

The Inaugural Vision

Patmos: Patmos is an inhabited island near Ephesus. It is commonly believed that the author is on Patmos in exile – either forced or voluntary – but others (Bauckham) suggest that he went to Patmos in order to receive the Revelation.

Daniel: The primary connection point between John's opening vision and the OT is the book of Daniel, specifically Daniel 7.

As I watched,
thrones were set in place,
and an Ancient One took his throne;
his clothing was white as snow
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames,
and its wheels were burning fire.
A stream of fire issued
and flowed out from his presence.
A thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.
The court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.

Other OT Connections: The frequent use of “like” indicates an indescribable experience, like that of Ezekiel.

“Seeing” a voice? “The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” Isa 2:1. “The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake.” Amos 1:1.

“The Lord's Day”: The Lord's day is a common phrase associated with final things in the Old Testament, but can simply mean Sunday. If we read this as a reference to Sunday, this makes sense of much liturgical imagery utilized in the letter.

The Temple

“You shall make seven lamps for it, and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it.” Exodus 25:37

“the weight of the golden lampstands and their lamps, the weight of gold for each lampstand and its lamps, the weight of silver for a lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each in the service...” 1 Chron. 28:14

Seven Stars

A cluster of seven stars was not only a biblical symbol paralleling the seven churches, it was an imperial symbol of the Roman Empire.

“The section climaxes by noting that [Jesus] holds seven stars in his right hand (Rev 1:16). This cosmic imagery conveys sovereignty. An analogy appears on a coin from Domitian's reign that

depicts the emperor's deceased son as young Jupiter, sitting on the globe in a posture of world dominion. The coin's inscription calls him "divine Caesar, son of the emperor Domitian," and the imagery shows him extending his hands to seven stars in a display of divinity and power. John has already identified Jesus as the ruler of kings on earth (1:5), and the imagery of the seven stars fits the book's larger context, which contrasts the reign of Christ with that of imperial Rome."

Craig Koester, *Revelation*

Seven Churches

Revelation as a Circular Letter: Scholars recognize that the ordering of the seven churches in Rev coincides with the geography of a circular letter "in the order in which they would be visited by a messenger starting from Patmos and travelling on a circular route around the Province of Asia." Bauckham. The problem: no evidence of such a route exists.

Revelation: A Unique Letter: Rev is written to specific churches and their specific needs, but is also a letter for other communities to read.

An Imperial Shape? In D.E. Aune's commentary, he argues that Rev is shaped like a Roman Imperial Edict: Praescriptio (opening declaration); narratio (reported information about addressees); dispositio (commands); and sanctio (sanctions for carrying out commands). Heightening the tension between Jesus and Caesar, John fits his Christian prophecy in an Imperial mold.

General Outline of the Messages to the Seven Churches

Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira struggle with false teaching.

Smyrna and Philadelphia struggle with persecution.

Sardis and Laodicea struggle with complacency.

Rev says nothing bad about Smyrna or Philadelphia.

Rev says nothing good about Sardis or Laodicea.

Pattern of the Messages

Title or Description of Speaker (Christ)

Status of the Church

Admonitions and Encouragements

Promise

Imagery: Both OT and Roman

"We should remember that Revelation's readers in the great cities of the province of Asia were constantly confronted with powerful images of the Roman vision of the world. Civic and religious architecture, iconography, statues, rituals, and festivals...all provided powerful visual impressions of Roman imperial power and of the splendor of pagan religion." Bauckham

We will see that images throughout the letter have connections to both the OT, and the Roman world.