

---

LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations

---

12-2006

## Review: The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse

Leo R. Percer  
*Liberty University*, lpercer@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts\\_fac\\_pubs](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs)

---

### Recommended Citation

Percer, Leo R., "Review: The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse" (2006). *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 112.  
[https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts\\_fac\\_pubs/112](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/112)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu).

Next, she rejects any form of dualism in the book of Philemon that might suggest a separation of the "spiritual" from the "social" or any sort of move that might suggest the church is only a "spiritual reality" separated from the world. "Rather," she says, "the church embodies God's vision of *the new humanity*, part of God's purpose to bring peace, wholeness, and harmony, in the form of restored relationships with nature, other humans, and God" (p. 254; italics mine).

Thompson is to be applauded for her expositional and theological presentation. She covers in a direct and succinct manner background, exegetical, and theological issues that typically arise when studying Colossians and Philemon, while at the same time stirring up a fresh cauldron of spell-binding theological thoughts for today's readers. The well-written and easy-to-read presentation will be attractive for a broad audience. Unfortunately, Thompson fails to interact with William J. Webb's work on *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001). After her discussion of the hermeneutical approaches in the nineteenth century, a brief comment on Webb's work and a signaling of where she agreed (or disagreed) would have been helpful. Nevertheless, this commentary is an excellent work and well suited for students, pastors, and other Christian leaders.

Herbert W. Bateman IV  
Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL

*The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse.* By Stephen S. Smalley. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005, xvii + 633 pp., \$52.00.

Why another book on Revelation and its symbolic world? In light of the numerous recent works on the Apocalypse, the casual reader may think that every possible angle has already been examined with regard to the last book of the NT. While it is true that there is a literal storehouse of materials in existence dealing with Revelation, the fact remains that the Apocalypse is an amazing book whose notoriety arises from an almost chaotic diversity of interpretations. Into this cacophony of voices Stephen Smalley offers a balanced treatment of Revelation as a cosmic drama. Smalley's treatment enlarges on his earlier introduction to the Apocalypse (*Thunder and Love* [Milton Keynes: Word, 1994]) and interacts with the works of other scholars from G. B. Caird through G. Beale. In fact, these works (and others) are constantly referenced throughout this new effort to explain the book of Revelation.

Smalley introduces his discussion with a brief twenty-two page treatment of his views on the origin, date, situation, character, and structure of Revelation. The introduction offers an explanation of the approach used in this new commentary, which involves a synchronic method in which the Apocalypse is treated as a unified narrative with special emphasis on its dramatic nature. The reader also finds here a view for the date of Revelation; the work came from the hand of John the beloved disciple sometime between AD 64 and 70. In fact, this commentary presents the Apocalypse as the first work of the disciple, followed by his writing (or influence on) the Epistles and the Gospel of John.

After this interesting introduction, the bulk of the work discusses Revelation as two "acts" comprising seven "scenes" sandwiched between a prologue (Rev 1:1-18) and an epilogue (Rev 22:18-21). Act 1 ("Creation, and Salvation through Judgment") comprises Rev 1:19-11:19, while Act 2 ("Salvation through Judgment, and New Creation") encompasses Rev 12:1-22:17. Simply stated, each "Act" contains several "scenes" and intervals (e.g. Act 1 contains the first three scenes and three intervals of the apocalyptic drama). There are few surprises in Smalley's discussion of structure of the book, but the in-

teresting (almost chiasmic) titles offered to each act provide the reader a foreshadowing for the content that follows. Each chapter of the commentary works with a particular section or "scene" of the Apocalypse by presenting the author's translation of the text, a textual analysis of the Greek, a discussion of the literary setting, a commentary, and a discussion of the theology of that section. The commentary also contains informative excursions scattered among the various chapters.

The most distinguishing aspect of this new commentary is the location of Revelation within the genre of Greek drama. Smalley's treatment here is not novel and in fact represents a variation of other attempts to treat Revelation as a drama. The author even references works such as E. W. Benson's *The Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1900) and J. W. Bowman's work on the dramatic structure of Revelation (*Int* 9 [1955] 436–53). Ironically missing is the more recent discussion on Revelation as drama found in the works of James L. Blevins (especially his book *Revelation as Drama* [Nashville: Broadman, 1984]). Drawing somewhat on the work of Ray Summers (*Worthy is the Lamb* [Nashville: Broadman, 1951]), Blevins offers a full-fledged treatment of Revelation as a drama intended for the Greek theatre of Ephesus. In fact, Blevins contends that the author of the Apocalypse expected the work to be acted out. Given Smalley's contentions regarding the dramatic genre of the Apocalypse, it is a bit surprising that he ignores the wealth of material to be mined from Blevins's work.

Nevertheless, Smalley's treatment of Revelation tends a bit in a different direction from his predecessors. Utilizing the elements of Greek drama as a means of analyzing the author's intent, Smalley notes that Revelation, like some forms of Greek tragedy, is meant to be heard, experienced, or even seen, not just read. In this approach he agrees somewhat with the view of David Barr (see especially Barr's treatment of Revelation as "oral enactment" in *Int* 38 [1984] 39–50 and *Int* 40 [1986] 243–56 and his work in the early 1990s on the readers/hearers of Revelation). In other words, the text of the Apocalypse is aural by nature, i.e. meant to be heard and read aloud as one would act out a role in a play. In an excursus on "Graeco-Roman Drama and Revelation" (pp. 109–12), Smalley offers some description of his understanding of the dramatic nature of Revelation as well as some discussion of ancient Jewish literary forms related to a dramatic presentation. No clear definition of the genre is given, however, and little discussion is presented regarding some of the basic elements of Greek drama and whether or not they appear in Revelation.

Smalley's synchronic approach is one of the strengths of this work. Focusing on the theology rather than the chronology of Revelation allows him to avoid some of the entanglements of eschatological debate that often monopolize interpretations of this book. Following the work of Beale, Smalley offers a modified idealist approach that views the Apocalypse as a "symbolic portrayal of the timeless conflict between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan" (p. 16). This conflict will realize its final consummation in judgment and salvation, two aspects of Revelation that are not always presented chronologically according to Smalley. In fact, he emphasizes the importance of a view of God's sovereignty and interaction in history that results ultimately in the establishment of God's kingdom. The center of this sovereign interaction is the Christ-event, and indeed Smalley locates the high point of Revelation's eschatology in the exaltation of God and the Lamb in chapters 4 and 5. According to Smalley, the Christ-event provides a fulcrum of sorts by which all of salvation history is divided. Judgment and salvation are understood as direct results of how others respond to Christ. The symbols of the Apocalypse thus are depicted as the earthly counterparts of the heavenly reality of Christ's exaltation and God's sovereignty. In an almost Platonic fashion, the heavenly events seem to inspire emulation on earth.

Revelation, then, is a testimony of God's sovereignty and the explication of his plan in Christ for the created universe. This plan is disclosed by means of a series of visions

that present the fulfillment of God's salvific purposes for the world, purposes that are consummated through judgment both in history and in eternity. Divine judgment includes an announcement of salvation, since God's judgment promises justice and deliverance for those who embrace the Lamb. Thus the book of Revelation becomes a kind of encouraging word for the embattled believers who may feel the weight of a disagreeable evil age pressing against them. This balance between judgment and salvation is a central theme according to Smalley and makes up the primary division of his structure of the book.

Smalley presents these materials in a very readable manner. Even though the subtitle of the book reminds the reader that this is a commentary on the Greek text of Revelation, the truth is that this work is easily accessible to those who may not have the necessary background in Greek. Smalley offers helpful indices and references, and his use of secondary literature provides a wealth of helpful information for interpreting the sometimes difficult passages of this work. Smalley's commentary will prove helpful to students of the Apocalypse and could be used in a variety of contexts from upper-level undergraduate courses to graduate-level studies.

Leo Percer  
Liberty Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA

*Rhetoric at the Boundaries: The Art and Theology of New Testament Chain-Link Transitions.* By Bruce W. Longenecker. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005, x + 305 pp., \$39.95.

Anyone who has worked closely with the text of the NT has encountered passages in which the sequence of thought seems odd, awkward, or disjointed. Such passages lead interpreters to propose theories of compositional interpolation, scribal emendation, or authorial ineptitude. It is precisely this sort of passage that Bruce Longenecker, Lecturer of New Testament Studies at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, argues might well reflect first-rate rhetoric rather than second-rate logic. His study of chain-link transitions in this book makes a strong case for his thesis.

Longenecker defines chain-link transition as "the overlapping of material at a text-unit boundary in order to facilitate a transition" (p. 5). It is a pattern that was present well before the NT was written and that was recognized in the work of at least two ancient rhetoricians. Longenecker has three aims for his in-depth study of the technique: "(1) to give clarity to the form, character, and function of chain-link interlock, (2) to cite instances of its occurrence within selected Pauline, Johannine, and Lukan texts, and (3) to study the consequent structural, theological, and/or historical aspects that arise from such occurrences within New Testament texts" (p. 6).

After a ten-page introduction, chapters 2–5 review the evidence from Lucian of Samosata and Quintilian, contrast chain-link transition with other rhetorical devices (e.g. inclusio, chiasmus, concentric symmetry, alternation, word chain), discuss the anatomy of chain-link transition as an inter-textual (rather than intra-textual) technique, and explore eleven examples from OT and extra-biblical sources. Chapters 6–9 then investigate fifteen NT passages in which Longenecker finds chain-link transition—five from Paul's letters, four from Revelation, two from John's Gospel, and four from the book of Acts. Chapter 10 builds on the discussion of the Acts passages to consider four issues related to the interpretation of that book. A five-page conclusion provides a helpful summary table of the NT passages studied and a collation of "some of the more significant conclusions" from the study.