

- In 1754 Thomas Newton said that the 2,300 period of Daniel 8 would expire in 1967, the year in which Jerusalem was once more in the hands of the Jews.
- In 1823 John Brown foresaw both the 2,520 period of Daniel 4 and Leviticus 26, and the 1,335 period of Daniel 12, expiring in 1917, whilst Grattan Guinness in 1886 stressed the great significance of the year 1917 in prophecy. These predictions were fulfilled in the driving out of the Turks from Palestine and the giving of the Balfour Declaration, which allowed the Jews to return to their land.

There are two arguments against the figurative interpretation that must be dealt with here:

- 1 It is pointed out that the statement of Jesus regarding his return, “of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mk. 13:32), means that it is not possible for men to predict the exact date of the return of Christ. However, none of the prophetic time periods of Daniel and Revelation are stated to expire exactly at the return of Christ, or at the resurrection of the dead. In any case, even if the time periods are literal,

they must begin at some time, and once they have begun the same objection, if valid, is equally applicable to the literal fulfilment.

- 2 The second objection is that there have been many cases where the proposed expiry dates of time periods based on the day-for-a-year method have come without anything significant happening. In particular, Christadelphians in the past have said with certainty that Christ would come in some year which has long since passed. However, just because brethren in past years in their laudable desire to see the return of Christ have wrongly applied these time periods, it does not follow that their method of approach was wrong. One might as well abandon all study of latter-day prophecy if such a criterion is used to evaluate prophetic studies.

There have already been more than sufficient fulfilments of prophetic time periods on a day-for-a-year basis to establish the validity of the method, as indicated above. It has become apparent that most, if not all, these periods have more than one appropriate commencement date and therefore more than one expiry date, and some anticipated expiry dates are still future.

The structure of Revelation

Geoff Cave

THE APOCALYPSE was written for a different audience and a different reason from any other book of Scripture. As the first verse reveals, it was for servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and it was to show them “things which must shortly come to pass”. It contains warnings, exhortation, encouragement and visions of future glory for those who “overcome”. It informs his servants of future events that will affect their walk in Christ.

The task of writing such a book would be difficult enough if it was for a specific group of servants, but this letter from the heavenly bridegroom was for a multitudinous bride living over a period of 2,000 years in many different circumstances. Human ingenuity could never rise to such a task in a letter containing just twenty-two short chapters, but God’s ways and thoughts are infinitely higher than human thoughts, and this is evident when considering the Apocalypse.

Use of symbols

The use of symbols is common throughout Scripture, but it is particularly dominant in Revelation. Using just a few words it is possible to describe an event that would need a few sentences if described using non-symbolic language. For example, the symbol is used in the third trumpet judgement of a star falling from heaven. It is describing the time when Attila the Hun attacked the Roman Empire. He had been a brilliant leader (a star), but when he attacked the Western Roman Empire his military career was coming to an end. The *Cambridge Mediaeval History* makes the following comment: “The empire of Attila was of too ephemeral a nature to be crucially dangerous; his attack on the west was like the passing of a transitory meteor”.¹

1. *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, Vol. 1, p. 417.

Basic structure of the prophecy			
A.D. 96	312	1793	2???
6 seals		6 trumpets	
Opening the seals revealed internal events in the Roman Empire—they brought judgements on the pagan Roman Empire		To summon barbarian nations to attack the empire (now 'Christian'), resulting in its collapse, first in the West, then the East	
		Poured out to bring judgement on papal Rome and to prepare the nations for Armageddon	
		7th trumpet contains the vials and lasts to the Kingdom	
		Opening the 7th seal reveals the trumpets and continues to the establishment of the Kingdom	

The other advantage of using symbols is that the reader, in an effort to interpret the meaning of the symbols, must go to the rest of Scripture to find out the correct interpretation. This, to twenty-first-century logic, makes the task harder, but our Lord knew the value of looking at the whole of the revealed Word (“All scripture is . . . profitable”). When using Scripture in this way it must be remembered that it will tell us how to interpret a symbol; it will not show which event is being described in the prophecy.

Details of the prophecy

The prophecy describes eighteen periods of history, beginning in A.D. 96 when the Apostle John received the vision and ending at the establishment of the Kingdom age. These periods are further divided into the three major sections of seals, trumpets and vials, as shown in the [chart](#).

Seals

Following the introduction and letters to the ecclesias, the Apostle John sees in vision a scroll sealed with seven seals. As each seal is removed, John learns of the next period of unfolding history and the events contained therein. The first six seals reveal events to occur in the Roman Empire from the first century through to the beginning of the fourth century. When the seventh seal is removed, John sees seven angels ready to blow seven trumpets. Thus the seventh seal encompasses the trumpet section and continues to the establishment of the Kingdom.

Trumpets

As each of the trumpets are blown, a power from without the empire invades. The first four

trumpets weaken and finally destroy the Western part of the empire. The fifth and sixth trumpets (also called woes) foretell attacks on the Eastern part of the empire, culminating with the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Vials

The seventh trumpet contains the vial section, which again continues through to the establishment of the Kingdom. The first five vials are directed against the power of the papacy in Rome, resulting in papal power to dominate and persecute the true believers being severely curtailed. The sixth vial moves attention to the East, describing the preparations made for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and also gives a remarkably accurate description of the evil powers at work in the world today.²

Earthquakes

Each of the three main sections ends with a major political earthquake. The seal section ends with a major change of government in the Roman Empire in the days of the Emperor Constantine. The empire was no longer to be ruled by pagans but by false Christianity. The end of the trumpet section and the start of the vials saw a major change in the religion that controlled the thoughts and actions of the people. The religion from this point was to be the froglike spirit of humanism. This power is strongly in evidence today. The third major earthquake will be the latter-day judgements of Almighty God; these

2. Mellows, R. (2003), “The three frog spirits and humanism”, *The Testimony*, Jul.-Sept.

will bring the nations to acknowledge His righteous laws.

The beast

The second part of the prophecy is dominated by the beast in its various phases. The dragon, the beast of the sea and the earth beast in Revelation are clearly closely related to the fourth beast in Daniel 7. It is this link which shows that much of the prophecy is concerned with the power of Rome. The chapters in the prophecy that give details about the beasts are describing events which took place during the same time period as the seals, trumpets and vials; they look at the same period but from a different point of view.

The unique state of the Roman power is seen when it is described in the prophecy: "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is" (17:8). This power exists; it is destroyed only to re-emerge again in another guise. The final phase of the beast power (the scarlet-coloured beast of chapter 17) can be seen emerging in Europe today.

Witnesses

Chapter 11 looks at a similar period of history again, but this time looking from the viewpoint of witnessing that took place against the false teaching and wicked practices of the papacy. This witnessing was seen in two specific forms.

The true believers witnessed against the papacy and were trodden "under foot" (v. 2) because, in accordance with the commands of their Lord, they would not use force. The other form of witnessing may be loosely described as Protestant; that is, those who could see that the worst excesses of the state church were wrong and were prepared to use force to combat it. They did not follow the true teachings of Scripture, but they were used in the Divine plan to protect those who did.

Visions of future glory

The whole of the prophecy is punctuated with visions of future glory in the coming Kingdom age. This has kept the vision bright for all believers over the last 2,000 years: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). Each historical section of the prophecy is preceded with a vision of the Kingdom. Thus a principle is used which is seen elsewhere in Scripture: the end result is first stated, followed by events which lead toward that result. This can only be achieved over such a long period of time by the One Who knows the end from the beginning.

The Apocalypse is not an easy book to understand. It was never intended to be; it is only for those with ears to hear, like Daniel and John, who had a fervent desire to know and, at least in part, understand what God has graciously revealed to His servants. We must belong to that category if we are to receive the blessings promised within the message: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (1:3).

For a book to have seven seals . . . was unusual and indicates both the importance of the book handed to the slain Lamb and the fact that it contained material hitherto known only to the Author of the document. It is important to realise that the scroll was not made up of seven separate writings, each with its own seal, the successive opening of which loosened a complete section of the roll. The book was a unity, with its own detailed scheme, to which full access was gained only when all seven seals had been broken. Objections to the continuous historic interpretation of the Apocalypse have been made on the ground that the period usually ascribed to the first six seals is relatively short compared with the time occupied by the seventh, and that there is too large a section remaining for the term 'continuous historic' to be properly applied. The difficulty vanishes, however, when it is realised that the first six seals simply open up the preface to the seventh. With the breaking of the seventh seal, the whole book becomes completely open for detailed inspection, for this seal introduces in the seven trumpets the stages up to the end of the 'first prophecy' in 11:19, by which time the consummation has been reached. One then as it were 'turns over' the scroll to read how John 'prophesied again' about nations and kings.

Alfred Nicholls, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, p. 42