

The Patmos Visions

by Sir Robert Anderson

In 'The Patmos Visions', Sir Robert Anderson explores the prophetic significance of the Book of Revelation and its implications for believers across generations.

Scripture: Revelation 5:2

Topics: "End Times", "Eschatology"

Description

Sir Robert Anderson preaches on the importance of understanding the prophetic nature of the Book of Revelation, emphasizing that its contents have future applications and are meant to counsel and comfort those who will face severe trials in the end times. The sermon delves into the chronological sequence of events in the Apocalypse, highlighting the significance of distinguishing between serial and episodic visions to grasp the unfolding prophecies. The message underscores the necessity of discerning the order of events in the last days, including the rise of Antichrist, the great tribulation, and the ultimate return of Christ for judgment and the establishment of His kingdom.

Transcript

NARROWNESS of interpretation is the bane of apocalyptic study. "The words of this prophecy," "Things which must shortly come to pass" such is the Divine description of the Book of the Revelation and of its contents. No one, therefore, is justified in denying to any portion of it a future application. The Book in its entirety is prophetic. Even the seven epistles, though they were undoubtedly addressed to Churches then existing, and though their intermediate reference to the history of Christendom is also clear, may well have a special voice in days to come for those who are to enter the fierce trials that shall precede the end.[1]

1. The Bible is not intended for the present dispensation only, but for the people of God in every age; and it is incredible that they who are to be so severely tried shall fail to find in it words specially fitted and intended to counsel and comfort them in view of what they are to endure. "This prophecy" is the Divine description of the Apocalypse as a whole (Revelation 1:3). Compare the "must shortly come to pass" of Revelation 1:1 with the "must shortly be done" of 22:6. The salutation (1:4, 5) seems to fix the dispensational place of the Book as future. It is not the Father, but Jehovah; not the Lord Jesus Christ, but "Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the Prince of the kings of the earth"; and the Book speaks from a time when the Holy Spirit, as a person, will again be in heaven, to join in the salutation, which He never does in the Epistles of the New Testament. Revelation 1:19 is frequently quoted to prove that the Book is divided, and that the latter part only is prophetic. In refutation of this, I appeal to the most candid of apocalyptic

commentators, Dean Alford, who thus translates the verse: "Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and what things they signify, and the things which are about to happen after these." He explains "the things which thou sawest" to be "the vision which was but now vouchsafed thee," and the closing words as "the things which shall succeed these, i. e., a future vision" (Greek Test., in loco).

In ch. 4:1, Alford inclines to give to the second meta tauta the general meaning of "hereafter." But the presumption is; that the words are used at the end of the verse in the same sense as at the beginning, i. e., "after these things." The words imply that the fulfillment of the subsequent visions should be future, relatively to the fulfillment of the preceding vision, and not relatively merely to the time when the vision was given, which was a matter of course.

In the fourth chapter the throne is set in heaven. Judgment now waits on grace; but when the day of grace is past, judgment must intervene ere the promises and covenants, with all their rich store of blessings, can be fulfilled. But who can unfold that scroll that lies on the open hand of Him who sits upon the throne? (Revelation 5:2) No creature in the universe[2] may dare to look on it, and God Himself will not break a single seal of it, for the Father has ceded the prerogative of judgment. The ministry of grace may be shared by all whom grace has blessed, but the Son of man is the only Being in the universe who can take the initiative in judgment; (John 5:22-27) and amid the anthems of the heavenly beings round the throne, and the swelling chorus of myriads of myriads of angels, echoed back by the whole creation of God, the Crucified of Calvary, "a Lamb, as it had been slain," takes up the book and prepares to break the seals. (Revelation 5:5-14)

2. Revelation 3. It is not, as in English Version, "no man," but oudeis. The Revised Version properly reads "no one."

It is at the fifth seal that the vision crosses the lines of the chronology of prophecy.[3] Of the earlier seals, therefore, it is unnecessary to speak in detail. They are evidently descriptive of the events to which the Lord referred in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, as preceding the great final persecution; - wars and unceasing threats of war, kingdoms in arms rushing on one another to destruction; and then famine, to be followed again by pestilence, hunger and the sword still claiming their victims, and others being seized by strange and nameless deaths in the ever-gathering horrors of these cumulative woes. (Revelation 6:2-8)

3. Because the fifth seal relates to the great persecution of the future, which, as already noticed, is within the seventieth week. The first four seals relate to the events preceding in time the fulfillment of the fifteenth verse of the twenty-fourth of Matthew. Compare the sixth and seventh verses of that chapter with Revelation 6:1-8.

According to the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, the tribulation is to be followed immediately by the signs and portents which the old prophets have declared will herald "the great and terrible day of the Lord." So in the Apocalypse the martyrs of the tribulation are seen in the fifth seal, (Revelation 9) and in the sixth, the advent of the great day of wrath is proclaimed, the precise events being named which the Lord had spoken of on the Mount of Olives, and Joel and Isaiah had foretold long centuries before.[4]

4. "The day of the Lord cometh...The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:1-31). "The day of the Lord cometh...The sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine" (Isaiah 13:9, 10). "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven" (Matthew 24:29). "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the

moon, and in the stars" (Luke 21:25). "The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood" (compare Joel 2:31), "and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth" (Revelation 6:12, 13).

I entirely agree with the following note of Dean Alford's (Greek Test., Matthew 24:29): "Such prophecies are to be understood literally, and indeed, without such understanding would lose their truth and significance. The physical signs shall happen as accompaniments and intensification's of the awful state of things which the description typifies." Not of course that the moon will really become blood, any more than that the stars will fall. The words describe phenomena which men will witness, and which will strike terror into their hearts.

Like the dull, oppressive calm which precedes the fiercest storms, there is silence in heaven when the last seal is broken, (Revelation 8:1) for the day of vengeance has dawned. The events of the earlier seals were Divine judgments, doubtless, but of a providential character, and such as men can account for by secondary causes. But God has at length declared Himself, and as it has been in the past, so now, the occasion is an outrage committed on His people. The cry of martyrs is come up in remembrance before God, (Revelation 3) and it is the signal for the trumpet blasts which herald the outpouring of the long-pent-up wrath. (Revelation 6)

To write a commentary on the Apocalypse within the limits of a chapter would be impossible, and the attempt would involve a departure from the special purpose and subject of these pages. But it is essential to notice and keep in view the character and method of the Apocalyptic visions. The seer, be it remembered, was not privileged to read a single line of what was written "within and on the back side" of the sealed scroll of the fifth chapter; but as each seal was broken, some prominent characteristic of a portion of its contents was communicated to him in a vision. The main series of the visions, therefore, represent events in their chronological sequence. But their course is occasionally interrupted by parenthetical or episodal visions; sometimes, as between the sixth and seventh seals, reaching on to the time of the end, and more frequently, as between the sixth and seventh trumpets, representing details chronologically within the earlier visions. The first and most important step, therefore, towards a right understanding of the Apocalypse is to distinguish between the serial and the episodal visions of the Book, and the following analysis is offered to promote and assist inquiry upon the subject.[5] -

5. The passages containing the parenthetical visions are marked in square brackets.

Chap. 6. - The visions of the first six seals; representing events in their chronological order.

[Chap. 7. - Parenthetical; the first vision relating either to the faithful remnant of the fifth seal, or to an election in view of the judgments of the seventh seal; the second, reaching on to the final deliverance.]

Chaps. 8, 9. - The opening of the seventh seal. The visions of the first six trumpets; consecutive judgments, in their chronological order.

[Chaps. 10. -11. 13. - Parenthetical, containing the hidden mystery of the seven thunders (10:3, 4) and the testimony of the witnesses (the latter being probably within the era of the fifth seal.)]

Chap. 11:15-19. - The seventh trumpet; the third and last woe (comp. 8:13; 9:12; 11:14), preceding the establishment of the kingdom (comp. 10:7; 11:15).

[Chaps. 12. -18. - Parenthetical]

Chap. 13. - The rise and career of the two great blasphemers and persecutors of the last days.

Chap. 14. - The remnant of chap. 7. seen in blessedness. The everlasting Gospel (vers. 6, 7). The fall of Babylon (ver. 8). The doom of the worshippers of the Beast (vers. 9-11). The revelation of Christ, and final judgments, (vers. 14-20).

Chap. 15. - A vision of events chronologically within chapter 8., the opening the seventh seal. (This appears from the fact that the faithful of the fifth seal are here represented as praising God in view of the judgments impending, - see vers. 2-4; which judgments are within the seventh seal.)

Chap. 16. - The seven vials; a second series of visions of the events of the seven trumpets. This appears -

First, because the seventh trumpet and the seventh vial both relate to the final catastrophe. Under the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God is finished (10:7), and the temple of God is opened, and there are lightnings, voices, thunders, and an earthquake (11:19). Under the seventh vial, "It is done!" is heard from the temple, and there are voices, thunders, lightnings, and an earthquake (16:17, 18).

Second, because the sphere of the judgments is the same in the correlative visions of both series:

- 1, The earth.
- 2, The sea.
- 3, The rivers.
- 4, The sun.
- 5, The pit, the seat of the beast.
- 6, Euphrates.
- 7, Heaven, the air.

[Chaps. 17., 18. - Detailed visions of the development and doom of Babylon, "the harlot," whose fall has been within the seventh trumpet and seventh vial; the last series of judgments of the seventh seal (11:18; 16:19).]

Chap. 19: The doom of the harlot being accomplished (ver. 2), the glory of the bride follows (ver. 7); the glorious revelation of Christ, and the destruction consequent thereon of the beast and false prophet (ver. 20).

Chap. 20. - Satan is bound. The millennial reign of the saints (vers. 1-4). After the millennial reign, Satan is loosed, and once more deceives the nations. Satan is cast into the lake of fire. The judgment of the Great White Throne.

Chaps. 21., 22:1-5. - The new heaven and new earth

Chap. 22:6-21. - Conclusion.[6]

6. I purposely pass over chap. 12, because of the exceptional difficulties which attend the interpretation of it. "Anything within reasonable regard for the analogies and symbolism of the text seems better that the

now too commonly received historical interpretation, with its wild fancies and arbitrary assignments of words and figures" (Alford, Greek Test., Revelation 12:15, 16). The only reasonable interpretation I have seen is that which regards the "man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron," and who "was caught up to God and His throne," as being the Lord Jesus Christ, and the woman as representing that people of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came" (Romans 9:5). But the objections to this are considerable. First, past historical facts are thus introduced into a vision relating to the future. I am not aware of any other instance of this in Scripture. Secondly, the main features of the vision after ver. 5 are not accounted for by the facts.

The following remarks are offered merely to assist inquiry and not at all as expressing a formed opinion on the matter. The 1, 260 days during which the woman is persecuted is precisely the period of "the great tribulation." Ver. 7 declares that during the woman's flight, Michael the Archangel fought on her behalf. Daniel 12:1, referring to the time of Antichrist's power, states that "at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of the people; and there shall be a time of trouble," etc., describing "the great tribulation" which is to continue 1, 260 days.

Again, the Old Scriptures clearly point to the career of a future David, a deliverer of the Jews, who will become their earthly leader at that time, and reign over them in Jerusalem afterwards. See, e. g., Ezekiel 22-25, about David the Prince, who is certainly not Christ, seeing he is to have a palace in Jerusalem and a definite inheritance in the land, and who, moreover, is to offer burnt-offerings, etc. (Ezekiel 45:17). I suppose this is the great military conqueror of Isaiah 43:1-3. May not the Revelation 12 refer to this personage, who is to be Christ's vicegerent on earth, and who will, in fact, rule over all nations.

As the last trumpet and the last vial embrace the final judgments of the day of vengeance, which precede the advent of the glorious kingdom, they necessarily include the doom of the two great antichristian powers of the last days, - the imperial represented by the ten-horned beast, and the ecclesiastical typified by the scarlet woman. The visions of the thirteenth and seventeenth chapters, therefore, are interposed, descriptive of the rise and development of these powers. These accordingly give us details which relate to events within the earlier seals, for the martyrs of the fifth seal are the victims of the great persecutor of the thirteenth chapter.

If the foregoing scheme be correct in the main, the eras included in the Revelation may be divided thus:

1. The seven Churches; the transitional period following the close of the Christian dispensation."[7]
2. The seven seals; the period during which all that prophecy has foretold shall precede the kingdom will be fulfilled.
3. The kingdom; to be followed, after a final interval of apostasy, by -
4. The eternal state; the new heaven and new earth.
7. That is, assuming that this portion of the Book has a prophetic aspect.

It is manifestly within the period of the seals that the prophecies of Daniel have their fulfillment, and the next inquiry should be directed to ascertain the points of contact between the visions of St. John and the earlier prophecies.

As already noticed, it is only in so far as prophecy falls within the seventy weeks that it comes within the range of human chronology. And further, the seventieth week will be a definite period, of which the epoch of the middle and the end are definitely marked. The epoch of the first week, that is, of the prophetic period as a whole, was not the return of the Jews from Babylon, nor yet the rebuilding of their temple, but the signing of the Persian decree which restored their national position. So also the beginning of the last week will date, not from their restoration to Judea, nor yet from the future rebuilding of their shrine, but from the signing of the treaty by "the coming Prince," which probably will once more recognize them as a nation.[8]

8. I do not assert that he will have reached the zenith of his power before that date. On the contrary, it seems extremely probable that the treaty with the Jews will be one of the steps by which he will raise himself to the place he is destined to hold, and that as soon as he has attained his end, he will throw off the mask and declare himself a persecutor. So Irenaeus teaches, and he possibly gives what was the tradition of the apostolic age.

But it is obvious that this personage must have attained to power before the date of that event; and it is expressly stated (Daniel 7:24) that his rise is to be after that of the ten kingdoms which are hereafter to divide the Roman earth. It follows, therefore, that the development of these kingdoms, and the rise of the great Kaiser who is to wield the imperial scepter in the last days, must be prior to the beginning of the seventieth week.[9]

9. He is neither king of the north nor of the south, for both these kings shall invade his territory (ver. 40), i. e., the powers which shall then respectively possess Syria and Egypt.

And within certain limits, we can also fix the order of the subsequent events. The violation of the treaty by the defilement of the Holy Place is to occur "in the midst of the week." (Daniel 9:27) That event, again, is to be the epoch of the great persecution by Antichrist, (Matthew 24:15- 21) which is to last precisely three and a half years; for his power to persecute the Jews is to be limited to that definite period. (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 13:5) "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light." (Matthew 24:29) Such is the statement of the twenty-fourth of Matthew; and the sixth of Revelation exactly coincides with it, for the vision of the fifth seal embraced the period of "the tribulation"; and when the sixth seal was opened, "the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood," and the cry went forth, "The great day of His wrath is come." (Revelation 6:12, 17) In keeping with this, again, is the prophecy of Joel. "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come." (Joel 2:31) The events of this day of vengeance are the burden of the vision of the seventh seal, including the judgment of Babylon, the scarlet woman - or the religious apostasy - by the agency of the imperial power (Revelation 17:16, 17) the beast, whose fearful end is to bring the awful drama to a close. (Revelation 19:20) We have definite grounds, therefore, for assigning the following order to the events of the last days:

1. The development of the ten kingdoms.
2. The appearance within the territorial limits of these kingdoms of an eleventh "king," who will subdue three of the ten, and will ultimately be accepted as Suzerain by all.
3. The making of a treaty by this king with, or in favor of, the Jews. The epoch of the seventieth week.
4. The violation of the treaty by this king after three and a half years.

5. "The great tribulation" of Scripture, the awful persecution of the last days, which shall continue three and a half years.

6. The deliverance of the Jews from their great enemy, to be followed by their final establishment in blessing. The close of the seventieth week.

7. "The great and terrible day of the Lord," the period of the seventh seal, beginning with a revelation of Christ to His people in Jerusalem, accompanied by appalling manifestations of Divine power and ending with His last glorious advent.

That the seventieth week will be the last seven years of the dispensation, and the term of the reign of Antichrist, is a belief as old as the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. But a careful examination of the statements of Scripture will lead to some modification of this view. The fulfillment to Judah of the blessings specified in Daniel 9:24 is all that Scripture expressly states will mark the close of the seventieth week. Antichrist will then be driven out of Judea; but there is no reason whatever to suppose he will otherwise lose his power. As already shown, the seventieth week ends with the period of the fifth seal, whereas the fall of Babylon is within the era of the seventh seal. No one may assert that that era will be of long duration, and it will probably be brief; but the only certain indication of its length is that it will be within a single lifetime, for at its close the Antichrist is to be seized alive, and hurled to his awful doom (Revelation 19:20).

The analogy of the past might lead us to expect that the events foretold to occur at the end of the seventieth week would follow immediately at its close. But the Book of Daniel expressly teaches that there will be an interval. Whatever view be taken of the earlier portion of the eleventh of Daniel, it is clear that "the king" of the thirty-sixth and following verses is the great enemy of the last days. His wars and conquests are predicted,[10] and the twelfth chapter opens with the mention of the predicted time of trouble, "the great tribulation" of Matthew and Revelation. The seventh verse specifies the duration of the "time of trouble" as "a time, times, and a half," which, as already shown, is the half week, or 1, 260 days. But the eleventh verse expressly declares that from the date of the event which is to divide the week, and which, according to Matthew 24., is to be the signal of persecution, there shall be 1, 290 days; and the twelfth verse postpones the blessing to 1, 335 days, or seventy-five days beyond the close of the prophetic weeks.

10. The day of battle" (Zechariah 14:3). The prophet adds: "And His feet shall stand on that day upon the Mount of Olives." I cannot conceive how any one can suppose this to be the great and final advent in glory as described in Matthew 24:30 and other Scriptures. "The prophecy (Zechariah 14) seems literal. If Antichrist be the leader of the nations, it seems inconsistent with the statement that he will at this time be sitting in the temple as God at Jerusalem; thus Antichrist outside would be made to besiege Antichrist within the city. But difficulties do not set aside revelations; the event will clear up seeming difficulties" (Fausset's Commentary, in loco). It is idle to speculate on such a matter, but I presume the city will have revolted against the great enemy during his absence at the head of the armies of the empire, and that thereupon he will turn back to reconquer it. History repeats itself. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that he will reside in Jerusalem, though presumably he will have a palace there, and as part of a blasphemous pageant, will sit enthroned in the temple. That Jerusalem should be captured by a hostile army at such a time will seem less strange if it be remembered first that the true people of God therein shall have warning to leave the city at the beginning of these troubles (Matthew 24:15, 16.), and secondly, that the deliverance of the capital is to be the last act in the deliverance of Judah (See Zechariah 12:7).

If therefore "the day of the Lord" follows immediately upon the close of the seventieth week, it seems that Judah's complete deliverance is not to take place until after that final period has begun. And this is expressly confirmed by the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah. It is a prophecy than which none is more definite, and the difficulties which beset the interpretation of it are in no degree overcome by refusing to read it literally. It seems to teach that at that time Jerusalem is to be taken by the allied armies of the nations, and that at the moment when a host of prisoners are being led away, God will intervene in some miraculous way, as when He destroyed the army of Pharaoh at the Exodus[11]

11. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall "the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:29, 30).

Comparison with the prophecy of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew is the surest and strictest test which can be applied to these conclusions. After fixing the epoch and describing the character of the great persecution of the last days, the Lord thus enumerates the events which are to follow at its close:- First the great natural phenomena predicted; then the appearance of the sign of the Son of man in heaven; then the mourning of the tribes of the land;[12] and finally the glorious advent.

12. kopsontai pasai ai phulai tas gas. Comp. Zechariah 12:12 (LXX), kopsetai ha ga kata phulas phulas.

That there will be no interval between the persecution and the "great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:11) which are to follow it, is expressly stated; they are to occur "immediately after the tribulation." That an interval shall separate the other events of the series is equally clear. From the defilement of the Holy Place, to the day when the tribulation shall end, and the "fearful sights" and "great signs" from heaven shall strike terror into men's hearts, shall be a definite period of 1,260 days;[13] and yet when He goes on to speak of the Advent, the Lord declares that that day is known to the Father only: it should be His people's part to watch and wait. He had already warned them against being deceived by expecting His Advent before the fulfillment of all that must come to pass (Matthew 24:4-28). Now He warns them against apostasy after the accomplishment of all things, because of the delay which even then shall still mark His coming.[14]

13. Therefore if the Advent synchronized with these events, any one then living would be able to fix the date of it, once the epoch of the tribulation were known; whereas the chapter clearly shows that an interval will follow after all has been fulfilled, long enough to weed out mere professors, who, tired of waiting, will apostatize (Matthew 24:48), and to lull, even true disciples to a sleep from which their Lord's return will rouse them (Ibid. 25:5).

14. Matthew 24:42-51, and 25:10-13: "THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins." tote, "at the period spoken of at the end of the last chapter, viz., the coming of the Lord to His personal reign" (Alford, Gr. Test., in loco.)] Though applicable to every age in which there is a waiting people on earth, the parable will have its full and special application in the last days to those who shall be looking back on the complete page of prophecy fulfilled. The entire passage from chap. 24:31, to chap. 25:30, is parenthetical, relating especially to that time.

The words of Christ are unequivocally true, and He never enjoins upon His people to live in expectation of His coming, save at a time when nothing intervenes to bar the fulfillment of the hope. Fatalism is as

popular among Christians as with the worshippers of Mahomet; and it is forgotten that though the dispensation has run its course these eighteen centuries, it might have been brought to a close at any moment. Hence the Christian is taught to live, "looking for that blessed hope." (Titus 2:12, 13) It will be otherwise in days to come, when the present dispensation shall have closed with the first stage of the Advent. Then the word will be, not "Watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come," (Matthew 24:42) - that belongs to the time when all shall have been fulfilled, - but "Take heed that no man deceive you, all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." (Matthew 4:6)

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