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EDITORIAL

THE REVELATION TO JOHN.

This book belongs to the form of prophetic experience termed Apocalyptic, which began with Daniel. Daniel differs in style and balance from the former prophets. Isaiah - Jeremiah - Ezekiel are characterized by "Thus saith the Lord" - Mend your ways or God will punish you. Nevertheless with these great exhortations a vision of hope is always presented even in Jeremiah so Apocalyptic was anticipated.

In Daniel however Apocalyptic predominates. What is implied by 'Apocalyptic'. The word Apocalypse is just the Greek for 'revelation'. The word Apocalyptic is however generally used in theology to characterize those prophecies that relate mainly to future events rather than the present forth-telling (προφητεω). This is not to say that 'Apocalyptic' has not a strong ethical theme - clearly shown, for instance, in the attitude of Daniel and his three companions. The 'future' however is the essence of what is 'revealed'. This demonstrates that God will reward the faithful. He knows their present suffering and will ultimately see that justice is done. Daniel gives the clearest reference to resurrection in the Old Testament and the Messianic Kingdom on Earth is its climax.

Does the book of Revelation follow a similar pattern? The fact that it is almost entirely the description of a series of visions given in symbolic language makes it possible for all sorts of interpretations. That this has happened it is needless to emphasize. The utmost discipline is thus necessary for each one of us in trying to understand this difficult book. Are there any guidelines that will help us? It is well to differentiate between things that seem quite clear from things that are doubtful and we must not flinch from saying that we cannot understand everything. The first guideline is "What did it mean to the generation who heard it?" It is just because we are not early

Christians that the difficulties are compounded. However there are surely enough salient points to tell us that the Message is similar to that of Daniel's though clothed in Christian dress. Thus:-

- 1) ".....to show to his servants what must soon take place." (Rev 1:1) RSV.
- 2) "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance"(Rev 2:2).
- 3) "The Kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev 11:15).
- 4) "Surely I am coming soon - Amen, Come Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:21).

The problems for us are - "What were the persecutions and false doctrines that were assailing the church at this time - the later half of the 1st century?" and "Why was Christs 'coming' delayed?" This latter point is not just a problem of the Apocalypse it is also a problem fo the gospels. Indeed the seals of Rev. chapter 6 have been shown to follow and expand the Olivet Prophecy. A further difficulty is the apparent satisfaction of the saints at God's judgements of the wicked. This does not seem to be the message of the Gospels or of the spirit of Christ that we find in them. It behoves us therefore to see what expositors have written on these problems. However it is for each of us to weigh up their arguments and reach our own conclusions. Useful books are appended at the end of the Magazine. Do not believe all you read! Use your critical faculties.

J.H.W.

Kingdom of God

The first article in this series showed that it was an oversimplification to say that "Kingdom of God" in the Old Testament was just another description of the Kingdom of Israel. "God is a king" is a metaphor and, as with most metaphors, this does not mean that the two things being compared are exactly alike. One has only to look at 1 Samuel chapter 8, in which Samuel described to the Israelites what the king they had asked for would be like, to appreciate this. Can we then continue to think of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament as a literal kingdom? It is often forgotten that in Jacobean English the word "kingdom" was exactly similar to the Hebrew word "malkuth" and the Greek "basileia". Its primary meaning was the authority and power of a king, not the country ruled, nor the people ruled, by a king. As an example of this the OED cites a statement of Hobbes in 1679 in which he defined monarchy as a form of government "Which, if he limit it by law, is called Kingdom: if by his own will, Tyranny." The argument that since the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament was the theocratic state of Israel the Kingdom of God of the future will be the Kingdom of Israel restored ceases then to be convincing.

Our doubts are reinforced when we remember that two aspects of Old Testament prophecy taken up in the New are the themes of God visiting his people to redeem them and of the New Covenant, mediated by an outpouring of God's Spirit. In view of this it is difficult to understand how the consummation of the ages will be brought about by Jesus as a Jewish Messiah subjugating the nations of the earth. However, before we move to the New Testament to see how these themes are in fact developed it is necessary to look at those other numerous prophecies which seem to envisage a material Kingdom of God, a "divine political kingdom", the first sign of the coming of which will be the regathering of the Jews to Palestine.

The return of the Jews as a sign of the time of the end is part of the bedrock of Christadelphian belief. Whenever doubt

is expressed about the imminence of the return of Jesus it is put forward as incontrovertible proof. My own memory of it goes back to 1920, when I was five years old, and the Balfour Declaration was new and exciting. I can remember seeing newly planted marram grass in the dunes on the shore of the Wirral and thinking that it would not have time to spread before Jesus had come back again, obviously a reflection of current expectation "at the meeting". When I cite this as a cautionary example of expectation disappointed I am still told that the end must be near because of the establishment of the state of Israel.

This expectation goes back, of course, much further than 1920; in fact to 1848 and the ringing declaration in "Elpis Israel" by Dr Thomas is often quoted as a correct interpretation of prophecy before the event. "The finger of God has indicated a course to be pursued by Britain which cannot be evaded, and which her counsellors will not only be willing, but eager, to adopt when the crisis comes upon them."

It is often supposed that this interpretation was originated by Dr Thomas but as LeRoy Edwin Froom has shown in his immense four-volume survey of prophecy, "The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers" the return of the Jews as a commonplace of prophetic exposition long before the days of Dr Thomas. Nearer his time there was for several years in the 1820's an interdenominational summer school on prophecy at Albury Park, near Guildford, where the regathering of Israel frequently figures in the discussions. The seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, the great philanthropist, tried to give prophecy a nudge towards fulfilment by endeavouring to get the British government to sponsor a scheme for settling Jews in Palestine.

Equally today there are several sects, mostly American, which share the belief that the establishment of the State of Israel is a sign of the second coming which will then be brought about by an invasion by the King of the North. Hal Lindsey's immensely popular book "The Late Great Planet Earth" has maps of that invasion like those to be found in our older literature. The same idea, but with some unusual doctrinal bedfellows, can be found in Herbert Armstrong's "Plain Truth" magazine.

The fact that others share our beliefs does not discredit them but it does have considerable significance. Firstly this is that other Christians do not reject this belief simply

because they have overlooked scriptures which seem to support it. Widespread acquaintance with the belief has produced alternative interpretations of the Old Testament prophecies in question by writers such as A.A.Hoekema, Louis de Caro and Erroll Hulse. A second significance is that the groups who share our belief do so because they share a common starting point, an assumption about the nature of Biblical language. It is difficult to describe this assumption except that it thinks of Biblical language as being somewhat similar to legal language. Legal language has to avoid ambiguities at all costs; there are not metaphors in it because metaphors are slippery things to deal with. You would never find the description "deafening" in a noise abatement statute for example. "A deafening noise" in common usage means simply a very loud noise, but lawyers would argue that what the word really meant was a noise so loud that it had actually made someone deaf. It is not denied that there is symbol and figure in the Bible, but it is felt that they are only employed when the text definitely signals that it is going to use them. An example is the attempt to explain the remark of Jesus about a camel passing through the eye of a needle by suggesting that it meant a very small gate in the city wall alongside the main gate. The underlying belief is that everything in scripture has a clear and definite meaning accessible to people in every age solely by intellectual consideration. The evanescent and quicksilver nature of imagery is not understood.

That this sort of consideration frequently leads to conclusions that, on general grounds of commonsense, seem incredible is dismissed by the rejoinder "This is what scripture says". An outstanding example of this kind of reasoning is the belief that those who have not accepted Jesus as their Saviour will be punished everlastingly in hell, either in literal fire or in some non-literal way which will be even worse. The argument that this cannot be right because anyone who devised it would be a monster rather than a loving God is countered by quoting the appropriate texts and adding "The Bible says so".

I do not suggest that it is as incredible to believe that prophecies given to captives in Babylon should not apply to them but to their descendants 2,500 years later in totally different circumstances as it is to believe in hell-fire for all non-Christians. It does however seem very unlikely. In the eleventh chapter of Daniel there is a prophecy which

describes in great detail the campaigns following the death of Alexander the Great. We are asked to believe that from one verse to the next, without any indication of a gap, the prophecy jumps forward some 2,300 years to a Russian invasion of Palestine which has not yet happened. Yet if we doubt this we are told that we are doubting the truth of scripture. The argument is, of course, that this last portion of the prophecy relates to the time of the end and has not yet been fulfilled.

The basis for the belief that prophecy must be fulfilled, no matter how long the gap between utterance and event, is Deuteronomy 18:22 in which the test of a true prophet is given:-

When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

The literalist approach is simple. If the prophet is a true prophet what he says will happen. Ezekiel and Daniel are true prophets because they are part of scripture. Therefore what they have foretold must come to pass.

But when we examine prophecy in action we find it is not quite so simple as this. There are prophecies which have not been fulfilled and will never be fulfilled. The most obvious example is Isaiah's prophecy to Hezekiah that his illness would be fatal. "Set thine house in order for thou shalt die and not live." (Isaiah 38:1). That prophecy was later rescinded, but no indication was given when it was uttered that it was conditional. So too with Jonah. When, after this attempts to avoid the divine commission he did eventually proclaim "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4) he gave no indication that there was any way of avoiding the threatened fate. When the people did repent it was not with much confidence that it would make any difference, but simply on the longshot that God might relent. "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger?" (Jonah 3:9). When God did relent Jonah was furious. Why? Perhaps because

he hated Nineveh but more likely because the non-fulfilment of his prophecy made him "a presumptuous prophet".

This was a constant source of anguish to the prophets. They were torn between not wanting to see the punishment of their own people and not wanting to see their prophetic credentials disproved. Thus Jeremiah 17:15 (Good News Bible) :-

The people say to me, "Where are those threats
The Lord made against us? Let him carry them
out now!" But, Lord, I never urged you to
bring disaster on them; I did not wish a time
of trouble for them. Lord, you know this: you
know what I have said.

In Jeremiah chapter 26, Jeremiah is threatened with death because of his prophecies against Jerusalem, which had not however been fulfilled. In v.16 it is recognised that nevertheless Jeremiah is a true prophet and in v.17 a precedent is found of a true prophet whose predictions had not been fulfilled. (Jeremiah 26:17-19 GNB) :-

After that, some of the elders stood up and
said to the people who had assembled, "When
Hezekiah was king of Judah, the prophet Micah
of Moresheth told all the people that the Lord
Almighty had said,

'Zion shall be ploughed like a field,
Jerusalem will become a pile of ruins,
,and the Temple hill will become a forest.'

King Hezekiah and the people of Judah did not
put Micah to death. Instead Hezekiah feared the
Lord and tried to win his favour. And the Lord
changed his mind about the disaster that he said
he would bring on them. Now we are about to
bring a terrible disaster on ourselves."

From this we can see that by this stage what were apparently unconditional prophecies were not regarded as absolute predictions. Things could turn out differently. One of the clearest examples is to be found in Ezekiel's prophecy against Tyre, which starts in chapter 26 and continues through chapter 27 and down to v.19 of chapter 28. But later on, in the middle of an oracle against Egypt, there

is the following comment on the prophecy on Tyre (Ezekiel 29:17 - 20 GNB) :-

On the first day of the first month of the twenty-seventh year of our exile, the Lord spoke to me. "Mortal man," he said, "King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia launched an attack on Tyre. He made his soldiers carry such heavy loads that their heads were rubbed bald and their shoulders were worn raw, but neither the king nor his army got anything for all their trouble. So now this is what I, the Sovereign Lord, am saying: I am giving the land of Egypt to King Nebuchadnezzar. He will loot and plunder it and carry off the wealth of Egypt as his army's pay. I am giving him Egypt in payment for his services, because his army was working for me. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken."

Here it is admitted that Ezekiel's earlier predictions against Tyre had not come to pass. Nebuchadnezzar and his army had worked hard against Tyre but ultimately the siege had failed. Josephus says that it lasted 13 years. To be fair, God then promises Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as a consolation prize. Since the prophecy specifically named Nebuchadnezzar as the king who would despoil Tyre and since Nebuchadnezzar has long since departed from this world, it is clear that this prophecy cannot be fulfilled.

The principle of all this is summed up in Jeremiah, chapter 18, the prophecy in the potter's house. (Jeremiah 18:7-10 GNB) :-

If at any time I say that I am going to uproot, break down, or destroy any nation or kingdom, but then that nation turns from its evil, I will not do what I said I would. On the other hand, if I say that I am going to plant or build up any nation or kingdom, but then that nation disobeys me and does evil, I will not do what I said I would.

We can see from this that a prophecy may be conditional even though no conditions are stated when it is given.

But even when prophecies are fulfilled the manner of fulfilment may be different from what is expected. The prophecy which caused Jeremiah so much trouble is to be found in 4:23-26 (GNB) :-

I looked at the earth - it was a barren waste;
at the sky - there was no light.
I looked at the mountains - they were shaking,
and the hills were rocking to and fro.
I saw that there were no people;
even the birds had flown away.
The fertile land has become a desert;
its cities were in ruins
because of the Lord's fierce anger.

"It was a barren waste" is rendered "without form, and void" in the Authorised Version, the same as the opening words of Genesis describing the state of the world before creation began. These are the only two places in the Hebrew bible where these words occur. But when Jerusalem eventually fell the physical world was undisturbed and many of the people of Judah went on living in the land.

There is a similar instance in Isaiah 12:9-11 :-

Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

This passage might well be a description of the end of the world and indeed some of the imagery was borrowed by medieval theologians to construct their gruesome picture of the Dies Irae. Yet, when we read on, we find that what the prophet is describing under the symbolism of world judgment was merely the end of Babylon's world, brought about by the invasion of Cyrus and the Medes. Using hyperbole Isaiah applied imagery of the Day of the Lord to something which fell very

far short of it.

In Isaiah chapter 30 there is a description of the Golden Age which will follow if Judah resists the temptations of an alliance with Egypt to meet the threat from Assyria and instead rests its confidence in God. In v.26 there is this promise :-

Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.

We now know what the people of Judah could not know. If the moon were to become as bright as the sun the polar ice-caps would melt, the weather systems of the world would be drastically changed and the circadian rhythms of all plants and animals would be upset. And if the sun were to become seven times brighter all life on the earth would be extinct within twenty-four hours. As hyperbole the passage is understable. If it were to come true literally it would produce not an earthly paradise but an earthly hell.

The most detailed Old Testament description of the consummation of the age is in Ezekiel chapter 38 and onwards. It has never been fulfilled literally and so it is held that fulfilment must still be in the future. To maintain this however not only introduces a sharp conflict with Hebrews but overlooks the close parallel between this passage and Revelation chapter 20 and onwards. Gog and Magog are defeated and judgment of the nations follows. In Revelation God shows the prophet the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven. In Ezekiel the prophet watches the angel measuring the temple. In Revelation the angel measures the city, not the temple. The reason is obvious because in John's Jerusalem there is no temple. There is no need of one. God and the Lamb will live visibly with their people so there is no point in representing God's presence symbolically.

There then follows in Ezekiel all the details of the sacrificial ritual; in Revelation there is no mention of sacrifice. The reason again is obvious, for in Revelation chapter 13 Jesus is described as the Lamb slain from the

foundation of the world. Ezekiel reaffirms the priestly prerogatives of the old Zadokite priesthood. In Revelation there is no mention of any special priests for, as in the New Testament generally, all believers are priests. Ezekiel is very concerned with the proper division of the land between the priests, the Levites, the king and the various tribes. The implication is that while life will be good in Ezekiel's new Jerusalem, the limitations of our present life will not be completely transcended. Generations will still come and go.

Over against this picture Revelation shows no concern for the proper division of its new Jerusalem for it is no mundane realm where there are such mundane considerations and it is ruled over by God and the Lamb, not a succession of human descendents of David. Whatever form the fulfilment of the prophecy may take it cannot be as described by Ezekiel for it has been modified by Revelation.

It should be noted that all these comparisons between promise and fulfilment come from scripture; they do not depend on human records or human judgment about fulfilment. What this brief survey shows is that it is impossible to be certain before the event that a prophecy will be fulfilled at all, or, if it is, in what manner. The unstated conditions attendant upon its being given may not have been met and so it may have been rescinded. The reality behind the imagery may be quite different from what has been imagined. Or it may be impossible for the real meaning of the prophecy to be communicated beforehand, not because of any failure on God's part but because men are incapable of understanding what is predicted.

The American naturalist philosopher Henry Thoreau made a very penetrating observation when he said "It takes two to speak the truth, - one to speak and another to hear." This means that there can be no effective revelation unless the hearer can understand what is being said. Imagine the difficulty in trying to explain exactly how a television set works to somebody miraculously transported from the first Elizabeth's day to our own - somebody who had no idea of the nature of light, electricity, electro-magnetic radiation or even what a vacuum was. Before they could understand properly they would have to learn a great deal of physics, mathematics and chemistry. In the same way before Christ came and brought

us his revelation of God nobody could fully understand the nature of Christ's work or the need for his sacrificial death. When prophecies of the second coming are being studied few expositors seem to remember that before the event nobody, no human being at all, understood how the prophecies of the first coming were to be fulfilled. It was left to Jesus to explain to the disciples what the prophecies really meant and the greater part of the apostolic preaching to the Jews followed the same course. How then can we expect to have a clear understanding in advance of the second coming?

Except for short-term prophecies, and even these were frequently given as warnings so that they would not be fulfilled, prophecy is not "history written in advance", nor can it be. Paul says of God's secret plan that "none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory". (1 Corinthians 2:8). We instinctively think "If only they had known" but a moment's pause for thought should show that if they had been made to understand it would have undermined human independence. God cannot tell us precisely and in detail what is going to happen in future without swamping our frail human nature and reducing us from men and women to automatons. So alongside Thoreau's dictum we must inscribe a second principle. "For the sake of creating a personal relationship with his human creatures God does not force an awareness of himself upon them."

These two principles taken together show why it is that the history of the world has gone on so long and so painfully. It is we human beings who have set the pace. It is our lack of understanding and our slowness to learn which have made it impossible for God to show himself more speedily and more clearly to us.

So I believe that the Old Testament prophecies about natural Israel were either fulfilled literally before Jesus came, or were rescinded, or were modified. They do not remain to be fulfilled literally but were taken up and subsumed into the future of spiritual Israel, the Israel of God.

To think otherwise is to make the Old Testament interpret the New, not the other way round. Did Paul mean by "the hope of Israel" that God would restore a purely Jewish kingdom with Christ as its king? Surely not. When he stood before

Agrippa he said he was on trial because he believed in the hope of Israel and that hope was fulfilled in the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead which announced salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. He said the same thing in his sermon in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. "What God has promised our ancestors he would do, he has now done for us, who are their descendants, by raising Jesus to life." (Acts 13:32-33. GNB). The hope of Israel is not the hope of natural Israel but that of spiritual Israel and this effects profoundly the nature of the kingdom.

The obvious rejoinder to this is "What then is the use of prophecy?" Sometimes when we go to visit friends for the first time at a new address they will give us a rough sketch map to guide us. If the sketch is very rough when we look at it we may not be able to understand it at all, but we set out in the right direction and when we get into the area the map covers, things begin to get clearer and as we recognise one thing after another - a road junction, a post office, a railway bridge - we say "Ah! That's what he meant." So those in New Testament days who were sympathetic and perceptive saw prophecy being fulfilled and understood then what it really meant.

In a further article, rather belatedly, I hope to deal more fully with what the New Testament has to say about the Kingdom of God.

Eternal God, who through long ages
prepared the way for the coming of Christ:
we praise you for your word through the prophets
who spoke in your name,
and for all the experience and discipline of life
that made the world long for a Saviour.
We praise you that when the time was ready Jesus came,
as Man among men,
as Saviour from sin,
as Lord of life
and Conqueror of death.
Help us to welcome him into our lives,
and into the life of the world,
and so to praise you more,
now and in all the time to come.

("New Every Morning" The Word made flesh)

R.Coleman.

GNOSTICISM

Who were the Gnostics and why should we be interested in them?

'Beloved - By this you know the Spirit of God, every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is spirit of antichrist.' (1 John 4:2).

It was the Gnostics (The Knowers) that said that Jesus did not come in the flesh and it has been remarked that - 'Nothing more absurd than the Gnostic speculations has probably ever been imagined by rational human beings'. The fundamental objectives of Gnostics was to explain the greater religious problems of how to relate finite man with an infinite God and secondly to account for the existence of evil. But why should we be interested in such peculiar people? The reason is simple - they were antagonists of Paul and of John the Evangelist. Indeed they have provoked some of the finest discourses from the pens of these two spiritual giants - The concept of Christ in John and Paul's discourse on resurrection in the first letter to the Corinthians.

The writer of this article avoided studying gnostics until he was convinced that a proper understanding of John and Paul's letters was impossible without some knowledge of their teaching.

The origin of the Gnostics is still obscure. Their writings which are extensive seem to arise with early Christianity but their origins in essence may well be earlier as their doctrines invaded Neoplatonism as well as Christianity and additionally their dualism together with their knowledge of the Old Testament savours Persian influence via heretical Judaism.

The heretical teaching of the Gnostics has been known since the early days of Christianity from the erudite account

in the writings of Irenaeus (180 A.D.) but the influence and reaction that their teaching had on the New Testament has only comparatively recently been appreciated.

There were numerous sects of Gnostics and perhaps the clearest account is that given by Irenaeus of the Valentinians and this we propose to use as our basis for their beliefs in the middle of the second century. This leaves us with the problem of projecting backwards to the time of Paul's letters say A.D. 50 - 65; It is almost certain that in this 100 year period the doctrines become elaborated. For instance it does not mean that a doctrine held by the Valentinians in A.D. 150 was necessarily a doctrine of the gnostics at the time of Paul and John. It does however alert us to the possibility and we must then ask was Paul countering such teaching? One of our principle letters for our examination will be 1 Corinthians. We know from 'Acts' that Paul founded this church (Acts 18), and later that Apollos went there after being further instructed by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24 - 19:1) We know also the date - it was the time that 'Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave Rome'. This will be about A.D.50 and he stayed there 18 months. We know the church was divided and this caused Paul much grief. Was the division caused by the Gnostics? We propose in the next part to examine the evidence.

There is always some danger in deriving the doctrine of heretic's from the writings of the orthodox for obvious reasons but in the case of the Gnostics there has been a discovery not dissimilar to that of the Dead Sea Scrolls. At Nag Hammadi a whole library of Gnostic writings has been unearthed. This library has recently (1977) been published in an English Translation (1) so we are able to check the accuracy of Origin in many particulars.

The discovery was quite dramatic, it is described by J.M.Robinson in his introduction to the translation. From this introduction we quote with abbreviation.

'Two brothers Muhammed and Khalipah were Egyptian peasants collecting fertile soil from around a fallen boulder and they came upon a buried jar (presumably with a sealed lid). Muhammed Ali reported that at first he was afraid to break it for fear that a genie might be closed up inside it; but on reflecting that the jar might possibly contain gold, he recovered his courage and smashed it with his matlock but instead of genies or gold - books, dust and papyrus fragments. He wrapped the books in his tunic, unhitched his camel and took them home to a hovel in the hamlet of Al-Qasar in Egypt. Now starts the drama! Some six month's earlier the father of the two brothers, whose name was Ali, while on his job of night watchman guarding irrigation equipment in the fields, had killed a marauder. By mid-morning he had been murdered in blood vengeance. About a month after the discovery of the books, a peasant named Ahmad fell asleep in the heat of the day near the house of the brothers and a neighbour pointed him out as the murderer of their father.

The village of al-Qasr was so glad to be rid of the sheriff's son that no eye-witnesses could be found to testify at the hearing. But during this period the police tended to search Muhammed Ali's home every evening for weapons. Having been told that the books were Christian, no doubt simply on the basis of the Coptic script, Muhammed Ali asked the Coptic priest of al-Qasr, Basiliyus Abd al-Masih if he could deposit the books in his house. A priest's home would hardly be searched. Coptic priests marry, and this priest's wife had a brother, Raghib Andrawus, who went from village to village in a circuit teaching English and history in the parochial schools of the Coptic Church. Once a week when he taught in al-Qasr he stayed in his sister's home. On seeing one of the books (Codex III), he recognised its potential value and persuaded the priest to give it to him. He took it to Cairo and showed it to a Coptic physician interested in the Coptic language, George Sobhi, who called in the authorities from the Department of Antiquities. They took control of the book, agreeing to pay Raghib £300.

Thinking the books were worthless, perhaps even a source of bad luck, the widow of Ali had burned part of them in the oven (probably Codex XII, of which only a few fragmentary leaves remain). Illiterate Muslim neighbours purchased the

remainder for next to nothing. Nashid Bisadah had one, and entrusted it to a gold merchant of Nag Hammadi to sell in Cairo, whereupon they divided the profit. A grain merchant is reported to have acquired another and sold it in Cairo at such a high price that he was able to set up his shop there. The villagers of al-Qasr identify him as Fikri Jibra'il, today the proprietor of the "Nag Hammadi Store" in Cairo; however, he denies any involvement. Bahij Alo, a one-eyed outlaw of al-Qasr, got most of the books. Escorted by a well-known antiquities dealer of the region, Dhaki Basta, he went to Cairo. They first offered the books to Mansoor's shop at Shepherds Hotel, and then to the shop of Phocion J. Tano, who brought their whole stock and then went to Nag Hammadi to get whatever was left.

Most of Codex I was taken out of Egypt by a Belgian antiquities dealer in Cairo, Albert Eid. It was offered for sale unsuccessfully in New York and Ann Arbor in 1949, and then on 10 May 1952 was acquired in Belgium from Eid's widow by the Jung Institute of Zurich and named the "Jung Codex". It has been gradually returned after publication to Cairo, where it is conserved in the Coptic Museum of Old Cairo. Meanwhile Tano's collection was taken into custody by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities to prevent it from leaving the country. After Nasser came to power it was nationalised, with a token compensation of £4,000. Today the Nag Hammadi library is back together again, conserved in the Coptic Museum.

J.H. Weaving.

STATISTICS AND THE DEFINITE ARTICLE.

In the Christadelphian (December 1983, page 449/450 and January 1984, page 22), F.T.Pearce wrote a number of comments on the occurrences of the definite article (i.e. 'the' in Greek) in the references to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Though these comments are valuable because, as he says, the matter "does not seem to have received the attention it must surely deserve", his comment that his "observations are exploratory only, and the conclusion is tentative" shows that the matter needs much fuller exploration. Yet he has removed a well-worn fallacy without making us too aware of the fact. His statement that the distinction between those occurrences that have the article and those that have not, may between the origin and effect of the Spirit's work logically defeats the temptation to read Luke 11:13 to mean "a holy spirit" because it has no definite article in Greek, in order to remove a passage which indicates that the Holy Spirit is bestowed as a result of prayer. He correctly shows that Luke 1:35, a miraculous occurrence of the work of the Spirit, has no definite article either, and he could well have added Matthew 1:18 and Acts 2:4 to this list.

To be sure of the correct explanation of the use of the article in Greek in this context we must study and classify all New Testament references into "article" and "no-article" (anarthrous) occurrences. It is best not to add references to "Spirit", "Spirit of God", "Spirit of Christ" etc. in this case, because of the danger of including references that are not clear occasions where the Holy Spirit is meant. .

It is difficult to get an exact list. If, for illustration, we use Strong (HOLY pp.488/489), we find Romans 15:19 omitted, though there is strong evidence (see RSV) that "Holy Spirit" occurs in this passage, but Strong includes 1 John 5:7 with an asterisk (*), (indicating exclusion from the R.V.), though most of us would want it excluded altogether as spurious. A number of others (e.g. Matthew 12:31) also have to be excluded, and we are left with 89

references. Of these, 49 have no definite article in Greek, and the other forty have it. Usage is not peculiar to any grammatical construction, nor to any particular author. Luke is the most frequent user of the phrase (in Luke and Acts) and his usage is equally divided into each category. Clearly then, we must look at the context, and see what is being described in each of the two categories. For this purpose, I commenced with about 12 different ways in which the phrase was used, but was able subsequently to combine some of these ways, and to reach seven basic categories. These are listed below.

1) Cases where the Holy Spirit is clearly described in terms of 'power' and often, of miraculous power. There are 12 of these. They include 3 references to the virgin birth (Matthew 1:18 & 20) (Luke 1:35), the powerful outpouring at Pentecost (Acts 1:2), as 'power' (not the incident itself), as also Romans 15:13, 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 6:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:5 & 6; Hebrews 2:4; 1 Peter 1:12 and 2 Peter 1:21. In all these cases the Holy Spirit is clearly "power" rather than "person" (in the personified or personalised sense), if we take "joy of the Holy Spirit" as meaning "joy" effected in people by the Holy Spirit, (1 Thessalonians 1:6). None of these cases has the definite article.

2) Cases where people are baptized in, sanctified by, washed in or regenerated by the Holy Spirit. These are Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5; 10:38; 11:16; Romans 9:1; 14:17; 15:16; Titus 3:5 and, for want of another category Jude 20 which talks of praying in the Holy Spirit. This could be included in 3 below also. There are again 12 cases, and none of these uses the definite article.

3) References to being "filled" with the Holy Spirit. All 14 of these cases, except one, do not contain the definite article. They are, for convenience of classification also made to include two references to "temple of" and "indwelling", where the thought is similar to that of being "full of" or being "filled with" the Holy Spirit. They are Luke 1:15, 1:41; 1:67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9; 13:52; 1 Corinthians 6:19; and 2 Timothy 1:14, and also Acts 4:31; which has the definite article.

All the references in the New Testament to being "filled with" the Holy Spirit are the work of Luke. The two Pauline references are those to "temple of" and "indwelling of" the Holy Spirit. I have added them to this category because the thought is similar.

4) References to the Holy Spirit being "received" or "given", and associated references. There are eleven of these. They include Luke 2:25; 11:13; John 7:39; 20:22; Acts 8:15; 17 and 19 and two references in Acts 19:2 Romans 5:5 and Hebrews 6:4. These are like 1, 2 and 3 above. They are instances of the Spirit being a 'power' rather than being conceived in a 'personal' sense. These have not the article.

5) Old Testament references, where the Holy Spirit (in a personalised sense) is said to speak by Isaiah, David or Moses. There are only six of these (Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 28:25; Hebrews 3:7; 9:8 and 10:15), and without exception they all have the definite article.

6) A small set of references, where the Holy Spirit is again the speaker (so personalised) but in the context of the New Testament Church. This class could have been combined with 5, where the references are to the Holy Spirit having spoken through Old Testament prophets, but has been kept apart to show that there is no difference in treatment of these cases. They also, all contain the definite article. There are only three of them. They are Mark 13:11; Acts 13:2 (where the 'I' clearly indicates that the Holy Spirit is speaking as a person) and Acts 21:11.

7) A whole set of references to the Holy Spirit as a person in other contexts than of speaking, being 'grieved' etc. There are 30 of them, (Matthew 12:32; (blasphemy against), 28:19; Mark 3:29; Luke 2:26; 3:22; 12:10; 12:12; John 14:26 (the comforter); Acts 1:8; (come upon); 2:33; 2:38; (i.e. gift of, in the sense of being given by); 5:3; 5:32; 7:51; 9:31 (because of the word 'comfort') 10:44; 45, 47 (though the latter of these could be included under 4) 11:15; 13:4; 15:8; 15:28; 16:6 (clearly personal) 19:6; 20:23 20:28 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:13 (meaning 'sealed by') and 4:30 (being grieved) and 1 Thessalonians 4:8 (which could

be categorised under 4).

Only two of these present any difficulty in being understood as personalised or personified uses of the Holy Spirit. They are those that relate to being given or received.

The Final Table looks somewhat like this :-

	No. Article	Article	Total
1) 'Power'	12	0	12
2) 'Baptism in' etc.	12	0	12
3) 'Filled with' etc.	14	1	15
4) 'Received' 'given'	11	0	11
5) Old Testament 'spoke' quoted	0	6	6
6) New Testament speaking.	0	3	3
7) Clear personal References	0	30	30
Totals:	49	40	89

The table speaks for itself, for there are very few exceptions, even if one were to move the two 'received' and 'given' reference out of category 7) A chi-squared test (a well-known statistical test) carried out on the above table with 6 degrees of freedom gives a significant value of 85.228, but even without this test, it should be easy for all readers to conclude from the table, that 'power'

references to the Holy Spirit do not contain the definite article, but references to the Holy Spirit as a person invariably do.

D.Pitt-Francis.

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LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I have recently read George McHaffie's review of the "Most Amazing Message Ever Written", and am giving my own reaction to the book, written from the standpoint of a member of one of the free churches. I found the book a real challenge. It challenged not just the way I look at prophecy in the Bible and the Apocalypse of John in particular, but the very basis of my faith. This was not the sort of book that could (or even should) be read quickly. The best way I found to read the book was to come with an open mind and to study in depth, questioning each passage. The result was illuminating and convinced me that the Bible, and Revelation in particular, was indeed the most amazing message ever written.

The book treats Revelation, not just as the final book of the Bible, but as the climax of the whole Bible, and therefore of history itself. It emphasises the dual nature of prophecy, for the world in which it was written and for the future world. The method that is used to interpret Revelation is neatly summarised at the start of chapter eleven.

"The book of Revelation is a spiritual history of the church it clearly traces three time periods... all visions fall neatly into one of three categories. They can be identified with reference to other (e.g. Old Testament) data to see whether they most clearly relate to the original outburst of Christian testimony in the first few centuries, its period of survival (as a New Israel) through the middle ages, or to its temporary destruction before the return of the Lord".

David Pitt-Francis even goes as far as to suggest that Revelation actually predicts the way in which doctrines, interpretations and the Church (as well as history) would develop. The interpretation is much wider than any I have met before and does perhaps better suit our most amazing God. It also stresses that God did not write the book in order to confuse us but to teach us.

The interpretations are thus consistent with the whole of the rest of the Bible, are not in any way 'mystical' or unbelievable, horrible or fantastic. Though I must confess that I had hoped for some magical explanation of the number 666, David's explanation of 666 as an attitude that attempts to measure men in terms of their material worth does however stress the higher purpose of Revelation, - to teach God's church. Indeed the fundamental message of Revelation - as comes across very clearly in the book - is that Christ will not come back again until "the good news is preached to all mankind". The onus is thus very much on us. The explanations and arguments are very clearly stated. Only in one or two places did I lose the track of the argument such as chapter 4 which I found rather involved to understand fully. Also in chapter 8 it was not completely clear whether the 'resurrection of the two witnesses' or the unity of the divided church was God's doing or by man's efforts - or maybe that's not explained in Revelation. Chapter 10 page 269 para 2 is also not quite clear.

What I particularly liked about the book though was the way the author dealt with any difficult doctrines that arose in the course of Revelation. Rather than skating over them, they are treated with the same rigorous explanation as the main text. A good example is the explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity in chapter 10.

I believe the book succeeds in its aim to stress the spiritual character of the Apocalypse, i.e. it is basically an account of the age-old battle between the spiritual forces of good and evil, reapplied to the conflicts of the Church in its testimony to the world, I would recommend the book to anyone who is not afraid to be challenged by this most amazing message.

Yours faithfully,

Rachel J. Tollyfield.
February 1984

Dear Editor,

DANIEL AND REVELATION.

I have a memory of listening to David Pitt-Francis giving his talks on the book of Daniel, and I have a clear recollection of the moment when I realised I had learned something of exceptional importance. To state the matter very simply, I was aware that a spiritual content had been missing in my understanding of the image prophecy of Daniel chapter 2.

I had both heard and had given addresses on traditional lines of nations from Babylon to Rome succeeding one another by the exercise of superior military power. The kingdoms of men themselves, divided after the decline of Rome, would at some future time be succeeded by God's kingdom. It would again be a take-over by sheer superior power to subdue armed forces.

History records the succession from Babylon to Rome. There is however, no high spiritual content in the rise and demise of political powers: nor is there any in the thought of a final contest in which a superior divine power subdues the rebellious armed forces of men.

Then there was the problem of the gap. The gap is the whole period from the birth of Christ to the completion of his kingdom. The traditional interpretation of the image prophecy ignores all the period of the New Covenant except its end - which is then related to the power succession in the sense of a political takeover by divinely appointed forces.

The intention in such use of the Daniel prophecy was, in one instance, to use the evidence of fulfilled prophecy in support of a prediction yet to be fulfilled. It could also be the intention to offer listeners reasons to believe the Bible or perhaps to use the 'doom' element in the thought of a violent end to Christian Times, usually reckoned to be close to fulfilment.

The addresses of this nature would often include or conclude with appeals to the listener to heed the gospel and be baptised. The logic of predictions being made and being fulfilled in violent events, or the 'doom' element may be seen as lacking in spiritual value as a context to the gospel of repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

The spiritual element was apparent when David's researches showed how the small stone was Jesus in his first impact upon our world. Jesus did say that his kingdom had arrived. The small stone would take time to crush the image in that its functioning was not by the terror tactics of a revolutionary but by the revealing of righteousness in the course of his own whole testimony.

The instance of a succession from Babylon to the close of Jewish Times, with its power struggles of men in national and other oppositions is now seen in stark contrast to the wholly other style of the character of the kingdom of God. It was God's way first to prepare the 'leader, and this proved to be the way of the cross. The preparation of the Son of Man by the fiery trial of faith; by the overcoming of temptation to serve self rather than his fellow men; of love unto death, all established in him the righteousness of God, and upon that the Kingdom of God would be built. It was this power of righteousness that would contend with all oppositions, beginning with Judaism which first stumbled at this stone.

There is a significant connection in the symbology of the small stone of Dan.2 reducing the image to dust carried away by the wind, and the words of Jesus where he quotes first Psalm 118:22, then using words resembling those of Dan.2, -

' And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder.' Matt. 21:44.

David points out that the first opposition to Jesus was the Judaistic element, the law against the spirit or the show against the substance. This was a warfare in which the spirit proved to be superior.

The David Pitt-Francis interpretation of Dan.2 closes the gap referred to above and brings the Christian Era totally to life in that the kingdom of God is being built and has been in building from the ministry of Jesus onwards.

The study of the book of Daniel may be seen as preparatory to the author's approach to the book of Revelation. This later work is entitled, 'The Most Amazing Message Ever Written'. As with the Daniel study, there is the sense of being given a key to the understanding of the last message of Jesus to the Church with his sevenfold exhortation, 'I know thy works '.... and 'To him that overcometh will I give...'

I conclude this acknowledgement with a quotation from David's final heading 'Relevance for today', -

' I trust that I have tried to raise the character of interpretation by showing that the book's character is not political, but spiritual, and that it is an account of the age-old battle between the spiritual forces of good and evil reapplied to the conflicts of the Church in its testimony to the world. Thus, the book is prescriptive rather than predictive. For its prescriptiveness lay in showing the Church of John's day what must be done before the Second Advent could occur'.

Jack. T.Murrell.
March 1984.

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