

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

James M. Gray, D.D.

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LESSON TWENTY-SIX

THE REVELATION

The book of Revelation is more closely related to the Old Testament than the New.

It deals chiefly, especially in the apocalyptic part following the third chapter, with the events synchronizing with the Day of the Lord. The earthly judgments accompanying that Day, and the incoming of the millennial reign of CHRIST are the themes of which it treats, stamping it at once as a Jewish book to a great extent, a book that deals with Israel as a nation, carrying us back to our studies in Daniel for example, or in Matthew, particularly our Lord's discourse on the last things as found in chapters 24 and 25.

Keeping in mind that, beginning with chapter 4, we are dealing with kingdom truth rather than church truth, will aid materially in the interpretation of the book and save the student from much confusion of thought.

Further explanation of its general scheme may wisely be postponed until the difficulties actually come before us.

A rough working outline of the book might be given thus:

- I. Introductory (chap. 1).
- II. Epistolary (chaps. 2, 3).
- III. Apocalyptic-Premillennial (chaps. 4-18).

- IV. Apocalyptic-Millennial (19:1-20:6).
V. Apocalyptic-Postmillennial (20:7-22).

I. Introductory

Under the head of "Introductory," it seems suitable to say that the authorship of this book is generally ascribed to John, the beloved disciple, who wrote the Gospel and three Epistles bearing his name, who was at this time, about 95 A. D., banished with other Christians, by Domitian, the Roman Emperor, to the Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea (1:9). The date is in dispute, some placing it as early as the rule of Nero, 64 or 65, but the preponderance of evidence is in favor of the later period.

(1) The opening chapter consists of the preface (vv. 1-3).

A few questions will put us in better possession of it.

- whose revelation is this?
- of course, the reference here is to JESUS CHRIST considered as to His human nature, considered as man.
- whence did He receive this revelation?
- for whom was it given unto Him?
- and for what purpose with reference to them?
- to which one of His servants was it representatively sent? And through what agency?
- what did this servant do with the revelation thus committed to him (v. 2)?

That expression in verse 1, "**things which must shortly come to pass,**" has puzzled some, and given rise to the opinion that the predictions in this book have largely been fulfilled in connection with the course of history from that time. I think, however, that while some of them have been fulfilled in the particular history of the seven churches of Asia, for example, that the bulk of them are still future in that respect. "**One day is with the Lord as a thousand years.**" However, this matter will be considered later.

(2) The salutation follows the preface (vv. 4-8).

The seven churches in Asia therein addressed and afterward named, were probably those over which John at this time had some particular charge. But, as others have been careful to say, it were a mistake to suppose that the readers of this book were limited to the members of those churches. To quote Alford, "The number seven itself can hardly have been chosen except as symbolical of universality, according to the writer's practice throughout the book."

Speaking further of the numbers used in this book, it may be well just now to say that seven is that of perfection or completion.

In the several series of GOD's judgments, each complete in itself, seven is the number of the seals, trumpets, thunders and vials.

Four is the number of terrestrial or physical extension; four seals, four trumpets, etc., in each

case complete the number of judgments consisting in physical visitations.

Twelve is the number belonging to Israel, or to the church, or perhaps to both. Certainly the latter remark may be true where twice twelve are referred to as in the number of the elders. The heavenly city has twelve gates and on them the names of the twelve tribes; it has also twelve foundations corresponding to twelve apostles.

The half of the mystic seven is also a ruling number in the book. Three and a half days are mentioned, and three and a half years, but of these things more shall be said later.

Observe in the salutation the evident allusion to the trinity.

- "**Him which is, and which was, and which is to come,**" GOD the Father;
- "**The seven spirits before his throne,**" GOD the HOLY GHOST;
- "**Jesus Christ the faithful witness,**" GOD the Son.

Compare for the seven spirits Isaiah 11:2-5.

(3) The salutation is followed by a revelation of the preparatory vision which John received, and which constituted his authority to write (vv.8-20).

This vision was that of the person of the glorified CHRIST into the details of which it is beyond our province to go, but those who would like to study the symbolism of the passage a little further may be helped by the following, taken from a little work by Mr. Wight.

- the candlesticks compare Revelation 1:20; Matthew 5:14-16;
- the clothing, Isaiah 11:5; 61:10; Ephesians 6:14; Revelation 19:8;
- the white head and hair, Daniel 7:9; Matthew 17:1, 2; Acts 22:6-8; II Peter 1:16-18; Revelation 22:5;
- the eyes of fire, II Timothy 1:7, 8; Hebrews 12:29;
- the feet of brass, Proverbs 1:24-28; Isaiah 48:4; Luke 13:25-27;
- the voice of many waters, Daniel 10:6; Revelation 14:2, 3; 19:6;
- the seven stars, Daniel 12:3; Malachi 2:7; Revelation 1:20; 12:1;
- the two-edged sword, Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12;
- the keys, Isaiah 22:20-22; Matthew 16:19; Luke 11:52; Revelation 3:7; 20:1; Matthew 28:18; John 20:22, 23; I Corinthians 12:4, 8.

II. Epistolary

There are those who regard the epistolary portion of this book, chapters 2 and 3, as giving, in the form of the Epistles to the seven churches, a prophetic outline of "the decline and approaching judgment of corporate Gentile Christianity," i. e., Christendom. Those who remember the teaching of the seven parables of Matthew 13, will need no explanation of this remark, but will recall at once the distinction between Christendom and the true church, or body of CHRIST. The apostasy set in the apostolic days, and has been running and increasing in power ever since, and will culminate as we have seen, in the development of the Antichrist at the end of the age. The course of this apostasy, the growth of the tares among the wheat, is supposed to be indicated in

these Epistles, which show a gradual decline from the fervor of the first love or the Ephesian period, to the lukewarm condition (spued out of the mouth) of the Laodicean period.

But prior to dwelling on this further, let us be very clear in the first place, that these churches were, in John's time, seven historical existences in Asia. Nevertheless, in the second place, they are doubtless to be regarded as representative churches.

Representative of what?

(1) Representative of the church universal at that period. Doubtless the church of the apostolic days in every place contained within it the various elements of decline, summed up in these seven Epistles.

(2) Representative of the different characteristics of the church universal always more or less existent in every period of her history. In other words, not only in the apostolic age, but in every age succeeding, the commendations on the one hand, and the censures on the other contained in these seven Epistles have been applicable to the church universal.

(3) Representative of the dominant characteristics of the church universal in seven different periods of her history. That is, in the earlier period of the church universal her dominant characteristic is set forth in the Epistle to the church at Ephesus. The next period in her history is indicated in the state of the church at Smyrna, etc.

These seven periods in the history of the church universal have sometimes been divided in the following manner:

The Epistle to the church at Ephesus represents the spiritual condition of the church universal in the first period of her history, or in other words, from the ascension of CHRIST to the close of the first century, the apostolic era.

The Epistle to the church at Smyrna represents the second period, or the martyr church, so-called, from the death of the last apostle, John, to the rise of Constantine, 100-311 A. D.

The third Epistle, Pergamos, from the state church under Constantine to the rise of the papacy (Pope Gregory I), 311-590.

The fourth Epistle, Thyatira, from the rise of the papacy to the Reformation, 590-1517.

The fifth, Sardis, the Protestant churches from the Reformation to the rise of Methodism, 1517-1755.

The sixth, Philadelphia, the missionary period, 1755, to somewhere near the present time.

The seventh, Laodicea, from the present time to the second coming of CHRIST.

Little space is left to speak of the structure of the Epistles themselves, but quoting Archbishop Trench at this point, it will be seen that there are certain forms fundamental to all of them, for example:

- (1) an order to write,
- (2) a glorious title of the speaker,
- (3) an address to the church,
- (4) a command to hear,
- (5) a promise to the faithful.

Those who are desirous of material for Bible readings will find the outline thus given a very helpful one.

It is further interesting to note, that the title of the speaker, CHRIST, has in every instance two main features,

- first, it is taken for the most part from the imagery of the preceding vision, and
- secondly, it always seems to harmonize with the state or condition of the church addressed.

Let the student carefully examine this.

III. Apocalyptic-Premillennial, Chapters 4-18

- (1) Chapters 4 and 5.

In these chapters we have a kind of introductory vision to those that follow, which seems to set before us a picture of the glory of the risen saints in Heaven and the going forth of the Lamb (who is at the same time the Lion of the tribe of Judah), in those judgments upon the living Gentile nations of which the prophets have informed us, and which we are prepared to learn will fall upon the earth after the church has been caught up to meet her Lord in the air.

- (2) Chapter 6.

In this chapter we see this work of judgment actually going on upon the earth after the church, doubtless, has been caught up. In the first seal, CHRIST himself may be the rider on the white horse, a figure symbolizing his triumphant and glorious advent. If so, it is, as Benjamin Will Newton expresses it, a kind of "*preface of blessing*" for that which follows in the case of the other seals, which represent the afflictions on the Roman world-war, famine, pestilence, etc., preceding it.

In other words, after the church has been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and before He actually comes to reign on the earth with His church, these purifying judgments must fall; but the revelation of His coming precedes that of the judgments, and is described as the "*preface of blessing*."

This is the plan as Newton thinks, throughout all the visions that follow.

The order of narration, in other words, is not historical but moral, that which occurs last usually being narrated first.

But some one may ask, what about the fifth and sixth seals!

The second, third and fourth represent the judgments just spoken of, but the fifth, it is thought, represents the faithful souls on the earth amid the prevailing error at that time. It is quite conceivable, and indeed almost necessary to believe, that after the church has been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and before the destructive judgments and the nations shall culminate, there will be some here who will have turned to him and be serving him. We can understand how the very translation of the church itself is likely, by GOD's grace, to produce that effect, and these are the ones who, as the great tribulation is settling down upon the earth, are heard to cry out, "**How long, O Lord, how long?**"

The sixth seal is the representation of the culminating judgments - literal signs in Heaven and earth just before the end, just before the fulfillment of the first seal, and synchronizing with the events forecast by CHRIST in the flesh, as recorded in Matthew 24, 25.

(3) Chapters 7-9.

In this section, according to the law of recurrence, we have fuller details of the divine judgments which precede the millennium. The "*preface of blessing*" is given in chapter 7, where we have set before us "the two elect bodies preserved for blessing at that time."

- the first is the faithful remnant of Israel which shall be preserved through the tribulation (vv. 1-8), and
- the second is the church caught up to meet the Lord (vv.9-17).

Now follow, in the revelation of the six trumpets, the judgments already outlined in the vision of the seals. It would appear that the judgments under the figure of the trumpets, however, are confined to the people and the land of Israel, and it will be seen that they are destructions partly resulting from the exercise of the powers of nature and partly from superhuman agencies.

(4) Chapters 10-13.

This section gives still further details of the same judgments as the preceding sections, but restricted apparently to the last 1,260 days of this dispensation, i. e., the last "half-week," the last three and a half years referred to in Daniel 9. To quote an English writer, Cecil Yates Bliss, the plan of the section is as follows:

In chapter ten we have the "*preface of blessing*," viz: a vision of the Lord's coming in power and glory, the "**little book**" symbolizing possibly the preceding witness-bearing of the faithful ones referred to above.

In chapter 11 we have Jerusalem's history during 1,260 days, the chief feature being the testimony of "**the two witnesses**," who many regard as Moses and Elijah returned in the earth in the flesh.

In chapter 12 we have Christianity cast out from the city and persecuted. * This is not the church, which we are to remember is caught up with the Lord, but the Christian system under the special

circumstances of that period as previously stated.

- the "**male child**" possibly represents the converts to Christianity in Jerusalem just prior to the absolute reign, the Antichrist being some secular despot represented by the beast.
- the ten horns are the ten kingdoms of the Roman Empire federated under him, and
- the seven heads possibly the seven systems, commercial, military, educational, political, ecclesiastical, etc., which contribute to the unity or federation aforementioned.

The second beast is an ecclesiastical head subordinate to the Antichrist.

* I prefer to think of the woman in chapter 12 as Israel, and the male child as the Messiah. V. 5 cf. with Psalm 2 seems to justify such an application. He was "**caught up**" at his ascension. Meanwhile Israel as a nation is dispersed but will be restored, and during the tribulation of the 1,260 days will "**flee into the wilderness**," or as some interpret it, will receive protection from some of the Gentile nations federated under the Antichrist.

(5) Chapter 14.

Here we have a vision enlarging again upon certain points mentioned before.

The "*preface of blessing*" is contained in verses 1-5. The Lamb on Mt. Zion with the 144,000 seems to represent the remnant of Israel purified and delivered through the tribulation, having overcome the Antichrist, and now reigning with CHRIST over the earth in the millennium. To quote B. W. Newton, the figure represents "the earthly seat of the new and heavenly power ordering the earth during the millennium."

Verses 6 and 7 represent the previous witness-bearing of the eternal Gospel, which would seem to be different from the Gospel of grace proclaimed in the present dispensation.

Verse 8 is to be regarded, I think, as a testimony against the city of Babylon itself, which, as we saw in our study of Isaiah and Zechariah is doubtless to be restored as the center of commercial and political greatness in the world at the time of the end.

Verses 9-12 are likewise a testimony against the system and the person of the Antichrist himself at that time reigning there.

Verses 14-16 forecast the judgments on the nations again, especially the nations of Christendom, while verses 18-20 may be referring perhaps to those which shall fall more particularly on Israel and what we know as the heathen nations.

(6) Chapters 15-18.

This section seems to deal particularly with the judgment on Babylon herself.

The "*preface of blessing*" is set before us in chapter 15, where we have a vision of the millennial glory and reign of CHRIST and His saints, as depicted in the allusion to the sea of glass and

what follows.

The pouring out of the vials in chapter 16 represents the judgments preceding the realization of this millennial reign. The battlefield is, I think, a literal battlefield between the Roman nations with the Antichrist at their head, and the nations of the East and North, perhaps with Russia at their head.

CHRIST, however, is seen as interposing on behalf of his people, i. e., the faithful remnant.

Chapter 17 gives us a picture of the fate of moral Babylon, or Babylonianism, the anti-Christian system which has made possible the Antichrist himself, and which is represented by the harlot sitting on the scarlet beast.

- this woman, according to Benjamin Wills Newton, symbolizes the moral, political, commercial, and ecclesiastical systems spoken of in an earlier paragraph in this lesson.
- the seven heads, indeed, may be seven systems forming a perfect whole, the sum and substance of Babylonianism in the last days.
- the ten horns are the ten kingdoms of the Roman federation which support the system.
- the seven kings may be the seven world-monarchies leading up to this last.

Five are fallen, viz, those of Nimrod, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. One is, viz, the Roman (of John's own day). The "other" was not yet come, i. e., the constitutional monarchies of the present time. The "eighth" is that of the Antichrist of which we are now speaking. The system is destroyed by the ten kings who give their power to the Antichrist for that purpose, having wearied of the restriction of their power which has been entailed upon them by the harlot, or in other words, by Babylonianism.

Chapter 18 speaks for itself, and outlines the destruction of Babylon as a city, the material Babylon, the capitol city of Antichrist's dominion.

The necessity for brevity in the outline thus completed gives to some of the declarations it contains a dogmatic character which the writer does not intend to convey. There is need of caution and modesty in interpretations of prophecy, please understand, therefore, that what is here written is simply the best the author knows at present, but it affords a working basis for those desiring to go further.

IV. Apocalyptic-Millennial, 19:1-20:6

In the previous division, apocalyptic-Premillennial, the coming of CHRIST was referred to again and again, but was not particularly described. It was held in the foreview as the "*preface of blessing*" to each of the visions enumerated, but the visions represented judgments of different kinds to fall on the nations, and on Israel, for punitive and purifying purposes, prior to the realization or the actual experience of his coming. Remember, however, that by the coming of CHRIST in this case is meant not His coming for His church which will have already taken place, but His coming with His church to inaugurate the millennial reign.

This view is called the Futurist because it holds, as we have seen, that the fulfillment of the

visions is future, synchronizing, indeed, with the close of the present age, perhaps with the first half of the last seven years of this age-Daniel's last week of the seventy.

A rival to this school of interpretation is the Historic which treats the chapters covered as a progressive sketch of the course of events in the world and in the church from the days of John to the end of this dispensation or age. In part they have been already fulfilled, in part they are being fulfilled, and in part they are yet to be fulfilled. This school of interpretation generally holds to the idea that Babylon means Rome, and that the Antichrist is the papacy, and is distinguished by what is called the year-day theory, i. e., the principle that the "days" spoken of in the book mean in each case a year.

The Historic interpretation is fascinating, and holds the student at first under the spell of its conclusions; but the study of the Bible as a whole, or even such a limited study as that we have just pursued, convinces one that however the historic school may approximate or foreshadow the events of the coming end, the teachings of Revelation have reference to them, i. e., the culminating events at the end, in a very special sense.

To proceed at once with the outline of Part IV:

- (1) We have first, a representation of the actual coming of CHRIST (19:1-10).
- (2) Secondly, a representation of the church coming with him (vv. 11-14). The saints thus seen as coming with him were those previously raised ere the beginning of the end, and harmonizing with the teaching in I Thessalonians 4:13-18.
- (3) Thirdly, a further representation of the judgments on hilt enemies (vv. 15-21). These judgments, according to the law of recurrence, are those previously referred to, only that now they are seen in a somewhat different connection or relationship.
- (4) Fourthly, the binding of Satan, for the millennial season (20:1-3). The absolute limitation of his power over men for the time being.
- (5) Fifthly, the actual millennial reign of CHRIST and his church (vv.4-6).

V. Apocalyptic-Postmillennial

The fifth and last part of the book, 20:7-22, dealing with the age to follow the millennium, can receive but the briefest treatment.

1. The first fact mentioned is the loosing of Satan (20:7), who is given another opportunity to test men in his antagonism to GOD.
2. The loosing of Satan is followed by the last conflict with evil in the flesh that GOD will ever have (vv. 8, 9).

Some people are surprised to learn that the millennium will be followed by such a conflict, for they have supposed that all sin would be put down during that period. But such is not GOD's plan. Sin will be in existence during the millennium, latent, or dormant, if you please, but still existent. It will not be able to raise its head as it does now, for righteousness will be in the ascendant, but it will be crouching at the door ready to spring into life and action as soon as an opportunity appears.

And the opportunity appears when Satan appears.

The truth is that the millennial age will be man's last chance on this earth to decide whether he will voluntarily serve GOD or not. And it will be a chance under most favorable circumstances, for the earth which will then have within its view the visible glory of CHRIST and His church in the air; it will have the advantage of all the experiences of past ages, and all the excellency of GOD's power and goodness in the millennium itself, but it will fail as it has always failed since the garden of Eden. When Satan is loosed there will be those on the earth who, neither regenerated nor united to JESUS CHRIST, will again yield to his seductions, and oppose GOD. They will even dare to compass the beloved city, the earthly Jerusalem, the citadel of the saints, and then it is that the last judgment begins to fall.

3. We, therefore, see next, the destruction of Satan himself (v. 10).

His time has come at length, and he will deceive the nations no more. Notice who have preceded him into the lake of fire and brimstone.

4. The judgment of the dead follows (vv. 11-13), by which is to be understood doubtless, all the dead from Adam to that time - the end of the world, except, of course, the saints who were reigning with CHRIST throughout the millennium:- notice that the present earth and Heaven flee away, also that a "**book of life**" is mentioned. This book of life doubtless contains the record of the saved ones during the millennial reign.

5. The destruction of death and hell, or Hades, the place of the dead (v. 14), which are personified here as representing the enemies of CHRIST.

6. The new Heaven and earth (21:1).

Observe the sequence of events suggested by this verse, e. g., now, i. e., in the present time, we have the church; in the millennium will be the kingdom; and after that the new world where GOD shall be all in all. To quote a commentator, "Man's soul is redeemed by regeneration through the HOLY SPIRIT now; his body shall be redeemed at the resurrection, and his dwelling-place at the creation of the new Heaven and earth."

"**And there shall be no more sea.**" The sea is the type of perpetual unrest, and its absence after the metamorphosis of the earth answers to the unruffled state of solid peace which shall then prevail. A "river," and "water" are spoken of in the next chapter, but no sea.

7. The descent of the holy city upon the earth as the tabernacle of GOD (vv. 2-8).

Here are revealed some wondrous and precious things.

Always distinguish between this New Jerusalem out of heaven, and that earthly Jerusalem in which Israel in the flesh shall dwell during the millennium. The two are distinct. The one will be done away with when the other comes.

This new Jerusalem will be GOD's tabernacle, GOD's dwelling-place with men in the new earth.

It is the antitype of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and is also the same Greek word as that used of CHRIST's tabernacling among us (John 1:14). He was then in the weakness of the flesh, but at the new creation he shall be seen in the glory of his God-head.

8. The description of the city (21:9-22:5).

All the details of this city suggest glory, beauty, security and peace.

In the millennium, literal Israel in the flesh dwelling in Jerusalem, is the antitype to the Old Testament earthly theocracy, but in this, the eternal (?) age, the heavenly Jerusalem is the antitype of the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles. This idea seems to be suggested by the names of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles written upon the gates and the foundations.

The fact that no temple is seen in this city is remarkable, and suggests that the means of grace cease when the end of grace has come. Uninterrupted, immediate, direct communion with GOD and the Lamb will then be enjoyed.

The student will be struck by the comparison evidently intended to be drawn between the picture in 22:1-4, and the story of the garden of Eden and the expulsion of our first parents.

9. Conclusion or postscript to the book (vv. 6-21).

In this conclusion there is nothing more solemn than that stated in verse 11, which emphasizes the thought that "the punishment of sin is sin, just as the reward of holiness is holiness." "Eternal punishment is not so much an arbitrary law as a result necessarily following in the very nature of things as the fruit results from the bud."

In this same connection notice the allusion to the eternity of sin in verse 15.

May GOD quicken us who know these things to do our duty in bearing witness to them, that some by all means may be saved.

This duty is set before us in verse 20: "**He which testifieth these things saith, surely, I come, quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!**"

~ end of book ~