

Introduction and Reading Strategy

THE ABYSS PLAYS A ROLE in the book of Revelation that is both fascinating and insufficiently researched. Although the word ἄβυσσος is used in the New Testament only two times outside of Revelation, within the book it appears seven times in four passages and is always found in close relationship with evil characters. The concept forms an important part of the universe that is presented in Revelation and it is significant that whenever evil creatures rise up from the abyss, they are described as attacking humans. For this reason, it is likely that John's audience would have found this concept to be of great interest and even concern. While some commentators do a notable job of describing the abyss as it appears in Revelation,¹ I know of no monograph or major scholarly article that has been written before now devoted to investigating the role that the abyss plays in the book of Revelation and how it might have been understood by John's audience. That is what I set out to do in this book.

John² writes at times from the perspective of the heavens and at times from the perspective of the earth. Although nowhere in John's Apocalypse³ is it apparent that he is writing from the perspective of the abyss, it is evident that the underworld plays an important role in the visions that he communicates to his audience. By focusing on the abyss, this work will, as it were, view Revelation

1. For instance, Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*; Beale, *Book of Revelation*.

2. The author is identified in the first verse as John and I will use that name in referring to him throughout this work. John does not identify himself as an apostle nor as an elder, but two common theories for his identity are that he is the apostle of Jesus described in the Gospels, or he is an elder mentioned by Papias (according to Eusebius) and of whom very little is known. John does describe himself as a prophet in this book, which could fit with either of the theories just mentioned or could mean that he was a prophet who was neither the apostle nor the elder. Although there are assumptions about him that I explain and defend in other parts of this introduction, I don't believe it is necessary, for the purposes of this book, to enter into the debate over the identity of this particular person.

3. I use both "Revelation" as well as "John's Apocalypse" to refer to this book. The terms are used interchangeably.

from below in an attempt to see what new insights this perspective might lend to the reader. It will be demonstrated that John carefully crafts his description of the abyss and its inhabitants in such a way that they play a key role in the development of his message. This message has a great deal to say about evil creatures, that is, those that oppose God as He is revealed in this book, and it has a great deal to say about how God does and will respond to evil in the future.

Reading Strategy

In the study that follows, various strategies will be employed and assumptions will be made. It will be useful at this point to state what these are and to give a rationale for them.

Prophecy, Epistle, and Apocalypse

I agree with the majority of commentators who find that the book of Revelation has characteristics of a prophecy, a circular letter, and an apocalypse. All three of these are taken into account as this study develops. The prophetic aspects demonstrate that John expected his message to be heard, believed, and obeyed because it came ultimately from God (Rev 1:1–3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19).⁴ This apocalypse has much in common with the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Not only does John allude to their prophecies constantly, but he also writes as if he were one of them or as if his apocalypse were the conclusion of their work.⁵ Bauckham, in his aptly named book, *Climax of Prophecy*, states convincingly that John conceived of his writings as being “equivalent to and surpassing the written works of the Old Testament prophets.”⁶

The epistolary aspects of Revelation give important information concerning the original audience and the social setting. For instance, Rev 2–3 contains personalized messages for the churches that shed light on the difficulties and temptations that John’s audience was facing. These seven personalized messages also give insight into the purposes of the book. They reveal what is important to Jesus and what issues must be addressed. By means of Jesus’s affirmations, admonitions, and threats, John introduces many of the book’s themes, gives clues as to

4. Grant Osborne writes that “the value of recognizing the prophetic nature of the book underscores that John is not merely producing his own epistle . . . but is the prophetic channel of a message directly from God and Christ” (*Revelation*, 13). Jonathan Knight, in his discussion of the prophetic character of John’s writing, says that John’s claim to be writing prophecy and his process of interpretation imply “that John discloses the authentic meaning of what the prophets said” (*Revelation*, 153).

5. Cf. Rev 22:7, 10, 18–19.

6. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 89. See also pp. 29–30 in the same book.

his purpose in writing, and aids the reader in the interpretation of symbols and imagery in other parts of the work.⁷ The epistolary aspects also help the reader or listener to understand the pastoral purposes that John had in writing the book.

Finally, the apocalyptic aspects raise expectations that the author is attempting to reveal a transcendent, otherworldly reality⁸ and that symbolism will play an important role in the communication of the message. Apocalypses normally arise from a context of crisis or perceived crisis. In the case of perceived crises, the readers actually discover that the crisis exists by means of reading the apocalypse itself in which the author attempts to portray reality from a certain perspective.⁹ The apocalypse discloses a transcendent reality in which the problem can be emphasized by the author and clearly seen by the reader.¹⁰ Regardless of whether John's audience was suffering under overt persecution from Rome or not, John tries to impress on them the critical nature of their situation that is caused by the pressure and the temptation to conform to the idolatrous practices of their neighbors. The apocalyptic aspects of the book allow the audience to sense the seriousness of the crisis that John felt was very real.

The Assumed Audience

As stated above, the purpose of this book is to understand how the abyss and related concepts function in John's Apocalypse. More specifically, this work demonstrates how John's audience would have likely understood and received what was communicated by means of these concepts. Because of this, the focus will normally be on how John's readers would have understood the text rather than on what John meant.

Garrow has helpfully outlined three aspects of context that he considers as he attempts to arrive at the assumed reader's understanding of the text of Revelation.¹¹ These aspects will be considered and examined in this work as well.

Co-text

The first aspect is the co-text that refers to the literary context in which the specific passage is found. In this work I consider the co-text in a variety of ways. For instance, the different abyss passages are compared and contrasted throughout the book and the immediate literary context of each of these passages is

7. See Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 227, 223–24. Beale asserts that the seven messages are “the literary microcosm of the entire book’s macrocosmic structure.”

8. Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 9.

9. Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 28.

10. See Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 32.

11. Garrow, *Revelation*, 1–4.

mined for insights. Also, the co-text will be studied intently, for example, in Chapter 6 which identifies and evaluates other concepts in Revelation that are used in similar ways to the abyss.

Theater of Reception

The second aspect of context is the theater of reception, which refers to the situation in which the audience was most likely to have heard the text. In the case of Revelation, it is very likely that the audience listened to the text as it was read to them (Rev 1:3) in the setting of a gathered congregation (Rev 1:11; 2:1–3:22).¹² Although not as certain as the point just mentioned, it is likely that John was part of a prophetic community to which he entrusted this text. The Christian prophets are mentioned in many passages including Rev 11:18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6, 9.¹³ The idea that John probably entrusted the book to them is seen most clearly in Rev 22:16.¹⁴ In attempting to understand the significance of this dynamic, Hill, Aune, and Bauckham have argued that it is likely that the prophets would have been a great help to the congregation in understanding the many allusions and symbols in the text. Hill writes that “it is probably safe to assume that having become sharers in the knowledge of the divine revelation through John, they would mediate this to others: they would teach and relate that which they had learned.”¹⁵ Bauckham writes, “If the prophets were intended to mediate John’s prophecy to the churches, then we might expect that they would do more than read it aloud. They would also have explained and expounded it.”¹⁶ Not only would they have been well versed in the Old Testament to which the majority of allusions refer, but they probably would also have benefitted from previous meetings with John as he explained his understanding of visions that he had received.¹⁷ For these reasons, as I attempt to discern what the audience would have understood from what John says about the abyss, I will assume that the audience would have been aided by the prophets in their understanding of John’s symbols and allusions to the Old Testament and other literature.

12. See *ibid.*, 4, and the authors he cites.

13. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 84.

14. David Hill writes, “In xxii. 16 the ‘you’ to whom the contents of the book are attested form a group to mediate the message to the churches, and are therefore best understood as Christian prophets in the communities” (“Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation,” 413). D. E. Aune attempts to strengthen Hill’s position regarding 22:16 and gives a list of scholars who agree that this verse is referring to Christian prophets (“Prophetic Circle of John,” 104). It is also possible that the word “servants” in Rev 1:1 and 22:6 refers to Christian prophets as well, although this is not as certain. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 85–86.

15. Hill, “Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation,” 417.

16. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 86.

17. *Ibid.*, 89–90.

Historical Context

Garrow's third aspect is the historical context in which the audience found itself. The assumed date for the writing of Revelation adopted in this book is that of the majority of scholars; that is, it probably was written during the reign of Domitian,¹⁸ although most of the affirmations and conclusions of my book would not be altered greatly if the date were earlier (any time after the death of Nero) or some decades later. This is because during the last half of the first century, the fundamental character of Roman imperial cosmology and eschatology was relatively stable.¹⁹ The social situation presented in John's Apocalypse is that of a group of churches in Asia Minor that lived in a political context dominated by Rome and experienced pressure to relax their loyalty to God.²⁰ It should be noted that most of this pressure and oppression appears to be local in origin rather than coming from Rome in a systematized persecution. Bauckham demonstrates this well in personal correspondence with Ben Witherington:

On Domitian and persecution, I would say the evidence for emphasis on the emperor cult is more important than evidence of persecution. But one should remember that the impetus for the emperor cult largely did not come from the centre but spontaneously from the local elites in the cities of the east, and Revelation in fact accurately reflects that in the figure of the second beast/false prophet. Nor was persecution an initiative from the centre, but depended much on local dynamics, as is clear from Pliny (Pliny's actions are very dependent on locals actually denouncing Christians—hence in Rev. the fury against the Jews who are in effect betraying Christians to the authorities). In other words, I would dissociate myself from the many older scholars who thought there was a widespread, centrally organized persecution under Domitian. That the historical situation doesn't support that seems to me to concur with Revelation.²¹

18. For a good review of the options and views, see Koester, *Revelation*, 71–79. He defends the view that the book was probably written during the final decades of the first century. Steven Friesen agrees (*Imperial Cults*, 150).

19. *Ibid.*, 151.

20. This is expressed well in Thomas B. Slater's article on the social setting of Revelation: "I propose a socio-religious setting for the Revelation of John in which Asian Christians experienced local harassment, ridicule, discrimination and oppression in the early 90s for their religious beliefs and customs" ("On the Social Setting," 254). Several years later, Slater changed his views regarding the dating of Revelation and opted instead for a date of composition in the year 69 ("Dating the Apocalypse," 258); however, this did not change his view of what the socioreligious setting was during the writing of the book (254).

21. Cited in Witherington, *Revelation*, 8.

Baukham explores this topic in one of his books and suggests that although the universal enforcement of the mark of the beast (Rev 13:15–17) probably did not represent contemporary reality, John was probably anticipating how this pressure to conform might develop.²² It wasn't a pressure exerted directly from imperial Rome, but rather from the second beast, the first beast's "local propagandists."²³ Price describes local festivals in which residents were expected to perform sacrifices in front of their houses as the religious procession passed by²⁴ and he presents evidence demonstrating that religious observance of various deities was expected to be observed by a number of members of society, not just the priests and priestesses.²⁵ "While Domitian may not have demanded worship, or even expected it, Asian pagans themselves promoted the imperial cult and would have been adamant concerning its observance."²⁶ By the time of the writing of Revelation, the imperial cult had already been well established in Asia Minor for several generations and not only was serving in the imperial priesthood a source of honor, but the festivals associated with the cult were very popular.²⁷ The pressure that John's churches were facing was probably closely related to these civic expectations and the Christians' lack of participation in these festivals would have been conspicuous.²⁸

Although the greatest pressure that Christians faced was most likely placed on them by local authorities and even neighbors, Rome would still have been viewed as the indirect cause and motivator of this pressure. The desire to be recognized by Rome as *neokoros*²⁹ and so to lord it over other competing cities was strong in the cities of Asia Minor.³⁰ After briefly identifying the material that deals with the imperial cult in Revelation, Friesen concludes that "the worship of the emperors is not the only important theme in these chapters, but it is the defining activity that separates those who are condemned from those who belong to God. Imperial worship is contrasted to the worship of the creator. Imperial cults are portrayed as a deception, a blasphemous lie, one crucial aspect

22. Baukham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 447.

23. Ibid.

24. Price, *Rituals and Power*, 112.

25. Ibid., 111–12.

26. Slater, "On the Social Setting," 238. See also Slater, "Dating the Apocalypse," 254. Bruce Winter emphasizes that in promoting the imperial cult, officials in Asia Minor rather obviously were trying to curry favor with the emperor in order to gain benefits for their city or region (*Divine Honors for the Caesars*, 55–60).

27. Koester, *Revelation*, 94.

28. Winter, *Divine Honors for the Caesars*, 25–26; Baukham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 447.

29. The imperial *neokoros* needed to be granted by Rome and consisted in the privilege of being permitted to construct a provincial temple of the imperial cult. See Biguzzi, "Ephesus," 55.

30. Biguzzi describes the necessity that Ephesus felt to continually pressure the governor of the province and even the senate and emperor so that they could gain ascendancy over Pergamum and Smyrna (ibid., 282).

in the Roman practice of dominating and exploiting the world. As such, imperial cults are presented as a crucial aspect of demonic Roman hegemony.”³¹

Koester classifies the issues affecting John’s audience into three areas: conflict with outsiders, assimilation and Greco-Roman religious practices, and complacency and wealth.³² As seen from the passages addressing the seven churches, John’s audience consisted of those who had remained faithful as well as those who had not. Whereas those who were faithful and felt threatened might have been encouraged by the promise of divine victory over the beast, those who were complacent would have felt challenged to question their perspectives and renew their commitment to God.³³ It will be assumed in this work that John’s purpose was not only to encourage the faithful but to convict the complacent among the churches.

Narrative Structure

In keeping with a standard definition of apocalyptic,³⁴ the assumption in this work is that the book of Revelation is a narrative that, despite its frequent recapitulations and cyclical visions, moves forward in communicating its message. Koester helpfully describes the structure of the book in the following way: “The combination of elements can best be pictured as a forward-moving spiral, which repeatedly leads readers through scenes of threat and back to the presence of God, even as the broad storyline moves forward to the new creation. Vision cycles both overlap and progress, with individual sections tracing the movement from conflict to victory that shapes the book as a whole.”³⁵

In this book, I investigate the roles that the abyss and related concepts play in this narrative. In addition, there is a focus on the roles of those characters that are intimately associated with the abyss and the attempt is made to describe how John’s audience would have understood the message that he communicates by means of these characters and concepts.

31. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 147.

32. Koester, *Revelation*, 96–103.

33. *Ibid.*, 103. Ian Paul speaks of the message of Revelation being relevant to the first readers in different ways, “depending on whether they needed comfort in the face of persecution or challenge in the light of their own complacency” (“Book of Revelation,” 146).

34. Collins mentions the narrative framework of apocalypses in his famous definition: “An apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (“Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 9).

35. Koester, *Revelation*, 115. See also Schüssler Fiorenza, “Composition and Structure.” See especially pp. 360 and 366, where she describes the forward movement of the book.

Contemporary Historical Criticism

The reading strategy employed in this work can be described as contemporary historical in the sense that the interpretations will be informed and guided by what is known of the historical context of Christians in Asia Minor in the latter part of the first century.³⁶ It also assumes that the author was writing for his contemporary audience³⁷ and that he wished to aid them in gaining perspective on their current situation. D. A. deSilva writes that “One of the primary vehicles of an apocalypse’s persuasive power is its ability to set everyday realities within a broader context that provides an interpretive lens for those experiences.”³⁸ An excellent example of this is seen in Chapter 4 as John’s audience is allowed a glimpse of God’s throne room that exudes a sense of His sovereignty and control; a needed corrective to the seeming invincibility of the Roman Empire and its hold over its subjects. The interpretive lens also functions well in chs. 19–22 as the rider defeats the beasts, the dragon is incarcerated, and the new Jerusalem descends to earth. The message that God will be victorious in the end is evident in the book but runs counter to the pessimism that John’s audience might have developed as a result of the apparent victory of Satan and evil in their everyday experience.³⁹ But what part does the abyss play in providing a lens for everyday experiences? How would John’s audience have understood and been helped by his writing concerning the abyss and the evil creatures who emerge from it? As these questions are answered, the assumption that John was attempting to instruct, encourage, and admonish the seven churches will provide a control for the interpretive process.⁴⁰

The Role of the Old Testament and Other Literature

As evidenced throughout Revelation, the author knew the Old Testament well and alluded to it and other Jewish literature a great deal.⁴¹ Because of the importance of this background material and the value of understanding the antecedents

36. See deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 6–14; Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 125–36; Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 4–6.

37. That is, to seven named churches in Asia Minor in the second half of the first century. Although a few authors date the book to the second century, the vast majority locate it in the first.

38. DeSilva, “Fourth Ezra,” 124.

39. See Rev 2:6, 9–10, 13–15, 20, 24; 3:9, 17–18.

40. This point will be explored later in this chapter.

41. For an excellent summary of a debate regarding the way that John uses the Old Testament, see Paulien, “Dreading the Whirlwind.” See also the works by Moyise and Beale that he cites, especially Beale, *John’s Use*; Moyise, *Old Testament*. See also Moyise, “Authorial Intention”; Beale, “Response to Jon Paulien,” 27–34. Moyise wrote a longer article regarding this subject the following year (“Does the Author of Revelation Misappropriate?”).

of the abyss, two chapters will be devoted to a survey of the use of the abyss and related concepts in the Old Testament, Greco-Roman literature, Second Temple Jewish literature, and the New Testament. As information is compiled regarding the way that authors before, and contemporary with, John wrote about these concepts, it will become easier to understand how John and his audience understood what the abyss normally meant and how it was used. It must be kept in view however, that John demonstrates repeatedly in this work that he felt free to use traditions creatively in the service of the message that he wanted to communicate.

Conformity to Early Christian Teaching

Though some source-critical theories imagine that there were various stages of development in the text of Revelation that now appears in the New Testament,⁴² in this study I focus on the final form of the text. This final form is Christian in that it exhibits a high Christology (Rev 5:8–13),⁴³ appears to speak of Christ's death and resurrection (5:5–6, 9, 12; 7:9, 14, 17; 13:8; 17:14; 22:3), and assumes his ascension (12:5; 19:11) and his parousia (3:11; 19:11–16; 22:7, 12, 20). In these ways it demonstrates consistency with early apostolic proclamation as seen in passages such as Rom 1:1–4, 1 Cor 15:1–4, and Phil 2:5–11. On this evidence is based the assumption that John's message was consistent with early Christian teaching regarding Jesus's identity, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. This then will serve as a control for the interpretations in this work; that is, that the interpretation of symbols in John's Apocalypse will not fall outside of what is commonly understood about early apostolic teaching regarding God and Christ.

The Interpretation of Figurative Texts

The genre that an author chooses serves in some respects as instructions of how he or she wishes the audience to read the text. Legal texts, whether modern or ancient, have the characteristic of using language that is exact and precise. The author of a legal text normally wants to reduce the possible interpretations of that which is written. Poetry, on the other hand, is characterized by a type of writing that is figurative and symbolic and therefore lends itself to a variety of interpretations. In this respect, most if not all of the texts examined in this book are closer to poetry than to legal texts because they are characterized by

42. For an overview of the subject, see Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, cv–cxxxiv. See pp. cxx–cxxxiv for an explanation of his theory regarding the proposed “first edition” and “second edition.”

43. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 118–49, esp. 118–20, 136–40, 148–49.

figurative language. In examining these passages, care will be taken to interpret them in ways that are consistent with widely recognized characteristics of their genre. For instance, parallelism in Hebrew poetry is often helpful in ascertaining the sense of words because a reader can compare one word that is not understood clearly with a more easily understood word used in a parallel line. This will prove to be important in understanding the sense of the abyss, sea, and the dragon in poetical and prophetic Old Testament texts.

The understanding that one has of the literary genre of Revelation greatly affects one's interpretation of this work. Especially significant are issues of narrative framework, symbolic language, and the genre elements of prophecy, epistle, and apocalyptic that are discussed in this introduction. In describing the interpretation of the specific genre of John's Apocalypse, Beale argues convincingly from an exegesis of Rev 1:1 that the most natural way to interpret this book is with a nonliteral interpretive method.⁴⁴ Although some readers feel compelled to interpret in a literal fashion unless there are strong indications that it should be interpreted figuratively, Beale rightly says that for the book of Revelation, this rule should be turned on its head.⁴⁵ Numbers too should normally be understood to be symbolic and to carry connotations that extend beyond the simple numerical value.⁴⁶

The Symbolic and Polyvalent Nature of John's Language

In considering the process of interpreting John's many symbols, it is helpful to consider the clues that he gave in the book itself. For instance, he says through the mouth of Jesus that the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Rev 1:20). This provides solid evidence that the readers are expected to decode the visions and symbols contained in this apocalypse. If this were the only clue, the reader could feel justified in assuming that there is always a simple one-to-one correspondence between the visionary elements and the literal things that they symbolize. However, the polyvalent nature of John's Apocalypse is evident in that there exist many examples of symbols that refer to several different things even in the same context. Chapter 17 says that the seven heads of the beast are seven mountains (17:9) and are also seven kings (17:10). Adding to the complexity of the interpretation is that the seven mountains appear to most commentators to be an obvious allusion to Rome, which was said to sit on seven hills. Even more complexity is

44. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 53.

45. *Ibid.*

46. See Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 10–12; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 29–37.

added by means of the number seven, which is generally understood to represent completeness.

A closely related characteristic of John's writing is that symbols often allude to two or more passages of the Old Testament or other earlier works. For instance, the four creatures around the throne (Rev 4:6–8) are described in ways that allude to both the seraphim of Isa 6⁴⁷ as well as the four cherubim supporting the chariot of God in Ezek 1 and 10.⁴⁸ The fact that John's symbols are not only polyvalent but also allude to multiple Old Testament passages gives them potential to powerfully create in the reader or hearer of Revelation new understandings of God, evil, and the reality of military and religious power.

As I attempt to comprehend what John's audience would have understood, especially with regard to the abyss and related concepts, I will assume that John intended that his audience would understand that he was using figurative language and symbols and that they would have attempted to interpret this language and these symbols. Their interpretations would be based on the clues provided by the author, the shared understanding of the social and political context,⁴⁹ the knowledge that some of them possessed of the Old Testament and other relevant literature,⁵⁰ and the help of the prophets as explained above.

The Visions of John

The content of the book of Revelation is presented as the recording of a vision that he received on the island of Patmos. While it is reasonable to accept that a vision or multiple visions are the basis for this book, the symbolism presented throughout is so intricate, the allusions to the Old Testament are so carefully described, and the structure is so complex that one is led naturally to the conclusion that a great deal of thought went into the presentation of this apocalypse.⁵¹ Bauckham's reconstruction of the creation of this work is plausible and appears

47. They have six wings and sing "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty."

48. They resemble a lion, ox, man, and flying eagle. They are filled with eyes.

49. Beale commented in 1999 that "Though the OT, Judaism, NT, and immediate context of the Apocalypse provide the primary background for its imagery, much work remains to be done on surveying the various sources of the Greco-Roman world to broaden the multiple ideas associated with many of the images in the Apocalypse" (*Book of Revelation*, 58). Scholars continue to accomplish this work and many of their insights will be reflected in this study.

50. Examples of relevant literature will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Part of the relevant literature consisted of texts that are defined today as apocalyptic. If these works, such as Daniel and some of the Enochic texts were known to John's audience, they would have provided examples and precedents that would have helped to guide John's audience in the interpretation of John's Apocalypse. See Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," 5–10.

51. Bauckham argues that John's statement that he was ἐν πνεύματι "must certainly be taken as indicating that real visionary experience underlies the Apocalypse but should not be taken to mean that the book is a simple transcript of that experience, as someone might recount their dreams

likely. He suggests that John composed the book of Revelation on the island of Patmos where he could produce a work much more elaborate and definitive than a simple verbal recounting of a vision. Bauckham adds that John incorporated revelations that he had received over a long prophetic ministry and combined them to create a unified whole.⁵²

Conclusion

Although the abyss might appear to some people to be an obscure topic with little importance, this book will show that its use in Revelation has profound implications for John's message regarding evil and God's response to it. In order to understand the many facets of John's presentation, however, it is vital to understand the situation of John's audience, the characteristics of John's writing, and the background to the concept. Having examined the first two of these issues, I will now explore the background to the abyss as seen in the Old Testament and other literature.

on a psychiatrist's couch" (*Climax of Prophecy*, 158–59). Ian Paul speaks of "a text that has been composed with extreme care over some time" (*Revelation*, 24).

52. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 89.