

THE PROPHETIC FOUNDATION FOR STUDYING REVELATION

I. INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to understand the Book of Revelation without an understanding of the many OT and NT prophetic themes would indeed be futile. Being the last book of the Bible, it is not surprising that many of these themes merge together as history comes to its grand finale.

- A. Notice the reliance on the Old Testament

"Swete mentions that of the 404 verses of the Apocalypse, 278 contain references to the Jewish Scriptures (p. cxxxv). UBS's Greek NT (2nd ed.) cites over five hundred O.T. passages in connection with the book."¹ The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are frequently referred to. One will also find a reliance on the Psalms, Exodus and Deuteronomy.
- B. Notice that many of the major themes of Revelation have their roots in the OT
 - 1. The Great Tribulation / The Day of the Lord
 - 2. The Antichrist
 - 3. The role of Israel in the "end times" (in particular, her persecution)
 - 4. The return of Christ
 - 5. The ultimate triumph of Christ over Satan
 - 6. The Lord's establishment of His Kingdom on earth
 - 7. The restoration of Israel under Messiah's rule
- C. Notice that the scriptural account of history goes full circle
 - 1. God's intention to make a harmonious creation
 - a. Gen 1:1 – initial creation that is allowed to experience "sin"
 - b. Rev 21:1,4 – a new creation in which "sin" is forbidden
 - 2. God's provision of "blessing"
 - a. Gen 1:26-28 – man created to experience blessing in submission and service to God
 - b. Rev 22:3 – man brought back to blessing (all curse removed) that he might be in submission and service to God
 - 3. God's provision of the "tree of life"
 - a. Gen 2:9 – man allowed to eat of the "tree of life" in the garden of Eden
 - b. Rev 22:2 – man allowed to eat of the "tree of life" in the New Jerusalem

II. GOD'S INTENTION FOR ISRAEL

- A. The Intrusion of Sin
 - 1. Gen 3:6-7 – The choice of man to sin against God

¹A. Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12:411.

Prediction of Ultimate Triumph – Gen 3:15

This motif climaxes in Revelation with the triumph of Christ over Satan and the beasts who are in alliance with him.

2. Gen 3:22-24 – The removal from the "tree of life" (experiencing curse)
 3. Gen 4–10 – The spread of sin as the human race multiplies
 4. Gen 11 – Babel! The human race is scattered across the face of the earth, not experiencing the *blessing* of God.
- B. God's Plan to Create a New Nation: Israel
1. Gen 12:1-3 – The plan revealed
 2. Purpose: That all the nations might be brought *back to blessing* under God
- C. God's Covenants with Israel
1. Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:5,18-21) – God makes an unconditional covenant with Israel to give them the land of Canaan.

This will be the basis by which God will continue to deal with Israel, and never forsake them.
 2. Mosaic Covenant (Ex 19:5-6) – God makes a temporary covenant with Israel, which they must obey to be blessed.

This is the standard by which the nation must live by, and by which they will be disciplined for disobedience.
 3. Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:12-16) – God promises that He will one day establish the kingdom of David's descendant, who will rule eternally.
 4. New Covenant (Isa 59:20-21; Joel 2:28-32; Jer 31:31-34) – God promises that He will pour out His Spirit on His people, and they will have eternal forgiveness of sin.

III. ISRAEL'S DISOBEDIENCE

- A. The anticipation of failure (Deut 4:25-31)
1. Scattered among the nations
 2. Israel will be "in distress" in *the latter days*
 3. God will not forsake Israel because of His covenant with them
- B. The principle by which God will deal with Israel (Deut 28–29)
1. Obedience – will bring blessing (Deut 28:1-2)
 2. Disobedience – will bring curses, i.e., God's discipline (Deut 28:15)

3. Failure to respond to discipline will bring more severe curses (in stages; cf. Lev 26:14-39)

C. God's plan of discipline for Israel

1. Discipline for disobedience (see above)
2. Increased discipline (especially on the land)
3. Foreign invasion and defeat by enemies (Deut 28:25)
4. The "hardening" of Israel (announced through Isaiah)
 - a. Isa 1:2-7 – Discipline has failed to turn Israel around. Judgement necessary!
 - b. Isa 6:9-13 – Immediate judgement will come in the form of spiritual "hardening"
 - c. Isa 13:6-11 – Climactic judgement will come in the time known as "the day of the Lord" [see #7 below]

God will use this time to bring judgement on the entire world (note vs. 11)

5. Exile from the land by foreign powers (Deut 28:36, 49, 64-65)
 - a. 722 BC – Northern Kingdom of Israel conquered and deported by Assyria (see 2 Kings 17)
 - b. 586 BC – Southern kingdom of Judah conquered by Babylonians and taken into exile in Babylon (see 2 Kings 24-25)

539 – Return to the land of Israel (by decree of Cyrus)
 - c. Judgement under Rome
 - 1) AD 70 – Romans destroy Jerusalem (Lk 21:20-24)
 - 2) AD 135 – Bar Kokhba Revolt
Jews were exiled from the land and dispersed abroad until the 20th century.

6. Sovereignty removed; placed under Gentile Domination

- a. The plan revealed (Dan 2 and 7)
 - 1) Under Babylon (605–539 BC)
 - 2) Under Medo-Persia (539–331 BC)
 - 3) Under Greece/Hellenistic Empire (331–64 BC)
 - 4) Under Rome (64 BC – AD 476)

God will delay the final aspects in order to build the "Church"

- 5) Under a 10 Nation Confederacy that emerges from the old Roman Empire (future??) – Dan 2:41-43; 7:24)
 - 6) Under the rule of the Antichrist (future??) – Dan 7:24-25
 - b. Reconfirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ (Lk 21:20-24)
7. Judgement Completed with "the Day of the Lord" (comp. Rev 6:17)
- a. God will use this period to judge the whole world
 - 1) Including Gentiles (Isa 13:6-11)
 - 2) Including Israel (Joel 1:15; 2:11; 2:28-32)

Note: The "Day of the Lord" will include the period known as the Great Tribulation!
 - b. The Antichrist will manifest himself during this time (2 Thess 2:1-12)
 - c. The Great Tribulation will have a particular purpose to humble Israel, but God will rescue them before annihilation.
 - 1) Deut 4:29-30
 “But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.”
 - 2) Jer 30:4-9
 “⁴Now these are the words which the Lord spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah, ⁵“For thus says the Lord, ‘I have heard a sound of terror, Of dread, and there is no peace. ⁶‘Ask now, and see, If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale? ⁷‘Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob’s distress, But he will be saved from it. ⁸ And it shall come about on that day,‘ declares the Lord of hosts, ‘that I will break his yoke from off their neck, and will tear off their bonds; and strangers shall no longer make them their slaves. ⁹‘But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.”
 - 3) Dan 12:1
 ”NOW at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.”

D. God's Plan of Restoration for Israel

1. The Unveiling of the Restoration Plan (Deut 30:1-6)

- a. Israel will be dispersed among the Gentiles – vs. 1
 - b. Israel must return to the Lord (repent) – vs. 2
 - c. The Lord will regather them to the land – vv. 3-5
 - d. The Lord will change Israel's heart – vs. 6
2. The Great Tribulation will culminate with Israel's repentance
- a. God's people (including Israel) will be persecuted by the Antichrist (Dan 7:20-21).
 - b. Israel will be assaulted by the nations of the earth (Zech 12:2-3)
 - c. Israel will finally believe upon her Messiah (Zech 12:10)
 - 1) Hosea 3:5 confirms that this will take place "in the last days."
This is when her "hardening" will be removed!
 - 2) Most of the Jewish population in the land will perish during the Great Tribulation (Zech 13:7-9)

But the intensity of the Tribulation will drive them to seek the Lord (Hos 5:15).
 - d. Israel will be delivered by the personal return of Jesus Christ (Zech 14:2-5a, 9).
3. New Testament Confirmation Regarding Israel (Romans 11)
- a. Israel is not presently rejected! (11:1-2a)
 - b. Even now, there is a *believing remnant* among the Jews (11:5-8)
 - c. We are living in a period when God is going to focus on saving the Gentile world (11:11-13)
 - d. God will ultimately *save* a future generation from Israel (11:25-29)

I.e., the nation *as a nation* will be delivered and brought into the bond of the New Covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34).

CONCLUSION

1. God has a covenant promise to fulfill with Israel. Therefore, Israel has a future in God's program. **LESSON** – our God is a promise-keeping God!
2. We must be careful not to equate Israel with the Church (see Rom 11).
Corollaries:
 - a. OT promises to Israel will be fulfilled with Israel, not the Church (though the Church may share in certain promises originally made to Israel—e.g., the promises of the New Covenant).
 - b. References to Israel in the Book of Revelation should not be spiritualized to mean the Church.
3. God is in control of history. **LESSON** – He is also in control of your life!