

**THE APOCALYPSE
OF ST. JOHN, FIRST
EDITION**

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The Apocalypse of St. John, first edition by E. Sylvester Berry

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BY

REV. E. SYLVESTER BERRY

FIRST EDITION

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PREFACE

The book of the Apocalypse is unlike any other book of the New Testament—and is full of consolation and instruction to all who read its inspired and prophetic words. It lifts the soul up to the beauty and grandeur of Heaven—shows us in all their glory the joys and triumphs of those who were once like ourselves—but who are now changed and happy with those “who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” How consoling it is to turn from the sordid things of earth—to be carried away with the sublime words that lead us to the throne of God—to the company of the Angels and Saints—to the new Jerusalem with streets of gold—to the river and tree of life—to hear the voice of God Himself saying “Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book.”

The following pages will be most interesting to those who love to study the word of God. Father Berry has entered a new field—for there is practically no study of the Apocalypse in the English language—and the points and explanations he has placed before us are both interesting and instructive. The student will read it with pleasure and profit. St. Jerome tells us “The Apocalypse has as many mysteries as words—or rather mysteries in every word.” The author has tried in a simple scholarly way to help us view them all with pleasure and understanding.

† JAMES J. HARTLEY,

Bishop of Columbus.

Columbus, Ohio, June 18th, 1921.

THE APOCALYPSE OF ST. JOHN

INTRODUCTION

In the study of Holy Scripture it is necessary to bear in mind that its various books are not separate and independent works. It is true, they were written by persons widely distant from one another in time and place, yet the Holy Ghost, their true Author, coordinates them all to one common purpose. The different books are but so many chapters of one and the same great work whose first chapter recounts the origin of the world by creation; its last, foretells the final consummation of all things. The intervening chapters relate in order various happenings between these two extremes.

The Bible does not give a complete history of mankind; in fact it is not intended to teach history as such. The Holy Ghost wishes to strengthen our faith, arouse our hopes in the mercies of God, and instill our hearts with the fear of His punishments. For this purpose He gives a summary view of God's dealings with mankind. There is only an occasional glimpse of things not closely connected with this main purpose. The origin of the material world is briefly sketched while the creation of the angels is only referred to incidently. But the questions which concern us more directly are treated at

length. Our nature, our origin, and our destiny summarize the content of Holy Scripture. It teaches that man is a free and intelligent being created in a state of grace and destined to be united with God in Heaven for all eternity. Through abuse of free will man fell from this high estate and is daily exposed to sin and suffering, but the merits of Christ's death on the cross have redeemed man's fallen nature and placed him once more upon the way of salvation.

The person of Christ thus becomes the central figure of all Scripture. He is the "alpha and omega, the beginning and the end."¹ As God, He created all things "and without Him was made nothing that was made. In Him was life and the life was the light of men."² As man, Christ is the greatest handiwork of God, the "first-born of every creature:"³ As the God-man, He is our Redeemer, the "only name under Heaven given to men whereby we must be saved."⁴ Thus is Jesus Christ the centre from which all things radiate, around which all revolve, and in which all must finally converge.

After recounting the creation and fall of man, the Old Testament announces the coming of the Saviour and narrates the preparation of mankind for this great event.

(1) Apocalypse i, 8.
(2) St. John i, 3, 4.
(3) Colossians i, 15.
(4) Acts of the Apostles iv, 12.

The Gospels and Epistles give the life of our Lord and rehearse His teachings. The Acts of the Apostles outline the first years of the new-born Church. The Apocalypse gives a prophetic history of the Church from the days of St. John to the final consummation of the world.

In its general purpose the Apocalypse does not differ from the other Scriptures. It is to teach men a knowledge of God, enlighten their faith, strengthen their hopes, and give them a rule of conduct by which they may obtain eternal salvation. It is also intended to fortify the faithful in time of trial and temptation, and to guide the Church in every age. In this respect the Apocalypse simply enlarges upon the warnings of Christ concerning persecution of His Church. "The servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me they will also persecute you. . . . They will put you out of the synagogue; yea the hour cometh that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth a service to God."⁵ Christ has promised that the gates of hell shall never prevail against His Church,⁶ but this very promise foreshadows a mighty conflict with the powers of darkness. The Apocalypse tells of the trials and sufferings of the Church in this great conflict and prophesies her final triumph according to the promise of Christ: "Behold I

(5) St. John xv, 18-20; xvi, 2.

(6) St. Matthew xvi, 18.

am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.'"⁷ Hence the prophecies of the Apocalypse should be a source of consolation when we see the Church opposed and persecuted for we have the assurance of the Holy Ghost that she shall come forth triumphant and reign peacefully over all nations.

In other parts of Scripture, purely historical events serve merely as a background upon which are depicted the designs of Providence. St. John pursues a similar method in the Apocalypse. He does not intend to give a detailed prophetic history of the Church. He singles out the more important points to serve as guide-posts along the course of centuries. It may be said that he gives only the philosophy of the Church's history,—the underlying causes of all its outward events.

The laws of sacred and profane history are alike; similar causes must produce similar effects. Hence all history repeats itself in general outlines. Only accidental circumstances differ. This explains why the Apocalypse is written under the form of symbolic visions instead of ordinary discourse. It must give in a few pages a résumé of many centuries. One and the same prophecy often announces many similar events separated in time by centuries. The account must be limited to the barest outlines and stripped of every accidental circumstance.

(7) St. Matthew xxviii. 20.