

Revelation made simple and attractive

John Nicholls



Revelation Study Guide.

Michael Ashton.

The Christadelphian.

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Office, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham, B28 8SZ, www.thechristadelphian.com/bookshop.

THIS BOOK is the latest addition to the series of Study Guides being developed by the Christadelphian Office. Other titles in the series cover the Song of Solomon and Philippians. The volume under review is an outstanding addition to this collection of guides, which are written for young people and those 'young in the Truth'. Interested friends also frequently want to know the meaning of the Revelation at an early stage in their quest to understand the Scriptures, and this Study Guide will also be helpful for them.

In less than 100 pages, this book gives a clear outline of the meaning of the prophecy and is attractively produced. We have to recognise that our generation is very 'visual' and does not want to read a book that is an endless sea of print. A guide like this, with its tables, maps, pictures, summary panels and diagrams, maintains interest despite the relative difficulty of the subject matter. It will, it is hoped, whet the appetite of more studious readers for the more meaty expositions of Revelation available in the Brotherhood, giving a clear framework and outline on which to base further studies. For those content to understand Revelation in broad outline without the detail, this guide is readable and an ideal reference work.

Patterns and clues

The book is arranged in twenty short sections of some three to six pages each. The Introduction makes the nice point that the seven ecclesias in Asia Minor to which the book was initially sent are located almost in the geographical centre of where the first-century work of spreading the gospel took place, between Jerusalem and Rome. So those ecclesias were representative ecclesias

and not special in any particular respect. In this section there is also a panel giving the three methods of interpreting the Revelation, stating that the third method, the 'Historic', is the one followed in the Guide.

The second section, "The scheme of Revelation: the Old Testament pattern", introduces the subject in a novel way, comparing Revelation with the account of the destruction of Jericho under Joshua: "As the people marched round the city once a day for six days, and for seven times on the seventh day, so the book of Revelation is divided into separate sequences of 'sevens'. Each seventh section contains the next 'seven', and so on. We can call this a 'Jericho pattern'" (pp. 5-6). It is a good analogy. Other expositors have used the 'opening telescope' analogy, which can also be helpful, but the one used in the Guide is Scriptural.

One of the best sections, in the opinion of the reviewer, is number 3, entitled, "A closer look: seven clues". Brother Ashton writes: "The seven clues listed . . . are designed to introduce the message of Revelation. They do not explain everything the book contains, but they will help new readers begin to find their way around". The clues are developed very well in subsequent chapters of the Guide, and are truly helpful in forming an understanding of the great purpose of God as it has unfolded over nearly 2,000 years of history. Just to kindle your interest, the seven clues are:

- Sevenfold structure
- Visions of the Kingdom
- Old Testament background
- A tale of two cities
- The development of the Beast
- Corrupt religion
- Three great earthquakes.

In the next section, entitled "Signs and symbols", is a useful list of the meaning of many of the symbols in Revelation, and it is to be hoped that readers will be stimulated to proceed to read Brother Thomas's enthralling expositions of the symbols in *Eureka* Volume 1. Section 5 is "Sevenfold structure: leading to the great day of rest" (did you realise there are at least *nineteen* different sevens in Revelation?), and then comes

"Visions of the kingdom: the joy set before us". In this section an analogy is made with the step-by-step instructions inside a construction kit:

"The outside of the box always shows a picture of the completed model—this is like the vision of the kingdom. Inside the box are the step-by-step instructions—they are like the sections that follow the kingdom visions.

"Naturally there is a strong relationship between the picture of the completed model and the instructions. In the same way, the special aspects of the kingdom visions are appropriate to the particular sections they introduce" (p. 17).

Again, this is a useful analogy. Each of the seven visions is taken and the links explored with the section of prophecy that follows.

The beast and the woman

The Old Testament basis of so much of Revelation is brought out in sections 7 to 10. The apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel and Zechariah are seen to be the basis of the right understanding of the Revelation. The reviewer was struck by the effortless way Brother Ashton expounds the various phases of the beast, a topic which is not always made too clear in other expositions. It is worth citing his exposition about the final stage (today's phase) of the beast:

"The 'Woman' in Revelation therefore represents a group of religious believers. If the group is faithful and true, the woman is pure and chaste. If it is corrupt or in error, the woman is unfaithful: she has adulterated her faith. The Prostitute in Revelation 17 describes a religious system claiming to be faithful to Jesus, but corrupt, like ancient Babylon: given over to idolatry, greed, blasphemy, and to the persecution of God's faithful people.

"The Beast and the Prostitute meet their end when they rise up against the Lord Jesus when he returns to the earth. The conditions he will find when he comes are ones where the real power behind the throne of the kingdom of men is a false system of Christianity, manipulating events for its own evil purposes" (p. 33).

Section 11 of the book is about the last of the seven clues, the three great political earthquakes in the book, which mark key stages in the outworking of God's purpose for His people. The author, having discussed the important clues in the book, then returns to the main sections, and

begins with the seven introductory letters. A nice double-page spread is used to compare the main features of each letter (pp. 44-45). These letters give us an insight into the attributes Jesus is looking for in an ecclesia, and they are a powerful exhortation and warning even to us in the very last days before the coming of our Master.

Separate sections are devoted to the historical fulfilment of the seven seals and the seven trumpets. Then comes "The Witnesses: living through the second great earthquake", and, although not all will agree with the interpretation, the author writes convincingly and links his exposition with the rather similar vision in Zechariah 4.

The later stages of the beast form the next major topic, and Brother Ashton brings out the comparison between the Man of Sin speaking blasphemies against the Truth and God's Word, and the Perfect Man, the Son of Man multitude



who speak and do God's will. The seven last plagues come next, leading in the sixth plague to the emergence of Israel as a nation as a result of the end of the vast Ottoman Empire in Europe and the Middle East.

After a brief consideration of the development of the European Union as the beast power, motivated by the false prophet, the penultimate section, called "Subduing the nations: events during the Millennium", deals with how Jesus and the saints put an end to all rule and all authority and power. The very last section of the exposition is about the joyful coming of the heavenly Jerusalem and the rulership of Jesus and his faithful servants. These servants have heeded the last message of Jesus to them in the Revelation and now live and reign with their Lord for ever.

In conclusion, this Study Guide is warmly commended as a valuable help for all in understanding the wonderful book of Revelation.