

Who wrote Revelation?

1. Title. The earliest extant Greek manuscripts, as well as the writings of several Church Fathers beginning with Irenaeus (c. A.D. 130–c. 202), entitle this book simply “Apocalypse of John.” Later, medieval manuscripts elaborated the title to “Apocalypse of John the Theologian and Evangelist” and “Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian.” The name as it stands in the KJV is a variant English rendering of this last title. The Greek word *apokalupsis*, “apocalypse,” “revelation,” means literally, “an unveiling,” and in religious literature, especially, an unveiling of the future. The apocalyptic was a characteristic literary form among the Jews of the intertestamental and early Christian periods (see Vol. V, pp. 87–90), and also among certain writers of the primitive church (see below on “theme”).

2. Authorship. The author of the Revelation repeatedly identifies himself as “John” (chs. 1:1, 4, 9; 21:2; 22:8). The Greek form of this name, *Ioannēs* (see on Luke 1:13), represents the common Hebrew name Yochanan, “Johanan,” which appears numerous times in the later books of the OT, the Apocrypha, and Josephus. This identifies the author as a Jew.

Various evidences clearly indicate that the name John was that of the author, and not a pseudonym, such as many Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic works bore. First is the fact that, in identifying himself as John, the author of the Revelation makes no attempt to establish himself as holding any position in the church. Various Jewish and Christian apocalypses are attributed to Hebrew patriarchs and prophets and to Christian apostles. If the Revelation were also pseudonymous, it would be expected that its author would attempt to identify himself specifically as an apostle. But the simple statement of the author that his name is John, “your brother” (Rev. 1:9; cf. Peter’s reference to Paul, 2 Peter 3:15), is testimony that he is giving his true name. Obviously the writer was so well known to the churches that his name alone was sufficient to identify him and to lend credence to his record of the visions he had seen.

Furthermore, it appears that the practice of pseudonymity did not flourish when the exercise of the gift of prophecy was vigorous. On the other hand, during the intertestamental period, when, so far as we know, there was no recognized prophet among the Jews, religious writers often felt it necessary to attach the name of some ancient personage of high repute to their work in order to gain for it general acceptance. There was apparently no true prophet speaking for God, as the OT prophets had done. But with the coming of Christianity the gift of prophecy once more flourished. In the Christian church of the 1st century the supposed need for pseudonymity did not exist; Christians were convinced that their apostles and prophets spoke directly for God. But when the prophetic office among Christians fell into disrepute and finally disappeared in the 2d century, pseudonymous works bearing names of various apostles began to appear (see Vol. VI, pp. 41, 42). In the light of these facts it is reasonable to conclude that the Revelation, coming from the 1st century, is not pseudonymous, but is the work of a man whose real name was John.

Who was this John? The NT mentions several men by this name, the Baptist, the son of Zebedee, who was one of the Twelve, John, who was surnamed Mark, and a certain relative of the high priest Annas (see on Acts 4:6). Obviously the author

of the Revelation could not be John the Baptist, for that John died before the crucifixion of Jesus; nor is there any reasonable probability that it was the relative of Annas, of whom there is no indication that he ever became a Christian. Similarly, there is little evidence that John Mark was the author of the Revelation. The style, wording, and approach of the second Gospel are quite different from those of the Revelation, and there is no evidence that anyone in the early church ever seriously connected the Revelation with Mark.

By a process of elimination, John the son of Zebedee and the brother of James is left for consideration. He was not only one of the Twelve but also a member of Jesus' inner circle. Almost unanimously early Christian tradition recognizes him as the author of the Revelation. In fact, every Christian writer until the middle of the 3d century, whose works are extant today and who mentions the matter at all, attributes the Revelation to John the apostle. These writers are Justin Martyr at Rome (c. A.D. 100–c. 165; *Dialogue With Trypho* 81), Irenaeus at Lyons (c. A.D. 130–c. 202; *Against Heresies* iv. 20. 11), Tertullian at Carthage (c. A.D. 160–c. 240; *On Prescription Against Heretics* 36), Hippolytus at Rome (died c. A.D. 220; *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* xlii). These testimonies demonstrate the strong and widespread belief in the early church that the author of the Revelation was the apostle John. Furthermore, several early Christian traditions associate the later years of John with the city of Ephesus. Thus Irenaeus (op. cit. iii. 3. 4; ANF vol. 1, p. 416) declares that in his youth he had seen the aged Polycarp of Smyrna, who “conversed with many who had seen Christ,” among them John, who had remained permanently at Ephesus until the days of Trajan (A.D. 98–117). Polycrates (A.D. 130–c. 200), bishop of Ephesus, the eighth of his family to be a Christian bishop, testifies that the John “who reclined on the Lord’s bosom, ... he rests at Ephesus” (*Epistle to Victor and the Roman Church Concerning the Day of Keeping the Passover*; ANF, vol. 8, p. 773). These statements coincide with the fact that John addresses himself to Ephesus and the other churches of Asia (Rev. 1:4, 11).

The only testimony during this period that would seem to discount the view that the author of the Revelation was the apostle John comes from the early Christian Father Papias (died c. A.D. 163). The works of Papias are lost, and all that is extant from his works is contained in highly fragmentary form in quotations preserved by later writers. Two of these relate to John’s death. One, a manuscript from the 7th or 8th century A.D., which appears to be an epitome of the *Chronicle* by Philip of Side (5th century), declares:

“Papias in his second book says that John the Divine and James his brother were slain by the Jews” (in R. H. Charles, *Revelation* [International Critical Commentary], Vol. 1, p. xlvi). Similarly, a manuscript of the *Chronicle* of Georgius Hamartolus (c. A.D. 860) says, “For Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, being an eyewitness of this, in the second book of the Lord’s sayings, says that he [John] was destroyed by the Jews, plainly fulfilling, with his brother, Christ’s prediction concerning them” (Greek text in H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. clxxv).

At first sight these quotations would seem to indicate that a Christian official living in the late 1st and early 2d centuries and in the vicinity of Ephesus testified that the apostle John was, like his brother, killed by the Jews too early to have

written the Revelation in the time of either Nero or Domitian, the periods in which scholars usually place it (see below on “historical setting”). On closer scrutiny, however, several questions must be raised in regard to these quotations. The fact that the passage from the Oxford manuscript refers to John as “the theologian” indicates that the quotation has undergone some modification by a medieval scribe, for this title is not applied to John in any extant Bible manuscript before the 8th century, and it is virtually inconceivable that Papias could have used it. The second quotation, from Georgius Hamartolus, is found in only one manuscript of that writer. Other manuscripts of his work say simply that John died in peace, but apparently they do not quote Papias at all. Consequently it is difficult to know just what Papias said regarding the death of John. If he did write that John, like James, was killed by the Jews, by no means does it follow that their deaths occurred at, or even near, the same time. The Revelation itself reveals that at the time of its writing the Jews still were causing difficulty for Christians, and if John did finally suffer a martyr’s death, it may well have been the result of Jewish machinations.

A third quotation from Papias is recorded by the church historian Eusebius (d. A.D. 340):

“And I shall not hesitate to append to the interpretations all that I ever learnt well from the presbyters and remember well, for of their truth I am confident. ... But if ever anyone came who had followed the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord’s disciples, had said [Gr. eipen], and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord’s disciples, were saying [Gr. legousin]. For I did not suppose that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice” (Ecclesiastical History iii. 39, 3, 4; Loeb ed., vol. 1, pp. 291, 293).

This passage has been the subject of much conjecture. Eusebius interpreted it to mean that there were two men by the name of John who had lived in Asia in the late 1st century—the apostle, and another man who was a presbyter, or elder. Eusebius’ opinion was that this latter man was the one whom Papias had known personally and that it was he who had written the Revelation, whereas the apostle had been the author of the Gospel.

It is possible, however, to interpret Papias’ words in another way. As the German New Testament scholar Zahn (Introduction to the New Testament, 2d ed., vol. 2 pp. 451–453) has pointed out, in Papias’ statement there is no real distinction made between presbyters and apostles. Papias says that he “inquired into the words of the presbyters,” and immediately goes on to list apostles; then when he mentions “the presbyter John” he identifies him at once as one of “the Lord’s disciples.” The real distinction between the two groups he mentions lies in the words eipen, “said,” and legousin, “were saying,” which suggests that those in the first group mentioned were disciples of Jesus who had lived and borne their testimony before Papias’ time, whereas those in the second group were still living, and available for information in his day. If Irenaeus’ testimony (see p. 716) is accepted, the apostle John would be included in both groups, and so might conceivably be mentioned twice.

Eusebius' effort to derive two Johns from Papias' statement is made more understandable by the fact that his conclusions were influenced by the work of Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria (d. A.D. 265; see Eusebius op. cit. vii. 24, 25). In reaction against some Christians who were stressing a literal millennium, Dionysius wrote a work entitled *A Treatise on the Promises*, in which he sought to show by scholarly arguments that the Revelation was not written by the apostle John, but by another man of the same name. Dionysius is the first Church Father to question the apostolic authorship of the Revelation, and his arguments have remained the classic ones for those scholars who share his point of view.

Dionysius centered his criticisms chiefly about the fact that there are obvious differences between the language of the Gospel and that of the Revelation. The vocabularies of the two books portray marked differences; a number of words that occur with particular frequency in one are found but infrequently in the other. The following examples are particularly striking: *kosmos*, "world," appears in John 79 times, but in the Revelation only 3 times; *alētheia*, "truth," in John 25 times, in the Revelation not at all; *phōs*, "light," in John 22 times, in the Revelation 3 times; *agapaō*, "to love," in John 37 times, in the Revelation 4 times; *pisteuō*, "to believe," in John 100 times, in the Revelation not at all; *alla*, "but," in John more than 100 times, in the Revelation 13 times; *enōpion*, "before," in John once, in the Revelation 36 times; *emos*, "mine," in John 42 times, in the Revelation once. In referring to Christ as "the Lamb," the Gospel always uses the word *amnos*, whereas the Revelation always uses *arnion*, both of which mean "lamb." In the Gospel, Jerusalem is always *Hierosoluma*, whereas in the Revelation it is consistently *Hierousalem*.

Dionysius also pointed out the fact that the Greek of the Gospel of John is correct and idiomatic, whereas that of the Revelation contains a number of passages that are unusual and cannot be explained in terms of correct Greek grammar and syntax. In view of these marked differences between the Gospel and the Revelation, Dionysius concluded that they were not by the same author. These criticisms appear to have had a wide influence upon the thinking of the Eastern Church in regard to the apostolicity, and therefore the canonicity, of the Revelation. Not only did Eusebius record the details of Dionysius' arguments, but he sought to establish them further by the passage from Papias quoted above. Similarly, in regard to the canonicity of Revelation, he reported:

Of the writings of John in addition to the gospel the first of his epistles has been accepted without controversy by ancients and moderns alike but the other two are disputed, and as to the Revelation there have been many advocates of either opinion up to the present (op. cit. iii. 24. 17, 18; Loeb ed., vol. 1, pp. 255, 257).

Although the evidence adduced by Dionysius to indicate two Johns is weighty, several other facts must be considered before a judgment is made. The view of Dionysius and Eusebius rests chiefly on two points—the ambiguous quotation from Papias, and Dionysius' arguments from linguistic differences between the Gospel and the Revelation. Although it cannot be proved that Papias did not refer to two different men by the name of John, if he did, his testimony—in so far as it may be used as evidence for the nonapostolic authorship of the Revelation—is contradicted by a half dozen other Church Fathers (see p. 716). Particularly

important in this regard are the statements of Irenaeus, who himself had personal contact with Polycarp, a contemporary of both John and Papias. He seems to have known of only one John, the apostle, and states clearly that this one wrote the Revelation. In view of this, it seems reasonable to conclude that Papias' ambiguous statement must not be pressed strongly as proof of the existence of two Johns.

The linguistic differences between the Gospel and the Revelation are significant. Although differences in subject matter and style, which obviously exist between the two books, may account to some extent for the divergent vocabularies, one writer does not ordinarily vary so widely in his use of such words as *alla*, *enōpion*, and *emos* (see p. 718). Regardless of subject matter or literary form, the same writer commonly uses or omits such words quite unconsciously. When two works vary as widely as do the Gospel and the Revelation in the employment of these words, it may seem difficult at first to think that they represent the work of the same writer.

However, this fact in itself does not necessarily mean that John was not the author of both works. The circumstances under which the two books seem to have been written may reasonably account for such differences as exist. In the Revelation, John declares that he received its visions while he "was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus" (ch. 1:9). That John was an exile there would imply that he was forced to rely upon his own linguistic abilities in the composition of the Revelation. Therefore it is not surprising that the language of this book is not always idiomatic, that Semiticisms sometimes shine through the Greek, and that its author was not at all times sure of his grammar. Such a situation is quite in keeping with the circumstances under which John is known to have written the Revelation. Furthermore, the visions were apparently written down as the scenes passed vividly before the prophet's eyes (see ch. 10:4). John may have purposely avoided revision lest the sense of drama be lost.

On the other hand, early Christian tradition indicates that the Gospel was written under entirely different conditions. The Muratorian Fragment, composed at Rome probably about A.D. 170—only a few decades after John's disciple Polycarp had visited there—declares:

The fourth of the Gospels is of John, one of the disciples. When encouraged by his fellow-disciples and bishops, he said to them: "Fast together with me the next three days, and whatever shall be revealed to each of us we shall recount to one another." That night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that while they all revised, John should narrate it all in his own name (Latin text in S. P. Tregelles, ed., *Canon Muratorianus*, pp. 17, 18).

Although this story obviously has fanciful features, such as the presence of Andrew and other apostles with John at the time he wrote the Gospel, it still may retain a kernel of truth, suggesting that in the composition of the Gospel, John may have had assistance. That this may have been so is indicated also by a statement attributed to Papias, preserved in a 10th-century manuscript:

This Gospel, then, it is clear, was written after the Apocalypse, and was given to the churches in Asia by John, being still in the body, as the bishop of Hierapolis, Papias by name, a beloved disciple of John, who wrote this Gospel with John by dictation, recounts in his *Exoterica*, that is, in the last five books (Latin text in Wordsworth and White, *Novum Testamentum ... Latine*, vol. 1, pp. 490, 491).

Although the details of this account cannot be taken as proved, these two statements strongly suggest that in the 2d century the idea was abroad that John had composed his Gospel with the assistance of others. In the light of this very early tradition, the statement at the end of his Gospel, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true" (ch. 21:24), would seem to be the affidavit of John's helpers to the truth of his account. If this reconstruction of the evidence is correct, it is not difficult to account for the linguistic and literary differences that exist between the Revelation, written probably when John was alone on Patmos, and the Gospel, written with the help of one or more fellow believers at Ephesus.

To the foregoing evidence may be added the fact that there are certain striking literary parallels between the Revelation and the Gospel of John that suggest identity of authorship. Thus the Revelation speaks of "water of life" (chs. 21:6; 22:17), and the Gospel of "living water" (chs. 4:10; 7:38). The Revelation invites, "Let him that is athirst come" (ch. 22:17), and the Gospel declares, "If any man thirst, let him come" (ch. 7:37).

The word *opsis*, "appearance," or "face," is used in the NT only in the Johannine writings (John 7:24; 11:44; Rev. 1:16). The same is true of the expression *tērein ton logon*, "keep my saying [or, "word"]" (John 8:51, 52, 55; 14:23, 24; 15:20; 17:6; 1 John 2:5; Rev. 3:8, 10; 22:7, 9), and *onoma autō*, "his name," literally, "a name to him" (John 1:6; 3:1; Rev. 6:8). Except where direct reference is made to OT symbolism, Christ is characterized as the Lamb only in the Gospel of John and in the Revelation (John 1:29, 36; Rev. 5:6; and 28 other times).

Therefore, although evidence may be presented against the Johannine authorship of the Revelation, it must be recognized that the arguments for the traditional view, that the author of the Revelation was the apostle John, are reasonable and sound. This commentary accepts the traditional view. Compare AA 578–585.

3. Historical Setting. Modern scholars are divided as to whether the writing of the Revelation should be assigned to a comparatively early date during the reign of Nero (A.D. 54–68; see Vol. VI, p. 81) or to that of Vespasian (A.D. 69–79; see Vol. VI, p. 86), or to a later date toward the end of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96; see Vol. VI, p. 86).

Generally, those scholars who prefer an early date for the Revelation identify the persecution referred to in the letters to the seven churches as that suffered by Christians under Nero (A.D. 64), or possibly subsequently under Vespasian, although it is not clear to what extent the latter emperor persecuted the church. They believe that the disordered world portrayed by the Revelation reflects the troubles that disturbed the city of Rome from the last years of Nero to the early years of Vespasian. They see in the beast that suffers a deadly wound and is

healed (ch. 13:3) and in the beast that “was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit” (ch. 17:8) a representation of Nero, of whom, after his death, a popular legend declared that he would one day reappear. Similarly they see the mystic number 666 (ch. 13:18) as symbolic of Nero Caesar, when spelled in Hebrew consonantal letters (Nrwn Qsr). These evidences have led a number of outstanding scholars to date the Revelation in the late 60’s or 70’s of the 1st century.

This reasoning, though apparently based on historical incidents, depends for its plausibility on the interpretation given to certain of the statements in the Revelation. But such an interpretation is, of course, subjective, and has not been accepted by many able scholars in the past. Nor is it accepted by this commentary, which believes that the prophecies of the Revelation have an application also to what is beyond the immediate and local situation (cf. on ch. 1:11). Any evidence for the date of the writing of the Revelation must be based primarily, at least, on other kinds of evidence and reasoning.

The testimony of early Christian writers is almost unanimous that the book of Revelation was written during the reign of Domitian. Irenaeus, who claims to have had a personal connection with John through Polycarp, declares of the Revelation, “For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign” (op. cit. v. 30. 3; ANF, vol. 1, pp. 559, 560). Victorinus (died c. A.D. 303) says, “When John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the labour of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse” (Commentary on the Apocalypse, on ch. 10:11; ANF, vol. 7, p. 353; see on Rev. 1:9). Eusebius (op. cit. iii. 20. 8, 9) records that John was sent to Patmos by Domitian, and that when those who had been unjustly banished by Domitian were released by his successor, Nerva (A.D. 96–98; see Vol. VI, p. 87), the apostle returned to Ephesus.

Such early Christian testimony leads the authors of this commentary to place the writing of the Revelation during the time of Domitian’s reign, which ended in A.D. 96.

It is interesting, therefore, to mention briefly something of the conditions existing in the empire particularly as they affect Christians during the time of Domitian. It was under this emperor that the question of emperor worship became, for the first time, a crucial issue for Christians. Nowhere was this more true than in the Roman province of Asia, the area to which the letters to the seven churches were first directed. See on ch. 1:1, 11.

Emperor worship existed in some Mediterranean lands before Alexander the Great. He had been deified, as had his successors. When the Romans conquered the East, their generals and proconsuls were often hailed as deities. This was especially true in the province of Asia, where the Romans had always been popular. It was common to build temples to the goddess Roma, a personification of the spirit of empire, and with her worship was associated that of the emperors. In 195 B.C. a temple was erected to her at Smyrna. In 29 B.C. Augustus granted permission for the building of a temple at Ephesus for the joint worship of Roma and Julius Caesar, and of one at Pergamum for the worship of Roma and himself. This was the first instance of a cult for a living emperor. Augustus did not urge

the worship of himself, but in view of the desires of the local people he doubtless considered such worship a wise measure from a political point of view. Gradually, in these cults, the worship of Roma became less important and that of the emperor became the salient feature. Worship of the emperor by no means replaced that of the local gods, but was added, and served as a means of uniting the empire. Rituals in worship of the emperor were not always easily distinguishable from patriotic ceremonies. At the same time the worship of a living emperor was discouraged at Rome, although the Senate did officially deify certain dead emperors.

Gaius Caligula (A.D. 37–41) was the first emperor to urge the worship of himself. He persecuted the Jews for refusing to worship him, and doubtless would also have directed his wrath at Christians had they been significant enough at the time for his notice. His successors were more lenient on the question and did not persecute for nonconformity.

The next emperor to make an issue over the worship of himself was Domitian (A.D. 81–96). Christianity was as yet without legal recognition by the Roman government (see p. 573), but even such a religion as that was not likely to be persecuted by the Romans unless it ran afoul of the law. Now Christianity did just that. Domitian zealously sought to establish his claim to deity in the minds of the populace, and to force his subjects to worship him. Suetonius records that he issued a circular letter in the name of his procurators, beginning with the words, “Our Master and our God bids that this be done” (Domitian xiii. 2; Loeb ed., Suetonius vol. 2, p. 367).

An intriguing passage from the Roman historian Dio (Roman History lxxvii. 14. 1–3; Loeb ed., vol. 8, p. 349) seems to throw some light on this persecution:

And the same year [A.D. 95] Domitian slew, along with many others, Flavius Clemens the consul, although he was a cousin and had to wife Flavia Domitilla, who was also a relative of the emperor’s. The charge brought against them both was that of atheism, a charge on which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned. Some of these were put to death, and the rest were at least deprived of their property. Domitilla was merely banished to Pandateria.

Although on first sight this passage seems to record a persecution of Jews (and according to the Jewish historian H. Graetz, Domitian’s cousin was a Jewish proselyte [History of the Jews, vol. 2, pp. 387–389]), scholars have suggested that it is really Christianity for which Flavius Clemens and his wife were punished. From the standpoint of a pagan historian not intimately acquainted with Christianity, “Jewish ways” would be a logical description for Christianity, and “atheism” might well represent the refusal of Christians to worship the emperor. Eusebius (op. cit. iii. 18. 4), apparently confusing the relationship between Domitilla and Clemens, says that Domitian exiled a niece of Clemens, named Flavia Domitilla, because she was a Christian. Probably the two references are to the same person, and they suggest that the persecution involved even the imperial family.

Such conditions of persecution for refusal to worship at the emperor’s shrine doubtless constitute the immediate background of John’s exile to Patmos, and

thus of the writing of the book of Revelation. Apparently all the twelve apostles but John were dead, and he was an exile on the isle of Patmos. Christianity had entered its second generation. Most of those who had known the Master were now in their graves. The church was faced with the fiercest external threat it had yet known, and it needed a new revelation of Jesus Christ. Thus, the visions given to John met a specific need in their own time. Through them heaven was opened to the suffering church, and Christians, who refused to bow to the pomp and circumstance of the emperor, were given reassurance that their Lord, now ascended and standing at the throne of God, infinitely transcended in majesty and power any earthy monarch who might demand their worship. See AA 581–583. For the significance of emperor worship in relation to John’s statement regarding the “Lord’s day” see on ch. 1:10.

4. Theme. At the very beginning (ch. 1:1) this book announces itself as an apocalypse, an unveiling of the mysteries of the future culminating in the triumph of Jesus Christ. Apocalyptic writings had been a prominent type of Jewish religious literature for more than two centuries. Indeed, the first-known apocalypse, the book of Daniel, appeared at the time of the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century B.C. When the Maccabean wars once more brought political independence to the Jews 400 years later, Messianic expectations looking toward the expected new Jewish kingdom ran high, and gave rise to a body of apocalyptic literature that drew to a greater or less degree on the literary form and symbols of Daniel. When, in the following century, Roman conquest dashed the hopes of the Jews for the realization of a Messianic kingdom through the Hasmonaeans (see Vol. V, p. 34), Messianic expectations became, if anything, more intense as the Jews anticipated a messiah who would overthrow the Romans. During the 1st century B.C. and the 1st century A.D. such hopes continued to provide the incentive for more apocalyptic works. For a survey of Jewish apocalyptic literature see Vol. V, pp. 87–90.

It is not surprising, then, that in the NT, written largely, if not entirely, by Jews for a church that was chiefly Jewish in its religious background, God would place an apocalypse setting forth the lead up to and usher in the Messianic kingdom. In His messages to men through the prophets God expresses His will in human languages and in literary forms with which the people to whom His messages were originally addressed were familiar.

Although apocalypse is, indeed, prophecy, it differs from other Biblical prophecy (such as that in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets) in several important aspects, and these distinctive features are the earmarks of apocalyptic literature. Particularly significant among these distinguishing characteristics are the following:

1. The Cosmic Sweep of Apocalyptic. Whereas most prophecy is concerned largely with national and international problems centering chiefly in the history of Israel and the glorious future that might have been hers (see Vol. IV, pp. 25–38), apocalyptic plays upon the grander stage of the universe, and takes as its central theme the great controversy between God and Christ on the one hand, and Satan on the other.

2. The Basis of Apocalyptic in Visions and Dreams. The apocalyptic writer records the dreams and visions granted him while “in the Spirit” (see on ch. 1:10). He is often snatched away and carried to distant places, where he beholds scenes of majesty and grandeur that defy adequate description in human language, and where he converses with angels. Although such experiences are found repeatedly in the other prophets also, they are particularly characteristic of apocalyptic writings; so much so, in fact, that they form virtually the whole content of the apocalyptic sections of Daniel and of the Revelation.

3. the Use of Allegory in Apocalyptic. In prophecy, generally speaking, the symbols are concrete object lessons from everyday life; for instance, the potter and the clay (Jer. 18:1–10), the yoke (Jer. 27:2), and the tile (Eze. 4:1, 2). In apocalyptic prophecy, on the other hand, the symbols employed are almost always creatures never seen as such in actual life, such as multiheaded beasts, angels flying in heaven, and animals that speak and act with intelligence. Similarly, time periods, though rare in conventional prophecy, are generally given there in literal years (see Jer. 29:10), whereas in Daniel and in the Revelation, time periods repeatedly are used, and usually are to be understood on the basis of the year-day principle.

4. The Literary Form of Apocalyptic. Much prophecy is in poetic form, whereas apocalyptic prophecy (and similarly noncanonical literature) is almost entirely in prose, with only an occasional insertion of poetry, particularly in the case of hymns (see Rev. 4:11; 5:9, 10; 11:17, 18; 15:3, 4; 18:2–24; 19:1, 2, 6–8).

These considerations give point to the rule that to be rightly interpreted apocalyptic writing must be understood in terms of its characteristic literary structure and theological emphasis. Central to its message is the theme of the great controversy, with particular focus upon the cataclysmic end of this world and the establishment of the new. All this is portrayed in highly symbolic language, which may not always admit of exact interpretation (see on Eze. 1:10). In speaking of supernal things, literal language is sometimes utterly inadequate to convey the subtler realities of heaven. In some respects the figurative language of apocalyptic is similar to that of parables, and the same precautions are to be taken in interpreting both (see Vol. V, p. 204; cf. Vol. III, p. 1111).

The book is a revelation of Jesus Christ at work perfecting a people on earth so that they may reflect His flawless character, and guiding His church through the vicissitudes of history toward the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. Here more completely than elsewhere in Holy Writ the curtain that separates the invisible from the visible is drawn aside in order to reveal, “behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will” (Ed 173).

Revelation consists of four major divisions, or lines of prophecy: (1) the seven churches, chs. 1–3; (2) the seven seals, chs. 4 to 8:1; (3) the seven trumpets, chs. 8:2 to 11; and (4) closing events of the great controversy, chs. 12–22.

Particularly in view of the fact that the language of the book is often highly figurative, it is essential to discover the intent and purpose of the inspired writer,

and the meaning the book conveyed to the readers to whom it was originally addressed. Otherwise, the interpretation of its figures, and thus its message, may reflect mere personal opinion. Those first intended readers were Greek-speaking Christians who, whether Jew or Gentile, considered the writings of the OT canon to be the inspired Word of God (see on John 5:39; Acts 24:14; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17), and who would be disposed to interpret the new revelation in terms of the old. Accordingly, the following observations and principles will be found useful in an interpretation of the book.

“In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end,” and in a special sense, it “is the complement of the book of Daniel” (AA 585). Much of what was sealed in the book of Daniel (see on Dan. 12:4) is unsealed in the book of Revelation, and the two must be studied together. The Revelation contains citations from, or allusions to, 28 of the 39 books of the OT. According to one authority there are 505 such citations and allusions, some 325 of which are to the prophetic books of the OT—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel in particular. Of the Minor Prophets, references to Zechariah, Joel, Amos, and Hosea are most common. Of the books of the Pentateuch, greatest use is made of Exodus, and of the poetic sections, Psalms (see on Luke 24:44). Some also find reflections from the NT books of Matthew, Luke, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians. For illustrations of the way in which John borrows the language and figures of the OT see Additional Note on Rev. 18; see on Isa. 47:1; Jer. 25:12; 50:1; Eze. 26:13. An examination of the citations and allusions makes evident that he translated directly from the Hebrew OT, though at times under the influence of the LXX or a later Greek version.

A clear understanding of these citations and allusions in their historical setting in the OT is the first step toward understanding the passages where they occur in the Revelation. Study may then be given to the context in which John uses them, to ascertain their adapted meaning. In particular this applies to the names of persons and places, and to things, incidents, and events. Since many of the symbols of the book of Revelation were already known in extant Jewish apocalyptic literature, this literature is sometimes helpful by way of clarifying these symbols. Those familiar with contemporary Roman history will also observe that John’s language is often descriptive of the Roman Empire and of the experiences of the church under its sway. Accordingly, a study of Roman history of the period clarifies some otherwise cryptic passages. Finally, attention should be given to contemporary modes of thought and expression, in the light of the cultural background of the time.

In determining the import of the successive scenes that passed before John in vision, it is well to remember that the Revelation was given to guide, comfort, and strengthen the church, not only in his day, but throughout the Christian Era, to the very close of time (see AA 581, 585). Herein the history of the church was foretold for the benefit of, and vital counsel was addressed to, believers of apostolic times, to Christians of future ages, and to those living in the last days of earth’s history, in order that all might have an intelligent understanding of the perils and conflicts before them (see AA 583, 584). For instance, the names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of history. The local church at Ephesus accordingly became a symbol of the entire Christian

fellowship in apostolic times, but the message addressed to it was placed on record for the encouragement of believers in every age (see AA 578, 585).

It is reasonable to conclude that the characterization of, and admonition to, the church at Ephesus was particularly appropriate to the needs of that church at the time the message was written. It was similarly appropriate to the needs of the entire Christian church in the apostolic age, and thus, in brief, represents the experience of that period of the history of the church. It was recorded for the inspiration and encouragement of believers in every age, for under similar circumstances the same principles apply. By analogy, the same is true of the messages to the other churches. In view of the fact that the focus of each of the four major lines of prophecy is on the closing scenes of earth's history, the messages of the book of Revelation have particular import for the church today.

That a single prophetic passage may embrace more than one fulfillment is evident (see on Deut. 18:15). Some such prophecies have both an immediate and a more remote fulfillment, and in addition contain principles that are generally applicable at all times. Furthermore, "it should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional" (EGW MS 4, 1883).

Thus certain predictions that might have met their complete fulfillment at an earlier stage of earth's history have been deferred because of the failure of the church to measure up to its privileges and opportunities (see Vol. IV, pp. 30–34).

About 4 Ezra

The writings of the know Ezra should be compared to the Book of revelation because their setting and themes are different. I will give a brief history about Ezra

[Following is the introduction to both Ezra and Nehemiah, for they are parts of one whole.]

1. Title. In Hebrew Bible manuscripts Ezra and Nehemiah appeared as one volume, like the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, until A.D. 1448, when the Vulgate division into two volumes was introduced into a Hebrew manuscript for the first time. Originally, the united book was called "Ezra." But in the LXX this was divided in two parts called 2 and 3 Esdras, prefaced by the Apocryphal 1 Esdras, which contains excerpts from the two canonical books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Jerome was the first to give the two canonical books the names "Ezra" and "Nehemiah," names which they retain to the present day. He designated 1 Esdras of the LXX as 3 Esdras and classed it as an Apocryphal book.

2. Authorship. Ezra and Nehemiah form the historical and literary continuation of the books of Chronicles, and a study of the style and language reveals that they probably had the same author. Jewish tradition (the Talmud) names Ezra as the chief author (Baba Bathra 15a) and Nehemiah as the one who completed the work.

Although the double book Ezra-Nehemiah does not claim to have been written in its entirety by Ezra, there is nothing in it which could not have been written by

him. The author used official material of Zerubbabel's time and his own, and also reports probably written by Nehemiah. The change in pronouns from the 1st person to the 3d person singular is no proof of a multiple authorship within the sections dealing with Ezra's (3d person: chs. 7:1–26; 8:35, 36; 10:1–44; 1st person: chs. 7:27 to 8:34; 9:1–15) and Nehemiah's work (1st person: chs. 1:1 to 7:73; 12:27 to 13:31; 3d person: chs. 8:1 to 12:26. Such changes appear also in ancient non-Biblical literature (see on Ezra 7:28).

Since the various lists of priests and Levites presented in Nehemiah 12 terminate about 400 B.C. (see on Neh. 12:10, 11, 22), the book seems to have been written at about that time, the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra was a scribe (Ezra 7:6), and was anxious to acquaint his people with the sacred writings (see Neh. 8:1–8). It would have been strange indeed for such a man not to make provision for preserving for the guidance and edification of posterity an accurate account of the wonderful events of his time. It is therefore entirely appropriate to consider Ezra the inspired author of the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. In writing, he was guided in making selections from available public records, such as decrees (see Ezra 1:2–4; Ezra 6:6–12; etc.), letters (see Ezra 4:11–16; 5:7–17; etc.), lists (see Ezra 2:1–67; etc.), and other source materials.

The fact that two sections of Ezra are written in Aramaic (chs. 4:8 to 6:18; 7:12–26) has been used in the past as evidence for a much later authorship than the time of Ezra. This argument was proposed at a time when there was only fragmentary knowledge of the spread and use of Aramaic in the Persian Empire. Since the discovery of numerous Aramaic documents from different parts of the Persian kingdom and of many Aramaic Jewish documents from Egypt, from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, this argument is no longer valid. There is remarkably great similarity between the Aramaic of these documents and the Aramaic parts of Ezra. Aramaic had become the official language of the Persian Empire, and was used for the publication of decrees and directives, as well as for correspondence and for economic and legal documents. Hence, lettered men like Ezra were bilingual and could use both their mother tongue and Aramaic in speaking and writing. In fact, the use of Aramaic spread so widely that any man who could read was expected to know Aramaic; thus the author of Ezra could expect his readers to be able to understand his Aramaic sections. This accounts for the fact that he did not deem it necessary to translate into Hebrew the Aramaic source materials he used. Concerning contemporary Aramaic documents, see pp. 79–83.

3. Historical Setting. Aside from Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah are the only historical books of the postexilic period, and are of great importance for a reconstruction of the history of postexilic Jewry. However, they do not record the history of the people of God in unbroken sequence for the period covered by the two books, but only certain parts of it. There are large gaps for which little information is available.

Ezra records, first of all, the return of the Jews from exile under the guidance of Zerubbabel, the reorganization of the sacrificial service, and the beginning of the rebuilding of the Temple. All these events took place within about two years, early in the reign of Cyrus. During the next 13 years the work progressed slowly against opposition. Then appears an account of the resumption of the building

of the Temple and its completion and dedication under Darius I. Of the next nearly 60 years Ezra leaves no record. Then, in 457 B.C., Ezra was sent back to Judea by King Artaxerxes, with far-reaching authority to reorganize the nation's administration according to Mosaic law. He tells of his return and some of his reforms, but again breaks the thread of continuity for more than ten years, when Nehemiah appears on the scene of action as governor, and reports his activities in the book which bears his name.

All the events described in Ezra and Nehemiah took place during the first half of the period of the Persian Empire, which lasted from 539 B.C., when Babylon fell to the victorious forces of Cyrus, until, with the death of Darius III in 331 B.C., the empire ceased to exist and was succeeded by that of Alexander the Great. The history of postexilic Jewry begins "in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia" (Ezra 1:1). The Persian Empire stretched from the desert wastes of Iran in the east to the coast of Asia Minor in the west, and from the Armenian highlands in the north to the border of Egypt in the south. Cyrus, its founder, was a prudent and humane monarch. In harmony with his policy of appeasing nations subjugated by Babylon, he resettled them in their old homes and restored their places of worship. In accord with this generous policy, the Jews were allowed to return to their old homeland and rebuild their Temple. For the most part, the kings of Persia attempted to rule their empire with equity and consideration. Their officials were admonished to practice honesty and to work in the interests of the peoples whom they governed. The monotheistic religion of Zoroaster, the state religion at least from Darius I on, stood on a much higher level than that of the polytheistic and idolatrous predecessors of the Persians, the people of Babylonia.

When Cyrus took Babylon he became acquainted with the aged Daniel, trusted counselor of the great Nebuchadnezzar of a former era, and learned to appreciate his advice. Through Daniel, Cyrus must have become acquainted with Isaiah's prophecies concerning him and his appointed role in behalf of God's people (Isa. 44:21 to 45:13), and granted their restoration (PK 557). The great work of pacifying his far-flung empire in its years of infancy required the king's full attention. He lost his life in a campaign against unruly eastern tribes after a reign of about nine years, counted from the fall of Babylon.

Returning to Judea, the Jews found hostile neighbors, and were continually harassed by the Samaritans, a people of mixed racial and religious origins. Because Cyrus was busy unifying his far-flung empire, these enemies succeeded in hindering the Jews and causing them untold trouble that slowed the work of rebuilding the Temple.

Cyrus' eldest son, Cambyses, reigned for less than eight years. His greatest achievement was the conquest of Egypt. That he was favorably disposed toward the Jews is known from a Jewish document found in Egypt, but we have no evidence that he actively assisted the Jews in rebuilding their Temple.

The short reign of the false Smerdis proved a great setback for the Jews. Under this king, described by Darius as a destroyer of temples, the work at Jerusalem was stopped. The stoppage may have been partly due to Samaritan enemies, for new foundations had to be laid as soon as stable conditions under the strong

government of Darius I permitted resumption of the work. The era of Darius the Great was marked by prosperity and order. The Jews, like other nations, benefited from his wise and strong rule. Under the spiritual leadership of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they finished the Temple and dedicated it in the sixth regnal year of Darius, 515 B.C.

An era of unrest began, however, when late in his reign Darius decided to invade Greece. From that time on the empire experienced repeated reverses in Greece, Egypt, and elsewhere that disturbed the internal peace and stability of the empire. The next two kings, Xerxes and Artaxerxes I, were weaklings, opportunists, and unstable in character, and owed their throne to the strong hand of powerful counselors. Disastrous campaigns in Greece and rebellions in Egypt and other parts of the empire caused great unrest and led to vacillating domestic and foreign policies.

It was during a serious rebellion in Egypt (463–454 B.C.) that Ezra received major concessions for the Jews, whose good will Artaxerxes needed in this crucial period, since Judea lay athwart the highway to Egypt. Later, when the satrapy to which Judea belonged rebelled (after 450 B.C.), Artaxerxes apparently supported the supposedly loyal Samaritans under the erroneous assumption and fear that the Jews might join the rebellion. Accordingly Artaxerxes authorized the Samaritans to halt the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, which had been in progress for some time. When order in the satrapy was restored, Nehemiah, a trusted Jewish court official, succeeded in obtaining a royal appointment as governor of Judea, and completed the rebuilding of the city wall. This he did under continuing threats of violence.

He served as governor for two terms, and proved to be an able organizer and religious leader. He laid a comparatively solid political, social, and moral foundation that proved of great value in the turbulent times that followed.

4. Theme. Ezra and Nehemiah are historical source books which record the outworking of the divine plan in the restoration of the Jews, whereby they were afforded another opportunity to cooperate with the eternal purposes and prove their right to exist as a nation. This record shows, furthermore, how the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah were fulfilled, and provides invaluable source material by which other prophecies, those of Dan. 8 and 9, can securely be anchored to the facts of history.

Ezra and Nehemiah illustrate, by a series of instructive examples, how a few people can do great things for God when led by God-fearing, sincere, unselfish, but fearless and determined leaders. These books contain much that edifies and that strengthens faith in the unfailing leadership of God

Was John against the Pauline Gospel?

It is asserted that John the writer of Revelation was against Paul but this is something that can't be proved when comparing the two writers. It should be remembered that Most of John writings depict Jesus as the lamb, a symbol that was enshrined in the sanctuary theme while Pauline letters point to the same Jesus christ as the Passover lamb who had fulfilled all the symbolism of the

sanctuary hence nullifying the notion that one may be writing the other in an antagonistic way

Was Paul bringing in New Religion and does those who “tolerate other gospels” and claim to be apostles are coming from “Pauline circles”

When you read Pauline letters, those causing trouble i.e. in Galatia, Ephesus and Corinth are those propagating Judaism. So to say that those destroying the new religion came from the camp of Paul is not true. When you read the book of Acts 15, you find that those troubling the work of spreading the gospel were Jews who wanted the gentiles to conform to the manner of their worship. In the council that met in Jerusalem, there was James, Peter and other apostles including John who wrote the book of Revelation and Paul and Barnabas. You don't find these early apostles of Christ contending against the doctrine of Paul but rather affirm it.

Revelation of Zostrianos or the Revelation of Peter

A study of the principal witnesses to the New Testament canon at the end of the 2d century shows that the four Gospels, 13 epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 and 2 John, Jude, Acts, and Revelation were generally recognized as canonical. While some in the West still doubted James, 2 Peter, 3 John, and Hebrews there were those in the East who felt free to use certain apocryphal writings as authentic.

This brief survey of the evidence shows that the New Testament canon during the 2d century did not develop so much through a process of collecting apostolic writings as through a process of rejecting those whose apostolic origin was not established. In the course of the first hundred years of the Christian church many books had been written.

Every Christian sect and province had produced writings, especially so-called Gospels. These were copied and distributed, with the result that the body of Christian literature grew to formidable size. It was soon noticed that gall had been mixed with honey, to use an expression of the Muratorian Fragment that describes works that claimed apostolic origin yet propounded Gnostic teaching. A clear stand regarding these spurious books became necessary.

A trend in the opposite direction, which intensified the need for a canon, was emphasized by the heretic Marcion. In order to have support for his anti-Jewish teachings, he rejected not only all spurious works but also several books of undisputedly apostolic origin. His rejection of such genuinely apostolic works, together with the widespread use of nonapostolic writings, forced Christians to decide what to accept and what to reject.

One principle that Christians adopted in determining the validity of a book was the status of the author. Whatever was not clearly of apostolic origin, they rejected. The only exceptions made were the works of Mark and Luke, who were the associates of venerated apostles. Another basis of canonicity was the contents of books for which a place was claimed in the New Testament. Even books purporting to be of apostolic origin were rejected when they were found to contain Gnostic elements. One example of such works is the so-called Gospel of Peter.

Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* vi. 12) records an incident that illustrates how church leaders gave counsel in the choice of a canon. About A.D. 200 the church at Rhosus, near Antioch, seems to have been divided over the use of the Gospel of Peter. The church members there submitted their dispute to Serapion, bishop of Antioch. He was not familiar with this work, and thinking that all the Christians at Rhosus were orthodox, he allowed its use. Later, however, when he became aware of the Gnostic character of this gospel, he wrote a letter to Rhosus and retracted the pennit he previously had given. It is most interesting to note that a bishop allowed a book unknown to him to be read in church, apparently because it carried an apostle's name as author, but that he prohibited it as soon as he recognized by its contents its spurious character and authorship. Similar cases may frequently have occurred, although no further records of such decisions have been preserved.

Canon After A.D. 200 in the East. —The first evidence after A.D. 200 concerning the New Testament canon in the East comes from Origen (died c. A.D. 254). He observed that differences existed among the various churches in regard to the content of the New Testament, and he differentiated between generally recognized writings and contested ones. Eusebius presents a record of Origen's views (*ibid.* vi. 25), according to which the four Gospels, the epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John, and the Revelation were generally accepted. Although Eusebius seems to have forgotten it, Acts should be added, because Origen clearly shows that he considered it as belonging to the same group. According to Eusebius' testimony, Origen lists as still contested 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Hebrews.

That he also placed Jude in this category is apparent from his own remarks (*Commentaria in Matthaemum*, Tomus XVII. 30). Although the Shepherd of Hennas, Barnabas, and the Didache stood on the borders of the canon, Origen was convinced that they were not apostolic.

A controversy over the Revelation took place in the Eastern Church during the 3d century. Orthodox Christians had not previously questioned the authenticity of this book. They had always accepted it as inspired and apostolic. Origen had expressed no doubts about the authority of Revelation, but his followers attacked it vehemently. Particularly notable in this regard was Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria (died c. A.D. 265), who wrote a treatise in which he sought to disprove the apostolic authorship of the book. The Alexandrian theologians seem to have turned against the Revelation because its vivid picture of the reality of the judgment and the heavenly kingdom did not agree with their allegorical and spiritualized theology. As a result of this controversy, the faith of many Christians in the book of Revelation was shaken, and for more than a century the Eastern Church was not sure whether the book was acceptable or not.

By the time Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire (A.D. 313), the line of demarcation between recognized and rejected books already had been drawn. Thus Eusebius, writing about A.D. 325 (*ibid.* iii. 25, Loeb ed., vol. I, pp. 257, 259), divided into three classes the New Testament books claiming canonicity. His first class consisted of the "Recognized Books": the four Gospels, Acts, 14 epistles of Paul (including Hebrews), 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation. His second class was made up of "Disputed Books," which he divided again into those that were "known

to most” Christians: James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and works that were “not genuine”: the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hennas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Didache. In his third class Eusebius placed “altogether wicked and impious” writings, such as the Gospels of Peter, Thomas, Matthias.

Eusebius’ discussion reveals clearly that Christians definitely had separated the chaff from the wheat of New Testament scripture before Christianity became a recognized state religion early in the 4th century. The books he classifies as “Recognized Books” and “Disputed Books which are nevertheless known to most” are the same 27 New Testament books recognized as canonical by all Christians today. All others he rejected.

An important factor in settling the question of the canon in the Greek Church was the declaration of Athanasius of Alexandria, in his 39th Festal Letter (A.D. 367). As the leading man of his time, Athanasius told his bishops and their people that the canon of the New Testament consists of 27 books. He made no criticism of any book, nor any differentiation between books. Of all the apocryphal works, he mentioned only the Didache and the Shepherd, and stated that although these two books do not belong to the canon, they might be used for the edification of candidates in baptismal classes.

Although Athanasius’ directives were binding legally only in Egypt where he was the recognized spiritual leader, yet his personality was so strong that the whole Greek-speaking church was influenced by his verdict. Although some theologians of the East rejected Revelation as late as the 5th century, his canon of 27 books came to be the recognized standard.

The formation of the canon experienced a different course in the Syriac-speaking church, which lay east of the imperial Roman borders in the area of the Upper Euphrates, Mesopotamia, and Persia. During the 2d century, Christianity took strong root in this area, and the Gospels probably were translated into Syriac before A.D. 200, as is indicated by the Curetonian and Sinaitic Gospel manuscripts (see p. 122). However, these Gospels seem to have been used much less than the Diatessaron, the Gospel harmony prepared by Tatian probably a few years earlier. During the 3d and 4th centuries the Syrian church knew the Gospel almost exclusively in this latter form. In the 5th century, leaders of the Syrian church, such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Rabbula of Edessa, made strong efforts to eliminate the Diatessaron in favor of “the Gospel of the Separated,” as the four individual Gospels were called.

Little is known concerning the early use of other New Testament books among the Syrians. From the *Doctrina Addai*, written about A.D. 350, it appears that the epistles of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles were in use in the Syriac-speaking churches along with the Old Testament and the Diatessaron. However, it is not known how early the Syrian churches had become acquainted with these books, or whether they had the general epistles and the book of Revelation. A list of New Testament books in Syriac from the 3d century found in the monastery at Mt. Sinai lists only the four Gospels, the Acts, and the epistles of Paul, including Hebrews.

A new Syriac translation, the Peshitta (see p. 122), appeared with strong ecclesiastical support in the early 5th century. It replaced the Diatessaron with the four Separate Gospels, and contained also the Acts, 14 epistles of Paul, and 1 Peter, 1 John, and James. Thus the Syriac New Testament canon consisted of 22 books, and so remained for many years. As a result of the Christological controversies of the 5th century, some elements of Syriac-speaking Christianity, under pressure from the West, accepted the canon of 27 books, while others retained only the 22.

Canon After A.D. 200 in the West. —The testimony of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the Muratorian Fragment shows that at the turn of the 3rd century, the New Testament canon had reached a rather fixed form in the West. The four Gospels, the Acts, 13 epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation, and perhaps also 2 John and Jude were generally recognized as belonging to the canon. Second Peter, James, 3 John, and Hebrews had not yet achieved this recognition, although some apocryphal works were still at times accepted. The history of the canon after A.D. 200 therefore involves chiefly the acceptance of three general epistles and Hebrews, and the rejection of some questionable apocrypha.

The Western Church did not have so many notable scholars as the East, but its church discipline was stronger, and consequently the development of the canon in the West did not involve as much vacillation as in the East. The Western Church finally followed the East in accepting Hebrews, while at the same time it strongly defended the Revelation, a book the East did not favor during the 3rd century and part of the 4th. Finally, the Greek theologians reversed their attitude and accepted Revelation into their canon.

The general epistles still were little used in the Latin Church during the whole 3rd century. Quotations from these books hardly ever appear in the Latin Fathers of this period, and when they do, they are taken from 1 John and 1 Peter. In the 4th century, however, the general epistles received wide acceptance. Two canon lists witness to this. One, a list discovered by Theodor Mommsen, probably from Africa, lists five general epistles: three letters of John, two letters of Peter. However, a later hand has added to one of the two extant copies of this canon the remark, *una sola*, “one only,” to both entries, perhaps indicating that while the original author of this list reckoned three letters of John and two of Peter as canonical, a later reader voiced his opposition to this view. The second canon list from the 4th century is the *Catalogus Claromontanus*, found between Philemon and Hebrews in the uncial manuscript D at Paris. It lists all seven general epistles in the following sequence: 1 and 2 Peter, James, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude.

The final decision concerning the New Testament canon was taken by the Latin Church in A.D. 382, when the Synod of Rome, under Pope Damasus, decreed officially that the seven general epistles form an integral part of the New Testament. This decree attributed the First Epistle of John to the apostle and the other two to another John, supposed to have been a presbyter. The church of North Africa followed suit, when during the council of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the 3rd council of Carthage (A.D. 397) decrees were voted similar to that made at Rome in A.D. 382.

The Epistle to the Hebrews likewise did not find complete acceptance in the Western Church until the second half of the 4th century. The main reason for this lay in its disputed authorship. The Latin Fathers of the 3d and 4th centuries either did not mention Hebrews or rejected its Pauline authorship. Consequently it is also absent from the *Catalogus Claromontanus*, unless it is indicated there under the entry “Epistle of Barnabas,” which is possible, but improbable. However, the great Latin theologians and ecclesiastical leaders of the latter part of the 4th century stood strongly under the influence of the Greek theology of the East, where the Pauline authorship of Hebrews had never been doubted. Hence, Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, Lucifer of Cagliari, Vigilus of Thapsus, Ambrose, Augustine, and other Western leaders began to accept Hebrews as canonical. This trend was legalized at the Synod of Rome in A.D. 382, which declared the canon to possess 14 letters of Paul. The subsequent African councils of Hippo and Carthage also accepted Hebrews as Pauline. Augustine, in his *New Testament canon*, as presented in his work *De doctrina Christiana* (II. 8, 12—14), does not vary in any way from the canon of Athanasius of Alexandria contained in his 39th Easter Letter (see p. 129). From this time on the Latin and Greek churches had the same New Testament canon of 27 books.

The apocryphal books of the New Testament were rejected earlier and more resolutely in the Western Church than among the Christians of the East. By A.D. 200 a clear stand was taken in the West with regard to books whose apostolic origin was questionable, as is attested by Tertullian and the Muratorian Fragment, while at the same time some of these same books were used by Clement of Alexandria with no scruples. Apocryphal books were still part of the Eastern Church literature in the 3d and 4th centuries as Origen’s and Eusebius’ works testify. At that time these books were unanimously rejected by the Latin Church Fathers. However, later Bible manuscripts reveal that in some circles apocryphal books remained in use until the Middle Ages. Twenty of these manuscripts are known to contain a Latin translation of the Shepherd of Hermias, and more than 100 of them have the so-called Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans.

It is a remarkable fact that not one of the ecumenical church councils of the early centuries attempted to fix the canon. The first ecumenical council (though recognized as such only by the Roman Catholic Church) to deal with the canon was the Council of Trent (1545-64), which for the first time established by decree a canon of Scripture binding upon all members of the Catholic Church. Although earlier councils had dealt with the canon, as mentioned, they were not ecumenical, and had jurisdiction only over certain ecclesiastical provinces.

A study of the development of the New Testament canon provides convincing evidence that the hand of Providence led in the formation of God’s written Word. As has been seen in the foregoing survey, the decisions that brought into being the canon of 27 books were not essentially the work of an organized church expressing its will through either a pope or a general council. Rather, the canon of Scripture developed gradually over a period of some four centuries as many Christian men under the guidance of the Spirit of God recognized that certain works had been inspired by that same Spirit, and that other works had not.

In this divinely directed work of selection, certain standards aided the early Christians in deciding which books merited a place in Scripture and which did

not. One of these standards was authorship. The New Testament was the good news concerning Jesus Christ, and Christians naturally believed that the most authentic presentations of this message were those written by men who had been with Jesus. Consequently only those works were accepted finally concerning which Christians were clearly convinced that they were the products of an apostle or of a companion of an apostle writing in the apostolic period. Thus the books of Mark and Luke were admitted because every Christian was convinced that they had been written in the time of the apostles Peter and Paul, and perhaps under their supervision. On the other hand, the so-called Epistle of Barnabas, although widely accepted in the 2d century, was ultimately dropped from the canon because its contents showed that it could not have been written by that apostle. Similarly, the Shepherd of Hennas, a book favored by some early Christians, did not finally achieve a place in the canon because it originated in the postapostolic period.

Another standard which guided the early church in the selection of the canon was that of content. This sometimes involved more subtle judgment than did the question of authorship. It necessitated the evaluation of a book in terms of its inner consistency, its agreement with the rest of Scripture, and its conformity with Christian experience. It was doubtless largely by this principle that the early Christians rejected the many Gnostic gospels and apocalypses.

Essential to the successful accomplishment of all of this was the guidance of the Spirit of God, the Spirit who led the minds of the prophets and apostles as they wrote, and who has brought conviction to the heart of every true believer in Jesus Christ, as he has read the Scripture, that it is truly the Word of God.

The idea that “Christians throughout the Empire read and treasured” the Gnostic gospels cannot be maintained in the light of evidence

Was Athanasius and Constantine behind the exclusion of the Gnostic material, suppressing books which were not orthodox and only endorsing books for the canon which were deemed acceptable by the then-dominant Catholic church?

How was the Bible Formed?

The Bible is an assorted collection of ancient writings. Christians believe there is something special about these works because God orchestrated their formation. Of course, ordinary people like you and me wrote the various poems and letters and historical accounts that became books of the Bible. But somehow God inspired these writings, unlike any other works of literature, so that they provide us with a unique and accurate picture of life, history, reality, and God himself.

This raises a question: if so much is riding on this collection of books, how do we know we have the “right” books? What if God inspired someone, but their book didn’t make the cut? Or what if we got the wrong books and, consequently, our whole view of God is wrong? Fortunately, there’s ample historical documentation about the formation of the Bible that can be of great help as we tackle these challenging questions.

To begin with, little debate exists about the Old Testament. Early in their history, the Jewish people began to collect writings that were important to their history and faith. These included the Ten Commandments and the Law, originally given by God to Moses; historical documents that traced God's relationship with humanity and Israel; poems, songs, and wisdom literature that Israel used for worship and character formation; and the messages of great prophets whom God called to guide and correct the people.

By the time of Jesus, most Jews considered this collection of works authoritative. This Hebrew Bible included thirty-nine different books (the same books Christians call the Old Testament, though in different order) and described events from the creation of the world until roughly 400 B.C. Various other Jewish books, later called the Apocrypha, were written between 400 B.C. and the time of Jesus, but Jews did not consider them as part of the authoritative canon. Jesus himself only quoted from Old Testament books and never referenced the apocryphal writings. There remain some Christians today (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church) that include the Apocrypha in their Bibles, but neither Jews nor early Christians believed in their authority and we should follow their lead.

The development of the New Testament took place over the first few centuries of the early church. Shortly after Jesus' death, writings began to appear from a growing group of both Jews and non-Jews who believed he was not only Israel's messiah, but also a savior for the world. First, there were letters between these early Christians, mostly from a preacher named Paul to his converts. But as the movement grew and the stories of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were told over and over, some individuals accepted the responsibility to accurately record the great events that had unfolded around them.

Thus, what emerged from the first century A.D. was an assortment of writings that included "gospel" accounts of Jesus' life, teachings, and climactic death and resurrection; letters from church leaders to specific individuals or churches regarding specific issues; and apocalyptic writings that describe God's cosmic plans for history and humanity.

More writings appeared in the centuries that followed, and on some occasions church leaders were faced with decisions regarding which books should be considered biblical. Consensus developed, and in A.D. 367 the respected church leader Athanasius published a universal list of twenty-seven accepted New Testament books, the same books in our Bibles today. As this decision-making process unfolded, several important criteria guided early church leaders. It's important to understand, however, that these criteria did not appear as a checklist by which bishops "voted" books in or out. Rather, they gradually emerged as Christian communities elevated certain texts as having significant and lasting value for the Christian faith. There were three primary criteria for evaluating a work.

1) *Apostolic authorship*. It was important that a work be authored by or associated with an apostolic witness; one of those first generations of people who had actually seen the risen Jesus. This excluded documents that were written much later, as useful as they may be. Second and third century Christians understood

that these first apostles could best convey the truth about Jesus' life and its significance.

2) *Widespread usage and acceptance.* The early church grew quickly and broadly. As a result, Christians of different backgrounds, nationalities, and even schools of thought developed. But when a text maintained or gained universal usage and acceptance among the vast majority of diverse groups, this attested to its authenticity.

3) *Conformity to the rule of faith.* Perhaps the most significant factor regarding the value of a document was its consistency (or lack of) with the general beliefs and practices recognized in early churches. Therefore, writings with especially questionable theology or practices dissimilar to those passed down from the apostles were intensely scrutinized.

In light of these considerations, the four gospels, Acts, the thirteen Pauline letters, 1 Peter, and 1 John, were universally acknowledged as biblical by the end of the second century. Only Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation faced more scrutiny, but were eventually accepted. Together with the Old Testament, this is the Bible Christians read today.

Ultimately, we believe that God guided the process of the Bible's formation. And while God can reveal himself to humans in many different ways, the Bible remains of chief significance for the church and all who seek him. It is not only an anchor for faith, but also an epic narrative that tells of creation, brokenness, redemption, and hope. And like the ancient Hebrews, early disciples, and Christians of the past 2000 years, in the word of God we can begin to find our part in the story.

Athanasius

Saint Athanasius (circa 293-373), Christian theologian, bishop, and Doctor of the Church, who championed the cause of orthodoxy in the 4th-century struggle against Arianism; Born in Alexandria, Egypt, Athanasius received a classical education before entering the famous theological school of his native city. He was ordained a deacon as a young man and served as secretary to the bishop of Alexandria. It was then that he began to take a prominent position in the great theological struggle that culminated in the Council of Nicaea in 325. At Nicaea, Athanasius opposed Arius, the Alexandrian priest who advanced the doctrine known as Arianism; his life is intimately connected with the progress of the Arian controversy, and he was by far the most formidable antagonist encountered by that heresy. Athanasius formulated the homoousian doctrine, according to which the Son of God is of the same essence, or substance, as the Father; Arius, on the other hand, maintained that the Son was of a different substance from that of the Father and was merely a creature, much more perfect than any other creature, who was used by God in subsequent works of creation.

Athanasius became bishop of Alexandria around 328. During the Arian controversy, politics mingled with theology, and each side labored to win the favor of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great. The Arian Party was both influential and very active at the imperial court. Athanasius was exiled five times; more than one-third of his episcopate was spent away from his see. His fifth and final exile lasted only four months and ended in 364. He spent the rest of his life

in quiet labor at his post in Alexandria. The theological battle was practically over, and the victory rested with the cause of Nicene orthodoxy (see Nicene Creed). Athanasius was a voluminous writer; of great value are his *Discourses Against the Arians*, *History of the Arians*, *Apology Against the Arians*, and *On the Decrees of the Nicene Synod*. He died May 2, 373. His feast day is May 2.

Monarchianism

Monarchianism, Christian heretical doctrine of the 2nd and 3rd centuries opposed to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity; it strongly maintained the essential unity of the Deity and was intended to reinforce monotheism in Christianity. Monarchians were divided into two groups, the Adoptionists, or Dynamic Monarchians, and the Patripassians, or Modalistic Monarchians. The Adoptionists taught that Christ, although of miraculous birth, was a mere man until his baptism when the Holy Spirit made him the Son of God by adoption. This doctrine was taught by Paul of Samosata, at one time bishop of Antioch. Adoptionism, or adoptianism, was revived in Spain about the end of the 8th century, when it was again condemned as heresy.

The Patripassians believed in the divinity of Christ, but regarded the Trinity as three manifestations, or modes, of a single divine being. They taught that the Father had come to earth and suffered and died under the appearance of the Son; hence their name (Latin *pater*; *patris*, "father"; *passus*, "to suffer"). This doctrine was taught by the Roman Christian prelate Sabellius and is thus sometimes referred to as Sabellianism.

Is there any trace of Gnosticism being addressed by John in the book of Revelation?

Yes, this is true and it is found in what we call "The Doctrine of Nicolaitans"

Revelation 2:6 "*But this you have, that you hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*"

Hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes - Notice how they did not hate the Nicolaitanes but the deeds performed by them, so to it was with God. God hates the sin but loves the sinner.

The preaching of grace without law was the sin of the Nicolaitanes and it lead to sensuality amongst those who accepted it, which was an abomination in God's sight. Thus although the first love was lacking, the doctrinal purity of the Church remained steadfast, which God commended. It is not often we read that God hates anything, but this doctrine of grace without law is one thing he does. It reappears in the Church of Pergamos.

Revelation 2:15 "*So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*"

Nicolaitanes - As far as we can find out from inspiration, those that were called Nicolaitanes were those that made the law of God of none effect through grace. Jude 4 gives us a glimpse of this group that turned the grace of God into

lasciviousness or sexual freedom, thus they were believing that the law doesn't matter for God's grace covers us. But the verse calls them ungodly men.

Them that hold - Under the Church of Ephesus the deeds of the Nicolaitanes was not tolerated. But here we see that, in the Church during this time, there were those who held to these false teachings.

NOTE: *The doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans within the Church itself reveal that there was a certain number of people that, while desiring to be true to the word also desired to be united or loyal to the Church as a whole body. Thus they sought to promote tolerance of the apostasy that was leading the Church astray. This is where the issue of Balaam becomes very clear to us, in that he encouraged the Israelites to join with the Moabites in the "harmless" feast which eventually led to their ruin, thus in the papal apostasy some promoted tolerance of the new ideas coming into the Church. It is important to learn what should be tolerated and what should not, as the wrong type of tolerance will lead to ruin.*

Revelation 2:16 *"Repent; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."*

Repent or I will come unto thee quickly - What is the Church to repent of? It is to repent of tolerating the teachings and practices of the Balamites and the Nicolaitanes. The Church is not to tolerate sin and apostasy in her midst, but how often has she allowed this to happen. Of this we must repent and reform.

It appears from the book itself that there had been already Churches for a considerable space of time in Asia; forasmuch as St. John, in the name of Christ, reproves faults that happen not but after a while. The Church of Ephesus had left her first love. That of Sardis had a name to live, but was dead. The Church of Laodicea was fallen into lukewarmness and indifference. But the Church of Ephesus, for instance, was not founded by St. Paul before the last years of Claudius. When in 61 or 62, St. Paul wrote to them from Rome, instead of reproving their want of love, he commends their love and faith, Eph 1:15. It appears from the Revelation that the Nicolaitans made a sect when this book was written, since they are expressly named; whereas they were only foretold and described in general terms by St. Peter, in his second epistle, written after the year 60, and in St. Jude, about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Vespasian. It is evident from many places of the Revelation that there had been an open persecution in the provinces; St. John himself had been banished to the Isle of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus. The Church of Ephesus, or its bishops, is commended for their labour and patience, which seems to imply persecution. This is still more clear in the words directed to the Church of Smyrna, Re 2:9: I know thy works and tribulation. For the original word always denotes persecution in the scriptures of the New Testament, as it is also explained in the following verse. In the thirteenth verse of the same chapter mention is made of a martyr named Antipas, put to death at Pergamus. Though ancient ecclesiastical history gives us no information concerning this Antipas, it is nevertheless certain that, according to all the rules of language, what is here said must be understood literally.

In the message to the church at Ephesus, Christ is represented as holding the seven stars in His hand, and walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. He is represented as "walking" among them, thus illustrating His constant diligence in behalf of His church. He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. Nor does He become indifferent. These figures are to be carefully studied by the undershepherds, and faithfully applied to their own experience, that they may not lose sight of their great privilege of securing light from the Source of all light, and giving it in turn to those for whom they labor (Letter 4, 1908).

[Revelation 2:1-5 quoted.] The words fall from the lips of One who cannot lie. The picture reveals eternal vigilance. Christ is in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, walking from church to church, from congregation to congregation, from heart to heart. He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. If the candlesticks were left to the care of human beings, how often the light would flicker and go out! But God has not given His church into the hands of men. Christ, the One who gave His life for the world, that all who believe in Him may not perish but have everlasting life, is the watchman of the house. He is the warder, faithful and true, of the temple courts of the Lord. Christ walks in the midst of His churches through the length and breadth of the earth. He looks with intense interest to see whether His people are in such a condition spiritually that they can advance His kingdom. He is present in every assembly of the church. He knows those whose hearts He can fill with the holy oil, that they may impart it to others. Those who faithfully carry forward the work of Christ, representing in word and deed the character of God, fulfill the Lord's purpose for them, and Christ takes pleasure in them (Review and Herald May 26, 1903).

Revelation 2:1-5 quoted.] In this scripture are outlined the conditions of acceptance with God. The first experience of the **Ephesus church led to good works**. God took delight in the fact that His church reflected the light of heaven by revealing the spirit of Christ in tenderness and compassion. **The love that dwelt in the heart of Christ; the love that caused Him to give Himself a sacrifice for humanity, and to suffer with forbearance the reproach of men, even to the extent of being called a devil; the love that prompted Him to perform mighty works of healing during His ministry--this was the love that was to be revealed in the lives of His disciples**. But they neglected to cherish Christ's compassion and tenderness. Self, as manifested in hereditary traits of character, **spoiled the principles of the grand, good works that identified the members of the Ephesus church as Christians**. The Lord Jesus must needs show them that they had lost that which was everything to them. The love that constrained the Saviour to die for us, was not revealed in its fullness in their lives; and hence they were unable to bring honor to the name of the Redeemer. **And as they lost their first love, they increased in a knowledge of scientific theories originated by the father of lies** (Ellen White Manuscript 11, 1906).

This message is an example of the way in which the ministers of God are to give reproof today. Following the commendation for earnest labor comes the reproof for losing the talent of love, which is a most sacred trust. It was the love of God that saved the fallen race from eternal death (Ellen White Manuscript 136, 1902).

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Thine is a decay, a declension in holy zeal--not forsaken is the object of it, but lost is the fervor. The first affection of the convert to Christ is deep, full, and ardent. **It is not necessary that this love should become less as knowledge increases, as the more and increased light shines upon him.** That love should become more fervent as he becomes better acquainted with his Lord. God will accept nothing less than the whole heart. Happy are they who from the commencement of their religious life have been true to their first love, growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sure result of their intercourse and fellowship with their beloved Lord will be to increase their piety, their purity, their fervor. They are receiving a divine education, and this is illustrated in a life of fervor, of diligence and zeal. It is our work to know our special failings and sins, which cause darkness and spiritual feebleness, and quenched our first love {SDA Bible Commentary Volume 7 page 957.1}

In view of the many virtues enumerated, **how striking is the charge brought against the church at Ephesus:** "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." This church had been highly favored. **It was planted by the apostle Paul. In the same city was the temple of Diana, which, in point of grandeur, was one of the marvels of the world. The Ephesian church met with great opposition, and some of the early Christians suffered persecution; and yet some of these very ones turned from the truths that had united them with Christ's followers, and adopted, in their stead, the specious errors devised by Satan.** This change is represented as a spiritual fall. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, **and do the first works**"--as outlined in the preceding verses. The believers did not sense their spiritual fall. They knew not that a change had taken place in their hearts, and that they would have to repent because of the **noncontinuance of their first works.** But God in His mercy called for repentance, for a return to their **first love and to the works that are always the result of true, Christlike love** (Ellen White Manuscript 11, 1906).

Is it [our sin] the sin of the **Nicolaitans, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness** (Review and Herald June 7, 1887)?

The doctrine is now largely taught that the gospel of Christ has made the law of God of no effect; that by "believing" **we are released from the necessity of being doers of the Word.** But this is **the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which Christ so unsparingly condemned** (Signs of the Times Jan. 2, 1912).

It is our work to know our special failings and sins, which cause darkness and spiritual feebleness, and quenched our first love. Is it worldliness? Is it selfishness? Is it the love of self-esteem? Is it striving to be first? Is it the sin of sensuality that is intensely active? **Is it the sin of the Nicolaitans, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness?** Is it the misuse and abuse of great light and opportunities and privileges, making boasted claims to wisdom and religious knowledge, while the life and character are inconsistent and immoral? Whatever it is that has been petted and cultivated until it has become strong and overmastering, make determined efforts to overcome, else you will be lost. -- Review and Herald, June 7, 1887.

But the doctrine is now largely taught that the gospel of Christ has made the law of God of none effect; that by "believing" we are released from the necessity of being doers of the word. But this is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which Christ so unsparingly condemned. To the church of Ephesus He says, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember then from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." {Bible Echo, February 8, 1897 par. 6}

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