Revelation - Commentaries by Andrew Miller

Pope Innocent III (1198 A.D. - 1216 A.D.): Chapter 24, Babylon of Revelation 17, The

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It has been our desire from the commencement of this work, to study history from a scriptural point of view; but more especially in the light of the epistles to the seven Apocalyptic churches. The evils which were only budding then are now full-blown. In Pergamos, we have Balaam teaching "to commit fornication;" and in Thyatira, we have Jezebel introduced, who imposed idolatry by force. But these and many other evils we shall now find concentrated in the cup of the false woman of Rev. 17

There can be no question, we think, as to what is meant by the symbol here used. Not only a woman, but a licentious woman, and enthroned amidst the corruptions of the seven-hilled city. "And here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth." Here we have a material point—that which has always characterized Rome, both in prose and poetry; as one has said, speaking of Arnold of Brescia, "In the service of freedom, his eloquence thundered over the seven hills." Every reader knows what city the historian means by this description. But the word of God is perfectly plain to "the mind that hath wisdom." Rome is clearly indicated, and her religious corruptions are symbolized by "the mother of harlots." But why, it may be asked, is she called Babylon? The term is applied figuratively, we believe, just as Sodom and Egypt are applied to Jerusalem. "And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." (Rev. 11:8.) Besides, the literal Babylon, the Chaldean capital, was built upon a plain—the plain of Shinar.

These points being fairly disposed of, and Rome fully identified, we accept Rev. 17, 18 as descriptive of the papacy. The character, conduct, relationships, and final judgment of this spiritual Babylon, are here set before us, not by the partial or imperfect pen of history, but by the Spirit of Truth who sees the end from the beginning. The papal system as a whole is looked at morally from God's point of view. This is an immense point gained to the man of faith. We will now briefly examine some of its more prominent features.

1. She is seen in vision as "seated upon many waters." This is explained by the angel in verse 15 to mean, "Peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." The figure implies that this false woman, or the corrupt religious system of Rome, exercises a soul-ruining influence over all these multitudes, nations, and tongues. But God sees it all -marks it all: her evil history is written in heaven.

2. She is represented as having intercourse of the most seductive, licentious character with all classes. "With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication." What a state of things for that which professedly bears the fair name of Christ! The term "fornication," as here used, means, we have no doubt, the seducing power of the Romish system in drawing away the affections from Christ, who is the only true object of faith for the heart. The priest comes in between the heart and the blessed Lord; the Bible is concealed; the mind of God is unknown; the people are intoxicated with her exciting falsehoods; and worship they know not what. The whole earth is corrupted with the wine of her fornication. But her end, her fearful end, speedily draws near, "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double."

3. She is next seen as ruling and directing the civil power. "And I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads, and ten horns." Whether it be the resuscitated Roman empire (Rev. 13.), or the different kingdoms which arose from the ruins of its imperial unity, or all governments and principalities of the earth, the woman swayed her scepter, or rather her blood-stained sword, over them all as her divinely given domain. The purple of the Caesars was claimed by the popes, the imperial eagles were exchanged for the cross-keys, and his Holiness proclaimed a universal monarch. And this new mistress of the world was not so in name only. She clothed with new power her ancient name. Rome imperial never inspired such terrors by its arms, as Rome papal by her anathemas. "Christendom," as one has said, "through all its extended realms of mental and moral darkness, trembled while the pontiff fulminated excommunications. Monarchs quaked on their thrones at the terror of papal despotism, and crouched before his spiritual power like the meanest slave. The clergy considered the pope as the fountain of their subordinate authority, and the way to future promotion. The people, immersed in gross ignorance and superstition, viewed his supremacy as a terrestrial deity, who wielded the temporal and eternal destinies of man. The wealth of nations flowed into the sacred treasury, and enabled the successor of the Galilean fisherman and head of the christian commonwealth, to rival the splendor of Eastern pomp and grandeur." The extent of her dominions too far exceeded the widest conquests of the empire. Many nations that had escaped the iron grasp of Rome imperial were held beneath the yoke of Rome papal. This we have seen in our history of the religious wars of Charlemagne. Some have reckoned them as Ireland, the north of Scotland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Prussia, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Austria, Hungary, with a considerable part of Germany. These, we are told, were gathered as sheep into the fold of the shepherd of Rome by such missionaries as Boniface; but in God's account they were enslaved by the tyranny and usurpation of the great corruptress.

4. But there is more than her sitting by the many waters and sitting on the beast. She is full of idolatries and the uncleanness of her fornication. "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of the abominations and filthiness of her fornication." In spite of all her outward glory—that which the world counts precious and beautiful, she is in God's sight as a licentious woman with a gorgeous cup full of all abominations. We have already seen her tenacious love of images, which is here referred to by the term "abominations."

5. Her great, flaunting, and exclusive pretensions to the truth of God. "And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and Abominations of the Earth." This is the gravest and weightiest of Rome's sins; the awful counterfeit of Satan, and the basest of all her hypocrises. Of the true, the heavenly mystery we thus read, "This is a great mystery," says Paul, "but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Eph. 5:32.) But in place of subjection to Christ and faithfulness to Him, she—like an abandoned shameless woman—corrupts by her foul embrace the great ones of the earth. Nor is this all. She is a mother—the mother of harlots; she has many

daughters. Every religious system in Christendom, that tends in any measure to lead souls away from Christ, to engage their affections with objects that come between the heart and the Man in the glory, is related to this great parent of spiritual iniquity.

6. Her insatiable thirst for the blood of God's saints. "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." This strange sight—a woman—a religious community, professing to be the true spouse of Christ, drunken with the blood of the martyrs, the saints of God, fills the mind of the apostle with great amazement. Nor need we wonder. But we shall soon have to see this strange sight, not in vision only but in unprecedented reality. Innocent III. was the man who declared war on the peasants of the south of France, and turned the sword of the notorious Simon de Montfort against the well-known Albigenses and Waldenses, and that under the pretense of doing the will of Christ, and acting by His authority.

From verse 7, we have the explanation which the angel gives of the vision, and the awful doom of Babylon from the hand of both man and God, down to the close of chapter 18. But as we are not interpreting, we need not pursue the solemn theme of these chapters any farther. We can now tread in the dark blood-stained footsteps of the historian in the light of holy scripture.

Rome and Her Rulers (64 A.D. - 177 A.D.): Chapter 7, Address to the Church of Ephesus, The

The grand object of the church in this world was to be "the pillar and ground of the truth." It was set up to be a light-bearer for God. It is thus symbolized by a "golden candlestick"—a vessel which bears the light. It ought to have been a true witness of what God had manifested in Jesus on the earth, and of what He is now when Christ is in heaven. We further learn from this address, that the church, as a vessel of testimony in this world, is threatened with being set aside unless its first estate is maintained. But alas! it fails, as the creature always does. The angels, Adam, Israel, and the church, kept not their first estate. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee," saith the Lord, "because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly; and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

There was still, however, much that He could praise, and He does praise all that He can. As an assembly, they had patience; they had labored and not fainted; they could not bear "evil men," or those who were seeking the highest place in the church. Nevertheless He feels the departure from Himself. "Thou hast left thy first love." He speaks as one disappointed. They had ceased to delight in His love to them, and hence their own love to Him declined. "First love" is the happy fruit of our appreciation of the Lord's love to us. "Outward testimony might go on," as one has said, "but that is not what the Lord most values, though value it He does, so far as it is simple, genuine, and faithful. Still He cannot but prize most of all hearts devoted to Himself, the fruit of His own personal, self-sacrificing, perfect love. He has a spouse upon earth, whom He desires to see with no object but Himself, and kept pure for Him from the world and its ways. God has called us for this: not only for salvation, and for a witness to Himself in godliness, though this is most true and important, but beyond all for Christ—a bride for His Son! Surely this should be our first and last, and constant and dearest thought; for we are affianced to Christ, and He at least has proved the fullness and faithfulness of His love to us! But what of ours!"

It was this state of things in Ephesus, and in the church at large, that called for the intervention of the Lord in faithful discipline. The church, as planted by Paul, had already fallen from its first estate. "All seek their own," he says, "not the things of Jesus Christ's," And again, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me." Hence the tribulation spoken of in the address to the church in Smyrna. Though the Lord is full of grace and love in all His ways towards His fallen and failing church, still He is righteous withal, and must judge evil. He is not seen in these addresses as the Head in heaven of the one body, nor as the Bridegroom of His church; but in His judicial character, walking in the midst of the candlesticks, having the attributes of a judge. See chapter 1.

It will be observed by the reader, that there is a measured distance and reserve in the style of His address to the church at Ephesus. This is in keeping with the place He takes in the midst of the golden candlesticks. He writes to the angel of the church, not to "the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus," as in the Epistle by Paul.

There have been many disputes about "who is meant by the angel." He was a person, we believe, so identified morally with the assembly, that he represented it, and characterized it. The Lord addresses the angel, not the church immediately. "The angel," therefore, gives the idea of representation. For example, in the Old Testament we have the angel of Jehovah; the angel of the covenant; and in the New we have the angels of the little children; and so of Peter in Acts 12, they said, "It is his angel."

We will now briefly glance at

Rome and Her Rulers (64 A.D. - 177 A.D.): Chapter 7, Address to the Church at Smyrna, The

Our interest in the history of the church is greatly increased when we see that the Lord has distinctly marked its successive epochs. The outward condition of the church down to the death of the first Antonine—so far as it can be ascertained from the most authentic histories—answers in a remarkable way to what we learn from scripture, and especially from the address to Ephesus. There was outward consistency and zeal; they were unwearied. It is also evident that there was charity, purity, devotedness, holy courage, even to the greatest readiness to suffer in every way for the Lord's sake. At the same time it is clear, from both scripture and history, that false doctrine was making its way, and that many were manifesting a most unworthy zeal for official pre-eminence in the church. That forgetfulness of self, and that care for Christ and His glory, which are the firstfruits of His grace, were gone. Historically we now come to the Smyrnean period. For the convenience of the reader we will give the address entire.

"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear

what the Spirit saith unto the churches, he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Here the Lord meets the declension by sore tribulation. Milder means had not answered the end. This is no uncommon case; though they may have thought that some strange thing had happened to them. But all their afflictions were known to the Lord, measured by Him, and ever under His control. "Ye shall have tribulation ten days." The period of their sufferings is exactly specified. And He speaks to them as one that had known the depths of tribulation Himself. "These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead, and is alive." He had gone through the deepest sorrow, and through death itself—He had died for them, and was alive again. They had this blessed One to flee to in all their trials. And as He looks on, and walks in the midst of His suffering ones, He says, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Thus He holds in His hand the martyr's crown, ready to place it on the head of His faithful overcomer.

We will now turn to our history, and mark its resemblance to the above Epistle.

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