

**A KEY TO THE  
BOOK OF  
REVELATION**

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A Key to the Book of Revelation by James M. MacDonald

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**JAMES M. MACDONALD**

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A KEY

TO THE

BOOK OF REVELATION;

WITH

AN APPENDIX.

BY JAMES M. MACDONALD,

MINISTER OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, JAMAICA, L. I.

SECOND EDITION.

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

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IN offering to the public another edition of the present work, I feel called upon to express my gratitude for the approbation with which it has been met; which has been far more general and decided than I, as a new writer, on a very difficult subject, had any reason to expect. Persons of different religious denominations, and many of them entire strangers to me, and to whom I must have been wholly unknown before my work came into their hands, have been pleased to speak in the most encouraging terms of my labors.

I wish here distinctly to state, what was intimated in the preface to the first edition, that this work was prepared not so much for learned theologians, as for the great mass of educated and thinking minds. It has afforded me not a little satisfaction to learn, that it has assisted some such in reading to their profit a portion of God's word, which before was veiled in impenetrable mystery.

In this edition those errors and blemishes which, owing to my distance from the press, much to my annoyance, crept into the first, have been carefully corrected. I have also taken the liberty to make a slight change in the title-page by dropping an expression, which, from the use that has been made of it, might make a false impression on the mind of one who should allow himself to judge of the character of the book from merely reading the title.

JAMAICA, March 22, 1848.





## PREFACE.

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To the celebrated Dr. South has been attributed the saying, that the study of the Apocalypse either finds a man mad, or makes him so; and long since it was mentioned as high praise of John Calvin, that he never wrote on this book of Holy Scripture. Even ministers of the gospel are sometimes heard to confess that they avoid making this book, or any portion of it, a subject of instruction to their congregations. But how are we to reconcile a studied neglect of this book, amounting to a virtual proscription of it, with its inspired authority? Believing, as the writer does, that the Book of Revelation is a part of that "Scripture given by inspiration of God," he also believes that it must be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." He knows of no warrant for turning away from this book, which we have not for turning away from Malachi, or Genesis, or any other book of the Bible. No one is authorized to say that he can find enough in other parts of Scripture for his instruction and consolation, without meddling with a book which is confessedly so hard to be understood. God knew where it was best to close the canon of Scripture; and as He did not see fit to close it with the Epistle of Jude, no Christian has a right, at that point, to shut up his Bible, and refuse to read or study farther; and especially is this true of those who profess to be expounders and teachers of the contents of the Bible.

It is a very mistaken idea that the Apocalypse is a confused medley of disconnected visions. On the contrary, it is one of the most methodical books of the New Testament. It is characterized by unity and continuity of design and structure, and has the connection and order of history itself. By this, however, we do not mean that it

constitutes a complete compendium of civil and ecclesiastical history. But, its design being to afford consolation to persecuted Christians, it predicts the overthrow not only of the persecuting powers that existed at the time it was written, but of all other persecuting powers that might arise in later ages, down to the period of the visible appearing of Christ in the clouds of heaven. The opinion that we are not to look in this book for anything relating to the enemies of pure religion, who have appeared subsequent to the apostolic age, because it was the design of John to console his companions in tribulation, appears very singular. How it was foreign to his design, after devoting at least one half of the book to foretelling the end of the existing persecuting powers, for him then to proceed to assure these suffering Christians that future enemies of Christ's church would meet with a similar doom, it is very hard to understand. Indeed, if John had ended his work with predicting the destruction of Jewish and Pagan persecutors, it would manifestly have been incomplete; for in the Apostle Paul's day another mystery of iniquity had already begun to work. Papal Rome succeeded to somewhat of the authority and influence, in the world, of Pagan Rome. The same city was the metropolis of both; and, to a remarkable extent, the same territory was included by each. The former, as has been abundantly shown by the learned Dr. Middleton, perpetuated the idolatry of the latter. It was in this manner that the beast, which symbolized Papal Rome, made an image to the beast which symbolized Pagan Rome. The second, therefore, was nothing more than a *reproduction* of the first beast. Or, to draw an illustration from another symbol employed in this book, if the beast with seven heads and ten horns, which we admit represents the empire of Pagan Rome, was to carry a woman, who was to pollute and afflict the earth, leading men into an idolatry as gross as that of Pagan Rome itself, how, we ask, was it incongruous with the design of the Apocalypse for the writer to proceed to describe this woman and her abominations. If the old Roman empire has been perpetuated to this day, even in its heathen worship, as well as its bloody violence against that kingdom which is not of this world, we ask if it was not entirely apposite to the end John had in view, to

include in his prophecy its cruelties, errors, and final overthrow ?

But in saying that the Book of Revelation is not to be regarded as an epitome of history, we are very far from admitting that we are not to consult the pages of history to find specific events as a fulfilment of its various predictions. If the book is prophetic, it must predict events ; if it is fulfilled, it must be fulfilled by answering events, which it is the province of the historian to record. Truths so self-evident would not have been mentioned had it not been for a theory promulgated, which, if the author understands it, amounts to this, that we are not to look for the particulars of history in the Apocalypse, but are to regard the prophecy it contains as a mere picture—a symbolical representation, not designed to be specifically or individually applied. It seems evident that such generalization as this is a more dangerous extreme than the theory which makes the Apocalypse contain a complete syllabus of history. Does it not nearly or quite destroy the prophetic character of the book ? It makes the object of John to be the publication of the general truth, that persecuting enemies of the church will be destroyed. It represents that the words of John would have been as truly fulfilled if these enemies had been destroyed in any other way or by any other means. But to declare the *general* truth, that persecutors would be overthrown, why was *prophecy* necessary at all, when a simple *promise* would amount to the same thing ? In a word, what are predictions, which are so “generic” as not to admit of a specific application to the events of history, but mere promises ?

In endeavoring to represent fairly the theory stated above, I feel bound to mention that by those who maintain it a specific application is given, in many instances, to the predictions of the Apocalypse. For example, what can be more specific than to understand by “the image of the beast that should speak,” Rev., xiii. 15, certain statues of Nero, that had the appearance of animation, that could move the lips and appear to speak, &c. ?\* The writer confesses that he does not understand the “hermeneutical principles” by which such an interpretation as this can be

\* See STUART'S Commentary, Vol. II., p. 288.