# Woodcuts to the Apocalypse in Dürer's Time

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# Woodcuts to the Apocalypse in Dürer's Time

# Albrecht Dürer's Woodcuts Plus Five Other Sets from the 15th and 16th Centuries

## Compilation and Introductions

by

# KÉNNETH A. STRAND

#### ANN ARBOR PUBLISHERS

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#### INTRODUCTION

The Boek of Revelation, so rich in symbolism, was a favorite subject and source for woodcut artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Albrecht Dürer's *Apocalypse* of 1498 (printed in both German and Latin editions that year, and later reprinted in further Latin ones) is particularly noteworthy. Its 15 magnificent woodcuts, which measure some 11 by 15 or  $15\frac{1}{2}$  inches, are reproduced in Part I of the present publication (in reduced size). Among the sources believed to have been used by Dürer in producing his illustrations for the Book of Revelation are 19 woodcuts to that book in a West-Low-German Bible printed in Cologne about 1479 and 8 woodcuts to it in a High-German Bible printed by Johann Reinhard de Grüningen in Strassburg in 1485. These two sets are reproduced in Part II.

But Dürer not only drew upon forerunners; he also influenced successors, among whom was the artist or artists responsible for the 21 full-page pictures to the Apocalypse in the first edition of Luther's New Testament published in Wittenberg in 1522 (the famed "September Bible"). Certainly[Lukas Cranach (and/or his elder son Hans) produced the majority of these. It is interesting that contemporary persons, places, and events or circumstances are interpretatively depicted in some of these illustrations—for example, Duke George as a rider on one of the lion-headed horses of Revelation 9, the Rome of Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik* as the falling "Babylon" of Revelation 14 (and the burning "Babylon of chapter 18), the monastic garb on the second beast of Revelation 13, the oppression of the lower classes by the horsemen of Revelation 6, *et cetera*. Hans Burgkmair also produced 21 woodcuts to the Apocalypse, which, however, show less intermingling of contemporary affairs with the scenes from the Bible text. Burgkmair's woodcuts decorate several editions of Luther's New Testament which came from the press of Silvan Otmar in Augsburg during the years 1523 and 1524. These two sets of 21 woodcuts are presented in Part III, and also included are three of the Cranach pictures in a revised form in which they appeared in the second Wittenberg edition of Luther's New Testament (the "December Bible" of 1522).

A number of woodcutters, including G. Lemberger and Anton Woensam, produced similar series of 21 woodcuts to the Apocalypse. But some Bibles soon began to use an expanded set of 26 pictures. Among such was the first edition of Luther's complete Bible, published in 1534. Its woodcuts to the Book of Revelation are reproduced in Part IV.

Preceding the woodcuts in each main Part of the present publication is a listing of the woodcuts in that Part, as well as a few general introductory remarks. The present book is, however, a book of pictures rather than discussion; and for detailed information the reader is referred to readily available literature on woodcutting and woodcutters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Treatments of Dürer are, of course, particularly numerous, and we may mention here but one: Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (4th ed.; Princeton, N.J., 1955). Earlier editions were entitled *Albrecht Dürer*. An excellent discussion of woodcuts in various editions of Luther's Bible is provided by Ph. Schmidt, *Die Illustration der Lutherbibel 1522-1700* (Basel, 1962). The fifteenth-century German Bibles have been treated by the present writer in his *German Bibles Before Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1966) and *Early*. *Low-German Bibles* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1967).

The woodcuts reproduced herein are for the most part shown in actual size or only very slightly reduced. A notable exception is Dürer's woodcuts, whose size here is about 60 or 65 per cent of the original.

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#### Part I

# DÜRER'S WOODCUTS TO THE APOCALYPSE

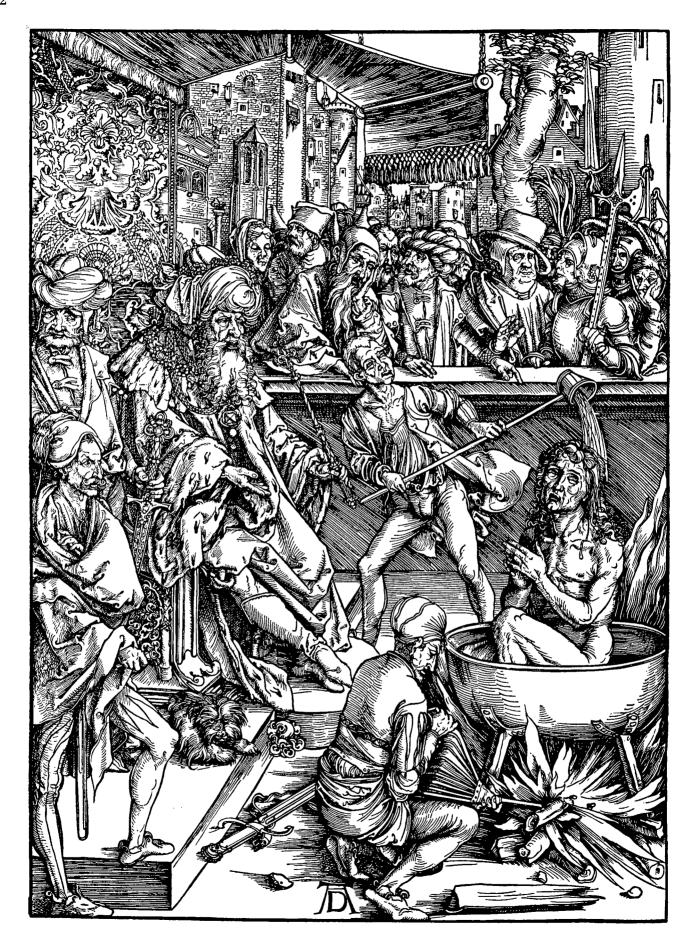
The woodcuts for the Book of Revelation produced by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) are truly magnificent as to style and workmanship and are of impressive size as well, measuring some 11 by 15 or  $15\frac{1}{2}$  inches. They appear on the right-hand pages of Dürer's *Apocalypse*, with accompanying text on the facing left-hand pages. This beautiful *Apocalypse* was first published in 1498 in Nuremberg in both Latin and German editions, with further Latin editions appearing in the early sixteenth century (notably 1510-11). Almost identical woodcuts appear also in Martin Graeff's German edition of 1502. For his publication, Graeff used Dürer's general format as well; but he incorporated a text based on Koberger's High-German Bible of 1483.

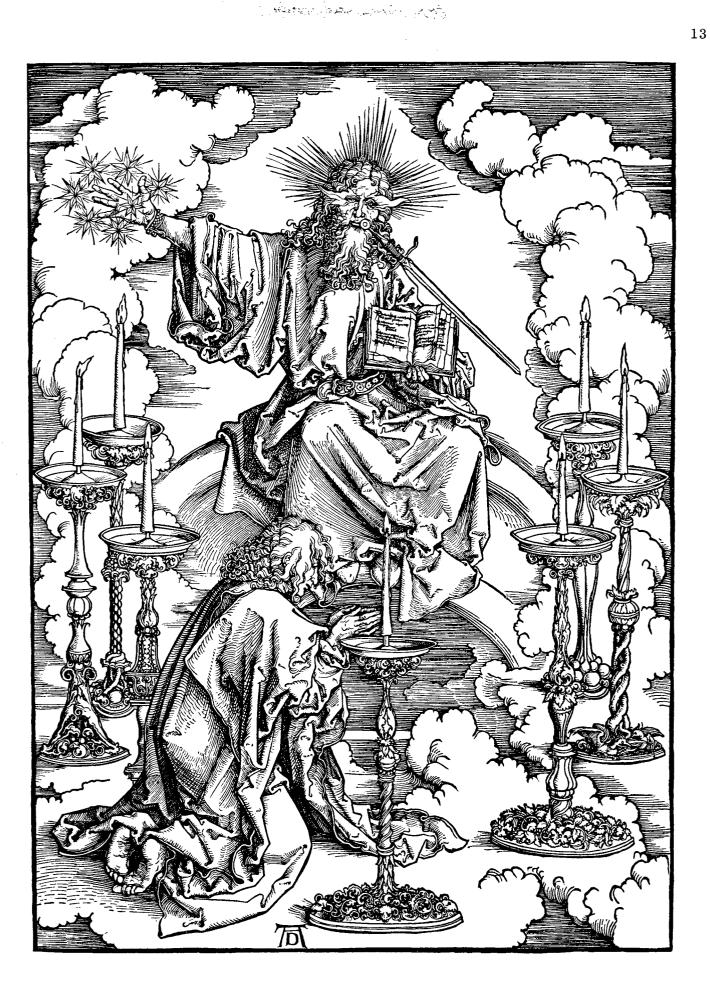
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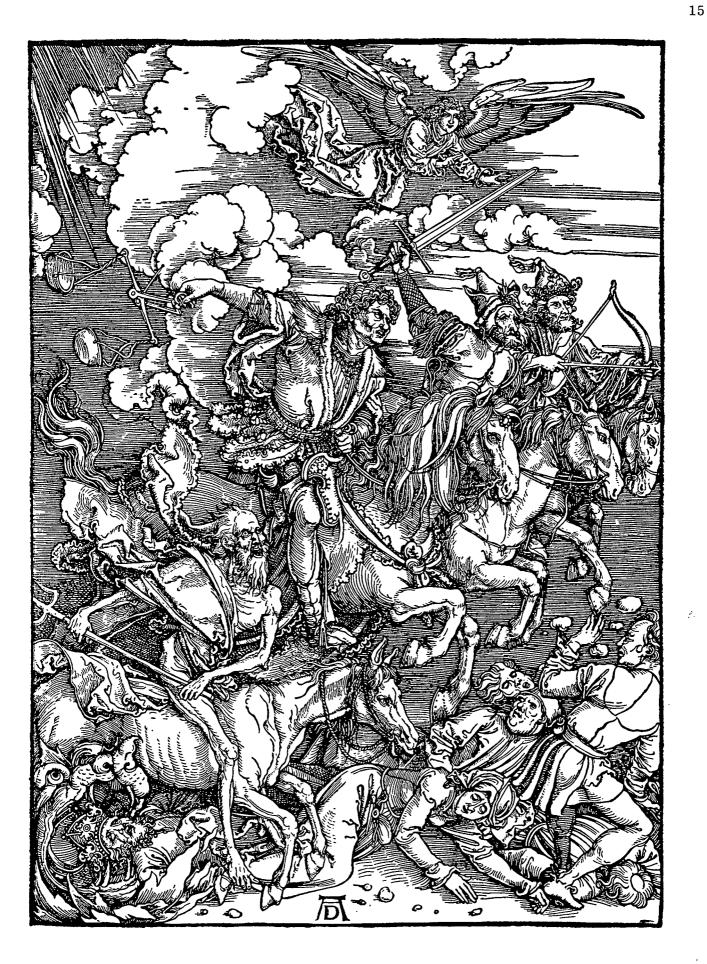


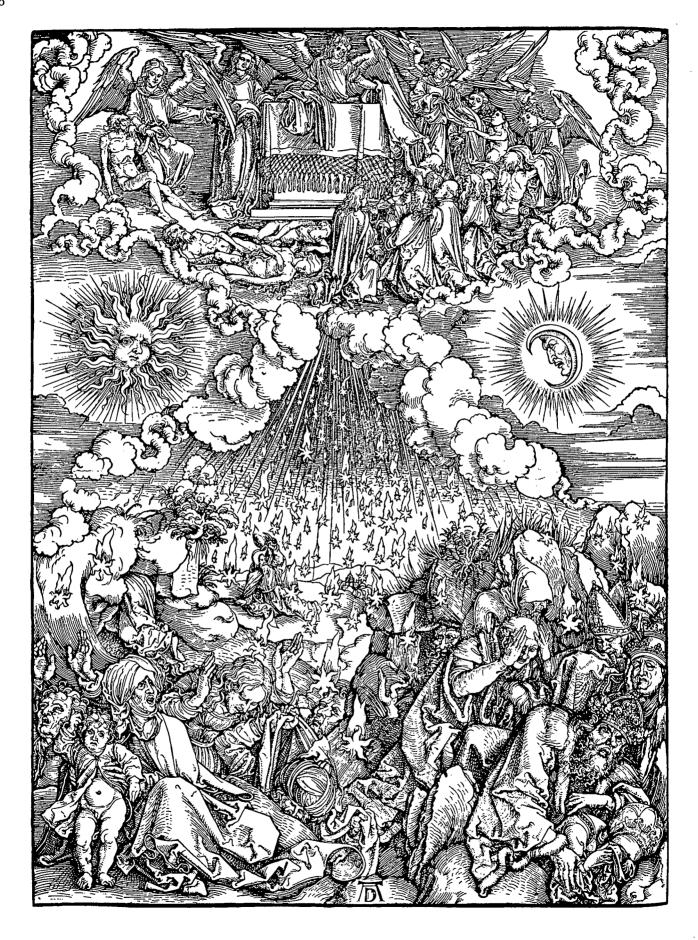


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### Part II

## TWO FORERUNNERS OF DÜRER

Among sources believed to have been used by Albrecht Dürer as he produced his woodcuts for the Apocalypse are the pictures decorating the Book of Revelation in the Cologne West-Low-German Bible of *circa* 1479 (reprinted in Koberger's High-German edition of 1483 and in the Halberstadt Low-German edition of 1522) and in Johann Reinhard de Grüningen's High-German Bible printed in Strassburg in 1485. The artists responsible for these woodcuts are not known. The dependence of the later set upon the earlier is clear, and it is also interesting to note that multiple scenes are usually reversed in the later set.

List of Woodcuts	Woodcut	Page
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THE WOMAN AND THE BEAST IN THE WILDERNESS, THE FALL OF BABYLON, THE HARVEST OF THE WORLD AND THE DRAGON THROWN INTO THE BOT- TOMLESS PIT (Rev. 17; 18; 14:14-20 and 20:1-3)		
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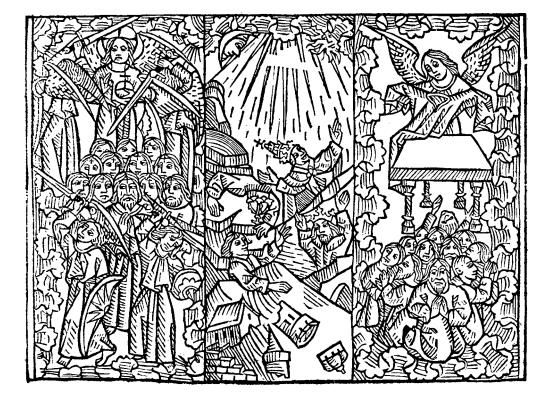




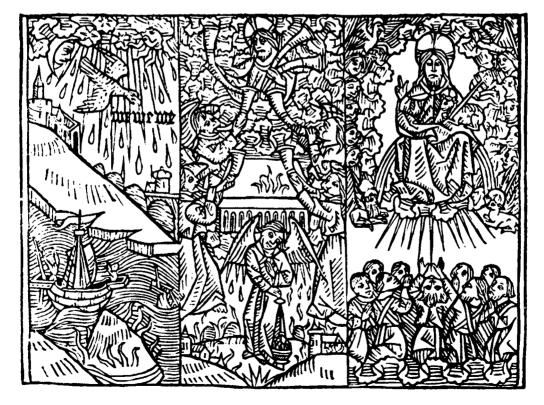
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## Part III

## THE WOODCUTS OF LUTHER'S "SEPTEMBER BIBLE" AND OF HANS BURGKMAIR

The first edition of Luther's New Testament was published by Melchior Lotther in Wittenberg in September, 1522, and has been called the "September Bible." Although the Book of Revelation took a somewhat subordinate place in this edition (together with Hebrews, James, and Jude), it nevertheless was the one book chosen to be illustrated with large, full-page pictures. Inasmuch as Lukas Cranach (or was it possibly Lukas' elder son Hans?) produced a number of these woodcuts during Luther's stay at the Wartburg, it may be that the inspiration for these particular illustrations came from Karlstadt and/or the Zwickau radicals who visited Wittenberg. The content of several of the woodcuts, with implication concerning contemporary circumstances, would lead to the same conclusion—as, for example, the suggestion of the oppression of the lower classes in the woodcut of the Four Horses and Horsemen (no. 35, p. 40). Interpretation of the contemporary scene is manifest in these woodcuts in other ways as well: We may note, for instance, the unnastic garb on the two-horned beast in Woodcut 46 (p. 51), and the papal triple crown on the beasts in Woodcuts 43 and 49 (p. 48, 54) and on the head of the whore in Woodcut 51 (p. 56). This tiara was reduced, however, when the woodcuts were used in the second Wittenberg edition—the "December Bible" of 1522—, perhaps at Luther's own request (see Woodcuts 44, 50, and 52, on pp. 49, 55, 57). Specific persons were at times depicted too. It is believed, for example, that the first individual shown as being sealed in Woodcut 38 (p. 43) is Lukas Cranach, and that the double-bearded warrior shown in the forefront among the riders of the lion-headed horses in Woodcut 41 (p. 46) is Duke George of Albertine Saxony, a foremost enemy of the Luther an Reformation.

Whether all the large woodcuts to the Apocalypse in Luther's September Bible are to be attributed to Lukas Cranach (and/or Hans) has been a matter of dispute. Those which have been considered as most likely from at least the "Cranach school" are the ones numbered herein as 33, 34, 36, 42, 43 (and 44), 51 (and 52), and 53 (see pp. 38, 39, 41, 47, 48 [and 49], 56 [and 57], and 58), although there is strong likelihood that all but Numbers 55 and 56 are indeed Cranach woodcuts. The "HB" which appears clearly in the final woodcut is particularly intriguing—and puzzling! Hans Burgkmair the elder (d. 1531) provided a series of woodcuts used in several editions of Luther's New Testament printed by

Hans Burgkmair the elder (d. 1531) provided a series of woodcuts used in several editions of Luther's New Testament printed by Silvan Otmar in Augsburg during the years 1523 and 1524. Except for the first woodcut to the Apocalypse, which occupies a page by itself, the rest of the pictures are interspersed with the text; but they are all nearly full-page size nonetheless. The initials "HB" may be noted in Burgkmair's woodcuts. These illustrations occasionally show a greater independence from Durer than do those in Luther's September Bible, though both woodcutters undoubtedly had made use of Durer's work. For instance, whereas Cranach follows Durer in depicting the four horses and horsemen in battle line, Burgkmair has placed them in succession—which is, incidentally, more true to the text (see Woodcuts 4, 35, and 59, on pp. 15, 40, and 63). Burgkmair, in fact, frequently has shown an interest in capturing the text quite literally. Mention may be made of the three frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, beast, and false prophet in contrast to six frogs from the beast alone in the corresponding woodcut of the "September Bible" (contrast Woodcut 72 on p. 69 with Woodcut 54 on p. 54); and of the sword proceeding from the mouth of the Leader of the armies of heaven rather than just being held by Him (contrast Woodcut 75 on p. 71 with Woodcut 54 on p. 59). It may also be noted that Burgkmair was less interested than Cranach in interpreting contemporary events through the woodcuts. Both of these artists, however, knew the Lutheran text of the New Testaments they were illustrating and endeavored to be true to it, as may be seen in the fact that whereas Dürer's woodcut for the first four trumpets depicts an eagle uttering the threefold "Woe," Cranach and Burgkmair pictured the cry as being given by an angel (see Woodcuts 7, 39, and 63, on pp. 18, 44, and 65).

List of Woodcuts

WoodcutPageWoodcutPageCHRIST AMONG THE CANDLESTICKS (Rev. 1) September Bible333812)Burgkmair5762September Bible4550THE THRONE, FOUR LIVING CREATURES, SEALED BOOK, AND LAMB (Rev. 4,5)5439September Bible4651Burgkmair5862Burgkmair6968611-8)5862THE TWO BEASTS (Rev. 13)6968September Bible333540September Bible4752September Bible3540September Bible4752Souls UNDER THE ALTAR (Rev. 6:9-11)5663Burgkmair7068September Bible3641September Bible4853Burgkmair6063Burgkmair7169Satter Bible3742December Bible5055Burgkmair6164Burgkmair5055September Bible3742December Bible5055September Bible3944Burgkmair7269September Bible3944Burgkmair5356September Bible5051565657September Bible3944Burgkmair7370September Bible515656575257September Bible535656575757September Bible53<						
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Burgkmair   58   62   Burgkmair   69   68     THE FOUR HORSES AND HORSEMEN (Rev. 6: 1-8)   1-8   AND THE THREE ANGELS (Rev. 14:1-12)   70   68     September Bible   35   40   September Bible   47   52     Burgkmair   59   63   Burgkmair   70   68     Souls UNDER THE ALTAR (Rev. 6:9-11)   THE HARVEST (Rev. 14:14-20)   70   68     September Bible   36   41   September Bible   48   53     Burgkmair   60   63   Burgkmair   71   69     September Bible   36   41   September Bible   48   53     Burgkmair   60   63   Burgkmair   71   69     Starks (Rev. 6:12-17)   September Bible   50   55   55     Burgkmair   61   64   Burgkmair   72   69     THE SEAL OF GOD (Rev. 7:1-8)   74   DERESS (Rev. 17)   56   55   56     September Bible   38   43   DERESS (Rev. 17)   56   51   56     September Bible   39	Sentember Bible	34			46	51
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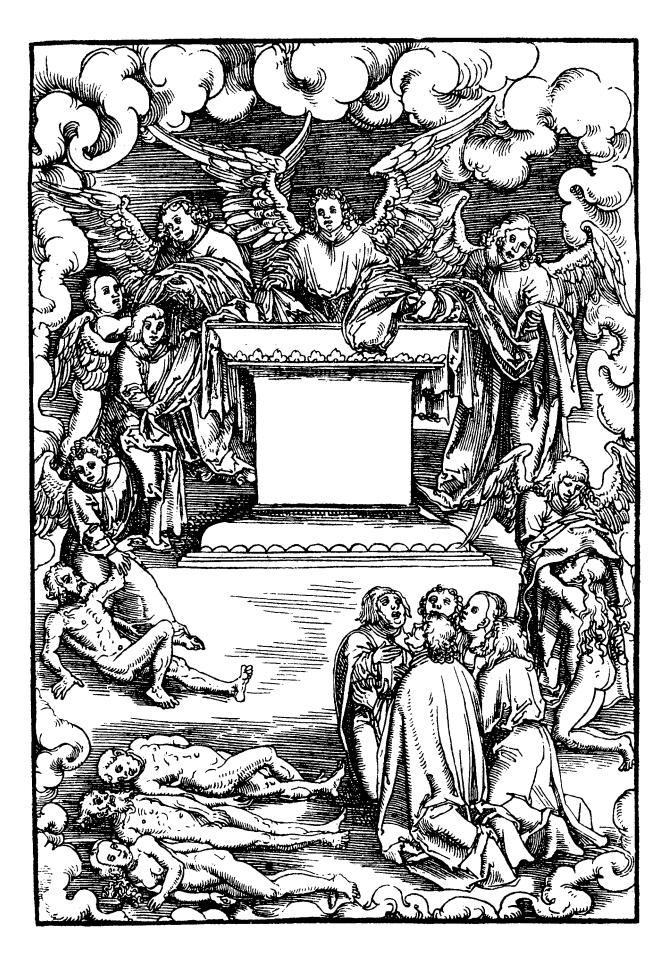


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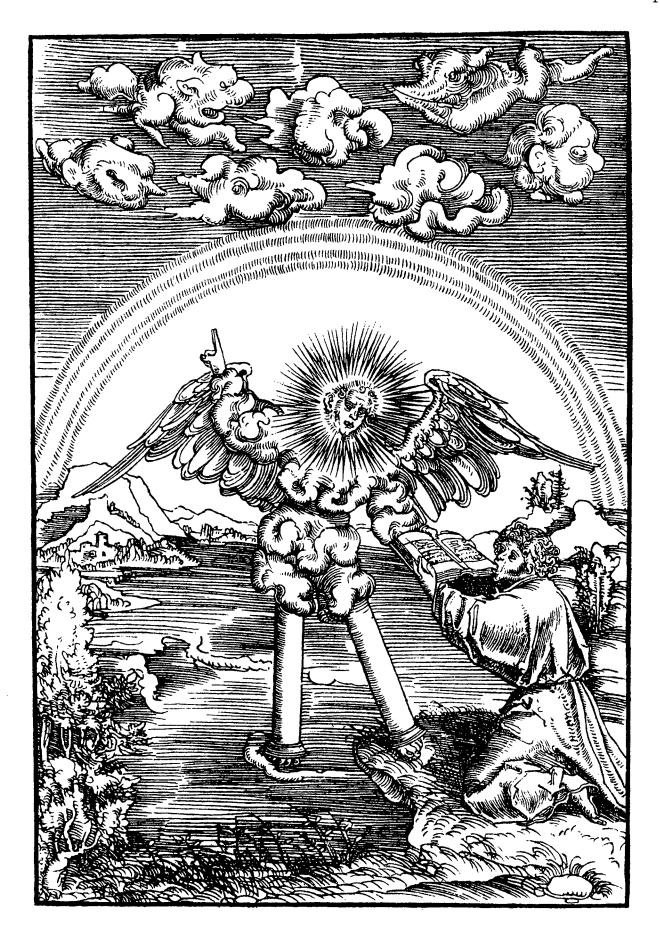
















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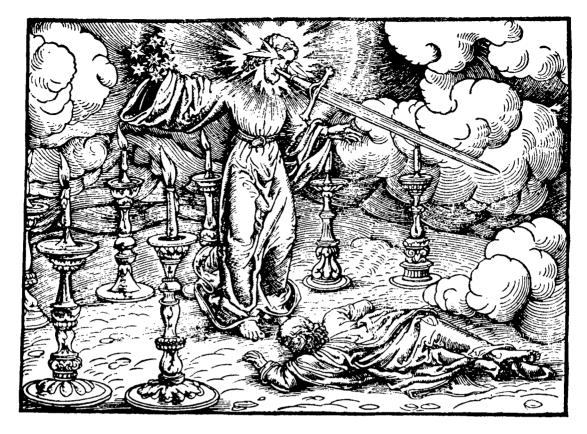
## Part IV

## THE WOODCUTS TO THE APOCALYPSE IN LUTHER'S FIRST COMPLETE BIBLE

Various editions of the New Testament which appeared after 1522 contained series of 21 woodcuts to the Apocalypse similar to those in Luther's September Bible or to those by Hans Burgkmair. However, the series was sometimes expanded to 26 pictures. In the first edition of Luther's complete Bible, published by Hans Lufft in Wittenberg in 1534, such a series of 26 pictures for the Book of Revelation appeared. In fact, this Bible was illustrated throughout, containing a total of about 125 pictures. There is, unfortunately, no absolute certainty as to who the woodcutter was. Melchior Schwarzenberg and Martin Schaffner have been suggested as possibilities because of the monogram "MS" appearing in some pictures, but Lukas Cranach has also been suggested. Regardless of who the artist may have been, it seems quite certain that Luther himself took an interest in the planning and preparation of the pictures for this Bible. Remarkably, a triple crown has reappeared, in woodcuts 92, 97, and 98 (pp. 81, 83, and 84).

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