

Scientists have removed one of the leaves for DNA testing so that the ancient palm can be compared with modern strains, and they now have to wait until the seedling is five years old to discover whether the plant is male or female. Only female plants bear fruit. Scientists hope that the unique seedling will eventually yield vital clues to the medicinal properties which were attributed to the fruit of the Judean date tree in Biblical times.

### **A modern parable**

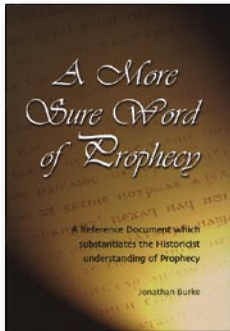
The astonishing revival of the ancient Judean date palm after nearly 2,000 years stands as a striking allegory of the national resurrection of Israel. The

palm is one of the characteristic trees of the Land (Joel 1:12), and its representation was specified for the decoration of the House of God (1 Kgs. 6:29ff.; Ezek. 40:16ff.). Its branches likewise were to be used for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:40) and were used to greet the Lord Jesus at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Jno. 12:13; cf. Mt. 21:8).

A scientific 'miracle' in which a 2,000-year-old date seed has sprung to life aptly symbolises the greater miracle soon to come, in which the nation of Israel will again bear fruit to God, and when the true Messiah will come again and be greeted by his people bearing branches of palm trees.

## **Our prophetic heritage**

John Nicholls



**A More Sure Word of Prophecy, subtitled "A Reference Document which substantiates the Historist understanding of Prophecy".**

**Jonathan Burke. 84 pages.**

**Published by the Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, Adelaide.**

**Available from the UK agent, Brother Peter Talbot, 6 Ridge Lane, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham, NG12 1BD, [talbotpj@aol.com](mailto:talbotpj@aol.com).**

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**T**HE 'CONTINUOUS historic' interpretation of the Book of Revelation was for a long time the only one held in Christadelphian literature, the basis being *Eureka* and *Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse*. Today other interpretations have been offered, usually 'Futurist' and generally fairly short in length. The arguments for and against have been well aired, particularly in Brother Graham Pearce's *Revelation: Which Interpretation?*

The booklet under review, written by Brother Jonathan Burke from Australia, adopts a different approach to supporting the Continuous Historic view. Our brother has accessed the writings of students of the Apocalypse and Daniel from

as far back as the first century A.D. in order to compare how they interpreted the books and understood the symbols. He has consulted over 200 sources and perused the comments of over 400 writers to produce his book, which he says "is a highly compressed edition of a far larger work". It contains only about a fifth of his material, and in order to keep his book to a reasonable size he has not included a bibliography.

When the reviewer read this, he was somewhat disappointed, as a work of this nature demands that original sources are quoted, but Brother Burke explains that to have done this would have increased the size of the book by twenty-five per cent. A website is given, however, from which it is possible to download a large number of the books which have been the research sources for his work.

### **Daniel and 2 Thessalonians**

The booklet itself is organised into sections based on particular prophecies. The first is Nebuchadnezzar's image dream, and there is a table with a list of expositors, the date of their exposition and how they interpreted the parts of the image: the head, chest, belly and thighs, etc. As Daniel is in the Old Testament, Jewish scholars are included, amongst them Josephus in the first century A.D. Selected quotations are then made from the sources used. For example, Irenaeus (A.D. 180), an early church father, says of the image: "The ten toes, therefore, are these ten kings, among whom the kingdom shall be partitioned, of whom some

indeed shall be strong and active, or energetic; others, again, shall be sluggish and useless, and shall not agree”.

Daniel 7 and the interpretations of the four beasts, the three horns of the fourth beast and the little horn which overthrows them, and also the time period of “a time and times and the dividing of time” follow next, with a high degree of unanimity over the interpretation. As early as A.D. 1240, Eberhard II, a Roman Catholic archbishop, interpreted the little horn as the papacy!

The section on 2 Thessalonians 2, the “falling away” and the emergence of “the man of sin”, is particularly fascinating. Twenty expositors are listed, dating from A.D. 180 to A.D. 1240, all of whom were Roman Catholics and most of whom believed that “the temple of God” of the prophecy is the Church, and “he who now letteth [restrains]” was the pagan Roman Empire. They all believed that the “man of sin” is an apostate Christian and some of them that it is the papacy. Brother Burke writes that to the ones listed in his table there “could be added at least another 58 expositors writing after 1240, all the way up to the late 20th century. This understanding of the passage was almost universal”.

### The Apocalypse

Coming to the Apocalypse, the author starts with a table covering chapter 6, which compares the interpretations of over fifty expositors of the first six seals. The agreement is amazing, and he cites, among others, Andreas of Caesarea (A.D. 520), who saw the six seals as taking place in a chronological sequence. It is also noteworthy that the later expositors (he only cites non-Christadelphian expositors), from A.D. 1600 onwards, saw “Constantine victorious” as the fulfilment of the sixth seal.

In a review of this kind it is not possible to go over all the prophecies where Brother Burke has compared the interpretations over the centuries, but it is worth listing those parts of the Revelation which he covers in separate sections of his work:

- the six trumpets in detail and the hour/month/day period (chs. 8, 9)
- the great city called Sodom and Egypt (11:8)
- the fall of the tenth part of the city (v. 13)
- the woman, the dragon and the man child (ch. 12)
- the forty-two months (13:5)
- the number of the name of the beast (vv. 17,18)

- the first five vials (16:1-11)
- the sixth vial (vv. 12-16)
- the heads of the beast (ch. 17).

For each of these prophecies the author has tabulated the expositors, the date of their exposition and their interpretation of the particular symbol. He has also selected quotations from the writings of the expositors, and these are very interesting.

In general, Brother Burke has found high agreement amongst different expositors, both Catholic and Protestant, over long periods of time. It can be reasoned from this that such a consensus means that the interpretation is the correct one, and we can therefore have confidence in our traditional interpretations by the pioneer brethren.

What is also of interest in this work are the citations from expositors with an understanding of God’s purpose and the symbols used in His Word. Such expositors were able to predict future events. A good example is James Bicheno, who wrote in 1793. To quote Brother Burke:

“Bicheno identifies the first vial as the French Revolution, and then—from as early as 1793—predicts the events of the following vials:

- The second vial would bring naval battles and maritime conflicts (first predicted 1793, expanded 1795)
- The third vial would bring wars in central Europe, especially in those countries around the Danube, the Rhine, and the Po (first predicted 1793, expanded 1797)
- The fifth vial would bring severe judgments on the Papacy, especially in Rome, which Bicheno anticipated would be sacked (first predicted 1793, expanded 1797)
- The sixth vial would dry up the Turkish empire, preparatory to allowing the Jews to return to their land (predicted 1798)” (p. 61).

### Wise words

The booklet is published by the ever-resourceful CSSS, and Brother Brian Luke has some wise words to say in the preface, particularly in regard to the identity of the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2, and also regarding how Brother Thomas in *Eureka* Volume 3 mentions many of the expositors cited in the booklet under review. Brother Thomas is not very complimentary to them and yet he leans heavily on their conclusions to support his expositions. Brother Luke says regarding this:

“It is because he could perceive that none of them understood the doctrine of the kingdom

of God, the hope of Israel, the establishment of a returned Christ upon the throne of David in Jerusalem. Nor did they know the mortal state of man and the essentials of atoning truth as it is in Christ Jesus. So much of the Apocalypse would remain a puzzle to them and their writings on the subject make this plain. So whilst we acknowledge the consistently accurate interpretations of so many of these past commentators when identifying key aspects of the symbols, we are the more grate-

ful that the whole of the Book has been made plain to us with a proper comprehension of the gospel of the Kingdom. 'Eureka' is a very special Christadelphian treasure!"

In conclusion, this booklet is unusual and gives us confidence that our understanding of Christ's last message to us is sound, and that we can look forward very soon to the return of the Lord and the fulfilment of the remaining prophecies in that wonderful message. It is heartily commended to the Brotherhood.

## The Lamb on Mount Zion (2)

Ralph Green

**R**EVELATION 14:2 contains several features that call for comment. The verse reads: "And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps".\*

The words "voice from heaven" indicates that these redeemed are already ruling in the symbolic heaven, the Kingdom of God, at least in its early stages. It will take some years fully to subdue all nations to the authority of Christ. The next phrase, "like the voice of many waters", indicates that the redeemed consist of a great multitude of men and women, said in chapter 7 to have been taken out of "all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" (v. 9).

Then we are told that the sound is "like the voice of loud thunder". This indicates that the process of subduing the nations to incorporate them into the Kingdom of God will inevitably mean war, the war of Armageddon. 'Armageddon' is a term used to identify the seventh and last vial of God's wrath (Rev. 16:16,17). Here we read, "And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth" (v. 18).

Included in this seventh vial is the destruction of the cities of the nations that will be necessary to achieve the submission of the nations to Christ. Also, and of particular significance, is the sentence, "And great Babylon [the papal and ecclesiastical system of the Roman Catholic Church] was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (v. 19).

### The Roman Catholic Church

This church is remembered particularly for her cruel treatment of God's true worshippers for a period of 1,260 years. They were unrelentingly persecuted and put to death because they refused to "receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads" (13:16), that is to say, to conform to the erroneous dogmas of the pope. To describe His hatred of this ecclesiastical system, God portrays it in symbolic terms as a profane harlot, "having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH". John continued, "And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:4-6). Without doubt, this would be one of the main reasons for her destruction during the seventh vial.

When this war of Armageddon is finished and all nations have been brought to submission to the authority of the Lord Jesus, there will be peace for 1,000 years. This peace is represented in the vision of chapter 14 by these "harpists playing their harps". What a happy time this will be for the redeemed, for they will then be ruling the nations of the whole world under the authority of the Lord Jesus!

### The Lord Jesus in Isaiah 9

The long-lasting peace following the war of Armageddon is briefly referred to in a well-known

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\* Quotations are from the NKJV unless stated otherwise.