

## Is the Apocalypse a dual-fulfilment prophecy?

In a recent publication on the Apocalypse the author claims that this prophecy is capable of rightly holding more than one interpretation. In this particular case the continuous-historic interpretation is accepted and the futurist interpretation is supplemental to it, not substituted for it. As we know, similar claims have been made in the past.

This raises the question of our approach to Bible prophecy. Should it be approached with a view to finding more than one fulfilment? There appear to be fulfilled Old Testament prophecies which are precedents and supportive of this approach. The question remains, does this have any bearing upon our interpretation of the Apocalypse?

An example of more than one fulfilment of prophecy is to be found in Isaiah 40–55. The prophet comforts the nation of Israel with the 'glad tidings' of their homecoming from Babylon. Their warfare was accomplished and every valley would be exalted and every mountain made low (40:1-4). Cyrus is identified as the anointed shepherd who would do this (44:28–45:2). The theme is unmistakably the redemption of Israel from Babylon.

The New Testament shows that this is not the only fulfilment. These Isaiah 'glad tidings' were fulfilled 700 years after the prophet's time in the coming of the greater Cyrus to provide a greater redemption. There is yet a further fulfilment in the future when "the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head" (51:11). Such is the marvel of prophecy. But what of the Apocalypse?

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### Comment

There can be no doubt that much Bible prophecy has more than one fulfilment, but I do not believe that this applies to continuous-historic prophecy. The nature of continuous-historic prophecies is that the fulfilment begins at or soon after the time they were given and stretches on

to the return of Christ, and even beyond. Consider the prophecies of Daniel:

**Daniel 2.** Begins with the Babylonian Empire, ends with the kingdoms of the world being overthrown and replaced by the Kingdom of God.

**Daniel 7.** Begins with the Babylonian Empire and ends with the saints possessing the Kingdom.

**Daniel 8.** Begins with the rise of the Medo-Per- sian Empire and ends with Jerusalem cleansed and no longer trodden down, and a power opposing Christ overthrown.

**Daniel 11:2–12:4.** Begins with the Medo-Persian Empire and ends with the resurrection of the saints.

These four prophecies of Daniel were given on different occasions, and the application of the initial part of the prophecies to powers then existing is given. The Apocalypse was revealed on one occasion, and no specific application to powers then existing is given. However, an application on continuous-historic lines beginning soon after the time the prophecy was given is indicated by the opening verse: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants *things which must shortly come to pass*". This could only be so if the fulfilment took place through history down to the return of Christ. There are in fact two continuous-historic sections:

**Revelation 6–11.** Begins with the fulfilment of the seals in events to do with the pagan Roman Empire, ends with the kingdoms of the world becoming the Kingdom of God, and with the judgement of the saints.

**Revelation 12–22.** Begins with a power which is described in terms of Daniel's fourth beast (Rome) persecuting the woman (the church), ends with the return of Christ and detailed descriptions of the establishment of the Kingdom and beyond.

I cannot see how such prophecies can have more than one fulfilment. What further fulfilment can there be of prophecies of the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God?

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