

Church History in the Book of Revelation

By A. T. Jones

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OPEN your Bibles to *Revelation* this morning. What is this book? “The revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Revelation 1

¹ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him...and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.

So, first of all, over all, through all, we are to consider the book of *Revelation* as the revelation of Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ revealed in the world.

Christ in the world is His church, and He is the head of it. Christ is in the world, in the form of the church. Once He was in the world personally in human form, as a man among men. That is individually true today: He is with each one of us. And He is personally in the world yet, in the form of his body which is His church.

Then when the book of *Revelation* is the revelation of Jesus Christ, and the church is the body of Christ, with what does the revelation deal? With the church. It is the history of the church.

The book of *Daniel* is a history of the ruling of the most High among the kingdoms of men; the book of *Revelation* is a history of the ruling of the most High in the church. *Daniel* is national history; *Revelation* is church history.

In *Revelation* there are some kingdoms dealt with, national powers, but they come in subordinate to the church history. In *Daniel* there is some church history; but it is subordinate to the great subject of national powers.

Revelation 1 [RSV]

⁹ I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle

that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet

¹¹ Saying, What you see, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches.

What does the word "seven" signify? Fullness; completeness; all there is of a subject. Then, first, as we come to study the book of *Revelation*, it is a study of the different phases, or conditions, of the church of God from that time on till the close.

There is much in a name. When God chose a name for him who had been Abram, his new name was given because of its meaning. The same with Jacob: the change was made because of his character. Then when God chooses names representative of the different phases of the full, complete church, it is done in order to represent the character of that church from the time of the giving of this book till the close of time.

All that John saw was written to the churches:

Revelation 1

²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which you saw are the seven churches.

The angels are the angels of the seven churches. And the seven candlesticks are the seven churches. And where is Christ seen, and what is He doing? Walking about in the midst of the candlesticks. But the candlesticks are the seven churches. Then do you not see, right on the face of the book of *Revelation*, that this book is church history?

And, as with national history and the book of *Daniel*, so with church history and the book of *Revelation*: we cannot correctly read church history until we can read the book of *Revelation*. We can not know church history until we know the book of *Revelation*.

We may read the books that pretend to be, and are, in fact, that phase of, church history; but we do not get the history, the truth of history, until we read the book of *Revelation*. Then we have church history as it is in truth; even as in *Daniel* we have national history as it is in truth.

First, then are the seven churches. In the 2nd and 3rd chapters there is a line of instruction on the seven churches.

That is followed in chapters 4-7; 8:1, by a line of reading straight through on the seven seals.

That is followed in chapters 8-11 by a line of reading straight through on the seven trumpets.

The seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets occupy the first eleven chapters of the book of *Revelation*. That is the first division of the book of *Revelation*, as the first six chapters are the first division of the book of *Daniel*.

The last half of the book of *Revelation* is another combination of affairs altogether, and is all one, from the first verse of chapter 12 until the last verse in the book.

The seven churches reach to the end of the world.

Turn to the last verses of the 6th chapter, and see to what point the seven seals reach.

Revelation 6

¹² And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

¹³ And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

¹⁴ And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

¹⁵ And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

¹⁶ And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

¹⁷ For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

These verses reach to the second coming of Christ.

To what point do the seven trumpets reach?

Revelation 11

¹⁵ And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.

¹⁶ And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshiped God,

¹⁷ Saying, We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which are, and was, and are to come; because You have taken to yourself your great power, and have reigned.

¹⁸ And the nations were angry, and your wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that you should give reward unto your servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear your name, small and great; and should destroy them which destroy the earth.

These also reach to the end of the world.

So here are three treatises, all ending only with the end of the world,—two of them reaching from the first advent of Christ to the end of the world, and the third one covering nearly all of the same period as the first two.

The seven churches, you will see if you look carefully, are seven definite epistles to the true church in its seven periods.

The seven seals are composed of seven steps marking the apostasy, the Reformation, and the events connected with the coming of the Lord.

The seven churches are seven instructions to Christ's church itself.

The seven seals take the church of God at the beginning, and show a step away, and another step away toward the world, and another step away toward the world, until the apostasy is complete; then the result of the apostasy is marked in the slaughter of the saints of God; and after that the vindication of the saints, the signs of the Lord's coming, and the sealing and deliverance of the remnant.

The seven trumpets are seven phases of the history among the nations of the world, as they are connection with the church history. Each of the trumpets is directly connected with the church history; particularly the first four come as a consequence of the apostasy that is shown in the seals.

When you have searched out and carefully read the full history of the book of *Daniel*, especially the ten kingdoms, it is easy to read, in the 8th chapter of *Revelation*, the whole history of the first four trumpets, because the history is there.

The first four trumpets occur in the same period as does the rise of the ten kingdoms. And the rise of the ten kingdoms was upon the fall of Rome.

But what caused Rome to fall? The union of church and state; the covering of all the iniquity of paganism, with only the forms and the profession of Christianity. The forms of Christianity, filled with the life and spirit of Satan,—it was that which caused the ruin of the Roman Empire.

When Jesus was born, Rome stood at the point where Satan, angels, and men could see no remedy but that it must be swept out of existence because of its wickedness. But they were only wicked; that was all. They were not hypocritically wicked. That was all that they pretended to be. The Lord could send His gospel to teach such people as that, to show them the beauties of righteousness and the joy of salvation, and to save them from their wickedness.

So Rome did not perish then. God sent the gospel, and multitudes accepted it; but when the forms of the gospel, and the mere

profession of the gospel, were put upon men, and worn only as a cloak, and the life underneath was only the life of Satan, the character of Satan, and the inspiration of Satan; when this same wickedness that had been in the days of the apostles was, at this time, thus covered with the form of godliness, and knew only the inspiration of Satan,—when the gospel was taken and perverted to sustain all this, how could the Lord save them in that condition?

The only means of saving people is the gospel. The Lord cannot save people any other way. The when the gospel is taken out of His hands by its being made a mere profession, filled with the life of Satan, and used only to cover up, and bolster, and apologize for, iniquity in the life, you see all means of salvation is taken entirely out of God's hand. When persons get to that point, the only thing to be done is for them to perish; for the only means of salvation, they have perverted to sustain iniquity. That is the danger, where even the remnant have stood. Thank the Lord, we have seen it; and He will lead us out of it, and away from it.

The Roman Empire was the same in character when Christ was born, and when the apostles went forth, as it was when it was destroyed; but in the time of Christ it was simply wickedness, while in the days of its ruin it was the same in character, but covered with the cloak of godliness; and then it had to perish. Thus it was the union of church and state, a perversion of religion, and the false pretensions of godliness, that ruined the Roman Empire. The ten kingdoms rose upon the ruins of that empire. When you understand the history in *Daniel*, and the seven seals, read the first four trumpets, and you will see the whole of the history right in the book of *Revelation* itself.

The other three trumpets are matters taking another field of history, and reaching down to a time when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever; when the nations are angry, and the wrath of God is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that He should give reward to His servants the

prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear His name, and should destroy them that destroy the earth.

Thus, by three separate treatises in the first half of the book of *Revelation*, we are brought to the coming of the Lord and the end of the world.

Take another look at the 12th chapter. Here we have the narrative of the “woman clothed with the sun.” The church of Christ, the true one, is taken up now in another phase. Christ was born; and there stood a great red dragon to devour Him as soon as He was born. The power, the instrument, by which the attempt was made to destroy the new-born Saviour was pagan Rome. But who is, in deed and in truth, the dragon? *Revelation* 12:9 says plainly that he is that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan.

Satan cannot work his purposes in this world except through men. Even the Lord has to have men to work His purposes in this world. He has never done it any other way. If the men who are present will not allow the Lord to use them, it is written, “God is able of these stones”—to do His work?—No; “to raise up children.” God cannot use stones until they are made into men. If the men who were there had altogether refused and rejected Him, He would have had to make men out of those stones before He could use them; for it is through men that He must work.

Satan cannot make stones into men. All he can do is to use men. So he uses governments, individuals, whomsoever he can: all his purposes must be carried on through men.

So when Rome was in this condition of wickedness, and Christ was born into the world, Satan tried to stir up a power to destroy Him as soon as He was born. Herod was king of Judea, becoming king by direct appointment of the Roman Senate. The history of it all is detailed in the book, *Great Empires of Prophecy* (see pages 308-310).

Herod sought to destroy Jesus as soon as He was born. But who was behind Herod? Satan. He failed at that time to do it; but it came around at last, and the word was spoken that made it possi-

ble for Jesus to be put to death, and the word went forth that led Him to be put to death. Whose was the word? Satan's. But who was the man? Pilate. He was a Roman, direct from Rome, representing Rome in all respects. It was the word of Rome that led them to crucify the Lord, and thus Rome is the power and instrument of Satan represented in the great red dragon. He was the life and inspiration of that power. And after Jesus had been caught up to the throne of God, Satan, still by dragon Rome, persecuted the woman who brought forth the man child.

Now I want you to see, in the 12th chapter of *Revelation*, the three phases of the history of the world, from Christ until now:

1. The first is pagan Rome,—Rome in the time of Christ and the apostles and the early church, with Satan as the inspiration of Rome.
2. From that the story passed down to another power that is used against the church. But where is the church at this time when this second power comes in? In the wilderness. And the dragon still persecutes the church; and now he casts out a flood after her. In the other he persecutes her; but in this he casts out a flood. There is as great a difference between plain persecution and a flood of persecution, as there is between the natural stream and the flood: the flood is overwhelming. This is still Rome, but in what form? It is the apostate church, the form of Christianity inspired by Satan, who was the life of it. And what does this phase of Rome do? Still by peace it destroys many; always by Rome's peace comes destruction.
3. Then "the dragon was wroth with the woman." Had he not been wroth with the woman from the first? Yes; but what now? He "went to make war with the remnant of her seed."

In all this, you see the three phases of history, the three powers that Satan brought against the church, between the first advent of Christ and the second coming. The first was pagan Rome; the second is the apostate church; the third is the power that is used against the remnant.

In the 12th chapter of *Revelation*, then, the church of Christ stands before us as warred upon by Satan through three powers. The first is the church at the birth of Christ; the second is the church in the wilderness; the third is the remnant church.

In the 12th chapter these last two powers are not named. The power used against the church in the wilderness, and the power used against the remnant, are not there described: only the fact is stated. But in the 13th chapter these two powers are described:

Revelation 13

¹ And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

² And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

Who was the dragon? The devil. And the dragon gave him his power. Who gave him his power? The devil. Who gave him great authority? The devil. Then whom does this beast represent? The devil.

Who is in him? The devil. Who is working in him? The devil. But it is the form of the church. It professes Christianity. Do not forget that all-important thing: it professes Christianity. It professes the gospel. It is all the forms of Christianity, with a great deal more added, it is true; but with the true forms of Christianity it started, and lo! it ends in and with only Satan.

Now when the Lord has pointed out to us the fearful consequences of allowing Satan to inspire his forms, and have his place in professed Christianity, is it not enough to teach us to beware of it forevermore, and to lead us to shun it as we would shun the devil? That other passage comes to me just here, that was printed in *Special Testimony*, No. 9, that there has been a “following in the track of Romanism.” What is the track of Romanism? The track of Satan.

O brethren, let us shake it off! Does not this lay on us an obligation everlastingly to examine ourselves, to watch the motives, to investigate the principles, which actuate us, to see whether Christ or Satan is manifested in us? Watch yourself, not some other brother; see that it is manifested in yourself, not in some committee or board, but in yourself. Look at it through the anointing of the heavenly eye-salve, that you may see and discern whether it is Christ who is your life and inspiration, or whether you have given place to the other spirit.

Next in the 13th chapter, is described another beast:

Revelation 13

¹¹ And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon.

¹² And he exercises all the power of the first beast before him, and causes the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

¹³ And he does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,

¹⁴ And deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

¹⁵ And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

This is the power through whom Satan makes his war with the remnant of the church.

Taking the 12th and 13th chapters of *Revelation* together, we have the history of the world from the birth of Christ to the end of the world,—the dragon, the beast, and his image.

What is the 14th chapter? The great threefold message for this time. To what time does the first part of the book of *Revelation* bring us? To the coming of Christ, the end of the world, the com-

ing of judgment. And the first message of the great threefold message, is,

Revelation 14

⁷ The hour of His judgment is come.

Now the warning comes against the worship of the beast. What is it to worship the beast? They worshiped the beast,

Revelation 13

⁴ And they worshiped the dragon which gave power unto the beast.

But it is Satan-worship all the time. Now comes the warning cry of the great threefold message:

Revelation 14

⁸ And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

⁹ And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

¹⁰ The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation;

Now to sketch rapidly through the rest of the book, to see the relation that all the rest of the book bears to this chapter:

What is in the 15th chapter? The seven last great plagues.

What is in the 16th? The pouring out of the vials of the wrath of God.

What is in the 17th and 18th? The judgment of the great harlot that sits upon many waters,—not the history of her, but THE JUDGMENT of her.

Revelation 17

¹ Come hither; I will show unto you the judgment of the great whore that sits upon many waters.

What is in the 19th? The coming of the Lord, the destruction of the beast, and the last great battle.

What is in the 20th? The binding of Satan, and the judgment of Satan and all the wicked.

What is in the 21st? A new heaven and a new earth.

What is in the 22nd? The throne; the river of the water of life; and the saints, who “shall reign forever and ever.”

Then do you not see that in the 12th chapter all the following part of the books is wrapped up; and from that chapter we can look right through into the kingdom of God? Bless the Lord.

Let us study as never before the book of *Revelation*.