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BIBLE TREASURY

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AND

A NEW CONCORDANCE TO THE *AUTHORIZED AND REVISED*  
*VERSIONS*, COMBINED WITH A SUBJECT-INDEX AND  
PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY OF SCRIPTURE  
PROPER NAMES

EDITED BY

WILLIAM WRIGHT, D. D.

*WITH UPWARDS OF 350 ILLUSTRATIONS*

AND A NEW

INDEXED BIBLE ATLAS

Thomas Nelson & Sons

33 EAST 17<sup>TH</sup> STREET (UNION SQUARE)  
NEW YORK

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Electrotyped and Printed at  
The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.

## THE REVELATION.

BY PROFESSOR B. B. WARFIELD, D.D., LL.D., PRINCETON, N. J.

**AUTHOR.**—The Book of Revelation represents itself to be written by a John so described as to be distinctly identified with the apostle John, whose long residence in Asia and banishment to Patmos by the Emperor Domitian are historically attested from the time of Justin Martyr (about 150 A.D.) onwards. After the third century, however, doubts as to the apostolic origin of the book were widely spread in the East. These doubts have been revived in modern times upon substantially the same grounds, which turn chiefly upon the unlikeness of the Revelation to John's other writings. A closer study of John's

books, however, reveals a deeper resemblance between them, and leaves no reason, on such internal grounds, for setting aside the historical testimony.

**DATE.**—Exceptionally strong and consistent historical testimony, beginning with Irenæus (about 175 A.D.), who had special opportunities for knowing the truth, assigns the book to the later years of the reign of Domitian, about 95 or 96 A.D. Nevertheless, there has existed in recent times a strong tendency to date it as early as 68 A.D. This opinion is supported chiefly by an appeal to certain passages in the book, which are



LAODICEA — ENTRANCE TO THE STADIUM.

(From a Photograph by FRITH.)

supposed to imply that Jerusalem and the Temple were still undestroyed (*e.g.* 11. 19), or to identify the emperor who was on the throne (13. 13; 17. 7-12), when the book was written; as well as to the dissimilarity of this book to John's other writings, which is supposed to be best explained by assuming a long interval between their compositions. The proposed interpretation of the passages appealed to does not seem, however, to be justified; and the differences between Revelation and the other writings of John are not such as lapse of time will account for. On the other hand, the fitness of the later date to the historical situation in the book, and to the stage of development of the churches described in its opening chapters, is becoming ever plainer as historical research proceeds.

**LITERARY FORM.**—In entitling itself "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him, to show unto his servants," the book announces itself as a divine disclosure, or, in other words, as a prophetic book. It is important to observe, however, that it is a prophetic book of a particular class. This class is designated by the Greek term *Apokalypse* ("Revelation"), and is characterized by its use of symbolical visions as the vehicle of prophecy. The model for this mode of prophecy was set by the book of Daniel. In the Apocalypse of John, the Divine Spirit makes use of that literary form which had been wrought out as the natural expression of persecuted believers, in order to enhearten the suffering church.

**CONTENTS.**—The woes of the churches depicted in the Revelation furnish only the start-

ing-point for its real message. Its text may be said to be those glorious words of the departing Lord, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16. 33). As the victory of Christ over the world is evinced in the triumph of that kingdom of God which He came to establish, the theme of the book comes to be the gradual triumph of the kingdom of God; and as this triumph culminates in the second coming of Christ, it is the return of the Lord in glory to which all the movement of the book advances. It may thus be conceived as the bridge cast over the chasm which divides the first and second Advents.

In Old Testament prophecy the Advent in glory was not sharply distinguished from the Advent in humiliation; and when Christ came announcing the kingdom of heaven, men looked for an immediate triumph. The contrast between these high expectations and the reality of a persecuted church, required a revelation of the real course of things to preserve the church from despair.

The Apocalypse does for the church what the spiritual vision of the love of God in Christ so often does for the individual mourner—it enables it to endure, as seeing the invisible. It is then, in the highest sense, "The Revelation;" it displays before the eyes of men, blinded in the turmoil of the strife, the inner reality and the true course of events in this period between the Advents. It is the divine philosophy of history. It is the exhibition in action of Paul's two great declarations, that Christ has been made head over all things for His church, and that all things

work together for good to them that are called according to God's purpose.

**INTERPRETATION.**— This general drift of the book has been perceived by most of its expositors. They have seriously differed, however, in its detailed interpretation.

Some have thought that it presents a picture, not of the whole period between the Advents, but only of its opening years; as if it were intended for the comfort of those only who met that first great crisis, and gave assurance only of the external destruction of evil as embodied in the apostate Jewish and persecuting Roman states, and of the external triumph of the church over the Jewish and Roman worlds.

Others have thought that only the closing scenes that accompany the coming of Christ in glory, and His completed victory over the world, are depicted; as if it were intended to comfort and strengthen only by revealing to those in the midst of the battle the sure and glorious end.

Others have perceived that, in the visions of this book, an inner view is given of the real nature of the whole space between the two Advents; but have mistakenly thought that it must therefore supply a continuous and detailed history of the course of events which fill this period, and have sought to frame from it an inspired chronicle of the history of the church or of the world.



SMYRNA, FROM THE TOMB OF POLYCARP.

(From a Photograph by FRITH.)

Others still have seen that the fortunes of the church are dealt with in these visions only in broad outlines and for their ethical and spiritual ends, and not with chronological purpose or effect. They have therefore read the book, not as intended to write history beforehand, but as designed to keep steadily before the mind of the church of God the great facts that the hand of God is in all history, and that its issue is, therefore, according to His appointment and direction; and thus to strengthen it to bear all trials, and to quicken its faith and trust in God, who does all things well.

**STRUCTURE.**— The structure of the book is admirably adapted to serve this end. Its plan does not form a single, closed ring; nor does it advance in a continuous straight line, but, returning repeatedly on itself, it makes its progress in a sort of spiral movement towards its climax. A mode of composition like this is peculiarly accordant with Semitic literary genius and art; and in the New Testament it is specially characteristic of John, who is accustomed to present truth to his readers by turning it round and round before them in successive and yet regularly advancing aspects.

The Apocalypse, in harmony with this literary method, is found to consist of a series of parallel and yet ever-progressing sections, which bring before the reader, over and over again, but in

climactic form, the struggle of the church, and its victory over the world in its Lord. There are probably seven of these spirals, though only five of them are clearly marked; and it is probable that each of them consists of seven subordinate divisions, though these are distinct in only four of them. The plan of the whole is, then, something like the following:—Prologue, 1. 1-8; seven parallel sections, divided at 3. 22; 8. 1; 11. 19; 14. 21; 16. 21; and 19. 20; Epilogue, 22. 6-21.

**SYMBOLICAL LANGUAGE.**— An Apocalypse is, before all else, a book written in symbols. The whole action of John's Apocalypse, and every detail of its representation alike, is, accordingly, wrought out not directly, but through the medium of symbolism.

The sources of this symbolism are to be sought in the prophetic books of the Old Testament and in our Lord's discourses; and the meaning of the book will become clear in proportion as the significance of these symbols is correctly ascertained. It would be idle to deny that the Revelation is a difficult book; every age of the church has found its interpretation a problem. But its difficulty will be found to arise largely from our unfamiliarity with apocalyptic writings, and it may be expected to give way in proportion as we seek consistently to interpret it as an Apocalypse, written in purely symbolical language.