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THE INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION

A synopsis by Harry A. Whittaker

1. The structure

- 1) Eight sets of seven: a. Seven letters (ch. 2, 3); b. Seven seals (ch. 6); c. Seven trumpets (ch. 8, 9, 11); d. Seven characters (ch. 12, 13); e. Seven thunders (ch. 14); f. Seven vials (ch. 16); g. Seven visions (ch. 19.22); h. "Come" used seven times (ch. 22).
- 2) Each seven is: a. introduced by a heavenly vision and an anthem; b. subdivided by a voice into 4 and 3 (first four sets), or into 3 and 4 (last four sets).

2. Date of writing

- 1) ALL the external evidence, except Irenaeus (who shows himself an undependable witness anyway), is for approximately A.D. 66, the Nero persecution.
- 2) The books of Hebrews and 1 and 2 Peter all have copious allusions to Revelation, and all three epistles are known to have been written before A.D. 70; therefore, Revelation was.
- 3) The detailed way in which seals and trumpets fit the events of A.D. 67.70 settles the question. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

3. More than one fulfilment

The NORMAL characteristic of Old Testament prophecy is: a. a short-term reference—speedy fulfilment; b. a Messianic fulfilment in the far future. There are SCORES of examples of this. Since Revelation obviously has so many Old Testament characteristics, ought not the same to be true of it?

4. Fulfilment not always in sequence

Beware of seeking SEQUENCE in fulfilment; that is, expecting that the second seal could not be fulfilled until the first seal is finished, etc.

Old Testament prophecies do not usually have this sequential character; e.g., Zechariah 12.14; Isaiah 24-27, 29-33; Joel 1.3; Amos 1, 2.

What these prophecies give is a set of "snapshots" concerning a crisis of divine judgment. Then why not Revelation similarly? We have been conditioned by "continuous-historic" exposition into thinking always in this mistaken sequential fashion.

5. Revelation and the rest of Scripture

Revelation is made up of somewhere between 500 and 1,000 allusions to, or quotations from, the Old Testament and the Gospels. There can be no better mode of interpretation than through equation with the earlier prophecies which the Apocalypse brings together in such profusion. What THEY are about Revelation is also about.

6. The heavenly sanctuary (ch. 4)

The entire book sorts itself out into visions seen in heaven and those seen on earth. The former always refer to the Ecclesia of Christ, described as a "New Israel," hence all the symbolism is in terms of the tabernacle and Israel in the wilderness. The latter always refer to those who are not God's covenant people.

7. The sealed book (ch. 5)

The Book of Life can be opened by none but Christ, the slain Lamb. The vision describes his ascension and glorious reception in heaven, and also the corresponding joy of all believers.

8. The earth, the land

All through the Bible the words "earth" and "Land (of Israel)" are interchangeable. In Revelation it is usually necessary to read "Land of Israel" instead of "earth."

9. The seals

In Revelation 6, 7 contacts with the Olivet Prophecy (Matt. 24, 25; Mark 13; Luke 21) are especially copious. Therefore, whatever the Olivet Prophecy is about, the seals also foretell.

There are at least half-a-dozen good reasons for believing that: a. the first half of the Olivet Prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70 and just before; b. the ENTIRE prophecy will be fulfilled at the Lord's coming and just before.

This is true for the seals also. They have had a fulfilment in A.D. 70. Another fulfilment of all seven seals is yet to take place.

10. The seals: A.D. 70 fulfilment

Seal 1. The gospel's conquest of Judaism, rounded off by the destruction of the temple ("conquering and to conquer").

Seals 2, 3, 4. War, famine, and pestilence afflicting faithless Israel.

Seal 5. The souls under the altar symbolize Old Testament saints whose salvation is achieved through Christ after their death. Now there is persecution of first century believers.

Seal 6. The shattering overthrow of Israel.

11. The seals: the last days

Seal 1. Conquest of the nations (and especially of Israel by conversion). Compare with Revelation 19:11-16.

Seals 2, 3, 4. The last horrifying era of war, famine, and pestilence.

Seal 5. Persecution in the last days, possibly of believing saints throughout the world, but most probably of just the small remnant of believers in Israel.

Seal 6. The final devastation of the Land, immediately before the second coming.

12. The 144,000 (ch. 7)

This is a symbolic representation of the true believers in Israel, saved from the judgments of first century (and twentieth century) tribulation. The "great multitude" includes these along with Gentile believers also. Together they make up the "New Israel" of God.

13. The trumpets (ch. 8, 9)

These are introduced (8:1-5) by allusions to a Day of Atonement which brings no forgiveness for Israel, but judgment instead. Trumpets 1-6 had fulfilment in A.D. 70, and will also be fulfilled afresh in the last days. Thus, they are a repetition—with different detail—of the seal judgments.

14. Trumpets 1.6, A.D. 70

Trumpet 1. Roman devastation of the Land of Israel.

Trumpet 2. The unquenchable altar-fire of Jerusalem put out. Much sea-fighting in the Roman war.

Trumpet 3. "Rivers and fountains of water"—the Land of Israel. The star—Halley's comet over Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Israel faces the trial of the bitter waters.

Trumpet 4. Sun, moon, and stars symbolize Israel in eclipse. Trumpet 5. Locust invasion—an invading army (same as in Joel 1, 2). Five months, the exact duration of the siege of Jerusalem.

Trumpet 6. An angel-led army against faithless Israel (Matt. 22:7).

15. Trumpets 1-6, the last days (ch. 8, 9)

Judgments on Israel, still unreconciled to God, just before the coming of Christ. Very impressive parallels with last-day prophecies in Joel 1,2; Jeremiah 8; Isaiah 14:29-32.

16. The angel with the open book (ch. 10)

Definitely an angel (Gabriel), not the Messiah. He announces that "the time [of the kingdom] is not yet" (v. 6). (The King James is wrong in saying "there should be time no longer.") Seven thunders are heard, and the messages written down, but not the meaning.

17. The two witnesses (ch. 11:1-13)

A lot of Bible evidence identifies them as Israel with law and prophets. In the last days they are brought low by their enemies in the Land. Repentance means a new and higher status before God. And then immediately follows the seventh trumpet.

18. The seventh trumpet (ch. 11:14-19)

The second coming, the resurrection, and judgment on God's enemies.

19. The woman and man child (ch. 12)

In the first century, Israel brought forth the "New Israel," the early church, and was then cast out from God's presence to live (be kept alive, but only barely) in the wilderness.

Sudden switch to the last days, as in the Olivet prophecy, etc. Then victory over powers of evil—Christ's Kingdom, except for a final persecution of the faithful.

20. The thunders (ch. 14)

Six angels "with a loud voice," followed by a seventh (16:1). These are judgments in the Land of Israel at the time when Christ comes in power. (For "Babylon," see #23.)

21. The song of Moses (ch. 15)

Saints delivered from all tribulation (?), but not yet glorified. Seven angels make ready to pour out the final judgments.

22. The seven vials (ch. 16)

These also involve the Land of Israel. They are the LAST judgments that blessed and cursed Land will see. But these judgments come mainly on the enemies of God's people who have brought Israel to final (yet not irreparable) ruin.

23. Babylon (ch. 17, 18)

Equation with the Roman church is completely disallowed. Instead, a massive assemblage of Biblical evidence points to Jerusalem, which in the Apostle John's day was THE great enemy of truth, and is still apostate.

24. The beast (ch. 13, 17)

Here is a power, comparable to the earlier oppressors of Israel in their own land, which has ten supporting "kings." It ravages the harlot Babylon (Jerusalem). It persecutes "saints" (the holy people), and is supported by a religious organization called also the "false prophet." This beast COULD be the P.L.O., the spearhead of Arab hatred of Israel. It is supported by the ten enemies of Israel. Jerusalem is ravaged, and its people persecuted. The Muslim religion (13:11ff)—the false prophet (19:20)—is a fervent supporter.

25. Seven visions ("and I saw") (ch. 19, 20, 21)

Messiah overcomes his enemies. There is resurrection and judgment, and the bringing in of a wonderful new God-centered order—the new Jerusalem. The symbolism emphasizes the spiritual quality of this Kingdom.

26. "Come, Lord Jesus" (ch. 22)

A threefold assurance—"I come quickly," is followed by a three-fold prayer—"Come." The second coming itself completes this eighth seven.

For a full exposition of the foregoing you would profit from the excellent book, REVELATION: A Biblical Approach, by the same author. It is available from the following:

H. A. Whittaker, #6 Walkers Croft, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS13 6TR, England

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