography of Genesis, I'm struck by scholarly neglect in reference to Revelation. For centuries, this book has captivated readers. It has produced an immense body of exegetical literature.

Yet in spite of that, there is, to my knowledge, no monograph on the cosmography of Revelation. Yet based on various literary notices in the Apocalypse, you can piece together a picture of the world in Revelation. It would be interesting if somebody produced a mock-up or simulation.

This post is not intended to be exhaustive. I'm just going to highlight some elements:

ii) In Revelation, "heaven" is largely a vast divine throneroom or temple. It even has a door (4:1; 11:19).

Inside the throneroom there's an artificial rainbow. I say it's artificial because there's no rain or sunshine inside the throneroom.

You also have lightning. From an ancient perspective, lightning might be interesting in part because it's a natural light source that's independent of sunlight. And, of course, it's especially dramatic after dark, when it momentarily lights up the night sky.

You also have the "sea of glass." That might suggest a reflective floor that mirrors the ceiling.

iii) In 8:8-9 you have what we'd describe in modern terms as a giant asteroid plunging into the sea. Its rapid descent through the atmosphere would make it white hot. The result is to make the ocean boil on contact.

This is reminiscent, both of doomsday science fiction scenarios as well as craters that bear witness to actual impact events in earth history.

iv) 8:12 might be a case of occultation or transit, where one celestial body temporarily obscures another, without covering it completely.

v) In 9:1 you have an angel depicted as a shooting star. The abyss seems to be the prison for fallen angels. It is distinct from Hades (in Revelation).

vi) In 12, the Devil is depicted as an ancient constellation. Candidates include Draco, Scorpio, Hydra, and Serpens. I

doubt John intended a precise astronomical identification in mind. I suspect the terminology is impressionistic.

At the same time, he's alluding to the primordial "snake" in the garden. That raises the question of whether the original audience for Genesis would associate the "snake" with constellations and shooting stars. How far back in time does that thinking go? Obviously, that stellar symbolism dovetails nicely with the identification of the tempter as a fallen angel, where it is named after constellations with reptilian designations.

vii) In 13 you have the beast from the sea. This isn't the normal ocean, but an ocean that's been contaminated by natural disasters. So if this were science fiction, the beast would be a mutant sea monster.

viii) In 16:20, the islands disappear. In theory, that could be caused by an asteroid raising the sea level. I'm not stating for a fact that that's what John intends. But there is a potential narrative connection between 8:8-9 and 16:20, where the latter might be a side effect of the former. The islands were submerged by rising oceans, caused by the asteroid impact.

ix) In general, Revelation depicts an ecological disaster on a global and even cosmic scale. The flora is firebombed. The natural freshwater sources are poisoned. Marine life is destroyed by boiling water and contaminants. The sun ceases to shine. Record meteor showers empty the sky.

Recast in modern terms, the sky is reduced to white dwarves, supernovae, and neutron stars.

The earth in general is rendered uninhabitable. The only "natural" source of heat and light is the lake of fire, which is

reminiscent of magma or lava.

The earth in general is not restored to its pristine, Edenic condition. Just the opposite: it is made inhospitable to natural lifeforms.

x) There is a singular exception: the New Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven.

It's like the domed city in science fiction. A residential greenhouse. A self-contained, self-sufficient ecosystem;

Because there is no sunlight, the New Jerusalem is illuminated by artificial (supernatural) lighting (21:23,25; 22:5), evoking the Shekinah and the pillar of fire.

It has its own fresh water supply: a stream that's fed from a spring under the divine throne (22:1). This, in turn, waters the "tree of life" (22:2). Possibly a bank of fruit-trees on either side of the river. In principle, the river might have fish (Cf. Ezk 47).

xi) The only other source of heat and light is the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10), beyond the confines of the domed city.

The damned exist outside the domed city (21:27; 22:14:15). In John's cosmography, hell isn't under the earth, but on the surface of the earth. The distinction is horizontal, not vertical. Inside the city or outside the city.

The damned are like zombies. Alive, but with nothing to live on. No sunlight. No vegetation. No livestock, fish, or game.

xii) Finally, we might ask how realistic this is. Three options:

a) Symbolic

b) Literal

A problem with (b) is that unless you suppose John thought angels were literally dumping buckets of brimstone over the railing of the celestial city, it's hard to treat the imagine as consistently realistic.

c) Lifelike

If you take Bible history seriously, then some natural disasters are divine judgments. Although John is using stock imagery, this could be analogous to a future cataclysm.

It's possible that the earth will be a worldwide ecological disaster zone. The damned will survive, but linger on. Supernaturally sustained, like immortal zombies. Life will only flourish inside the New Jerusalem, where the saints reside forever.

Of course, this is visionary literature. Some things that are physically impossible can happen in a dream-like vision, where natural laws don't apply.

There is hope, but not for us

There are stock arguments for the traditional authorship and dating of NT books like the Gospels, James, and Revelation. I think these are good arguments. But I'd like to explore a neglected line of evidence.

Moderate to liberal scholars typically date the Synoptic Gospels (esp. Matthew and Luke) to after the Jewish War (c. 67-73). I think that's easier to say if you're not a Jew who lived through the Jewish War.

Admittedly, there's a sense in which that disqualifies me as well. But this is less about being Jewish or having a particular experience, then cultivating an awareness of the relevant sensibilities.

Let's take a comparison. George Steiner and Edmund Wilson are both great literary critics. Steiner regards Kafka as a major writer, whereas Wilson regards him as overrated and ephemeral. Why the difference?

Simply put: Steiner is Jewish and Wilson is Gentile. Steiner is reading a Jewish author through Jewish eyes. He sees Kafka as a prescient allegory of the Shoah.

That's magnified by the fact that Steiner is, himself, haunted by the Shoah. His father had the wisdom to get his immediate family out of Dodge, but he couldn't save his extended family. He wrote them pleading letters. They ignored the threat and perished in the death camps. Steiner has the psychology of a Holocaust survivor (whether or not he meets the technical definition, which is disputed).

By contrast, Wilson just doesn't get Kafka. He can't. Kafka doesn't speak to him at that level. It's too alien to his own experience. He has a waspish, patrician background. Hobnobbed with F. Scott Fitzgerald. He has no ear for Kafka. I don't necessarily say that as a criticism. It's not as if I can directly relate to Kafka's experience either.

Let's draw another distinction. When people look back on their youth and childhood, there's often a sense of loss—assuming they had a happy childhood. But that can take either one two very different forms:

i) They may wax nostalgic about the past. Take writers like Mark Twain (**THE ADVENTURES OF HUCK FINN & TOM SAWYER**) and Ray Bradbury (**DANDELION WINE**). Although that's tinged with a sense of regret, because it's irrecoverable, the loss was natural and gradual.

ii) But then you have writers whose happy youth or childhood was torn from their arms. Prematurely ripped away. Take Giorgio Bassani. His novels are set in pre-war Ferrera. And they reflect that place and period. They reflect his actual experience, making allowance for artistic license.

Yet they are told with a view to the Shoah. Although the historical setting is prospective, the narrative viewpoint is retrospective, as a chain of events leads inexorably to the abyss.

This is Holocaust literature. And it has Biblical precedent in exilic literature (e.g. Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamentations). In Jeremiah you have escalating despair as he foresees his people doomed by their own obduracy. What makes it so maddening is the self-fulfilling nature of their fate. They bring it upon themselves by their defiance. Ezekiel oscillates

between elation and bitter rage. And Lamentations gives voice to the unspeakable.

Now, the Jewish War was an event similar in significance to the Holocaust and the Babylonian Exile. Even for Jews outside Palestine, Jerusalem was the epicenter of Judaism. It's hard to overstate the psychological impact that would have on survivors. There's medical evidence that children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors suffer from transgenerational trauma. And you'd have the same dynamic for analogous events.

And that's a basic problem with the post-70 date for Matthew. If it was written after that cataclysm, why does it not read like Lamentations, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel? Although ostensibly set in the time of Jesus, we'd expect the calamity of the Jewish War to cast a long backward shadow, just as we find in exilic literature and Holocaust literature. That's assuming it was, in fact, written after 70 AD.

But Matthew doesn't begin to have the emotional register of someone who wrote from that harrowing vantagepoint. Yes, there are storm clouds on the horizon in the Olivet Discourse. But that lacks the direct transparency and intensity of searing personal experience. It's abstract. Future. Not the past as future.

Instead, the reader is treated to academic debates about *Halakha* and competing theories of the afterlife—from forty years before. And that's perfectly consistent with Matthew being precisely what it purports to be—rather than a retrojection.

Compare that to Paul Celan, who lost both parents in the death camps. Who was repeatedly hospitalized for clinical

depression. Who eventually committed suicide—unable to overcome the grief and guilt. Likewise, Primo Levi was another Jewish chronicler of the Shoah who survived the death camps, but succumbed to suicide. Ditto: Jean Améry. The memory was just unbearable.

Conversely, the tone of Revelation calibrates very well with exilic literature and Holocaust literature. It's easy to imagine John writing *that* after the Jewish War. The emotional register parallels Ezekiel.

But what about the Gospel of John? I think it might well have been written in the 60s.

But suppose it was written in the 90s. Is that consonant with what I've been discussing? Possibly. People have different coping strategies. One way is to become more withdrawn. And, indeed, John's Gospel is detached and otherworldly. If the life you knew has been obliterated, that's one way to adapt.

If Matthew was composed before 70 AD, and is literarily dependent on Mark, then Mark is however much earlier.

The letter of James is written in a serene style that bears no trace of trauma to the collective psyche of 1C Jewry which you'd anticipate if it was penned sometime after the Jewish War.

Luke is less susceptible to this style of analysis. Likely a Gentile convert to Judaism, and then to Christianity via Judaism. Although he's profoundly invested in Messianic Judaism, that's not a part of his formative experience, so even if his Gospel was written after 70 AD, I wouldn't necessarily expect it to reflect the same traumatization.

There are, however, other arguments for dating its composition prior to 70 AD.

I've been using Jewish comparisons, but we could cast a wider net. Dabney was so demoralized after his side lost the Civil War that he moved to Texas. He just couldn't stand to live in Virginia any more. The life he'd known and loved was literally shot to pieces. Or consider the enduring psychological impact on dispossessed American Indians, driven from their ancestral lands.

Finally, this may touch on the question of what happened to most of the apostles. After being listed in the Gospels, why did many melt away? You have traditions and legends, but that has an apocryphal flavor. A way of validating a national sect.

One explanation may be that some of them perished in the siege of Jerusalem. Not because they were too devoted to the city, or nostalgic memories, but because they had relatives there, or because they had house-churches there where they ministered. Like missionaries who stayed behind in China during the Japanese invasion. Rather than abandon their flock, they suffered with them and died with them.

Decrypting prophecy

Must Be Relevant and Understood by the First Century Author and Readers

Then a third principle is, and I think this is very important, interpretations of Revelation must be something that John could have intended and his first century readers could have understood. Let me say that again. Interpretations of Revelation must be consistent with what John could have intended and his first century readers could have understood. If not, I think any interpretation that John couldn't have possibly intended and his first century readers living in a pre-technological age living in a political situation very different from our own, any interpretation they could not have possibly understood should be rejected, in my opinion.

...for any interpretation of Revelation to be plausible and compelling, must be something that John could have understood and that his readers could have understood, or John could have intended and his readers living in the first century Greco- Roman Empire, in a pre-technological, pre-consumer age, pre-modern day warfare age, pre-nuclear age, something that they could have understood and would have made sense of. In my mind that rules out a lot of the possible explanations of 666 that have been proposed down through the centuries. Especially today, particularly those that associate with modern technological features of our day, our modern methods of warfare, and things like barcodes and computers and things like that. That principle rules those kinds of explanations out immediately.

http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/DigitalCourses/Mathewson_Revelation/Revelation_Mathewson_Text/Mathewson_Revelation_CompleteText.pdf

i) This is a good rule of thumb in biblical hermeneutics. However, it's more germane to some genres than others. When Paul composes a letter to the Corinthians, that's something he writes from scratch. He chooses the content. It is what he intends it to be.

Likewise, he is addressing the situation of the Corinthians. It was written to them and for them. He writes to be understood by his target audience.

However, prophecy and visionary revelation are different. A seer is receptive. This is in the first instance something that happens to him. To a great extent he's a passive spectator, although he can ask questions.

Likewise, he writes down what he saw. He's a reporter. Although there's some editorial freedom in how he verbalizes what he saw and arranges the material, he is recording what he heard and saw in a vision. He doesn't have the same control over the content as a letter writer. So authorial intent is far less central.

In addition, if this is a prophecy about the distant future, then the meaning might be quite opaque to the original audience. Even if an oracle is about events set just 100 years in the future, that world may be so different from the world of the original audience that it's fairly unrecognizable to that audience.

ii) Why would God reveal the future to them if it won't happen to them and they don't know what it means?

a) To begin with, to be recognizably prophetic, an oracle must be delivered in advance of the events.

b) It can still be encouraging to the original audience to learn that ultimately, God wins. They are on the winning side.

c) The book of Revelation can be a combination of oracles about the past, present, near future, and distant future. A little something for everyone.

iii) One concern is that if we unmoor Revelation from authorial intent or audiencial understanding, there's no check on what it can or cannot mean. That's a legitimate concern. By way of reply:

a) One issue is to avoid a prejudicial approach the book. Don't assume in advance that it's past or future. Don't assume you know who it's for. And don't insist on a false dichotomy.

b) In my opinion, Revelation relates certain kinds of events. Generally repeatable events. Especially towards the end (19-22), the events are unrepeatabe, but in-between, it uses archetypical symbolism that can signify events throughout church history. So there's a principle of analogy. A prediction must refer to something analogous to the description.

c) We should avoid over-confidence in our ability to identify the referent. Maybe it's past, maybe it's present, maybe it's future. With respect to 19-22, the fulfillment will be unmistakable once that happens. But aside than that, we should not become too invested in a particular identification. That's not necessarily or even probably

something we can tie down. If we try, it will come loose. To the degree that Revelation is about the future, that's something to be discovered by readers living at the time. It will happen to them.

Dystopian prophecy

Rev 8-9 & 16 contain end-of-the world descriptions. How should we take that?

i) Is this supposed to refer to events pretty much as described? If so, what's the timeframe?

For instance, one might use that to support a futurist interpretation. Since that didn't happen in the past, it must lie in the future.

Conversely, a liberal preterist would say it predicted the destruction of the Roman Empire, which was roughly conterminous with the known world. Therefore, it predicted the end of the world when the Roman Empire ended. But since that didn't happen, it's a false prophecy. Moreover, although the Roman Empire disintegrated, it didn't fall apart in the way Revelation envisions. So, once again, it's a false prophecy.

So there's some circularity to how we use that to date the outlook.

ii) Another approach is to say it uses end-of-the-world symbolism to refer to something else. One potential problem with that approach is that unless you have reason to believe the Bible wouldn't predict the end of the world, or unless you have reason to believe the end of the world (as we know it) won't involve cataclysmic natural and humanitarian disasters, why would you assume this imagery stands for something else?

iii) You can also take the position that even though it refers to the end of the world, it uses surrealistic imagery. This is,

after all, a vision. The images are dream-like or nightmarish. Things can happen in dreams and nightmares that are physically impossible in real life. That's my own inclination.

iv) There is, however, a final option. Assuming this is a long-range prophecy, then the referents have modern analogues. The reader should mentally substitute a modern equivalent. If, say, John depicts ancient military technology (e.g. archers, warhorses), and this actually looks forward to the distant future, then you update the technology.

Mind you, that can be hazardous. Unless you know when it will happen, your modernization may soon be obsolete. A reader can only use the present as his frame of reference for modernizing the text. So that will be different for a 21C reader than a 19C reader.

v) In terms of the sheer scale of damage, one interesting thing about Rev 8-9 & 16 is that it's unrealistic in light of 1-2C history, but becomes more realistic the further we move into the future. For instance:

The Justinian Plague. The first recorded pandemic, the Justinian Plague, was named after the 6th century Byzantine emperor Justinian I. The Justinian Plague began in 541 AD and was followed by frequent outbreaks over the next two hundred years that eventually killed over 25 million people (Rosen, 2007) and affected much of the Mediterranean basin--virtually all of the known world at that time.

"Black Death" or the Great Plague. The second pandemic, widely known as the "Black Death" or the Great Plague, originated in China in 1334 and spread along the great trade routes to Constantinople and

then to Europe, where it claimed an estimated 60% of the European population (Benedictow, 2008). Entire towns were wiped out. Some contemporary historians report that on occasion, there were not enough survivors remaining to bury the dead (Gross, 1995).

<http://www.cdc.gov/plague/history/>

Imagine a contemporary of the Justinian Plague or the Black Death reading about natural disasters (in Revelation) that kill 1/3 of humanity. That would be a good ballpark figure. In his experience in time and place, that would be terrifyingly true.

vi) Let's play along with (iv-v). On this interpretation, John describes destruction raining down from the sky, from angels and meteors and so forth, because that's the imagery he had available to him. But from a futuristic perspective, modern analogues might be bombers dropping napalm and Agent Orange. Or orbital weapons. Space-based lasers. If God were revealing the distant future to a 1C seer, isn't that how God would convey the idea of advanced military technology?

Or take the 200 million-man army in 9:16-17, consisting of fire-breathing warhorses. Now I myself think the figure is hyperbolic. The point is to conjure the impression of an overwhelming invasion force.

But suppose we think it's more realistic. A stock objection is that a 200 million-man army is infeasible. The logistics of moving and supplying that many square miles of infantry is impractical. A problem Robert Thomas overlooks.

But suppose this refers to military robots? Miniature tanks armed with flamethrowers and rocket launchers? Isn't that

a good modern analogue for fire-breathing warhorses? And it's more feasible. But if God was revealing that spectacle to a 1C seer, he might use images of mutant equine monsters instead.

vii) Apropos (vi), consider the talking eagle in 8:13. Robert Thomas takes that literally. But that's problematic. Even allowing for supernaturalism, there's a dilemma:

If the eagle is near enough to be seen and heard by some observers, it's too close to be seen and heard by everyone. Conversely, if it's far away, then it's too far to be seen (much less heard) unless you have a telescope and know where to point it.

We need to ask what is the purpose of the eagle? A talking eagle at the cosmic zenith point functions as an international broadcast system—or warning system. Using 1C conceptual resources, that's one way to convey the idea. But assuming this is futuristic prophecy, what if the talking eagle stands for a communications satellite?

viii) Likewise, I mentioned the Bubonic plague. That had a vast death toll despite being a natural pathogen. A more recent example is Ebola in Africa. The last outbreak nearly lost containment.

But in futuristic prophecy, we should make allowance for weaponized pathogens. Pathogens engineered to be more contagious (by contact or airborne), have a longer incubation period, and be resistant to antibiotics and antivirals.

That could be produced by governments, but it could also be produced by well-funded, biotech savvy ecoterrorists who think the survival of the biosphere depends on wiping

out the human race, or at the very least decimating the population.

Chemical weapons would be another threat: say, to poison municipal fresh water supplies. Even with respect to what's naturally possible, the scale of damage envisioned in Revelation becomes increasingly realistic as we head into the future.

I'm not saying that's the right way to interpret Revelation; but it's something to consider. Hold in reserve.

Deceiving the nations

1. The plot of Revelation 16-20 is straightforward. After devastating aerial bombardment (16), Babylon is reduced to smoldering rubble (17-18).

Incidentally, if you wish to understand the fulfillment in futuristic terms, you could view it in terms of orbital weapons.

After heaven rejoices over the downfall of Babylon (19:1-10), Jesus returns. He defeats the armies of Satan on the battle field (19:11-21).

Satan is taken into custody, as a war captive. The abyss is a subterranean POW camp (20:1-3).

You have the "Millennium" (20:4-6).

Satan is then paroled. He raises another army, is defeated, and cast into the lake of fire (20:7-10).

BTW, what does it mean to say he's "released"? Did he escape? Was that an inside job?

2. In traditional, Augustinian amillennialism, the Millennium represents the church age. However, that doesn't fit the plotline. In the plot, the Millennium is just one phase in the history of the church. It hardly covers the entire period.

More recently, some amils construe the Millennium as the Intermediate state for Christians. That has more going for it than the traditional, Augustinian interpretation.

To some degree, the premil reading is more straightforward insofar as it tracks the actual sequence of the plot. However, that simplicity is deceptive. Premils add a lot of subplots to 20:4-6 by using that as a framework to place the fulfillment of various OT and NT endtime prophecies. They attempt to correlate Revelation with other prophetic notices in the Bible, but that clutters the plot.

In addition, Revelation isn't a historical narrative like the Gospels or Acts. Rather, it's more like historical fiction. Although it refers to some real people, places, and events, it also contains a lot of imaginary material. So we can't just assume the storyline mirrors a historical sequence. In another respect, Revelation is the ancient equivalent of superhero comic book flicks, with their surreal cityscapes, their heroes and villains with paranormal powers.

Furthermore, there's the problem of where Satan finds a recruiting pool to raise another army, of hyperbolic size, after his army was annihilated the first time around. That's because Revelation rhetorically bifurcates the battle of Gog and Magog into two stages, separated by the millennial interval.

3. Then there's the question of what the binding/loosing of Satan signifies. What's the real-world analogue? The binding/loosing of Satan and the deception of the nations are corollary. There's some conceptual relationship. So what does it mean for Satan to deceive the nations? How does Satan deceive the nations? And how is he bound?

i) In Rev 12, we have a studied anachronism. Satan's power is broken by the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ. That's depicted in terms of civil war in heaven, where Satan and his cohorts are expelled. That uses imagery from the prehistoric fall of Lucifer to represent

a historic event. That should warn us to be careful about the "timing" of the imagery in Rev 20:1-10. We need to guard against synchronizing what might be an intentionally anachronistic description.

ii) With that in mind, the binding/loosing of Satan isn't necessarily a one-time event. It might be something that happens intermittently at different times and places during the course of church history.

ii) In Revelation, one way Satan deceives people is through heathen witchcraft. Paganism and witchcraft go together. Not only does Revelation use that terminology (9:21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15), but the False Prophet is a sorcerer (13:13-15) who uses witchcraft to delude unbelievers (19:20).

On this view, one way Satan might be bound is when heathen witchcraft is banished. Or when Christian prayer trumps sorcery.

iii) Apropos (ii), Dan 10 might supply some conceptual background material for Rev 20. Daniel's prayer is impeded by a territorial spirit until the Archangel Michael intervenes. Not coincidentally, the Archangel Michael is Satan's nemesis in Rev 12. And not coincidentally, it's another angel (possibly Michael) who is Satan's nemesis in 20:2.

So another way in which Satan is bound may be when Christians pray (cf. Rev 5:8; 8:3-4), and God answers their prayers.

iv) Apropos (ii), the binding and loosing of Satan might correspond to possession and exorcism. Possession, paganism, and witchcraft go hand-in-hand. Demonic spirits delude unbelievers through signs and wonders (e.g. 16:14).

Presumably, that involves possession. Sorcerers are demoniacs—demonically empowered. The notion that exorcism binds the Devil goes back to the Gospels.

I surmise that the binding and loosing of Satan picturesquely depicts in one big climatic battle what is more often many spiritual skirmishes in the course of church history, as Christians pray, perform exorcisms, and banish pagan witchcraft. But until the final battle, there's ebb and flow.

God of death

I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades (Rev 1:18).

There's probably a connotation to this verse that's lost on modern readers. We think of "death" as an abstract term for the cessation of life. The physical condition of the decedent. A corpse—which undergoes rapid disintegration. And that's it.

However, for ancient readers, I suspect "death" would have an added connotation. In ancient polytheism, you have gods of death, viz. Osiris, Hades, Pluto, Dis Pater, Thanatos. In part, these personify the end of life. The notion of death as a personal agent who takes life.

But in addition, gods of death ruled the netherworld. In pagan folklore and mythology, when you died, that wasn't necessarily the end. Rather (depending on the tradition), your soul descends to the underworld. There the god of death rules over you, for the duration. When you die, you transition from the domain of one god or gods to the domain of another god. You are now under the thrall of the king of the the underworld. Death is your god. And a very dismal god at that.

On that view, Rev 1:18 demythologizes the gods of death. Imagine how liberating that message would be to gentile Christians raised in paganism. There is no god of death who controls the afterlife. Rather, there is only one God for everything. Your postmortem fate is in the hands of Jesus.

I'd add that paganism is not a dead religion (pardon the pun). It's entrenched in parts of the third world and the indigenous folk religion. Moreover, immigrants from those traditions bring it with them. From a modern missionary standpoint, as well as evangelizing immigrants, this message can be as liberating as it was in the 1C.

Seven lampstands

and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Rev 1:20).

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (Rev 2:5).

Why seven churches? Why the lampstand metaphor for churches? What's the significance of removing a church's lampstand?

- 1.** No doubt the churches in Revelation were real 1C churches. But were there only seven? Or is that sample dictated by John's numerology?
- 2.** The septunarian numerology in Scripture has its background in creation week.
- 3.** But beyond that general background, there may be a more specific tie-in. The seven days of creation are distinguished by alternating light and darkness. Sunlight, dawn and dusk. So the lampstands in Revelation may mirror the seven units of daylight in Genesis.
- 4.** God is the giver of light. By threatening to remove the lampstand, God rescinds the gift of light. And, of course, that plays on the metaphorical connotations of light and darkness in Scripture.

5. In addition, Rev 2-3 may evoke some other motifs from Gen 1-3.

i) In the case of the Ephesian church, which is the inaugural example in Revelation, you have some explicit allusions to Genesis in the "tree of life" and the "paradise of "God.

Moreover, to have "fallen" or "abandoned one's first love" recapitulates the sin of Adam and Eve.

The fact that the Ephesian church is the first church in the sequence might provide a framework or textual clue for Genesis motifs in the other churches.

ii) The "book of life" (Sardis) and "crown of life" (Smyrna) may be synonymous metaphors for the "tree of life".

iii) The "morning star" (Tyatira) may recall starlight and the dawn/dusk refrain in Gen 1.

iv) The "shameful nakedness" (Laodicea) and "garments" (Sardis) may recall the Fall in Gen 3.

v) The temple/pillar imagery may recall Eden as sacred space (Philadelphia)

vi) The "white stone" (Pergamum) may be recall the gemstones of Havilah (Gen 2:11-12).

vii) And the Spirit refrain may recall Gen 1:2.

Narrative order

A friend asked me to comment on this:

[The amillennial] approach does not fit the literary movement of Revelation. John pictures the period between Christ's exaltation and return as the time of Satan's banishment from heaven to earth, where he deceives the nations and persecutes the saints (Rev 12:1–17). By way of contrast, in 20:1–3 Satan is confined in the abyss, which means that he cannot deceive the nations "anymore" (eti), just as defeat in heaven meant that he had no place there "any longer" (12:8) and Babylon's fall mean that life was not found there "anymore" (18:21–23). Satan does not deceive anyone during the millennium (20:4–6), but deception resumes afterwards (20:7–8; Mounce; Osborne). If the vision of Satan persecuting the faithful in 12:1–17 shows the present character of earthly life, the vision of Satan's binding assures people that the present situation is not the final one. Evil will be defeated in ways that are not now evident (Boring; Giesen; Murphy) [Craig R. Koester, **REVELATION: A NEW TRANSLATION WITH INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY**, 785.]

1. RECAPITULATORY PARALLELISM

Warfield is the earliest writer I've seen appeal to this. It was, of course, popularized by Hendrickson, and later picked up by Beale and Poythress. Metzger defends it as well.

I think there's *some* truth to it. When I first read Revelation through several times as a young Christian, I was struck by how the narrative structure was cyclical to some degree. That's before I read any commentaries advocating recapitulatory parallelism.

That said, there are limitations to that analysis:

i) While I think Revelation has a degree of periodicity, efforts to subdivide it into 7 sections strike me as artificial. Also, I doubt the book is that literary. This isn't Dante or T. S. Eliot. I don't expect Revelation to be that symmetrical. I don't think it's that kind of work.

ii) Although Revelation has a degree of periodicity, it's both linear and cyclical. There's progression towards a definitive climax. So it's not endless repetition circling back on itself like **FINNEGANS WAKE**.

2. VISIONARY GENRE

Poythress makes the point that Revelation originates in a vision. So the question is whether the sequence is chronological or psychological. Michaels raises the same basic issues. And I think that's a legitimate query.

To be sure, that's more of a question rather than an answer. In principle, that could be a false dichotomy. Maybe the sequence in which God revealed these scenes to John are chronological. Or maybe John edited his visionary experience into a chronological sequence—assuming he'd know the actual order of events.

3. THE NATURE OF NARRATIVE SEQUENCE

i) To my knowledge, there are roughly three types of literary genres that use plotlines: historical narratives, fictional narratives, and historical fiction. The whole issue of narrative sequence is interesting and perhaps underexplored.

Take intervals. Our preference is to group intervals by longer or shorter units of time: we group minutes with minutes, hours with hours, days with days, weeks with weeks, months with months, years with years, decades with decades, centuries with centuries, millennia with millennia.

By the same token, our preference is to group sequential intervals by common type: a day follows a day, a week follows a week, a month follows a month, &c.

One consequence is the natural tendency to group intervals in concentric temporal relationships. For instance, we group months within a year, weeks within a month, days within a week.

So there's concentricity as well as linearity. Sequences within sequences.

As a rule, we prefer to add days to days, weeks to weeks, years to years, &c. We prefer to say a day is sooner or later than another day, rather than a week is sooner or later than a day. We have an ordinal numerical sequence of days that begins with each new month and terminates with that particular month, then starts all over again with the new month. Self-contained intervals that are expansive when linked with other self-contained intervals.

Of course, there are times when that breaks down. Is May later than April? Depends. If the same year, yes. But April

1941 is later than May 1940, while May 1939 is sooner than April 1940.

So context is crucial. Are there temporal markers that clarify relative sequence? Are we comparing days to days? Years to years? A month in one year to a month in another year?

ii) Or take autobiographies. These are wildly disproportionate in terms of how much detail is lavished on particular intervals of time. That's because a human life consists of some personally significant events, along with many average days, weeks, and months. An autobiography will focus on events significant to the writer. He will write a lot about shorter significant intervals and only write a little about longer average intervals. So there's a certain paradox, where more time is given to less time and less time is given to more time.

If he didn't make explicit that he was discussing what happened to him in the course of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it might be impossible to gauge the length of the intervals comprising the sequence. Whether he was skipping over extensive intervals.

We also have this in Scripture. Luke and Acts are about the same length, but Acts covers a much longer span of time. Although Genesis is just one book, it covers a far longer span of time than Exodus-Deuteronomy combined (even if we omit the legal material).

iii) And that's historical narrative. In fictional narrative or historical fiction, the chronology of the plot follows dramatic logic rather than an actual historical order of events.

iv) Allegory is a subgenre. The plot that may in some sense parallel reality, but the correspondence isn't a mirror image of reality.

v) Back to historical narrative, consider what's involved in writing a history of WWII. You have to write about developing events in England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Japan, North Africa, the USA, &c. So a historian will have to write about a certain interval of time in one country, then back up and write about an interval of time in another country, because there are so many parallel as well as intersecting events and developments. A historian sometimes has to back up to go forward. To pick up where he left off as he narrates the evolution and intersection of events in each major country that figured in the war.

And if we think Revelation is about world history, will it be any less complex?

Time lag

I'm going to return to a topic I've discussed on more than one occasion.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place (Rev 1:1).

1. This is a prooftext for preterism. On this view, John expected the predictions in his Apocalypse to be fulfilled within the 1C, give or take. Of course, that's a somewhat anachronistic way of looking at it. People in the 1C didn't think of themselves as living in the 1C. They didn't think of the end of the 1C as a terminus ad quem. That's a retrospective calendrical distinction.

2. In addition to Rev 1:1, we have similar sounding passages at the end of the work:

And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place” (Rev 22:6).

“And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of

this book” (Rev 22:7).

“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done (Rev 22:12).

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:20).

And I doubt it's coincidental that these kinds of passages come at the beginning and ending of the Apocalypse. It forms an inclusio.

And these passages are customarily understood to refer to the end of the world. The return of Christ and the aftermath thereof.

3. Before discussing that, I'd like to draw a technical distinction. A linguistic or philosophical distinction. Expressions using terms like "I," "sooner," and "later" are called indexicals:

An indexical is, roughly speaking, a linguistic expression whose reference can shift from context to context. For example, the indexical 'you' may refer to one person in one context and to another person in another context. Other paradigmatic examples of indexicals are 'I', 'here', 'today', 'yesterday', 'he', 'she', and 'that'.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/indexicals/>

In the philosophy of language, an indexical is any expression whose content varies from one context of use to another. The standard list of indexicals includes pronouns such as "I", "you", "he", "she", "it", "this", "that", plus adverbs such as "now", "then", "today", "yesterday", "here", and "actually".

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/dem-indx/>

A temporal indexical is only be true at a particular time. A spatial indexical is only be true at a particular place. Mind you, that doesn't necessarily mean it can only be true once. Once person's "now" may be another person's "then," and so forth.

By themselves, indexicals don't pick out a particular time and place. They don't have a date-stamp or place-name.

4. In addition to the first set of passages I quoted, there's another set:

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (Rev 2:5).

Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth (Rev 2:16).

Only hold fast what you have until I come (Rev 2:25).

Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you (Rev 3:3).

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown (Rev 3:11).

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me (Rev 3:20).

Like the first set, these refer to Jesus "coming" or coming "soon," yet unlike the first set, these seem to refer to events within church history rather than events that terminate church history. Indeed, the Apocalypse is inaugurated by Jesus coming to John, on Patmos. So the variety of similar sounding statements, that can't all converge on the same event, should make the reader cautious about assuming that when Revelation talks about the coming of Jesus, or his coming "soon," that this is necessarily an end-of-the-world prediction, with a terminus ad quem around the turn of the 2C, give or take.

5. The thief-in-the-night motif (Rev 3:3; 16:15) is in tension with a predictably imminent event. The point is to

keep Christians watchful. They can't afford to let their guard down, because the timing of the Parousia is unexpected. That, in itself, qualifies how imminent it can be.

6. A theme in some science fiction stories is a character in the present sending a message to people in the future. This may take the form of a warning. The messenger has foreknowledge that if the current trajectory continues as is, it will culminate in a catastrophe one or more generations in the future—or possibly centuries in the future. He needs to send this message into the future, or at least have a message from the past which, when they discover it, future readers will recognize is about their situation, enabling them to deactivate the time bomb before it detonates (as it were). The impending disaster can't be prevented in the present.

So this raises a practical question: how to send a message about the future to people in the future. How to send a message about the future to people in the same future as the message is referring to. The message would have to be sent in the past. There'd be a time lag between time-frame when the message was sent and the time-frame when it took effect.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that predictions about Jesus coming soon are not to give people in the present (i.e. John's contemporaries) a preview of the near future, and not even to give people in the present a preview of the distant future, but to give people in the future a preview of their impending future. How would a seer in the 1C, or Jesus speaking through a 1C seer, give people in the distant future advance notice? How would you signal them?

As in science fiction stories, there's a certain paradox when a character must speak over the heads of his

contemporaries to an audience that doesn't yet exist. His contemporaries may be the first people to hear it, although it's really not about them. And in order to reach the target audience down the line, it may have to be transmitted from one generation to the next. Handed down by scribes who copy it down and recopy it, century after century, until it finally reaches the intended audience.

We can't literally send messages into the future. We can't skip over the intervening time. A message to future recipients has to begin in their past. In some cases, in their distant past. It has to work its way through the intervening years or centuries.

That's the nature of long-term prophecy in general. Promises or forewarnings to people who do not yet exist. The carriers of the message are, in a sense, the immediate audience. But it's really not for them or about them. They are just switchboard operators.

7. Scholars typically think the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2-4) were addressed to real 1C churches in Asia Minor. And that's my own predilection.

But suppose, for the sake of argument, that you took a consistently futuristic view of Revelation. Could Rev 2-4 be reconciled to that position?

Well, this goes back to the science fiction conundrum. How would Jesus signal churches far into the future? The letters can't be addressed to the church of Manilla, the church of Buenos Aires, the church of Helsinki, the church of Singapore, the church of Fiji, the church of Bombay, the church of Cape Town, &c. That would be anachronistic to the point of opacity.

Moreover, it would be counterproductive. If the NT used placenames that didn't exist in the 1C, Christians would name localities prematurely after those placenames. So the message would never get to the intended target. It would be diverted.

Therefore, a seer would need to use familiar localities that function as placeholders for the future counterpart. Suppose this was really for the benefit of Christians in Manilla. One of the ancient churches will be a stand-in for that future referent.

I'm not saying I agree with this. I think it's overstated. My own position is that Revelation was occasioned by the situation facing 1C Christians, that it's intentionally germane to the situation of Christians at different times and places throughout church history, but it also has a climactic fulfilment in the future.

8. A critic might object that my explanation could rationalize any failed prophecy. That raises several issues:

i) A dated prediction is falsifiable after the fact. That's more specific than mere indexicals.

ii) It's true that a long-range prophecy may be unverifiable or unfalsifiable in advance. But if there's a track record of fulfilled predictions, then that supplies a reason to believe the next prediction.

Extinguishing the light

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Rev 1:20).

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (Rev 2:5).

Recently, as I was sitting in church, I was occasionally gazing at the out of doors through the window beside, another window facing me on the other side of the transept, yet another window in the apse. It was one of those mildly breezy, partly cloudy days where the trees are in motion and the ambient light alternately brightens and darkens.

It occurred to me that compared to many sanctuaries, this church had an usual number of windows. Clear glass windows. There are modern churches where the sanctuary has no windows at all. They are entirely illuminated by electrical lighting.

The difference is that I was seated in a Colonial church, built before the advent of electrical lighting. As such, the only source of illumination the sanctuary originally had was

sunlight in the daytime and candlelight or lamplight for evensong. Hence, the abundance of windows.

If, at night, you were to extinguish the lamplight or candlelight, it would plunge the sanctuary into darkness—unless there was a full moon.

The imagery about lampstands in Revelation trades on that picture. Removing the lampstand plunges the errant churches into darkness. A reversion to the heathen darkness.

The light motif is one of the themes that John's Gospel shares in common with Revelation. The "Light of the World" is a title for Christ in John's Gospel (Jn 8:12; 9:5). That harkens back to his role as the Creator of light in Jn 1:1-4. Light was God's first creation (Gen 1:3). In Revelation, Christ is again the light of the world, only Revelation uses a concrete metaphor to illustrate the title.

When I was a boy, we'd attend the candlelight service on Christmas Eve. Near the end of the service, the electrical lights were switched off. Each parishioner had a candle. The pastor had one lit candle. He used his candle to light the candle of someone sitting in the first row. And so it went, row by row. The spreading light. The sanctuary gradually filling with light. Light swallows up darkness. But if the candle is quenched, darkness swallows up the light.

Its lamp is the Lamb

9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— 13 on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. 16 The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he

measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. 17 He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. 18 The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will

never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev 21).

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever (Rev 22:1-5).

i) I doubt the world to come will actually be devoid of oceans, sunlight and moonlight. Rather, that describes the visionary world John saw, like a surreal dreamscape. Dreams can have a detailed geography internal to the

dream, but that doesn't correspond to reality outside the dreamscape. And visions are like inspired daydreams.

ii) One exegetical question is the extent to which these are picturesque metaphors or direct descriptions of what John saw. In reading Revelation, it's useful to assume the viewpoint of a director. If you were filming Revelation, how would you visualize the imagery?

iii) Apropos (ii), John depicts the New Jerusalem as a fortified city. He says the source of illumination wasn't natural lighting but the Father and the Son. What is the reader supposed to envision? If these are figures of speech, then they don't necessarily depict a unified pictorial composition. If, however, these are descriptions of what John saw in his vision, then how should the reader imagine the scene?

Is the supernatural illumination external lighting? Does it shine over the city? Or is it interior lighting? Rev 1 begins with a Christophany. Jesus appears to John. His appearance is luminous. In addition to his personal radiance, he's holding a menorah.

We have other examples of supernatural divine illumination in Scripture. The Shekinah. The pillar of fire. The Star of Bethlehem. So it's possible that John saw something like that. Perhaps, then, there's light within the new Jerusalem, but darkness outside the city walls. The source of light is not above the city, but inside the city.

iv) Before the advent of electrical lighting, it was generally brighter outside than inside. During the day, exterior lighting (sunlight) illuminated buildings, through an open door, window, or oculus (like the Roman Pantheon).

But in churches, the situation was reversed at night. After dark, candlelight made churches brighter on the inside than the outside. At night, a parishioner was walking into the light, as he entered church. Instead of sunlight illuminating the interior through windows, the windows radiated candlelight. Against the backdrop of the night, you could see the church as a literal beacon of light. A symbolic lighthouse.

v) One time during a power outage, I went outside while it was still light out. The only available light was sunlight, and that was fading by inches.

Probably most folks in a hitech civilization have never watched daylight gradually fade until the last glimmering of light is gone. We have electrical lighting, flashlights, camp lanterns. We usually have some backup lighting source that we switch to before we're plunged into darkness. If there's a sudden blackout, we may grope in the dark for flashlights, but that's because we were caught off-guard. For obvious reasons, we don't normally wait until we can't see anything to reach for a flashlight.

But imagine a traveler in the ancient world heading for a fortified city. Back then, a unit of time was "day's journey". You had to time things. Imagine the traveler's panic as he sees that he's running out of time before nightfall. He won't make it to the city in time. He clings to the remaining, fading daylight. After sunset there's some residual ambient light, but that's bleeding out—orange, red, gray, black. Now he's lost in the dark. At the mercy of nocturnal predators.

And that's a description of hell. Outer darkness. Outside the city gates. Overtaken by the night. Eternal darkness.

Consider the reverse. When God created light, when he said, "Let there be light!", was there a sudden burst of light, or was it like a dimmer? An imperceptibly incremental brightening, like sunrise?

Space as a plot device

Although visionary revelation is a major revelatory mode in Scripture, the Apocalypse is unusual, both for how extensive the vision is, and the narrative structure of the vision. One wonders if John had the entire vision at one sitting, and wrote it out as is, or whether he edited it in some respects. A question we can't answer.

Because Revelation has a narrative structure, that raises the question of how it corresponds to time. This is a point of controversy, with idealists, preterists, amils, premils, and postmills taking different sides.

Space can be a metaphor for time. Space is a plot device in some stories. Take road stories. That's a popular genre. Some of the best or most enduring stories are road stories, viz. **THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH, THE ODYSSEY, THE DIVINE COMEDY, PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, THE VOYAGE OF THE DAWN TREADER, LORD OF THE RINGS, ROUTE 66.**

Road stories make linear use of space. They are forward-leading. Because of how humans conceptualize time, we associate that use of space with action moving into the future.

There are, however, other ways that space can function as a plot device. Take a story about kids poking around a rambling old mansion. They explore one room after another, on one floor after another, to see what's inside each room.

That involves the use of interior space as well as space within space. Smaller spaces inside larger spaces.

There are many possible variations on this theme. Take the opening of **THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH**, which takes place within a walled garden. There a traveler is moving towards the center. It's set up like outer rooms and inner rooms. A nautilus shell design.

Stories set in a large, but confined space with outer perimeters and lots of interesting things to look into. Take a campus like Oxford or Cambridge with lots of historic buildings. A story with that setting could make creative use of space, but it wouldn't be linear.

Exploring a castle is another example. You're going places inside the castle, or on the castle grounds, but it has a coming and going quality to it. You check out one room, then another.

A biblical example is Ezekiel's vision of the temple complex, with the angelic tour guide to show the seer around.

Natural examples include labyrinthian journeys like trails along the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, caverns, &c.

In this kind of story, the use of space isn't backward and forward but inward and outward. Not linear but concentric.

In reading Revelation, it's useful to ask ourselves how the narrative uses space. If you were a director, how would you film it? Is the use of space linear and forward-leaning? Or more like opening doors into rooms? Alternating between inside and outside perspectives?

The number of the Beast

This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666 (Rev 13:18).

I'm going to consider three interpretations of this famous verse.

1. A CRYPTOGRAM FOR NERO OR NERO REDIVIVUS.

Many scholars and commentators identify the Antichrist figure in Rev 13 & 17 with Nero redivivus. That's a respectable interpretation, but not without difficulties:

i) Why would John resort to a cryptogram? Is the motivation that John is concealing the seditious nature of indictment in case his prophecy falls into the hands of Roman authorities? That John is thereby protecting Christian recipients of his Apocalypse?

But that generates a dilemma. If the identity of the Beast is sufficiently transparent to John's target audience, then it would be sufficiently transparent to Roman authorities.

ii) There's the question of whether a Nero redivivus figure is an artificial modern scholarly construct. In the Sibylline oracles, Nero doesn't return from the dead. Cf. Jan Willem van Henten, "Nero Redivivus Demolished: the Coherence of the Nero Traditions in the Sibylline Oracles", **JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA** 11/21 (April 2000), 3-17.

iii) It's difficult to correlate the eight kings in Rev 17:10-11 with Roman emperors. Any particular correlation is arbitrary. Cf. C. Koester, **REVELATION** (Yale 2014), 72-73. So interpreters who favor that identification must use a file to make the evidence fit the Neronic identification.

2. GENERIC NUMEROLOGY

On this view, the Beast aspires to, but falls short of, the divine number seven. So this is part of John's stock numerology. The Beast comes tantalizingly but frustratingly close to the goal, making his failure all the more aggravating. That's my own interpretation. And that's open to a past or future fulfillment.

3. FUTURE ANTICHRIST

i) For the sake of argument, I'd like to explore another identification. A challenge of prophetic hermeneutics is that we can only judge whether or not an oracle has been fulfilled by our own place in history in relation to the oracle. Candidates from the time of the oracle up to our own time. From the past to the present. In the nature of the case, we lack access to future candidates.

So, for instance, Nero or a Nero redivivus figure might be the best available candidate, given where we stand, but he might still be the wrong candidate. As I already noted, in reference to Rev 17:10-11, Nero/Nero redivivus isn't a tight fit with the 1C evidence at our disposal. Scholars who favor that identification can't simply take the evidence as it stands, but must file it down.

By contrast, a future figure might be an exact fit. Easily recognizable. If he was on our list of candidates, he'd be the obvious candidate. But the only available candidates are past and present candidates. Nero wins by default because he comes closest to the profile, even though scholars who pick Nero have to wedge him into the evidence.

ii) As commentators note, 666 is a triangular number. There are different ways to visually represent triangular numbers. In addition, triangular numbers overlap square, cubic, and hexagonal numbers, viz.,

<http://mathworld.wolfram.com/TriangularNumber.html>

<http://mathworld.wolfram.com/HexagonalNumber.html>

<http://mathworld.wolfram.com/SquareNumber.html>

In theory, the Antichrist might have a symbol or organization that subtly exemplifies some variations on triangular numbers. That's more sophisticated than gematria. And it's something only future readers would be able to discern, given advances in modern mathematics.

Because prophecy is future-oriented, identification of the fulfillment often depends on a combination of past and future knowledge. Not just what the original audience was in a position to grasp. At the same time, this can be a trap since mathematical solutions invite excessive ingenuity, and offer too many solutions.

Vampire hunters

Alan asked me to comment on Mealy's statement:

<https://www.alankurschner.com/2018/07/23/the-irreconcilable-contradiction-within-amillennialism/>

1. In traditional Augustinian amillennialism, the Millennium spans the entire church age or interadventual age. It is, however, illicit to take a single incident in a long narrative and stretch it to cover the entire plot (Rev 4-19).

2. A more recent version of amillennialism appeals to recapitulatory parallelism. I don't know the first scholar to use that analysis. Warfield uses that analysis. It was popularized by Hendriksen, in his classic, anti-Dispensational commentary. And that's developed by more recent amil commentators like Beale and Poythress.

From what I can tell by the excerpt, Mealy is shadowboxing with that analysis. He doesn't think the two battle scenes (Rev 19-20) overlap.

3. I do think Revelation has some overlapping scenes, although we need to avoid rigidly schematizing that feature.

4. The Apocalypse is a record of a vision or series of visions John had one day on Patmos. God showed him things in the vision. It's important to draw a conceptual distinction between:

i) Only shown something once

ii) Something happening only once

The fact that this is the only time John sees an incident doesn't necessarily mean this is a one-time incident. If he was only shown it happening on one occasion, that doesn't imply that it only happens once. Maybe it's an unrepeatable event, or maybe it's a repeatable kind of event that John saw just one time. Is the relationship between events in Revelation and the real world a one-to-one or one-to-many correspondence?

5. The Apocalypse belongs to the narrative genre. The question is how the plot maps onto reality. Consider dream sequences. To some extent, Revelation is like a recurring dream or inescapable nightmare, where bad things keep happening. You think you put it behind you, but it's waiting for you around the next corner. It circles back to pounce. The plot in Revelation is characterized by alternation.

6. What's the significance of Satan's binding? What narrative function does that serve? How does it correspond to reality?

It reminds me of a cinematic trope. In the horror genre, monsters like vampires, werewolves, and zombies personify a contagion. If they bite the victim, that turns the victim into one of them. So they multiply exponentially. This has science fiction counterparts with aliens that incubate a human host, then replace it. In real life, this is similar to parasitoid wasps—as well as rabies, where a rabid animal infects a human, making the human rabid.

A variation on the vampire mythos is the master vampire who's the patriarch for a family tree of vampires. They all descend from him. He turned them directly or indirectly. If you kill the master vampire, all his descendants revert to human. If you can track down the progenitor, you don't

need to destroy all his progeny, one-by-one. Kill multiple birds with one stake.

Because these monsters are so contagious, public safety requires total eradication. A single surviving carrier will recreate an outbreak all over again.

I think that's the point behind oscillating events in Rev 19-20. There are times and places in church history where Christians enjoy a respite from persecution. But that can lull them into a false sense of security. Because evil is infectious, like a communicable disease, you can never be sure if you put it behind you once and for all time. So you dare not drop your guard. Eventually, Satan and his minions are permanently quarantined, but you don't know ahead of time where you are in church history.

Is the millennium timeless?

Here's an interesting post by Alan Kurschner:

<https://www.alankurschner.com/2018/09/09/the-thousand-years-reference-in-revelation-20-indicates-a-period-of-time/>

Premillennialists and amillennialists agree with each other that the thousand years reference denotes a temporal period, that is, a historical period. What we disagree on is when it will begin. Amillennialists think it started at Christ's first coming, so they view it as interadvental, that is, between Jesus's first and second coming. Premillennialists on the other hand think the millennial period will begin in the future at Christ's second coming, so they view it as postadvental.

i) There are amils who identify the millennium with the intermediate state. The logic of that position means the millennium antedates the first advent of Christ. If the millennium is conterminous with the intermediate state, then that goes all the way back to the antediluvians. Abel would be the first person to enter the millennium. The first saint to die and thereby pass into the intermediate state.

ii) It might be argued that while the millennium/intermediate state isn't chronologically coordinated with the first advent of Christ, it's teleologically coordinated inasmuch as the merit of Christ retroactively saved OT saints.

But I want to address another view on the millennium. There are some interpreters who think that the thousand years reference does not denote a period of time at all, so they would hold to a non-temporal

construal of the thousand years reference. Typically they would read an exclusively symbolic meaning of the expression, for example, referring to the victory and vindication of the saints. So for these interpreters they would see the fulfillment of the millennium occurring not in the course of a period of extended time, but only thematically, at the second coming of Jesus.

One of their key arguments against a temporal interpretation of the millennium (pre-, post-, and amillennial) is to point out that numbers in the book of Revelation are symbolic, that is, we should not take them literally (e.g. 144,000). I would argue against this because there are clear examples that this is not the case (e.g. John wrote to seven literal churches), so we should not make sweeping blanket statements when it comes to numbers in the book of Revelation, which seems to be the case with many interpreters. Leaving aside this point, I want to reply to this objection by making a different point.

i) That argument either proves too little or too much. For instance, Preterists identify Babylon as Rome since any 1C Mediterranean reader would recognize Rome as the city of seven hills (Rev 17:9). Yet Alan is a futurist.

ii) Even in a scheme where the numerology is purely symbolic, odds are that every so often a symbolic number will coincidentally match a literal counterpart. That's statistically inevitable since there will always be 2 of something, 3 of something, 12 of something, &c. For instance, Rome isn't the only city with seven hills.

iii) Although there may have been seven literal churches in Asia Minor at the time of writing, were there *only* seven

churches? Even in the same city you might have more than one house-church. So how do we count them?

Was each letter sent individually to each church? Or were the letters bundled with the rest of Revelation and distributed to all the churches within John's purview? Every church which had a copy of the Apocalypse heard all seven letters read aloud. Is that just seven churches? The seven letters appear to be integrated with the Apocalypse as a whole, so it seems unlikely that they ever circulated separately.

iv) As one commentator notes:

Next is the flow of time within the visionary world...But in the visionary world this "short" period extends from Christ's first coming until his final return. Visionary time does not correspond to chronological time in the readers' world. Revelation was written decades after the death of Jesus, yet the entire period of the church's conflict with evil fits within the three and a half years of visionary time (11:2-3). C. Koester, **REVELATION** (Yale 2014), 120-21.

Back to Alan:

In the book of Revelation, when it comes to these non-temporal interpreters, they will agree that—not all numbers—but the particular numbers which designate temporal periods do in fact refer to historical periods of time. For example, designations such as "ten days" [2:10], "short time" [12:7-10], "three and one-half years, 42 months or 1290 days" [11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5] are typically interpreted as symbolic by virtually all of these interpreters, but, they also would view

them as indicating historical periods of time, not necessarily the literal designation, but nevertheless, a period of time (e.g. "42 months" is symbolic of the church age, they will claim; yet the church age by definition denotes a historical period of time).

My question then is why would all these other references to temporal designations in the Apocalypse refer to actual temporal, historical periods (and also possessing symbolic meaning), but the reference to the thousand years is singled out as a non-temporal period? Just like all the other temporal designations, why can't the thousand year reference also denote both a symbolic meaning and a temporal meaning? This does not require the interpreter to think that it refers to a literal thousand year period (though I do not think there is reason to think it does not refer to a literal thousand years), but at least it could indicate an undetermined period of time.

i) A radical position might classify Revelation as literature, like Perelandra. Or like a movie. In a novel or movie, the flow of time is subdivided into a series of episodes. There's what the periods represent in plot terms. But they don't represent anything outside the fictional world of the movie or novel.

That's not my own interpretation. I simply mention it to draw attention to a potential objection.

ii) One issue is the need to distinguish visionary time from real time. Revelation is like an extended symbolic dream. The dream is episodic. The question is what those correspond to in real life.

iii) As timebound creatures we necessarily experience reality in temporal intervals. The real question is not whether the millennium is temporal, but whether the episodes in Revelation chart a unilinear sequence of unrepeatable events. Does real history (past, present, future) run along a parallel track?

An alternative interpretation is to construe some of these episodes as stereotypical kinds of ordeals which Christians at different times and places may experience. If, say, the millennium represents the intermediate state of the saints, then believers enter the millennium at different times because they die at different times throughout the course of human history.

Dramatic license

The same individual can be both a fictional character and a real person. Suppose, for instance, a director makes a scifi movie on an alternate history theme. Maybe Hitler wins WWII. Maybe the Civil War results in a truce. You just change some key variables. What if Hitler didn't invade Russia? What if Churchill broke his neck falling down a staircase? What if FDR lost his reelection bid when news of his mistress leaked out?

What if Sherman fought for the South? What if Grant was shot to death in a bar room brawl? What if Stonewall Jackson wasn't killed early on? What if Lee used guerrilla tactics rather than frontal assault? What if Lincoln lost his reelection bid because the Union army was faring badly?

In these alternate history scenarios, all the major players will be the same. They'd be based on real people. Yet they're fictional characters in the alternate history scenario. They only exist in the imagination of the director or screen writer.

Something to keep in mind when we read Revelation. It's not a historical narrative like the Gospels or Acts. Rather, this is a surreal world, like a revelatory dream. Although some of the figures are based on real people, or correspond to real people, they function as fictional characters within the plot of Revelation. There's dramatic license in an allegorical vision that you don't have in straight historical reportage.

On the interpretation of dreams

I'd like to revisit this issue:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2017/11/space-as-plot-device.html>

This post is really about the hermeneutics of Revelation, but I'll back into it. Dreams have always fascinated humans. And that includes the interpretation of dreams. Traditionally, that's because dreams were thought to be premonitions, which gave rise to oneiromancy.

Although some dreams are premonitory, most dreams are imaginary. Yet even imaginary dreams may be very interesting to the dreamer. After all, dreams tap into our personal memories and imagination. They represent the subconscious projection of the dreamer. Sometimes they allegorize what happened during the day. Sometimes they allegorize our fears or yearnings.

So even though most dreams aren't premonitory, they may still hold personal significance. And that raises the question of whether they are worth interpreting. Does the symbolism have any real meaning—albeit a private encoded meaning, unique to each dreamer? Do dreams have their own logic? Is it just a case of finding the key?

In addition, since humans share a common nature, do dreams have some collective significance? Do some dreams embed transcultural symbolism?

Conversely, perhaps there is no logic to a dream. It epitomizes imagination untethered to reason.

Consciousness imposes logic on the subconscious. On that view, there's no hidden meaning. Nothing to interpret.

Some dreams, while they last, have a narrative structure, while other dreams have abrupt scene changes. Some directors experiment with nonlinear narrative to evoke or mimic dreaming. We find this episodic quality in visionary revelation like Zechariah.

Do discontinuous dream sequences have an inner logic, or is this just the mind at play? This issue crops up in commentaries on Revelation. Is it primarily linear or nonlinear narration? Premil scholars think it's primarily linear while amil commentators think it's primarily cyclical. Idealists think it's entirely cyclical—like **FINNEGANS WAKE**.

Is there a third approach? Suppose discontinuous dream sequences exhibit spacial logic rather than chronological logic. They unfold in space rather than time. Architectural structuring.

What I mean by that is this: suppose dream scenes are like opening doors to rooms. Each room is different. Abruptly shifting from one scene to another is like opening the door to a new room and walking inside.

In a sense, a house is one big room, one large space, subdivided into smaller rooms. There's an internal relationship between different rooms within the same house. Or different stories. Perhaps an attic and basement. So it's not entirely random.

In addition, there can be rooms within rooms. A walk-in closet in a bathroom in a bedroom.

There's another distinction between inside and outside. You can open doors inside the house—to rooms, closets, and hallways inside the house—or you can open a front door, side door, or backdoor to go outside.

Furthermore, the yard might be walled in, so that you can subdivide "outside" into space between the house and the wall—as well as space beyond the wall. Likewise, in Roman, monastic, and Islamic architecture (e.g. domus, cloister, Getty Villa, Alhambra), there might be inner courtyards as well as outer courtyards. Paradoxically, there's an outside inside the building. A microcosm of the macrocosm.

Bunyan's **PILGRIM'S PROGRESS** uses linear space (a road story) while **THE HOLY WAR** uses nonlinear space (a fortified city). For his part, Dante combines both.

Suppose the layout or floor plan of Revelation is architectural. Rev 1-18 is more like inside space. Alternating rooms. Heaven, earth, netherworld. Rev 19-20 are transitional while 21-22 are more expansive. Suppose, as we read the Apocalypse, we visualize moving in space—like moving from room to room, or going outside.

Sometimes divine revelation is like opening a door to the past or future. Normally those doors are locked. But the seer is allowed to open those doors and go inside. Perhaps time itself is more like that.

Journey back to Eden

1. Traditionally, Revelation is the last book of the Bible. I don't mean chronologically (although that's quite possible), but in terms of the canonical sequence in standard editions of the Bible. This seems to be a scribal tradition. Scribes must make editorial decisions about the order in which to copy the books. And that in turn reflects precedent, if they copy a preexisting manuscript. It's an interesting question when the sequence of the NT became standardized in church history.

But even if we were starting from scratch, it's natural for Revelation to round out the canon. A logical climax to the OT and NT alike.

2. One of the challenges facing a commentator is how to outline a book of the Bible. Narrative books of Scripture have a plot. In some cases the outline is straightforward, but in other cases, like Revelation, that figures in the overall interpretation of the book.

One question is whether this simply concerns the internal structure of Revelation, or if the structure of Revelation is in some measure a mirror-image of Bible history, the Pentateuch or OT. To take just one example, Genesis plots a journey out of Eden while Revelation plots a journey back to Eden. But are there other parallels or mirror-images in terms of the plot?

3. There are different ways to outline a narrative. A common method is by time. By events. By the actions of agents in the narrative.

However, we can also plot a narrative in terms of motion through space rather than motion through time. Like a movie with changing scenes. Many biblical narratives are travelogues.

In Biblical narratives, people are situated in different places. They begin in a particular place. They move from one locale to another. And the locations may be theologically or symbolically significant. Moving from one place to another may represent a change in the traveler's spiritual condition, for better or worse. Consider the different connotations of a pilgrim and a drifter.

4. Take the three-story universe: sky, earth, sea (or netherworld). It's natural to imagine that in vertical terms because humans are earthlings for whom the sky is "up".

However, the spatial orientation is more complex. A horizontal dimension as humans walk across the surface of the earth.

In addition, the surface of the earth isn't flat. The land has "stories". Hills and mountains, steppes, plateaus, valleys, caves, canyons, plains, and coastlines.

Suppose you view the three-story universe as a building, and you lay it on its side. Instead of three stories, it's a single-story house with three rooms: front, middle, and back—or middle with two side rooms.

The tabernacle complex is like a three-story building laid on its side: the courtyard, sanctuary, and inner sanctum. In addition, there's a concentric dimension: the inner sanctum is inside the sanctuary, which is inside the courtyard, which is inside Eretz Israel, which is inside (surrounded by) pagan nations and the Mediterranean sea.

The depiction of a three-story universe is somewhat arbitrary because that reflects the viewpoint of an earthbound observer. We can easily reorient our perspective if we mentally lay it on its side. And that's a way to read biblical narratives. Where you begin. Checkpoints along the way. And your destination.

5. Space is a narrative category in the Pentateuch. A category with emblematic significance:

i) In Gen 1, God creates sky, land, and sea (oceans, lakes, rivers).

ii) In Gen 2, God makes man's ancestral home. That's a good place to be.

iii) In Gen 3, Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden. They lose access to the tree of life for themselves and their posterity.

iv) In Gen 6-9, Noah's family undergo drastic dislocation.

v) In Gen 10-11, the human race is scattered to the winds.

vi) In Gen 12, God summons Abraham from Ur. Abraham is like Adam in exile. Ur represents the plight of Adam's banished posterity, sunken in pagan idolatry and immorality.

vii) Having left his ancestral home at God's behest, Abraham is rootless. A wayfarer—as are Isaac and Jacob.

viii) Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13,18-19) were located by the Dead Sea, which lies far below sea level. A symbolic netherworld. The area is generally inhospitable although

freshwater springs rivers create a few oases. After fiery destruction, it becomes an earthly token of hell.

ix) In Gen 37-50), Joseph winds up in Egypt, and sponsors the rest of his relatives. That's initially benign.

x) In Exodus, Egypt becomes a place of oppression.

xi) Crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites become stranded in the Sinai desert. The antipode of Eden.

xii) Eventually they will cross the Jordan river to settle in the Promised land.

6. Places are central in great prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel. Passage in space as well as passage in time. And these places have spiritual connotations, for good or ill.

Take the Babylonian exile. That represents judgment. By the same token, Isaiah and Ezekiel both depict the netherworld as a place of judgment (Isa 14; Ezk 32).

Ezekiel has paradise lost (Ezk 28) and paradise regained (Ezk 37:1-12)—as well as the new Jerusalem (Ezk 38-48). Likewise, Isaiah has the new Jerusalem (Isa 2) and the new Eden (Isa 65-66). The future represents a physical destination.

7. The opening scene in Revelation takes place on Patmos, a Roman penal colony.

i) An island in the Aegean Sea, the ocean forms a natural barrier, precluding escape.

ii) Although John can't go anywhere, Jesus can go to John. A stupendous Christophany initiates a series of visions. In a

sense, the action in the Apocalypse plays out on Patmos. It all happens in the mind of John.

iii) Jesus dictates letters to churches in Roman colonies. Immersed in the dominant pagan culture. That includes Jewish communities, but many Jews have turned against the Christian movement.

iv) The cosmography of Revelation reflects a three-story universe: heaven/sky, land, and sea or netherworld. Heaven represents the domain of God, saints, and angels. The earth is a battleground while the netherworld is subdivided into the domain of demons (the abyss) and the domain of the damned (Hades).

v) One monster comes from the sea (Rev 13:1) while another monster comes from the netherworld (Rev 13:11).

vi) There are two seas. The sea below represents a fallen domain while the sea above represents heaven. The glassy sea (Rev 4:6; 15:2), issuing from the throne of God, is reminiscent of Ezk 47:1-12—which in turn, evokes the rivers of Eden. A reversal of Gen 19. Not a restoration of the dead sinners, but the land.

vii) The Euphrates (Rev 9:14; 16:12) triggers associations with Babylon and Eden. Abraham, the Babylonian exile, and the long-lost Garden.

viii) In addition to the seminal Tempter in Gen 3, the dragon (Rev 12:3) parallels the genocidal Pharaoh of the Exodus. Egypt is depicted as a marine dragon or sea-monster (Ps 74:13-14; Isa 27:1; 51:9; Ezk 29:3; 32-2-3). Likewise, the woman escaping into the wilderness (Rev 12:6,14) parallels the fleeing Israelites (Exod 19:4; Deut 8:3).

ix) The beast of the sea is the functional counterpart to Pharaoh while the false prophet is the functional counterpart to his court sorcerers. The whore of Babylon is the counterpart to Ur, Sodom, and Gomorrah. The lake of fire might be the counterpart to the Dead Sea if the conflagration which engulfed Sodom and Gomorrah turned the Dead Sea into a cauldron of boiling water, from the hailstorm of fire and brimstone.

8. The upshot is that one way to outline narratives of Scripture is to map them by space rather than time. In the Pentateuch, after the primary spaces are made (Gen 1), man is given a very auspicious place to begin. But he is banished. Life in exile degenerates into heathen vassalage, rootlessness, and judgment. They are delivered from bondage, but the wilderness becomes another place of judgment.

In the Apocalypse, John is banished to a penal colony, while Christian communities teeter on a knife-edge of assimilation or annihilation. But the final destination is a new Eden. In a way, the Pentateuch ends where Revelation begins while Revelation ends where the Pentateuch begins. A mirror-image.

The four horsemen of the Apocalypse

6 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" **2** And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" **4** And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. **6** And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"
8 And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth (Rev 6:1-8).

For unbelievers, as well as many Bible scholars, Revelation is a period piece. Whatever its prophetic pretensions, the historical horizon is sealed in the 1C. But it's striking to consider how modern this vision is:

1. The white horse apparently represents aggressive warfare. As we know, 2000 years down the pike, warfare remains a perennial feature of life on earth. So there may seem to be nothing prescient about that vision. Yet you have utopians like Steven Pinker (**THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE**) who think secularization is making the world less violent. Likewise, secular humanists thought organizations like the United Nations would prevent war. If countries just have a forum in which to talk through their disagreements.

2. The red horse apparently represents social unrest, the breakdown of civil authority.

3. And that, in turn, may tie into the black horse, which seems to represent the consequences of economic manipulation.

i) In the 1C, the diversion of arable land to produce luxury items for the ruling class created food shortages in staple crops. For a modern-day parallel, consider the economic implosion of Venezuela.

ii) Cities are especially vulnerable because they rely on having food, water and other necessities supplied from the outside. Cities lack the local resources to be sustainable on their own. Vast population centers become completely dependent on commerce which, if disrupted, precipitates urban catastrophe in a few days. The flourishing of urban populations is even more precarious in a hitech civilization than it was in the 1C.

4. Among other things, the pale horse represents epidemics triggered by infectious disease. You might think this is one of the most dated aspects of the vision. Hasn't modern medicine done much to eradicate pandemics? True, but that could revert overnight:

i) Overprescription of antibiotics and antivirals has generated superbugs.

ii) Progressive policies funnel immigrants into the country who haven't been screened for contagious disease. In addition, traditional Muslims have prescientific views of hygiene.

iii) The general public is losing resistance to contagious disease, due both to the diluting effect of uncontrolled immigration—as well as progressive elites at the helm of the antivaxxer movement.

iv) Likewise, welfare is a magnet for urban concentrations of homeless men and women. This leads to the breakdown

of public sanitation.

v) In addition, green policies promote composting rather than standard food disposal. That attracts rats, which multiply exponentially.

A side effect of affluence is to make many people indulge a false sense of security. Affluence creates a buffer. The affluent aren't used to living on the edge, where there's no margin for error. They lose their sense of danger. In addition, most folks are crisis-driven. Hazards are an abstraction. They are used to feeling safe, so they lower their guard. But the world is an unforgiving place. Just consider the following scenario:

https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2019/05/31/dr_drew_pinsky_entire_population_of_california_could_fall_victim_to_bubonic_plague_due_to_homelessness.html

The warning is focussed on LA, but all up and down the West coast, urban centers have become a haven for illegal immigrants and the homeless. While many infectious diseases are curable, the system is easily overloaded. For instance, the black plague is curable, but because it's rare, hospitals lack the resources to contain a serious outbreak.

So the vision in Rev 6:1-8, far from being obsolete, dovetails with contemporary conditions.

The Revelation maze

To my knowledge, premils think Revelation has a linear plot while many modern-day amils think Revelation has a cyclical plot, although 19-22 break the cycle with a definitive denouement.

Linear and cyclical are both spatial metaphors. Ways to structure time figuratively.

Here's an alternative to a linear or cyclical plot alike: suppose Revelation is like a maze. In terms of John's experience, it's like an extended dream in which the scenes keep shifting. An immersive experience in which he's an observer in the visionary world. Dreams can be like a maze, where the dreamer is seeking a destination or looking for a way out. A maze has an entrance and an exit. And it's possible to make progress from one end to the other. But there's a certain amount of backtracking. Entry points with no outlet.

Real life has blind alleys, wrong turns, and dead-ends. You see the same thing coming and going. Backing out. Turning around.

Suppose John's experience is like working his way through a maze. Take the binding of Satan. He's unbound, then he's bound, then he's unbound. In the vision, John is traveling in one direction. He sees Satan bound and unbound because John is moving forwards and backwards. The vision hits a wall, and he has to turn around and look for another way out. That leads to repeated sightings. In a maze, Satan may be both bound and unbound. It's not a matter of when but where. In a maze, retracing your steps or walking in circles is analogous to moving backward in time or temporal loops.

Revelation: inside and out

Revelation is one of those books of the Bible that many Christian readers keep coming back to. Unlike, say, 1-2 Kings, which has a straightforward plot and little subtext, Revelation is hard to reduce to a single perspective. From modern readers, the added appeal of Revelation is that it's the most cinematic book of the Bible.

To my knowledge, premils typically think Revelation has a linear plot (at least Rev 5-22) whereas modern-day amils typically think it has a cyclical plot, although the return of Christ breaks the cycle. But perhaps that's a false dichotomy.

Consider a comparison. A plot device in science fiction is the temporal loop. Here's an illustration of what I mean: a character wakes up in a bedroom. He glances at the clock. It shows the time and date. He gets dressed and goes outside. Nothing feels unusual. During the course of the day he witnesses a cycling accident, notices a pretty jogger, and sees a customer spill coffee at the cafe. He goes to bed, wakes up in the same bedroom, glances at the clock. Everything repeats. Between the character falling asleep or waking up, the cycle resets.

This happens several times without variation until he has an unshakable sense of *déjà vu*. Hasn't he seen all this before? Hasn't he done all this before? How long has this been happening? It can't be real. He must be stuck on some sort of illusion.

This time, when he wakes up, he tries to change a variable, hoping that will break the cycle. He intervenes to prevent the cycling accident. When he wakes up, it's the same date.

So he changes a different variable. He intervenes to prevent the coffee from spilling. He takes sleeping pills to oversleep or sets the alarm clock to wake up in the middle of the night.

He hopes, through dumb luck, to change the key variable, like flipping a switch. Finally he wakes up, glances at the clock, and it's a day later. Or he wakes up in different bedroom. He made his escape. He's back to reality.

Is the plot linear or cyclical? Depends on the standpoint of the observer. From the viewpoint of the character, inside the temporal loop, the experience is cyclical. The action keeps returning to where it began. In a sense, it has no beginning or ending, like a Möbius strip—constantly folding back on itself.

But suppose this is a movie. From the standpoint of the movie viewer, outside the temporal loop, the experience is linear. The movie viewer doesn't experience a day repeating itself. Rather, he watches a character experience a day repeating itself.

In that respect, Revelation operates at two different levels. There's the internal standpoint of John. His experience is immersive. He is drawn into the world of the vision, as if he's there.

By contrast, there's the external standpoint of the reader. He is reading the description of John's experience from outside the world of the vision, as an outside observer. His experience is characterized by linearity, as he reads one scene after another in literary succession. The reader isn't like a character who wakes up on the same day, over and over again. Rather, it's like watching a character wake up on the same day, over and over again.

However, it would be possible for a reader, using his own imagination in addition to John's imagination, to see the action through the eyes of the narrator. Projecting himself into the world of the vision, using John's description as a conduit. Making an effort to visualize the picturesque descriptions as if the reader was standing there, seeing it for himself. That takes more effort, but it's a rewarding exercise.

So Revelation may exhibit linearity and periodicity alike, depending on whether we adopt a standpoint inside the visionary world or outside the visionary world. These are two different reading strategies.

Likewise, if you were a moviemaker, filming Revelation, you'd have to choose which standpoint to display. Cinematically, I'd opt for the immersive standpoint.

And, to complete the parallel, there's a sense in which John exits the loop when Jesus returns—in the vision. The return of Christ breaks the cycle.

In addition, there's a certain parallel with the Fourth Gospel, anchored in the dual consciousness of Christ. At a human level, Jesus experiences time from within the standpoint of 1C earthbound observer. He processes time as present, moment by moment.

Yet he also says things to indicate that he's conscious of the past, of OT history. Not *remembering*, as if he *was* there—although that would be impressive enough. But as if he *is* there (at least at the level of consciousness). Equally conscious of all times. In addition, he says things to indicate that he's ever-conscious of his eternal state. From that

standpoint, he's outside any particular time or place, and ultimately beyond time and space entirely.

Moreover, the narrator says things about Jesus that reinforce the same shifting perspectives. A timebound consciousness side-by-side a consciousness that transcends time. An awareness that's simultaneous with all times and ultimately outside of time.

Where is Jesus coming?

This post piggybacks on my prior post:

<https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2019/07/revelation-inside-and-out.html>

i) Amils, premils, and classic postmils believe the return of Christ is future. Indeed, the future Parousia is a benchmark of orthodoxy. However, certain well-known passages in the Gospels and Revelation are preterist prooftexts. Not only does Revelation refer to Jesus coming but to his coming "soon" (Rev 1:1; 2:16; 3:11; 22:6-7,12,20; cf. 1:3). On one reading, that would suggest that Jesus was expected to return in the lifetime of the 1C readers. But since that seems to be manifestly false, either the predictions are mistaken or else our interpretation is mistaken. If the predictions are mistaken, this wouldn't be some marginal error. We're waiting for something that will never happen, and that raises questions about the promises of Scripture generally regarding the world to come and our participation in the world to come.

ii) One face-saving explanation is that Jesus came symbolically in God's judgment on Jerusalem in 70 AD. But that raises the question of whether promises about the world to come in general should be given the same treatment. If they can be symbolically construed to stand for earthly events, then is there an intermediate state? Is there a future resurrection of the just? Do we go to heaven (or hell) when we die? Or is that a symbolic depiction of *this life, this world*? Is that in the past or present—with no future hope that things will ever get better?

iii) Another problem is that whatever the merits of that interpretation in reference to the Olivet Discourse, there are no clues to indicate that Revelation is alluding to the fall of Jerusalem.

iv) Suppose we take a different approach. Revelation consists of an introduction (1:1-8), followed by a continuous series of visions. Almost all the action takes place in John's vision, from 1:9-22:21. So that raises a logical question: when Revelation says Jesus is coming soon, is he coming soon *inside* or *outside* the visionary world? Within the world of John's vision, Jesus may be coming soon. It's like John is watching a movie in his head. He sees the plot unfold.

At one level, John sees this happen in the vision. At another level, John sees this happen on Patmos. Where does it happen? Depends. There's the real world. The penal colony on Patmos, surrounded by the Aegean sea. That's outside the vision. Then there's "where" he is within the vision, as an immersive observer. There are places outside the vision, in the 1C Roman empire, as well as places inside the vision. In a sense, that shifts the question from *when* Jesus is coming to *where* Jesus is coming.

v) A possible objection to this interpretation is Rev 1:1,3. That's from an introductory section before we get into the vision. However, that's a summary or lead-in to what the reader is about to witness in John's extended vision.

In what respect did Jesus "show" or "reveal" to John "what must take place soon"? That must have reference to what follows in the visionary narrative. It's not something Jesus told John directly, apart from the vision, but is mediated through the vision. John, and various characters within the vision, experience the impending return of Christ in that surreal history as it unfolds right before his eyes.

Once the reader is transported into the vision, he never leaves. It has an entry point but no exit. Like parachuting out of a plane onto an island. After that, everything happens on the island.

vi) Another objection to this interpretation might be, if Jesus was only coming soon in vision but not in reality, how does that give beleaguered 1C Christians any hope of deliverance? One answer is the fate of martyrs (Rev 6:9-11; 20:4). Jesus comes to them by bringing them to himself. At the moment of death they are inducted into God's presence. And that has the advantage of making that hope available to every Christian generation. A very tangible hope, and not some far-off hope that only one generation at the Parousia will enjoy.

vii) There will, of course, be a Second Coming in the real world, but we can't use Revelation to fix the timing. Events in Revelation are meant to have some counterparts outside the vision, but how they correspond is often intentionally open-textured, to leave room for multiple applications.

Avenging angels

Larry Hurtado summarizes a monograph on inscriptions in Roman Asia Minor that refer to "angels":

<https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2016/07/26/angels-pagan-jewish-christian/>

He says "A number of the inscriptions in question are in burial sites, and warn against disturbing the graves, effectively warning the ire of angels if anyone does so. They also come from a particular geographical area in present-day Turkey, and a few islands off/near the Turkish coast."

This, of course, intersects with the time and place of the apostle John's ministry. I wonder if that's applicable to John's enigmatic reference to "angels" in Rev 2-3. What does John mean by that appellation? Does he mean "angels" in the technical sense of the word? If so, in what respect do the churches have angels?

Keep in mind that the inscriptions are just a surviving sample. Presumably, there were more inscriptions of the same kind.

As I've noted before, I think the identity of the "angels" depends in part on whether we view Rev 2-3 as an interlude in the narrative, or part of the narrative. John's vision begins in 1:9. If Rev 2-3 are a continuation of his visionary experience, then it could well denote angels. To say the churches have angels within the visionary narrative doesn't imply that the historical churches of Asia Minor had angels. We need to distinguish what happens inside the visionary narrative from reality outside the visionary narrative. Things

can happen in the vision that don't actually happen in real space and time. Rather, visionary events point to something analogous.

However, the inscriptions raise another issue. According to the epitaphs, the angels have a deterrent value, to ward off would-be grave-robbers. Avenging angels who will punish those who presume to desecrate the grave.

This raises the question of whether John (or God through John) is trading on the local connotations of angels. By analogy, the angels of the churches could be guardian angels. That doesn't necessarily mean the churches literally have guardian angels in the sense of cherubic warrior angels. Rather, that's a way to indicate divine protection of the churches.

The great red dragon

**3 And another sign appeared in heaven:
behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads
and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.
4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of
heaven and cast them to the earth (Rev 12:3-4).**

The traditional rendering of this passage is somewhat misleading because it transliterates the Greek designation rather than translates the Greek designation. The original text uses the Greek word *dracon*. The English rendering substitutes English letters.

For a modern western reader, the word "dragon" triggers mental images that are conditioned by medieval art and Hollywood movies. The 1981 movie **DRAGONSLAYER**, starring Ralph Richardson, is a good example.

But that raises the question, what did the "dragon" in Revelation actually look like? Commentators draw comparisons with OT sea monsters and chaos monsters or Greco-Roman and ancient Near Eastern mythological monsters. That, however, simply pushes the question back a step, because we still don't know what mental image that conjured up in the minds of ancient people.

There are some ancient artistic representations of dragon-like figures, such as the mosaic of the Mushhushshu "dragon" guarding the Ishtar Gate in the city of Babylon. Another example would be the Feathered Serpent in Mayan and Aztec art. Likewise, you have the Chinese iconography

of dragons. This can be traced back at least as far as a Neolithic oyster shell "dragon".

But while it's natural for modern viewers to identify these examples as dragons, the recognition is circular inasmuch as we begin with a culturally-conditioned preconception of what dragons look like. These examples just happen to bear some resemblance to our preconceived notion of what dragons are supposed to look like.

An ancient literary candidate is Leviathan, the fire-breathing monster in Job 41. In Egyptian mythology, the netherworld is guarded by fire-breathing cobras. I wonder if that's based on spitting cobras.

In the astronomical setting of Rev 12, it's quite possible that the "dragon" represents an ancient constellation. In that event, the implicit imagery either derives from the actual appearance of the constellation, or from ancient artistic depictions of the constellation.

A related issue is the question of how the idea of dragons originated. Does the prevalence of "dragons" in geographically diverse civilizations reflect cultural diffusion, or did these arise independently of each other?

In some cases these are hybrid creatures. In other cases, stylized snakes.

Here's another possibility. This is speculation on my part. To some extent, dragons might be the product of nightmares. Suppose you live in a location frequented by pythons or crocodiles and the like. That's something you might dream about. And, of course, dreams can be surreal.

In fact, one place I used to live had some big alligators in the rivers and ponds. I saw them from time to time, and I once had a bad dream about alligators or crocodiles. In my dream I was walking along a footpath between ponds or rivers infested by crocodiles. And in the dream, the area was flooded, so there was no margin between the footpath and the infested waters. I was surrounded. There was no escape.

Here's another consideration: I expect that pagan witchdoctors have nightmares that are even worse than ordinary nightmares. What if a witchdoctor lives in a location frequented by pythons or crocodiles, and the like. The fact that he's immersed in the occult will drench his imagination. Some of his dreams might be inspired by ordinary snakes or crocodiles, but that's distorted and magnified by the surreal nature of dreams, as well as his diabolical imagination. Perhaps dragons are, in part, a product of subconscious fears. There's some real information feeding into that, but other factors turn these into surreal monsters.

Who's the dragon?

A quick sequel to this:

<https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2019/10/is-mary-woman-in-revelation.html>

Catholic apologists argue that since the child in Rev 12 is an individual (Jesus), and the dragon is an individual (Satan), then in consistency, the woman is an individual (Mary). But let's take a comparison:

2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended (Rev 20:2-3).

It's the same dragon we find in Rev 12. So *who* is the dragon in Rev 20? Suppose you say it's Satan/the Devil. After all, the text explicitly identifies the dragon/serpent as Satan/the Devil. And Satan is an individual. So that supports the Catholic argument, right?

Not really. Certainly the Satanic identification is true as far as that goes. But is that the only referent?

Consider this: would it make sense for God to bind Satan to prevent him from deceiving the nations while God allows billions of demons to continue deceiving the nations? (I

don't know how many demons there are, but there doesn't seem to be a shortage.)

Why would God bind just one fallen angel (Satan) but let all the other fallen angels have free rein to deceive the nations? So I understand "the dragon/serpent" in this vision to be a synecdoche for all the fallen angels, using the leader of the pack to illustrate the principle. The binding includes Satan, but he's being used as a representative figure for demonic and diabolical deceivers in general.

If that's correct, then the same holds true for the dragon in Rev 12. The referent isn't restricted to one individual in particular, but functions as a synecdoche for angelic adversaries of God, Jesus, and the people of God (faithful Jews and Christians).

Shedding light on John and Revelation

Let's consider a neglected line of evidence for the common authorship of John, 1 John, and Revelation

1. To begin with, light is a common motif in all three documents. Jn 1-12 has 16 figurative references to light, as well as two figurative references to day and night (Jn 9:4; 11:10). 1 Jn has 5 references to light. Rev 1:12-13,20 & 2:5 refer to lamplight while 21:23-24 & 22:6 refer to divine light. Although light is a frequent Scriptural metaphor, which other Bible writers use, the way it clusters in John, 1 John, and Revelation is striking.

2. In addition, the connections are more specific:

i) As some scholars note, Gen 1:14 foreshadows the tabernacle. It uses the same word ("lights") for the Menorah (Exod 12:31-40).

ii) Jn 1:1-5 is a studied allusion to the creation account. Not only does it identify Jesus as the Creator in Genesis, but, not coincidentally, it picks up on the contrast between light and darkness.

iii) In Rev 1:12-13,20 Jesus carries a Menorah.

iv) References to sun and moon, sunlight and night in Rev 21:23-25 & 22:5 evoke the creation account in Gen 1. That's reinforced by other Edenic imagery (tree of life, river of life). This is a new creation, or recreation, only divine light will take the place of sunlight, and the diurnal cycle will be abolished.

3. Finally, some people with senile dementia suffer from sundown syndrome. At night they become restless and disoriented. Despite the advent of electrical lighting, humans remain earthlings, psychologically programmed to be responsive to sunlight and night.

John's Gospel and the Apocalypse

Due to stylistic differences, some otherwise conservative scholars think the Apocalypse has a different author than the John and 1-3 John. Some conservatives defend common authorship by saying they were written at different times of life. I don't find that terribly convincing. Another argument defending common authorship appeals to genre differences. I think there's something to that, although it's too generic.

In defense of common authorship, Revelation, John, and 1-3 share some striking parallels. In addition, it's a more economical explanation for why early Christians acknowledged all of them as canonical and Scriptural if they share common apostolic authorship; if it's the same John in both cases rather than the apostle John and some other John, a prophet whose background was oddly forgotten by the early church. We have his book, but everything else about him has disappeared from history without a trace. Seems unlikely. Not that that can't happen to an author (who wrote **BEOWULF**?) but early Christians would take an interest in the pedigree of the author. Why acknowledge him as a Christian prophet, speaking to and for the universal church?

I'd like to draw a distinction between inspiration and revelation. Although they can be used synonymously, it's helpful to distinguish them. When the terms are used in a more technical or specialized sense, inspiration doesn't infuse the writer with new factual information. Everything an inspired writer says may be based on naturally obtainable information. His own observation, investigation, and memory. The main thing inspiration does is to protect from error as well as providing verbal guidance.

And the whole process may be subliminal. I don't mean the process of remembering and composing the text is unconscious, but the divine direction behind the process operates at a subliminal level.

For the most part it takes place in a normal state of mind. The writer is aware of his body and physical surroundings. Nothing out of the ordinary in that regard. An exception might be recording long speeches. Perhaps that operates more like automatic writing, since we don't naturally have verbatim recall of long speeches.

In direct visionary revelation, by contrast, the mind of the seer is infused with new information. A supernatural source of information. The process is conscious. The Spirit takes control of his mind and plays a movie in his head. It's like a structured lucid dream, only the content is controlled by the Spirit rather than the seer (or dreamer). So it takes place in an altered state of consciousness.

The human mind isn't blanked out. Rather, is like an immersive spectator. His empirical surroundings are screened out. Simulated sensory perception replace physical sensory perception.

John's Gospel originates in past observation and memory. By contrast, the Apocalypse originates in a psychological experience that lifts him out of himself.

Under the circumstances, it's not surprising that the Apocalypse is written in a rapturous, ecstatic style, in contrast to the sedate prose of the Gospel. It's hard to come back down to earth after that. Their stylistic difference mirrors their radically different points of origin.

Revelation: the movie

The Apocalypse is the most cinematic book of the Bible. Thanks to advances in CGI, it's now possible to film Revelation. Do a cinematic adaptation.

It's useful to play director. A useful mental exercise because a director must visualize what he's going to film. He has to make many interpretive judgment calls. So a director is like a commentator, only in the case of book like Revelation, the material lends itself to the cinematic imagination. So even though the average reader isn't going to turn Revelation into a feature-length film, it's a good interpretive exercise.

1. PLOT

Premils typically think Revelation has a linear plot, at least from 4-22. Modern-day amils typically think Revelation has a largely recursive plot, although it straightens out towards the end for the definitive, end-of-the-world events.

So should a director film the plot in the original sequence, or rearrange things according to what he thinks is the intended structure?

I think it best to film the plot as is. Even if it's implicitly recursive to some degree, that's best brought out by a linear storyline. The very linearity provides a point of contrast for when events fold back on themselves. There are stock cinematic conventions for showing flashbacks.

Also, it's important for the director to avoid taking unnecessary liberties with the sacred text.

2. SETTING

There are several different options.

i) 1C Roman Empire

If you're a preterist, you think the 1C time and place go together. When it happens and where it happens are synchronized.

In traditional (Roman) preterism, the 1C Roman Empire is the terminus ad quo while the fall of the Roman Empire (however that's dated) is the terminus ad quem.

ii) 1C Roman Empire placeholder

If you're an amil, you might give it a 1C setting but with the proviso that the 1C setting is a stand-in for events throughout church history. So even though it has a 1C setting, that may refer to later events.

From the standpoint of a movie-viewer, (ii) will be neutral with respect to preterism, amillennialism, or even premillennialism. It would be open to a futuristic perspective, but all the audience would see is the 1C setting.

iii) Futuristic setting

If you're premil, you might give it a futuristic setting. It would be future in relation to whenever the movie is made. The director will project it further into the future.

The dilemma of a futuristic setting is that futuristic scenarios often become very dated because that's not how the future turns out.

A futuristic setting requires the director to take greater liberties by devising futuristic counterparts to the stuff in Revelation.

What did John see? We don't know for sure what John saw. On an amil or premil interpretation, did he see future events set in 1C terms, or did he see future events as they actually appear in the future, but narrated them in stock imagery and 1C terms because he lacked the vocabulary or common frame of reference to describe them on their own terms?

The reader doesn't have direct access to John's imagination, so we can't be sure what he saw. But it's best to be conservative.

3. GENRE

i) Literal

i) Allegorical

ii) Historical fiction

iii) Science fiction

iv) Fantasy

By fantasy and science fiction, I don't mean that's the actual genre of the Apocalypse. Rather, I mean that if a director was adapting Revelation to the film medium, would it be appropriate to use the conventions and furniture of science fiction or fantasy to depict the action? Science fiction would provide futuristic analogies for the 1C imagery.

That raises some interesting theological issues. The danger of a science fiction adaptation is to secularize the material. Especially in "hard science fiction," advanced technology replaces "magic".

However, that can be a false dichotomy. The Christian worldview alternates between miracle and ordinary providence. Science coexists with miracle, answered prayer, and special providence. So these aren't mutually exclusive paradigms.

That said, a fantasy genre might be more suited to Revelation. Again, I don't mean "fantasy" in the sense of fictional. Rather, I mean fantasy is more suited to supernaturalism.

In addition, the Apocalypse is visionary revelation with a surreal quality, so a fantasy adaptation might be more fitting to the nature of the material. It's not realistic in terms of physics. Rather, the power comes from agents with psychokinetic abilities. Mind over matter.

I'd add that a director doesn't necessarily have to make exclusive editorial choices. He could shoot some of the same scenes from alternate genres and let the audience decide which is more authentic.

4. CHARACTERS

i) How should a director depict angels? In Scripture, angels have three forms. Sometimes they look indistinguishable from normal human males. At least what you can see of them. Sometimes they're humanoid but luminous. Then you have tetramorphs (cherubim, seraphim).

And still leaves a lot to be penciled in. Angels simulate human form, but in how much anatomical detail? They don't have the hormones to produce the facial and body hair of adult males, so are they beardless? Presumably they have an ageless appearance. Do they all look like twin brothers?

What's the ethnicity of angels? I presume they blend to match the people-group they appear to.

On film, should they appear corporeal, or more like translucent energy fields, viz. a holographic image of a human being? That would emphasize their numinous nature.

ii) What about Satan? Although Revelation calls him a snake and a dragon, he's not literally reptilian. Perhaps he could have a humanoid appearance with ophidian eyes

5. APPLICATION

We might now consider some specific scenes in Revelation:

Chap. 1 The opening scene is prosaic. A penal colony on Patmos.

i) But it quickly shifts to the overwhelming Christophany, with stars, menorah, and angels. What should Jesus look like? An enhanced image of the Shroud of Turin is one possibility. I'm not vouching for its authenticity, but it's recognizable and looks Jewish. However, this is an incandescent Christophany. So Jesus would have to have a nimbic aura.

ii) The identity of the angels is a crux. One attractive possibility is to depict them as warrior angels (cherubs) who

protect the churches. That would fit the admonitory function of angels on tombstones in ancient Anatolia, which is the setting for the seven churches of Asia Minor:

<https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2016/07/26/angels-pagan-jewish-christian/>

It's as good a guess as any, and has dramatic appeal.

Chaps 2-4 Letters to churches

Rather than have a narrator read the letters aloud, the director should have cameo scenes of what the letters describe.

Chap 5 Throne room

i) This is a challenge for a director. There's the danger that any cinematic depiction will be a letdown. It can't rise to the necessary expectations. Likewise, there's the danger that depicting the figure on the throne will be irreverent and anticlimactic.

ii) However, lightning is the primary illumination in the throne room. Lightning both reveals and conceals. You only see glimpses through flashes of lightning. So that simplifies the challenge. In addition, the rainbow is like a screen obscuring the figure on the throne, preserving God's unapproachability.

iii) Not coincidentally, the gemstones, rainbow, and sea of glass are light-reflective materials. So it's like a kaleidoscopic mirror.

iv) The sea of glass may be the benign, celestial counterpart to the malign, infernal lake of fire.

In Revelation there's a certain symmetry between heaven and hell in the use of firelight. But their respective significance is arrestingly divergent.

v) The lightning from the throne seems to be the primary form of interior illumination for the sky city.

Chap 6,8 Astronomical and ecological cataclysms

i) This is what CGI was made for.

ii) Heaven is a sky city or temple containing an inner sanctum.

Chap 7 Angels restraining four winds

An interesting technical question is how to show angels restraining wind, since wind is ordinarily invisible. A director might show the effect of wind on one side of the angel. The angel extends his hand, like a wall blocking the wind. On one side are bent trees, roiling seas, lowering clouds, and dark turbulent air like a sand storm. On the other side the air is clear, the sea is calm, the grass is still.

Chap 9 Fiery netherworld hybrid monsters

Caves and caverns, illuminated by licking, flickering flames, would be a natural setting.

Chap. 12 Portents and prodigies

In principle, it could show ancient constellations like Virgo, Draco, Serpens, or Hydra. Certainly the imagery trades on that.

It would, however, make more sense to have a dragon composed of red starlight. He rain down on earth like a meteor shower, then reassemble. Likewise, the woman could originally appear to be a starry mosaic.

Chap 13 The Beast

i) The challenge isn't depicting a hybrid sea monster but how to depict it communicating.

ii) The imagery of the second beast rising from the earth might suggest a ghost rising from the grave (tomb, sepulcher). So the false prophet could be a wraith. Perhaps the damned soul of a sorcerer conjured from the dead.

Chap 14 The Lamb

i) Should Jesus be shown as a lamb, or as the Redeemer in a garment stained with his paschal blood?

ii) The winepress is a graphic symbol of salvation and judgment. Should a director depict the symbol or what it symbolizes? Unless the audience is familiar with its significance, the symbol is opaque.

Chap 16 Sky city (cf. chaps. 6,8)

Chap 17 Whore of Babylon

Since the whore bestride the beast is a symbolic synecdoche of the wicked city and godless world order, should the director show a whore bestride a beast, or something like the red light district of a metropolis with alternating scenes of lavish wealth, poverty, cruel, obscenity, blasphemy, and decadence?

chap. 19 Rider on white horse

This resumes the Christophany in Rev 1. Jesus is no longer on Patmos but acting as a warrior king to reclaim the world from the diabolical usurper.

Chap. 20 Lake of fire

i) The lake of fire might suggest a sea of molten lava. For the original audience it might evoke the nightmarish fate that overtook the ungodly cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Or it might hearken back to the iconic destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The body of water is superheated by meteor showers or a submarine volcano. Consider the volcanic eruption spilling into the sea in Rev 8:8-9.

ii) The image of the sea giving up its dead might suggest skeletons miraculously surfacing and regenerating (Ezk 37) to face the final judgment, for better or worse.

Chap 21-22 the ski city lands

i) The new Jerusalem is a symmetrical city, fortified on the outside but with a parklike interior (a stream lined with trees of life).

ii) In the absents of sunlight, the city is not illuminated from the outside or overhead. Rather, it's illuminated by the Shekinah ("glory of God"). But where's the locus of the Shekinah? Is the city illuminated from the inside rather than the outside?

The throne room is illuminated by lightning. Is that equivalent to the Shekinah? Suppose the throne room is at the city center. Suppose it has twelve windows or open

doors. Shafts of light beam out of the throne room into courtyards and even through the city gates to the surrounding countryside.

Or maybe the Shekinah suffuses the city, the way it suffused the tabernacle and temple during their dedication. Unlike lightning, the Shekinah emits a steadier light.

In any case, light seems to emanate from the city rather than from exterior light sources (sunlight, moonlight). This might suggest the surrounding countryside, beyond the city gates, is bathed in a well of light. But it may also imply a borderland between light and shade, a perpetual twilight zone, where the radiance of the city doesn't reach. Where the pool of light is swallowed by shadowy valleys or obstructed by mountain ranges facing away from the city.

Of course, that may go beyond what John saw in his vision. It's just something for a director to think about to fill in the picture.