

of Hezekiah, when the Assyrians invaded the Land (5:5,6), and the prophecy helps to build up a picture of Hezekiah as a type of Christ and the overthrow of the Assyrians as a type of the overthrow of the hosts of Gog. Again a look at some details will establish the point:

- As a result of the overthrow of the Assyrian host, representatives of the nations came to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:23; cf. Mic. 4:1);
- Following the overthrow of Assyria, the Jews would “plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof” (Isa. 37:30; cf. Mic. 4:4);
- The remnant (Isa. 37:4,31,32; cf. Mic. 5:3,7,8);
- “The strength of the Lord” (Mic. 5:4). This is the meaning of the name Hezekiah.

3. Prophecies with a complete fulfilment in the short term and a typical fulfilment later

These are prophecies which were completely fulfilled fairly soon after they were uttered, but the fulfilment is typical of something greater to come, so that the prophecy has a further application. All the details are fulfilled in the immediate fulfilment, but all the details are not necessarily fulfilled in the remote fulfilment.

1. Isaiah 17. Here is a prophecy which has its complete fulfilment in events close to the prophet’s own day, the invasion by the Assyrian army. Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel are

first affected (vv. 1-3), but the invading army brings judgement upon Judah until it is overthrown suddenly in a night (v. 14). Yet the Assyrian invasion is a type of the Gogian invasion to come, so we can study the prophecy with this in mind also; a host from the north, coming down through Syria, rushing against Israel, and being overthrown suddenly. The prophecy does not have to be applied in every detail to the Gogian invasion, though; for example, there are no idols in the land now, as there were when the prophet wrote (v. 8).

2. Psalm 41. This psalm clearly has as its background a time when David’s enemies were rising up against him, desiring his death (v. 5). The reference to his close friend rising up against him (v. 9) shows that the setting must be the time of Absalom’s rebellion, when Ahithophel turned against David. Yet verse 9 is quoted by Jesus with reference to the treachery of Judas Iscariot (Jno. 13:18).

This does not mean that all the details of the psalm apply to Christ. Verse 4, where David asks God to have mercy on him and forgive his sin, clearly does not apply to the sinless one. The quotation of this psalm by Jesus is not an indication that we should look at the psalm in isolation as a prophecy about Jesus, and try to apply all the details to him. It directs us to look at the historical account of the rebellion of Absalom, and the psalms that have it as their setting, to build up a type of Christ.

The continuous-historic approach to prophecy

Tony Benson

WHAT IS MEANT by the continuous-historic approach to prophecy? The term is usually applied to the Apocalypse and to the view that it is a prophecy fulfilled over the centuries, from the time it was given to the return of Christ and beyond. However, this type of prophecy is found in the Old Testament also.

God reveals His purpose

Scripture expresses the principle that God “revealeth His secret unto His servants the proph-

ets” (Amos 3:7). From the Fall to the call of Abraham little is recorded about God’s dealings with man, but from the time of Abraham there is a more detailed record of the history of God’s people. However, between the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus there is a gap, but prophecy filled that gap, for in Genesis 15:13-16 a brief outline of the events which span that period is given. This is a continuous-historic prophecy.

There is a much larger gap in Divine revelation between the Old and New Testaments.

Again, however, prophecy fills the gap, for the faithful had the prophecies of Daniel to guide them. Chapters 2, 7, 8, 9 and 11 would all have made their contribution to their understanding of the times in which they lived and what was to happen.

It is now 1,900 years since the New Testament was completed, and we believe we are living shortly before the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will return. On the basis of God's past dealings with man, it is reasonable to suppose that He has given information and guidance to His servants regarding that long gap. This is what the Apocalypse claims to be, but this is only so if it is a continuous-historic prophecy.

Daniel and the Apocalypse

This comparison between Daniel and the Apocalypse is enhanced if we look carefully at them, and the comparison confirms that the Apocalypse is a continuous-historic book. Though the prophecies of Daniel cover the period between Daniel's time and the New Testament time, their complete fulfilment spans the period from the prophet's own time to the still future establishment of God's Kingdom. It is thus a book of continuous-historic prophecies, summarised as follows:

- The image prophecy in Daniel 2 clearly begins in Daniel's own time and ends with the establishment of the Kingdom.
- The same four kingdoms are depicted as beasts in Daniel 7, and we have clear statements about the establishment of the Kingdom, which ends the sequence of events.
- Daniel 8 commences with the Persian Empire, then existing and about to overthrow the Babylonian Empire, and runs forward to the Roman conquest of the Land and beyond.
- Daniel 11-12 is in fact one prophecy, again beginning with the Persian Empire and culminating with the Kingdom.

Any reader coming fresh to Daniel and to the Apocalypse would be struck by how similar in character both are. The prophetic portions of Daniel mostly consist of highly symbolic visions, and so does the Apocalypse. These visions in Daniel are fulfilled progressively over long periods of time, and it is reasonable to suppose that the visions of the Apocalypse are similarly fulfilled.

In Revelation 12 we read of a dragon (v. 3), which is clearly based on the fourth beast of Daniel 7, for both have ten horns. The beast of

Daniel 7 is the Roman Empire, which was, of course, the dominating power when the Apocalypse was written. If Revelation 12 is the beginning of a sequence of prophecies running from the time the Apocalypse was given to the time of the Kingdom then it is appropriate that the Roman Empire should appear in symbol here. (It should be noted that there are two sequences of prophecy in Revelation, the second beginning in chapter 12, as is shown by the fact that there are clear references to the establishment of the Kingdom in 11:15,18, and an opening of heaven again in 11:19, as in chapter 4.)

In Revelation 13 the dragon is succeeded by a beast. This beast is clearly connected with Daniel 7 because it incorporates within itself characteristics of the first three beasts of Daniel 7 and has ten horns like the fourth beast of Daniel 7 (Rev. 13:1,2). This beast has significant similarities to the little horn that develops out of the beast of Daniel 7. The little horn has "a mouth speaking great things" (Dan. 7:8,20), and the beast has "a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies" (Rev. 13:5). The little horn "made war with the saints, and prevailed against them" (Dan. 7:21), and of the beast it is said: "it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (Rev. 13:7).

Thus Daniel and the Apocalypse are alike in character, and partly similar in content. The visions of Daniel are clearly continuous-historic in fulfilment; the Apocalypse must likewise be so. In fact the Apocalypse is largely a development in more detail of the visions of Daniel, and more connections could be brought out.

The introduction to the Apocalypse

The opening of the Apocalypse strongly indicates that it is a continuous-historic prophecy. John was told: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (1:19). "The things which shall be hereafter" are detailed in chapters 4 onwards, as is shown by the repetition of the phrase in 4:1.

In fact, however, chapters 4 and 5 are an introduction to the "things which must be hereafter". Future events are depicted as being written in "a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals" (5:1), and only the crucified, resurrected and ascended Christ is worthy to open the book. When he begins to open the book, things happen on earth in series after series of events. It is surely unreasonable to sup-

pose that there should be a gap of two thousand years between the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus being accounted worthy to open the book, and the things prophesied in the book occurring. The introduction to the main visions of this book is surely telling us that the continuous-historic interpretation is the correct one.

The opening words of the Apocalypse state that it is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass". This rules out the view that the book will be fulfilled at a time yet future to ourselves, for it would not then be "things which must *shortly* come to pass". At first sight these words seem to support the idea that it was all fulfilled in John's day, but this cannot be so because the visions lead up to the establishment of the Kingdom. The terms of 1:3 indicate that the Apocalypse is intended for the instruction of all Christ's servants down the ages, and this best fits the idea that it is a continuous-historic prophecy. At any time between when the prophecy was first recorded and the establishment of the Kingdom, the servants of Christ would be able to see prophecies being fulfilled in their time or in recent times, and would be able to look for the fulfilment of new events in the sequence. To every generation it reveals "things which must shortly come to pass".

Other points

There are other arguments in favour of the continuous-historic approach to the Apocalypse. Here, briefly, are three:

1 Daniel and the Apocalypse use much symbolic language, which enables much to be revealed in few words. In Daniel 11 there is a

continuous-historic prophecy expressed in literal language. It is much lengthier than the other continuous-historic prophecies in Daniel. In contrast, the symbolic prophecies in Daniel cover a lot in a few words by the use of symbols. The Apocalypse is much longer than the prophecies of Daniel, yet the language is symbolic. Only the continuous-historic method enables the prophecies to be explained in a rational and orderly fashion.

- 2 The last few chapters of the Apocalypse are about the establishment of the Kingdom and beyond. If the book is continuous-historic prophecy then, given that it is 1,900 years since it was given, we would expect to be seeing prophecies in later parts of the book being fulfilled in our day. This is the case; 16:13-16 speaks of the gathering of the nations into the Middle East (as also foretold in several Old Testament passages), and chapter 17 speaks of the revival of a united Europe, strongly influenced by a great apostate church, which is destroyed by Christ at his return.
- 3 It is a principle of God's dealings with His people that He issues warnings against going astray after false worship. In the Old Testament, Israel were repeatedly warned not to get involved with the worship of the nations around. In the continuous-historic interpretation of the Apocalypse, the book contains strong warnings about the uprise of an apostate religious system with great political power and influence. Take away the continuous-historic interpretation of Revelation and you take away strong warnings from God to His people to avoid this apostate system.

"Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" [Amos 3:7]. We should therefore expect to have been given a prophetic record covering the time the Master is away in heaven. That such a record should have been provided is the more to be expected, because in this time of his absence there has been no living voice of "holy men of God" speaking as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Without such a prophetic record, believers through long centuries would have been without a guiding light. Therefore, when the last book of the Bible outlines, in symbol, events leading up to the setting up of the kingdom under Christ, we should expect it to be an unfolding prophecy of events from John's day to the coming of the Lord. And this is its opening claim. It is concerned with "things which are, and [the] things which shall be hereafter" (1:19). It claims therefore to be a prophetic record which would soon start to be fulfilled. And for each subsequent generation they would find in this record "things which must shortly come to pass" (v. 1) in their own day.

The Revelation—Which Interpretation?, Graham Pearce, p. 115