

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50537-7 - The Text of Revelation a Revised Theory

John Oman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PART I

THE TEXT & ITS REARRANGEMENT

I

SECTIONS AND GLOSSES

FOUR years ago I published a work on the Book of Revelation in which I rearranged the text on the basis of a theory that it consists of twenty-seven exactly equal sections. These were held to be 33 lines of Gebhardt's edition of the New Testament.

While attempting to arrange part of the text, on the view that the two women were parallel ideas—one representing the Divine Rule and the other the World-Rule—I noticed that I was moving a little over a page of the Gebhardt text I was using, or multiples of it, each time. When this was applied to the whole book, it wrought out with unexpected precision, except in three cases. Two passages, when put together, made exactly two sections (XXIII–XXIV); but the other, which is now § XI, was different from the rest, and the solution offered always appeared unsatisfactory.

But the working out of this theory had an obvious weakness. While the length of the sections was rigidly objective, the glosses were subjective, and it was possible to suppose that I had selected them to suit the length of the sections. Nor, as now appears when there is also an objective standard of glosses, was this suspicion without justification.

Sometime after I had turned to quite different work, and seemed to have dismissed the whole matter from my mind, it occurred to me that a great many of the passages I had treated as glosses were doublets, and that the correct test of all glosses might be that they are repetitions.

That anything so obvious should have escaped attention from the first is a mysterious, but common experience. Most people, who have concentrated attention upon work involving much detail, have found, on relaxing it, defects which it seems inconceivable that they should have overlooked.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50537-7 - The Text of Revelation a Revised Theory

John Oman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 SECTIONS AND GLOSSES

But there was also a reason. I started with the ordinary idea of a gloss, as of the nature of a comment. Thus, in the Messages to the Churches, I said that the omission of all the repetitions of “He that hath an ear”, except the last, gave a more accurate result. Yet I was so much determined by the idea of a gloss as a comment that I left the first, though it was absurd to speak of what the Spirit says to the Churches when only one Church had been mentioned, and omitted the passage about the “seven stars that are the angels of the seven churches”. As I went on, it became plain that the author does thus comment on his visions, and I should have seen, therefore, that this comment should stand, and instead all the doublets go out.

The new test has discovered other errors in my previous treatment, and I have no wish to explain them away. The door opens with two keys and I had only one in hand at the time. All the same, much was done which was right.

Here, however, I wish to insist only on one point. This is that the division of the book into sections and the standard of them as exactly 33 lines of Gebhardt’s text is only confirmed by this new test of glosses. This length, it will be seen, works with more rigid accuracy than before, while the sections are as they were first determined. This was done without any consideration of glosses; and they were published without any thought of the gloss as a doublet. Nor could their boundaries well be altered, because they are separated by quite decisive breaks.

In any case the divisions were made without thought of doublets, and then the removal of all free doublets—that is doublets not guaranteed by the context—makes them, with quite astonishing precision, of equal length. Surely this must be more than an accident.

A common way of criticising work of this kind is to fasten on what seems weakest, and then to dismiss the whole as equally unconvincing. One critic dismissed the previous book as the work of a twentieth-century philosopher, who could have no understanding of the mind of a first-century Christian. In any case, the criticism could only apply to the commentary, which might be all wrong, yet the re-arrangement of the text right. In the order of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50537-7 - The Text of Revelation a Revised Theory

John Oman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

SECTIONS AND GLOSSES 3

probability interpretation must necessarily be last: and, till the other probabilities are settled, it had perhaps better not appear at all, as in the present work.

Again attacks were made on special points, but obviously a great many points might be wrong, yet the general theory be right. Thus the broken pages might not be made up correctly or the order not be rightly determined, and yet the theory of the book as divided into equal sections be true.

An argument of this kind is not all as weak as its weakest link, but there is an order of probability in the various points, the higher probabilities not being affected by the lower. In this case, the question which is first and on which all the others depend, but which does not depend on them, is the length of the sections and the nature of the glosses.

The test of glosses now is that they are all doublets, that is to say repetitions by the original editor from his author. And what is more, so far as I have been able to detect them, the glosses include every doublet in the whole book not guaranteed by its context: and that means almost every exact doublet in the book.

With respect to the length of the sections, it may be asked why Gebhardt's text should be made the standard.

The first reason is that it happened to be the text by which this division into equal sections was first noticed: and this was the easier that the length happens to end exactly with the line. This may be accounted for by some general impression the editor had gathered from the study of MSS., or it may be a pure accident. But, if it is an accident, it is a very convenient one, as it is much easier to count exact lines than if it were always necessary to reckon with a fraction.

The lines have been approximately reproduced in the text which follows and the sections accurately: and this affords the reader a test for controlling the result, so as to be sure that the length was determined beforehand, and never depends on the present printing.

Still more important is the fact that no edition I have come across seems to be spaced so accurately. Almost any closely printed text gives the same result, but not with the same precision: and where there is difference, the comparison always seems to be in favour of Gebhardt's. Von

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50537-7 - The Text of Revelation a Revised Theory

John Oman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 SECTIONS AND GLOSSES

Soden's text, however, runs almost exactly parallel. But it is $26\frac{1}{2}$ lines, which is less easy to calculate. The case I have discovered most different is where Von Soden has printed the number of the beast in full, where it is to that extent longer than the usual length, which confirms Gebhardt's view that the letters are the original. Tischendorf's text also works fairly accurately with $33\frac{1}{2}$ lines.

The original, of course, had no spaces between the words, but the spaces seem to average out more accurately than the average of the width of letters, which in Greek was considerable, some letters being more than twice the width of others. There are two reasons why Von Soden's text and Gebhardt's are more reliable than the others. Both are printed in a type which corresponds fairly exactly to the breadth of the Greek uncial, and in a long line, which makes the adjustment at the end less frequent. They are also closely printed. Not only is this more like a closely written Greek MS., but, the wider the spacing, the less obvious any slight difference in it is; and this over a whole section might make an appreciable difference.

Supposing the MS. were written on a page somewhat like an Aramaic palimpsest in our library, which was bequeathed to us by the late Mrs Lewis, each line of which is complete and without any breaks, and written with beautiful regularity, a well printed text might be a much more accurate reproduction than any MS. of the New Testament we now possess.

The earliest we have are 250 years later than John wrote; they are large volumes written for public use; they are written in columns with short lines; and, finally, they have contractions, which are probably a later device.

But the standard is also tested by the result, as well as the result by the standard. In more than half the sections at least there is no question about the glosses, as they are all the doublets. When they are removed, the Gebhardt text is always exact, which could hardly be, unless it were an exact measure. But how this is a test of the standard of length will be more easily understood after we have seen how the tests of doublets and of length work in the simpler cases.

THE COMPLETE SECTIONS 5

II

THE COMPLETE SECTIONS

WE shall assume for the present the correctness of the re-arrangement of the text which follows, and deal with the sections as there numbered.

We shall begin with the sections which seem to be whole as they stand. That is to say, nothing has been taken from them, and nothing inserted into them except doublets. We begin with them because they present the easiest problem.

These sections are I-IV, VI-X, XIII-XVI, XIX-XX. As there is no § VII—the reason for which will be given later—this means 14 sections. There are 27 in all, so this is more than half the whole book.

§§ I-IV are continuous. When all repetitions of “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” are omitted except one, which is naturally the last (iii. 22), the result is exactly four sections of 33 lines each.

A critic complains that this takes away from the sonorosity of the reading. This may well be, because adding to the sonorosity seems to be one reason, possibly the only one, for these and a good many other doublets.

In § VI, xi. 7 “that comes up from the abyss” is from xvii. 8 (p. 66). There it describes the devil. Here we have only to do with the beast which is the world-power.

§§ VIII-IX are continuous. The only doublet is in xiii. 9, “He that hath an ear, let him hear”, which is again a doublet of iii. 22. Besides, no one is here speaking.

§§ XIII-XVI are continuous. There are exactly four lines too many for four sections. Three doublets are obvious. First, xvi. 21 “And men blasphemed God from the plague of the hail”, is from *vv.* 9 and 11 above, with hail added from the previous verse. “Because” explains why the hail, which seems to be the symbol of terror, was so enormous. It was not natural, but, in a special way, supernatural.

In xviii. 15 “They stand afar off because of fear of her

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50537-7 - The Text of Revelation a Revised Theory

John Oman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 THE COMPLETE SECTIONS

torment"; and in *v.* 18 "afar off... seeing the smoke of her burning": both from *vv.* 9 and 10 above.

Each of these doublets is almost exactly a line. The rest is made up of words or short phrases: and about them there cannot be the same certainty. The repetition of "and goes into destruction" in *xvii.* 11 from *v.* 8 above is, however, certain. "The great city" is repeated with suspicious frequency, and "small and great" seems to be in favour with the editor. In *xviii.* 10 "Babylon the strong city" is not strengthened by having the great city before it. Therefore, "the city, the great" is almost certainly a gloss.

The other three or four words, it may be admitted, are selected somewhat on grounds of interpretation. The first is "the great" in *xvi.* 19. "Great" in the book is always supernatural, in the sense of being above nature, and it is a counterpart of the natural. Thus, if there is a great Euphrates, there is a natural Euphrates. And here the repetition of "the great city" is to keep it distinct from an ordinary city or government. This is the usual summary, and what happens is told in more detail in *xvii.* 12. The "three" here should be "ten" as there. The present "city" or government, which could hardly have been mentioned more particularly, will fall to pieces, each consul setting up for himself, and then "the great city"—which is very much what we mean by civilisation—will meet its doom. *xi.* 13 refers to the same event: and it is "city" alone and has "a tenth".

The other is *xix.* 5 "the small and great". This the author seems to keep for cases where differences of worldly state are involved, which cannot be the case here. The usage of a wider class after a narrower in this form is somewhat characteristic of the author. "Praise him all his servants, yea all fearing him."

Here we may raise the important question of whether we are excluding all doublets not required by the context, or are there many more, and we are only selecting from them?

In no other case, so far, has there been anything left even resembling a free doublet, or, beyond a word or two, a repetition at all. But here two clauses are left which have at least resemblances to other clauses.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50537-7 - The Text of Revelation a Revised Theory

John Oman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE COMPLETE SECTIONS 7

The first is xvi. 18 “And there were lightnings and voices and thunders”. This is the only one left at the end, and such atmospheric phenomena are natural when the vial is poured out on the air. While the editor might have collected them together, it is much more probable that the author had them together in one place. And, if so, this is the most likely. The chief objection is the way “And a great earthquake took place” follows it. But the difficulty arises from wrong pointing. “Lightnings, voices and thunders” end the setting, or, as it were, the paragraph. Then the narrative begins—There was a daimonic revolution to start with.

The second is xvii. 14 “Because He is lord of lords and king of kings”. This seems to come in awkwardly between the “Lamb” and “those with Him”: and we have the same phrase in xix. 16, the only difference being the reversal of the order of the titles. But even this change is not likely to have been made by the editor; and the difficulty is again with the pointing. There should be no comma after “kings.” The Lamb conquers them because He is “lord of lords and king of kings” and *because* “those with Him are called, elect and faithful”.

§ XIX is exact when the repetitions of the breaking of the second to the sixth seals are removed. Only the first and the last are mentioned, because, obviously, nothing can be read out of a roll till all its seals are broken.

§ XX vii. 5–8 is merely a mathematical doublet of the 144,000 in the previous verse. Equal numbers from tribes so unequal, the author, who knew his country, would not be likely to have made. Besides he is speaking of spiritual Israel. The other is in *v.* 2 “to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea”, which is a prosy reproduction of the following verse with “it was given” from elsewhere.

This makes all these 14 sections exact.

In this larger half of the book all glosses are doublets of the same decorative type, either easily remembered phrases or from the immediate context. Moreover, not only are they all the free doublets: but, so far as I can discover, all the doublets. Nor is the length merely approximate, as it

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50537-7 - The Text of Revelation a Revised Theory

John Oman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 SINGLE OMISSIONS

was when I was guessing glosses, but is, in every case, precise almost to a word.

Up to this point better proof for equal sections could scarcely be produced: and it is at least good *prima facie* evidence for applying the same idea to the rest of the book.

III

THREE CASES OF SINGLE OMISSIONS

IN dealing with these fourteen sections, it was only necessary to seek out all that could be doublets, and the length came of itself. If passages have been interpolated or removed, this is no longer possible. But if the passages are restored because they fit the context, and then, when the free doublets are removed, they fill exactly the spaces required, it should be very little less convincing.

As it is well to limit as far as possible the field of greater perplexity, we shall begin with what is simplest. These are three sections. But, as two go together, we have only to do with the restoration of two passages. One has been restored to the beginning of § V and the other to the beginning of § XVII. Should this be right, both the place and the number we shall find to be important.

The passage which has been restored to § V is xxii. 10-12.

The reasons for removing it from its present place are:

(1) There is a second "he says to me", which the author does not use elsewhere when the same speaker is continuing.

(2) To introduce the "prophecy of this book" and then to re-introduce it a little later is also unlike his work.

(3) It will be found that in order to make room for it, the editor has removed a passage, which, from its connexion with what follows, certainly belongs here.

(4) Reasons will be given afterwards for believing that, in the order in which the editor found his MSS., § V immediately followed xxii, and, therefore, if he were embarrassed by this passage, he inserted it where he could most easily dispose of it.

SINGLE OMISSIONS

9

(5) It will be found that at the close of xxii. 17 he has an appeal about "this prophecy", which makes this passage superfluous in the place it now occupies.

The reasons for inserting it in § V are:

(1) That, if the author closed one prophecy with an appeal about its words, he would probably close another in a similar way; and the only other prophecy is the Messages to the Churches.

(2) It exactly suits this purpose. No other part of the book speaks in the same way of reward, and no ending could be found to the Messages more appropriate than, "Lo I come quickly, and my reward with me, to give to each as his work is".

The missing passage was originally rightly sought in ch. xxii, but, the existence of doublets not being then suspected and the only test being length, this passage seemed to be too long. But when the doublet (xxii. 13) which follows it and seemed to be part of it, is removed, the rest fits in with perfect exactness, not being merely approximately exact as before, but having the word over the five lines which makes it precise.

In this section there are no doublets, and the result is exactly 33 lines.

In §§ XVII–XVIII, "To Him that sitteth on the throne" in iv. 9 is a doublet of v. 10^b. There is no need to repeat to whom the praise is given: and to have it in the same form within a line or two is quite unlike the author. iv. 5 "Lightnings and voices and thunders" are a favourite decoration of the editor. Therefore, they are always suspect. That he should have introduced it here, however, entirely without suggestion from the original is improbable. But that he may have expanded what he found is another matter. Voices and thunders, where there is solemn praise and finally solemn silence, are more than suspect. Besides voices would be as elsewhere "from" the throne, not "out of" it. But lightnings are probable.

In the introduction we find a passage which suits both the length and the context. Moreover, it is followed by a passage from iv. 8, which shows that, when the editor wrote it in the introduction, he had the page we call § XVII

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50537-7 - The Text of Revelation a Revised Theory

John Oman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

before him. The passage is i. 7 “Lo He comes with clouds” etc. If the present connexion is right, it is a wholly suitable conclusion to the previous section. This makes §§ XVII–XVIII exact to a word. The section is a line short, the doublets are $1\frac{1}{2}$ and the passage restored $2\frac{1}{2}$.

The problem of understanding the editor’s action here is quite simple. Not having his pages in right order, he found passages at the beginning of the pages irrelevant, and was forced to remove them to a context where the irrelevance was at least less obtrusive. Possibly one of the reasons for producing an introduction was to find a home for such stray passages, to which no other context in the book offered hospitality.

With this we shall also take § XII, because it also is simple.

As there are no doublets, the problem of its shortness was rightly solved before, on the tests of context and length. The missing passage is xix. 19^c–20. In the context where it now stands it is impossible, because a wine-press of wrath has no relation to a blessed vintage, which is the subject there (§ XIV). The only place in the book where it does fit in is after xiv. 15. It suits this context perfectly and makes the section exact.

Yet here we have another kind of procedure, which shows a deeper perplexity. To remove a passage from the middle of a page is a different matter from merely disposing of a part at the beginning, the real connexion of which had been lost.

The reason for this we shall have to consider later, but in the sections yet to be considered, we shall find that the perplexity, and the confusion arising from it, deepen.

But this section is more than a transition to this more difficult problem. It also shows what the editor did when in doubt. He settled the content purely by verbal similarity.

We can now see how all these results are a test of the Gebhardt text as a standard of length. So long as we were using this standard for determining both the length and the glosses, it was always possible that it varied from the original, and that by ingenuity the glosses were selected to suit this variation. But in 14 sections, which is more than half the