

Getting the Big Picture of the Bible: Revelation

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Revelation 10:1-10—The Angel with the Little Scroll



Opening questions

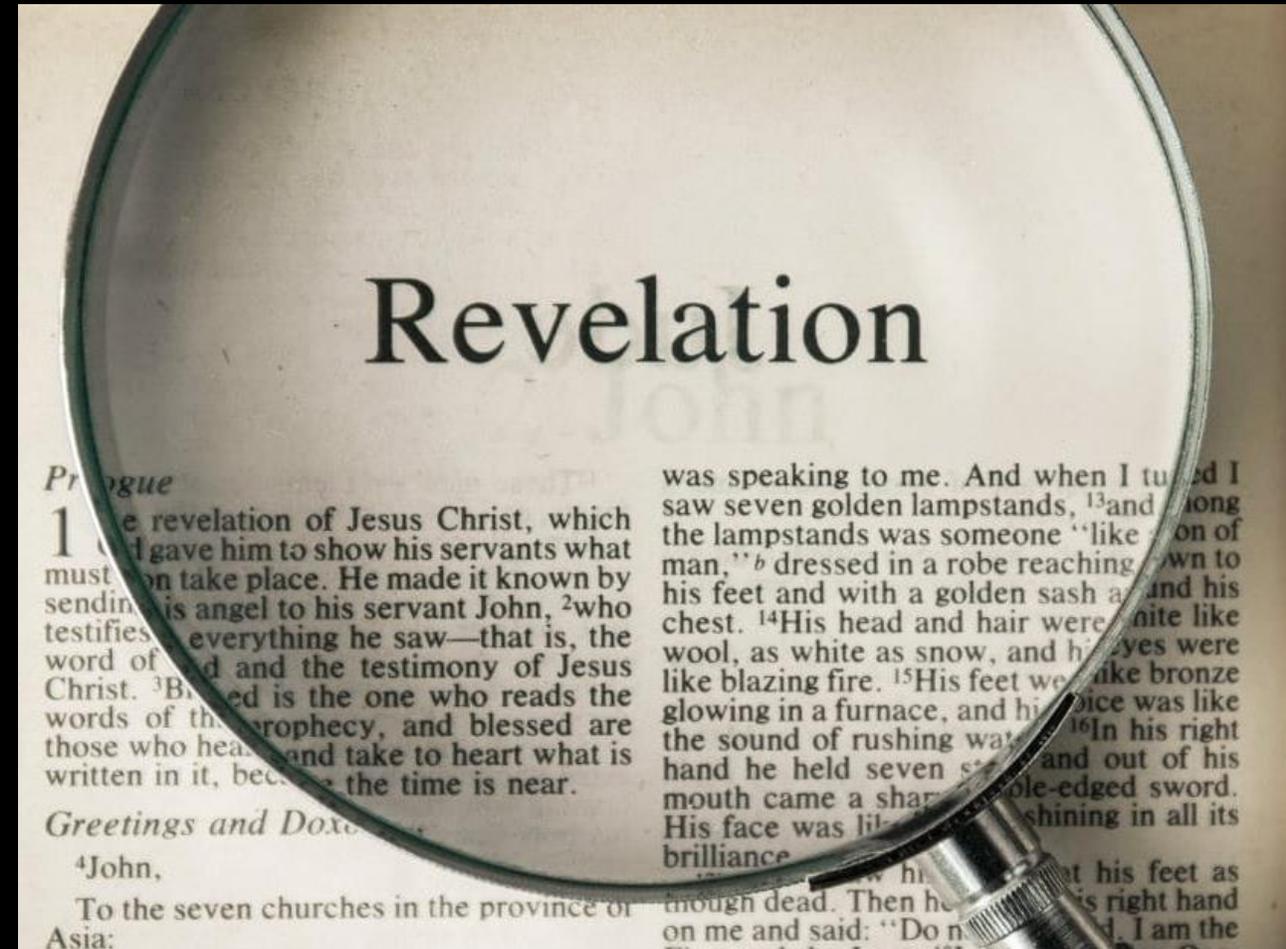
- What do we make of Revelation?
- Do we read it regularly or avoid it?
- How do we understand the book?

- Why should we read it?
 - Read Gorman xv.



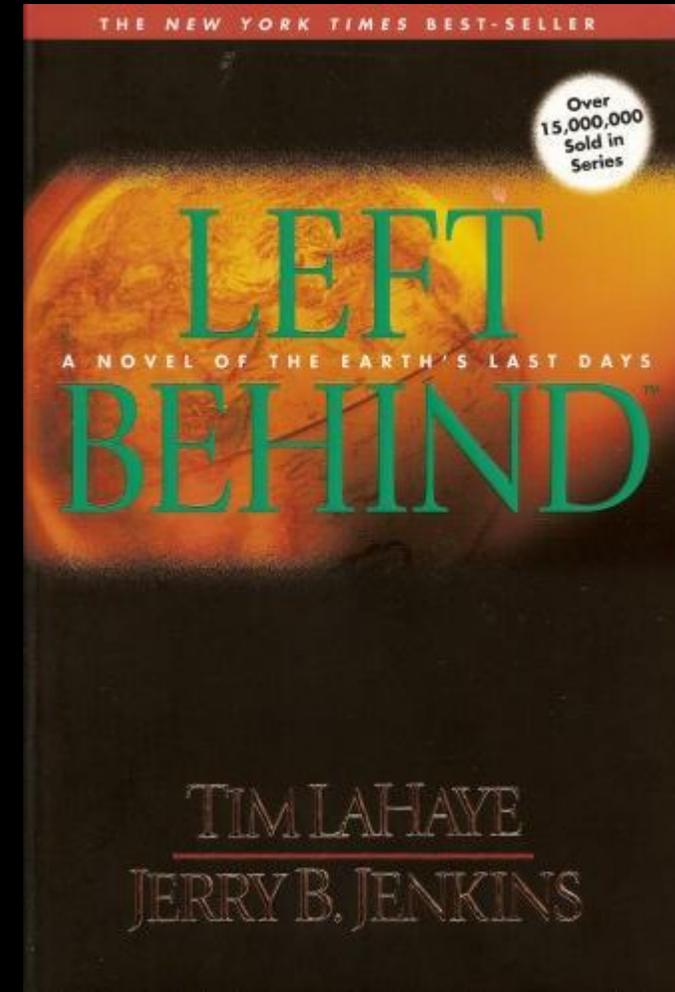
Outline of today's class

- Approaches and attitudes
- Genre
- Authorship, Audience, Dating
- Outline of the book
- Understanding some symbolism
- Hearing the Book=Blessing
- Delving into some passages



Approaches and attitudes

- Some completely avoid it! (decanonized)
 - Too difficult, complicated, scary, and mysterious
- Some completely concentrate on it! (hyper-canonized)
 - The future is foretold, if only we can decode the symbols or unravel the mystery
- Could we establish some middle ground?
- Foretelling vs forthtelling
- Prophetic foresight vs. theological insight
- “The book of Revelation is unique in appealing primarily to our imagination—not, however, a freewheeling imagination, but a disciplined imagination.” (Metzger, 11)



Approaches and attitudes: Prophecies can just be symbolic
Ezekiel 37—Dry bones

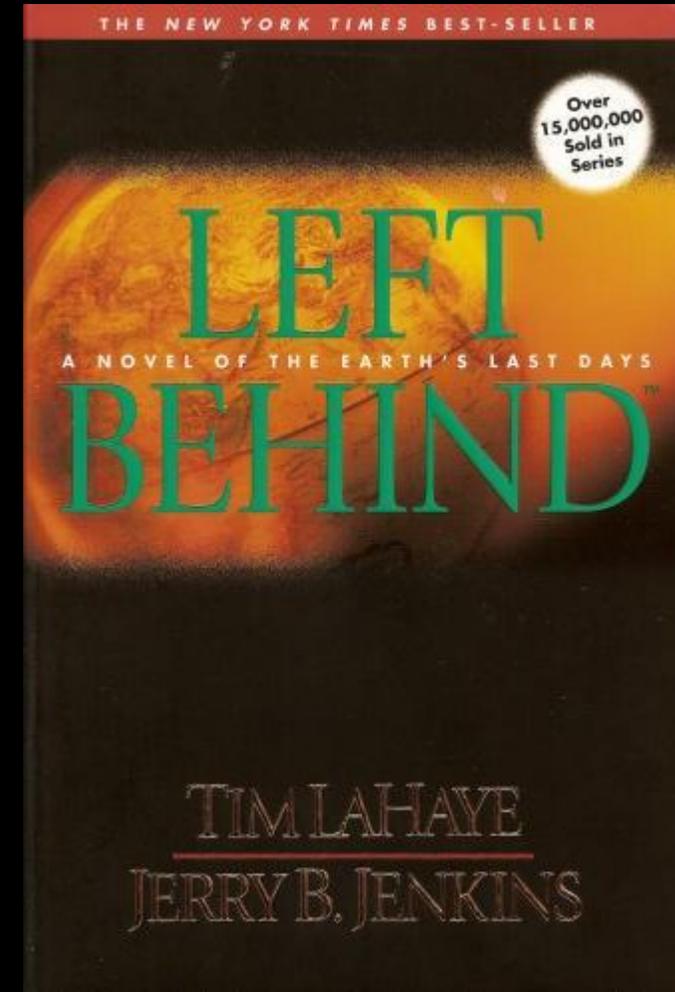
“We are not to understand that bones were actually scattered around in a valley; the account is purely symbolic.”

Acts 10—Many animals

“This vision taught Peter that, as a Jewish Christian, he need no longer restrict his diet to kosher foods only, but was permitted to visit and even to reside at the home of Gentiles. We are not to think that there was literally a sheet filled with various creatures.”

Revelation (as a whole)

Similarly, when the book of Revelation reports that John saw “a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads” (13:1), there is no reason to imagine that such a creature actually existed. Nevertheless, the vision had profound significance for John—and still has for the reader today. Such accounts combine cognitive insight with emotional response. They invite the reader or listener to enter into the experience being recounted and to participate in it, triggering mental images of that which is described.



Defining Apocalypse

- This term is the English form of the first Greek word in the book, *apokalypsis*, meaning “revelation.”
- It does not mean “destruction,” “end of the world,” or anything similar. (Gorman, 1)
- Actually: multiple genres appear within Revelation
 - Prophecy
 - Letter
 - Liturgical Text
 - Theopolitical Text
 - Apocalypse



Defining Apocalypse

- During the two centuries before and after Christ a considerable number of Jewish and Christian writings appeared that belong to the category of apocalyptic literature. Jewish apocalyptic literature begins with the book of Daniel, though apocalyptic tendencies can be seen in Isaiah 24-27, Ezekiel 38-39 and Zechariah 9-14, where there are frequent references to the approaching “day of the Lord.”
- Important apocalyptic writings outside the Old Testament are the book of Enoch, The Apocalypse of Baruch, the Fourth Book of Ezra, the book of Jubilees, the Ascension of Isaiah, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.



(Metzger, 17)

Defining Apocalypse

Collins and Hellholm define apocalypse as

- “A genre of revelatory literature
- with a narrative framework,
- in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being
- to a human recipient,
- disclosing a transcendent reality
 - which is both temporal,
 - insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation,
 - and spatial
 - insofar as it involves another, supernatural world ...
- intended for a group in crisis
- with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation
- by means of divine authority.”



John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 5 and 41.

Understanding the Genre

John (and thereby his readers with him) is taken up into heaven in order to see the world from the heavenly perspective. He is given a glimpse behind the scenes of history so that he can see what is really going on in the events of his time and place. He is also transported in vision into the final future of the world, so that he can see the present from the perspective of what its final outcome must be, in God's ultimate purpose for human history. The effect of John's visions, one might say, is to expand his readers' world, both spatially (into heaven) and temporally (into the eschatological future), or, to put it another way, to open their world to divine transcendence. The bounds which Roman power and ideology set to the readers' world are broken open and that world is seen as open to the greater purpose of its transcendent Creator and Lord. (Bauckham, 7)

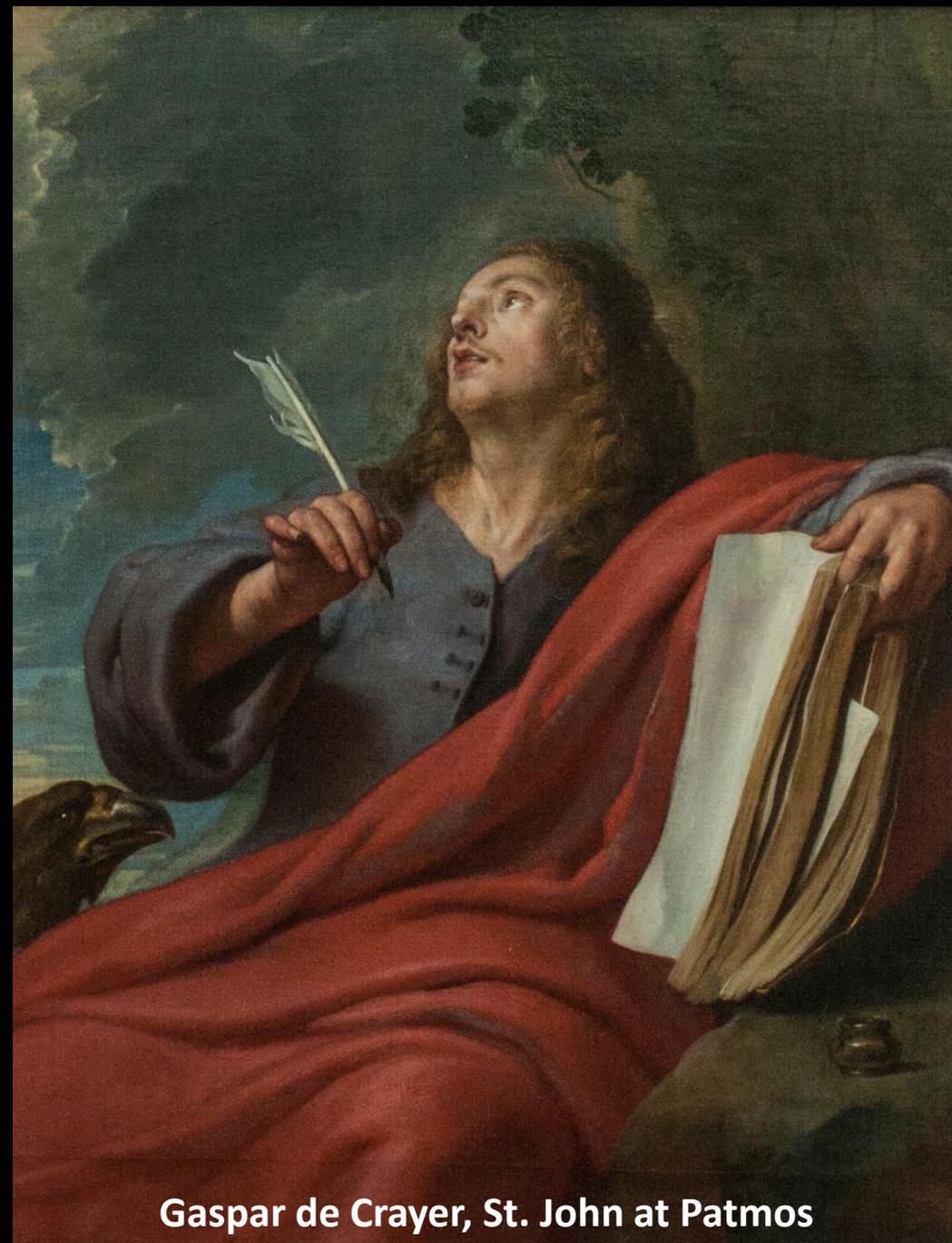


Authorship, Audience, Dating

John who?

Deeply rooted in Hebrew Bible: “It is clear that John had studied the Old Testament very thoroughly. Of the 404 verses that comprise the 22 chapters of the book of Revelation, 278 verses contain one or more allusions to an Old Testament passage.” (Metzger, 13) That’s at least 69%!

Connection to Polycarp: One of the best-known Christian martyrs of all ages was a native of Smyrna. This was Polycarp, who, according to both Irenaeus and Tertullian, had been consecrated bishop of Smyrna by John himself. Undoubtedly, he would have read this letter and pondered its message. Perhaps it was a source of strength to him when his hour of martyrdom came in February of the year 156. (Metzger, 33)



Gaspar de Crayer, St. John at Patmos

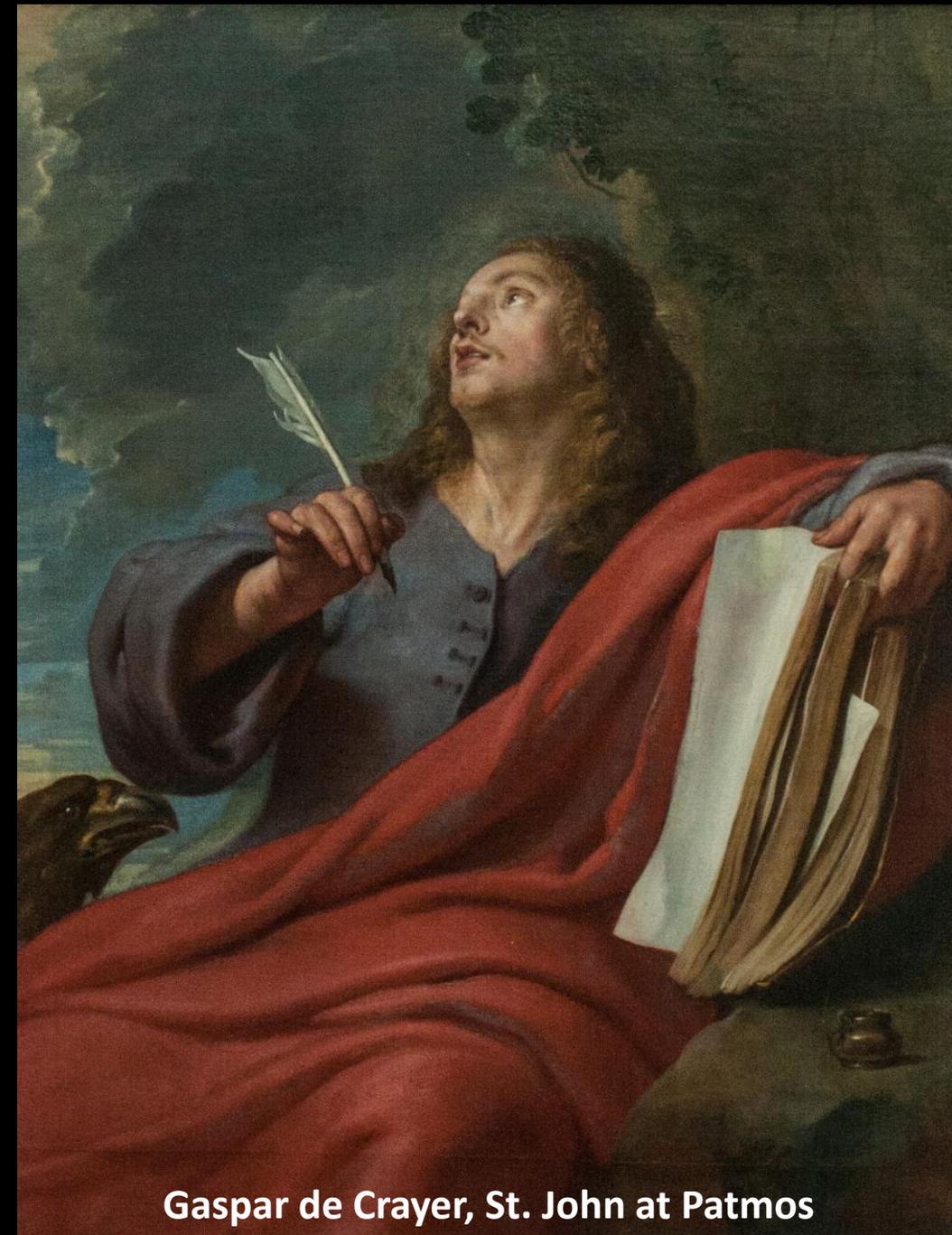
Authorship, Audience, Dating

Christians with an unsure future

- Blend in, assimilate, and compromise faith
- Stick out, resist, and risk ostracization
- Coded language would be necessary

Specifically the seven churches or the whole church generally?

- When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. (Rev 1:17-18)
- As Christ controls death, those potentially facing death (by persecution or social ostracization and loss of livelihood) can take heart knowing that God is with them and controls life and death.

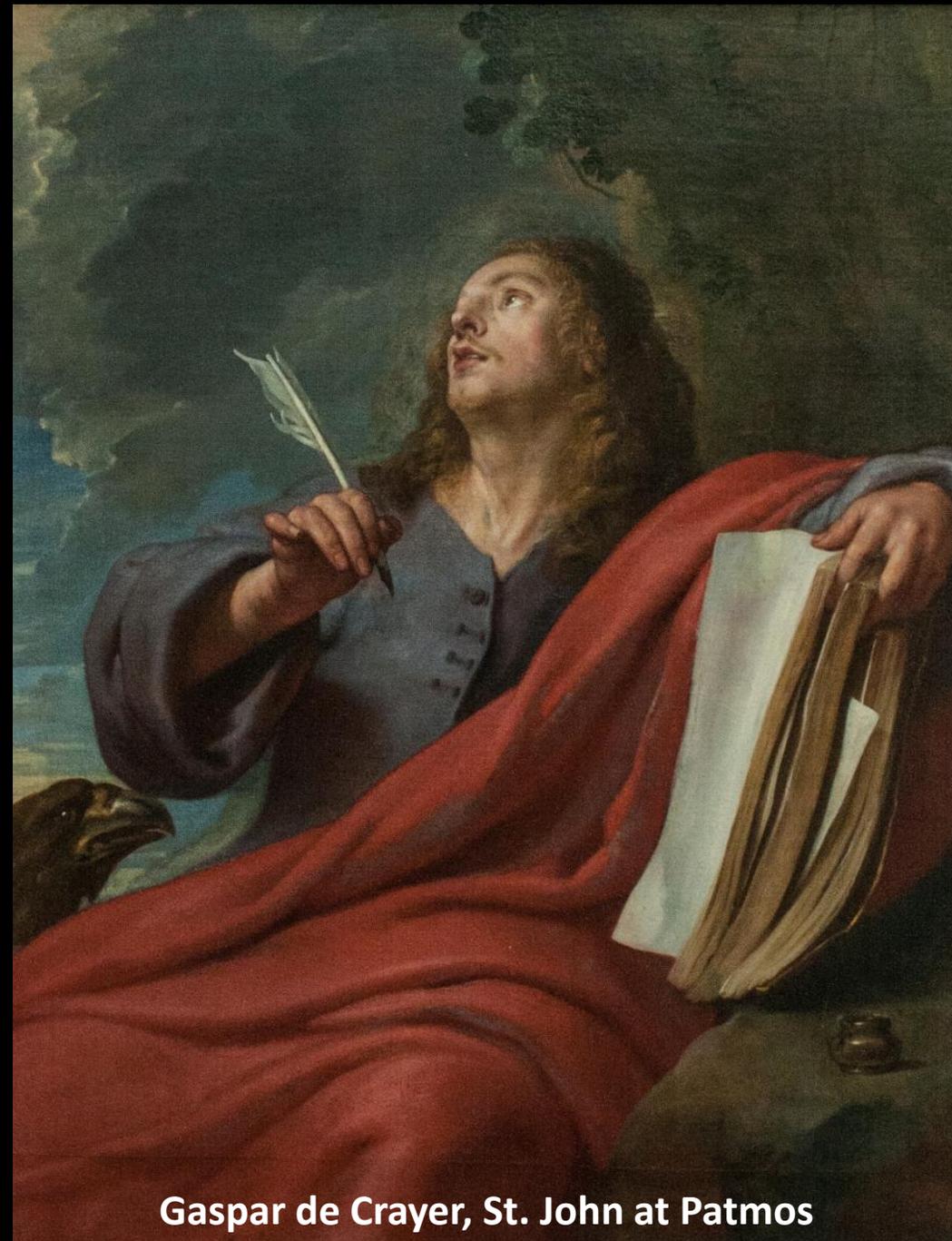


Gaspar de Crayer, St. John at Patmos

Authorship, Audience, Dating

When was he writing?

Irenaeus said that John's visions were witnessed at the end of the reign of the emperor Domitian (81-96 CE), and the book is most commonly dated to 95 CE.



Gaspar de Crayer, St. John at Patmos

General Outline of Revelation

1:1-8	Prologue
1:9-3:22	A Word from the Lord: Ethical Instructions to the Seven Churches
4:1-22:9	A Series of Visions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Introductory Vision Cycle• Visionary Flashback: The Start of the Story• A Concluding Vision Cycle
22:10-21	Epilogue and letter closing

Colors throughout Revelation

White	Victory, resurrection, purity/cleanness, heaven/divinity	1:14; 3:4-5, 18; 6:11;7:9, 13-14; 19:14; 6:2; 19:11,14; 20:11
Red	Blood, violent power	6:4; 9:17; 12:3
Purple, scarlet	Decadence, empire and imperial evil	17:3); 17:3-4; 18:16; 18:12
Black	Death, disaster	6:5; 6:12
(Pale) green	Death	6:8
Gold	Incorruptible wealth, beauty, royalty; actual or false divinity	1:12, 20; 2:1; 1:13; 15:6; 3:18;4:4; 5:8; 8:3; 15:7; 9:7; 9:13; 9:20; 14:14; 17:4; 18:16; 21:15; 21:18,21

Numbers throughout Revelation

1/3, 1/2	Limited scope or time	8:1; 8:7-12; 9:15,18; 12:4
3	A distinct group Divinity or false divinity	8:13; 9:18; 16:19 1:4-5; Chapters 12-13; 16:13
3 1/2	Limited time (half of fullness = 7)	11:2-3; 11:9,11; 12:6,14; 13:5
4	Universality, especially within creation	4:6-8; 5:6,8,14; 6:1,6-7, 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4
6	Imperfection, false divinity (lack of fullness = 7)	13:18
7	Fullness, perfection	
12 (and its multiples 24, 144)	(Fullness of) God's people, God's chosen tribes and/ or apostles, God's presence; cosmic fullness	12 - 12:1; 21:12,14,21; 22:2 24 - 4:4,10; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4 144 - 7:14; 14:1,3
1,000 and its multiples	Large number with enhanced symbolism in multiples	5:11; 7:4,5,8; 11:13; 14:1,3; 20:2-7

Letters to the Seven Churches

- “Thus Revelation seems to be an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia.”
(Bauckham, 2)
- Christ stands in the midst of the lampstands = Jesus is with/ among them
- A number of expositors down through history have held that the seven churches represent seven sequential stages of church history....The view is known as the historical-prophetical view, [which] states that while all seven types of churches always exist, one type dominates a particular era of church history. Throughout church history all seven types of churches will be present, but one type will tend to dominate a particular period of church history. . .



Vision of the throne room (see Rev 4-7)



Vision of the throne room (see Rev 4-7)

“The finite languages of earth are incapable of defining the infinite realities that John saw in heaven; hence he must use earthly analogies, but always with the understanding that the heavenly reality far surpasses the earthly symbol.” (48)
In accord with the reluctance of Jewish writers to picture God, John carefully avoids any descriptive detail.

When such a stone is polished it sparkles and flashes luminous splendor. Is not this a beautiful and poetic way to draw attention to what other biblical writers refer to as the holiness and glory of God?

For the Jews the rainbow was sign of the covenant of God's mercy.

24 elders-Divine council, patriarchs, apostles?

Four living creatures