

IRREGULAR LINGUISTIC FEATURES IN REVELATION: INTERACTING WITH R. H. CHARLES

Virgil Warren, PhD

Three possibilities can explain irregularities: they were intentional, they were due to ignorance, or they were unintentional mistakes. R. H. Charles wrote the two-volume commentary on Revelation in the *International Critical Commentary*. It presented an extended investigation of linguistic peculiarities in the Book of Revelation. He concluded that the writer was a Jew thinking in Hebrew and writing in Greek, which he did not know very well. Other writers, particularly Henry Cadbury, have challenged that conclusion, saying that the linguistic irregularities are deliberate. The issue is of some importance because it relates to the authorship issue for the Apocalypse. If the anomalies were deliberate, it is not as necessary to posit a different author for Revelation vs. the Gospel of John and the three Epistles of John, which do not have such grammatical features.

In responding to Charles' contention, several authors have argued that all the peculiarities he notes appear in non-literary papyri and the like. They infer that it is not necessary to appeal to Hebrew grammatical habits to explain the phenomena in Revelation. The amount of these peculiarities and the nature of some of them, however, do look away from an explanation that depends on analogies from Greek backgrounds. Furthermore, some phenomena are not objectionable Greek *per se*, but they are minority features that predominate in this book. The issue is not whether the style is Semitic, because it is, not only in its abnormalities but in other ways. The issue is why it has this Semitic coloring.

A Summary of Linguistic Peculiarities According to R. H. Charles

1. Occasionally words are in a different gender from the words they modify. For example, τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα (neuter) is followed by λέγοντες, a masculine participle (4:8).
2. Some Greek words in Revelation are assigned secondary meanings of their Hebrew equivalents—meanings that are lacking in the Greek word: οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὡς στῦλοι πυρός (10:1). Here Charles thinks that πόδες means “legs” because στῦλοι is compared with them. The Hebrew word לֶגָּ, sometimes means “legs.”
3. Κύριος ὁ θεὸς, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ is a set Old Testament phrase used to translate יהוה האלהי צבאות. An interpolation is charged in the case of κύριος ὁ θεὸς, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ (1:8).
4. In its context βάλλω εἰς κλίνην (2:22) is said to be meaningless Greek but significant if translated into Hebrew. This idiom stands for a number of phrases in Revelation that are not Greek idioms.
5. Grammatical constructions are sometimes not parallel. A finite verb may continue a participle where another participle should appear: Οὗτοί εισιν οἱ ἐρχόμενοι . . . καὶ ἐπλυναν (7:14). A finite verb may sequence with an infinitive: ἐδόθη αὐτῷ δοῦναι . . . καὶ ποιήσῃ (13:15).

6. Instances of tense usage represent the Hebrew idiom: ὅταν δώσουσιν . . . δόξαν . . . πεσοῦνται (4:9-10).

7. The pleonastic use of the pronoun occurs frequently: ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτήν (3:8). Nominativus pendens is also used in Revelation: ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ (3:21). A related usage occurs with the dative: τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ (2:17).

8. A noun or participial phrase dependent on a preceding case in Hebrew stands with the article in the nominative even though Greek syntax requires agreement in case: ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός (1:5).

9. Charles lists a class of unique expressions, or “slips,” among which is τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων . . . καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας (1:20) instead of τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν.

10. In place of the vocative case, the articular nominative is sometimes used: Ἄξιός εἰ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν (4:11).

Examples where the number of the subject and verb differ could be classified here; but since there are examples of this elsewhere in the New Testament, the phenomenon is not particularly unusual. Discord in gender, however, does not occur elsewhere.

Gender

There are nine words that sometimes occasion a lack of concord in gender: ζῷον, θηρίον, κέρας, ἀρνίον, κτίσμα, στράτευμα, πνεῦμα, χιλιάς, and φωνή.

In three of the twenty times that ζῷον occurs, proper gender is disregarded (4:7, 8²); the other occurrences are 4:6, 7³, 9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1, 3, 5, 6, 7; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4. All three instances appear together describing the four living creatures that were around the throne. The first instance reads, καὶ τὸ τρίτον ζῷον ἔχων τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου. In the next verse a similar thing happens twice: καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῷα, ἐν καθ’ ἑν αὐτῶν ἔχων ἀνὰ πτέρυγας ἕξ . . . καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες . . . Revelation 4 gives a picture of the throne room of God. Besides God himself there are twenty-four elders, the seven spirits of God, and the four “living creatures.” These are some kind of heavenly beings, and heavenly beings are usually considered masculine. So, the masculine participle may demonstrate that the author is using figurative language. It is noteworthy that he enters this “modification by sense” in connection with the first mention of the living creatures. The meaning of subsequent references is set by a personal modification of this neuter entry.

Of the thirty-eight times θηρίον (“beast”) is used, five times gender is violated: 13:11, 14, 15; 17:3, 11, 16; normal usage is found in 6:8; 11:7; 13:1, 2, 3, 4³, 12², 15², 17, 18; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2, 10, 13; 17:7, 8², 12, 13, 17; 19:19, 20²; 20:4, 10. The θηρίον in 13:11 arises from the earth having two horns and speaking like a dragon. The gender violation in verse 14 refers to the subject of the nearest verb, which equals the beast of verse 11. This beast is later called the false prophet, who is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. He is not literally a beast, but a person working on the side of evil.

13:14 says, . . . ποιῆσαι εἰκόνα τῷ θηρίῳ, ὃς ἔχει τὴν πληγὴν τῆς μαχαίρης καὶ ἔζησεν. This beast arises from the sea, having seven heads and ten horns. To him the second beast gave his allegiance. He is also cast into the lake of fire. In 13:18 he is called a “man.” Accordingly, the masculine gender is by sense instead of grammar.

Καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθημένην ἐπὶ θήριον κόκκινον, γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα (17:3). This beast is the dragon that equals Satan, because

he was to ascend out of the bottomless pit (17:8). Καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδον καὶ τὸ θήριον οὗτοι μισήσουσιν τὴν πόρνην (17:16). The quotation is part of the explanation of the woman and the beast that the angel gives. In the remaining occurrences of the word, there is no problem of gender.

The word κέρας (“horn”) is used ten times in Revelation (5:6; 9:13; 13:1², 11; 17:3, 7, 12, 16). The only anomaly occurs in its last usage (17:16). The horns and the beast are made equal to a masculine plural pronoun although both are neuter. Again, the horns are not literal, being identified as “kings” (βασιλεῖς), a masculine term. The masculine demonstrative pronoun refers to what the horns represent. Consequently, we have here another instance of modification by sense.

Ἀρνίον, “lamb,” has no gender difficulties in Wescott and Hort's text, Nestle's text, or the UBSGNT 5 rev_C. However, Charles uses a masculine reading on the adjective in 5:12. That is the only example he cites of the twenty-nine times the word appears. “Lamb” clearly refers to Christ, the perfect offering for sin, and it therefore involves modification by sense.

Twice κτίσμα is used in Revelation (5:13; 8:9). Πᾶν κτίσμα . . . ἤκουσα λέγοντας represents two difficulties, one in number and the other in gender. The number problem can be explained as an emphasis on each individual, and the masculine participle can be explained as a reference to the persons represented by the word “creature.” Both number and gender can be explained as usage by sense.

Καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐφ’ ἵπποις λευκοῖς, ἐνδεδμημένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν (19:14). Στράτευμα is modified by a masculine participle. This is the one irregular usage in three occurrences (cp. 9:16; 19:19). The army is that of “the Word of God,” of the “*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*.” It is made up of the saints of God. The participle emphasizes the individual persons in that army and so again illustrates modification by sense.

One time πνεῦμα (“spirit”) occurs with a masculine participle: οἱ εἰσιν τὰ ἐπὶ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσα τὴν γῆν (5:6). Charles lists this among his examples of gender discord. He is pushing a point because οἱ εἰσιν at the beginning of the quotation relates to ὀφθαλμούς. “Eyes” is modified by two groups of words: and ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν. Πνεύματα is nearer than ὀφθαλμούς but since “spirits” equal ὀφθαλμούς, the participle could modify either. Πνεῦμα is used correctly the other twenty-three times (1:4, 10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:1, 6, 13, 22; 4:2, 5; 11:11; 13:15; 14:13; 16:13, 14; 17:3; 18:2; 19:10; 21:10; 22:6, 17).

Χιλιάς (“thousand”), though feminine, is modified by a masculine participle four times (7:4, 5, 8; 14:3). The number could have been higher if the participle had been used every time. The sealing of the 144,000 is the main place where it appears, but since ἐσφραγισμένοι is not always used when χιλιάδες occurs, it is mentally supplied throughout the rest of the chapter. In only one place does the author use correct gender: καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες ἔχουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (14:1). In the sealing of the 144,000, the participle that modifies χιλιάδες is looking more to the people numbered than to the gender of the number. The other thirteen uses of χιλιάδες are 5:11; 7:5², 6³, 7³, 8²; 11:13; 21:16.

Φωνή (“voice, sound”) is used fifty-one times in the Apocalypse. Charles lists five times where it is used incorrectly: 4:1; 5:11-12; 9:13-14; and 11:15. In 5:11-12 the text says, καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἀγγέλων πολλῶν . . . λέγοντες. A masculine plural participle modifies a feminine singular noun. The writer intended therefore that the participle connect more closely with ἀγγέλων. This leaves only the problem of case, but this type of thing happens in the papyri according to Moulton. He is even willing to say, “. . . the Apocalypse doesn't owe its blunders to

Semitism.” The other four cases fall under one explanation. The usage in 6:6 shows the prevalent use of “sound,” or “voice,” in Revelation: καὶ ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν τεσσάρων ζῳῶν λέγουσαν. Periphrastically this means, “*I heard something that sounded like a voice.*” Other scriptures speak of the sound as something “like” the sound of many waters. So the speaker of the sound is modified, not the sound itself. The usage here might then involve personification as well as modification by sense.

In all cases, therefore what is expected has been supplanted by the masculine. With the exception of φωνή, all the difficulties occur with some spiritual concept illustrated by a figure, and the anomaly is an example of modification by sense.

Charles says that the author thinks in Hebrew and writes in Greek. This does not fully account for the gender of these words. Ζῳὸν and θηρίον would equal the Hebrew or Aramaic חיה, which is feminine. Κέρας equals קרן (f.), and ἀρνίον equals טלה or כבש, both of which are masculine. Στράτευμα may equal צבא or חיל (m.), or מערכה, מהנה (f.). Πνεῦμα equals רוּחַ or נְשֵׁמָה (f.). Φωνή corresponds with קל (m.) and χλιιάς matches אֶלֶף (c.). Six of the nine terms have a different gender in Hebrew from what the error that Revelation contains; two agree, and the last (στράτευμα) may or may not agree.

In places where it can be determined, the author uses the gender of what the figure stood for. Thus θηρίον (ψευδοπροφήτης) is modified by λέγων, κέρατα (βασιλεύς by οἱ, ἀρνίον (Χριστός or κύριος) by ἄξιος; στράτευμα and χλιιάδες (ἄνθρωποι, πολῖται, etc.) by ἐσφραγμένοι. Since the writer usually uses correct gender and since the gender he uses does not match the corresponding Hebrew term, he may have acted intentionally. Charles also admits this, saying that the constructions are κατὰ σύνεσιν, as we have noted several times.

There are some manuscript differences regarding gender that are not accepted by either Nestle, UBSGNT5 rev_c, or Westcott and Hort. In 5:6 some manuscripts read ἐστακὼς for ἐστακός in modifying ἀρνίον, and in 5:12 some read ἄξιος for ἄξιον in modifying ἀρνίον. These are the same kinds of differences that appear in the text used above. One of two conclusions is necessary: either these readings were in the original and would be additional instances of anomalies, or this type of Greek could be introduced. The latter option is interesting because it could indicate that such constructions did not sound all that foreign to the Greek scribes.

Secondary Meanings

Charles lists four words that agree with the Hebrew in primary meanings, but secondary Hebrew meanings have been assigned to the Greek words. The first is ποῦς: καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὡς στῦλοι πυρός (10:1). He notes in his commentary that ποῦς here most likely means “legs” because στῦλοι parallels it, and supposes that the writer had Daniel 10:6 in mind. In this very reference וְרַעְתִּין וּמַרְגְּלֵתִין כְּעֵין נְחֹשֶׁת קָלִיל (Aramaic); καὶ οἱ βραχίονες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πόδες ὡσεὶ χαλπὸς ἐξαστράπτων (Greek LXX). In Daniel 10:6 מַרְגְּלֵתִין probably does mean legs because βραχίονες parallels ποῦς as being “*like in color to polished brass.*” If hands were paralleled with מַרְגְּלֵתִין, it would more likely mean feet.

If it is true that the writer of Revelation had this figure in mind, he used ποῦς because it was used in Daniel. He was not necessarily thinking in Hebrew; he could have been thinking this passage of Septuagint Greek. Furthermore, ποῦς translates כרעים(thigh) in Exodus 29:17; Leviticus 1:13; 8:21; and 9:14. These notes Charles himself gives, admitting that “this

secondary meaning of πούς (when used as a rendering of the Hebrew) was not unexampled at the time” (p. 259). As a matter of fact, πούς had an extended meaning even in classical Greek. Liddell and Scott give examples where it meant “the arms or feelers of a polypus” (*Hes. Op.* 524), the “*leg with the foot, as χεῖρ for the arm and hand*” (*Il.* 23:772; *Od.* 4:149; *Luc. Alex.* 59). The Hebrew background of the writer together with the LXX influence in this case sufficiently explains appealing to a secondary option for the meaning of a Greek word. Admitting that the Hebrew influence is there does not mean the author was rather illiterate in Greek.

Three times the phrase ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ occurs (2:27; 12:5 19:15). The usual meaning of ποιμαίνειν is “to shepherd.” However, in these instances Charles suggests that the meaning is “to break” since there is possible parallelism between πατάχῃ (smite), ποιμανεῖ (break?), and πατεῖ (trample). This phrase occurs in Psalm 2:8-9: תִּרְעֵם בְּשִׁבְטֵי בְּרִזְיָהּ . . . וְאַתְּנָה גּוֹיִם. The LXX translates: καὶ δώσω σοι. . . ποιμανεῖς αὐτούς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ. Revelation 2:27 adds to this phrase ὡς τὰ σκευὴ τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται. This likewise is added in Psalm 2:9: כִּכְלִי יוֹצֵר תִּנְכָּצֵם; the Septuagint says, ὡς σκεῦος κεραμένως συντρίψεις αὐτούς. The second phrase is applied loosely to the figure used in Revelation. Nevertheless, the use of two proximate phrases was hardly accidental.

Charles comments on the possibility of borrowing the wording from the LXX:

“. . . since it is our author's usage elsewhere to translate the Hebrew text independently, there is no reason to infer that he is here simply borrowing from the LXX. The LXX was no doubt familiar to him and provided him with a vocabulary. But he was in no sense dependent upon it” (p. 76)

If he did not know Greek very well, he depended to an extent on the Septuagint for expressing himself to his readers. Charles also notes that the root of תִּרְעֵם was probably understood by the LXX translators to be רָעָה (“to shepherd”). So, they pointed it תִּרְעֵם whereas for the sake of the parallelism, they should have supposed the root רָעַע (“to break”) as does Symmachus and pointed it תִּרְעֵם.

The author's independent translation of the Hebrew need not be an independent translation. It could be a paraphrase of one already existing. We cannot tell the difference. Whether he depended on the LXX is incidental. If he was familiar with the Septuagint, he may have used it. Theoretically, he could have used it even to the point of doing injustice to the Hebrew; after all, according to Charles he was “unfamiliar with the fine shades of meaning in the Greek words.”

Charles lists some examples where רָעָה means “break” (Psalm 80:14; Jeremiah 6:3; 2:16; 22:22; Micah 5:5). Why then did the LXX take תִּרְעֵם from the wrong root? It is not hard to see how the Septuagint translators themselves may have influenced the meaning of ποιμαίνειν from “shepherd,” “govern,” or “rule” to “rule harshly over a flock,” as might be characteristic of a hireling. The change from “rule” to “harsh/ destructive rule” is not a radical change. Knowing full well the Hebrew meaning, the writer of the Apocalypse could have used the verse mainly as a note to his Christianized, Hellenistic readers to recall Psalm 2:8-9, the meaning of which had been previously qualified. Yet perhaps in all this, the apparent parallelism is not even intended.

Charles insists that πρωτότοκος in 1:5 means “chief” or “sovereign”: καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς. That Jesus was

“the firstborn of the dead” is perfectly sensible. There is no reason to suppose that this word must mean “sovereign” here. Actually, it is more likely that it does not carry this significance because ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς clearly states the fact of his sovereignty. Three groups of words modify “Christ.” Certainly, parallelism was not intended because “the faithful witness” is not parallel to “the firstborn of the dead,” or “sovereign of the dead,” or “the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Charles hopes to charge the author with supposing that πρωτότοκος contains the additional meanings of בכור. He refers to 1 Corinthians 15:20 and Colossians 1:15:

“In these Pauline passages Christ's resurrection is undoubtedly referred to, which carries with it His claim to headship of the Church; as in Colossians 1:15 πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως implies His claim to headship over all creation by virtue of His primogeniture.”

According to this interpretation Christ’s claim to headship by virtue of his primogeniture had already been introduced by Paul through the word πρωτότοκος. According to Charles Hebrews 12:23 emphasizes the secondary idea of sovereignty. Is this instance supposed to show that the author of Hebrews was also guilty of this author's mistake? If Psalm 89:27 (LXX 88:28, 38) is in the writer’s mind, he may again have used πρωτότοκος because it appears in the Psalm. On the whole, however, πρωτότοκος does not mean “sovereign” in this sense; and if it did, his thinking in Hebrew would not be necessary. Charles' own examples show other places where the word was used with this implication.

The last example under this classification is the use of ἐπί with the secondary meaning “because of,” “on account of”: καὶ κόψονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς (1:7). Thayer, however, lists no less than twenty-three clear references where ἐπί has this meaning in the New Testament: Matthew 19:9 (λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι ὃς ἂν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ καὶ γαμήσῃ ἄλλήν μαιχᾶται); Mark 3:5; 10:22; Luke 1:14; 2:20; 5:5; 13:7; 15:7; 19:4; Acts 4:9, 21; 20:38; 1 Corinthians 7:13; 9:15; Philippians 1:5; 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:7, 9; Philemon 7 (besides the idiom ἀφ’ ᾧ in 2 Corinthians 5:4; Philippians 3:12). Particularly significant is Acts 7:2 (συνεκόμισαν δὲ τὸν Στέφανον ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς καὶ ἐποίησαν κόπτετον μέγαν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ) and James 5:1 (Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι, κλαύσατε ὁλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς ταλαιπωρίας ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις).

These examples set aside the need to say that ἐπί has been assigned a secondary meaning of the Hebrew לַע—at least in a sense that implies illiteracy in the Greek language. It may be noted that in these cases ἐπί has the dative while Revelation 1:7 has accusative, but this is aside from a discussion about secondary meanings assigned to ἐπί. Therefore, there is no clear case where the writer of the Apocalypse assigned to the Greek term secondary meanings of the Hebrew word in a way that does not already have precedence in the Septuagint, in other New Testament writings, or in Greek usages elsewhere. Three of the four words (πούς πρωτότοκος, ἐπί) have these other meanings. Regardless of the secondary meaning of πρωτότοκος there is no reason to interpret as Charles does. In the case of ποιμαίνειν and πούς the Septuagint uses the specified secondary meanings in the places that the writer may be quoting.

The oft-recurring phrase יהוה האלהי צבאות is frequently translated by the LXX as κύριος ὁ θεὸς παντοκράτωρ. Revelation 1:8 uses the phrase κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ πρωτότοκος. Charles objects to the presence of ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος between ὁ θεός and ὁ παντοκράτωρ because ὁ κύριος ὁ θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ is a set phrase in the LXX for translating יהוה האלהי צבאות (cp. 19:6). Hebrew has very few adjectives. To express the adjectival concept another noun is frequently used with the one being modified. “Godly men” is expressed in Hebrew as “men of God” (אנשי אלהים). The adjective “godly” is replaced by its cognate noun while “men” is put in the “construct state,” a state of relationship with God. This changes “men” to “men of” (אנשי) to (אנשי). Thus “men of” cannot stand alone but must appear with another noun to express a complete thought. In יהוה צבאות (“Lord-of hosts”), יהוה is in the construct state awaiting to complete its meaning; so it cannot stand alone. Since ὁ κύριος ὁ παντοκράτωρ is used to translate יהוה צבאות, ὁ κύριος represents the construct state of the tetragrammaton, which must immediately lean on παντοκράτωρ to complete its meaning. Therefore, Charles declares that an ignorant scribe, not realizing this, interpolated ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος between the two nouns.

צבאות is the plural of צבא, meaning “host.” Therefore, it emphasizes the supremacy of God over the many angels and men of heaven and earth. Παντοκράτωρ is a compound of πᾶς (“all”) and κρατεῖν (“to be powerful”), or κράτος (“mighty”). The meaning of the παντοκράτωρ is “mighty in respect to all things,” “almighty,” “omnipotent.” Consequently, צבאות stresses supremacy while παντοκράτωρ stresses omnipotence. Strictly speaking, παντοκράτωρ is not an exact translation of צבאות; each word expresses a different aspect of God's uniqueness.

To consider ὁ κύριος ὁ παντοκράτωρ a word-for-word translation of יהוה צבאות makes παντοκράτωρ a noun. But it is declined each time with the same case as κύριος (1 Kings 19:10, 14). If it were a noun, Greek would put it in the genitive case, because “Lord-of hosts” in Hebrew is “Lord of-hosts” in Greek, which changes the form of the second noun to a genitive. Since παντοκράτωρ is an adjective, there is no reason why John could not break precedent, use it in its basic sense, and separate it from the noun it modifies. Thus, he introduces a phrase stressing a third aspect of God's person—his eternality. The two concepts together present the most important theme of the apocalypse: God, not Satan, will be in control of the future—παντοκράτωρ, and it will always be so—ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος.

A final consideration applies to this example. The text history of this passage in Revelation shows no sign of scribal tampering in the way Charles supposes. The fact, then, that the “inserted” element appears as it does can argue that the writer was not closely tied to the Hebrew equivalent. He was at least facile enough in Greek that he was not woodenly substituting Greek words in Hebrew syntax.

Idioms

As part of his effort to show that the writer of Revelation was thinking in Hebrew while writing in Greek, Charles gives a list of Hebrew idioms literally translated into Greek. He contends that their proper meaning is apparent only when translated back into Hebrew.

Revelation 1:16 says, καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ. The Hebrew would read, *וּפְנֵי כְּשֶׁמֶשׁ יֹאחֵר בְּגִדּוֹרָתוֹ*, meaning “*and his face (was) like the sun shining in its strength.*” The Hebrew would typically use a finite verb to express the last verbal idea that

sequences with the participles earlier in the verse. Greek idiom would equal the English: καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνων ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ. To illustrate his point Charles gives six references that he considers parallel to the present construction:

(1) “As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings, the Lord alone led him; no strange god was with him” (Deuteronomy 32:11-12).

Ὡς ἀετὸς σκεπάσαι νοσσιὰν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς νοσσοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐπεπόθησε, διεῖς τὰς πτέρυγας αὐτοῦ ἐδέξατο αὐτούς, καὶ ἀνέλαβεν αὐτούς ἐπὶ τῶν μεταφρένων αὐτοῦ. Κύριος μόνος ἦγεν αὐτούς, οὐκ ἦν μετ’ αὐτῶν θεὸς ἀλλότριος.

יהוה כְּנֶשֶׁר יַעִיר קִנּוּ עַל גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחֶף יִפְרֹשׁ כַּנְפָּיו יִקְחֵהוּ יִשָּׂאֵהוּ עַל אַבְרָתּוֹ
בְּדָד יִקְחֵהוּ נֶאֱמַי אֵל נֶכֶד

(2) “As a servant earnestly desires the shadow and as a hireling looks for the reward of his labor, so I am made to possess months of vanity and wearisome nights are appointed to me” (Job 7:2-3).

. . . ἢ ὥσπερ θεράπων δεδοικῶς τὸν Κύριον αὐτοῦ, καὶ τετευχῶς σκιάς; ἢ ὥσπερ μισθωτὸς ἀναμένων τὸν μισθὸν αὐτοῦ; Οὕτως κἀγὼ ὑπέμεινα μῆνας κενούς, νύκτες δὲ ὀδυνῶν δεδομέναι μοι εἰσίν.

כְּעֶבֶד יִשְׁאַף צֶל וּכְשָׂכִיר יִקְנֶה פְּעֻלּוֹ
כִּן הַנְּחֻלְתִּי לִי יִרְחִי שְׂוֵא וְלִילֹת עֵמֶל מִנּוּ לִי

(3) “They are passed away like the swift ships; as the eagle hastens to the prey” (Job 9:26).

Ἡ καὶ ἐστὶ ναυσὶν ἵχνος ὁδοῦ, ἢ ἀετοῦ πετομένου ζητοῦντος βοράν;

הִלְכּוּ עִם אֲנִיּוֹת אֲבָה כְּנֶשֶׁר יָטוּשׁ עַלִּי אֲכָל

(4) “Because those will forget misery, as water passes away, you will forget it” (Job 11:16).

Καὶ τὸν κόπον, ἐκδύση, ὥσπερ κῦμα παρελθόν, καὶ οὐ πτοηθήσῃ.

כִּי אַתָּה עֵמֶל תִּשְׂכַּח כְּמִים עֲבָרוּ תִזְכֹּר

(5) “. . . because he clothed me with the garments of salvation; he covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

ἐνέδυσσε γάρ με ἱμάτιον σωτηρίου, καὶ χιτῶνα εὐφροσύνης, ὡς νυμφίῳ περιέθηκέ μοι μίτραν, καὶ ὡς νύμφην κατεκόσμησέ με κόσμῳ.

כִּי הִלְבִּישָׁנִי בְּגָדֵי יֵשַׁע מְעִיל צִדְקָה יַעֲטֵנִי

כִּחֲתֹן יִכְתֹּן פֶּאֶר וְכַכְלָה תַּעֲדָה כִּילָהּ

(6) “‘Is not my word like a fire,’ says the Lord; ‘and like a hammer breaks the rock in pieces’” (Jeremiah 23:29).

Οὐκ ἰδοὺ οἱ λόγοι μου, ὥσπερ πῦρ, λέγει Κύριος, καὶ ὡς πέλυξ κόπτων πετρᾶν;

הֲלוֹא כֹה דְבָרִי כְּאֵשׁ נֹאֵם יְהוָה וּכְפִטְיֵשׁ יַפְצִץ סֶלַע

Examples (1) and (5) use the finite verb in the comparison. Again, if this is done in the Septuagint, which the readers know, such phraseology could be used by the writer of Revelation even if it were not a common Greek usage. As long as parallel constructions can be found in Greek documents known to the writer, solecisms he uses do not particularly prove him ignorant of proper Greek any more than an occasional “goeth” proves that a minister is continually thinking in archaic English.

There may be other explanations for the clause in 1:16. It could be translated, “His face shines like the sun in its strength,” which makes ἡ ὄψις the subject of φαίνει rather than ὁ ἥλιος.

This is probably not correct. It is more likely that φαίνων is to be supplied: ὁ ὄψις αὐτοῦ (φαίνων) ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ [ὡς ὁ ἥλιος (φαίνων) ἐν τῇ δυνάμει, not φαίνει, is supplied because of ἔχων used earlier]. The author intended for this to be supplied in the reader's mind.

Another example of Hebrew idiom occurs in 5:6: Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἄρνιον ἑστηκός The ἐν μέσῳ is supposed to equal יָנִי . . . יָנִי in Hebrew. So the lamb is standing “between . . . and between.” Although ἐν μέσῳ occurs twice, there may be three relative positions. The first has two complements: τοῦ θρόνου and τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων. It would be hard to have the lamb standing between the throne and the four living creatures, and also between them and the elders. This could indicate two positions for the lamb. The more likely interpretation is that the lamb is simply among the living creatures, elders, and the throne. Figurative language is notable here because the lamb is standing in the middle of the throne.

Charles supposed that the throne and four living creatures are to be taken together as opposed to the twenty-four elders. 7:17 favors the idea of the lamb's general position among the group (ὅτι τὸ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ θρόνου ποιμανεῖ αὐτούς). But Charles says that 5:7 makes that unlikely because the lamb “came and took” the book out of the right hand of the one seated on the throne. That depends on how near the throne the four living creatures are.

“The text may mean ‘between the throne and the four living creatures (on the one side) and the elders (on the other).’ The LXX constantly translates this way the Hebrew preposition literally and not idiomatically, as in Gen. 1:4, 7, 18; 3:15; 9:16, 17, etc. (Vol. I, p. 216).”

The text of Revelation says ἐν μέσῳ . . . ἐν μέσῳ, but it is not true of the LXX that it translates יָנִי . . . יָנִי by ἐν μέσῳ. In fact, it never translates the Hebrew idiom in this fashion. The idiom is translated ἀναμέσον in each of the above quotations. Besides these references יָנִי . . . יָנִי is translated ἀναμέσον eighty-eight times (ninety-four in all: Exodus 9:4; 30:18; Leviticus 10:10; 11:47; Deuteronomy 1:16, etc.). The phrase ἐν μέσῳ is used chiefly to translate (בֵּין, בֵּתוֹן) (“in the midst of”), and בְּקֶרֶךְ (“in the midst of”). The closest example to what Charles pictures is Song of Solomon 2:2: כַּשּׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחֻהִים כֵּן רַעִיתִי בֵּין הַבְּנוֹת (“As the lily is among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters”). However, this is merely a comparison (יָנִי . . . יָנִי, not יָנִי . . . יָנִי). If it were a statement of position between two objects, it would be יָנִי . . . יָנִי. Ἐν μέσῳ . . . ἐν μέσῳ occurs once for בֵּתוֹן . . . בֵּתוֹן (Judges 12:14). So, at this point in Revelation ἐν μέσῳ carries the natural sense of “among” or “in.”

Revelation 21:8 says, τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς καὶ ἀπίστοις καὶ ἐβδελυγμένοις καὶ φονεῦσιν καὶ πόρνοις καὶ φαρμάκοις καὶ εἰδωλολάτραις καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ψευδέσιν τὸ μέρος αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ λίμνῃ τῇ καιομένῃ πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ, ὃ ἐστὶν ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος. Charles' explanation is given in a footnote:

“In τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς . . . τὸ μέρος αὐτῶν, we have a Hebraism where τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς . . . τὸ μέρος αὐτῶν is used in introducing a new subject: . . . cf. Chron. xxiv.1, יָנִי וְלִבְנֵי מַחֲלֻקֹתָם “And as for the sons of Aaron their courses were.” also vii.1, xxvi.31 (where the LXX reproduces by the dat.); 2 Chronicles 7:21; Ecclesiastes 9:4 (ICC, Vol. II, p. 216).”

He may be properly exegeting some of the passages he notes, but the reference to 1 Chronicles 26:31 is incorrect. The Greek translates לְהַבְרִיזָהּ by τοῦ Χεβρωνι (not τῷ Χεβρωνι). Neither is the construction of which he speaks found in 2 Chronicles 7:21:

וְהַבִּירַת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר הָיָה עָלָיו לְכַד עֲבָר עָלָיו יֵשׁוּעַ וְאַמֵּר בְּמָה עָשָׂה יְהוָה כִּכָּה לְאַרְץ הַזֹּאת וְלִבְיַת הַזֶּה

The LXX reads, καὶ ὁ οἶκος οὗτος ὁ ὑψηλὸς, πᾶς ὁ διαπορευόμενος αὐτῶν ἐκστήσεται καὶ ἐρεῖ, Χάριν τίνος ἐποίησε Κύριος τῇ γῇ ταύτῃ καὶ τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ; A third passage that is misapplied here is Ecclesiastes 9:4: הַמָּת מִן הָאָרֶץ הוּא טוֹב מִן הָאָרֶץ הַמָּת The Septuagint translates, ὅτι τίς ὃς κοινωνεῖ πρὸς πάντας τοὺς ζῶντας; ἔστιν ἐλπίς, ὅτι ὁ κύων, αὐτὸς ἀγαθὸς ὑπὲρ τὸν λείοντα τὸν νεκρόν. This last example is a regular Hebrew idiom for possession and parallels the Greek dative of possession.

Charles' reference to 1 Chronicles 24:1 is the only good comparison between the LXX and the Hebrew. Whether the passage in Revelation is a Hebraism depends on where the omitted linking verb is supplied. It could be translated, *"And to the fearful . . . and all liars [is] their part in the lake burning with fire and brimstone."* Charles supplies the linking verb thus: *"And to the fearful and unbelieving . . . their part [is] in the lake burning with fire and brimstone."* The former rendering removes the solecism although it is a less likely format given the prevalence of nominativus pendens and redundant pronoun patterns in Revelation.

Another example of solecism occurs in Revelation 22:5: ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεὸς φωτίσει ἐπ' αὐτούς. He comments,

"First, as regards the construction, it must be conceded at once that it is peculiar. If our author had wished to express the thought 'shall shine upon them' or 'give them light,' he would have said φανεῖ αὐτοῖς: cf. 21:23. We have a good sense if we explain it as a Hebraism. When regarded from this standpoint we next recognize that κύριος ὁ θεὸς φωτίσει ἐπ' αὐτούς is a rendering of Ps. cxviii.27, אֲלֹהֵינוּ יְאִיר . . . , which later he changed into יִאִיר. Here the Aramaic Targum and the Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic Versions similarly transform the text to have been יִאִיר and not יְאִיר. Here, therefore, the ἐπί reproduces ל."

Charles' argument rests largely on changing the Hebrew form from hiphil to qal stem, which he says is presupposed by the translations he refers to, despite the lack of manuscript evidence for a Hebrew text that read הָאִיר. The evident reason for his desire to do so is that -ίζω verbs are largely causative and loosely correspond to Hebrew verbs in the hiphil, while passive -ίζω verbs correspond to the hophal. Therefore, because the Hebrew is hiphil, its meaning is generally transitive. Likewise, -ίζω verbs are basically transitive, but there is no object of φωτίζω in the Greek of Revelation. Charles then later supplies the object from Number 6:25. Psalm 118:27, which he regards as a shortening of the phrase in Numbers (וַיִּאָּר פָּנָיו אֱלֹהֵי), omits פָּנָיו. This general phrase also occurs in Numbers 4:25; Psalm 31:17; 67:2; 119:135; and Daniel 9:17. In each case, the root אִיר is translated by the LXX ἐπιφαίνειν and פָּנָיו is an object. Accordingly, Gesenius says that in this phrase פָּנָיו is omitted only once—in Psalm 118:27, the precise passage that Charles claims the author is quoting.

In this argument Charles seems to deny that φωτίζω can lose its causative idea, but -ίζω verbs do not always convey this idea, especially in Hellenistic Greek. In fact, both Liddell and Scott and Thayer give "to shine" intransitively as their first meaning. Gesenius' Hebrew lexicon

also gives “to shine” as a meaning for the hiphil of אָרַר. Thus “*God will shine on them.*” Because the writer of Revelation used φωτίζω transitively in 13:1 and 21:23 does not require that he use it transitively here. The word occurs only these three times; two times makes it hard to determine the limits of the author's familiarity with its meaning.

“*God will shine on them*” is not an unlikely expression although Charles thinks it is. Since the word can mean either “to shine” or “to cause to be illuminated,” either may be a likely expression. Because of Numbers 6:25 and the fact that John uses φαίνειν to mean the same thing, Charles understands φωτίζειν to mean something different. Since John in 1 John bases his whole concept of fellowship, sin, love, the Holy Spirit, and antichrist on the statement that God is light and men walk in that light now, how much more it would be true that in heaven “*God is light.*” The writer is simply substituting φωτίζειν in its intransitive meaning for φαίνειν.

Closing Observations

Charles’ approach does not allow sufficiently for originality or digression from precedence without being considered ignorant. His overall criticism assumes too much. That is especially true in exegesis; in his interpretation of the book, he first seems to decide on a meaning and then align the text and writer to it.

His first proposition that the grammar of Revelation is unique calls for a few observations. Two things in its uniqueness are the “*unheard of expressions*” and the solecisms. Other writers have noted that some solecisms are not necessarily solecisms, and that the unique expressions were intentional.

Some of his irregularities are warnings against literalism or to illustrate the figurative nature of the imagery. What is said to be Hebrew appeared in Greek writings even other than the papyri. That is true of the LXX in the exact places where the writer is supposed to be quoting. At least one of Charles’ interpretations is unwarranted—the interpretation of πρωτότοκος.

With the foundation of his observations made questionable, the second preposition, which rests on the first, becomes questionable: the writer thinks in Hebrew while writing in Greek or is ignorant of certain sections of the Greek language. In fact, at least one major classification of irregularities cannot be accounted for by Hebrew: unusual uses of gender. The overwhelming proper usages demonstrate that in every case discussed above, the author knew the “proper” construction. In all the mentions of the LXX, there is not to be the other extreme: that the author did not know Hebrew, because he evidently uses it as long as it does no injustice to the Hebrew because of the readers’ familiarity with that translation. So the peculiarities, as far as they have been studied here, are accounted for by intention plus the use of the Septuagint.