Biblical Hermeneutics;

OR,

THE ART OF

SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION.

FROM THE GERMAN OF

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WITH

NOTES, STRICTURES, AND SUPPLEMENTS

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TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINALS,

With Additional Notes and Observations,

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LONDON:

FREDERICK WESTLEY AND A. H. DAVIS,

STATIONERS' HALL COURT.

1835.
[I have no doubt that it will be acceptable to the English reader to add the following analysis of, and observations on, the Apocalypse, by the learned Professor Hug. His scheme is formed on the system approved by Grotius, Eichhorn, Heinrichs, Herder, Seiler, Heringa, and the most eminent modern interpreters:—

"The Apocalypse frequently enters into very great circumstantiality in the treatment of its subjects, and portrays them with many embellishments; but there is much in the detail which seems not to be essential, and, nevertheless, communicates to the subject its perfect scope. The minor incidents become thereby often significant; and it is difficult to give an outline of the whole, because in such an outline the incidents must necessarily be neglected. Yet will we endeavour to bring the whole into one survey.

"John beheld at Patmos, in a trance, a form like that of a man, between seven lamps; in which, however, all was superhuman, uncommonly glorious, and divine. This form commanded him to write seven Epistles to seven communities of Asia, the symbols of which are the seven surrounding lamps, which are tended by seven spirits. These Epistles commend the virtues, and censure the faults, of the seven churches; admonish some to amend, and others to be constant.

"This took place on the earth; but now the gate of heaven is opened, and an herald commanded John to enter. Here he saw God on a throne, encircled with glory, and round him four and twenty of his elect, on four and twenty seats. He had in his hand a book with seven seals, and no one in the whole creation was able to loosen them. But a Lamb which stood on the middle of the throne opened these seven seals amidst the hymns and praises of the spiritual world.—vi.

"At the opening of the first seal, he perceives a hero with the insignia of victory. At that of the second, peace vanishes from the earth; at that of the third, famine approaches; at that of the fourth, death and its train; at the opening of the fifth, the blood of the martyrs cries for vengeance. The sixth is opened, the sun and moon are darkened, the stars fall from heaven; terror and anguish are universal. Four angels restrain the tempests, until an angel, who arrives from the east, has sealed with the seal of the living God, twelve
thousand of those who should be saved from each tribe of Israel. Around the throne of God stands a great multitude out of all nations, in white robes, with palms in their hands, who have arrived from the abodes of affliction, and are now comforted and sing praises to God.—viii. The seventh seal is opened; all heaven is silent; and now seven angels appear with seven trumpets. The prayers of the saints lie upon an altar before God, and the fragrance of them ascends to Him.—viii. 7.

"The first of the seven angels begins the blast of war; fire, hail, and blood, fall upon the earth. At the sound of the second trumpet, a fiery mountain is precipitated into the sea, and the third part of the water becomes blood. The third trumpet is sounded, and a brightly shining star falls upon the third part of the rivers and fountains, which are embittered by it. The fourth sounds; then the third part of the sun, of the moon, and of the stars, becomes darkened. An eagle flies through the midst of heaven, and cries, Woe to the inhabitants of the earth! The fifth sounds, and a star falls from heaven, having the keys of the abyss, which it opens, from whence all sorts of poisonous vermin come forth. At the sound of the sixth trumpet, the four angels, which were bound on the Euphrates, are loosened; the third part of mankind perishes in war,—the survivors nevertheless do not repent, nor desist from their idolatry.

"An angel of a colossal form speaks with the voice of seven thunders, and extends a book to John, who is obliged to swallow it; he swallows it, begins to prophesy, and measures the edifice of the temple; but the outer court of the city he abandons to the enemies. Two martyrs, who are mentioned in magnificent terms of eulogy, are also obliged to prophesy and die in the allegorical Sodom;—the tenth part of the city dies.—xi. 15. The seventh angel sounds his trumpet. The four-and-twenty elders fall down before God's throne, and sing unto him a triumphal song.—xii.

"A woman appears in heaven; she is clothed with the sun; under her feet is the moon; on her head is a crown of stars. Her hour of delivery approaches, and a dragon is lying in wait for the child, who is destined to rule the nations with his sceptre. But Michael hurls the dragon down to the earth, which occasions
a general jubilee of the heavenly host. But even from thence he pursues the woman in labour, who avoids him by a flight into desolate regions, where she brings forth, and nurses her child. Therefore the dragon wages war with the remaining adherents of the woman.—xiii.

"In the mean time there arises from the sea a marine Monster, with seven heads, ten horns, and ten diadems. It wages war upon the saints; all nations worship it. Another arises from the earth, with two horns, and speaks like a Dragon; it subjects mankind to the power of the marine Beast, makes an image of him, and commands the world to worship him; then it marks the worshippers with a peculiar character. The Beast himself bears the number 666. But the Lamb stands upon Mount Sion, and marks his faithful followers, and new songs of praise resound to his honour.—xiv.

"Three angels appear in heaven. The one bears on high the everlasting gospel: the other exclaims, Babylon is fallen: the third proclaims punishments to the worshippers of the Beast. A human form appears above a cloud, with a sickle in his hand; an angel also appears with a sickle: the one performs the harvest, the other the vintage.—xv.

"Seven angels, with seven vials of wrath, come forth from the tabernacle of God, surrounded with smoke. The first poured out his vial, thence flowed imposthumes and ulcers upon the earth. The second poured it over the sea, which bubbled up like coagulated blood. The third poured it over the rivers and fountains, which immediately streamed with blood. The fourth poured it over the sun, and men were scorched. The fifth over the throne of the beast, and he was enveloped with darkness. The sixth poured his vial over the Euphrates, and its springs were dried up. Finally, the seventh poured out his vial in the air, and a voice resounded out of God's sanctuary from heaven—It is finished! Nature seemed to be reversed; every terrible phenomenon burst forth in it, to complete the destruction.—xvii.

"Now one of the seven angels approaches, leads John into the desert, shows to him another woman, sitting upon a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. She bears the name of Babylon on her forehead, is intoxicated with the blood of the saints, and allures nations to whoredom. The heads are seven
hills, the horns are ten kings. The beast is on the verge of
destruction.—xviii.

"Another angel descends from heaven, proclaims the destruc-
tion of Babylon, and calls upon the nations to take vengeance
of her. An elegy arises from the earth on account of Babylon.
In heaven a hallelujah is sung; for the nuptial day of the Lamb
is approaching.—xix. 11.

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"Now the Conqueror on the white horse is seen again. His
name is written on his thigh, and he is called King of kings;
he is also the ΛΟΓΟΣ ΘΕΟΥ, [Word of God]. An angel, who
stands in the sun, beckons the birds of the air to the field of
battle, where bodies of princes and mighty men in great num-
bers await them; for their last attempts at resistance were un-
availing.—xx.

"In the mean time, an angel descends from heaven, who has
the keys of the abyss; there he chains the sea-monster, and
locks his prison for a thousand years, during which time the dead
reign with Jesus. But after this period, he will again arise to
battle, and call distant nations to his assistance, although in vain:
he will be eternally consigned to the torments of fire.—xx. 11.

"The Judge is already seated upon the throne; the fabric of
the world trembles in disordered commotion; the book of life is
unrolled; the graves give up their dead; the sentence is passed.—
xxi.

"A new heaven and a new earth are formed. A new Jeru-
salem, adorned like a Bride, descends upon earth; its towers, its
walls, its palaces, are embellished with characters of Christianity:
consolation, tranquillity, peace, eternal light, and the kingdom of
God, are there.—xxii. 6.

"Now follow a concluding discourse to John, and a con-
cluding discourse from John to his readers."

"In no book were the interpreters so unfortunate as in this:
a proof, that soon after the fall of the Jewish state, the acquaint-
ance with the opinions and the peculiar views of this nation were
likewise effaced, and that the comprehension of Jewish expressions and Palestinian imagery was lost even among the Asiatics. We may no longer include what has occurred in this respect in much later times. At one time Antichrist and the end of the world, at another the history of the church, were seen represented therein in visions; then the history of the world, the Saracens, the Huns, the Turks, &c. were added to it. At length the turn came to the Pope, the corruption of the clergy, the Roman church, and the Reformation, and many other things of this sort, which were not a whit more rational.

"Among the moderns, Bossuet trod a more judicious path. The Apocalypse appeared to him to treat of the conquest of Rome and of the dismemberment of its empire, which events actually took place under the command of Alaric, the king of the Goths. Unto this period the book extends, and shows the divine judgments upon the idolatrous state which had so often oppressed Christianity, which now is at last revenged, and triumphs over every violence. The intermediate events, which are here still further discussed, are the fate of the Christian school under the Cæsars, its persecutions, principally that of Dioclesian; its momentary tranquillity under Constantine; then the oppressions of Julian, which hastened the punishment.

"These, Bossuet, whom Calmet afterwards followed, considered to be the contents of the Revelations. Wetstein, on his part, conceived the transactions differently, and principally described in them the destruction of Jerusalem, the fate of the Jewish religion connected with it, and the dominion of Christianity: to him succeeded Herder, who, in the detail, has been very happy in some of his observations.

"But Hugo Grotius, an excellent and acutely discriminating genius, had long before seen farther than they. He says, at the beginning of the fourth chapter of his explanation of this book: 'Pertinent autem hæc visa ad res Judæorum usque ad finem capitis undecimi: inde ad res Romanorum usque ad finem capitis vicesimi; deinde ad statum florentissimum Ecclesiae Christianæ ad finem usque.' "

* "These visions appertain to the affairs of the Jews to the end of the eleventh chapter; from that to the end of the twentieth
"Joh. Simon Herrenschneider, professor at Strasbourg, the author of a small but very comprehensive treatise, has penetrated still more profoundly into the mysteries of the whole. He has shown that the two cities, Rome and Jerusalem, whose fate constitutes the most considerable part of the Apocalypse, are only symbols of two religions, whose fall is foretold; but that the third, which appears at the end, viz. the heavenly Jerusalem, signifies the kingdom of the blessed. From these points of view a celebrated scholar has circumstantially discussed the Apocalypse, whose work is at present the principal book upon the subject."

"There are three cities, in this book, on account of which all these terrible preparations above, and here below, and all the commotions of the earthly and heavenly powers, take place. One of them is Sodom,—it is also called Egypt; the other is Babylon; and the third is a new Jerusalem descending from heaven.

"The whole affair of the seven angels with the seven trumpets, viii.—xii. refers to Sodom. But we soon see that this city, long since destroyed, only lends its name to denote another. For in this Sodom our Lord was crucified, xi. 8. In this Sodom is the Temple, the outer court of which is said to be abandoned to the Gentiles; thus it is the Holy City itself of which foreign nations will take possession, xi. 1. As true martyrs have perished in it, its destruction is decided, xii. 1. Josephus the Jew likewise compared Jerusalem to Sodom at the same epoch.—Bel. Jud. v. 10.

"After a long episode, in which a matron appears in the pains of childbirth, and is persecuted [pursued] by a monster, and after the description of two more monsters, which torment the adherents of this distinguished woman, xii. xiii. xiv. the destruction of Babylon also is decided in heaven, xiv. 8.

"But the seven angels with the seven vials of wrath are appointed to execute the decision, xvi. 17—19, although Babylon stood there for centuries before, deserted, and amidst but half-distinguishable remains of its magnificence. But this Babylon is to the affairs of the Romans; from thence to the end, to the flourishing state of the Christian church."—Tr.

— Eichhorn. See pp. 561, 563, 564.—Tr.
built upon seven hills, xvii. 9—18. It is an urbs septicollis; a mark of distinction renowned throughout the world, which renders it easy for us to guess the city which is peculiarly intended. But the other criterion, that it possesses the empire of the world, Βασιλεια εντ Βασιλεων της γης, perfectly assures us, xvii. 18, that this Babylon on the Euphrates is Rome on the Tiber.

"Consequently, Jerusalem and Rome are the two cities whose destruction is here seen in the spirit. These cities, however, do not exist in reality, as cities, in the poetical composition, but they are images of other ideas. Rome, or Babylon, in particular, is by the author conceived to be opposed to the everlasting gospel, xiv. 6, 7, 8. In this opposition to Christianity it could hardly signify any thing but Paganism, to represent which the capital of the heathen world is most eminently and peculiarly qualified. Hence John farther also describes it, with such phrases as are used by the Prophets, to denote false gods and their worship. It is the habitation of demons, the seducer to infidelity to the true God, to πορνεία, from the cup of whose fornications all nations and kings of the earth drink; xviii. 2, 3; xvii. 1, 2, 5.

"If the capital of the heathen world symbolizes the religion of the heathens, we shall easily ascertain what the capital of the Jews represented. What else but the Jewish religion? Therefore, heathenism and Judaism, the two prevailing religions of the ancient world, were destined to perish.

"And what should now succeed to them? A New Jerusalem,—the kingdom of the blessed after this life? xxi.—xxii. 6. This New Jerusalem is certainly so described, and such is usually considered to be its meaning. But if these cities be religions, they can be no other than these. If Rome and Jerusalem represent heathenism and Judaism, the New Sion can only be Christianity, which has an endless dominion, and blesses mankind. This the unity of the whole demands; nor would it be consistent if the idea of it was compounded of such an unequal representation of its parts, as heathenism, Judaism, and eternal blessedness.

"For what purpose should this kingdom of the blessed afterwards forsake that long-beloved abode in the higher spheres and in heaven, and descend among men, unless it were an earthly institution? xxi. 23. It could only descend upon earth as a religion, for the sake of supplying the place of the two former religions.
The previous openings of the graves, and the return of the dead to life, can be no impediment to this circumstance. A resurrection of the dead is here only one of those awfully terrible images which the prophets sometimes used to represent a total change of things, the revival of the national state, and of the religious constitution of the Jews; Ezek. xxxvii.; Isaiah xxvi. 19.

And if a last judgment be also connected with it, we well know that such also is figuratively convoked by the prophets, for the purpose also of executing the punishment of those who have oppressed and ill-treated the people of God, or for the purpose of expressing Jehovah's designs of introducing a new epoch of glory for his religion and his people, Joel iii. 2; Zephaniah iii. 8. This being admitted, the whole passage of the Seven Seals is only an introduction to the three principal descriptions—to the dissolution of Judaism, to the abolition of heathenism, and the occupation of the dominion of the world by the doctrines of Jesus, v.—vii. 2. For, a prophecy, according to the antient prophethical language, is a sealed book, Isaiah xxxix. 11; of which the mysteries can only be developed by the Lamb, who is on the throne of God, the Co-Regent with Jehovah, in whose hands are the events. Terrible plagues, famine, pestilence, war, and an entire revolution of states, are impending, from which those however are exempted who belong to the chosen of the Lamb.

But the Epistles, which are preludes to the whole as far as chap. iv., are dedications, or addresses to those communities which were particularly connected with the author in the district of his ministry.

Then the episode, xii. xiii., which follows the judicial punishment of Jerusalem; the episode relating to that noble woman who struggles in the agonies of labour, and who is pursued by the dragon (Daniel's ancient metaphor of idolatry), exhibits to us Judaism, which is still in the act of bringing forth Christianity, as all the circumstances and the individual traits in the description prove. But the other monsters, which ascend from land and sea, and which are in the service of the dragon, signify, according to very recognizable criteria, the Roman land and sea forces, which protect the dominion of Paganism, xiii. 1—xiv. 6.

Opposed to this, after the punishment is executed on Rome,
xvii. 1—xviii., another woman appears on a scarlet beast. The former woman, after her new-born child had been taken up to the throne of God, henceforth repaired to the deserts and pathless regions, which is an excellent metaphor of wandering Judaism; but the fate of the latter woman is not so mild. The destruction is soon after celebrated in jubilees and triumphal songs. That this [woman] typifies idolatry, as the former did the Jewish religion, is evident from the representation.

"It is not necessary to observe, that very many individual delineations and images in this great work, are by no means significant. Many are merely applied to animate the whole, or are collected, for the sake of adornment, from the prophets and sacred books; for no one of any judgment in these things will deny the execution to be uncommonly rich, and very splendid for an Occidental. The description of the punishment by hail, pestilence, rivers which are turned into blood, by insects and vermin, is an imitation of the Egyptian plagues, without requiring or allowing here a minute or historical explanation. The darkening of the sun, of the moon, the falling stars, are common poetical images of the prophets, used to express to the senses great misfortunes of states, or the fall of illustrious personages by great and horrible phenomena. The author lavishly scattered into his book the most sublime and most effective images and passages of the Prophets, for the sake of imparting to it an oriental splendour, which outstrips all the Arabian authors.

"The numbers, likewise, are seldom to be accepted arithmetically, where there are not particular grounds for so accepting them. Seven seals, seven angels, seven trumpets, and seven vials of wrath,—seven thunders—who does not here observe that it is the prophetical and sacred number, and serves merely the purpose of embellishment and decoration? So likewise the round numbers, and times, and half times, neither admit of a chronological nor numerical calculation, but are, for the most part, indeterminate periods and numbers.

"There are in the whole but two historical events which are even thus capable of an historical interpretation. Exclusive of the dominion of Christianity, with which he closes his visions, the destruction of Jerusalem is one fact; therefore it is to be expected, from the genius of the poet, that he would select for his representation, as far as it was practicable, circumstances
founded on fact, instead of those which are poetical and fictitious. In this respect we are also referred to the historical exposition, as far as it may be effected without violence, and as far as history voluntarily offers its assistance.

"Parallel to this is the destruction of Rome. It certainly had not taken place, but was admitted by the author for the sake of obtaining a type and an antitype. But notwithstanding this, he saw the then Empress of the nations in a peculiar condition in which she was at that time only, which supplied him with sufficient facts to describe a State which was visibly hastening towards its decline, and the fall of its greatness. Here, also, was he obliged, in order to render his picture recognizable and true, to take pains in selecting traits from the actual state of the world; thus his likeness became striking, and passed from the circle of ideal imagery over to that of natural resemblance. But in this, as in the former case, all minutiae, all that was indistinct or forced, would necessarily be avoided.

"Very evident as it is from the preceding observations, that this writing has a well-digested plan, and an artificial arrangement of its parts; yet even all this is insufficient to give us an idea of it, unless we peruse it part by part, and examine the connection of each part with the whole; for then only shall we be pleasingly convinced of the beautiful symmetry of its design, and its fine organization.

"Of late some have been inclined, in consequence of its arrangement and structure, to reckon it among the dramatic compositions. This assertion might be embellished by the circumstance of fragments of a Jewish tragedian, named Ezekiel, who must have lived about this time, being extant in Clemens and Eusebius (IIαρακ. Elαγ.) Or they might remark, that John wrote more immediately for Ionian and Asiatic cities, in which the Drama had been for ages past known and admired. However, all this could only serve to explain the fact, if John had really chosen a dramatic form for his composition. But a composition which is merely narrative can never belong to the dramatic species; and if it were possible or necessary that the poetical productions of all countries and nations should always be brought under one class of Aristotle, or distributed according to Greek models, this composition, which is only descriptive, should rather be included under the Epos. Yet, though it be rather
deficient in the principal qualities of the drama, it cannot indeed be denied, that this hypothesis, according to which its proposer* has analysed the whole, is uncommonly useful for an easier survey, and for assistance to the memory."]—Tr.

§ 320. Besides the works already cited, there might be many other books named, in which rare or valuable treatises on difficult passages in the New Testament are examined and explained at length. But this would occasion too great an extension of the work. I shall content myself therefore with remarking, that future interpreters may glean an abundance of good hermeneutical observations from the *Opuscula* of the justly celebrated divines and biblical scholars, Ernesti, Teller, and Morus, and especially from the bibliographical collections of Noesselt and Storr, and may find in them the best models for the interpretation of the New Testament.

* Viz. Eichhorn. The following are his dramatic divisions of this poem:

1. The Title (chap. i. 1—3.)
2. The Prologue (i. 4—iii. 22.)
3. The Drama (iv. 1—xxii. 5.)
   Act 1. The Capture of Jerusalem, or the Triumph of Christianity over Judaism (vii. 6—xii. 17.)
   Act 2. The Capture of Rome, or the Triumph of Christianity over Paganism (xii. 18—xx. 10.)
   Act 3. The New Jerusalem descends from Heaven, or the Felicity which is to endure for ever (xx. 11—xxii. 5.)
4. The Epilogue (xxii. 6—21.)
   (1.) Of the Angel (xxii. 6.)
   (2.) Of Jesus (xxii. 7—16.)
   (3.) Of John (xxii. 16—20.)

The Apostolical Benediction (xxii. 21.)
In the Programs also of such men, which have appeared from time to time, and which are to be met with in no compilation, there often lies concealed a rich treasure of scriptural interpretations. Of such collections of antient and modern tracts, those of Ikenius, the Bibliotheca Bremensis, and the Commentationes Theologicæ of Velthusen, Kuinoel, and Ruperti, may be reckoned among the best. More particular notices of such works will be found in Noesselt’s Anweisung yur Kenntnis der besten allgemeine Bücher in allen Theilen der Theologie, § 167—171. [See p. 135, supra.]

I shall conclude with naming some of the best Scholia and short illustrations extending over the entire New Testament, among which Rosenmüller's are deservedly acknowledged to be, beyond controversy, the most solid, copious, and useful. [See Appendix.]

Observation.—A good use may be often made of modern translations of the New Testament for discovering the sense of many difficult passages, as, in the business of interpretation, so much depends on discovering the true German phrase which expresses the sense and force of the original Greek. To these especially belong Michaelis, and Bahrdt's first edition of his translation of the New Testament; Stolz's New Testament: perhaps also some advantage may be derived from my own work, which is to be had at the Biblical Repository in this place. [The author refers to his Grossere Erbauungs Buch, or Greater Edification Book, 17 vols. 8vo., which is afterwards described by Dr. Heringa as the best work upon the subject, and as being sold, through Dr. Seiler's generosity, at a very low price, at the Biblical Repository of Tubingen.]—Tr.