

**THE BOOK OF
REVELATION: A SERIES
OF EXPOSITIONS**

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The book of Revelation: a series of expositions by John Brown

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JOHN BROWN

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A SERIES OF EXPOSITIONS,

BY

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PREFACE.

THESE lectures were projected, and more than half of them delivered to the people it is my happiness to serve in the Gospel, before I had any thought of their seeing the light in their present form. It was only after many entreaties on the part of others, and much hesitation on my own, that I consented to their publication. And this, not because of misgivings as to the soundness of the views advanced, but rather from a deep and unaffected consciousness of my unworthiness to deal adequately with so exalted a theme. Yet even a little help may be welcome to some; and I was anxious that those who had heard these lectures should be able to review, as a whole, that exposition which had, of course, been brought before them in separate parts, and at intervals extending over several months.

To choose the Apocalypse as the subject of a series of lectures is in these days rather perilous to a man's reputation for common sense. The book has furnished occasion for the display of so many wild vagaries, that he who again attempts to unfold its meaning lays himself open to the suspicion that he has abandoned wholesome teaching, and in moonings about seals and vials, trumpets and dragons, is wasting time that might be better employed. Yet, who that believes that the evidence for the genuineness and authenticity of this book of the Revelation is equal to that of any other part of the canon does not regret that it has become the special hunting-ground of fanatics and day-

dreamers? Who that believes that in it we have a veritable portion of the mind of the Spirit does not wish to do something, however little, to roll back its reproach, and to excite the search of a more reverent inquiry? With this hope, I have sought to interpret this part of Scripture by the light of the rest, and have especially sought to bring out the spiritual lessons which all have found therein, however wide apart they have been in their views of its general structure.

Among those who may read these pages, there will be, of course, difference of opinion as to the views here adopted. I am happy to say that they do not now seek for acceptance for the first time. The scheme of the book of Revelation, and the general principles of interpretation I have followed, were set forth in a series of articles that appeared about twenty years ago in the *Biblical Review*. Some parts of the scheme had been suggested long before. For example Andreas of Casarca, in his commentary on the Apocalypse, written between A.D. 450 and 500, speaking of the dire portents at the opening of the sixth seal, when there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of heaven fell to the earth (vi. 12), says that there were those in his time "who applied this passage to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus." Arethas, his immediate successor, also wrote a commentary on this book, which is valuable as a catena from different authors. Writing upon the vision of the seven seals, he says, "Here there were manifestly shown to the evangelist what things were to befall the Jews in their war against the Romans." Hentenius, in his preface to the Latin version of Arethas (Paris, 1547), hinted at a further division of the book, which applied it to the Jewish enemies of the Christian Church, to heathenism, and to the worldly powers with

which the Church would have to contend. The latter part of the book was referred to the final conquest, rest, and ultimate glorification of the Church. These views were further developed by Aleassar, in a book published in 1614. Herrenschnuiger, in his work on the Revelation (1786), also found therein the overthrow of Judaism and heathenism, and the universal triumph of the Church. But while there have been many feelings after a simpler and more spiritual interpretation of this important part of Scripture, I have found nowhere such help and satisfaction as in the anonymous articles I have mentioned, and which too soon shared in that forgetfulness which is the usual fate of the onflowing stream of periodical literature.

Ten years ago there appeared a metrical translation of the Apocalypse, with Scripture references, by Professor Godwin, of New College. I have frequently availed myself of that translation; and as it is manifestly from the same pen as the articles I have mentioned, I would express to its author my most grateful sense of obligation.

I have received help also in translation and exposition from "Lectures on the Revelation of St. John," by Dr. C. J. Vaughan, of Doncaster. These lectures he has avowedly based on Hengstenberg's scheme entirely, and so far they are to me unsatisfactory; but his translation is that of a scholar; his exposition has all the characteristic excellences of his writings; and the work is a welcome addition to the libraries even of those who are unable to accept the scheme he has chosen.

I have throughout addressed myself necessarily to a mixed congregation, and have therefore passed by many questions of interest to some. But there is one matter on which I wish here to say a word or two. It will be seen at once that the scheme adopted assumes that the Apostle John received the Revelation before the destruction of

Jerusalem. There is, however, a very generally received tradition that he was banished to Patmos, under Domitian; and this would give as the date of the book, A.D. 96, or twenty-six years after the overthrow of the city. It is neither possible nor desirable for me to enter into the whole question here. I will merely refer to one or two arguments, based on the internal evidence, which have had great weight with me in favour of the earlier date, A.D. 68. The apostle wrote both his Gospel and the Apocalypse in the Greek language, while his native tongue was that form of the Hebrew known as the Aramaic. In the Apocalypse there are very many Hebraisms, and in the Gospel very few. Now if an Englishman were to write two books in the French language, one of them in good idiomatic French, and the other with very many Anglicisms in its style, it would be fair to conclude that the latter had been written at an earlier period than the former, and clearly marked a shorter acquaintance with the foreign language. It seems to me that the argument applies in the case of the apostle, inspiration notwithstanding, and necessitates a much earlier date for the Apocalypse than for the Gospel, which was written in A.D. 97. The differences in style were pointed out very early, and are universally admitted. Even Dean Alford, who is in favour of the later date, says, they "must be freely acknowledged," and states that the difficulty thus occasioned "has never yet been fairly solved."

Then again it seems to me that those writers have made out their case, who, by a minute comparison of various passages in the earlier chapters of the Revelation, have endeavoured to show that as yet the Jewish power was unbroken, and Jerusalem not yet destroyed, when John beheld the visions in Patmos.

The opinion in favour of the later date rests almost

entirely on the testimony of Irenæus, and I freely admit that that testimony is explicit enough. He says plainly that John was exiled under Domitian. But Irenæus did not directly receive the account from Polycarp, the friend of the apostle. He was only a boy when he saw him, and appeals to what others had heard from him. But even at that early time there was great uncertainty on small points of tradition; and if it be said that Irenæus plainly mentions the exile of John as taking place under Domitian, it is perhaps sufficient to answer that he as plainly appeals to the testimony of all the presbyters in Lesser Asia, who had been in the society of the apostle, that Jesus was about fifty years old. In the words of Neander, "We cannot acknowledge his account (of the time of the apostle's banishment) as sufficiently accredited. It is, indeed, possible that it proceeded only from a peculiar interpretation of this obscure book, and not from any historical testimony.

And if the Apocalypse contains certain marks of having been written before this time, this opinion would at once cease to be tenable. *As this is really the case, the Apocalypse must have been written soon after the death of Nero.*" Olausen also gives it as his opinion,† that "the internal characteristics of the book show that it was written in the early part of John's life, before Jerusalem was destroyed." Equally decided is Stier, when he says, "Shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, which was one of the comings of Christ, almost simultaneous with it, and yet beholding beforehand what he afterwards survived, St. John received the Revelation, in which the Lord says, 'Behold I come!' Not under Domitian, but under Nero, was the apostle banished to desolate Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." I may further mention that Dr. Davidson, in his "Introduction to the New Testament," published in 1851, contended strongly for the later date of