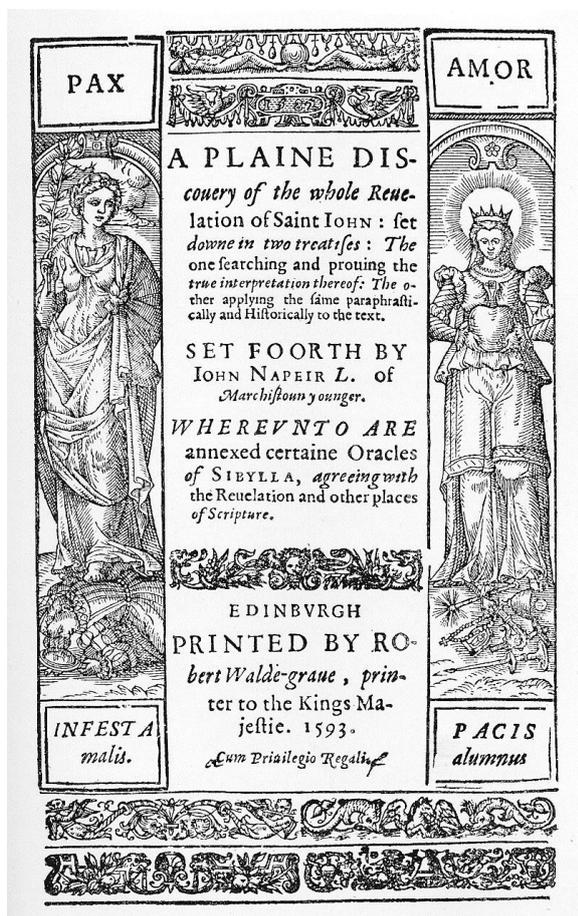


John Napier's *Plaine Discovery of the whole Revelation of Saint John*

Werner H. Rudowski

Introduction

Not the *Mirifici Logrithmorum Canonis descriptio* and not his *Rabdologia*: John Napier himself regarded his interpretation of St. John's Revelation as his most important work. Originally he had planned to publish the book in Latin, but due to the turbulent times he decided to write it in English, so that it could be read by most people. The first edition appeared 1593 in Edinburgh. Figure 1 shows the title page. Up to 1645 a total of five English editions were printed. Also on the continent, his book received great attention: There were nine French editions (between 1601 and 1607), three Dutch (1600 to 1607) and four in German (1611 to 1627). But not all of them were complete translations. The German translation by Leonem de Dromna *Entdeckung aller Geheimnüssen in der Apocalypsi der Offenbarung S. Johannis....* of 1611 only contained the 36 propositions. The second part with 22 chapters was completely omitted, as well as dedication, preface and other sections. On the other hand an edition of 1615 by Pastor Johannes Woltherus was amended with comments and refutations.



The Situation in Scotland and England at the End of the 16th Century

At Napier's time England and Scotland were independent kingdoms. In England Elizabeth I reigned from 1558 to 1603, while in Scotland after the death of King James V his only survived, legitimate child Mary Stuart – Mary Queen of Scots – became Queen regnant of Scotland only a few days after her birth. Therefore Scotland was ruled by regents until she became an adult. When Mary was forced to abdicate her son James VI became King regnant.

After the death of Elizabeth I, James, who had converted to Protestantism, also became – as James I – King of England and Ireland. But Scotland and England were still independent kingdoms.

The reign of Elizabeth I is known as the *Golden Age* in English history, while Scotland was not so wealthy. However, both countries suffered under the conflict between Roman Catholics and Protestants. In the eyes of Roman Catholics Elizabeth was not a legitimate queen. There were many plots and conspiracies. Spain, France and the Pope in Rome tried to kill her and to replace the Protestant Elizabeth by the Roman Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots and to restore the Catholic Church in England.

Figure 1: Title page of Napier's "Plane Discovery ..."

But the Protestant Reformation became more accepted especially after the Spanish Armada had been defeated in 1588 when Spain had tried to invade England (and Scotland).

Scotland, too, was torn between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Protestantism had been officially established by the Scottish Parliament in 1560. But Roman Catholics were also supported by French troops, invited by Mary of Guise, mother of Mary, Queen of Scots. Supporters of the imprisoned Mary were known as *Queen's Men*, while those sided with the child-king James VI were called *King's Men*. Also English troops intervened in the Scottish civil war.

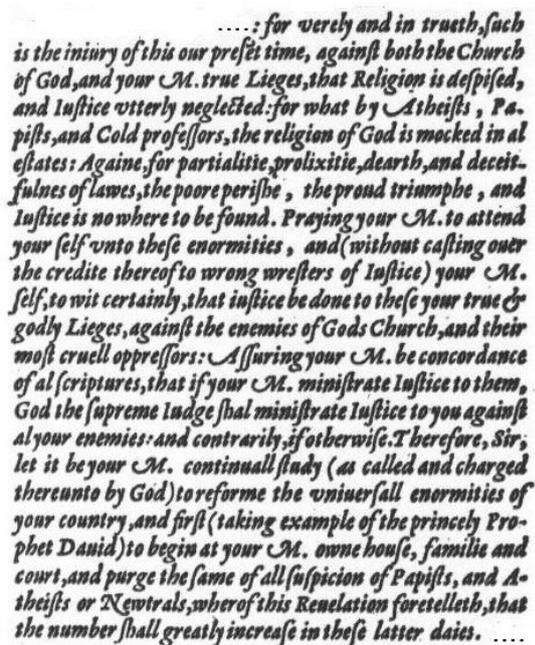
Besides the internal struggle between Roman Catholics and Protestants, both England and Scotland feared another Spanish attack and invasion, even after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

John Napier a theological Fighter

In those times of great anxiety and turmoil the young John in 1563 at the age of 13 became student at St. Andrew's University northeast of Edinburgh at Scotland's east coast. John same as his father had already forsaken his Roman Catholic upbringing and had become Protestant. At the university he had hot debates especially with his Roman Catholic friends. Here he was inspired already to study the Apocalypse.

John's uncle Adam Bothwell, Bishop of Orkney, had strongly advised John's father to send him to France or Flanders for further studies. 14 years old John started a dangerous, risky and uncertain voyage for about three years. We do not know where he stayed and what he studied. But he came back with an excellent knowledge, particularly of Hellenistic Greek, the Greek of the bible.

Later, John became member of his parish church and was made an elder there. In 1588 the Presbytery of Edinburgh appointed him Commissioner of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This was the year of the Spanish Armada, whose purpose was to conquer England and Scotland. However, the fear for another attempt of the Spanish was still great.



.....: for verely and in truth, ſuch
is the iniury of this our preſent time, againſt both the Church
of God, and your M. true Lieges, that Religion is deſpiſed,
and Juſtice witerly neglected: for what by Atheiſts, Pa-
piſts, and Cold professors, the religion of God is mocked in all
eſtates: Again, for partialitie, prolixitie, dearth, and deceit-
fulnes of lawes, the poore periſhe, the proud triumphe, and
Juſtice is nowhere to be found. Praying your M. to attend
your ſelf unto theſe enormities, and (without caſting over
the credite thereof to wrong wreſtlers of Juſtice) your M.
ſelf, to wit certainly, that juſtice be done to theſe your true &
godly Lieges, againſt the enemies of Gods Church, and their
moſt cruell oppreſſors: Aſſuring your M. be concordance
of all ſcriptures, that if your M. miniſtrate Juſtice to them,
God the ſupreme Iudge ſhal miniſtrate Juſtice to you againſt
all your enemies: and contrarily, if otherwiſe. Therefore, Sir,
let it be your M. continuall ſtudy (as called and charged
thereunto by God) to reforme the wniuerſall enormities of
your country, and firſt (taking example of the princely Pro-
phet Dauid) to begin at your M. owne houſe, familie and
court, and purge the ſame of all ſuſpicion of Papiſts, and A-
theiſts or Neutrals, wherof this Renelation foretelleth, that
the number ſhall greatly increaſe in theſe latter daies.

Figure 2: Part of Napier's letter to the King

sent as a preface to his *PLAINE DISCOVERY...* in *THE EPISLE DEDICATORIE "TO THE RIGHT EXCELLENT; HIGH AND MIGHTIE PRINCE, JAMES THE SIXT; KING OF THE SCOTS"*. He did not mince his words, as can be seen from the sections of the epistle (Figure 2).

Who was the Author of the Book of Revelation?

Most probably the author is not the apostle John. He identifies himself in Chapter 1, verse 9 as John of Pathmos, (now Patmos) an island in the Aegean near Ephesus. It is assumed that he was a traveling preacher. On Pathmos he was instructed by an angel to write down the contents of a vision (Figure 3). It is believed that it was written around the year AD 95 or around AD 70. Napier explained the bible verse in *the Notes, Reasons, and Amplifications* with the index "h" further: *Pathmos is one of the yles, that are called "Sporades" or "Cyclades", lying in Mare Aegeo, by East the coast of Asia minor. Herein hid S. John himself from the great tyrannie and persecution of Domitian, where he abode until Domitian died, and that year Anno Christi 97. or 99. hee wrote this booke in that yle as appeareth by Irenaus and Eusebius.*

What is written in the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse?



Figure 3¹: Handing over the Revelation

The Revelation of Saint John is the last part of the Christian New Testament, containing 22 chapters. At the beginning is said, that Jesus Christ had sent the revelation, given to him by God, through his angel to his servant John, to show his servants what will happen in the near future (Figure 3). John described in mystery visions how he received the revelation. Chapters 2 and 3 are letters to the seven churches (Christian communities) in Asia Minor, which were persecuted in the Roman Empire. It is supposed that the revelation is a kind of “underground literature”, where names and places are encoded. The *Whore of Babylon* for example means the Roman Empire and “666” stands for a name.

The second part deals with the *Seven Seals*, the next with the *Seven Trumpets*, others with the *Seven Visions*, the *Seven Plagues*, the *Fall of Babylon* etc.

When first reading the revelation one could have the feeling the author might have had terrible nightmares. In the following only a few examples are given. They appear later again in Napier’s *Plaine Discovery*.



Figure 4: Durer’s four horsemen

Chapter 6/1-8 describes the opening of the first six of the seven seals and the four horses (white, red, black and pale). Figure 4 (left) shows Albrecht Dürer’s interpretation of the four apocalyptic horsemen.

Chapter 8/1-6: Opening of the seventh seal (Figures 5 & 6, next page) and appearance of the first angles with trumpets followed by plagues. This chapter ends with the threefold woe to the inhabitants of the earth.

Chapter 9/1-12: The fifth angel trumpets the first woe. Figures 7 & 8 (next page) illustrate the first three verses of that chapter.

In the following the first plague is described drastically, and in the second part of this chapter the second woe is depicted also very horribly.

¹ Figures 3, 6, and 8 to 10 are taken from the *Bamberger Apokalypse*, a Latin book containing 57 miniatures, and now a UNESCO World Heritage item

CHAPTER 8.

AND when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

7 The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;



Figure 6

Figure 5

CHAPTER 9.

AND the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.



Figure 8

Figure 7

Chapter 13/18: "Here is wisdom: Let him that hath wit, count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man, and this number is six hundred, three score and six".

CHAPTER 13.
18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

Figure 9



Figure 10

There are many very different interpretations of the number “666”; John Napier’s idea is given later.

Chapter 18 tells the fall of Babylon as shown in Figure 11. The last three chapters 19 to 22 of the revelation describe the end of the evils, the banishment of Satan for a thousand years and finally the New Jerusalem (Figure 12).



Figure 11



Figure 12

The previous examples are only fragments of the Revelation of St. John. For those readers more interested in this theme, it is worth while reading the Holy Bible and to use “Google”. 49 miniatures of the *Bamberger Apokalypse* can also be found there (see **Literature**).

Napier’s *Plaine Discovery of the whole Revelation of Saint John*

John Napier’s – in his own opinion – most important book in total consists of 293 pages, divided as follows:

- *Epistle Dedicatorie* to King James VI (5 pages)
- *To the Godly and Christian Reader* (6 pages)
- A Table of Conclusions introductive to the Revelation, and proved in the first Treatise (1 page)
- The First and Introductory Treatise ... (36 Propositions) (68 pages)
- Conclusion with Table (2 pages)
- The Second and Principal Treatise (22 chapters) (199 pages)
- To the misliking Reader whosoever (3 pages)
- Hereafter Followeth Certaine Notable Prophetics ... (8 pages)

In the dedication to the king he strongly asked for support for his fight against atheists and Papists. And *To the Godly and Christian Reader* he explained all his thoughts and why he wrote this book. His propositions and conclusions are summarized in the table at the beginning.

During the 16th and 17th centuries many people had thought about the *Last Judgement* and the Antichrist. From his days at St. Andrews John Napier had asked himself the question: *To what effect were the Prophecies of Daniel and of the Revelation given to the Church of God, and so many dates of years and circumstances of time foreshewing the latter day contained the reintill, if God had appointed the same never to be known or understood before that day come?* He used for his propositions and conclusions besides the Revelation also other bible texts, particularly the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel. Napier’s main goal was to identify that The Pope is the Antichrist! As a mathematician Napier tried to bring all the relevant dates given in the bible into a model (See Table 1 later) which would confirm his intention.

The First and Introductory Treatise – or the 36 Propositions

Napier explained shortly the searching of the true meaning of the Revelation and how the whole grounds thereof were brought to light. In the propositions he always noted the sources in the bible.

In the first proposition and also in the others he explained the meaning of prophetic dates of days, weeks, months etc. Most important are:

- 1 day = 1 year (360 days)
- 1 week = 7 years
- 1 month = 30 years
- 3 ½ great days = 3 ½ years (Revelations 13/5,6) “...and power was given to him to continue forty and two months.”²
 - = 42 months
 - = 1260 days = 1260 years
- 6 weekdays = 6000 years, during this time mankind had to suffer all the efforts, troubles and grief of this world. After 6000 years the world will be destroyed by fire.
- 1 day = 1000 years (The second Epistle of St Paul to Peter 3/8: “*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand yeas as one day*”
- 70 weeks = 490 days = 490 years = 1 great jubilee (Daniel 9/24): “*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, ...*”
 - 245 years = one half great jubilee.
 - Every 245 years there are great historical changes.

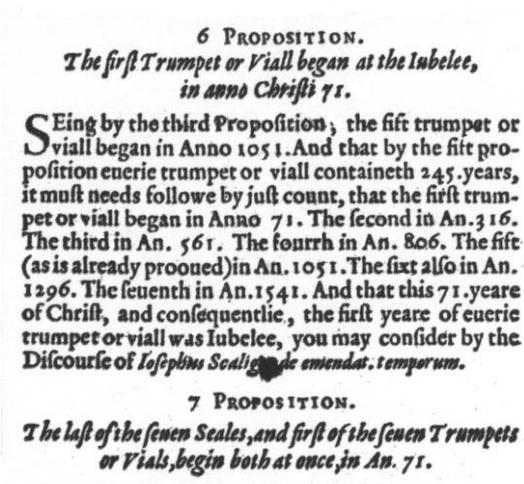
² Previous scans of biblical quotations (Figs 5, 7 and 9) as well as this and subsequent biblical quotations are all taken from the 1611 King James Bible [1].

There are many more such definitions, for example:

- 1290: The Empire of the Antichrist falls after 1290 years (Daniel 12/11): “*And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.*”
- 1335: The Day of Judgement will be 1335 years after the Roman emperor Julian II³ in 365 AD had been ordered to persecute Christians (Daniel 12/12) : “*Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days*”.

In the second proposition Napier had *proved* that the seven trumpets and the seven vials are all the same. The third proposition explained that *the star and the Locusts of the fifth trumpet are not the great Antichrist and his Cleargie, but the Dominator of the Turkes and his armie, who began their dominion, in anno Christ 1051.* Napier stated in the fourth proposition that *the kings of the East, or four Angels, specified in the sixth trumpet ... are the four nations Mahometanes beyond and about Euphrates, who began their empire by Ottoman, in the year of Christ, 1296, or thereabout.*

It would take far too long here to describe all the 36 propositions. Only a few shall be mentioned as follows.



The sixth proposition and the summary of the seventh are shown in figure 13. The Day of Judgment will be completed by the last four thundering angels. This is the content of the 13th proposition. And the following says: *The day of Gods judgement appears to fall betwixt the year of Christ 1688 and 1700.* Napier proved this on six pages.

In the following propositions John Napier proved the meaning of other persons, beasts etc. in the Apocalypse, like the 24 Elder (Prop. 17 & 18), the four beasts (Prop. 19), the New Jerusalem (Prop. 20), the woman with the sun (Prop. 22), Babylon stands for Rome (Prop. 23) or the Pope is the only Antichrist (Prop. 26). The number 666 (Revelations 13/18, Figure 9) according to Proposition 29 stands for the Roman or Latin Empire in general which is named after King Latinus, in Greek *λατῆίνος*.

Figure 13: Proposition 6

Each of the Greek letters represents a number as shown in the Greek alphabetical system of numbers (Figure 14). Adding these numbers together, the sum will be 666:

$$30 + 1 + 300 + 5 + 10 + 50 + 70 + 200 = 666$$

UNITS				TENS				HUNDREDS			
A	α	Alpha	1	I	ι	Iota	10	P	ρ	Rho	100
B	β	Beta	2	K	κ	Kappa	20	Σ	σ	Sigma	200
Γ	γ	Gamma	3	Λ	λ	Lambda	30	T	τ	Tau	300
Δ	δ	Delta	4	M	μ	My	40	Y	υ	Ypsilon	400
E	ε	Epsilon	5	N	ν	Ny	50	Φ	φ	Phi	500
Γ	ς	Digamma	6	Ξ	ξ	Xi	60	X	χ	Chi	600
Z	ζ	Zeta	7	O	ο	Omikron	70	Ψ	ψ	Psi	700
H	η	Eta	8	Π	π	Pi	80	Ω	ω	Omega	800
Θ	θ	Theta	9	Ϛ	ϛ	Koppa	90	Ϟ	ϟ	San	900

Figure 14

³ *Editors Note:* Napier is quite definite in quoting Julian as the Emperor in question, however he had died in 363 AD and it was Valentinian on the throne in 365 AD, an example of Napier's slightly cavalier approach to dates.

The strange names in the Apocalypse Gog and Magog according to Napier’s interpretation represent the Pope and the Turks and Mohammedans (Prop. 32 & 33).

This first and introductory treatise containing Napier’s 36 propositions ends with a conclusion and *A Table Definitive and Divisive of the whole Revelation*. A clearer abstract is given later in tabular form, Napier’s “Calendar of the Revelation” (Table 1).

THE SECOND AND PRINCIPAL TREATISE

wherein (by the former grounds) the whole Apocalyps or Revelation of S. John, is paraphrasticallie expounded, historicallie applied, and temporallie dated, with notes on every difficultie, and arguments on each other.

With these words John Napier begins the second and most extensive part of his book. It contains 22 chapters, corresponding to the 22 chapters in the Revelation. The inside columns repeat the text of the bible, the outer columns Napier’s *Paraphrase*. In this he often used indices, which he explained in the *Notes, Reasons, and Amplifications* at the end of each chapter. For many chapters Napier added a third column *Historical application*. As an example a part of page 122 is shown in figure 15 and additionally the explanation of the relevant indices (Figure 16). Described are here the opening of the seventh seal and the seven trumpets given to the seven angels. Historically, according to Napier, the seven ages of 245 years each start in the jubilee year AD 71 and will continue until the worlds end in 1786.

In chapter 9 of the revelation the fifth angel announces the first woe: the locusts (see previously). Napier explains the locusts as the Turks, the new Mohammedans, which will oppress all Christian lands. Napier proved, confirmed and embellished this in the *Notes, Reasons, and Amplifications*.

The mysterious number “666” at the end of chapter 13 is a number of a man, meaning the ten-horned beast, the Roman or Latin Empire in general and not the Antichrist - the Pope - only.

In chapter 18 the fall of Babylon is described, but Napier concluded that Babylon means Rome and that afterwards no inhabitant will dwell there again (Figures 17 & 18). He continued to explain on many pages his interpretation of chapters 19 and 20 in the Revelation. Napier: *But (God willing) at length shall these Papistical and Mohammedan kingdoms, both enemies to God, be destroyed by the power & force of Gods word. And Sathan, that great deceiver of the world shall be cast into hell fire eternallie, wher also all the godless Roman and Mahometicki Emperours, and other wicked Princes, together with al the false Prophets, Papists, Mohammedans, & others, shall terriblie bee tormented day and night for evermore. After the Last Judgement (chapter 20) the renewing of the heaven and earth, described in chapter 21, means that all heavenly motions and earthly vicissitudes must have an ende. The destruction of the world shall be with fire, and the sea shall be utterly dried up, which means that all tumultuous troubles, shall cease at that day forever. This Jerusalem, called New Jerusalem and the Spouse of the Lamb, must therefore be the renewed Church (see also figure 11).*

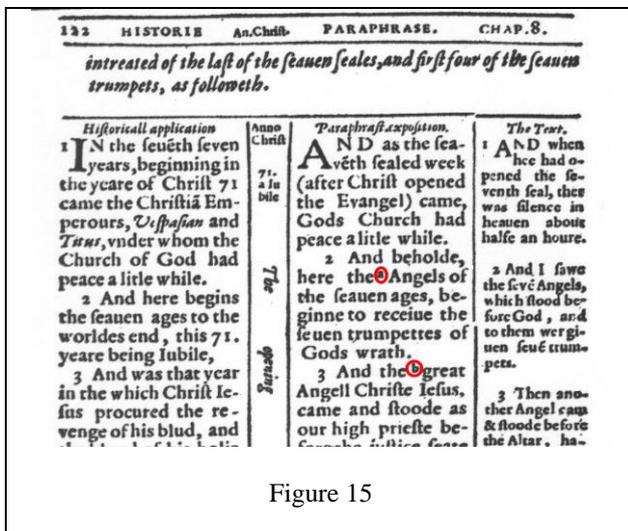


Figure 15

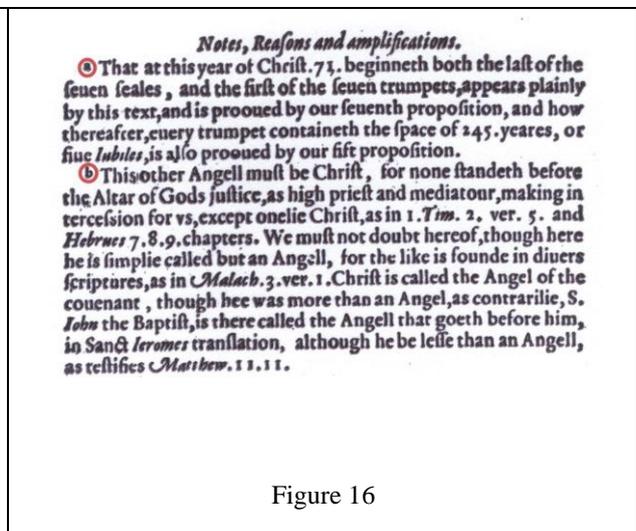


Figure 16

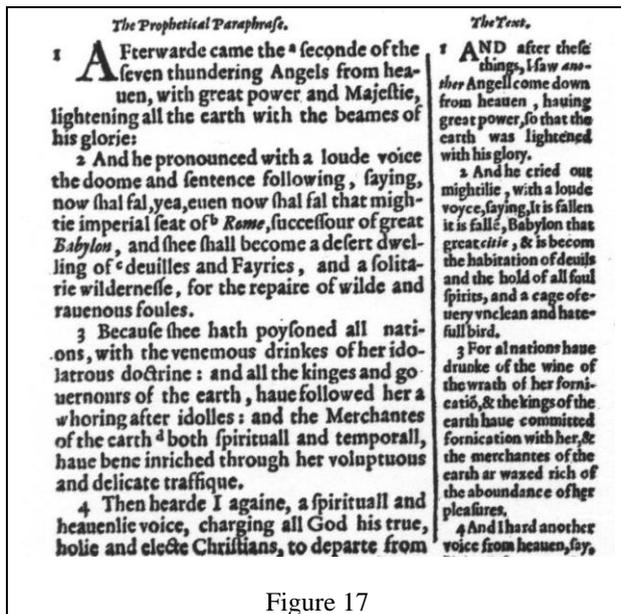


Figure 17

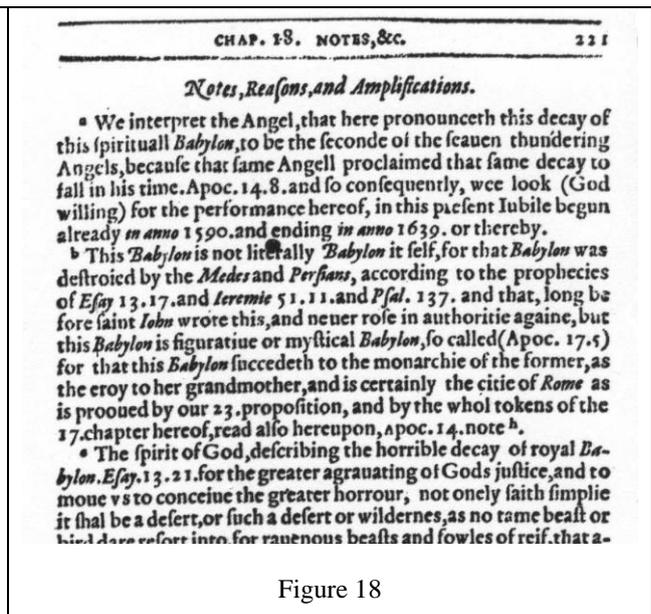


Figure 18

Final remarks

The world did not end in 1686 nor in 1700 at the latest as John Napier forecast. Many of his statements and propositions nowadays could not be accepted by everyone. But as explained in the first paragraphs one has to consider the difficult circumstances in Scotland at Napier's time. Most of his lifetime he had thought about the intention of the revelation and other prophetic books in the bible. He had learnt Hellenistic Greek to better understand what is said in the bible and he did not want to be misled by a translation.

Everywhere in his *Plaine Discovery*... one is impressed by Napier's universal knowledge. It can be assumed that during his three years on the continent he had studied at the best universities. Most probably he also had collected as many books as possible and had studied them home in Scotland. However, we do not know where and what he had studied. Unfortunately, nearly nothing of John Napier's original manuscripts, books, relics and personal belongings have survived. A large collection was still in existence at the end of the 17th century in the care of Colonel Milliken Napier, a direct descendant. The Colonel was called to active duty and deposited for safekeeping all of John Napier's relics in a room of a country house he owned in Renfrewshire. While he was out of the country, the house burnt to the ground, and most of the physical links to John Napier were destroyed.

In 1914, three hundred years after John Napier's *Mirifici Logarithmorum Canonis Descriptio* was published there was a great NAPIER TERCENTENARY CELEBRATION AND CONGRESS held in Edinburgh between July 24th and 27th. Universities, Technical Colleges and Museums of all over the world had sent delegates. Also many private persons attended the meeting with receptions, readings and discussions of papers bearing directly on Napier's work. On the afternoon of Sunday a Memorial Service was held in St. Giles Cathedral.

In addition to the congress the committee had gathered a huge exhibition: Napier's Relics, Napier's Bones, Logarithmic Tables, Slide Rules, Abaci, Calculating Machines, Books, Portraits and Medals and other Mathematical Instruments.

A Handbook, edited by E.M. Horsburgh of the University of Edinburgh was given to the participants of the congress followed by a hardcover edition with the title *Modern Instruments and Methods of Calculation*. One year later, in 1915, a 450 page NAPIER TERCENTENARY MEMORIAL VOLUME, edited by Cargill Gilston Knott with a great number of papers was published.

This year, 400 years after the *Mirifici Logarithmorum*, logarithms and slide rules are nearly forgotten. There is not a great celebration as 1914, only a few friends of logarithms and slide rules still honour John Napier's work.

<i>Symbols in the Revelation</i>	<i>Chronological Table</i>		<i>Napier's Interpretation</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
	<i>AD</i>	<i>Duration</i>		
7 Seals		6 x 7 years		
1 st Seal	29		Baptism of Christ	
7 th Seal = 1 st Trumpet	71		<i>Last of the seven Seales, and the first trumpet or Vial begin both in once, in An 71. (7th Proposition)</i> Destruction of Jerusalem	70 AD by Titus
		245 years	Every 245 years a new trumpet begins, also great historical changes. Every 49 years each trumpet sounded.	
2 nd Trumpet	316		<i>Constantine</i> transported the Imperial Seat from <i>Rome</i> to <i>Byzantium</i> ; <i>Pope Sylvester I</i> began the Popistical kingdom, which should last 1260 years	officially in 395
3 rd Trumpet	561	245 years	<i>Totila</i> , king of Goths burned <i>Rome</i> and usurped the kingdom thereof	Totila died 552
4 th Trumpet	806	245 years	<i>Charlemagne</i> received the new Empire of Germanes and Romanes	800: Coronation of Charlemagne
5 th Trumpet	1051	245 years	<i>Zadok</i> began the first dominion of the <i>Turkes</i>	
6 th Trumpet	1296	245 years	<i>Ottoman</i> began the first Empire of the four nations <i>Mahometanes (Turks, Tartarians, Saracens, and Arabians)</i>	1299: Osman I
7 th Trumpet 1 st Angel	1541	245 years	<i>The first of the seven thundering Angells, and the seventh and last trumpet or vial begin all at once in An. 1541</i>	
		49 years	<i>Every of the first three Angells proceede of Gods great harvest (latter judgement), to continue 49 years Christ preached his everlasting Evangell to the year of God, 1590</i>	
2 nd Angel	1590	49 years	<i>Beginneth the second thundering Angell to continue proclaiming the final decay and fall of Babylon to the year 1639</i>	Babylon= Rome
3 rd Angel	1639	49 years	<i>Third thundering Angell, and he continueth exhorting and threatning these of the last dregs of the Antichrist to repentance, to the year of Christ, 1688</i>	
4 th - 7 th Angel	1688		<i>Fourth thundering Angel, even Christ himself enters actually unto the great harvest, to gather up his elect, at the warning of the fifth Angell, even Gods holy spirit. The sixth Angel, executer of Gods fierie and fierie wwrath is admonished and warned by the seventh angel comander thereof, to cut down and tread out the vines of the earth, in the winepresse of Gods wrath: By these four Angells all the great day of Gods harvest, and latter judgement is also accomplished.</i>	
			<i>The day of Gods judgement appears to fall betwixt the yeares of Christ, 1688 and 1700.</i>	Only God knows day and hour.
	1786	2 x 49 years	End of 7th Trumpet: Seventh age shall continue until 1786 at the latest, for the Elects sake the time shall be shortened	

Table 1

Literature

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2. John Napier: A Plaine Discovery of the whole Revelation of Saint John: set downe in two treatises; Edinburgh, 1593
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Editors Note

Napier's “*Plaine Discovery....*” is available as an e-Book, see <http://tinyurl.com/o67jr5k> which will give you a .pdf version