

UNDERSTANDING REVELATION

Part I

“Interpretation” in the Book of Revelation

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The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John (Rev. 1:1).

The Book of Revelation is where many expositors and Bible students commit mayhem in Biblical interpretation, and that is especially true beginning with chapter seventeen and continuing through the first six verses of chapter nineteen.

These are chapters where *interpretation, for the most part, has remained unchanged over the years*, with expositors seemingly being unable to break away from an erroneous view which has been held by individuals in one form or another for at least the last five hundred years, since the time of the Reformation.

The Church, Israel, and the Nations

The Church is dealt with at the beginning of this book (opening four chapters), in both a *historical* and *judgmental* respect — a history of the Church throughout the dispensation is presented, but centrally these chapters have to do with the Church removed from the earth at the end of the dispensation and judged in Christ’s presence.

Beginning with Rev. 6:1, following the introduction of the seven-sealed scroll in chapter five (the scroll containing God’s redemptive terms for the forfeited inheritance, the earth), this book deals with “the time of Jacob’s trouble” and time immediately beyond, not the time of the Church’s trouble (either the true Church or a so-called false Church).

God, at this time, will have completed His

dealings with the Church during Man’s Day. And beginning with Revelation chapter six, God is seen turning back to Israel and completing His dealings with the Jewish people during the last seven years of Man’s Day, fulfilling events which will occur during the final week of Daniel’s Seventy-Week prophecy (along with the nations to be dealt with through Israel at this time, with the Messianic Era to follow).

Subject and Structure of the Book

Note *the subject matter* of the Book of Revelation and *how the book has been structured*, given in the opening verse of the book.

Then, with these things in view, *the time element* — “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” beginning in chapter six — can be dealt with and understood within its proper context and the manner in which the material has been put together in this book.

1) Subject

The word “Revelation” in the opening verse of this book is a translation of the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which means to “disclose,” “reveal,” “uncover.” And this word, along with its verb form (*apokalupto*), are together used forty-five times in the New Testament in passages such as Rom. 16:25; I Cor. 2:10; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3, 5; I Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13.

The Book of Revelation, the *Apokalupsis*, the “Apocalypse,” is about a *disclosure, an uncovering, an unveiling* of that which the Father had previously given to and would accomplish through His Son (cf. John 3:34, 35; 5:20-22; 7:16; 8:28). And that which the Father had previously given to and would accomplish through His Son is seen in both Old and New Testament Scripture as “all things” (cf. Gen. 24:36; 25:5; John 16:15; Col. 1:16-18; Heb. 1:2-13).

Then, more directly, in the words of the book itself, that being made known pertains to a *revelation of the Son Himself*. This book is an opening up of that which relates *all that the Father has given to and would accomplish through His Son, revealed through a revelation of the Son Himself*.

And the revelation of the Son, according to this opening verse, is going to be accomplished

through a specific, revealed means — through revealing “things which must shortly [Gk., *tachos*, ‘quickly,’ ‘speedily’] come to pass.” That is to say, once this revelation of the Son begins through an unfolding of future events, the revelation will occur in a quick or speedy fashion — actually over time covering little more than seven years.

(On the translation of *tachos* in the opening verse as “quickly” or “speedily,” refer to a cognate word, *tachu*, used seven times in this book, translated “quickly” each time [2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20].)

According to John 1:1, 14, the incarnation was simply the Word (the Old Testament Scriptures) becoming flesh. There is *the written Word* (which is living [Heb. 4:12]), and there is *the living Word* (which is the written Word, inseparably connected with the Father, made flesh).

The Book of Revelation is thus an opening up of the Old Testament Scriptures *through a Person, through the Word which became flesh*. And any thought of an opening up of the Old Testament Scriptures extending to and including an opening up of the New Testament Scriptures as well could only be *completely out of place*, for there is nothing in the New that cannot be found, after some fashion, in the Old. If there were, there could not be *the necessary corresponding completeness* between the written Word and the living Word at a time before the New Testament even began to be penned.

The New Testament, *at any point, of necessity*, can only have to do with revelation which can be seen as having an Old Testament base. Revelation in the New Testament *must* bear the same inseparable connection with the Word made flesh as revelation in the Old Testament bears.

Thus, the existence of the Word made flesh *preceding* the existence of the New Testament clearly relates the truth of the matter concerning the content of the New Testament. The New can only be *an opening up and revealing of that previously seen in the Old*. To state or think otherwise is to connect the Word made flesh with one Testament and disconnect Him from the other — *an impossibility*.

In short, *the Old Testament is complete in and of itself*; the Word made flesh incorporates *this same completeness*, and the New Testament adds *nothing per se* to this completeness. Any supposed subsequent addition would be impossible, for *this would be adding to that which God had already deemed complete through the incarnation, the Word made flesh.*

The preceding is why Christ, shortly after His resurrection, began at “Moses and all the prophets” (an expression covering the whole of the O.T.) when He appeared to and began *making Himself known to two disciples traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus* (Luke 24:13-31). The living Word, using the written Word, began putting together different facets of a *word picture pertaining to Himself.* And He could have gone to *any part of the Old Testament* to accomplish the matter, for *the whole of the Old Testament was/is about Him.*

Through this means, those being addressed would be able to see one (the word picture) alongside the other (the Word made flesh). And, comparing the two, they would be able to come into an understanding of not only *the identity of the One in their midst* but an understanding of *that which had occurred in Jerusalem during the past several days as well.*

This is the manner in which God has put matters together in His Word, making Himself, His plans, and His purposes known to man. And this is why the Son — God manifest in the flesh, the Word made flesh — undertook matters after exactly the same fashion when making Himself, His plans, and His purposes known to two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of His resurrection.

Then, the same thing is seen when He appeared to ten of the eleven remaining disciples (with Thomas absent) in Jerusalem a short time later (Luke 24:36-45; John 20:19-29).

And this is the manner in which the Book of Revelation *must* be studied. Since it is an unveiling of the living Word, it is equally an unveiling of the inseparable Old Testament Scriptures, which, throughout, have to do with both of God’s firstborn Sons — Christ and Israel (Ex. 4:22, 23; Heb. 1:6), with one Son seen inseparable from the other Son (cf. Ex. 12:1ff [John 4:22; Acts 4:12]; Jonah 1:17 [Matt. 12:39, 40]; Hosea 11:1 [Matt. 2:15]).

Then, another person is seen throughout the Old Testament as well — *the Beast*, introduced in Gen. 3:15 and dealt with throughout Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets. And he, accordingly, is seen and dealt with extensively in Revelation chapters six through twenty.

Thus, understanding the Book of Revelation after the preceding fashion is *the only way a person can come into a proper and correct understanding of the various things opened up and revealed in this book, which, of course, would be equally true of any other portion of Scripture.*

2) Structure

The word “signified” in the opening verse of this book is a translation of the Greek word *semaino*, which is the verb form of the word for “sign” (*semeion*). The Apostle John introduced, opened up, and developed matters in his gospel account through *signs*. And in the Book of Revelation, matters are introduced, opened up, and developed *in a similar manner.*

God, throughout His revelation to man, shows an affinity for the use of *types, numbers, signs, and metaphors* to make Himself, His plans, and His purposes known. And this must be recognized, else man will find himself failing to go beyond the simple letter of Scripture (cf. II Cor. 3:6-4:6).

Man, for example, will find himself understanding *Biblical history* but failing to understand the God-designed *typical significance* of that history. Or if *numbers, signs, or metaphors* are used — which they often are — he will fail to understand the God-designed significance of these as well.

At the very outset, God makes it clear that the Book of Revelation has been structured in a *particular manner*, closely related to the manner in which John was led by the Spirit to structure his gospel.

The Gospel of John was built around eight signs which Jesus had previously performed during His earthly ministry, and these signs were recorded and directed to the Jewish people during the time of the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel (which occurred between 33 A.D. and about 62 A.D.).

And the Book of Revelation — dealing

largely with the Jewish people once again (*exclusively*, along with God’s dealings with the nations through Israel, in chs. 6-19, covering time and events during and immediately following Daniel’s Seventieth Week) — uses the verb form of the word for “sign” at the very outset in order to reveal the manner in which this book has been structured.

To understand how the word *semaino*, translated “signified,” is used introducing the Book of Revelation, note how John uses this same word three times in his gospel, in John 12:33; 18:32; 21:19. The context leading into each verse provides *an illustrative statement which allows that stated in the verse to be understood.*

Note the first of these three usages, within context:

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

This he said, signifying [from *semaino*] what death he should die” (vv. 32, 33).

Aside from Rev. 1:1 and the three verses in John’s gospel, the only other usages of the word *semaino* in the New Testament are in Acts 11:28; 25:27. And the same thought is set forth through the use of the word in these two passages, though the illustrative statement is inferred in the first usage.

Thus, “signified,” a translation of *semaino*, has to do with making something known through *a manner which carries the reader from a somewhat indirect means to a direct means, using an illustrative statement as a means of explaining a matter.* And this is seen accomplished in the Book of Revelation centrally through the use of numerous *numbers* and *metaphors*, though *other illustrative means* are used as well.

In the preceding respect, *all illustrative means of this nature in the book are, they would have to be, in line with the meaning of the word semaino and the manner in which this word is used elsewhere in the New Testament.*

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