

CHAPTER NINE

Michael, the Dragon and the Fifth Beast

We have come now to the end of the prophecies of Daniel. We have seen that the book describes in detail the course of history from the time of Daniel up to the time of Christ. I hope I have demonstrated this convincingly.

I believe that apart from clearing up a few minor points, this book (together with my published articles) has made three significant contributions to our understanding of Daniel's prophecies. First, it shows that the four kingdoms are *accurate*, true-to-history descriptions of Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. Second, it shows that the prophecy of the 'seventy weeks' (9:24-27) really does predict the date of Christ's first advent. Third, it shows that Daniel 11:40-45 is not an erroneous prediction of how Antiochus was to meet his fate. It is an accurate prediction of how the Greek empire was to be destroyed.

The special significance of the two latter prophecies (9:24-27 and 11:40-45) is that both predict with great accuracy events which took place *after* the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. These prophecies must be accepted as genuine predictions, even if we believe in a second century date of authorship. In both cases critical scholars have dismissed the predictions as 'erroneous', because they appear to be inaccurate *when applied to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes*. If these scholars heeded the clear teaching of the New Testament, they would see that both prophecies pointed in a most wonderful way to the coming of Jesus Christ.

The prophecies of the 'four kingdoms' (with which 11:40-45 is linked) also pointed to the coming of Christ, because they indicated that God's kingdom would begin to fill the earth *after the total destruction of the Greek empire*.

I reject completely the critical view that Daniel's prophecies contain historical errors and mistaken predictions. I reject also any interpretation which stops at Antiochus Epiphanes and fails to take into account the coming of Christ. I reject these views because they are *demonstrably wrong* and also because they are, in my opinion, incompatible with the teaching of Jesus.

The Bible does not speak of a people who searched for God and invented a religion. It speaks of *a God who revealed Himself to men*. As for the prophecies of Daniel, they show that God is in control of world history and that it is leading up to the consummation foreordained by Him. They reveal Christ in the context of world history, and through their remarkable predictions they provide further, powerful evidence that He is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

The present age

In this book I have concentrated, so far, on showing that Daniel's prophecies were accurate, and that they foretold the date and historical setting of Christ's first coming. In this final chapter I will examine their relevance to the present age; but again I will deal with only one aspect of the subject — the historical one — and I will do so in a rather unusual way. I will not attempt to apply the prophecies in a devotional way. This has been done already very adequately by other authors.

I have made it clear already that I believe there is an element of 'foreshortening' or 'telescoping' in Daniel's prophecies. His vision of God's kingdom includes both the first and the second advents of Christ. I have indicated also that I believe the events of the past age *typify* certain aspects and events of the present age — and to a large extent this is the theory I

will consider in the present chapter.

Before proceeding, however, we should question whether the prophecies may have a more specific type of fulfilment in our own day. I believe it is wrong, in general, to apply the prophecies to the present age in a detailed way. Nevertheless, I feel that there is one such interpretation which could turn out to be at least *partly* true. This interpretation holds that the four beasts of Daniel 7 represent empires which will arise shortly before the second advent. This theory is based on the fact that the words 'shall arise' (7:17) were spoken after the rise of Babylon.

We have seen that the 'four empires' of Daniel's vision found their primary fulfilment in Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece; but there is still the possibility of a secondary, less detailed fulfilment. In the preceding chapter I noted that there are indications that Christ's second coming may be near. One more indication, which I did not mention, is that Christ said, 'This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come' (Matthew 24:14). This prediction seems close to fulfilment *in our own day*. If (a big if) there is any truth in the above theory, and if Christ's return is near, one or more of the secondary 'four empires' may have appeared already.

At this point, in the first edition of *God in Control*, I suggested a possible fulfilment. I emphasized that it was pure speculation, and could well prove to be completely wrong. In spite of this, one reviewer criticized me for including it. I could avoid this kind of criticism by omitting all mention of the theory in this edition. But I feel that the 'coincidences' are too great for the theory to be totally ignored and dismissed without consideration. It needs to be mentioned, at least in passing. I will repeat the main points, and comment briefly on how the theory looks today, 26 years later, in the light of current events.

I suggested that if the above theory is correct (it may not be), and if Christ's return is near, Daniel's first beast could picture the British empire, and the second beast the Russian empire. The British *lion* and the American *eagle* are familiar symbols, and so also is the Russian *bear*. (Note that Daniel's lion had eagle's wings, and that the U.S.A. is an offshoot of the British empire.) The fact that these nations are associated with these particular animals is quite a 'coincidence', to say the least. The British empire and the Americans from the west, and the Russians from the east, together destroyed Hitler's Germany just as Babylon and Media together destroyed Assyria. Thereafter the U.S.A. and Russia were rival powers, as were Babylon and Media. I went on to suggest that Russia would fade and be succeeded by a world-ruling third empire. This empire would then be superseded by another and more terrible world-empire, ruled by the Antichrist. In some way this fourth empire would be 'different' from the preceding empires, and shortly before the return of Christ it would make an all-out attempt to destroy the Christian church.

I then suggested that China could turn out to be the third empire that would succeed Russia. In fact today this looks increasingly possible. Russia's power declined dramatically in 1991; but China's power has continued to grow. She is frequently described these days as a 'giant' or 'an economic superpower', with the potential to dominate the world. Note that American power has outlasted Russian power, just as Babylon outlasted Media. In a rather loose and general way, history does seem to be repeating itself. If it continues to do so, perhaps China will become the dominant party in a partnership with Russia, and will then overcome the West (economically if not militarily). This would mimic the way in which Persia united with Media before conquering Babylon.

However there is no clear-cut order of progression from British power, to Russian power, and then to Chinese power — unless the U.S.A is left out of the picture or is regarded as little more than a supporter of the British empire. As I indicated earlier, and as many Biblical

scholars have warned, we are on shaky ground if we try to apply Old Testament prophecies to modern history in a detailed way. Many such attempts have been made in the past, and most have come to nothing. All I am suggesting, therefore, is that God may be *conveying a message* to us through these ‘coincidences’ — the message that He is still working out His purposes in history, and that Jesus *will* return. I said something very similar regarding that mysterious number 1335, which appeared in the year 1917. I concluded this section (in the first edition of this book) with the following paragraph:

This is all pure speculation, of course, and it may well prove to be completely wrong. But the parallels between Babylon and Media on the one hand, and the ‘British Lion’ and the ‘Russian Bear’ on the other are rather striking. History does repeat itself sometimes; so there may be some truth in this theory. In fact I feel that there may be a certain amount of truth in each of the various schemes of interpretation. Each school has something of value to contribute. With regard to the rather detailed interpretation outlined above, there is no certainty about its validity and we would do well to adopt a ‘wait and see’ attitude. However, it *is* possible to relate Daniel’s prophecies to present and future events with a good deal more certainty, but in a less specific way; and I shall proceed to do this now.

The book of Revelation

In trying to discover how Daniel’s prophecies should be applied to our own day, it will be helpful to take a brief look at the New Testament apocalypse, the book of Revelation. That it will be helpful should be apparent from the way in which I have referred to it several times already in the course of this study.

The most helpful exposition of Revelation which I have come across is *More than Conquerors*, by W. Hendriksen. He believes that the book of Revelation describes the whole of this present dispensation — the age which began with Christ’s first advent and will end with His second advent. In a series of visions we are taken again and again through the whole age, beginning with the first advent and ending with the second advent. The visions are *parallel*. They describe the same period of history, but concentrate on different aspects. Note that this is very similar to the scheme in the book of Daniel. In a series of parallel visions, Daniel describes history up to the first coming of Christ. Revelation continues the story by describing history from the first to the second comings of Christ.

Let it be noted, however, that Daniel and Revelation have at least one big difference. Daniel describes in remarkable detail the actual course of history. The eleventh chapter is an obvious example of this. Revelation describes rather certain *principles* of history which apply to the whole of the present age — it does not go into the details of specific events in the way that Daniel does. And this is what we would expect, because Christ stressed that we cannot know the date of the second advent. Revelation does describe the first advent and the second advent. These events can be identified clearly. The intervening period, however, is described in general terms only.

Now the book of Revelation is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. Nearly all the symbolism is from the Old Testament, and a good deal of it comes from Daniel. I will go through Revelation very briefly now, taking particular note of those parts which are closely connected with the book of Daniel and which therefore help us to understand its relevance to the present age.

The risen Messiah

In the first chapter, John records his stupendous vision of the risen Christ. His description of Christ’s appearance is similar to (though even more awe-inspiring than) that of the great angel

of Daniel 10. In both cases the description is that of a mighty heavenly being. However, whereas Daniel gave no indication whatsoever that the angel he saw was divine, the being of Revelation 1 clearly identifies Himself as the divine Christ. ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’ This vision of Christ gives us a faint idea of His majesty, power and glory.

In the second and third chapters we find the letters to the seven churches. They describe conditions which are typical of churches throughout the age.

The Messiah’s coronation

In chapters 4 and 5 John describes a scene which Daniel witnessed over six hundred years earlier — the scene of Christ’s coronation (Daniel 7). In Revelation Christ is symbolized by ‘a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes’. The Lamb advanced to the throne and took a book ‘from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne’, and the beings around the throne (four living creatures and twenty-four elders) sang,

“Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth.” Then I looked, and I heard ... the voice of many angels ... saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!” And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth ... saying, “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!” (Revelation 5:9-13)

Now compare this passage with Daniel 7:13, 14, 27:

‘I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.’ (Daniel 7:13, 14)

‘And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.’ (Daniel 7:27)

John and Daniel are surely describing one and the same event — Christ’s coronation following His victorious death and resurrection.¹ The climax of Daniel’s visions is the Heavenly scene of Daniel 7. Daniel’s prophecies *end* with Christ’s coronation and the establishing of the Messianic kingdom. The prophecies of Revelation *begin* with this event.

Note that Revelation 5:9-13 does much to explain the relationship between the ‘one like a son of man’ and ‘the saints of the Most High’. Some interpreters deduce from Daniel 7:27 that the one like a son of man does not symbolize Christ at all — he symbolizes the saints. Revelation 5:9-13 clearly explains that *Christ* received power and glory and the kingdom, and He *gives* it to the saints whom He has redeemed with His blood.

Suffering and disasters

The book which the Lamb took was sealed with seven seals. In chapter 6 the Lamb opens the seals one by one. Each opening is followed by scenes symbolical of various forms of suffering and persecution which recur again and again during the age. Their purpose is to turn men to God and to purify and strengthen the faith of the saints. The concluding verses

describe symbolically the cataclysmic destruction of the world at the end of the age. Already we have been brought right through to the end of the age.

Chapter 7 describes the sealing of the hundred and forty-four thousand, representing the church. Chapter 8 begins with the opening of the seventh seal and proceeds with the seven 'trumpets'. As each trumpet is sounded, John sees scenes symbolizing various calamities and disasters which afflict the earth repeatedly during the age. The trumpets are trumpets of *warning*. By these disasters, God is warning the world of coming judgment.

The mighty angel

The seventh trumpet was yet to sound when John saw a mighty angel descending from Heaven. The appearance, actions and words of this angel are very similar to those of the great angel of Daniel 10-12. Note particularly the following words:

'And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the issue of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end.' (Daniel 12:7-9, R.V.)

'And the angel which I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created the heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that there shall be time no longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.' (Revelation 10:5-7, R.V.)

The reader should observe that Daniel's question was not answered. He was told when 'these things' (the things he had just been told) would be finished; but he was not told what was to happen afterwards. We gather that there was still something to follow. In Revelation, however, the angel's words seem to be quite final and conclusive.

The three and a half times

At this point we have the vision of the city and the two witnesses. And we are introduced to the period of 'three and a half times', familiar to us from the book of Daniel. This period is mentioned several times in Revelation, once as 'three and a half times', twice as 'one thousand two hundred and sixty days', and twice as 'forty-two months'. I suggest (with Hendriksen) that it symbolizes the whole of the present age from the time of Christ up to just before the second advent.

For the early Christians, this period of three and a half years had very special associations. In Elijah's day the church was persecuted for three and a half years, but not destroyed. Despite the persecution, God's power was made manifest, and His people were miraculously preserved (I Kings 17-19, James 5:17). In the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, the church was savagely persecuted for three and a half years, but was not destroyed (Daniel 7, 8, 11 and 12). The public life and ministry of Jesus lasted, it seems, for three and a half years (Daniel 9:27). He was opposed and persecuted, but He emerged triumphant. And in the days of the early Christian church, Israel was ravaged by the Romans for three and a half years; but the church was preserved (Daniel 9 and 12). Because of Christ's warning, the Christians fled into the wilderness and so escaped the slaughter.

It is because of these associations that this period of three and a half years is used in Revelation to describe the present age. Throughout its history the church has had to (and will have to) undergo trials and tribulations; but God has always preserved it and it has maintained its witness. Revelation teaches, however, that at the end of the age Satan will gather his forces together against the church in one last desperate onslaught. It appears that the church will be silenced for a very short period, but this will be immediately followed by Christ's second advent. The figure three and a half is half the 'perfect' number seven and symbolizes, perhaps, the temporary nature of the tribulation. God is allowing it to go on for 'a little time' only (Revelation 6:11).

In Revelation 11 the three and a half-year period is mentioned twice. We are told that the nations are to tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months, but the temple of God and they that worship therein are to be kept safe. It is likely that the three and a half-year Jewish War and siege of Jerusalem is at the back of this picture of the world's siege against the church. The true church is kept safe, but everything false is trampled underfoot and defiled.

We then read of the 'two witnesses' who are to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. Comparison with I Kings 17-19 and James 5:17 makes it clear that this picture was partly inspired by the episode of Elijah's three and a half-year contest with Ahab. Satan is unable to prevent the witness of the church during the present age. In chapter 20 this is symbolized by his binding with a chain.

The two witnesses are finally killed and lie dead for three and a half days 'in the street of the great city ... where their Lord was crucified'. They are then raised up and ascend into Heaven. This indicates, perhaps, that the church will finally be silenced for a very short period preceding the second advent. It indicates also that this vision is based largely on the three and a half-year ministry of Jesus, His crucifixion, His 'three days and three nights' in the grave and His resurrection. Daniel 9 indicates that there were three and a half years between Christ's baptism and crucifixion. In Revelation 11 this symbolizes the period between the 'baptism' of the church, when it was anointed with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and began to witness, and the time when it will be silenced for a short period at the end of this age. Just as Jesus was apparently defeated at the close of His ministry, but emerged triumphant, so the church will be apparently defeated at the close of this age, but will emerge triumphant. (Note that this vision was recorded in the first century A.D., and is powerful evidence that Christ's public ministry really did last three and a half years.)

Michael and the dragon

The book of Revelation is divided into two main sections, the second one opening with chapter 12. In the earlier chapters we see the church suffering trial and tribulation in the world. In the later chapters we see the deeper spiritual conflict which underlies this struggle with the world. We see that it is a struggle between Christ and Satan.

At the start of chapter 12 we are taken back again to the beginning of the age, the first advent. We see a woman wearing a crown of twelve stars. She clearly represents the church, the Israel of God. 'The church' and 'the Israel of God' are terms which cover the whole people of God, including those who lived before the time of Christ. The woman gives birth to a child, the Messiah, who is then caught up to God and His throne. These events are associated with *the flinging of a dragon (Satan) from Heaven by Michael*, after which a loud voice is heard saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come'.

Recall the first words of Daniel 12: 'At that time shall arise Michael, the great Prince who has charge of your people ... at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose

name shall be found written in the book.’ The meaning of these words is made plain to us in Revelation 12. The words refer to Christ’s work of salvation at the time of the first advent. This picture of the Messiah being born of a woman and then caught up to Heaven places the work of Michael fairly and squarely at the beginning of the present age — the time of the first advent.

The dragon, knowing he has not long to live now, desperately persecutes the woman; but God enables her to flee into the wilderness, where she is nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days (verse 6), or three and a half ‘times’ (verse 14). Here again we meet our period of three and a half years. It represents the present age during which Satan seeks to destroy the church; but the church is preserved by God.

This picture of the flight into the wilderness could be inspired by the story of Elijah, and also by the escape of the Christians during the war with Rome. Elijah fled into the wilderness and was nourished by God for three and a half years. Likewise the Christians fled into the wilderness and were kept safe during the three and a half-year Jewish War. It is this passage which shows us the precise meaning of a ‘time’ —that is, a year of three hundred and sixty days.

Let us see if we can establish further the exact relationship between the three and a half times of Revelation and that of Daniel. Daniel is describing particular events of history, namely the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes and the war of the Jews against the Romans. Since he is describing certain specific events, the distinction between 1260 days and 1290 days, for example, is important. But they are important only so far as those particular events are concerned. As applied to the present age the distinction is unimportant. These past periods of time (both of approximately three and a half years) are simply *types* of the present age, and particularly of the period preceding the second advent. We shall consider the relevance of Antiochus’ persecution when we look at the following chapter. In the present chapter it is the Jewish War which is relevant. Now the ‘three and a half times’ of Revelation 12 is exactly equivalent to that of Daniel 12:7. The ‘three and a division times’ of Daniel 7:25 is approximately equivalent, but not exactly. This tends to confirm our interpretation of Daniel 12:7. For various reasons we thought it likely that Daniel was speaking of the Jewish War with Rome. In Revelation we find an exactly similar term used in connection with a scene which has strong associations with this same Jewish War. As far as the present age is concerned the minutiae of these three and a half years are unimportant; but they assume considerable importance when we try to identify the specific historical events which Daniel was predicting.

We read these words in Daniel 12:7: ‘I heard him swear by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time; and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be accomplished’. These words refer primarily to the end of the old dispensation; but in line with the use Revelation makes of the Jewish War, we can, perhaps, apply them in a secondary sense to the present dispensation. In Daniel’s time ‘the holy people’ referred to the Jews. In our time it refers to the worldwide church. The old era of Jewish nationhood ended with the three and a half-year war against Rome. The present era of the church will come to an end after the symbolical ‘three and a half years’ of war with the world. In the case of the Jews the war ended ‘when the shattering of the power of the holy people came to an end’. Revelation 11 informs us that at the end of the age the world will appear to break the power of the church — and this will indeed be the end, because Christ will then return.

The fifth beast

We are told that the dragon ‘was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest

of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus'. The dragon's instrument, in his persecution of Christians, is a great beast.

'And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.' (Revelation 13:1, 2)

It is immediately obvious that this picture is drawn from Daniel. Note that the beast John saw is a combination of the four beasts of Daniel 7. It is like a leopard, but it has the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion, and it has ten horns. In addition, it has all the seven heads of Daniel's four beasts. The latter beasts represented great earthly empires, great anti-God organizations of Man. They are combined in the beast of Revelation to represent all human governments and secular organizations which oppose and persecute the church during this present age. In its widest sense, indeed, the beast represents godless society as a whole. In the days of the early church this primarily meant the Roman empire — and the narrative itself hints at this very strongly. In chapter 17 we see a woman seated on the seven heads of a similar ten-horned beast. The narrative indicates clearly that she represents the city of Rome, and that the seven heads represent the 'seven hills' on which it was built ('the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated ... and the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth').

Now the beast represents governments and organizations which oppose the church during this age. At least three of Daniel's beasts represent empires of the previous age. In other words, these empires of the past typify the powers which oppose the church during the present age. If three, why not four? It is logical, surely that all four empires are empires of the previous age. They are combined into one ferocious beast to typify all the powers which oppose and persecute the church during the present age. The beast of Revelation is a combination of all Daniel's four beasts, and yet at the time of the vision it appeared to represent the Roman empire. It is surely unlikely that one of the original four beasts was this same Roman empire. It is more sensible to assume that the beast of Revelation follows after the four beasts of Daniel. Those beasts belonged to the old age. In other words, the four beasts of Daniel represent Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece of the old era. The beast of Revelation represents Rome and all other anti-God powers of the present era. These latter powers are typified by the four great heathen pre-Christian empires.

Now we read that the beast was given authority to continue 'forty-two months'. Here again we meet our period of three and a half years. We read also that 'it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them'. Clearly this picture is derived from the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes as described by Daniel. The three and a half-year persecution of Antiochus typifies the persecution of Christians throughout the present age. We may add that he could further typify some specific antichrist who will arise shortly before the Lord's second advent. Revelation indicates that persecution will greatly increase towards the end of the age, and it seems likely that some particularly awful antichrist will make his or its appearance at this time (see also II Thessalonians 2:1-12). As Christ's first advent was preceded by the persecutions of Antiochus, so His second advent will be preceded by the persecutions of the last and most terrible antichrist.

John next records that he saw 'another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon'. A dragon in sheep's clothing! This beast deceives people into serving the first beast, and is called the false prophet. It is apparent that it represents false religions and false philosophies — in other words, false ideologies. Some people think that all religions lead to God. They have been deceived by the lamb-like

appearance of the beast!

In chapter 14 we read of the blessing attending those who remain faithful to God and the punishment which awaits those who serve the beast. John then sees a vision of the ‘harvest’ at the end of the world. Again we have been brought right through to the end of the age.

In chapters 15 and 16 we read of the seven bowls of wrath. As each bowl is poured out, John sees scenes symbolizing God’s judgments. God has been judging and punishing men throughout the age; but a last great judgment awaits the world. Although the various visions in Revelation deal with the whole age, there is an element of progression. The closer we come to the end of the book, the more the emphasis is on the events at the end of the age.

In chapter 17 John sees the vision of the great harlot sitting on the heads of the beast. The narrative hints very strongly that the woman specially symbolizes the city of Rome with all its worldly, godless pleasure and its persecution of the saints. And Rome, like Babylon, typifies all worldly pleasure, and the godless way of life in general. Woven into the description of the woman and the beast, there are unmistakable references to Nero and Domitian, the terrible persecuting Roman emperors. Together with Antiochus Epiphanes, they typify all antichrists, particularly the final one at the end of the age.

Wilcock rather plays down the allusions to Rome — without entirely denying them — and concentrates on showing that the beast represents godless society as a whole.² The harlot, like the second beast of chapter 13, is shown to represent false ideology. No doubt the symbols do point to these things, but the way in which they appear to describe Rome is surely more than a mere coincidence. The early Christians not only *saw* Rome in the descriptions of the harlot and the beast — they were *meant* to see this. The fact is that Rome (the empire and the city) was itself a symbol of godless society and false ideology.

In chapter 18 we read that the harlot is eventually destroyed by the beast itself. In chapter 19, by contrast, we read of the marriage supper of the Lamb, His bride being the church. Again we have been brought to the end of the age.

In the second half of the chapter we see Christ in His role of conqueror, wielding His ‘rod of iron’. This He has been doing throughout the age. Again and again he has punished and destroyed the kings of the earth. We read in verse 16, ‘On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, *King of kings and Lord of lords*’. In Daniel 8:25 the angel said that Antiochus Epiphanes ‘shall even rise up against the *Prince of princes*; but, by no human hand, he shall be broken’. Here in Revelation 19:11-16 (and in 17:14) it is clearly indicated that the ‘Prince of princes’ who struck Antiochus (and the Greek empire) down, was Jesus Christ Himself. This strongly supports my suggestion that Daniel’s fourth kingdom was destroyed by the pre-incarnate Christ. Colossians 1:15-17 indicates that He has had authority over the kingdoms of this world since the beginning of creation.

The climax comes in verses 19-21, where we see the beast gathering the forces of the world against the King of kings. Again this pictures the world’s final effort at the end of the age to destroy Christ and His church. We read, however, that the beast and the false prophet will be taken and ‘thrown alive into the lake of fire’.

The dragon bound and destroyed

At this point the narrative returns to the dragon. John tells us that he saw an angel come down out of Heaven, bind the dragon ‘for a thousand years’, throw him into the pit and shut him in. This was done ‘that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while’.

We are reminded here of Christ's declaration that the gospel must be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and that Satan must first be bound before his goods are spoiled (Matthew 24:14; 12:29). Christ implied that Satan had been bound already, and so it would appear that the 'thousand years' symbolizes the age in which we are living now. We are told that Satan was to 'deceive the nations no more'. 'The nations' is a term which signifies the Gentiles. Before the Christian era, Satan kept the Gentiles in the darkness of ignorance, with no knowledge of the true God. But from the time of Christ's first advent, the light of truth has been made freely available to all.

'And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.' (Isaiah 25:7)

'... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.' (Isaiah 49:6)

The question immediately arises, how can we reconcile this picture of Satan's imprisonment with the earlier picture of his persecuting the church and with other evidence that he is active in the world today? Part of the answer is that the pictures in Revelation are symbolical only and cannot deal with all aspects of the truth. They describe a complex spiritual situation which cannot be portrayed in a single picture.

The two pictures of Satan describe two facts about his condition today. Firstly, he is very active. Secondly, despite his activity he has already been defeated by Christ and is in a certain sense bound and helpless. The first picture shows Satan actively persecuting the church. The second picture shows that he is bound and helpless to prevent the spread of the gospel to every nation of the world. This must have been very reassuring to the early Christians who first read the book of Revelation — and they were able to see its truth for themselves. They were experiencing Satan's activity through the fearful persecutions of Rome, but they were also witnessing his inability to prevent the spread of the gospel to the four corners of the earth.

It is sometimes suggested that the angel with the great chain who bound Satan is a picture of Christ himself. If this 'angel' is Christ, we can be sure that the 'archangel' Michael also is a picture of Christ.

In verses 4 to 6 we read about the saints living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years, and we are told that this is the 'first resurrection'. We have had occasion to mention this section twice already, once in connection with the reign of the saints in Daniel 7:22, 27, and once in connection with the awaking of 'many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth' in Daniel 12:2.

We read in verse 4, 'Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed', and in Daniel 7:22 (R.V.) we read that 'judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom'. Comparison with Ephesians 1:18 — 2:6, Revelation 1:5, 6 and 5:9, 10 (R.V.) makes it clear that the saints are reigning *now*. The question is whether the reign of the saints and the first resurrection applies only to those who have died and gone to be with Christ, or whether it includes those who have not yet died.

We read in verse 4 that those who reigned with Christ were 'the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus ... and who had not worshipped the beast or its image ...' In verse 5 we read that 'the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended'. The impression one gets is that John is speaking of those who have died. On the other hand, passages such as John 5:21, 24, 25, Ephesians 2:6, Revelation 1:6 and 5:9, 10 (R.V.) suggest that those who are still alive can be included. If the latter is the case, 'the

first resurrection' would refer to the spiritual rebirth of a person as a Christian, when he or she passes 'from death to life' (John 5:24). Perhaps the most we can say is that Revelation 20:4-6 definitely does refer to the saints who have died, but it *may* include also those who are still alive.

We are told that Satan is to be loosed again after the thousand years and that he will gather the nations together against 'the camp of the saints and the beloved city' (the church — Hebrews 12:22). This goes with Revelation 19:19 which says, 'I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse (Christ) and against his army'. It appears again that there will be a period of greatly increased apostasy, spiritual darkness and persecution of the church at the end of this age.

However, we are told that fire shall come down out of heaven and burn up those gathered against the church (the second advent — II Thessalonians 1:7-10); and Satan shall be cast into the lake of fire together with the beast and the false prophet. Earth and heaven shall pass away and the dead (unredeemed) shall be judged and cast, together with death and Hades, into the lake of fire. Then shall God create a new heaven and a new earth and He shall dwell with His saints for ever. What a glorious hope for those who put their trust in Christ!

Superficially, Revelation 20 seems to indicate a future millennium. However, scripture must always be interpreted in the light of other relevant scriptures — particularly in the case of such an obscure and difficult book as Revelation. Revelation is highly figurative, and must be interpreted in the light of the plain, straightforward teaching of the gospels, the Acts and the epistles. Figurative, symbolical and obscure scriptures should be interpreted in the light of scriptures which are written in straightforward, non-figurative language and can be clearly understood — *and not vice versa*. And this applies to the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. We must remember, too, that we are now in the new, Messianic age — not the old age, when 'Israel' meant the Jews. Christ's body, the church, is the true Israel; and it is we, who are 'children of Abraham by faith', who have inherited most of God's promises.

Christ Himself never gave any hint of a millennial age interposed between this age and the end of the world. He always indicated that this present age will be brought to a close by His own return for His saints and the casting into fire of those who are not His — e.g. the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:36-42). The New Testament writers indicate quite clearly that we are now in the 'thousand years' of Revelation and are looking forward *not* to an earthly millennial kingdom, but to something far more wonderful — a new heaven and a new earth. Let us take, for example, a passage in II Peter.

'... scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing ... saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" ... the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men ... with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day ... the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up ... what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.' (II Peter 3:3-13)

This passage from Peter's second letter provides very strong evidence that the 'thousand years' of Revelation 20 symbolizes the age in which we are living now. In fact it acts as a very clear commentary on this part of Revelation. To start with, Peter eliminates any idea of a future millennium by indicating that the end of the *present age* will be marked by increased apostasy, followed by the destruction of the universe by fire and the creation of a new earth

and universe. These are precisely the events which Revelation 20 and 21 say will terminate the 'thousand years'. And as if that were not enough, Peter speaks in this context of 'a thousand years' being as a day (and vice versa) with the eternal God. In my opinion, the 'thousand years' of Revelation 20 clearly refers to the present age, and is meant to convey the idea of a period of time that is long by human standards.

I am not saying that the early Christians expected a delay of many hundreds of years before Christ's return. Most of them probably expected something shorter than this — although Christ did indicate that there would be a considerable delay (Matthew 24:3-14; 25:5, 19; Luke 12:45; 21:24). But God is the ultimate author of the Bible, and the writers did not always appreciate the full significance of what they were writing. And this is something we need to remember when we study the book of Daniel.

In Daniel's case, God did not reveal that the Messiah's kingdom would be consummated many hundreds of years after its foundation. Daniel saw that the kingdom of Heaven would one day fill the whole earth and have absolute dominion; but he did not foresee the long period of time involved. As remarked in an earlier chapter, it is as if Daniel were gazing at a range of mountains from a great distance. From a distance they seemed to stand very close together. In the book of Revelation we are actually standing among these mountains and we can see that they stand far apart.

The last recorded words that Daniel spoke are these: 'O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?' (12:8). The answer was not given until some six hundred years later. A large part of this answer is found in the book of Revelation. The books of Daniel and Revelation are in fact rather like the first and second instalments of a serial. The climax of Daniel's visions is the heavenly scene of Daniel 7, where the 'one like a son of man' is brought before the Ancient of Days and given power and dominion. The prophecies of Revelation begin with this scene (chapters 4 and 5), the scene of Christ's coronation following His death and resurrection. Daniel describes the old age, but points to a new age, the Messianic age. Revelation describes the new, Messianic age, but points to the end of the world, with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Conclusion

We have dealt in this book with some things that are truly miraculous. The amazing prophecies of Daniel are among the many signs that God has given mankind — signs that confirm Christ's words, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me'. Let no one say that the evidence for the truth of these words is inadequate.

We read that the disciples' hearts burned within them as Jesus 'interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself'. May our hearts also burn within us as we see the wonders of God's infinite might and majesty, love and compassion. He who is the great I AM, whose hand laid the foundation of the earth and whose right hand spread out the heavens loved us and gave Himself for us. Because our sins have separated us from Him, God the Son put aside His glory and out of eternity came into time. He came into this world as a man and Himself bore the penalty for our sins on the cross.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16)

As well as bearing witness to the Messiahship of Jesus, the prophecies of Daniel convey to us today the same message that they conveyed to the Jews who were persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes — the message that although godless man may appear to be all-powerful, God is in control and His ultimate victory is certain.

It may well be that the worldwide church is due to enter — in the not very distant future — a period of great persecution. A period when the forces of evil will seem to triumph, and the Christian church will seem to be destroyed. But the message of Daniel's prophecies is as true now as it was over two thousand years ago. *God is in control*. In His own time He will destroy the kingdoms of this world — finally and completely — and then, at that time, His everlasting kingdom will indeed 'fill the whole earth'.

1. Compare also Revelation 5:11 with Daniel 7:10.
 2. Michael Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Opened*, (Inter-Varsity Press, 1975).
-

© 1980, 2006 R.J.M. Gurney.

Revised and updated for the Web by the author.

http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_god-in-control_gurney.html
