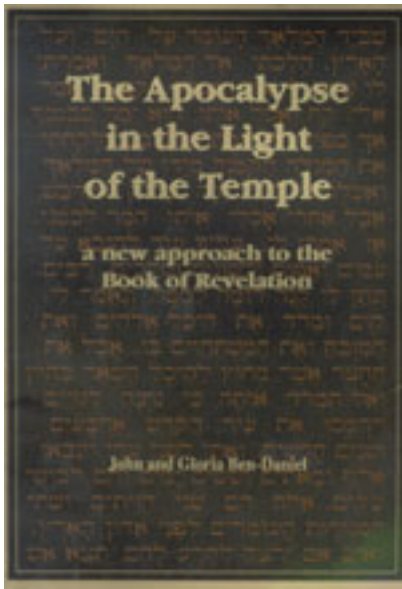


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Ben-Daniel, John, and Gloria Ben-Daniel

The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation

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Did temple rituals find resonance in the Apocalypse of John? Will extracting a liturgical outline shed light on the meaning and purpose of the Apocalypse? By interpreting the Apocalypse holistically “in light of the Temple” (ix), John and Gloria Ben-Daniel share with their readers the outcome of a ten-year exegetical journey through the Revelation of John. Despite evidencing strong Catholic persuasion—stressing the role of the Magisterium—the book and the approach therein are accessible to people across denominational and educational spectra.

With the theme of the temple as the “organizing principle of the text as a whole” (4), the Ben-Daniels postulate that the background to the Apocalypse is not the Roman persecution of the early Christians but the destruction of the Second Temple and the new rabbinical Judaism that developed at Jamnia. The Apocalypse is understood as “the divine response to the destruction of the Temple” (4). Therefore, since the impact of the temple destruction was colossal, the Ben-Daniels use the religious traditions as an interpretive matrix concerning the ancient temple in Jerusalem.

By way of introduction, the Ben-Daniels pose a semantic distinction between *naos* (used to refer to the sanctuary of the temple) and *ieron* (the temple as a complex). This linguistic distinction drives the bias of the book: “the Temple that was revealed to John

and is described in the Apocalypse is the same heavenly Dwelling that was revealed to Moses with the purpose of building the Tent or Dwelling of God on earth” (10). Thus based on linguistic data, temple liturgy used during the Second Temple period is applied to and recognized in the Apocalypse.

The methodology employed in the book is a systematic tracing of references or allusions to the temple throughout the Apocalypse, substituted by other primary sources, in particular the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, when such information was unavailable. The book is divided into three parts: (1) “The Heavenly Liturgy,” (2) “The Role of Prophet and Prophecy,” and (3) “The Fulfillment of the Mystery of God.” In the first part the emphasis is on defining and identifying activities pertaining to temple liturgy in the Apocalypse. Spatial and ritualistic components are presented and discussed in nine chapters, followed by a summary, a conclusion, and implications. In the second part the focus is on the role of John, the prophet, the commandments to prophesy, as well as the location of prophecy. This part is also presented in nine chapters. The third part of the book is concerned with the content of the prophecy introduced in part 2. In the twelve chapters presented in this part of the book the climax of the heavenly liturgy and the completion of the new temple are presented as the main theme of the Apocalypse and hence its interpretive center. A proposed literary structure of the Apocalypse is provided in the form of an appendix.

In order to define liturgical activities in the temple, which later were identified in the Apocalypse, the Ben-Daniels use the first eight chapters to set the stage for the temple attributes. The presence, presentation, and location of the sanctuary in the Apocalypse are linked to temple attributes and Jewish holidays during the Second Temple era. Specifically, the authors’ interpretive axis revolves around extracting elements representative of the liturgy for the Day of Atonement throughout the unfolding text of the Apocalypse. This liturgy, in turn, was propelled by the central role of the resurrected Christ. The Ben-Daniels conclude, “Being the principal activity in the heavenly Sanctuary, the liturgy not only provides a framework that embraces the entire sequence of visions in the Apocalypse, but also determines the course of events on earth” (73). Proposed implications of this interpretation include recognizing a strict chronological order of the liturgy in the text and a culmination of this liturgy occurring at the end of time. Implications for the millennial question follow an Augustinian approach in which the nature of the millennium is likened to the character of the Day of Atonement, which is then linked to the concept of Sabbath rest. According to the Ben-Daniels, “The fact that the saints work for salvation on earth and take their rest in heaven guides the authentic interpretation of the millennial reign of Christ with his saints” (78).

Next the Ben-Daniels tackle select controversial and veiled passages in the Apocalypse. Among these veiled passages is the command to measure the temple. This command is identified as a way of expressing the manner and, more specifically, order of prophecy. The content of and time frame related to the prophecy finds its anchor in the little scroll that is identified with the scroll of life. The Apocalypse at this point moves toward the completion of the prophecy in the new temple of God. This new temple is located on Mount Zion. Assembled on Mount Zion, the community of the 144,000 represents the city of God.

The Ben-Daniels conclude that the salvation of humanity is being celebrated in the heavenly sanctuary in a liturgy of reconciliation. These who “are reconciled while the liturgy is in progress come to represent the new Temple that is being built on earth, whose Sanctuary is the heavenly Sanctuary” (212). Employing structuralism much in line with Schüssler Fiorenza’s work, the authors identify the new temple with the church. Rather than adhering to a preterist interpretation of Revelation, the Ben-Daniels deduce that the greater part of the text is “a prophecy for the Church at the end of her historical mission” (213).

Viewing Revelation solely in light of the temple is both refreshingly singular in focus as well as hermeneutically inconsistent. Indeed, most scholars would concur with the opinion that the temple plays an important role in the book of Revelation. However, while the Ben-Daniels present the theme of the temple as the organizing principle of the text, information concerning the ancient temple is applied only to proposed relevant parts of the Apocalypse.

The Ben-Daniels focus on the liturgical character of the inaugurating vision of God’s sanctuary. Individual elements and artifacts of temple worship are identified in the text. However, when identifying the one like a son of man with the high priest in temple worship, the Ben-Daniels exhibit circular thinking. The robe and bare feet, for example, identify the son of man as the high priest, whereas the lack of ornaments for a priest affirms this identification. The latter is explained away by the dual role of Christ as the high priest and the sacrifice. Dual identification inconsistencies also are apparent in the comparison between the martyrs before the throne and the Levites in the temple. The Ben-Daniels consider the martyrs analogous to the Levites. However, the martyrs are also identified as offerings. Therefore, circular thinking and dual identifications at times slow down the flow and the strength of the argument.

The liturgy for the Day of Atonement is discussed in detail and related to the Apocalypse. Again, symbolic and interpretive parallels are used to substantiate the comparisons, whereas the lack of parallel between the liturgies is relegated to the singular sacrifice of

Christ. Also, in part 1 the Ben-Daniels identify various elements of temple liturgy. Nevertheless, whereas they claim that “the liturgy revealed in the Apocalypse follows a very precise chronological order” (75), numerous diverging aspects are explained as being presented in reverse order or different in foci. Reverse orders of chronological parts and inconsistent identifications are in turn used to support the book’s thesis, again indicating circular reasoning.

The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple contains innovative elements worthy of further pursuit. The Ben-Daniels provide valuable background research that may open up new avenues of interpreting Revelation. Students of the Apocalypse will want to familiarize themselves with this work.