

‘ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ’ (REV. 1:1): THE CLIMAX OF JOHN’S PROPHECY?

Marko Jauhiainen

Summary

This article argues that interpreters of the book of Revelation have not paid sufficient attention to the way the introductory phrase Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is qualified in 1:1: the ἀποκάλυψις concerns “what must take place soon,” as “shown” to John by an angel. A critique of the traditional position is followed by an evaluation of Richard Bauckham’s proposal that ἀποκάλυψις refers to the contents of the little scroll in ch. 10. The article ends with an alternative reading of the data: the clues provided by John in 1:1 regarding the ἀποκάλυψις suggest that it is primarily found in the climax of the book, i.e., the visions of the destruction of Babylon and her replacement by the New Jerusalem (17:1—19:10; 21:9—22:9).

I. Introduction

The book of Revelation begins with the interesting phrase Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. There are at least three different ways to understand the word ἀποκάλυψις in this context. A small group of scholars would take it as a genre description,¹ while the majority sees it as referring to the document as a whole for other reasons. The third and smallest group consists of those who, on the basis of various textual indicators, would argue that ἀποκάλυψις does not refer to the book itself, but rather to something contained *within* the book. The purpose of this essay is to propose a new reading in this last category. I will begin with a brief critique of the first two alternatives, then proceed to examine Richard Bauckham’s proposal that ἀποκάλυψις refers to the contents of the little scroll in ch. 10,² and finally offer my own alternative.

II. “Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” as the Document as a Whole?

The first view, that ἀποκάλυψις functions as a genre marker, need not detain us for long. While later usage of that term and the genre definitions of critical scholarship would undoubtedly support this view, it is unlikely that it had similar connotations for John and his audience.³ Not only would there have been no precedent for John’s use of the word in this way, but he was also departing from the tacit conventions that had been followed by those earlier authors whose works modern scholarship considers “apocalypses.” Moreover, by 1:8 any genre hypothesis based on 1:1 would have been frustrated by the explicit identification of the work as “prophecy” (1:3), two OT-style prophetic utterances (1:7-8), and a formal letter opening (1:4-6). The repeated references by John to

¹ E.g., G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (2nd ed.; London: A & C Black, 1984), 9; D. Hellholm, “The Visions He Saw or: To Encode the Future in Writing,” in T.W. Jennings Jr., ed., *Text and Logos: The Humanistic Interpretation of the New Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 109-146 (112-14, 121-23).

² *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 238-337.

³ E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 150; M. Smith, “On the History of ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ and ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ,” in D. Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 9-20 (14, 18-19).

the book as “prophecy,”⁴ together with the formal letter closing at the end (22:21), further suggest that he did not intend 1:1 to be taken as a genre description.⁵ Thus, while it is possible to define ἀποκάλυψις and “apocalypse” in such a way that 1:1 indeed looks like a genre marker, one should not be too hasty in attributing the same understanding to John.⁶

While there is no consensus regarding the primary genre of Revelation, most commentators nevertheless hold the second view, namely, that 1:1 refers to the book as a whole. Whatever other merits this position may have, its popularity is undoubtedly at least partially due to the prominent position of the verse, the early date of the inscription Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου,⁷ and therefore centuries of established usage. However, it must be asked if this view does full justice to v. 1. Most discussions on ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ pay insufficient attention to the way this “revelation from Jesus Christ”⁸ is qualified later in the same verse: it concerns “what must take place soon,” as “shown” to John by an angel.⁹ Let us briefly consider the problems that these qualifiers, if taken seriously, pose to the traditional interpretation.

First, how is the apparent future reference of the phrase ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι¹⁰ ἐν τάχει reconciled with the virtually universal agreement that there are sections in Revelation which do not focus on something that “must take place soon,” but rather to something that has already taken place --- or at best to John’s present? To this category clearly belong ch. 1 and chs. 2–3, many would include chs. 10 and 12, and possibly also chs. 4–5,¹¹ and some would even consider chs. 6–9.¹² It appears that there are three ways to deal with this phrase. One attempt at resolving the perceived tension between 1:1 and the rest of the book has been offered by Greg Beale, who interprets ἐν τάχει in such a way that it loses its obvious future reference and becomes a semi-technical term, referring primarily to something that has taken place in the past.¹³ He claims that Rev. 1:19 is an interpretive key to Revelation, invoking the dream of Dn. 2, which provides for Revelation “a framework of the inaugurated latter-day judgment of cosmic evil and the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom.”¹⁴ Part of his argument is that the background or source of 1:1 is Dn. 2:28–29, 45 LXX, and that John has taken the words of Daniel (2:28 LXX) regarding a God who unveils mysteries and who had disclosed to Nebuchadnezzar “what must take place in the last days,” has understood Daniel’s reference as referring to his own era, and has updated the text accordingly. This “strongly suggests”

⁴ 1:3; 19:10(?); 22:7, 10, 18, 19; 10:11 (cf. 1:11). Seeing and hearing visions, and interacting with angels and other characters were part of the prophetic activity of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah, so there is nothing in terms of John’s activities that is not found in the OT prophetic tradition. On the other hand, the content of John’s prophecy is certainly at points more developed --- or “apocalyptic” --- than those of his predecessors. On John as a Jewish-Christian prophet, see, e.g., J. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTS 93; Sheffield: SAP, 1994), 37–58, and the references cited therein.

⁵ As D. Aune (*Revelation 1–5; Revelation 6–16; Revelation 17–22* [WBC 52A, B, C; Dallas: Word, 1997; Nashville: Nelson, 1998], 4) points out, “it is... relatively certain that... 1:1–2 was intended by the author to function as a title.” For an ancient reader, a title would have given hints regarding the essential matter of the composition (Epiphanius *Pan.* 1.1.1). The abrupt introduction of the letter opening suggests that the title, together with the beatitude of v. 3, was added when John’s prophetic letter was published.

⁶ G. Linton, “Reading the Apocalypse as an Apocalypse,” in E. H. Lovering Jr., ed., *SBL 1991 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 161–186 (175).

⁷ This shorter title may have arisen because the codex had not yet supplanted the use of the scroll, to differentiate between John’s apocalypse and other apocalypses (e.g., *Apocalypse of Peter*), or simply as a convenient short reference to the otherwise lengthy title; see further Aune, *Revelation*, 3–4.

⁸ It is generally agreed that the context favors subjective genitive here; see, e.g., Aune, *Revelation*, 5.

⁹ The precise activity of the angel is, strictly speaking, not mentioned, only that the angel was sent in order for the revelation to be “shown.”

¹⁰ Cf. ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι in 1:19. Both expressions emphasize divine determination and have a definite future reference, especially when further defined by μετὰ ταῦτα (1:19; 4:1) or ἐν τάχει (1:1; 22:6).

¹¹ C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 420; G. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1999), 311–12.

¹² Caird, *Revelation*, 128; and more cautiously, Bauckham, *Climax*, 263.

¹³ *Revelation*, 153–161.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

that Dn. 2 and Rev. 1 “describe the same event and are linked as promise and fulfillment.”¹⁵ In the course of his argument, Beale appears to assign ἐν τάχει in Rev. 1:1 a meaning which no longer pertains to “a relatively brief time subsequent to another point of time.”¹⁶ Yet, what Beale thinks it exactly refers to is difficult to pinpoint. At times he seems to allow that it has a possible future reference, but this is always coupled with the suggestion that it refers to the past or to something that has begun in the past.¹⁷ Furthermore, in his discussion on the meaning of ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς in 1:3, he implies that the fulfillment to which ἐν τάχει refers had already begun during Christ’s earthly ministry, some sixty years earlier.¹⁸ Finally, in his treatment of 1:19 he points out that even Daniel itself understood the era of the “latter days,” to which John refers with ἐν τάχει, as “undergoing incipient inauguration in the time of the Babylonian empire.”¹⁹ Thus, Beale has effectively emptied ἐν τάχει from its primary meaning with a clear future connotation and turned it into a semi-technical term primarily referring to something that has taken place in the past, whether it is the “incipient inauguration” of the latter days in Daniel’s time, the inauguration of God’s kingdom during Christ’s earthly ministry, or a further inauguration of God’s kingdom during the time John is writing.²⁰

Another alternative is to acknowledge the future connotation of ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, but argue that since most of the material in Revelation seems to be about what will take place in John’s future, the inclusion of chapters that are not about the future does not present a problem. Of course, one must ask why John would characterize all of his composition as a revelation of “what must take place soon,” if up to half of it does not actually fit the description. Nevertheless, even if we grant that the ἀποκάλυψις is not about ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει in its entirety, surely John’s primary concern is on “what must take place soon,” as the explicitly stated purpose for giving the revelation in v. 1 clearly indicates. The third possibility is to understand the ἀποκάλυψις as a whole to be about ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, as I hope to show later.

While it could perhaps be argued from v. 1 that the first qualifier does not require the whole of the ἀποκάλυψις to be about “what must take place soon,” the second qualifier leaves less room for such a maneuver. The whole ἀποκάλυψις is shown by an *angel* sent to John for this purpose. This fits the standard definition of “apocalypse,” where a revelation is always mediated by an otherworldly being,²¹ which in the literature antedating Revelation is usually an angel.²² However, many have been puzzled by the fact that despite the expectation created in 1:1, the first explicit mention of an angel addressing John or otherwise relating to him comes in ch. 10, and the traditional *angelus interpres* does not appear until ch. 17. Again, there seem to be three basic ways of accounting for this phenomenon. First, one may claim that everything John sees is implicitly shown by an angel, though it is not explicitly stated in the text. This explanation works well at the beginning of the book, but encounters some problems in ch. 22, where the angel who showed John the New Jerusalem is explicitly identified as the angel whom God sent to “show” John “what must take place soon.” Moreover, this same angel seems to have shown John also the judgment of Babylon earlier in the book. The assumption that the contents of the book are implicitly shown by an angel would thus mean that in 17:6-7, for example, we have an instance where an angel is

¹⁵ Ibid., 154.

¹⁶ BDAG, 993.

¹⁷ For fine examples of this, see *Revelation*, 153.

¹⁸ *Revelation*, 154. While ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς can be used to “exaggerate imminence,” it does not necessarily follow that John has the same referent as Jesus in his use of a related phrase in Mk. 1:15, as Beale seems to suggest.

¹⁹ *Revelation*, 156 (emphasis mine).

²⁰ A similar fate has befallen another chronological marker, μετὰ ταῦτα, which is understood as a synonym to ἐν τάχει in Rev. 1:19 and 4:1. Yet, it is possible to retain the future sense of ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει without adopting a futurist interpretive approach to Revelation dreaded by Beale. Moreover, he can still argue that Revelation is about the “judgment of cosmic evil and the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom” without putting on ἐν τάχει (and μετὰ ταῦτα) weight it is ultimately unable to carry.

²¹ J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979) 1-20 (9).

²² E.g., Dn. 7–12; *Jub.* 23; the Book of Watchers (*1 En.* 1–36); the Book of Heavenly Luminaries (*1 En.* 72–82); and the Animal Apocalypse (*1 En.* 83–90).

implicitly showing John a vision where this same angel is *explicitly* showing John the prostitute and interacting with him. Not only is this assumption too complicated, but also unnecessary, since John has economically, yet clearly, attributed his visionary experiences to the divine Spirit (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), just as his OT predecessor Ezekiel repeatedly did.²³

The second way of accounting for the mention of the angel in 1:1 is more persuasive. According to this view, the mysterious voice in 4:1 belongs to an angel, who then shows John everything that follows in the book. A slightly revised version of this is that the ἀποκάλυψις begins already in 1:10, where the same angel speaks. Yet, both alternatives have minor difficulties. The former seems to form a better beginning to an apocalypse, but at the same time concedes that chs. 1-3 were therefore not part of this apocalypse. The latter, on the other hand, appears to do more justice to the claim that the book as a whole is the ἀποκάλυψις, even though the events that “must take place” only come after 4:1. However, it is unlikely that the mysterious speaker is an angel, as we will see later. Moreover, if the showing of the ἀποκάλυψις begins in 4:2, we again have a case of an implicit showing which seems slightly problematic vis-à-vis an angel explicitly revealing to John the destruction of Babylon and the glorious New Jerusalem descending from heaven later in the book. Of course, it is always possible to take refuge in the claim that “in Revelation nothing is impossible,” but we need more internal evidence if we are reading John against the explicit clues he has provided regarding the ἀποκάλυψις.

The third possible explanation for the absence of the traditional *angelus interpres* figure at the beginning of the book is that the revelation of “what must take place soon” follows later in John’s prophecy. According to this view, John has provided his audience with various clues in order to help them identify those sections of the book where the expectation first created in 1:1 is finally fulfilled. The question is, what exactly are these clues, and where do they point? I will first examine the answer provided by Bauckham, and then proceed to my own.

III. “Αποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” as the Content of the Little Scroll?

Bauckham’s thesis is that “the question of the conversion of the nations---not only whether it will take place but also how it will take place---is at the center of the prophetic message of Revelation.”²⁴ Space considerations preclude the full treatment that Bauckham’s ingenious and well-argued proposal deserves, but I will nevertheless offer a brief critique of its key points that pertain to this study.

According to Bauckham, (1) the little scroll the angel gives John in ch. 10 is identical with the scroll God gives the Lamb in ch. 5, and there is therefore a chain of revelation from God to John, as described in 1:1; (2) the mighty angel of ch. 10 is also the angel to whom 1:1 and 22:8 refer; (3) the scroll is alluded to in Dn. 12:7-9 and contains the answer to Daniel’s question, “What shall be the outcome of these things?”; (4) the content of the scroll is the “revelation of the role which the church’s suffering witness is to play in the conversion of the nations”; and (5) this revelation begins in 11:1, is contained *in nuce* in 11:1-13, is further expanded in later chapters, and extends to 22:5.²⁵ I will comment on each point briefly.

²³ So, e.g., Beale, *Revelation*, 203, 319, 850, 1065; cf. Bauckham, who comments that the expression γενέσθαι ἐν πνεύματι “is probably to be taken as both phenomenological and theological, denoting both the visionary experience as such and the Spirit’s authorship of it” (*Climax*, 152).

A way of combining the Spirit’s authorship of John’s prophecy with the view that an angel is responsible for the contents of John’s book has been suggested by A. Garrow (*Revelation* [London / New York: Routledge], 30), who has recognized that these premises lead to the logical conclusion that the angel in 1:1 must be the Spirit. However, while this theory addresses the “problem” of the late appearance of the *angelus interpres*, later in the book it runs into similar difficulties as the basic version of the view.

²⁴ *Climax*, 238.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 243-54, 257, 266, 283.

First, while the two scrolls certainly appear to be closely related, most scholars have not been convinced of their identity.²⁶ Moreover, even if their identity were granted, that in itself would not yet demonstrate that chs. 5 and 10 portray the chain from God to John referred to in 1:1.²⁷

Bauckham's second point, that the mighty angel of ch. 10 is also the revealing angel of 1:1 and 22:8, demands more attention. He notes that the mighty angel is described in different (and more majestic) terms than the angel who shows him the visions of Babylon and the New Jerusalem, and that the angels must therefore be different.²⁸ Yet, the descriptions in 10:1 and 15:6 are not mutually exclusive, for they relate to different aspects of the outward appearance of these angels and may merely serve different purposes in their contexts.²⁹ Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the mighty angel is also one of the bowl angels, only that he *could* be. However, if it is granted that the mighty angel is not the angel who shows John the two visions, then the sudden switch from one angel to another in the middle of 22:6-9 requires an explanation. Bauckham suggests that the insertion of the oracle in v. 7 facilitates the shift from one angel to another in v. 8. Yet, it is dubious whether his audience would have perceived such a shift, given not only the obvious parallel between the conclusions to the two city-visions in 19:9-10 and 22:6-9,³⁰ but especially the unmistakable fourfold identification of one of the bowl angels as the one "showing" John these two visions (17:1, 21:9, 21:10; and 22:1). If we follow the textual indicators provided by John, then either the mighty angel of ch. 10 is also the angel who showed the two visions to John, or else this mighty angel appears only in ch. 10 and therefore is not the angel referred to in 1:1 and 22:6-9.

Bauckham's third point hinges on the interpretation of Daniel's question in 12:8. He has interpreted the difficult phrase *מָה אֲחֵרֵית אֵלֶּה*, usually translated, "What will be the outcome of these things?", in the sense, "Could you tell more *about* these things?", whereas a more straightforward reading would have the sense, "What will be *after* these things?"³¹ Unfortunately, at this critical junction Bauckham fails to provide evidence for his interpretation, other than that it better fits his reading of Revelation.³²

The main point of Bauckham's argument is that the little scroll reveals how the nations will be converted as a result of the suffering witness of the church.³³ He is undoubtedly correct in emphasizing the role of the sacrificial death of the Lamb and the prophetic witness of the church -- even unto death --- in winning people to God. Yet, he does not argue merely for an innumerable multitude to be saved *from* every tribe, language, people and nation (as, e.g., Rev. 5:9 and 7:9 suggest), but for a separate large-scale conversion of these nations as a result of the martyrdom of the church. However, there are two major difficulties with this view. First, though Bauckham has

²⁶ See the extended discussion in Beale, *Revelation*, 530-32.

²⁷ Bauckham's case would be stronger if John had not distinguished the angel in ch. 5 from the angel in ch. 10 by designating the latter as "another mighty angel." Moreover, the link from Jesus to the angel is not explicitly narrated and has to be assumed.

²⁸ *Climax*, 253, 255. Bauckham is right in pointing out that part of the full description of the angel in ch. 10 is different from the description of any other angels in Revelation. However, the initial reference to "another mighty angel" (cf. 5:2; 18:21) may imply that this one was not the only "majestic" angel. There is obviously a reason why John has described the angel in ch. 10 more fully than the other mighty angels, but it is not necessarily in order to establish a link to 1:1; see standard commentaries for various explanations regarding the description in 10:1.

²⁹ In fact, the description of the appearance of the angels in 15:6 resembles that of the angels in Dn. 12:6-7, a passage which has clearly served as a background to Rev. 10, as Bauckham himself argues.

³⁰ See 6n53 below.

³¹ So, e.g., H. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 542-43; E. Lucas, *Daniel* (AOTC 20; Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 197; J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 400; and Jerome (cited by Collins, *ibid.*, 400). R. Charles (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1929], 335-37) notes that both the Peshitta and Vulgate also support the reading "what will be after these things," but he opts for the emendation of the MT on the basis of the LXX.

³² 251-52. His main argument for this seems to be that the last period of "a time, times, and half a time" first appears in Revelation in 11:2-3 (though of course it only appears in 12:14, the designations in 11:2-3 at best being parallel expressions), after "John has ingested the scroll and begins to divulge its contents as prophecy" (252). However, this first appearance of the formula only after ch. 10 does not necessitate his conclusion.

³³ See *Climax*, 257-58, for four subsidiary points in support of this.

rightly rejected the view that only a faithful – and presumably relatively small – minority will be saved,³⁴ he has not demonstrated that the “great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9)³⁵ does not qualify as the fulfillment of the expectation that the Gentiles will come and worship Yahweh.³⁶ Revelation does not appear to contain references to a number of redeemed that exceeds an innumerable crowd but is still short of a universal salvation. Second, the evidence for the claim that the conversion of the nations is a result of the church suffering martyrdom is somewhat scarce. In fact, this view rests almost entirely on a particular reading of Rev. 11:3-13, and especially of v. 13, in which only a small, faithless minority of the city are killed in the earthquake, while the rest repent.³⁷ But this reading is problematic for four reasons: (1) those who repent are inhabitants of one city, not of the whole earth,³⁸ though John could have easily made the latter point here had he wished to emphasize the conversion of the nations (cf. 11:9, 10);³⁹ (2) as has been shown, the response of the inhabitants of the city does not necessarily indicate they were converted;⁴⁰ (3) in the narrative, the survivors’ reaction appears to be primarily attributed to the vindication of the two martyrs and the attendant judgment on the city, not to their sacrificial witness;⁴¹ and (4) if the nations are converted in 11:13, what are we to make of the various references in Revelation to large, ultimately non-repentant groups of God’s enemies?⁴² We must therefore conclude that while one purpose of 11:3-13 may be to show how sacrificial prophetic witness can result in the repentance of some of those hostile towards the people of God, it is debatable whether it portrays a full-scale conversion of the nations as the result of this witness.

The last key point from our perspective in Bauckham’s argument is the claim that the revelation of the contents of the scroll begins in 11:1, is contained *in nuce* in 11:1-13, and extends to 22:5. However, a closer examination of 11:1—22:5 reveals that most parts of this section do not seem to be about “how the hope of the conversion of the nations is realized,” or about “the role which the church’s suffering witness is to play in the conversion of the nations.” Such units include at least

³⁴ Ibid., 242.

³⁵ Presumably, even without the “conversion of the nations” there will still be more conversions before the bowls of wrath are poured out, so the innumerable crowd becomes even greater.

³⁶ Bauckham maintains that “John cannot have thought Daniel 7:14 fulfilled” in 5:9 and 7:9, for these are those whom the beast conquers while still ruling the nations, whereas reading Dn. 7:14 must have led John to expect “the transfer of dominion over the nations themselves from the beast to Jesus Christ” (*Climax*, 330). However, even if we knew what expectation John “must” have had on the basis of his interpretation of Daniel, we also need to note that Daniel expected this transfer to take place *after, and as a result of, the judgment* (i.e., Rev. 20; cf. Dn. 7:9-14, 22, 26-27), whereas Bauckham appears to expect this transfer to take place through the conversion of the nations *before* the beast is defeated in Rev. 19. Yet, Revelation seems to imply that there are only two groups during the reign of the beast: those who worship the beast, receive his mark, are judged, and end up in the lake of fire; and those from every nation who do not worship the beast nor receive his mark, and who thus are God’s people. The latter group is an innumerable multitude which truly constitutes “the nations” when those from the nations who followed the beast have been judged.

³⁷ *Climax*, 273-83.

³⁸ Cf. Zc. 12, which envisages the end-time repentance of the inhabitants of the city where Jesus was crucified.

³⁹ Τοὺς θεωροῦντας αὐτοῦς in v. 11 refers primarily to those who witness the resurrection of the martyrs, and not necessarily to those who are looking (βλέπω) in v. 9, though it is of course possible that there were people from all over the world living in the “great city.”

⁴⁰ For an extended discussion on v. 13, see Beale, *Revelation*, 602-608.

⁴¹ Though Bauckham consistently emphasizes the effectiveness of the witness and the failure of judgments to effect repentance, he admits that only after the resurrection of the martyrs (and the attendant judgment on the city) do the inhabitants of the city repent (*Climax*, 278). Yet, there is the problem that the alleged conversion comes last, after the martyrs have been vindicated. He correctly notes that the story is in part patterned after Jesus’ testimony, death and resurrection, but then goes on to say that the martyrs’ resurrection is not a literal event; the nations merely “perceive the martyrs’ participation in Christ’s triumph over death” (ibid., 281). However, this hardly does justice to the text, where the perception of the enemies is changed *only* by external events that they witness and/or experience.

⁴² E.g., the second harvest (14:17-20); those who have the mark of the beast (16:2, 9-11); “the kings of the whole earth” and their armies (16:14; 19:19); “the cities of the nations” (and presumably their inhabitants, 16:19); “all men; both free men and slaves, and small and great” (19:18); and the nations at the four corners of the earth whose number is “like the sand of the seashore” (20:8).

11:1-2,⁴³ 11:14-19,⁴⁴ ch. 12,⁴⁵ ch. 13,⁴⁶ most of ch. 14,⁴⁷ 15:5—19:21,⁴⁸ and ch. 20.⁴⁹ Therefore, while 11:1-13 and 12:1—22:5 for the most part seem to be dealing with the same time period or events related to it, the latter section hardly corresponds to the content of the scroll as identified by Bauckham.

In sum, our brief analysis of the relevant points in Bauckham's thesis regarding the conversion of the nations as "the central and principal content of John's prophetic revelation"⁵⁰ has revealed significant weaknesses in his argument. We conclude, therefore, that ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ should not be identified with 11:1—22:5 and the contents of the little scroll.

IV. Locating the Ἀποκάλυψις in John's Prophecy

This study thus far has already provided several indicators of my approach; it now remains for it to be spelled out more fully. In brief, I will attempt to demonstrate that ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ does not refer to John's prophecy as a whole, but rather to something contained *within* the book. John, who is "astonishingly meticulous" with his literary artistry, as Bauckham puts it,⁵¹ has provided his audience with three specific clues in order to guide them to the ἀποκάλυψις within his prophecy. It concerns: (1) "what must take place soon," (2) as "shown" to John (3) by an angel. Let us now follow these signposts.

"What must take place soon"...

The phrase ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει occurs only twice in Revelation, in 1:1 and 22:6.⁵² The latter verse is part of 22:6-9, a sub-unit that has close verbal ties with both 19:9-10 and 1:1-3. As many commentators now recognize, 22:6-9 concludes the vision of the New Jerusalem (21:9—22:9) and thus corresponds to the similar sub-unit 19:9-10, which forms the conclusion of a parallel vision of Babylon (17:1—19:10).⁵³ Moreover, it is also possible to take 22:6-9 as the beginning of the

⁴³ See M. Jauhainen, "The Measuring of the Sanctuary Reconsidered (Rev 11:1-2)," *Biblica* 83, no. 4 (2002) 507-526.

⁴⁴ Bauckham (*Climax*, 250) himself argues that the trumpets are not part of the contents of the scroll.

⁴⁵ Though v. 11 mentions those who have overcome the accuser, the chapter is hardly about how the suffering witness of the church leads to the conversion of the nations.

⁴⁶ This chapter is about the allegiance of the nations given to the beast, not about the way this allegiance is transferred to the Lamb.

⁴⁷ Bauckham sees support for his view in the two harvests in 14:14-20, but vv. 15-16 could as well symbolize the deliverance of God's people before the judgment/destruction of the unrepentant humankind.

⁴⁸ Curiously, Bauckham himself agrees that this passage "*contains no hint of the conversion of the nations*" (emphasis mine), yet maintains that these chapters nevertheless "do portray the consequence of the church's witness" (*Climax*, 309). But if these chapters are not about the conversion of the nations as a result of the sacrificial witness of the church, then surely he must revise either his view of the content of the scroll, or else his claim that 11:1—22:5 is that content.

⁴⁹ If anything, this chapter suggests that a significant number ("like the sand of the sea") of people among the nations are not converted (20:8). As for 21:1—22:5, they contain references to the theme of the conversion of the nations only to the extent one is able to justify a distinction between "the nations" and the innumerable number of redeemed from every nation and people and tribe and tongue.

⁵⁰ *Climax*, 254.

⁵¹ *Climax*, ix.

⁵² The first part of the phrase, "what must take place," also occurs in 4:1, and a similar phrase, ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι, in 1:19. Since "what must take place soon" hardly describes the subject matter in chs. 2—3, these two phrases indicate that the "revelation" of 1:1 follows somewhere after 4:1. The second part of the phrase, ἐν τάχει, is not found elsewhere in Revelation.

⁵³ As Bauckham (*Climax*, 4-5) has correctly pointed out, the visions of the two cities, portrayed as women (the Prostitute in 17:1—19:10, and the Bride in 21:9—22:9), are quite obviously parallel, forming two major structural sections with similar openings and similar conclusions.

epilogue to the book as a whole.⁵⁴ But what are we to make of all these connections? Do they necessitate the conclusion that the whole book must be seen as a revelation of “what must take place soon,” or that οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι in 22:6 refers to the “words of the prophecy of this book” in v. 7?⁵⁵ Attractive though this inference may be, it is based on two faulty assumptions.

First, it is assumed that 1:1 refers to the whole book and thus forms a fitting envelope with 22:6, marking off the ἀποκάλυψις between them. Yet, this view has its problems, as already noted.⁵⁶ The second assumption occurs in ch. 22, where the phrase “the words of the prophecy of this book” is first connected to οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι in v. 6, which in turn is taken to refer to everything between 1:1 and 22:6. While it is true that John clearly understands his composition (cf. 1:11; 22:7, 9, 10, 18, 19) to contain “words of prophecy” (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18; cf. 22:19), there is nothing that compels us to understand the phrase “the words of the prophecy of this book” as a reference to οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι in 22:6. It is even less clear why we should take οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι as a reference to 1:2—22:5. If οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι refers to what has preceded 22:6, the primary referent is the preceding vision of the New Jerusalem, as most commentators acknowledge.⁵⁷ Moreover, 22:6b appears to qualify 22:6a: οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι is somehow related to what this angel has shown to John, namely, the preceding vision and perhaps also its parallel two chapters earlier. Another possibility is that the καὶ at the beginning of 22:6b is exegetical, in which case οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι does not refer to what has gone before, but to what follows.⁵⁸ Thus, in view of these two contextually more plausible options, the burden of proof must surely rest on those who claim that οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι refers either to the phrase “the words of the prophecy of this book” in v. 7 or to everything that has taken place between 1:1 and 22:6.

If we no longer assume that 1:1 and 22:6 refer to the whole book, ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει ceases to be a problem that requires solving, and the links of 22:6-9 to 19:9-10 and 1:1-3 can be re-evaluated. Commentators are correct that the latter link confirms the angel in 22:6-9 as the one referred to in 1:1, who is sent to John to show “what must take place soon,” and that by 22:6 the angel has completed his mission.⁵⁹ It is also clear that the former link draws attention to the fact that these two visions shown by an angel are parallel accounts. However, I suggest that a further purpose of the link to 17:1—19:10 is to remind the audience of the fact that the angel had shown not only the vision of the New Jerusalem, but also the vision of Babylon. In other words, the ties of 22:6-9 to 1:1-3 and 19:9-10 function (1) to establish the identity of the *angelus interpretis* as the angel mentioned in 1:1; and (2) to point to the audience that he has fulfilled his mission by showing John “what must take place soon,” namely, the two parallel visions describing the respective fates of the two cities pictured as women. As Bauckham puts it, “[t]ogether these two sections form the climax

⁵⁴ H. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 298; Caird, *Revelation*, 281-82; J. Roloff, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare, NT 18. Zürich: TVZ, 1984), 208; and P. Prigent, *L'apocalypse de Saint Jean* (éd. revue et augmentée; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2000), 77; see now also B. Longenecker, “Linked Like a Chain”: Rev 22.6-9 in Light of an Ancient Transition Technique,” *NTS* 47 (2001) 105-117.

⁵⁵ This is the course followed by Bauckham in his essay “Structure and Composition” in *The Climax of Prophecy*, 5. However, in another essay in the same volume, “The Conversion of the Nations,” he gives a different interpretation of 22:6-9. We take the latter essay to represent Bauckham’s position more accurately and have dealt with it above; the former interpretation is included here only as a representative of the line of thinking that tends to identify ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ with the book as a whole.

⁵⁶ The use of an interpretation of 1:1 in trying to establish the interpretation of 1:1 also results in circular argument.

⁵⁷ Despite their acknowledgement that in their context, “these words” refers in the first instance to the preceding vision, these commentators often hasten to add that the link to 1:1 indicates that the whole book must also be in view; see, e.g., Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 209-210; Aune, *Revelation*, 1182; and I. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 772.

⁵⁸ Καὶ at the beginning of 22:6b could also have a force similar to ὅτι; cf. BDAG, 494 (1bβ), which notes that καὶ is often used as a connective “where more discriminating use would call for other particles,” such as ὅτι, for example. This seems to be how the translators of the *NLT* have taken it.

⁵⁹ In addition, 1:3 and 22:7 both pronounce a blessing on those who read and heed John’s prophecy as found in “this book.” This supports the view that 22:6-9 belongs simultaneously to two sections, but is not relevant to our discussion (unless it is assumed that John treats ἀποκάλυψις and προφητεία as equivalent terms).

towards which the whole book has aimed: the destruction of Babylon and her replacement by the New Jerusalem.”⁶⁰ Our investigation of the first verbal clue suggests we need to go a step further: the expectation of this climax was created by John already in 1:1. This conclusion gains further support from the examination of the other two clues below.

... as “shown” to John...

The second clue given in 1:1 is the verb δείκνυμι, “to point out,” “show,” or “make known.”⁶¹ Throughout the book, in a typical prophetic fashion,⁶² John sees (ὁράω, βλέπω) and hears (ἀκούω) a number of things, but δείκνυμι occurs only eight times. In 1:1, reference is made to an angel sent by Jesus or God⁶³ to *show* John “what must take place soon.” In 4:1, a voice from heaven promises to *show* John “what must take place” next. In 17:1, an angel takes and *shows* John the great Prostitute. In 21:9, 10 and 22:1, an angel takes and *shows* John the Bride, the New Jerusalem. In 22:6, which still belongs to the vision of the New Jerusalem, the angel says God sent his angel to *show* his servants (including John; cf. v. 8) “what must take place soon.” Finally, in 22:8 John attempts to worship the angel who *showed* “these things” to him.

In analyzing these eight verses, we see that four of them refer to the angel’s showing of the two city-visions to John (17:1; 21:9, 10; 22:1). Two verses, 1:1 and 22:6, state clearly that the showing of the revelation is done by an angel. Furthermore, as argued earlier, 22:6 and 22:8 indicate that the mission of the revealing angel has been completed and that it was the two cities and their respective fates the angel had shown. The only verse where the subject of the verb δείκνυμι is not explicitly identified is 4:1, though there are various indicators that the mysterious voice probably belongs to God, as we will see below. Yet, whoever the speaker is in 4:1, the presence of the phrase ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα suggests that the preceding messages to the seven churches, describing their current conditions, was not “what must take place soon,” but that the ἀποκάλυψις lies still ahead at 4:1. Thus, the analysis of the second clue, the use of the verb δείκνυμι by John, points to the same direction as the first one: the ἀποκάλυψις concerning “what must take place soon” and shown by an angel are the two city-visions, the climax of the book.

... by an angel

The third fact known about the ἀποκάλυψις from Jesus Christ is that it was shown to John by an *angel*. Though there is a lot of angelic activity throughout the book,⁶⁴ there are only three occasions when an angel is explicitly communicating with John: (1) the angel in 10:9 tells John to take the little scroll from his hand and eat it; (2) an angel shows John the judgment of the Prostitute in 17:1—19:10; and (3) an angel shows John the exaltation of the Bride in 21:9—22:9.⁶⁵ The words of the angel in 10:9 hardly qualify as an ἀποκάλυψις, but the other two occasions, and their convergence with our earlier findings, further substantiate the view that the three clues in 1:1 are provided intentionally in order to allow the audience to pinpoint and identify the climax of John’s prophecy with ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

In addition to these explicit references, there are unidentified voices that address John. The voices speaking in 1:11 and 4:1 are explicitly said to belong to the same person, whereas it is not

⁶⁰ *Climax*, 5.

⁶¹ BDAG, 214.

⁶² Cf. 2n4 above.

⁶³ The reference in 1:1 is not clear, and later both God (22:6) and Jesus (22:16) are explicitly said to have sent an angel. If 1:1-3 was added later on the basis of the visionary experience narrated in 1:10—22:20, the ambiguity is understandable.

⁶⁴ The word ἄγγελος occurs 67 times in Revelation (NA²⁷), but there are also a number of pronominal and other references to an angel.

⁶⁵ It is difficult to identify the speakers in 22:6-21 with certainty, but it seems probable that the angel continues to speak in vv. 10-11; so, e.g., Aune, *Revelation*, 1216; Beale, *Revelation*, 1129; R. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (rev. ed.; NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 405; and Swete, *Apocalypse*, 301.

immediately clear if a different speaker is addressing John in 10:4, 8, 11. However, John has provided us with enough hints that we may identify the speaker or speakers with some confidence. As for ch. 10, the continuation of the scene in ch. 11 and the reference in v. 3 to “my witnesses,” together with the clear allusions of ch. 10 to Ezk. chs. 2—3, suggests that the voice from heaven belongs to God. The voice in 1:11 and 4:1 is often taken to be Christ’s, but that identification is unlikely for three reasons.⁶⁶ First, while in the Spirit, John hears a voice in 1:10 that causes him to turn, but the speaker is not identified. The first thing John sees is seven lampstands, and it is only in v. 13 that the “one like a son of man” appears. Second, the voice in 1:10, “like a trumpet,” is explicitly described in terms different from that of the Son of Man in v. 15, “like the sound of many waters.” Moreover, if John meant to identify the speaker in 1:11 as the Son of Man, why would he refer to the voice in 4:1 as “the first voice that I had heard speaking with me like a trumpet”?⁶⁷ Finally, at 4:1, the Son of Man is presumably still standing next to John, whereas the voice is now heard from heaven.

While it appears that the speaker is not Christ, there is some uncertainty as to whether the voice belongs to God or to an angel. For example, elsewhere in the book, both are said to instruct John to write things down (1:11; cf. 19:9; 21:5). Furthermore, though angelic guides are common in literature with visions and ascents, “showing” things in a vision can also be attributed to God (e.g., Zc. 2:3, 3:1 LXX; both with δείκνυμι). There seem to be only two considerations in favor of the voice belonging to an angel: the expectation of a revealing angel created by 1:1, and the fact that in all the other instances in Revelation where John is “shown” something, the person showing is clearly an angel, as we have seen. On the other hand, one could also argue that the speaker is God, who in 4:1 promises to show John “what must take place,” and then fulfills his promise later in the vision by sending his angel to John, just as 1:1 and 22:6 affirm. Moreover, the reference to “a loud voice like a trumpet” seems to allude to the voice Moses heard on Mt Sinai when Yahweh revealed himself (Ex. 19:16, 19-20). Yet, it is only a closer analysis of the unidentified voices in the book that decisively tips the balance in favor of God. Three points are worth noting: First, John does not seem to have any trouble speaking of angels and describing their activities and sayings throughout the book. It is difficult to imagine why he would occasionally not identify the angel as the speaker if that were the case. Second, in contrast, John never directly attributes anything to God, though the One sitting on the throne is clearly the one who runs the show and instructs various characters in the story from his command center. Thus, we have numerous divine passives,⁶⁸ and commanding voices coming from heaven (10:4, 8; 11:12; 14:13[?]; 18:4), from the temple (16:1), from the midst of the four creatures (6:6), from the throne (16:17; 19:5; 21:3), and so forth, but God is never explicitly identified as the speaker.⁶⁹ Third, this pattern only changes in 21:3-8, when the New Jerusalem is descending from heaven and God comes to dwell with his people. Yet, even here the change is gradual rather than abrupt. John first hears a loud voice from the throne (vv. 3-4), which is then for the first time in the book attributed to Him who sits on the throne (v. 5), and finally God speaks openly and directly to John (vv. 6-8). Thus, while there seems to be no reason or need to attribute the various unidentified commanding voices to angels, it makes perfect sense to attribute them to the One who sits on the throne. Therefore, any communication between John and angels is limited to the three occasions mentioned earlier.

In sum, once we no longer assume that ἀποκάλυψις in Rev. 1:1 refers to the document as a whole, an analysis of all three signposts provided in the same verse strongly suggests that 1:1 is

⁶⁶ The majority of commentators attribute the voice to Christ; Aune (*Revelation*, 282), Swete (*Apocalypse*, 13) and Roloff (*Offenbarung*, 40) understand the voice as belonging to an angel; and Beale (*Revelation*, 203, 317) seems to be unable to decide between Yahweh, an angel, and Christ.

⁶⁷ As Roloff (*Offenbarung*, 40) correctly points out, the reference to the “first voice” distinguishes it from the voice of the “one like a son of man.”

⁶⁸ E.g., 6:2, 4, 8; 7:2; 8:2-3; 9:1, 3-5, 15; 11:1-2.

⁶⁹ On an unidentified heavenly or revelatory voice as that of God’s in the OT and early Judaism, see Aune, *Revelation*, 561.

looking forward to the climax of the book, namely, the visions of the destruction of Babylon (17:1—19:10) and its replacement by the New Jerusalem (21:9—22:9).

The two scrolls revisited

If our view regarding the ἀποκάλυψις is correct, it may also help to solve the “insoluble problem of the nature and content” of the little scroll,⁷⁰ though we can only outline our proposal briefly here. First, the two scrolls are closely related, but not identical. The sealed scroll of ch. 5 is opened by the Lamb, is shown to John by an angel, and it contains ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The open scroll of ch. 10 is given for John to eat, in order that he may prophesy its contents.⁷¹ Second, the sealed scroll concerns the hitherto unrevealed outcome of the struggle between the beast and the saints,⁷² whereas the open scroll focuses on the struggle itself. Finally, if the trumpets are seen as a development of the seventh seal, and the bowls as a development of the seventh trumpet and thus as the third woe,⁷³ then the sealed scroll is open by the end of ch. 16 and its contents begin in 17:1.⁷⁴ In contrast, the contents of the little scroll primarily appear in chs. 12—14,⁷⁵ before merging with the main story line in ch. 15.⁷⁶

V. Conclusion

The book of Revelation begins with a reference to ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ given to Jesus and states that the purpose for its giving was to show John and other servants of God “what must take place soon.” It further states that this purpose was fulfilled by sending an angel to John who made the ἀποκάλυψις known. In this essay I have argued for three points regarding this ἀποκάλυψις. First, I have attempted to show that the traditional understanding of the significance of the word in its context does not do full justice to the way it is qualified with regard to its content and its manner of being communicated to John. Second, I have highlighted significant weaknesses in Richard Bauckham’s thesis that the word refers to the content of the little scroll, which discloses how the nations are converted as a result of the church’s suffering witness and which is revealed in 11:1—22:5. Finally, I have suggested that if we consider the clues provided by John in 1:1, they all point to the same direction. John is *not* revealing to his audience that they are persecuted and may have to pay for their faith by their lives. He is *not* disclosing to them that God has a throne in heaven, or that there are, and continue to be, famines, earthquakes, diseases and war. He is *not* letting them into the divine secret that the ancient serpent is the real enemy of God’s people, or that the faithful followers of Jesus are not the object of God’s judgment and wrath. All these and many other elements belong to John’s prophecy, but the real revelation lies elsewhere. John reveals to his audience what was kept hidden from Daniel, namely, the outcome of the period of the final tribulation of God’s people. “What must take place soon,” as shown to John by an angel, are the

⁷⁰ Bauckham, *Climax*, 248.

⁷¹ As Bauckham has argued, the motif of the sealed scroll is drawing primarily from Dn. 12 (ibid., 251-253), whereas the motif of digesting an open scroll comes from Ezk. 2 (ibid., 246-247).

⁷² See p. 5 above. The answer to the question, “What will be after these things?” is precisely what we have argued in this essay: the destruction of the oppressors, the vindication of the oppressed, and the full realization of God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

⁷³ Cf. *Climax*, 8-9, 15-18, 250.

⁷⁴ Though only 17:1—19:10 and 21:9—22:9 are explicitly attributed to the angel, these two visions may also serve as “bookends” to the intervening material, structurally merging or integrating the transitional section into the ἀποκάλυψις.

⁷⁵ Ch. 11 may also be included, though there is no clear structural break between ch. 10 and 11. Chs. 12—14 give a panoramic view of the conflict between the beast and the saints, aspects of which are also portrayed in ch. 11.

⁷⁶ Bauckham, *Climax*, 16; Longenecker, “Linked,” 115-116. It is also worth noticing that the fourfold formula for the nations (ibid., 326), concerning whom John is told to prophesy, appears only four more times after 10:11, three of which are in the section which reveals the contents of the little scroll (11:9; 13:7; 14:6).

judgment of the prostitute Babylon and the exaltation of the Bride, the New Jerusalem. Whatever the circumstances of John's audience, one thing is certain: the judgment of God's enemies is imminent, and therefore also the vindication of his people. This affirmation is, of course, complemented by the sevenfold repetition of Jesus' "I am coming" formula, which is qualified five times by the word "soon" (ταχύ).⁷⁷ These fundamental realities ought to both comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comforted among the recipients of John's prophetic letter.

⁷⁷ 2:5, 16; 3:11; 6:15; 22:7, 12, 20. This is yet another example of John's repetition of a phrase which never occurs in the same form twice; cf. Bauckham, *Climax*, 22-29.