

because Christ dwells in it. Result? The world always, again and again, persecutes the church, chapters 4-7. Result? Divine judgments, of every description, always fall upon the world, while the church is victorious, chapters 8-11. This struggle between the church and the world always reveals a deeper conflict between Christ and Satan. Satan always employs allies mentioned in Chapters 12-14. They always go down in defeat. The victory is always ours! There is, or course, nothing mechanical about these seven sections. They are not seven blocks of thought. They do not constitute seven water-tight compartments. The book is an organism, every part of which is vitally related to all the others. Thus, for example, the fall of Babylon is already announced in 14:8. Yet, it is not described until we reach the section, chapters 17-19. Similarly, the persecution of the church by the world and even the judgment upon the world are presupposed and introduced in the very first section, 1:9,13ff. But the main theme of that section is: the Christ-indwelt church shining in the midst of the world.

11. The teachings of these seven sections, which reveal such glorious unity and gradual thought-progression, agree with the whole Bible. Let us now examine how this understanding corresponds to other passages of scripture.

1-3 Christ's constant and abiding presence in his church – Light shining in darkness.	Matthew 28:20 Matthew 5:14	Lo, I am with you alway. Light of the world.
4-7 Seals – Church oppressed by the world – darkness hating the light.	John 16:33 2 Timothy 3:12	In the world you have tribulation. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.
8-11 Trumpets of Judgment.	Luke 18:7 Romans 12:19	And shall not God avenge his elect? Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.
12-14 The struggle between the church and the world is a manifestation of the conflict between Christ and Satan!	Genesis 3:15	I will put enmity between thee and the woman.
15-16 Seven bowls of wrath.	Romans 2:5 Luke 13:3	Hardness and impenitent at heart treasurest up for thyself wrath. Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.
17-19 Actual fall of the harlot and the beasts.	1 John 2:17	The world passeth away and the lust thereof.
20-22 The Dragon himself is utterly destroyed.	Romans 8:37	We are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

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12. **Revelation is a series of pictures. The pictures move. They are full of action. Everything is constantly astir. You see one picture. It soon makes way for another; again, another, and another. If you really wish to understand the book, you must imagine that you are watching a movie.**
- a. Seven golden lampstands. There is action, motion: someone is walking among these lampstands. He is wearing a long robe with a gold belt around his breast. His hair is white as snow, and his eyes blaze like fire. In his right hand he is holding seven stars, and from his mouth issues a sharp double-edged sword.
 - b. The scene changes. We see a halo-encircled Throne. Out of the Throne comes flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder. In the right hand of the throne-Occupant there is a scroll, sealed with seven seals. Now, someone is approaching the Throne. Who is he? The lion of the tribe of Judah. He takes the scroll. Immediately the four living ones around the Throne and also the twenty-four elders fall down before the lamb. Each has a harp and gold bowls full of incense. But listen, now, they are singing a new song.
 - c. As this music dies, we see four horses: white, red, black, and pale. Notice also the riders. See what each one does. As these horses and their riders are going forth, we see people slaughter one another. Some seem to be hungry. In fact, they appear to be starving. Others are being thrown before the wild beasts. We now see the souls of the slaughtered individuals. In a loud voice they are crying underneath the altar.
 - d. But now the sun becomes black as sackcloth. The full moon takes on the color of blood. The stars of the sky are falling on earth. The sky is being rolled up just like a scroll. Every mountain and island is being dislodged from its place. People – including kings, nobles, officers, the rich the poor alike – are hiding themselves in caves and rocks. Four angels now are holding back the four winds so that they do not immediately damage anything on earth or sea.
 - e. Now a hundred forty-four thousand people are marked with a seal. And now, a great crowd which no one could possibly count, people of every nationality and region on earth, with palm branches in their hands. What are they doing? They are crying with a loud voice: “Our salvation is the work of our God who is seated upon he Throne, and of the Lamb.”
 - f. And now seven angels with seven trumpets. Another angel is busily engaged offering incense. Now, the censer is being filled with fire. It is emptied upon the earth. This is followed by peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.
13. **Revelation continues in this fashion moving from one picture to another. The entire book consists of changing scenes, moving pictures, active symbols. Moreover, there are sounds, voices, songs, responses, and choruses (4:8,11; 5:9,10; 5:12-14; 11:15-18; 12:10; 15:3-4; 19:1-8; 22:17).**
14. **The question now arises: “What do these pictures mean? How shall we interpret them?” In order to answer these questions let us remember what we know about interpreting other moving pictures in the Bible. Let us consider how some have interpreted the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10.**
- a. “The man who is on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho represents Adam, the head of the human race. He left the heavenly city and is traveling down to the city of earth, the profane

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city. But, having turned his desires toward the earth, he falls into the hands of robbers; that is, he is overpowered by Satan and his evil angels. These robbers strip him of the garment of original righteousness. They also beat him, leaving him full of wounds, half-dead! Yes, half-dead in sins and trespasses! The priest and the levite represent the law and the sacrifices. They cannot save the sinner. They are powerless to help. But the Good Samaritan, namely, Jesus Christ, is traveling that way and helps the poor sinner. This Good Samaritan dresses his wounds with the oil of the Holy Spirit and with wine, namely the blood of his Passion. He, then, puts the poor man on his own mule, that is, on the merits of his own righteousness! He takes the poor man to an inn, that is, to church. The next day, the Good Samaritan gives the host two shillings, that is, the Word and the Sacraments, in order that with these he may provide for the spiritual needs of the poor sinner. Then this Good Samaritan departs but promises to return later.”

- b. If you have the type of mentality that enjoys such spiritualizing explanations, you might as well close the book of Revelation. You will never really understand either the parables of Jesus or understand the book of Revelation. The explanation just given is wrong from start to finish. It is altogether wrong to ask:
 - i. What is the meant by the poor man who fell among the robbers?
 - ii. What is meant by the robbers, the priest, the Levite, the Good Samaritan?
 - iii. What is meant by the wine, the oil, the mule, the inn, the two shillings?
- c. Not any of these things has any “deeper,” spiritual meaning whatever! If the mule must be spiritualized, who is going to determine exactly what is its meaning? And what about the two shillings? Do they represent the bread and the blood, the two testaments, or what? Who is going to determine this? The context in which the parable occurs says nothing about it. And because the context says nothing, we should say nothing!
- d. Surely, all these elements of the parable: wine, oil, priest, Levite, inn, shillings, mule, etc., have their value. They belong to the parable. Without them the parable would not be complete and would convey no meaning. But you should not ascribe a separate, spiritual meaning to each of these features. They simply serve to make the parable complete. Then, once you have read the entire parable, you should ask: “Now, what is the meaning of this parable, *taken as a whole*?” Each parable teaches a central lesson. A little study of the context usually makes the central lesson perfectly clear. In light of Luke 10:25-29, also verses 36-37, we see that the meaning of this beautiful parable is this: instead of asking, “Who is my neighbor?,” we should be neighbor to whomsoever the Lord happens to place in our path.

15. Now, something similar holds with respect to the interpretation of the symbols of Revelation. One must not begin to press the details. One must not ask: in the symbol of the locusts that came out of the pit of the abyss, 9:1-11, what is the separate meaning of their hair, teeth, breast-plates, etc.? What we mean is this: we must not pluck the symbol apart, losing the unity. These details belong to the picture; just like the mule, wine, oil, etc., belong to the parable of the Good Samaritan. One should ask: First, what is the picture, taken as a whole? Second, what is the central meaning of this picture?

16. As a rule, the details belong to the picture, to the symbol. Do not try to give a “deeper”

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interpretation to the details, except insofar as the interpretation of these details is necessary in order to bring out the full meaning of the *central idea* of the symbol. Thus, in the symbol of the New Jerusalem, chapters 21-22, the *central idea is perfect fellowship with God*. The details – wall, foundations, gates, river, etc. – describe the glorious character of this fellowship. What we are after is the total impression, the central idea, of each complete symbol. As in the parables, so here, the context helps to explain the meaning of the picture. Thorough study of all the details also is necessary in order to determine what is the central thought.

17. WHAT DOES THE SYMBOL MEAN?

- a. If we grant that we should interpret the symbol *as a whole*, and its details *in harmony with the whole*, we still must ask, “What does the symbol mean?” Does it refer to a specific event in history, a particular happening, a detail of chronology, an important date, perhaps?
- b. In this connection, it is well to distinguish between two kinds of symbols.
 - i. There are symbols which describe **the beginning or the end of the course of the new dispensation**. These symbols, as is very evident from the context, generally refer to a specific event. Thus, for example, the radiant woman who is delivered of a son, a man-child, refers to the bringing forth of Christ, his human nature (12:1-5). Again, the two-fold harvest, 14:15ff, refers to the final judgment, to that one great event.
 - ii. But there are also other symbols, namely, those that seem to intervene between Christ’s first and second coming. We are thinking of such symbols as the lampstands, the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. Do these symbols refer to specific events, single happenings, dates, persons in history? But if they do, then we may as well admit that we cannot interpret them. For, among the thousands of dates and events and persons of history that show certain traits of resemblance to the symbol in question, who is able to select the one and only date, event, or person that was forecast by this particular symbol? Confusion results. Thousands of “interpretations,” but no certainty. *Revelation would remain a closed book*.
- c. Yet, we do not believe that this is a closed book. We fully believe that it is a *revelation*, an *unveiling*. The seals, trumpets, bowls, and similar pictures, refer not to specific events or details of history, but to *principles that are operating throughout the history of the world, especially, throughout the new dispensation*. Let us consider the following in support of this understanding.
 - i. Notice, **first** of all, that **the sphere** in which these seals, trumpets, and bowls operate **is very extensive**. These symbols affect, respectively, the fourth part of the earth; the third part of the earth, sea, trees; the whole earth, sea, etc. (Chapters 6, 8, 9, 16). Now, this could hardly be true if each seal, trumpet, or bowl had reference to just one, single event in history; an event that takes place on a certain specific date in a definite locality. But if, on the other hand, we regard the symbol as indicating a whole series of happenings from the beginning to the end of the dispensation, these descriptions of the sphere in which the symbols operate begin to have meaning. Thus, for example, we can understand the expression “a huge mountain all ablaze” that was “hurled into the sea” if it represents all maritime disasters throughout the dispensation.

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- ii. **Second**, these **symbols affect** not just one, very limited group of people, but a **multitude that cannot be counted**. The trumpets, for example affect *mankind*. They do not refer merely to some people living in Europe who happen to have a quarrel with the pope (“rest of mankind” – 9:20). The description is even more general than this, for these symbols seem to affect not only all the evil people in one age, but also former generations. Rev 16:6 (KJV) “For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.” We cannot escape the impression, therefore, that the symbols refer to **series of happenings**, to **principles** of human and satanic conduct and of divine moral government. They refer to things that happen again and again and again, so that the book of Revelation is always up-to-date. The symbols describe **principles** of conduct and of divine moral government that are in evidence today as well as during the first century A.D.
- iii. **Third**, let us not forget that each of these series – whether lampstands, seals, trumpets, or bowls – appears to span the long period beginning with the first and ending with the second coming of our savior. This also would seem to harmonize better with the idea that the symbols indicate ever-operative **principles** than with the theory that they signify single, isolated happenings in Europe or America.
- iv. **Fourth**, we must not fail to observe that the symbols usually come in groups of **seven**. The book is addressed to **seven** churches, represented by **seven** lampstands. There are **seven** stars symbolizing **seven** angels of the churches. There are **seven** spirits of God represented by **seven** lamps. Further: **seven** seals; a Lamb with **seven** eyes and **seven** horns. **Seven** angels blow **seven** trumpet blasts. **Seven** other angels pour out the contents of **seven** bowls full of the final **seven** plagues. **Seven** thunders utter voices. The beast out of the sea has **seven** heads. There are **seven** mountains, **seven** kings, etc., etc. The number **seven**, representing completeness, harmonizes very well with the idea that the symbols refer to **principles** of human conduct and of divine government that are ever operative, especially, throughout this entire dispensation.
- v. **Fifth**, we must keep in mind that Revelation was **intended to strengthen and edify the hearers**. The book has an ethical or spiritual purpose. Now if these symbols merely indicate and predict isolated, future events, someone’s curiosity may be satisfied, but it can hardly be said that people, in general, are edified. On the other hand, if we believe that the book reveals the **principles** of divine moral government which are constantly operating; so that, whatever age we happen to live in, we can see God’s hand in history, his mighty arm ever protecting us and giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, then, only then, are we edified and comforted.
- d. Conclusion: The seals, trumpets, bowls of wrath and similar symbols refer not to specific one time events, particular happenings, details of history, but to **principles** of human conduct and of divine moral government that are operating throughout the history of the world, especially throughout the new dispensation.