

# THE ORIGINALITY OF THE APOCALYPSE.

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## II.

*The author's use of the Old Testament: angels, numbers, symbolism.—  
Relation to other Jewish apocalyptic literature: Book of Enoch; Fourth Ezra  
—Conclusion.*

We are to consider, first, the way in which the Apocalypse uses the Old Testament. In the introduction (1:1-3) the author represents the Apocalypse as communicated through the angel of Christ. This resembles Scripture usage, and again differs from it. It was a common thing for angels to bring messages to men, and in the book of Daniel the angel Gabriel is sent to make Daniel understand the vision which he had received (8:16; 9:21); but there is not in all Scripture anything which is similar to the function of the angel of the Apocalypse. For he is said to mediate the entire Apocalypse, and yet he does not once appear in it. Not only so, but in the Apocalypse various beings—divine, angelic, demonic, human and purely imaginative—speak and act; thus John hears God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the elders, the four living creatures, men on earth, an eagle, angels, and the redeemed. The representation is that all these diverse visions are mediated by the angel. How this mediation is to be understood, I do not here inquire; but only call attention to the fact that this function of the angel is unique.

The author's use of numbers, while having its basis in Scripture, has its own peculiarities. First, numbers have here an importance far transcending that which they have in any other biblical book. They are used in greater variety and with greater frequency. They are used to set forth prominent ideas, even attributes of the divine Being. They modify the structure of the Apocalypse, as is seen, for example, in its consisting of seven

visions, and in the seven-fold character of several of these visions; and numbers are often in mind even when not mentioned, as in the *three*-fold ascription to the Father (4:11), the *seven*-fold ascription to Christ (5:12), and the *four*-fold ascription to Father and Son together (5:13); also in the *four*-fold designation "tribe, tongue, people and nation (5:9, 7:9, etc.). Peculiar to the Apocalypse is also the use of multiples and fractions of one and the same number. Thus it has 10,  $\frac{1}{10}$ , and 1000; 12, 24, 144, 12,000 and 144,000.

The author's free and original way of using Old Testament symbolism may be sufficiently illustrated by the examination of a few passages. Take the vision of one like a son of man in the first chapter. The seven golden candles among which he stands, symbolizing seven churches, according to the author (1:20), though perhaps suggested by the Lord's words to his disciples that they were the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16), are an original figure. The peculiar designation of Christ as one like a son of man, found in the New Testament only here and in chapter 14:14, is taken from Daniel's vision of the four beasts (7:13), where it describes the coming King. The golden girdle is a feature borrowed from the unnamed angel of Daniel, 10:5, 6, though its position at the breast is unlike that of the angel. The hair white as wool and snow is a part of Daniel's description of the Ancient of Days, and thus the author ascribes to Christ the attribute of eternity. The eyes of fire and the feet of brass are like the eyes and feet of that angel who brought the revelation to Daniel (chap. 10). The voice as the voice of many waters is like the voice of the God of Israel, which Ezekiel heard (Ezek. 43:2). The symbol of stars for the angels or pastors of the churches is original with John, as is also the fact that Christ holds the seven stars in his right hand. The sharp two-edged sword out of the mouth is based upon such figures as that of the Psalmist when he says that the words of his enemy are *drawn swords* (Ps. 55:21), and that the tongue of his enemy is a *sword* (Ps. 57:4). The prophets also speak of Jehovah as slaying his foes by the word of his mouth, and say that his tongue is a devouring flame (Hos. 6:5; Isa. 30:27). The appearance of Christ

is described in a figure which is found in the song of Deborah (Judges 5:31), "It is as the sun shines in its strength." John fell at the feet of this glorious Person as Daniel had fallen at the feet of the angel (Dan. 10:8). The reassuring word of Christ unto him—"I am the first and I am the last"—is also the word of Jehovah to Isaiah (44:6). The keys of death and Hades, which Christ says he has, are an original symbol.

Thus in his description of the Lord, as seen in a vision, John uses figures drawn from various sources and applied originally to various beings. The entire picture, however, surpasses any of the passages from which its materials are drawn.

Again, let us take the symbol of the four living creatures (4:6-8). These beings have features from the cherubim of Ezekiel, and also from the seraphim of Isaiah (Ezek. 1:5, 10; Isa. 6:2-3), but they are far simpler than the cherubim. For instance, they are full of eyes before, behind, and under their wings; while in the case of the cherubim Ezekiel specifies that their bodies, backs, hands and wings are full of eyes. Again, each of the cherubim had four faces, while each living creature had but one. Ezekiel describes the feet and the color of his cherubim, but these points are not touched by John. The old prophet also describes the motion of the cherubim, how when they went every one went straight forward: whither the spirit was to go they went; they turned not when they went, etc. The Apocalypse has none of these details. The living creatures of the Apocalypse have each six wings, like the seraphim of Isaiah, while the cherubim have but four (Ezek. 1:6). The ceaseless adoration of the living creatures finds expression in part in the words of the seraphim of Isaiah. Thus it seems plain that John treated both the seraphim and the cherubim as pure symbols, and in constructing his symbol of the living creatures he borrowed freely from both.

Another significant passage is that which describes the content of the sixth seal (6:12-17). This is made up almost entirely of Old Testament symbolism, and yet there is no passage in the Old Testament which compares with this in terrific grandeur. In the first place, it is altogether original that these

cosmical and human scenes which herald the consummation are represented as coming out of the seven-sealed book. As to the separate heavenly signs, all are found in the prophets in connection with the judgments of Jehovah save one, namely, the removal of every island out of its place; but some are modified in the Apocalypse. Thus the sun becomes black *as sack-cloth of hair*, and the stars fall *as a fig-tree casts its unripe figs when stirred by a great wind*. The conduct of man in view of the divine wrath is also set forth chiefly in Old Testament symbols. Thus men seek refuge in caves and rocks, and say unto the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us" (Isa. 2: 19; Hos. 10: 8). But the enumeration of the ranks and classes of men—kings and magnates, captains, the rich, the mighty, the bond and the free—is an addition by John. In the latter part of the scene the prayer to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb is new, and of course could be spoken only from the Christian point of view.

Again, take the vision of the beast out of the sea (13: 1-8). It was doubtless suggested by the vision of Daniel, and has much in common with that, but it is also singularly unlike it. Daniel saw four great beasts come up out of the sea; John sees but one. This one, however, is a composite creature, made up of features of all the four beasts in Daniel. Thus it is like a leopard, has the feet of a bear, the mouth of a lion, and has ten horns. The motive that guided in the selection of these parts seems to have been the desire to make a monster that would exemplify in the highest degree the quality of destructiveness. It must certainly be admitted that this is an original method of dealing with the Danielian symbol. Furthermore, here, also, as in the case of the cherubim, the simplification of the Old Testament symbol is remarkable. One of Daniel's beasts had eagle's wings and two feet as a man. Another had four wings on its back and four heads. Another had great iron teeth, and still another had three ribs in its mouth. All these details are dropped by John. He selects from the description of Daniel that which suits his purpose.

The scene in 19: 11-16 illustrates how old materials are used by the author of the Apocalypse to form new and won-

drous pictures. John saw the heaven opened as Ezekiel had seen it (1:1). The white horse, while prefiguring the victory of the rider, is new with the author. Eyes as a flame of fire point back to the initial vision in chapter 1. The many diadems on the head to set forth the idea that the bearer reigned over many kingdoms, is original. The thought that Christ has a name unknown to all but himself is also peculiar to the author. The garment sprinkled with blood is probably borrowed from Isaiah's picture of Jehovah coming from Edom, "with dyed garments from Bozrah," the life-blood of his enemies being sprinkled upon his garments (Isa. 63:1-3). The name of the rider, the Logos, is found elsewhere only in the Gospel and First Epistle of John. A heavenly army is referred to by Daniel (4:35), but it is new with the author of the Apocalypse to represent the members of this army as seated on white horses and clothed in clean white linen. The sharp sword out of the mouth is a feature from the vision of Christ in the first chapter, and the fact that the rider shepherds the nations with an iron rod is from the second Psalm. Though Christ goes forth as a mounted warrior, he yet treads the winepress of the wrath of God, a symbol from Isaiah (63:3). The name "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," which is applied to God in 1 Tim. 6:5, is here given to Christ, and, what is original, is placed on the garment at the thigh. This vision, therefore, of Christ and the armies of heaven riding forth in mid air, though embodying symbols from Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, the second Psalm, and perhaps also from 1 Timothy, is in its entirety, as also in many of the details, original, a creation of John's imagination.

As a final illustration, we may take the picture of the new Jerusalem in chapter 21. Notice the elements that are old and those that are new. The conception of a heavenly Jerusalem was old. We find it in Paul (Gal. 4:26) and in Hebrews (11:10-16; 12:22), adumbrated also in the Old Testament (Isa. 65:17). The conception of its descent out of heaven upon the earth is new. The comparison of its light with that of a crystal jasper is also new. The twelve gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, three gates to each point of the

compass, are from Ezekiel (48:31). The twelve foundations, on the other hand, bearing the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, are new. Ezekiel measured his city with a reed; John sees an angel measure the new Jerusalem with a golden reed. Ezekiel's city is square; John's a cube. Ezekiel's city is 18,000 reeds in circuit; John's is 48,000. It is to be noticed here that in John's description the number twelve, which is the number of the people of God, appears as the unit of all the numbers. Thus the wall is 144 cubits high, and each of the three dimensions of the city is 12,000 cubits. Further, it is new in John's picture that the city seen is of pure gold and its street of gold like transparent glass. New also that each of the foundations is a precious stone, and that the city has no temple. The author borrows from Isaiah the figure of the city as lighted by Jehovah (60:19), but adds the feature that the Lamb is the lamp of it. Nations walking in the light of the city, kings bringing their glory into it, the gates open night and day, the fact that nothing unclean can enter into it, and no person whose name is not written in the book of life, these all are borrowed features.

The passages which have been analyzed may suffice to show how the author of the Apocalypse uses Old Testament symbolism. He modifies the old with freedom, and blends with it much that is wholly new. He combines the old elements to form pictures which, while they have sacred associations with ancient Jewish history, are yet largely original. It may be noticed in this connection that he employs these Old Testament symbols in essential harmony with their original use. His beast out of the sea belongs to the same genus with the beast of Daniel. The day of Jehovah, which the Old Testament prophets heralded by dread signs in heaven and on earth, is in line with the final day in the Apocalypse, in the description of whose approach it combines most of the ancient symbols. As the cherubim of Ezekiel and the seraphim of Isaiah belong in the vision of Jehovah, and are his servants, so the living creatures in the Apocalypse are a ministering element in the sublime vision of God. In like manner the new Jerusalem of John is the consummation of the dream of Isaiah, the same essential ideal, but

more clearly seen in the light that came from the face of Jesus Christ. It must not be supposed that John uses these Old Testament symbols because they are in themselves forcible and beautiful; he uses them because they are to him vehicles of that divine revelation of the consummation of the Messianic kingdom of which he feels himself called to be a seer. They preserve with him all their ancient meaning, and receive also new meaning as they take their place in the new Christian environment. He does not choose and use them primarily as a literary man, but as one charged with a sublime revelation. He gathers them up as scattered gleams of the divine will in regard to the struggle between the people of God and the adversaries, and in regard especially to the outcome of that struggle, and he combines them with each other and with his own later and more developed thought to produce the final picture of the *parousia* of Jehovah in Jesus Christ, which forms the transition from the conflicts of earth to the peace and glory of the perfected Messianic kingdom.

It remains to consider the literary dependence, if there be any, of the Apocalypse upon the non-canonical Jewish writings of an apocalyptic character. Of these the only ones which are certainly older than the Apocalypse and which have in their symbolism anything in common with it, are the Book of Enoch and Fourth Ezra. The apocalypse of Baruch was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, and is to be regarded as having borrowed from the Apocalypse rather than as having contributed to it. Some of the symbols which they have in common were doubtless drawn by each from the Old Testament, independently of one another. Thus their use of manna as a reward of the redeemed (Bar. 29:8; Apoc. 2:17); their employment of an eagle as a messenger (Bar. 77:19; Apoc. 8:13); the blending of angels and stars (Bar. 51:10. Apoc. 9:1); and the existence of a heavenly Jerusalem (Bar. 4:3; Apoc. 21:2). As to the symbols which are not plainly based on the Old Testament, Baruch has nothing which we are justified in saying that the author of the Apocalypse borrowed. It is antecedently improbable that a great creative mind like that of the author of the

Apocalypse should have borrowed from a third-rate writing like the apocalypse of Baruch, which left no trace on Christian literature with the single exception of Papias.

The only writings therefore which come into serious account are the Book of Enoch and Fourth Ezra. The Book of Enoch was highly esteemed in the early church and widely circulated. It draws largely from the Old Testament and contains some passages of a lofty character. It is not at all improbable that the author of the Apocalypse was acquainted with it, even as was the author of Jude. But if so, he was not deeply influenced by it. There is but one symbol in the Apocalypse that can with any likelihood be traced to the Book of Enoch. In the 14th chapter of the Apocalypse we read that "the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from the winepress *even unto the bridles of the horses*, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs." Enoch in describing days of vengeance on the wicked says: "And a horse will walk up to his breast in the blood of the sinners, and a wagon will sink in to its height." There are many symbols in Enoch which are found in the Apocalypse, but they are all taken from the Old Testament. John does not follow Enoch in his adaptation of Old Testament symbolism, but as we have seen makes an original use of it. Thus, for example, while Enoch speaks of *God* as having a "head of days," "white like wool" (46:1), John applies this language to Christ. So Enoch speaks of a tree of life on *earth* (24:42-57) which gives long life to the righteous on *earth*; while in the Apocalypse the tree of life is in the paradise of God, in the new Jerusalem (2:7). Enoch speaks of beings who praise God, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of the spirits fills the earth with spirits" (Enoch 39:12). John in the corresponding passage does not follow the Old Testament, neither does he follow Enoch (Apoc. 4:8).

In no passage does the Apocalypse follow that modification of Old Testament symbolism which is found in Enoch; and as for that which is not immediately based on the Old Testament, it has left no trace on the Apocalypse unless the figure cited above be an exception.



Old Testament symbolism regarding the Messianic future is lowered in the Book of Enoch, while in the Apocalypse it is exalted. From the simplicity of the Apocalypse, from its unity of purpose and structure, from its grandeur and climactic movement, the Book of Enoch is far removed.

There is far less likelihood that the author of the Apocalypse was acquainted with Fourth Ezra. The common critical view is that this book was written toward the close of the first century, between 81 and 96 A.D. If, then, the modern view regarding the date of composition of the Apocalypse were correct, which puts it before the destruction of Jerusalem, the question of any influence of Fourth Ezra upon it would be settled. But holding that the Apocalypse was written toward the close of the reign of Domitian, *i. e.*, about contemporaneously with Fourth Ezra, the question of any influence of the latter on the former is still not difficult. There is, first, no single point where the symbolism of the Apocalypse in its departure from the Old Testament follows Ezra, and, second, there is no single point where the symbolism of the Apocalypse which is not based on the Old Testament shows any trace of the influence of Ezra. Ezra has ideas and symbols in common with the Apocalypse, as is natural in view of the theme of his writing and in view of his relation to the Old Testament, and yet the difference between the two writings is surely as great as that between the synoptic Gospels and the best of the apocryphal gospels. The Apocalypse belongs among the most creative works of literature; Fourth Ezra has little that can be called original.

In conclusion, we may sum up briefly as follows: First, there is in the Apocalypse both in its structure and especially in its symbolism a remarkably large element which is, as far as we can say at present, purely original; second, there is a large element in its symbolism that is grounded more or less directly upon the symbolism and the significant events of Scripture, and this element also shows the originality of the author's mind in that he has freely modified, re-adapted and frequently exalted the Old Testament symbolism; and, third, of the non-canonical Jewish writings of an apocalyptic character no one, unless it be the Book

of Enoch, had any appreciable influence upon the Apocalypse, and that has left at the most only a single incidental trace.

Regarded simply as a literary production, the Apocalypse must be allowed a place among the most original and consummate portions of the Bible, which is equivalent to saying that it must be allowed a place among the most original and consummate productions of human literature, for the Bible even from a literary point of view is certainly the crown of all that men have said or sung.