

THE SCOPE OF REVELATION

John states that the book is a record of things "which should shortly come to pass." He saw outlined in his vision events which were at that time in the future, but high were "shortly" to become history. No one would suppose that it was the divine purpose to reveal all the changing history of nations, races and kingdoms for the last eighteen hundred years, and hence, a question necessary to interpretation is: To what countries and series of events do the predictions apply? If we turn to the Old Testament prophets, we will be guided to a correct answer. The central thought in all their predictions is the future history of the people of God. All that they utter is related, either directly or indirectly, to the fortunes of Israel, temporal and spiritual, the typical nation, and the spiritual nation, or in other words, to the fortunes of the Jews and of the Church. With this great object before them they predict the fate of the great Gentile nations with whom the Jews came in contact, who influenced their fortunes, or became their oppressors. Hence, we have Assyria, Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, etc., made burdens of prophecy.

Exactly the same is true of New Testament prophecy. The prophets speak of the future of Israel and of the Church, and necessarily reveal much concerning the opposing and persecuting nations. It was not in the mind of Christ to give in Revelation the outline of all history, but to outline the fortunes, tribulations, and triumphs of the Church. The Church was, in the earlier centuries, almost wholly within the bounds of the vast, persecuting empire of Pagan Rome. Hence this opposing power would come before the prophetic vision, and we will find that the symbolism often refers to the Roman power. Let it be ever present to the mind of the reader that John was the victim of Roman persecution, and an exile on Patmos when he wrote; that he had never been beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire, and that there is no historical authority for supposing that any apostle ever stepped upon soil that a Roman citizen would call foreign. Since this mighty empire affects so closely the interests of the Church, it is in harmony with all we know of prophecy to expect it to be the subject of prophetic vision. That Pagan Rome is, to a greater or less extent, the subject of the predictions is agreed by almost all interpreters, but the agreement is by no means so marked that Papal Rome, the great spiritual despot upon which the mantle of the pagan empire fell, is also an important

element in the explanation of the visions. I believe that a close and unbiased study of the text compels the conclusion that a great apostasy, a false church, a persecuting spiritual power, is revealed which mightily influences the fortunes of the Church, and that its characteristics are found strikingly exhibited in certain periods of the history of the Papacy. There arises a great apostasy, a false church that produces for the time a mighty influence upon the saints of Jesus Christ. This is also a subject of prophecy. I am then prepared to arm that the general scope of the Book of Revelation is similar to that of the Old Testament prophets; that its primary object is to outline the history of the church; that, in subordination to this primary object, it portrays the fortunes of the two great persecuting powers, Pagan and Papal Rome. The changing fortunes of the Church are portrayed, running like a golden thread through the dark panorama of history, until at last, in God's good time, the battle is fought to the end, the victory won, and the triumphant Church enjoys the fruition of all its sufferings and labors and the glories of the New Jerusalem.

DIVISIONS

In order to an understanding, the reader must keep in mind that there is more than one series of visions, and that these overlap each other, revealing different features of the same period. The whole book might be divided as follows:

PART I. Chapters I-IV--This part embraces the Introduction, the Vision of the Son of Man, the Letters to the Seven Churches, and Vision of the Opened Heaven and the Throne of God.

PART II. Chapters V-XI--This part opens with a Vision of a Book sealed with Seven Seals in the Hands of Him who sits upon the Throne--the Book of Destiny; the Contents hidden by the seals. The Lamb of God prevails to open the seals; that is, to Reveal the Future. As each is opened a vision appears which presents a Symbol representing a Period of Human history. Six seals are opened in succession, followed by a pause before the opening of the seventh seal. When the seventh seal is opened it is found to embrace Seven Thunders and Seven Trumpets. The trumpets are blown in succession, each followed by Great Events, and when the last is blown the End comes when Christ triumphs overall. The Seven Seals, with the Seven Trumpets, contained under the last seal, reach to the end of time.

PART III. Chapters XII-XVIII--This part opens with a Vision of a Woman, a symbol of the Church; an Enemy of the Woman which appears with as a Seven-headed and Ten-horned Beast, understood to be a symbol of Pagan Rome; a Two-horned Beast, which I understand to be Papal Rome; there also appears sitting on the Seven-headed Beast a False Woman, a symbol of a False Church. The figures change and these opposing powers under the name of Babylon are overthrown.

PART IV. Chapters XIX-XX--These chapters describe the Great Victory over the opposing powers, the Millennial Period, and the Final Uprising and Defeat of Satan.

PART V. Chapters XXI-XXII--These chapters describe the Glorious Home of the Redeemed Saints and embrace Closing Exhortations.

Revelation - Introduction Commentary - People's New Testament

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/peoples-new-testament/revelation/introduction.html>
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