

Part 7

Conclusion

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Two themes emerge from the present study. One is that no clean contrast exists between Rev 1-14 and 15-22. The other is that the throne and praise that we find in Rev 4-5 are associated with the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary in and after 1844.

Of the two, the first theme serves the second. My main point has to do with the time and place of Rev 4-5. This in turn is the chiasmic counterpart of Rev 19a. Rev 4-5 describes the beginning of the judgment and Rev 19a describes the end of the judgment. The chapters in between for the most part show us the sorts of evidence reviewed in the judgment. Here is the overriding focus of the book of Revelation.

Rev 1-14 and Rev 15-22

We consider the supporting theme first. Kenneth Strand, and with him C. Mervyn Maxwell, have developed and elaborated a model for understanding the book of Revelation in which the book is arranged chiasmically and also has two contrasting halves - one "historical," the other "eschatological."

I propose accepting the first part of this formulation and rejecting the second. The book is arranged chiasmically, just as Strand says and with his original outline largely intact, but from this it does not follow that the chapters which come before the chiasmic center of the book are different from those which come afterward. It is an assumption that they do. The assumption is unsubstantiated and in fact does not bear scrutiny.

I do not deny that there is a broad shift from history to eschatology as we move from the beginning of the book to the end. Clearly Strand was onto something here. But I do deny that the shift is as abrupt as he suggests or that it has to do primarily with structural facts. It is thematic in nature and occurs gradually as we move through the book.

If by "eschatology" we mean the study of last events, events occurring during the end time should qualify as being eschatological. A number of these occur in Rev 1-11. Examples include the letters to Philadelphia and Laodicea, the fifth and sixth seals, the extra material in Rev 7 and 10, and the three angels messages. This is one point. A lot of eschatological material occurs in Rev 1-14.

If by "history" we mean things that have actually taken place, any real events that have ever occurred should qualify as being historical. Are there no real events in Rev 12-22? At issue is not whether they have occurred already, but when they do occur whether they are real.

To have structural meaning, which is the claim Strand makes, the distinction between "history" and "eschatology" must go beyond the question whether a given event has occurred yet. Before me as opposed to after me is not a question put to the text but to the reader of the text and it will potentially have a different answer in each generation. There must be something more than this. If there is not a qualitative difference between historical events and eschatological events then there is not a qualitative difference between history and eschatology.

If there is a qualitative difference, what is it? Historical events are real in the sense that they actually occur in time and space. Are eschatological events somehow unreal? If not do they become historical once they occur? If so how are they different from those historical events that have already occurred?

Let us go beyond the hypothetical. There are test cases. The great disappointment of Rev 10, occurring as it does after 1798 during the time of the end, is eschatological under the definition I propose. Was it real and therefore historical? It was just as real as the War of 1812 fought thirty-four years earlier and the Civil War which began some twenty years afterward. Following up the idea of wars for a moment, have modern wars gotten less real than these as we get farther away from historical time and farther into eschatological time? Let us take the Second World War for example. Our grandparents and their grandparents were all born well within the time of the end.

Perhaps we are using the wrong definition of eschatology. 1798 is too early. Eschatology begins (in Rev 15-16) with the falling of the plagues while Christ is en route to the earth. This means that many - in fact the vast majority - of events that occur within the time of the end do not qualify as eschatological. This cannot be the right definition either. At this point we are thrown back on a before me/after me distinction, which will not work in a structural context.

I suggest that the distinction between history and eschatology, in the book of Revelation and in every other, is precisely along these lines. It is relative rather than qualitative. Pfandl has led the way here.⁹² For Moses the Babylonian captivity was clearly eschatological.⁹³ So one's historical vantage point is an unavoidable factor in determining whether an event seen from that vantage point is historical (it has already happened) or eschatological (it has not already happened). The event must also have such a high level of significance that when it happens it brings an era to an end. But my point is that events which do this are real and therefore historical once they occur. For a first century reader almost the entire book of Revelation will have been eschatological.

⁹² Pfandl's published dissertation. The Time of the End in the Book of Daniel, is discussed in an earlier chapter. He points out that in every age certain events have been promised for the distant future and were considered eschatological. For ancient Israel, the birth of a Savior to come was the paradigm example of eschatology. But now it has happened and so for us it is no longer eschatological but historical. The distinction does not reside in the event itself but in our relationship to the event as regards time. There are two factors to consider here rather than one and since we are one of those factors our definition of eschatology must always be relative to our historical point of view. Prophecy is to history as eschatology is to ancient history.

⁹³ For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall upon you because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord and provoke him to anger by what your hands have made" (Deut 31:29). See Pfandl, *ibid.*, p. 151.

(The epiphany to John, the letter to Ephesus, and the first seal are exceptions.) After Christ has come and we are all in the kingdom almost the entire book will be historical. (The lake of fire after the millennium and the descent of the Holy City are exceptions.)

Strand is certainly correct in saying that Revelation is arranged as a chiasm and that the chiastic center of the book comes between chaps. 14 and 15. The reason why I oppose taking the additional step of contrasting Rev 1-14 with 15-22 as a whole is, first, because I do not believe the hypothesis has been supported with strong arguments and that it is factually unsound, but second, I oppose it because it leads one to view material from the two halves in terms of any contrasts, or differences, or dissimilarities that they might have. This is a fundamentally wrong emphasis and if pressed it is self-contradictory. A and A' are parallel and therefore similar, but B is historical while B' eschatological and so they are dissimilar. The chiastic framework brings the parallels together while the bifurcation hypothesis drives them apart. The two parts of the model are ultimately at odds with each other. So let this divided house fall. Let us keep Strand's brilliant chiastic analysis and discard his bifurcation theory.

The Background Contribution of Rev 2-3

It is impossible to understand Rev 4-5 without first having a correct understanding Rev 2-3. Some would like the letters to the seven churches to remain static with respect to time, such that they do not take us beyond the first century. If we start wrong here, nothing else will be right later on.

If, on the other hand, the letters to the seven churches bring us forward step by step through time, as Seventh-day Adventists have always taught, what time do they bring us to? My position is that the letters do indeed have different ages of history in view and that when we get to Laodicea, that letter describes the remnant church during the time of the judgment starting in 1844. There is nothing innovative in saying so. The church is on earth. We all know that. The praise described in Rev 4-5 is in heaven. No one says otherwise.

So if the timeframe of the last letter in the series is later than the letters that lead up to it and at the beginning of Rev 4 only the venue changes, we have the judgment in heaven taking place in the timeframe of the letter to Laodicea. Is this doctrine new in some way? Of course the judgment takes place in the timeframe of Laodicea. My only possible innovation in any part of this is the claim that John supports this idea in Rev 4-5. Why shouldn't he do that? If he says the same things elsewhere, that is acceptable, but if he says them here, that is not. I can't follow such logic.

Placing the judgment in and after 1844, as my model does, is not the same as attacking our historic position on the judgment. Our liberal scholars want Rev 4-5 to take place in the first century and the second apartment. This destroys the significance of 1844. Our conservative scholars want Rev 4-5 to take place in the first century and in the first apartment. This destroys the continuity of the broader passage starting in chap. 2 and much of the immediate context. But why must we assign Rev 4-5 to the first century? It is true that the focus of time must drop back to the first century at some point

in order to capture the parallels between the seven churches and the seven seals, but why not make this switch at the beginning of Rev 6? Why must it take place at the beginning of Rev 4?

I challenge the reader to reflect on the following illustration. As you climb a set of stairs and then step off the highest tread ask yourself, Where am I? Answer: Not at the bottom of the stairs. When you finish climbing a set of stairs you are at the top of the stairs. In the same way, when we finish following John through the various ages of church history one after another in Rev 2-3, and we finally come to the last one, where are we then? Answer: Not at our starting point back in the first century.

The letter to Laodicea in Rev 3 and the throneroom scene of Rev 4-5 describe events that take place at the same time, but in different places. While the church here is busy being lukewarm and uninterested, the heavenly sanctuary is ringing with heartfelt praise because of the wise and loving decisions being announced in the judgment. What begins in Rev 4-5 ends in a corresponding manner in Rev 19a, after which it only remains for Christ to mount the white horse of Rev 19:11 and lead all the angel armies, who wanted so eagerly to come to His aid in Gethsemane (see Matt 26:53), back to earth to rescue His beleaguered saints. This is Michael and His angels.

Incidentally, at the end of Dan 11 and the beginning of Dan 12, where Michael is mentioned by name, we have the same type of literary usage. Dan 11:44-45 take place on earth; Dan 12:1 takes place in heaven. The king is here; Michael is there. The king vents his rage on earth; Michael stands up in heaven. But not at different times. The reason why the king comes to his end and no one will help him (see vs. 45) is that Michael stands up, comes here, and causes him to come to his end in such a way that no one could possibly help him. "Who can stand when he appears" (Mal 3:2)? Not the king of the North.

The time relationships we have seen earlier in Dan 11:44-45 and Dan 12:1 have their counterpart in Rev 2-3 and 4-5. In both cases the location of events changes, but the timeframe does not.

Parallels with Rev 4-5

A specific set of parallels that I wish above all to bring together is that between Rev 4-5 and 19a. Supporting this are additional parallels between Rev 4-5 and Dan 7. Both must be seen and appreciated in order to understand the thematic emphasis that the book of Revelation places on the judgment. Both are unusually important, but my point here has to do primarily with the relationship between Rev 4-5 and 19a.

Rev 4-5 and Dan 7

I have argued above that Rev 4-5 must be placed at the beginning of the judgment in 1844. If Dan 7 describes the judgment and if Rev 4-5 runs parallel to Dan 7 then Rev 4-5 also describes the judgment. In this case Dan 8 is parallel to both. On the one hand we have the judgment, on the other the cleansing of the sanctuary. Seventh-day Adventists have always studied the two chapters together and have derived their

1844 starting date for the judgment by expanding the scope of this system of parallels to include Dan 9 as well as Dan 8 and Dan 7.

The judgment and the cleansing of the sanctuary are not two events but one, despite the fact that they are described in two places (Dan 7 and 8). By quoting Daniel as he does John links what he sees in Rev 4-5 to what Daniel saw seven centuries earlier. So now these same events are described in three places. And if we link Rev 4-5 to Rev 19a and other similar passages (see e.g. Rev 7:11; 11:19; 14:3) we lend still further support to a position we have long held.

Rev 4-5 and 19a

The context in which we find Rev 4-5 fits the time honored Seventh-day Adventist prophetic framework perfectly. The seven churches lead us step by step from John's day to our own. When the prophet reaches the period of Laodicea (whose name refers to people being judged) the prophet's attention shifts from earth to heaven and he sees what is happening there in the same timeframe that the letters have brought him to in the preceding chapters. No interpretation of the relationship between Rev 3 and 4 could be more natural than this one. So at this point we have been brought down to the end time - to the beginning of the judgment, when the door to the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary is thrown open (see Rev 4:1).

John does not see the throne of God in the first apartment, nor does he see the second apartment from the first. He sees the first apartment from the second through the open door of Rev 4:1.

Then, as Christ prepares to open the seven seals in Rev 5, we notice that the document He opens is - precisely - a document that needs opening. It has already been written and sealed. It is complete. It therefore deals with events that are completed, that were done in the past, before the seals are broken. This fact tells us two things. It tells us that the events are not witnessed as they occur but are reviewed as already past. Otherwise the seals would not already be in place. And it also tells us that the review occurs in a time far distant from John's own. The process of review does not begin until the seals are in place. Otherwise why would they need to be broken?

The subject matter of the sealed document takes us back in time to a period when the church would go everywhere boldly, conquering new territory for Christ. This was the first Christian century during John's lifetime. Then later the falling away would occur gradually over time and so the horses used as symbols would change colors from white, to red, to black, to pale. This change does not occupy space but time.

What John records is an overview of the church's history and also the history of the world outside the church. Why are these things important? So that the life choices of people living through those successive ages could be understood fully and fairly against the historical backdrop for their lives. This process of thorough review is the judgment.

The cyclic nature of what the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders do in Rev 4-5 confirms such an analysis. They speak out in to praise God. but not until they have listened carefully to Him as He explains the decisions of the court. This is the judgment. What the twenty-four elders say is a response to what God says. As He

declares on case after case they acknowledge His wisdom and fairness and in this way God's dealings with mankind are vindicated before the universe.

In the judgment God explains Himself. He does not convene the court to seek information but to impart it. He stoops to explain because He wants His creatures to understand His character, which is the foundation for His government. And as the truth about God dawns more and more fully on the minds of those in attendance, they respond again and again in heartfelt praise, acknowledging both His justice and His mercy.

Summary

Rev 4-5 depicts the beginning of the judgment and Rev 19a is its chiasmic counterpart, showing its closing scenes just before Christ returns. When the work of our great High Priest is finally over He lays His priestly robes aside and leads out all heaven on white horses to rescue His beleaguered saints on earth. Thus the judgment ends in Rev 19a and Christ returns to earth in Rev 19b. Next comes the millennium in Rev 20 and after that the New Earth in Rev 21-22.

What comes between Rev 4-5 and 19a is a summary of information submitted as evidence in the judgment. The events are not reviewed as they occur. Thus the judgment does not begin in the first century as the events occur, nor do the events we are talking about occur in the last days during the judgment. The events occur first, spanning the period from the apostolic age to our own day, and the judgment which reviews them comes afterward. And in this case the time of final review was specified in prophecy. "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Dan 8:14,KJV).

Within this context, asking if we can find the judgment in Scripture is like asking if we can find Revelation in Scripture. The whole book, from chap. 6 to and including chap. 18, shows us the main lines of evidence that would eventually be reviewed in the judgment, when the time for reviewing them should finally come - exactly on schedule - in 1844.