

**The Revelation
of
St John the Divine**

Commentaries and Essays
on the Book of the Revelation

Geoffrey C. Bingham

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of
St John the Divine

COMMENTARY AND ESSAYS
ON THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

by

Geoffrey C. Bingham

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Author's Preface

THE Book of the Revelation has always held an appeal for me. I was introduced to it by way of *The Scofield Reference Bible* in my mid-teens, and was grateful for the explanation that that Bible gave. Naïvely I considered the notes to be as inspired as the text! I was shocked when a theological student told me it was 'all hog-wash', especially as much of my reading had been in such books as *In the Twinkling of an Eye* by Sidney Watson, whose eschatological novels were—to say the least—fascinating. I gradually became aware of the various views of prophecy—such as pre-millennial, post-millennial and amillennial—and in my simple way I tested them all, fascinated no end by their schemata, being sure one day that such-and-such a view was the authentic one, and the next coming to despair about them all. One of the problems of these systems is that they start, for most of us, as viable presuppositions, but then we find we cannot fit all the biblical data into any one of them. A synthesis of these views is impossible, by nature of the case. This is not to say, of course, that each view does not hold valuable elements: they do, but it seems best to me to approach eschatology—and in particular the Book of the Revelation—without these schematic presuppositions. It has been said that the Revelation has 404 verses and 518 references from the Old Testament, none of which is explicitly quoted. This should tell us something. It should tell us we need to be soaked in the thinking of both Testaments and allow that thinking to determine what we find in the Revelation. Holding dogmatically to one prophetic system of interpretation may blind our mind to much of the richness of thought and revelation in the Book.

Over the years I have expounded the Revelation quite a number of times and to variant audiences, and have noticed the intense interest that students of this prophecy bring to its study. Some, of course, are simply curious. They see it as a coded document, and are searching for the key. Whilst it cannot be denied there are elements of coding, they are quite minor. I have been fascinated by the written commentaries available, and none of them is without a certain value. Two books which have afforded particular pleasure are Austin Farrer's *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* and Thomas Torrance's *The Apocalypse Today*.† Their essay form makes for easy, useful and evocative reading. More detailed older commentaries such as those by H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*‡ and I. T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of St. John*§, are invaluable. As our Bibliography shows, there are many commentaries available today. Few of them seem to avoid taking up a certain prophetic system, and this presents its own problem. For this reason it seems to me that one of the best commentaries—though not greatly detailed—is Leon Morris's *The Revelation of St. John* in the Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series.||

The format of this present Commentary is somewhat different from the traditional commentaries, in that I have tried to communicate the spirit and thrust of the whole Book by means of a series of Essays. I scarcely know what to recommend, i.e. whether readers should scan the Essays before they commence the text and its verse-by-verse Commentary, or read the Commentary first and then the Essays. Probably both operations would be helpful, so that no matter where the reader commences, he can go backwards and forwards and find the material helpful. I believe this Book of the Bible—more than most others—needs constant reading. One needs to live in its ethos, its atmosphere. One needs—so to speak—to relax into its living material and feel the life of the prophecy. Certainly it is essential that we keep knowing the mind of God through it. Whilst we seem to have a drive to decode what we think is coded, and interpret what we think requires interpretation, the best way to go is to let it soak into us. The Book is apocalyptic, but it is not fantasy. It

* Oxford University Press, 1964.

† James Clarke, 1960.

‡ Macmillan, 1907.

§ Macmillan, 1919; Baker Book House, 1979.

||Tyndale Press. 1969.

will bring its own message through its own symbols. It is not a Book to intrigue us, nor has it been written for the curiously minded. It is a prophecy which is intended to speak to us, and go on speaking, and help us to have the way of life it espouses.

I trust the treatment given in this Book of the great prophecy of John the Divine will be helpful in bringing us to see and know Him Who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One Who was, and is, and is to come.

Geoffrey Bingham

Introduction

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHECY

THE New Testament Gospels have taken a natural form, in that they were intended to tell readers the events of the incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of the man Jesus, who—it was claimed—was both Son of Man and Son of God. The Gospels were the Good News of what God had done in and through Jesus Christ, and as such the documents were alive, confronting the readers, whilst offering them eternal life through their subject, Jesus. It was almost inevitable they would take the form they did, especially given their writers.

The Book of the Acts—Luke would say—was the continuation of ‘all that Jesus began both to do and teach’ as recorded in his—Luke’s—Gospel. Acts, then, has been variously called ‘the Acts of Jesus’, meaning ‘the continuing Acts of Jesus’; ‘the Acts of the Apostles’, meaning they were the chief figures who acted; and ‘the Acts of the Holy Spirit’, meaning the Third Person of the Trinity was the prime mover in the events of Acts. It could also be called ‘the Acts of the church of Jesus Christ’, for that was the case.

The Epistles of the New Testament writers—Paul, James, Peter, John, Jude, and the unknown author of Hebrews—also almost inevitably took their form from the fact that they were Letters written out of the apostolic truth, and designed for special readers.

Different from the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles is the format and way of writing of John the Seer—sometimes called ‘the Divine’. His Book is called ‘The Apocalypse’, i.e. ‘The Revelation’, meaning that it is an unveiling. The principle of *apocalypsis* we will discuss later, but here it is sufficient to note that the nature of the Book determines its differences from the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles. There are apocalyptic passages in the Gospels and in some Epistles, and quotes from Old Testament apocalyptic passages in Acts and some of the Epistles.

THE BOOK IS A PROPHECY

This is clear from 1:3, ‘Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy . . .’ ‘The words of the prophecy of this book’ is a statement written four times in chapter 22 (vv. 7, 10, 18, 19). The *nature* of prophecy is shown in Exodus 7:1–2, where Aaron becomes Moses’ prophet by being his mouthpiece, and in this sense Moses is God to Aaron. The *means* of telling the prophets what to say was generally by dreams and visions (Num. 12:6–8; Jer. 23:23–29; Acts 2:17–20), although in Moses’ case God spoke ‘mouth to mouth, clearly’. In the case of John the Seer, the prophecy was the revelation of Jesus Christ which he brought to his servant by the angel; the angel revealed it to him. The church must be known as the prophetic community because Christ is *the* Prophet (cf. Deut. 18:15–22; Acts 3:22–24), and they are his members and therefore prophetic (Acts 2:17f.). They have always been prophetic in ‘holding the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ (Acts 1:8; cf. Rev. 1:2, 9; 3:10; 6:9; 11:3; 12:11, 17; 20:4). The *content* of prophecy has always been Jesus, for ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 19:10; cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–45; Acts 26:22–23), so that nothing in this prophecy of the Revelation will refer to other than Christ, and none of its *action* will be other than Christ’s. The purpose of prophecy is to be the voice of God in both *exhortation* and *prediction*—~~forthtelling~~ and ~~foretelling~~—these two really being the one.

When we say that all the actions of the prophecy are Christ’s, we mean they are initiated by him and linked with him. Even the anti-Christ actions are evoked or provoked by him, but primarily we mean the people of God are lion-like with him in the action of his testimony or witness, and this is borne out in Acts 1:8; Revelation 1:2, 9; 3:10; 6:9; 11:3; 12:11, 17; 20:4, by which we mean that people of the Lamb ‘hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. They participate in what is the Lamb’s witness to God and the truth, i.e. the very actions which he does.

THE BOOK IS *THE* PROPHECY

That is, it is not only *a* prophecy but *the* prophecy, the completing and crowning prophecy. Whilst other prophetic-apocalyptic passages comport with this Book, yet it is more full and explicit and completing. In 1:1 we read of ‘what must *soon* take place’; in

1:11, 'Write what you see'; in 1:19, 'write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter'; in 4:1, of 'what must take place after this'. The 'soon' of 1:1 means 'quickly' rather than an act which will shortly happen in time (cf. Luke 18:1ff.; II Pet. 3:9ff.). 'What you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter' really covers all the tenses. When we see the man-child who is caught up to the throne in 12:5, then it must be a flashback to the incarnation and ascension of Christ, so that no particular tense is excluded. In 10:7 the things God announced to His servants the prophets (i.e. in the past) are about to take place in fulfilment in the present or near future.

So important is this Book as the prophecy that John is told not to seal up the words of this Book (i.e. do not lock it off from being presently read), 'for the time is near' (22:10). Dire warnings are given against taking away from, or adding to, the words of the Book. Blessing is promised from the reading of the Book (1:3) and from the hearing of the Book (1:3; 22:7). In 22:16 Jesus says he has sent his angel with this testimony—i.e. this prophecy—for the churches.

THE TREATMENT OF PROPHECY

We have said that prophecy is the direct communication of the word of God, by God, through His servant. Whilst we must read the text and try to understand the substance of it, we have to be careful to hear it as the word of God, and not subject it to our human reasoning so that only what is acceptable to and understandable by that reasoning is what we receive and expound. There has to be a *humility of hearing* and a *humility of expounding*. We must beware of trying to *interpret* prophecy rather than trying to *hear* it. Prophecy—especially apocalyptic prophecy—is something we allow to soak into us, rather than seek to make intelligible as such. We are not discounting the practice of exegesis, but are saying we must come under prophecy rather than bringing it under the canon of our minds.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK

The Book is the prophecy given 'to his servant John' (1:1). A 'John', then, is the writer of the Book. We can learn a little

about him and his writing from the Book. The term 'servant' is primarily a term for a prophet (10:7), although it may well cover being one of the saints. Paul, Peter, James and Jude—along with John—all call themselves servants of God. The word is 'slave' (*doulos*). In the Revelation all who hear or read the prophecy are the servants (slaves) of God (1:1ff.), the martyrs are called servants (19:2)—and so on. John classes himself with his readers as 'your brother', and as one 'who share[s] with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance' (1:9), i.e. he is no spectator in the prophecy or of the sufferings of the saints. In 22:9 the angel who has brought the prophecy to John declares himself to be 'a fellow servant [*sun doulos*] with you and your brethren the prophets', so that John is one amongst the prophets. These elements we have described certainly affect the way in which John writes.

Some scholars find three Johns who are authors of New Testament writing—John the apostle, John the author of the Johanne Epistles, and John the Divine or 'the Seer' who wrote the prophecy of the Revelation. Many scholars see John the apostle as the writer of the Gospel, the Epistles, and of the Revelation, whilst some see him as the writer of the Gospel and the Epistles, but not the Revelation. The latter do not believe the same person can be author of the three sets of writing because of the linguistic differences. The Gospel seems to have little or no linguistic affinity with the composition of the Revelation. Undoubtedly these arguments are quite strong. They have to do with both grammar and style.

The earliest references to the authorship of John believe him to be the writer of both Gospel and Revelation. Justin Martyr writes, about A.D. 135, 'There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation . . .' There are similar comments by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian at later dates. It was Dionysius, the Bishop of Alexandria (third century), who first questioned the authorship of the Revelation. Dionysius comments that the author of the Revelation makes no reference to the material of the Gospel or the Epistles, and has a vastly different way of writing, his Greek being inferior to that of the Gospel writer. At the same time, Dionysius is not critical of the Apocalypse or its author. He simply wishes to show they cannot be the one person.

Not all scholars agree with this. Some see not only differences

in style and language, but similarities, and some see consistency of style, thought and content in all the Johannine writings. We need not here go into the arguments, for we have the Revelation written by *someon* and that is what matters. The authentication of the author is there in the prophecy, and one cannot but take a high view of the writer. Any competent writer can assume different styles for different kinds of writing, and since John wrote in what is called 'Hebraic Greek', this may have been deliberate and it may have altered his style considerably. Even so, it seems the strongest consideration is the fact that this Letter was written 'in the Spirit'. John was 'in the Spirit', and a considered style—and even a considered grammar—may go to the winds under such profound influence. It may well make materials of the Gospel and Epistle to be of no great importance in the light of the power of the Spirit upon the person to proclaim the incredible vision given to him. It seems this is the guiding factor when we look at the authorship, and know the presence of Jesus and the Spirit both urging the churches, through John, to read, understand, and keep the prophecy, thus emphasizing the importance of this Book. Certainly we have a great production through a man fully involved in the prophecy which he records, and which he urges upon his readers.

THE DATE OF THE BOOK

The traditional date of writing is A.D. 95–96, and if John the apostle wrote the Book then this is possible, he being an old man by that time. Certain internal arguments cause scholars to date it at varying times, according to the differences in evaluation of the internal material. For example, there seems to have been extensive martyrdom—as indicated in chapters 6, 18 and 19—which would seem to indicate a persecution of the church which did not take place in the early part of the first century, or even towards the end of it. There seem to be indications of persecution in chapters 2 and 3 of the Book, but it does not seem to have been on a large scale. There are indications that the Christians refused to worship the emperor and suffered as a consequence, but again not on the scale the Book indicates.

Some place the writing prior to A.D. 70, but the churches in the Lychnus Valley seem to have quite a history and a maturity which would not have permitted this growth. Again, since

Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60/61, the city would have had to have been rebuilt before it could be the prosperous metropolis indicated in chapter 3. Many such details indicate a later authorship, but then one wonders whether elements of apocalyptic can be—so to speak—uncoded and made more literal and historical, and so much so that arguments for authorship can be based upon the deductions. After all, we have historicist and futurist schemes of interpretation, and which one shall we choose? In other words, can elements which *may* refer to Rome, to the Caesars of the time, and to events within the century, really be counted upon? Apocalyptic has a way of ignoring such details, and expanding beyond them. Can the seven kings and the ten kings of Revelation 17 be limited to some special historical period, or do they represent symbolically the rulership and leadership *in principle* of other periods?

We can see, then, that the resolution of the date of authorship is not simple, since it can be argued many ways. Perhaps it matters little really, and in this vein we might speak for a moment on what is called 'contextual exegesis'. This form of exegesis has a hermeneutic which insists that the local time, culture, modes of thinking and expression determine the way we should exegete a passage of Scripture. A simple example would be the locality, culture, religions, and customs of the seven cities in which the seven churches were located. Some exegetes insist that the letters cannot be properly understood without recovering the contemporary elements and allusions within the letters. It would certainly be useful and helpful to have these, but the question, surely, is: 'Do these letters not state principles which could be learned and applied to similar situations or states of churches?' Is that not the prophetic point of the writing of the seven letters? If this be the case, then contextual exegesis is not an indispensable requirement, however valuable it may otherwise prove.

THE MATTER OF *APOCALYPSIS*

The Greek title of the Book is '*Apokalypsis*' i.e. 'Revelation'. Between the writings of the Old and New Testaments, there were a number of books written which deal with *apokalypsis* i.e. that form of writing which claims to unveil those things of God which relate to the nature, action and future of God's plan and His people. The writing is in cryptic form, dealing with unknown

and hidden things, linked with spiritual mysteries, and to some extent—it would seem—are a coded form of communication. This kind of writing employs symbols, images and pictures which are generally fantastic, i.e. whilst resembling literal things, go far beyond them, amplifying form and action to a degree not normally known. For example, in the Book of Daniel we have four fierce beasts who eventually are shown to be kingdoms. Their nature is fantastic, but yet they represent actual, literal kingdoms.

In the period between the two Testaments there were no prophets, i.e. those who were 'canonical'—prophets who are accepted as true messengers of God, bringing God's true word to His people. Prophecy is often impressive—even to the point of superstitious regard—so forms of prophecy were used by self-styled prophets of the times. Their favourite forms were apocalyptic and allegorical writing. They often took Old Testament prophetic writings as their source and basis, and built on them. They mixed history with prophetic vision, and *apocalypsis* of a sort was the result. The following are some of the books read by Jews, though not pronounced canonical: *Books of Enoch*, *Assumption of Moses*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, *Book of Jubilees*, *Psalms of Solomon*, *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *The Sybilline Oracles*. None of these have any genuine historical basis, and some are simply wild fantasies. At the same time, they often reflect some of the thinking of their times and so have a certain value. We would consider John's '*Apocalypsis*' to be of a higher order than this type of writing.

Structure & Analysis

THE main contents of the Book are easy to analyse. After an introductory chapter follow four series of sevens: seven letters (chs 2–3), seven seals (5:1—8:1), seven trumpets (8:2—11:19), and seven bowls (15:1—16:21). These four series are broken by several interludes which briefly interrupt the flow of the narrative and do not belong to the four series of sevens. The Book concludes with the judgement of Babylon, the apostate civilization, the final triumph and consummation of God’s Kingdom, and the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem (chs 17–21).

In terms of literary structure, the Book consists of four visions, each of which is introduced by an invitation to ‘come and see’ what God purposes to disclose (1:9; 4:1; 17:1; 21:9). The Book is concluded by an epilogue.

I: PROLOGUE 1:1–8

1. Introduction to the Book	1:1–3
2. Salutation 1:4–5a	
3. Doxology to Christ	1:5b–6
4. The Theme of the Book	1:7
5. The Divine Imprimatur	1:8

II: THE FIRST VISION 1:9—3:22

1. John Sees the Glorified Christ	1:9–20
2. The Seven Letters	2:1—3:22
(i) The Letter to Ephesus	2:1–7
(ii) The Letter to Smyrna	2:8–11

(iii)	The Letter to Pergamum	2:12–17
(iv)	The Letter to Thyatira	2:18–28
(v)	The Letter to Sardis	3:1–6
(vi)	The Letter to Philadelphia	3:7–13
(vii)	The Letter to Laodicea	3:14–22

III: THE SECOND VISION 4:1—16:21

1.	The Heavenly Throne and the Heavenly Creatures	4:1–11
2.	The Seven Seals	5:1—8:1
(i)	The Sealed Book and Universal Praise	5:1–14
(ii)	The Six Seals	6:1–17
	(a) The First Seal	6:1–2
	(b) The Second Seal	6:3–4
	(c) The Third Seal	6:5–6
	(d) The Fourth Seal	6:7–8
	(e) The Fifth Seal	6:9–11
	(f) The Sixth Seal	6:12–17
(iii)	Interlude: The Two Sets of Peoples	7:1–17
	(a) The 144,000	7:1–8
	(b) The Innumerable Multitude	7:9–17
(iv)	The Seventh Seal	8:1
3.	The Seven Trumpets	8:2—14:20
(i)	The Six Trumpets	8:2—9:21
	(a) Preparation	8:2–6
	(b) The First Trumpet	8:7
	(c) The Second Trumpet	8:8–9
	(d) The Third Trumpet	8:10–11
	(e) The Fourth Trumpet	8:12–13
	(f) The Fifth Trumpet	9:1–12
	(g) The Sixth Trumpet	9:13–21
(ii)	Interlude	10:1—11:13
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	(b) The Measuring of the Temple and the Two Witnesses	11:1–13
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SECTION ONE:

The Commentary

AS indicated in the Author's Preface, this book is divided into two Sections, the first being an introduction to the text, and the second a series of Essays taking up various themes of the Book. Some readers will prefer to read the Essays in order to get the general gist of the Revelation, whilst others will prefer to go through the text first, with the help of the Commentary.

A section of texts set out in bold and italicized type above the passages which deal with it, and the same text is then used in the passages with a verse by verse commentary. Sometimes the Commentary is interrupted by notes which expand an idea or theme beyond the importance and place given to it in the text. Use of the Index of the book will also help readers to advert to the themes of the Essays, where that might prove helpful.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

WHAT are we to expect as we open this prophecy of St John the Divine, the Spirit-inspired Seer of God? We do not open it; it opens itself to us, telling us that it is the revelation of Jesus Christ himself, i.e. it reveals Christ to us, which is a wonderful matter in itself. However, it is even more than that. It is a revelation which God purposed should come to the human race via His Son, and so He—the Father—has given this revelation to His Son to give to us, via John the Seer. John himself was to receive it through an angel—a special angel who was to take John around the traps of God, and let him see for himself what God is about in history. As a result of God's gift of the revelation through Christ via the angel, John has, throughout this whole prophecy, and by the writing down of it, borne witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus—Jesus' own testimony. In this chapter the testimony is not wholly explained, but we sense it is Jesus' part in fulfilling the plan of God which He has for His creation—a plan which later unfolds in wonderful and awesome ways.

In this chapter we will read the first beatitude, i.e. the blessing, and it is for those who read, and read aloud to others, this prophecy. He who has read this prophecy time and again will be one to understand it, and he will wonder how he had ever thought he knew the Scriptures when he had neglected to use this great truth to the plan of God.

Having introduced the revelation, the author will take us on to seeing the Father—the great Alpha and Omega, the One Who works ceaselessly in all time—and will show us Jesus Christ as the only true witness, and will set out before our eyes the grand perspective of the Father and Son working in history. John will tell us of the voice like a trumpet which caught his attention and turned him to see the source of the voice. Then—because John is suddenly in the Spirit on the Lord's day—will follow that marvellous vision of the Son, the Lamb, the Lord, Jesus Christ. This majestic and regal figure walks

among golden candlesticks, each of which is a church, and all of which constitute the sevenfold church of which he is Lord. Vision it is which John sees, and not a literal happening, but visions often convey more than literal happenings. It is, of course, a happening—a real event, and part of the testimony of Jesus to the Father. Here the Christ of God will be seen in majesty and authority and beauty. He will bring the swooning prophet to his senses, and explain that he holds in his right hand the seven angels of the seven churches, and he walks among the golden candlesticks which are the seven churches.

The first chapter will conclude on this high note, preparing us for the letters which Christ is to send to the angels of the churches.

COMMENTARY

¹ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.

Verse 1 *The revelation of Jesus Christ:* This whole Book is the revelation which belongs to Jesus. God gave this revelation to him—Jesus—and it is the revelation of what must soon take place, *which God gave him to show to his servants:* and he has given this revelation, in turn, to his servant John. A revelation (*apocalypsis*) is an unveiling and effective disclosure of what is. It takes a revelation to know Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:15–16; John 6:44; Matt. 11:27; cf. John 16:12–15), and it will take a further revelation to know him further when he returns (I Pet. 1:13). When we know this Book is a special revelation, we will both revere and value it, and then use it (cf. Dan. 2:28).

what must soon take place means ‘surely and quickly’ rather than soon in time. In 4:1 there is that which ‘must take place after this’, i.e. after Christ’s being with the seven churches and going on to bring in the Kingdom, by the opening of the seven-sealed book.

and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John: i.e. Christ made the prophecy known by sending it, communicating it through the actions, revealing the signs and wonders in it to John through the medium of an angel—‘his angel’, i.e. the angel of the

Lord. *How* the angel brings the prophecy is not told, but in chapter 17 onwards a special angel does show John many things (see 17:15; 19:9; 21:9; 22:16). Angels play a big part in this Book (see the Essay 'Angels in the Book of the Revelation' on pp. 317–320).

his servant John: John is called a servant (*doulos* 'slave'), and the term 'servant' (*ebed*) was used in the Old Testament for prophets: 'You have not listened to his servants the prophets'; 'I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them' (Jer. 25:4; 7:25). We have reason to believe the church was to be the new community of the prophets, i.e. the prophetic community (Acts 2:17–21, esp. vv. 17 and 18—'and they shall prophesy'), and that each in the church was (is) a servant, (cf. Eph. 4:12). The term 'servants' in the Revelation refers to those who 'hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'. They are prophetic in their ministry.

Verse 2 *who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ:* This seems to mean, in this case, the word of God—i.e. the action of God as it operated under the hand of Christ (cf. 5:1ff.), so that writing it down would be inscripturating the word. 'The testimony of Jesus' and 'the word of God' are one, for they are what Jesus says and does. Jesus in 3:14 is called 'the faithful and true witness'; in John 18:37 he is said 'to bear witness to the truth', i.e. to God; and in Revelation 19:10 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy', i.e. the essence, subject and substance of the prophets (Luke 24:25–27, 44f.; Acts 26:22–23; 1:8; Rev.1:2, 9; 3:10; 6:9; 11:3; 12:11, 17; 20:4). The Revelation references here relate to those 'who keep the commandments of Jesus and have [hold, practise] the testimony of Jesus'. In I Peter 1:10f. it is the Spirit of Christ who is in the prophets. All the prophets bear testimony to Jesus, and his life and action is *histestimony*, which in turn witnesses to God.

even to all that he saw: 'All that [John] saw' means the whole range of the prophecy from 1:10 to 22:21. John saw it as a whole, and not as a bewildering series of unintelligible events. For the whole theme of the testimony of Jesus and the church see the Essay on pp. 222–229, 'The Testimony of Jesus in the Book of the Revelation'.

Verse 3 *Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy:* Here commences the first of seven beatitudes of this Book (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14), and these blessings are rich. Here John proceeds to speak of those who read aloud the words of the Book, meaning by it (i) that as one reads for one's own benefit, and (ii) that

as one stands as a lector, reading aloud to others so that others may hear the prophecy and be affected by it, then the reader–lector receives a blessing.

and blessed are those who hear: This must mean that the Book is, in some way, self-interpreting: it is powerful to make its own effects on listeners and will have blessing for them, too. Blessing is a powerful term in Scripture for God's gifts of peace and joy.

and who keep what is written therein: For that blessing to be received, the prophecy is to be understood and kept, i.e. observed and obeyed, so that the prophecy is not just material for the curiously minded, but the very word of God, demanding obedience. If we ask how a 'prophecy' can be observed and kept, then the answer is (i) prophecy is exhortation to certain action, and (ii) a number of commands are given to believers in this prophecy of the Revelation.

for the time is near: The serious nature of this observance of the prophecy can be seen in chapter 22:

'what must soon take place' (v. 6);

'your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book' (v. 9);

'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near' (v. 10);

'I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches' (v. 16);

I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (vv. 18–19).

We can conclude that this opening section is an introduction to the whole prophecy, i.e. the messages to the churches, and then the unfolding of the book of history, the seven-sealed book, whose description and action are found in 5:1ff.

* * *

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he is coming

with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

⁸ 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Verse 4 *John to the seven churches that are in Asia*: John, the scribe of the prophecy of the Revelation, is addressing the seven churches that are in Asia, namely Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (v. 11). The question is whether these are actual churches, so that messages to them were given at that time only for that time, in those places, and only for them; or whether they represent the whole church, down through the church age, whenever the points raised in them by Christ are relevant. The answer seems to lie in the word-number 'seven'. This number is used of 'the seven spirits' (1:4; 4:5; 5:6) and would indicate 'sevenfold' if it is speaking of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2–3). The word-number 'seven' means 'complete', although not always 'holy' since the dragon and the beast have seven heads (complete intelligence and authority). There are seven candlesticks, seven seals, trumpets and bowls, and each represents complete series or operations. I believe we can therefore conclude that the seven churches are the sevenfold or complete church, the whole body of Christ in history.

Grace to you and peace was the formal, yet dynamic, apostolic salutation found in almost every New Testament Epistle. 'Grace' refers to God's action in Christ to redeem, restore, and keep, as also to enable to live in Christ, and would require a whole book to describe it.* Likewise 'peace' is a vast subject in the Scriptures, and carries the ideas of security, lack of conflict, serenity, and joy—among other things.

from him who is and who was and who is to come: i.e. from the 'Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last' (22:13; cf. 1:8; 4:8; 21:6), who here is God, and in some places Christ. 'Who was and is and is to come' means, 'Who has always been in action, is acting and Who will act', for He is the living God—the God Who acts. By contrast, the beast in 17:8–11 'was, and is not'; 'was and is not and is to come', showing the brief but temporary nature of his being and actions.

and from the seven spirits who are before his throne: See Isaiah 11:2–3, where the Spirit has seven attributes; Revelation 4:5 and 5:6, where the Spirit is 'seven torches of fire', and the 'seven horns and seven

* For further reading see my *Great and Glorious Grace* NCPI. 1988.

eyes' of the Lamb are 'sent out into all the earth'. 'Before his throne' is a significant phrase, the throne being the place of God's authority, around which the celestial creatures are placed; the place of worship, before which prayers are presented; the place from which issue commands; the place where God and the Lamb are seated; where the seven-sealed book is opened; from which the judgements are executed; and from which the river of life flows in the Holy City: the presence of the Sevenfold Spirit is with that of God and the Lamb. The seven spirits (Sevenfold Holy Spirit) are the source of grace and peace, along with 'Jesus Christ the faithful witness'.

Verse 5 *and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness* who, as we saw in verse 2, witnesses to God and the truth (John 18:37), and here to John's prophecy. This phrase is repeated in 3:14, and partly in 19:11.

The term *the first-born of the dead* may refer simply to his having risen first of all humankind from the dead (I Cor. 15:20), or be as in Colossians 1:18, which, in turn, must be linked with Psalm 89:27, 'I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth'. This seems to fit with *and the ruler of kings on earth* and shows Christ to be Lord over all, a doctrine also strong in the Acts and the Epistles. It is seen, too, in Revelation 17:14 and 19:16, i.e. the name 'King of kings and Lord of lords', in addition to other passages which show the Lamb as being in authority over all things (1:17–18; 5:11–13; 11:15; 12:10). His being over all authorities is significant in this prophecy of the Revelation, since he rules and judges all, which links with the ascription *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood*: i.e. (i) having *loved* us (Rom. 8:37; Gal. 2:20), he *loves* us continually; (ii) he has freed us from the penalty, pollution and power of sin (as John 8:31–36; Matt. 1:21; 26:28; Rom. 3:24; 6:12–14; I Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13; and Heb. 10:12–14 show). *by his blood* shows us that nothing but the propitiatory sacrificial death of Christ (I Pet. 1:18f.; 2:24; 3:18; Rom. 3:24f.) could do this, at the same time ransoming us from the power of Satan and his princes (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15), and so equipping us to become 'a kingdom of priests'.

Verse 6 *and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father*: where '[has] made us a kingdom' must mean (i) he has brought us into the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13), (ii) we will reign with him (Matt. 5:2–5; 19:28f.; 25:34; Luke 12:32; 22:30), and (iii) we, his people, will constitute the Kingdom, being kings (Rev. 5:10; 22:5); whilst

‘priests to his God and Father’ must mean ‘royal priesthood’, the principle we find in I Peter 2:4–10 and Hebrews 13:15–16, which link with Exodus 19:5–6. That is, the church is the new priestly people of God to the world, as also it is the priestly people ‘to his God and Father’ (indicating Christ’s Sonship of the Father, with all that means of the Son’s deity, his relationship to the Father in His plan). This shows that both the Father and the Son should receive ‘glory and dominion for ever and ever’, for throughout the prophecy glory and rulership are accorded to both God and the Lamb, without whom nothing would be accomplished.

to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen: To give glory is simply to set forth God as He is in what He does. Here it is simply an acknowledgment of the fact that glory and dominion belong to Him alone.

Verse 7 *Behold, he is coming with the clouds* is the theme of the whole prophecy, and the manner of his coming in the *Shekinah* i.e. the Glory-Cloud of his presence (Dan. 7:13; Isa. 19:1; Acts 1:11; Matt. 16:27; 24:30; 26:64; cf. Acts 2:19).

and every eye will see him: i.e. this will be a universal revelation of Christ in his Lordship (cf. Phil. 2:11).

every one who pierced him: i.e. not only Israel, as in Zechariah 12:10, but all whose sins caused his crucifixion—no one will escape the sight of him, and seeing him, ‘all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him’, i.e. they will know they have done wrong, and will have remorse.

and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him: It does not indicate elsewhere in the prophecy that they will have repentance (cf. I Cor. 2:8), so that their wailing will be that which comes with judgement, since Christ will come as Judge (cf. John 5:25–29; Acts 10:42; 17:31); thus the *Even so. Amen* means ‘This is fitting. This is just.’

Verse 8 *I am the Alpha and the Omega,* says the Lord God now spells out *who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty* *, i.e. ‘the Lord God Almighty’—the *Pantokrator*—‘the One who has power over all things and rules them’, for in the Old Testament this is the equivalent of ‘the Lord of Hosts’, so here all things are subject to Him. This ‘All-Ruler’, then, is the One Who will initiate the prophecy and fulfil it.

* * *

* See commentary on v. 4.

⁹ *I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.* ¹⁰ *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet* ¹¹ *saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.'*

¹² *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,* ¹³ *and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast;* ¹⁴ *his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire,* ¹⁵ *his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters;* ¹⁶ *in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*

¹⁷ *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last,* ¹⁸ *and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.* ¹⁹ *Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter.* ²⁰ *As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

Verse 9 *I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance:* Telling them he has been sharing with them—as their brother—the same suffering as they were enduring towards the end of the first century, but it is 'in Jesus' (cf. Phil. 3:10; Rom. 8:17–18; Col. 1:24), i.e. 'the tribulation' (Rev. 2:3, 9) which is linked with 'the kingdom' (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Matt. 24:13; II Thess. 1:5—but see Dan. 7:9ff.), i.e. for the matter of persecution and the Kingdom, and for which 'patience' is required (Rev. 2:2, 10; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12).

was on the island called Patmos: i.e. John was, but seems not now to be, on that island, since he is giving the entire prophecy on the Island of Patmos *on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus:* i.e. exiled because he had preached the word of God and given testimony *to Jesus*, which in practical action was the word of God and the testimony *of Jesus* (i.e. the present action of Jesus himself); and because he was to be given the word of God and the testimony of Jesus in this prophetic form.

Verse 10 *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day:* John claims he was in the Spirit, without which (or whom) there could be no prophetic sight

or understanding (4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Romans 8:9–11 and I Corinthians 2:14 show the revelatory power of the Spirit is needed. To understand John's revelation we need to be equally 'in the Spirit' on the Lord's Day, 'the Lord's Day' being the first of the week, the day of resurrection, but in Scripture the final day, the day of deliverance and judgement. It appears the early Christians met on this day, especially sharing the Eucharist (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2), showing forth Christ's death—'until he comes'.

and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet: loud voices in this prophecy are voices of authority giving commands which are initiated by God Himself; angels are the ones who sound trumpets.*

Verse 11 *saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea':* i.e. write the prophecy in all its events and interpretation *in a book*—i.e. a scroll—*and send it to the seven churches:* i.e. the seven actual churches, but yet the sevenfold church, noting that *all* the churches are to receive *all* the prophecy (cf. 22:6, 'his servants'; 22:16, 'this testimony for the churches').

Verse 12 *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands:* Turning to see the voice John sees *seven golden lampstands* which are separate and do not form a solid candelabra, since Jesus stands in the midst of them (1:13) and also walks amongst them (2:1). Perhaps he is the candelabra, combining and comprising the sevenfold church himself, as it is also his body of which he is the Head. The golden lampstands are important, for by them the light of the gospel goes out to the world, and nothing can be more important than this.

Verse 13 *and in the midst of the lampstands one:* John sees one *like a son of man:* i.e. as in Daniel 7:13ff. and Matthew 26:24, 64, i.e. the Messiah; *clothed with a long robe:* ranging down to his feet and denoting a high personage; *and with a golden girdle round his breast:* also a sign of such a personage, thought by some to be the high priest (Exod. 28:4; 29:5; 39:27–29; Lev. 16:4), though this can scarcely be the case. In a vision anything may obtain.

Verse 14 *his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow:* i.e. as in Daniel 7:9, indicating deity, though not 'ageing deity', seeing God does not age. The comparison with human likeness was to

* See comment on 8:2.

communicate maturity and wisdom, no doubt.

his eyes were like a flame of fire: indicates penetrating discernment, and holiness in power (cf. the man or angel in Dan. 10:6 for this and next verses—‘his eyes [were] like flaming torches’).

Verse 15 *his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace:* indicates strength and stability, and one who can trample in war and judgement (cf. 19:15).

and his voice was like the sound of many waters: indicating glory and deity, as in Ezekiel 43:2:

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with his glory.

Verse 16 *in his right hand he held seven stars:* ‘stars’ stand for angels, and these the angels of the churches (see v. 20), meaning he controls them as he walks among the lampstands, some of whom are worthy of rebuke.

from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword: as in Isaiah 11:4; Revelation 2:16; 19:11–16; cf. Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12—a sword so powerful to smite the nations, let alone the human heart. Signifies judgement; all this glory of Christ is not without justice.

and his face was like the sun shining in full strength: such as the glory Saul might have seen, so terrible to behold even in all its glory.

Verses 17–18 *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades:* Even though John is in the Spirit, yet the sight of the vision is too much for him. *I fell at his feet as though dead:* Such is the reaction of those who have experiences of theophanies (cf. Dan. 8:17; 10:7–9; Ezek. 1:28). The touch of Christ’s right hand and the reviving words dissipate his fear, and he is given a revelation of Christ, a parallel to the Father. *I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades:* This one who is equal with God and yet is truly man, who has died and is even now alive, and in whose authority are the matters of Death and the Grave—he decides the destinies of all men. We note here, too, that this present description of Christ is distributed throughout the seven letters of chapters 2 and 3 of the Book.

Verse 19 *Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter:* John has to get down to the business in hand, which is to

record the whole prophecy for the seven churches (the sevenfold church). Those who hold to views which place all happenings in the apostolic age, or all of them only in the future age, cannot truly hold such positions in the light of these 'times'.

Verse 20 *As for the mystery*: a 'mystery' being an open secret to the initiated in the Spirit, but closed to those who do not have the revelation of the Spirit. Paul said the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14); Christ said a man must be born of water and the Spirit before he can see and enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:1–6). Jesus used the word about the Kingdom (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10), and yet a child can understand such a mystery (Matt. 18:3).

of the seven stars: 'seven' ensuring this entity will be full and complete.

which you saw in my right hand: The same right hand active in reviving John—the hand of authority—meant having the stars in his authority for his action in regard to the churches, *and the seven golden lampstands*: and the action of the church in regard to history.

the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: Though just who and what these angels are is difficult to define, some thinking they were guardian angels of the churches, some seeing them as messengers to the churches, some thinking of them as bishops; probably, since the letters were written to angels, they are the churches themselves.

and the seven lampstands are the seven churches: i.e. the sevenfold church, the whole church of the church age, which stretches from Pentecost to the Parousia—the day of Christ's appearing.

The stage is now set for the events and letters of the next two chapters.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

The best way to review the chapter is to read the introduction to it, for the pattern and meaning of the chapter will then come to us. This will help us to think clearly when sometimes such wonderful material is likely to prevent us seeing the wood for the trees. We need to see both the trees and the wood.

What advantage, then, do we receive from this chapter? We receive many advantages, especially if we open ourselves to the word-

script John has given us. If we regard all that is written as God's genuine prophecy given to us as a revelation of Himself, of His Son, and of His action in history, then the chapter will be an excellent introduction to the whole prophecy. The fact that it comes from God, through the Son, and via the angel to John—and then on to us—is breathtaking. The whole prophecy is set into right perspective by the vision of Jesus Christ, a vision which is not only glorious but quite confronting. With John the Seer we, too, see Christ, and fall at his feet as though dead. We, too, are set upon our feet and told that Christ is Lord of the churches, and Lord of the church. Through this church age or era, he holds all its being and actions within the hand of his powerful and loving authority.

This is the main advantage we draw from the first chapter, i.e. that we are one with 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'.

Chapter Two

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

BELOW this chapter introduction the general format of each letter is set out, so that here we have no need to describe it. In this second chapter we see Christ opening his heart and mind in a personal way to four churches, namely those at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira. Walking amongst these four golden lampstands he has observed their life, and the things which are particular to them. We have observed that the seven churches together constitute the sevenfold church, and that it is best not to type them as being representative of special ages or eras. Whilst any one local church might be similar in any age, it is doubtful that a whole era will find the church to be Ephesian or Laodicean, as is the opinion of some commentators. The seven churches were certainly of geographical localities, namely all situated in the Lychnus Valley of Asia Minor, now roughly speaking Turkish territory. Some of the towns are extinct, and for the most the churches are also dead. This is the sad march of history: the golden lampstands no longer glow. Even so, they are very much alive in this chapter, existing at the close of the first century. Each has its season (*chronos*) and each its particular point of crisis and happening (*kairos*).

We will see that the church at Ephesus is a model church but for one thing—the abandonment of holy and dynamic love, here called ‘the first love’, i.e. the love the church had known in the days of its founder, Paul, and under the ministry of great apostolic figures, such as John and Timothy. So we will learn that without love nothing is of worth, and that the loveless are required to repent and to be renewed in love. The church at Ephesus also has a moral heresy troubling it which it strongly rebuts.

The church at Smyrna is a church living in tribulation and poverty, and one which receives no rebuke from the Lord, but it is exhorted to remain faithful.

Pergamum lives under the dark shadow cast by Satan's throne and yet persists in the face of that, and has among its members those who are linked with a form of idolatry and immorality. Christ warns he will come and confront the church personally if it does not repent.

The church at Thyatira is commended for its way of life, but it, too, has a form of immorality that stirs the Lord of the lampstands. He will visit this church with strong punishment if it does not oust a certain woman who exercises a prophetic ministry and is morally corrupting the congregation.

The four churches Jesus rebukes, saying, 'I will come,' must be troubled by this exhortation. We will see, then, the concern that Christ has for his churches, and his refusal to let them go their own way.

FORMAT OF THE SEVEN LETTERS: 2:1—3:22

There are a number of things common to each of the seven letters, which are as follows:

- (a) John is commanded by Christ to write what he dictates to each of the churches.
- (b) Each letter commences with some aspect of the person and work of Christ, mainly drawn from John's vision in the first chapter. The important thing is the constant statement 'The words of him . . .' This is part of 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'.
- (c) Each letter commences with 'I know', i.e. Christ, who walks among the golden lampstands, knows the state of each church.
- (d) Each church is dealt with according to its works, i.e. rebuked, encouraged, instructed.
- (e) Each church is told by Christ that he will come to it—directly or indirectly—as in 2:5, 10, 16, 25; 3:3, 11, 20.
- (f) Conquering or overcoming is expected of each church, and rewards for conquest are nominated.
- (g) Each church is exhorted by Christ to hear what the Spirit is saying to all the churches, and not only the particular church being addressed.

COMMENTARY

¹ *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: “The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.*

² *“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”*

Verse 1 *To the angel*: which we have already seen to be called ‘stars’ (cf. Gen. 37:9; Judg. 5:20; Dan. 8:9–11; 10:13, 20–21), and who have both authority and responsibility within the affairs of men, though some interpret these ‘angels’ as humans, leaders or elders or bishops of the churches. Even so, we meet seven angels in Revelation chapters 8–9, and these pour out judgements on the earth.

of the church in Ephesus: Ephesus (see Acts 19) was the church founded by Paul, and had a good record, Timothy and John the apostle having had ministry in it. It was a city given over to idolatry and Jewish occultism. One of the leading cities of Asia Minor, it had a good port and—among other things—a good timber trade.

write: “*The words of him*: Christ is still talking, giving the material for writing to John.

who holds the seven stars in his right hand: The church is expected to see Christ’s authority over all the churches, and so listen to him.

who walks among the seven golden lampstands: They are expected to see his personal concern for the church, his discernment of them in his visitation of them, which gives him the right to warn, rebuke, praise, and encourage, accordingly.

Verse 2 *“I know your works*: i.e. your works which are commendable, as I know them in all the churches, and in your case; *your toil and your patient endurance*: things required of all believers within ‘the prophecy’ (cf. 1:9; 13:10; 14:12); *and how you cannot bear evil men*: the coming of whom was predicted by Paul in Acts 20:28–31. The church had not been afraid to oppose and discipline the evil ones, *but*

have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false: since false apostles would take on themselves the authority and prerogatives of true apostles, and would do much damage.

Verse 3 *I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary:* so that commendably you maintain purity of faith and practice.

Verse 4 *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first:* i.e. not simply lost that love, or drifted from it, but have deliberately abandoned it (cf. II Pet. 1: 9).

the love you had at first: without this love, works have no value (I Cor. 13:1–3; cf. I Cor. 16:14, 22; I John 2:7ff.; 3:10ff.).

Verse 5 *Remember then from what you have fallen:* The need to *remember*, telling you that it is a long time since you lived in Christ's love (II Cor. 5:14f.).

repent: The word being mentioned twice in this verse.

and do the works you did at first: i.e. the works done out of the first love. So terrible is 'no love' that it requires repentance, a demand only normally made in the New Testament in regard to initial salvation (cf. II Cor. 7:10).

If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent: The most terrible action of all, and to a church which otherwise had a fine record. To be deprived of ministry is to be deprived of life. No love, no light—no church!

Verse 6 *Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans:* i.e. those who would be among the 'evil men' and whose practice is thought by some to involve immorality, and by others a false triumphalism.

which I also hate: i.e. those at Ephesus have a hatred for evil men.

Verse 7 *He who has an ear:* when in fact not every one has an ear. Much is made of this in the New Testament, i.e. hearing and not hearing (see Luke 8:4–21).

let him hear: for one must always be listening to *what the Spirit says to the churches:* noting that *all* the messages of the Spirit are for *all* the churches; *To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God:* for the Spirit never ceases to speak to the churches, and his voice is as that of Christ the Head.

To him who conquers: Every Christian should be a conqueror, for there are not those who conquer and those who do not (see I John

2:12–14; 4:4; 5:4; Rom. 8:37–39; Phil. 4:13; Rev. 21:5ff.), for greater is he that is in us (Christ) than he that is in the world (Satan), and faith in him makes us overcome the world.

I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise [i.e. 'garden'] of God": from which man was evicted, but—as told to the penitent thief on the cross—is now opened to all believers, described as it is in the last two chapters of this prophecy. When one eats of the tree of life, one lives for ever.

* * *

8 'And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: "The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

9 "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death."

Verse 8 *'And to the angel of the church in Smyrna*: Again, whilst Smyrna was a place (today's Izmir, in Asiatic Turkey) and had certain local conditions which related to the letter, yet a church is always in some *place* where conditions may not be as at Smyrna; nevertheless the exhortations given may apply in all times. Smyrna had a strong emperor cult, and a hostile group of Jews—'the synagogue of Satan'.

write: "The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life: because this ascription will hearten them, since they will know the Living One is their Lord, and that death is not the end of things.

Verse 9 *"I know your tribulation and your poverty*: we have seen that tribulation is part of true witness (see comment on 1:9). Ostracized from the community, it was difficult to earn well.

(but you are rich): i.e. by contrast with the church at Laodicea, who thought itself rich but was poverty-stricken (3:17).

and the slander [blasphemy] of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan: Whilst a true Jew (cf. Rom. 2:28–29) would normally become a Christian following Christ's coming, Jews who blasphemed the Christians were setting themselves against God and so siding with Satan.

Verse 10 *Do not fear what you are about to suffer*: Suffering predicted means it is in God's hands: in the ultimate all things are from His hand, though He permits agents to inflict such (cf. the case of Job; I Pet. 4:12–19).

Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested: for testing is what produces maturity (James 1:2–4; Rom. 5:2–4).

and for ten days: The same period Daniel and his three friends were tested, but here meaning that for (i) a short time, and (ii) a set time, *you will have tribulation*.

Be faithful unto death: i.e. if death meets you at the end of the allotted period of ten days, as it appears it would.

and I will give you the crown of life: i.e. of eternal life, physical death being unable to kill them for ever. This is how it must be with all Christians, whether it be imprisonment and suffering, or the general persecution every believer must know.

Verse 11 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death*": John uses the term 'second death' three times (cf. 20:14; 21:8), where it is the terrible end for these wicked—the lake of fire. Believers will never see this. Sinners are in the first death now, and will die, after which they will have the second death—death eternal (cf. Rom. 5:12ff.; Eph. 2:1–5).

* * *

¹² *'And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.*

¹³ *' "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practise immorality. ¹⁵ So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it."*

Verse 12 *'And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword*: Once this One speaks the words,

they are irreversible. The two-edged sword will ultimately smite the nations in judgement (19:15) and here it will fight the apostates and heretics—verse 16, ‘I will war against them with the sword of my mouth’—the sword of Christ being at the same time ‘the sword of the Spirit’ (Eph. 6:17), which is never apart from all the elements of salvation.

Verse 13 ‘*I know where you dwell*: He knows all about all the churches, and here it is *where Satan’s throne is*: i.e. where Satan has his seat of power. The prophecy of Revelation is the battle for *the Throne*, i.e. the battle *of the thrones*, Satan’s being no insignificant throne. The city was a city of pagan cults—to the emperor, to Zeus and Athena of Greek origin, and Dionysus and Aesculapius of Asian origin. Undoubtedly there was a concentration of evil against the gospel and Christ delights to say *you hold fast my name*: i.e. ‘you go on holding fast my name’, *and you did not deny my faith*—called ‘my faith’, i.e. ‘the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3; cf. Col. 1:22f.), *even in the days of Antipas my witness*: i.e. in special days of tribulation, days of testing when they might have succumbed.

Antipas my witness was one of those mentioned in 6:9ff., and *my faithful one* makes him one with Christ, the faithful witness. It was said that he was roasted alive in a brazen bull: *who was killed among you, where Satan dwells*. Paul’s linking of idolatry with demons in I Corinthians 10:17–22 helps us to understand the darkness of the otherwise fine city of Pergamum.

Verse 14 *But I have a few things against you*: Here we must not understand ‘few’ to mean they are insignificant—to the contrary. Syncretism is always a danger where religions are dynamic. The mentions of Balaam and Balak tell us that syncretism and heresies never die. This is part of the message of these letters.

you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam: i.e. infecting with moral corruption those who could not be subverted by religious means (prophecy; cf. Num. chs 23, 24).

who taught Balak the king of Moab to send women to entice the men of Israel to join the lascivious worship of Baal *to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practise immorality* and so be caught in surrendering holy passion for the impure, giving to detestable idols the worship and love due to God.

Verses 15–16 *So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth:* Balaamites and Nicolaitans—and how many others? And all this in the early, the apostolic, church! He who has the words of God and the sharp two-edged sword is standing in the wings watching—but not for long. He will come and will war with the words of his mouth—the deadly sword. He cannot desist.

Verse 17 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers: i.e. over Satan and death, I will give some of the hidden manna: i.e. the unseen but actual bread of life—Christ himself (John 6:35, 57–58)—the continuous manna (Exod. 16:33–34; Heb. 9:4).*

and I will give him a white stone: i.e. enduring, permanent.

with a new name: i.e. new revealed identity, perhaps hitherto sensed but never disclosed, the identity which is unique to each person of faith—those baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—for it was written of them:

The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
which the mouth of the Lord will give (Isa. 62:2).

written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it”: In Revelation 3:12 the matter of the name is expanded, but we will wait to see and expound that. It is enough here to see that being given the name, each believer will have achieved maturity and fullness—will know even as he is known.

* * *

18 *‘And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: “The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.*

19 *“I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practise immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her immorality.*

22 *Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings; 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart,*

and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay upon you any other burden; 25 only hold fast what you have, until I come. 26 He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Verse 18 *‘And to the angel of the church in Thyatira:* A wealthy city located in the northern part of Lydia, on the Lychus River near the border of Mysia, about 40 miles south-east of Pergamum.

write: “The words of the Son of God: Note that this is the only place in the Revelation where Jesus is called by this title.

who has eyes like a flame of fire: as in Daniel 10:6, ‘eyes like flaming torches’.

and whose feet are like burnished bronze: (cf. Rev. 1:14–15), i.e. feet that trample down in judgement.

Verse 19 *‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first:* This reads like the opening words of the letter to the church at Ephesus, with the significant differences being that the church at Thyatira works by love, and that its second works are greater than its first. We can deduce that ‘first works’ come from the ‘first love’ (cf. 2:4–5). If we can speak about ‘second love’, i.e. maturing love, then works can increase in excellence with maturity (cf. Phil. 1:9–11; I Thess. 3:12–13). Let us note that ‘patient endurance’ is one of the hallmarks of the church in the eschatological situation (Rev. 1:9; 13:9–10; 14:12).

Verse 20 *But I have this against you, that you tolerate:* i.e. compromisingly have a relationship with *the woman Jezebel:* Jezebel being the wicked wife of King Ahab of Israel, who led Israel into worship of the pagan gods (I Kings 16:31; 21:25–26; cf. II Kings 9:22).

who calls herself a prophetess: Sometimes believers are almost superstitious about prophets, and dare not question their utterances. This prophetess is obviously a false messenger.

and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practise immorality: i.e. to worship false gods, and to link with cults, teaching syncretism in a plausible way; *and to eat food sacrificed to idols:* Idolatry was adultery, since Israel was God’s wife.

Verse 21 *I gave her time to repent*: for God is long-suffering (Rom. 2:5; II Pet. 3:9) with a view to repentance, *but she refuses to repent of her immorality*.

Verse 22 *Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed*: i.e. a bed that will bring death.

and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation: i.e. 'I will bring great judgement, such as is found in this prophecy'.

unless they repent of her doings: i.e. they are to see the source of their wrongdoing as this Jezebel.

Verse 23 *and I will strike her children dead*: Such was the fate of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1ff.) and those who failed to discern the Lord's body in the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:29–30).

And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart: i.e. has eyes like a flame of fire and who alone can understand the human heart (Jer. 17:9–10).

and I will give to each of you as your works deserve: (cf. II Cor. 5:10). God is just in His judgements.

Verse 24 *But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan*: i.e. as against 'the deep things of God' (I Cor. 2:10 AV), Satan being jealous of God and His 'deep things' (cf. Deut. 29:29). These things are probably occultic, mystical and hidden, but practised by some local cult — *to you I say, I do not lay upon you any other burden*.

Verse 25 *only hold fast what you have*: i.e. 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3; cf. Acts 15:28–29); *until I come*: for faith is always linked with hope, and one of the Christian dynamics is that of the Parousia or appearing of Christ.

Verse 26 *He who conquers and who keeps my works*: as against 'her works', for to keep his works is to be part of them, as they are set out in I Corinthians 15:24–28; *until the end*: i.e. the *telos* the time of completion of all things; *I will give him power*—authority—*over the nations*.

Verse 27 *and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces*: This being a fulfilment of Psalm 2:6–9, and meaning that the saints shall participate in the victory and ruling of

their Lord (cf. Rom. 5:17; Eph. 2:5–6).

even as I myself have received power from my Father: For God is the Father of him who is called ‘the Son of God’.

Verses 28–29 *and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’:* The assurance of the coming dawn of triumph, the prize to the victor, the assurance of the great light of the Holy City.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

We need to re-read each letter, mark its elements, compare it with the church or churches we know today, and benefit by the commendations and rebukes the Lord gives to each. We need to remember Christ is Lord of the church, and that he is constantly concerned for it as he walks amongst the golden lampstands. We may become critical of a church (or churches), seeing the weaknesses and defects, and decide to separate ourselves from it. Christ is not critical of the church after this angry fashion. He is out to reform and renew, but not to leave or eliminate. It is true that he warns he will take away the golden lampstand of a church if it does not repent, but then he is the only one in a position to do this. It is also interesting to note that he rebukes and chastens those whom he loves, and does not just abandon them.

In these four letters—as indeed in the remaining three—we learn so much. We learn that no church is wholly perfect; all are attacked by the powers of darkness in many guises—threatening, deceiving, and seducing—and we learn to alter and watch out for such invasions. If we keep close to Christ and learn to live under his Lordship, then our lampstands will bring rich light to a world in dire need of it.

Chapter Three

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THREE churches receive letters from Christ written by John, addressed to the church-angels, and spoken by the Spirit to them. The first we will read will be to the church at Sardis. This church seems to be flourishing, but because of immorality is at the point of death—something we would not expect in the apostolic period. It is exhorted to see its own state, and act quickly and strongly in order to survive. To be consistent with the purification it had received, and the holiness in which it ought to walk, is the primary exhortation it receives, and the promise is that it will be so if it awakes and conquers the evil that has penetrated it. By contrast, the church at Philadelphia—similar to the church at Smyrna—receives no rebuke. There, at Philadelphia, the opposition is by Jews whom Jesus says are not true Jews. The Lord comforts them by saying he will yet bring these enemies to admit that the church is loved by Messiah. He also promises that they will be saved from the great tribulation which is to come upon the whole world.

Then, in a further contrast, the church at Laodicea is strongly castigated by its Lord. It is cosy, affluent, indolent, and ignorant of its own terrible state. Jesus is scornful of its affluence, its self-confidence and its fateful blindness. He must become the figure they look to, the Reformer they heed, and the Renewer they apply to. He encourages them by saying that rebuke and chastening are forms of his love, and if they realize this then he will enter the hearts and lives of those who repent and advert to him. His promise to this slothful church is no less rich than other promises to the other churches.

COMMENTARY

¹ *‘And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: “The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.*

‘“I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead. ² Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. ³ Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. ⁴ Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. ⁶ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Verse 1 *‘And to the angel of the church in Sardis:* The capital of Lydia, a city set on a smooth and almost perpendicular hill, with three sides that were unscalable, and a fourth side that could be well defended. Its seeming impregnability made its inhabitants feel they were secure, but Cyrus of Persia took the city from the rich Croesus in 549 B.C., and Antiochus the Great again captured it some 330 years later.

write: “The words of him who has the seven spirits of God: i.e. the seven-fold Spirit (cf. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6), the Spirit who speaks to the seven churches even now.

and the seven stars: i.e. he holds the entire church in his right hand, which means he is Lord of them, directs them, protects them and causes them to share with him in his works.

‘“I know your works: i.e. ‘I miss nothing with my eyes like a flame of fire, and your works are not commendable.’

you have the name of being alive: which must mean that ‘you, and others who see you as alive, must be discerning wrongly,’ as today many active vital churches must also be dead under the busyness.

and you are dead: as a fruit tree that has dry rot and borers still shows leaves and seeming signs of life, but is tragically almost dead. Its ‘life’ is death-giving. The deceit of sin is that it covers itself, giving itself out that it is not sin, or, if sin, then of no great consequence. This is what deceives and hardens the heart (Heb. 3:13).

Verse 2 *Awake:* is an injunction often given to slothful, sleeping Christians (Rom. 13:11–14; Eph. 5:14).

and strengthen what remains: because there is just a little. The tree

radically pruned can help the remaining life to be regenerated and so flourish.

and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect: i.e. of the right kind and completed *in the sight of my God*. Had there been good first works and better latter works, then these would have been proof of life (cf. Matt. 5:16; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14).

Verse 3 *Remember then what* [in fact it is not *what* but *how*] *you received and heard:* a good example of which is seen in I Thessalonians 1:6–10. *received* is, of course, the acceptance of the gospel and links with *heard*, which means obedience to the gospel.

keep that: i.e. observe and do the truth.

and repent: i.e. 'change your mind and attitude completely about your seeming success which has been abject failure.'

If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you: i.e. 'If you will not watch for me in a state of spiritual alertness, then I will come unexpectedly' (cf. Matt. 24:43; I Thess. 5:2; II Pet. 3:10). Even so, this is not a reference to the second coming, for whether they watch or not that will happen. No, Christ will come upon them in the church and—as with other churches—will deal with them in punishment (e.g. in Revelation 2:5 he will take away the candlestick—the light and witness of the church).

Verse 4 *Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments:* i.e. the soiling of which has brought death to the church, the activity which has been mistaken for the motions of life; God's people are called to be holy (Lev. 11:44; Exod. 19:5–6; I Pet. 2:9–10; Heb. 12:14), for without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

and they shall walk with me in white: i.e. 'in the splendour of holiness', in the joy of sheer purity of mind and heart, *for they are worthy*.

Verse 5 *He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments:* In 7:9–17 these are the ones who have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, who worship God in the holy temple, and who are led by the Lamb to springs of living water, and whose sorrows are wiped away for ever.

and I will not blot his name out of the book of life: (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; cf. Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16; Luke 10:20) i.e. 'as I threatened to do with Israel after their idolatry in the desert' (Exod. 32:33). In fact he whose name is written in the book of life of the Lamb shall be saved in the judgement before the great white

throne (Rev. 20:11–15).

I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels: a glorious graduation before ‘the assembly of the first-born’, to be named by the Father and the Lamb as those who endured unto the end in holiness and hope. Jesus had said he would confess before the Father those who confessed him before men (Matt. 10:32–33; cf. Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8–9).

Verse 6 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

* * *

⁷ *‘And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: “The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens.*

⁸ *“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

⁹ *Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you.*

¹⁰ *Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹² He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ”*

Verse 7 *‘And to the angel of the church:* a church which, like the one at Smyrna, receives no rebuke.

in Philadelphia: a city located on the main trade route from east to west, built by King Attulus II Philadelphus of Pergamum, who affectionately called it ‘brother love’ in honour of his own brother Ecumenes II. It worshipped Dionysus, the god of wine and the vine.

write: “The words of the holy one: a term used for God Himself—‘the Holy One of Israel’ (Isa. 41:14), and carrying the idea of Redeemer.

the true one: or the faithful, dependable one, as against the Jews in the city who lie.

* See commentary on 2:7.

who has the key of David: i.e. the government and authority (cf. Isa. 22:15–25).

who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens: i.e. a door (or doors) of opportunity for ministry (cf. Acts 14:27; I Cor. 16:9; II Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3), perhaps with the Jews at Philadelphia who are opposing them but will come, bow down and confess that Christ has loved those of this local church.

Verse 8 ‘*I know your works:* Here no adverse comment is made, but the church is comforted in that Christ has noted their works.

Behold: is a term intended to draw notice from the readers, or it is important.

I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut: for Christ’s authority moves on their behalf.

I know that you have but little power: by contrast with the churches at Sardis and Laodicea, which seem too powerful; however, ‘little power’ may mean ‘much power’ when the people are dependent upon grace, as in Paul’s case (II Cor. 12:1–10; cf. 13:4).

and yet you have kept my word: i.e. ‘the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’.

and have not denied my name: (Luke 9:26) i.e. ‘you have confessed the faith of Christ crucified, and you have usefully employed the gifts given’.

Verse 9 *Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not*, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet:* i.e. ‘I will vindicate you’, as in Isaiah 60:14 (cf. Isa. 45:14; 49:22–23):

The sons of those who oppressed you
shall come bending low to you;
and all who despised you
shall bow down at your feet;
they shall call you the City of the Lord,
the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

God always vindicates His people—at least in the ultimate (cf. Rev. 6:9–11; 19:1–2).

and learn that I have loved you: this love being primarily elective (cf. Mal. 1:2–3, ‘I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau’), even though it is affectional love also. The Jews will be both amazed and ashamed.

* See commentary on 2:9.

Verse 10 *Because you have kept my word of patient endurance:* i.e. ‘my command to endure patiently’—so often recurring in this prophecy—which is primarily Christ’s own patience working out through them (cf. fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5:22–23); *I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth:* This ‘hour of trial’ (testing) is most important. Did it come upon the world in John’s day, simply exempting those at Philadelphia, or is this ‘hour of testing’ one which is continually upon unbelievers and climaxes at the end of history? It is not stated, but warns all not to presume upon God’s patience.

Verse 11 *I am coming soon* (for ‘soon’, see 1:1) is intended to encourage the believers not to give up, but to *hold fast what you have*, in conformity with the principle of Jude 20f.; *so that no one may seize your crown:* i.e. your reward, the crown of life (cf. II John 8; Rev. 2:10).

Verse 12 *He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God:* pillars are strong and a special part of the temple (cf. Gal. 2:9; I Tim. 3:15).

never shall he go out of it: i.e. he is for ever in the temple, for ever a part of God (21:22).

and I will write on him the name of my God: which is really the personal revelation of the nature of God, as also His sealing of His people as being His. In 7:1–3, 14:1 and 22:4, the name of the Father is on the foreheads of the elect.* *and the name of the city of my God:* i.e. a revelation, too, of the Holy City and the seal of eternal citizenship.

the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven: as shown in Revelation chapter 21 (cf. Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22)—the City that is wrought in heaven and descends to earth, but is essentially eternal.

and my own new name: i.e. a fresh and extended revelation of Christ himself, the understanding of his person and identity beyond what one has at the present. See I Peter 1:13 (I Cor. 2:10), where it is suggested that grace beyond all presently known boundaries will be revealed to believers, when he comes.

Verse 13 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”†

* * *

* See commentary on 2:17.

† See commentary on 2:7.

14 'And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

15 ' "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. 21 He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. "'

Verse 14 *'And to the angel of the church in Laodicea:* a city between 40 and 50 miles south-east of Philadelphia, and about 90 miles east of Ephesus, 11 miles west of Colossae, and 6 miles south of Hierapolis (cf. Col. 4:13). Named by Antiochus II (a Seleucide king 261–242 B.C.) after his wife Laodicea, it was a centre of Hellenic culture, and was wealthy because of its medicine school and a certain powder used to make eye salve. It also produced glossy black wool. The church there seemed to have also gathered some of the wealth as it lived in the community.

write: "The words of the Amen: but this seemingly simple word *Amen* must not be underrated, since in Numbers 5:21–22 and Deuteronomy 27:15–26 it is used as an oath linked with certain curses, in Nehemiah 5:13 and Jeremiah 11:5 with promises, and I Chronicles 16:36 as the response to a benedictory prayer (cf. Ps. 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48). In Isaiah 65:16 one swears by 'the God of truth', i.e. 'the Amen', and this is what Jesus is, in II Corinthians 1:20.

the faithful and true witness: which we saw in 1:5, *the beginning of God's creation:* i.e. the source and agent of all creation by the power of his word (John 1:1–3; Heb. 1:2–3; Col. 1:15–17; I Cor. 8:6). The Laodicean church is faced with an uncompromising Lord who has come to face them in their softness, ease and indecision. He who can create can recreate: he can alter the abysmal state of the church.

Verse 15 *' "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot:* i.e. 'you lack zeal, fire in the belly.'

Would that you were cold or hot!: 'Whilst you are not frigid, you also are not burning.' The complacent Pharisee in Luke 18:9–14 and the self-assured Jewish leaders in John 8:31ff. speak of indifference to the great issues of sin and grace, whilst the worldly ones are so sedated with comfort that the radical gospel—intended to penetrate wherever sinners are—seems to speak of a different arena of action. The church did not have enough vitality to go heretical!

Verse 16 *So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth:* The church makes the Lord sick!

Verse 17 *For:* The conjunction here links the state of the church in its lukewarmness with *you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing:* The people plainly and honestly believed they were in good order because of their material well-being, *not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked:* They seem even worse than those at Sardis. They are completely deceived. They are shocked to hear his words, *wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*

Verse 18 *Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire:* i.e. the true riches, since worldly riches are disastrous, love of money being a root of every kind of evil (I Tim. 6:9, 10, 17), for wealth gives a false impression of security and achievement, and brings suffering—'pierced their hearts with many pangs'.

that you may be rich: in his blessings (Eph. 1:2–3).

and white garments: as against filthy rags (Zech. 3:3–5; Isa. 64:6, 'and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment'), *to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen.*

and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see: Laodicea had plenty of medicinal eye salve, but not for these morally blind (cf. II Pet. 1:9).

Verse 19 *Those whom I love:* for love has nothing to do with the goodness and badness of a person. Even so, 'love suffers long and is patient'. The church seems to be in a worse condition than all others, but it is loved by the Lord of the candlesticks.

I reprove and chasten: as the principle is set out in Hebrews 12:5–11, i.e. the discipline of the Father's love.

so be zealous: 'get fire in the belly, zeal in the heart, fan up the embers till they send up flames (II Tim. 1:6), and be caught up in the passion of the gospel.'

and repent: i.e. 'effect a total change of mind to your riches and comfort and see afresh the life of the gospel—radical as it confronts

the world.' This would call for a radical change in the life of this comfortable church.

Verse 20 *Behold, I stand at the door and knock:* i.e. 'I am constantly knocking. Can you hear the sound of it? Can you hear my voice speaking to you? I am locked out of your life as a church. Do I stand as an intruder or as the Lord of the churches, the true and faithful one, the very Creator of all things?'

if any one: 'person amongst all those persons in your church.'

hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me: i.e. 'We will have the closest of fellowship—break bread together, salt our food with hospitality, be reminded of the Last Supper and the coming Messianic victory feast, but, in simplicity, talk and fellowship together.' This strong intimacy will banish the complacency, enliven the slothful spirit, and set it ablaze with love and affection for him who will sup with his people!

Verse 21 *He who conquers:* i.e. the now-awakened at Laodicea—and, indeed, in all the churches—conquering sloth, ease, complacency, blandness, blindness and the like.

I will grant him to sit with me on my throne: this great throne of which we read so much in this very prophecy, the seat and centre of all authority, action and judgement (cf. Dan. 7:9ff.).

as I myself conquered: i.e. the powers of darkness and of death and of the world (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15; Gal 1:4; 6:14).

and sat down with my Father on his throne: as my reward for conquering, and my right for ruling.

Verse 22 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'* **

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

Further lessons are to be learned from Christ's communication with the last three churches. For example, if we find a church that has a name that it lives, which seems to be flourishing and even admired, then it could well be at the point of death. In the ultimate only Christ can detect this, and so the church must be listening always to hear the voice of the Spirit discerning its state and informing it of it. A seemingly prosperous church may be a poverty-stricken and blind

* Refer commentary on 2:7.

church, but who would recognize this fact when the church is often trying to impress the world about it, and is unconsciously conforming to it? Often the world seeks to take on the seeming morality and spirituality of the church, turning it into a charade or travesty, or making it a basis for self-righteousness, and the church must not conform to this clever sort of worldliness.

Obviously the church to copy is the one at Philadelphia—the name meaning ‘brotherly love’—which knows persecution, but is undeterred by that. An obedient church has encouraging promises from its Lord, and benefits from his care and protection because it hears what he is saying.

Summed up, the seven churches, which constitute the sevenfold church throughout the age, are under the care and aid of the Lord, and remembering that the angels of the churches are in his hand, and that he walks among the golden lampstands, we can be one with them as he fits them to meet the age in which they live—the eschatological and apocalyptic age. Many things are to happen in these last times, and the church must be alert and ready to meet them, to obey the commandments of God, to hold to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, for this is what the church—and the churches—is all about.

Chapter Four

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

IF chapter 1 was necessary to introduce us to the entire prophecy, and if the vision of Christ was indispensable to create the setting for it, then this vision of God, the throne, the celestial creatures, the seven-sealed book and the Lamb is essential for us to understand the nature of the prophecy itself.

Much of this chapter has become incorporated into Christian thinking, liturgy and hymnody. Again, John has to be 'in the Spirit' to be transported to heaven, or anyway to see into heaven, as also to understand what he sees. He sees the throne in its beauty, authority and action. The placing of heavenly creatures is also given. The four living creatures are closest to the heart of the throne, and are the initiators of worship. We will later see that they give commands in regard to the creatures sent forth by the opening of the seals of the book. We also have a description of the twenty-four elders, including something of their function in heaven, and within the prophecy.

In this chapter we also witness the worship of celestial creatures—the living ones, elders and angels. The nature of the worship and the objects and inspiration of that worship are also given. Altogether it is a momentous chapter. As with other chapters, we wonder how the book of prophecy could really be such a book if this chapter were absent. We are being coached and conditioned to go more deeply into God's purposes for His creation.

COMMENTARY

¹ After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this.' ² At once I was in the Spirit, and lo, a throne stood in heaven, with one

seated on the throne! ³ *And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald.* ⁴ *Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads.* ⁵ *From the throne issue flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God;* ^{6a} *and before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.*

Verse 1 *After this:* i.e. after the vision of the Lord of the lampstands and the letters written.

I looked, and lo: The 'lo' is intended to catch our attention to see and know something marvellous.

in heaven an open door!: i.e. he who opens and shuts doors has opened this special door to a human prophet.

And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet: i.e. the voice of 1:10, *said, 'Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this.'* So the prophet will be inducted into the fullness of the prophecy, but he will have to be in heaven for this—an extraordinary event for a man. The use of the term *must take place* shows the events will be indispensable to God's sovereign purposes. Nothing unnecessary happens from God.

Verse 2 *At once I was in the Spirit:* for without the Spirit—who is the Spirit of prophecy (I Pet. 1:10–12; II Pet. 1:21; Rev. 19:10)—there can be no sight, understanding or utterance of prophecy—in this case *the prophecy*—nor can there be entrance into heaven.

and lo: (again attention is riveted in one direction), *a throne stood in heaven:* this heavenly throne being the centre of all that is created, the place of Divine dwelling, the seat of authority and judgement, from which issues the river of life.

with one seated on the throne!: The word *throne* is mentioned fourteen times just in this chapter. It is God who is seated, and we find it is also the seat of the Lamb. The scene is reminiscent of Daniel 7:9ff., and that scene is intended to be recalled to memory. In Revelation 3:20 Christ required the heart of the listener—his throne room. We see Satan has a kingdom, and a seat to that kingdom—'Satan's throne' (2:13), 'the throne of the beast' (16:10). The prophecy is really the account of the battle of the thrones for the throne of God.

Verse 3 *And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian:* i.e. translucent whiteness and brilliant red, which symbolize the holy beauty of God and perhaps His judgements.

and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald: i.e. this green light and the rainbow spoke of covenant—as with Noah, and as with Moses, and so through Christ to his people.

Verse 4 *Round the throne were twenty-four thrones:* for the throne of God is not alone. Others have delegated authority, and rule with Him and under His direction. The whole area depicting God's present action is an awesome one.

and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders: i.e. twenty-four who have authority in heaven and may be seen as the archetype of human elders. Their task is a vast one, for they do many things, such as surrounding the throne, helping to lead in worship, gathering the prayers of the saints to give to the angel to present to God.

clad in white garments: tells us of their purity—and so—power.

with golden crowns upon their heads: such being the symbol of delegated authority and power which issues from the throne of God. The elders have an awesome task if it constitutes assisting God to rule the nations. Some have thought the twenty-four elders represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and the Gentile nations. This has led some to believe they are human, but everything points to them being celestial.

Verse 5 *From the throne issue flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder:* i.e. the dynamic activity of God's glory, as seen in Exodus 19:16–19 (cf. Heb. 12:18f.). Later we meet the same throne-phenomena (cf. Rev. 8:5; 11:19).

and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God: this sevenfold Spirit being as the holy candelabra—the seven-branched candlestick always in the Holy Place, shedding light on all—as it were forming the Glory-Cloud of God's presence, as also being the horns and eyes of the Lamb crucified (5:6), i.e. his eyes heart-searching in all the world, and his horns the strength by which the word of God goes out to the uttermost part of this globe.

Verse 6a *and before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal:* This sea, which in the temple was the great bronze laver in which the priest washed before approaching the Holy Place, could quite represent peace to the sinner, and a quiet and serene conscience, or it could represent the purifying of the waters of baptism—Paul's 'laver of regeneration' (Titus 3:5) bringing 'renewal in the Holy Spirit'.

6b And round the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: 7 the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing,

*'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!'*

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

*11 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for thou didst create all things,
and by thy will they existed and were created.'*

Verse 6b *And round the throne, on each side of the throne:* i.e. the throne is square or four-faced.

are four living creatures: which have six wings (see Ezek. 1:1–26 for the four creatures of the throne of God called cherubim, which have four wings; and Isa. 6:1–3 for the glorious creatures called seraphim, i.e. 'burners', which have six wings, all being occupied with the throne and with worship), i.e. four beautiful living beings representing various elements—man and other strong creatures—which God has put into creation.

full of eyes in front and behind, who can thus see what is happening upon the throne, both before and behind them. In Ezekiel's vision (1:17–20) they do not have to turn their heads. Here, in verse 8, they are full of eyes all round and within, i.e. they have outer perception and inner discernment, for the use of these senses is required in pure worship and service of God.

Verse 7 *the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle:* Swete comments, "The four forms suggest what is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate Nature.* They combine what is so in creation—noble glory (cf. Ps. 104:1–30)—and as one unit they serve God. They are *living*, i.e. they are in action, doing things, and not passive and inactive. Their worship is so

* Henry Barclay Swete. *The Apocalypse of St John* 2nd edn. Macmillan and Co.. 1907. p. 71.

powerful that its revelation of God initiates worship in the twenty-four elders, or sometimes they simultaneously share with them and others in this worship-action (Rev. 4:9–10; 5:6–8, 11–14; 7:11; 14:3; 19:4). In 6:1, 3, 5, 7, the action of the first four of the living seals of the book is activated by the four living creatures; in 7:11 they share with the great multitude of the redeemed in praise and adoration for their salvation; in 14:3 they witness the ‘new song’ that the 144,000 sing before the throne; and in 19:4 they are part of the thunderous adoration to God for the righteous judgements wrought upon Babylon and for the coming glorious marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. All in all they represent the entire creation. As the noblest of all creatures—apart from glorified man—they fall down before God in worship (7:11; 19:4).

Verse 8 *And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings:* doubtless, as in Ezekiel and Isaiah, to be in action in worship. In Isaiah two wings are used to cover the face and two to cover the feet before the Ineffable, and two are used to fly in service.

are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing: i.e. their worship is perpetual; they can never desist from it. At no moment is worship not ascending to God. In Isaiah 6:3 the lyric is,

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

Here it is,

*‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!’*

and we have seen in 1:8 that the Lord God Almighty is the Lord of Hosts, the Pantokrator, God over all, the Alpha and Omega, the Initiator of all His own acts, which are unceasing in history. Worship in the Revelation is for many things, such as God’s holiness (here stated), His glory, His eternity, His redemption, His sovereignty and His righteous judgements. Worship consists of praise and glorification of God, and thankfulness for His works and His judgements.

Verse 9 *And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to him:* i.e. when as creatures they attribute to Him what is His true character, what is due to Him as Creator, and what delineates His true being—doing it with thankfulness for His nature.

who is seated on the throne: God over all, creating, redeeming, sustaining, judging, and *who lives for ever and ever.*

Verse 10 *the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne*: for He is the One Who matters, the central Object of worship, for which the throne and the creatures all exist—He alone.

and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne: in humility, not caring for their own authority, but submitting it to Him—*singing*,

Verse 11 *‘Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created’*: Without doubt, creation is the primary thing, not only of this prophecy but of all things. Peter assures us that we can trust our souls to ‘a faithful Creator’, i.e. that God does not create and abandon His creation. Before time He has planned its great *telos* climax, and its repristination, i.e. its glorification, its eternalization. The celestial creatures have all this in mind as they give Him what is due to Him. It was His will to bring them into being, and creation was planned and executed in wisdom (Jer. 10:12; cf. 51:15–19):

It is he who made the earth by his power,
 who established the world by his wisdom,
 and by his understanding stretched out the heavens (51:15).

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

No one who has read this chapter—who had not previously read it—should ever be the same again. Whilst the symbolism is beautiful and even charming, it should not blind us to the reality of God within it. There are forty-seven mentions of thrones in the prophecy and only a few of them pertain to evil. The throne, when seen, is the centre of authority, power and action, and so much happens on the throne, and all works emanate from it. We should keep our minds on this centre. Then, also, we should trace the origins of living creatures and elders, and—for that matter—the significance of angels.

This chapter introduces us to pure worship—worship such as we do not find at present on earth. The matter of it is enlarged in one of our Essays at the back of the book, for it is an important subject. See also my book *The Way and Wonder of Worship*. The worship is what prepares us for the next step in the prophecy, i.e. the appearance of the Lamb and the seven-sealed book, and these in turn lead to a further expression of celestial worship.

By this time we should be realizing that we cannot—so to speak—sit on the sidelines and watch history as a spectator. We too—especially as we are believers—are involved in it. The world of God's plan and our obedience to it are opening up to us.

Chapter Five

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THIS chapter is perhaps the pivotal chapter of the whole Book. There is so much commotion when no one can be found who is competent or accredited to open the seven-sealed book which appears before us. John the Seer is deeply moved, for it seems he knows what it is about. In visions something of their meaning comes through the viewer, and in this case he wishes there was one able to open the scroll. One is found, and it is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, with all the connotations that title has. When John looks, he sees not a Lion but a Lamb.

The fact that such a one has prevailed to open the book and its seven seals again causes celestial worship to break out. At first the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders begin the worship, but then it is taken up by a numberless multitude, which includes angels and all creatures in heaven and on earth. Their thunderous praise and adoration is for the Father and the Lamb and their redemptive action in history. It is marvellous to see the Lamb accorded the same kind of praise as that given to the Father.

COMMENTARY

¹ And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals; ² and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and breaks its seals?' ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, 'Weep not; lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

Verse 1 *And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne:* i.e. the executive hand, as in 1:16, 17, 20; 2:1.

a scroll: i.e. a book in scroll form.

written within and on the back: which means it was full and complete.

sealed with seven seals: which, for those times, represented a testament, but the *seven* accords with the many sevens of this Book, i.e. a thing full and complete. It has been thought by some to be to the church, as the covenant document was to Israel (Deut. 31:26)—a witness against them in times of rebellion and idolatry—but the scroll, when opened, proves to be God's judgemental acts of history upon the human race, and the evil powers.

Verse 2 *and I saw a strong angel:* not meaning that some angels are weak, but that this one has power to reach the whole of humanity (cf. 10:1; 18:21) whilst he is *proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?'* Whilst the angel does not verbally include it in his message, he is asking 'who is worthy?'—capable of opening up all history, and controlling it, not only for humanity but for all celestial creatures also. All history is in the contents of this book, and he who opens it must be the Lord of history.

Verse 3 *And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it:* so that it is clear that no human being or any celestial creature has the integrity, power, authority or ability to control the events that arise from opening the scroll.

Verse 4 *and I wept much:* i.e. noisily, wailing, deeply distraught.

that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it: This because John was to see the things 'which must take place after this', and it now seemed impossible. Perhaps he was wondering why his Lord was not sufficient for the scroll-opening.

Verse 5 *Then one of the elders said to me, 'Weep not:* i.e. there is no cause for weeping; though even Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon are not worthy, there is one who is.

lo: i.e. look up, do not miss this fact: see him.

the Lion of the tribe of Judah: as prophesied by the dying Jacob in Genesis 49:9–10, the famous 'Shiloh' promise and prediction:

Judah is a lion's whelp;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He stooped down, he couched as a lion,

and as a lioness; who dares rouse him up?
 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
 nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
 until he comes to whom it belongs;
 and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

the Root of David, has conquered: in accordance with this and many other prophecies. He has conquered at the Cross, defeating Satan and his hosts, rebellious man, and the world, and the flesh, *so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.*'

* * *

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth; ⁷ and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; ⁹ and they sang a new song, saying,

*'Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals,
 for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God
 from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
¹⁰ and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
 and they shall reign on earth.'*

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!' ¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, 'To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!' ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Verse 6 *And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders:* i.e. in the place of honour, closest to the One on the throne, and higher than the living creatures and elders.

I saw a Lamb: i.e. the one John had called 'the Lamb of God [even though the word was different, it is basically the same animal] who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29).

standing: as in action (cf. Acts 7:55–56).

as though it had been slain: i.e. 'Christ crucified', but not now on the cross; he is risen, ascended and glorified. Even so, the Lion is the Lamb, the Lamb the Lion, i.e. victory comes through the weakness of the Cross (I Cor. 1:25; II Cor. 13:4).

with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God: i.e. the sevenfold Spirit who is the eyes (seven eyes) and strength and authority of Christ (seven horns), i.e. who is one with Christ, as is 'the Spirit of Christ', 'the Spirit of Jesus', 'the Spirit of the Lord', 'the Spirit of [Christ's] Sonship'.

sent out into all the earth: the very earth which the Spirit created (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps. 33:6; 104:29–30), in which the Spirit causes the gospel to be proclaimed 'to the uttermost part' (Acts 1:8; cf. Ps. 2:7–8; I Thess. 1:8; Heb. 2:1–3; I Pet. 1:12).

Verse 7 *and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne:* This going to the throne without hesitation or human deference casts our minds back to Daniel 7:13–14 (cf. Rev. 11:15f.):

I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed;

for the giving—and taking—of the scroll is tantamount to God giving the Kingdom to His Son.

Verse 8 *And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb:* for the Lamb is now shown as Lord of history; having conquered he has proved himself worthy to open the scroll, and warrants the same worship as is given to God.

each holding a harp: 'harps of God' (15:2), instruments of worship acceptable to God.

and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints: As David has said, 'Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!' (Ps. 141:2).

Special incense was used in worship, and its prescription was forbidden for common use (Exod. 30:22–38), under threat of death. Worship offered to God is holy. In Revelation 8:1–5 the prayers of the saints are offered with incense by an angel—the prayers which have been collected by the elders.

Verse 9 *and they sang a new song*: because something new had happened. The new song always comes from God's special visitation, for He puts the song in the heart (Ps. 40:3). Isaiah 42:10 (cf. Ps. 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9) enjoined, 'Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth!', and in Revelation 15:3 the song sung is new, even though it has the 'old' song of Moses.

saying, 'Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals: 'for you have done in the history of man what no other has ever done, in that you have liberated men and women, have entered into their suffering, and by that suffering redeemed them.'

for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men: 'by the price of your blood, your death for men.'

for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation: because that is what God is about in history, i.e. redeeming and making into His family those *from every tribe and tongue and people and nation*.

Verse 10 *and hast made them a kingdom*: i.e. 'inheritors of your Kingdom, the Kingdom for which they suffer' (II Thess. 1:5; Acts 14:22), 'which you are pleased to give them' (Luke 12:32; 22:28–29).

and priests: i.e. the priestly people, as in Exodus 19:5–6 and I Peter 2:9–10; *to our God* (Rev. 1:6; 22:5).

and they shall reign on earth.' That they should thus reign is the message of Daniel 7:13ff. There is a present reigning (Rom. 5:17; Eph. 2:5–6), and there will be a future reigning (II Tim. 2:12). We are apt to think the saints will reign only in heaven, and be only in heaven, but here is Divine nationhood operating on earth, even if its seat and throne is in heaven.

Verse 11 *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands*: as we see in Deuteronomy 33:2, Psalm 68:17, Daniel 7:10, and Hebrews 12:22, celestial creatures being innumerable.

Verse 12 *saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain*: since for them, as for St Paul, they could glory in nothing other than

Jesus Christ and him crucified: no other faith can have such depth of the word of the Cross.

to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!': This sevenfold ascription to the Lamb is valid; he is worthy to receive worship because these elements are truly his. Rightly understood they are both dazzling in their brilliance and beauty, and awesome in their authority and dominion.

Verse 13 *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, 'To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!'* Not only the living creatures and the elders worship—as in 4:9–10—but these are accompanied by the multitudinous angels. Then all creatures celestial and terrestrial join in the accolade to God and the Lamb (cf. Heb. 12:22–23; Phil. 2:10). We should note that the great worshipping multitude does not give 'blessing and honour'—for these attributes already belong to God. They simply recognize and confess these elements of God and the Lamb.

Verse 14 *And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshipped:* This is the ultimate and total acknowledgment of the Lordship of Christ, his Sonship of the Father as he inherits all things, and the affirmation of his oneness with the Father. Every knee bows and every tongue confesses that he is Lord, to the glory of the Father, and he, in turn, gives the Kingdom he has won to the Father, that 'God may be all in all'.

Even so, much has to happen to ensure that all this comes to pass. That is the burden of the rest of this Book.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

If all heavenly creatures and every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth give forth such magnificent praise to God and the Lamb, then the event must be of great significance—which of course it is. Much of the remainder of the Book is about the events which opening the seals of the book will bring forth. For us the main revelation is that Christ is Lord of history. Other parts of the New Testament tell us this also. For this reason, then, we must consider the confrontation of the Lamb in our lives. As the Lamb, he has seven horns and seven eyes which are the Holy Spirit—the sevenfold Spirit—who is one with him in his Lordship over all the earth. His

vocation as 'the Lamb'—attested by John the Baptist and the prophets—is of such importance as to be the central vocation of history. We, then, need to absorb every detail of this section, and then learn to live by it. Christ's Lordship is central to all history. This chapter must be burned upon our memory and our daily thinking, else we will not understand the plan of God, nor ourselves be involved in it. We should—we must—be involved in all history.

Chapter Six

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THERE is something about prophecy which defies literalizing it. Naturally we seek to interpret it, but often interpretation is based upon our own subjective feelings about it, and our own intellectual views of what it should represent. Whilst it is natural that we will want to interpret visions in the light of history, it is often that we ought to interpret history in the light of visions. Visions somehow become part of us, their mysteries indelibly printed on us, and they can so determine our way of thinking that we sense the prophetic in everything. We see life around us through the lens of such visions. Visions and dreams are, of course, the substance from which prophecy is formed (cf. Num. 12:6; Jer. 23:23ff.; Acts 2:17–18). Sometimes the prophets told their visions, but mostly they simply gave the message which had come naturally to them—the seers—from the visions.

We have a number of things to take into consideration before we look at the breaking of the seven seals. We will have to understand that the seals do not necessarily follow a chronological order, and neither do the seven trumpets, which are the next series of the Revelation. For that matter, the seven bowls are not necessarily sequential. We should keep in mind the fact that each series of seven is a set of judgements. In his book *More than Conquerors* W. Hendrik—sen sees these sets as ‘progressive parallelism’. Others see them as three emanations from an epicentre—a sort of circular parallelism. Some, of course, see them all as sequential in time. Most theories are endeavours to get the material into some rational form, but since we are dealing with apocalyptic happenings and language, it would seem unwise to do that. We need to keep seeing that symbolism is

* Tvndale Press. 1947.

dealing with reality, the communication of which requires such symbols. For this reason it is best for us not to try to tie visions down solely to events which we think they may fit, or which fits them. One example of this is the mark or name of the beast. How many names have been fitted into the value of the numerals 666!

In this chapter we meet 'the four horsemen of the Apocalypse', as they have been named. At the opening of the fifth seal we are shown the martyrs under the altar and their desire for vengeance. The last scene of the sixth seal is a terrible one, striking at the mighty in this world, and terrifying them. So, then, runs this famous chapter!

COMMENTARY

¹ Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, as with a voice of thunder, 'Come!' ² And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

³ When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, 'Come!' ⁴ And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

⁵ When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come!' And I saw, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a balance in his hand; ⁶ and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not harm oil and wine!'

⁷ When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, 'Come!' ⁸ And I saw, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him; and they were given power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

Verse 1 *Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say:* Which of the living creatures speaks we do not know, although John says 'the second,' 'the third,' (etc.), so it would seem to be the first, i.e. the lion-like one.*

as with a voice of thunder: It speaks with a voice of thunder, probably to be heard not only by the rider, but universally. In effect the voice comes from the throne, commanding the rider, 'Come!'. It is the moment and situation in history for this conqueror to do God's will.

* See also commentary on 4:6-9.

Verse 2 *And I saw, and behold, a white horse*: making most readers think of 19:11f., i.e. of Christ the Conqueror. In fact Zechariah 1:8–10 shows us horsemen of God whose work was to patrol the earth, and the result was ‘the earth remains at rest’. Then in Zechariah chapter 6 there are four horsemen and their steeds about the same in colour as in Revelation 6, and their work is to patrol the earth. They are shown to be the four winds which do only the will of the Lord.

and its rider had a bow: a weapon often linked with Divine victory (cf. Hab. 3:9, 13; cf. Isa. 41:2; 49:2–3; Zech. 9:13; Ps. 45:4–5).

and a crown was given to him (i.e. a wreath of victory), *and he went out conquering and to conquer*: and because conquering seems primarily an action of Christ and the gospel (cf. Rom. 8:37; Rev. chs 2 and 3—seven times—and 21:5ff.), the Rider is thought to be the Gospel-Rider. There is, of course, a conquest of peace, but see also Revelation 13:7 and Daniel 7:23, where the Beast conquers the saints.

Comment: This rider on the horse is the first of the ‘four horsemen of the Apocalypse’, and since the three latter horsemen come to bring catastrophe to man and the creation, certain misunderstandings have arisen. One is that the latter three horsemen are evil. When God says, in Isaiah 45:7,

I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe,
I am the Lord, who do all these things,

He does not mean that He creates moral darkness and evil, but that the darkness He brings to man, and the disaster that comes to man—which is ‘woe’ but not moral ‘evil’—must not be ascribed just to evil powers. Even when evil powers do their worst, God is in control, and God permits and uses such. He turns the wrath of man to His praise. If we do not see this we are likely to ascribe judgements to Satan and not to God! In the ultimate everything comes from the hand of God, so that no one needs to be dismayed.

In the section before us regarding the four riders, we must see them in the hand of God. It is the Lamb who opens the seal, and as a result, the four living creatures direct the riders in their action. This brings us to a second point, namely that it does not matter if we cannot interpret all or even any matters of the prophecy. Commentators often assume everything must be interpreted. The Spirit of God who inspired John is the same Spirit who attends our sincere reading of the prophecy. Often inner comprehension cannot be outwardly verbalized. When some commentators make the Rider on the white horse to be Christ and others to be Antichrist, then who shall we believe, since both have convincing arguments? What we do know is that the rider has been called forth by God to do a work. It is God—in Christ—Who is controlling and working out history, and this is what matters.

Verses 3–4 *When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, ‘Come! And out came another horse, bright red*: generally inter-

preted as signifying bloodshed which takes peace from the earth (cf. 'wars and rumours of wars', Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7–8; Luke 21:9–10), and it may be presumed that the Rider on the white horse did not take, but even gave, peace to the earth.

its rider was permitted (again we see the actions can only take place under God's agreement) *to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.*

Verse 5 *When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come!' And I saw, and behold, a black horse:* portraying grief and mourning.

and its rider had a balance in his hand: i.e. for weighing out rations, a custom in times of famine.

Verse 6 *and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures:* the voice expressing the unanimity of the four creatures.

saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not harm oil and wine!': Wheat was used by the affluent families, and barley by the poor. It would cost more for wheat, but as yet there would be no restrictions—higher prices—for wine and oil, i.e. the famine would not be extremely severe.

Verses 7–8 *When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, 'Come!' And I saw, and behold, a pale horse:* in fact its colour was pale green, the colour of a corpse.

and its rider's name was Death, and Hades (over which Christ has both the victory and authority*) *followed him; and they were given power over a fourth of the earth:* which shows their action, though vast and terrible, is strictly limited.

to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence: i.e. three forms of judgements of God in Egypt and on Israel whenever she turned to apostasy, the latter being called 'covenantal curses', as in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 29.

and by wild beasts of the earth: which figure quite largely in the history of Israel (cf. Lev. 26:6; Ezek. 14:21; 5:17).

* * *

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; ¹⁰ they cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord,

* See commentary on 1:18.

holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?’ ¹¹ *Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

Verse 9 *When he opened the fifth seal:* this time without a command from the four living creatures.

I saw under the altar: the altar of sacrifice (cf. Lev. 4:7), where the blood of the sacrifices was poured out, and which now signifies the redeeming Cross. Here the altar is in heaven.

the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne: i.e. for proclaiming the gospel by their witness to Christ, and Christ had predicted such opposition, persecution and killings so that they would not be surprised and shocked when the time came (John 15:18—16:4; cf. Matt. 10:16–23).

Verse 10 *they cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge:* i.e. not bring revenge (cf. Rom. 12:18–21) but justice, and in this way avenge *our blood* which always cries from the ground (Gen. 4:10; cf. Heb. 12:24), and under law required expiation (Num. 35:33; cf. Job 16:18; Isa. 26:21; Ezek. 24:7).

on those who dwell upon the earth?’: In Deuteronomy 32:43 God had promised this avengement. The souls under the altar had no doubt that God would avenge them, but they desired it to be quickly.

Verse 11 *Then they were each given a white robe* (see 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 7:9, 13; 19:14) *and told to rest a little longer:* i.e. there is a time appointed and it will not go beyond that point (see comment below).

until the number of their fellow servants (‘servants’ is a biblical term for prophets) *and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been:* This is a statement about the sovereignty of God, that it is in His purpose for so many to be killed.

Comment: The matter of vindication is a strong one in both the Old and New Testaments. In 6:9–11 the martyred saints are not so much asking to be avenged, as for God’s justice to be vindicated. In Genesis 4:10 Abel’s blood cries for avengement, for homicide is a terrible and horrible deed. God’s power over the universe and His justice within it is the question. God does avenge, but never before the time. In Genesis 15:12–16 God shows Abraham that He will not judge the Amorites before the proper time of judgement, ‘for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete’. Nor will He judge after the time. The story in Luke 18:1–8 asks, ‘And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day

and night? Will he delay long over them?’ and answers, ‘I tell you, he will vindicate them *speedily*. It is just that God’s time and ours differ. Even so, God’s time is the right one.

* * *

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; 14 the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?’

Verse 12 *When he opened the sixth seal*: Again there is no command from a living creature, and again John looks. The question is whether the fifth and sixth seals are linked, some seeing the sixth as the direct answer to the cry for avengement in the fifth, but since they were told to bide their time, it seems the catastrophic events point to an even wider situation than the killing of the martyrs.

I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun (the light and ruler of the day, Gen. 1:16) *became black as sackcloth, the full moon* (the light and ruler of the night, Gen. 1:16) *became like blood.*

Comment: The question is whether these events of the seals are *literal* or *metaphorical* but of course they are *actual*, and the form in which they are described is apocalyptic, i.e. it cannot be tied to the literal, whilst the literal cannot be excepted. If verses 12–16 are literal, then certain statements contradict themselves, but contradictions can be contained with the structure of apocalyptic language. This kind of description is used in the Old Testament, as also by our Lord. Here it signifies the utter confusion, the removal of all identifying landmarks, the complete bewilderment as the old order is banished. Of course it is judgement in terrible forms, although the indications are that even this is not the utter end.

Examples of apocalyptic language used in the prophets are such as employed in Isaiah speaking about action against Babylon:

For the stars of the heavens and their constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising
and the moon will not shed its light . . .
Therefore I will make the heavens tremble,

and the earth will be shaken out of its place,
at the wrath of the Lord of hosts
in the day of his fierce anger (Isa. 13:10, 13)

I clothe the heavens with blackness,
and make sackcloth their covering (Isa. 50:3; cf. Jer. 4:23ff.)

In Joel 2:31 we have, 'The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood', similar language to that used by Christ in Matthew 24:29f., namely, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven . . .'

Note: It would seem, by this passage, that the ultimate judgement has come, but in the Revelation and much other prophecy, apocalyptic descriptions leave room for the further, and perhaps more intensive, visitation of God, such as we find in later descriptions. It may well be that all crises—such as the one here described—are aspects and phases of the total judgements, and show that God is always working in processive judgement which, in turn, will come to a climax in the *telos*

Verse 13 *and the stars of the sky:* the keepers of light against darkness (Gen. 1:16–17), known in Scripture as angels created to do God's will in the universe (Num. 24:17; Isa. 14:12; Dan. 8:10), *fell to the earth as the fig tree*—the fig-tree representing Israel, but here the judgement seems wider than Israel—*sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.*

Verse 14 *the sky vanished like a scroll:* 'And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fade away, as the leaf falleth from the vine, and as the falling leaf from the fig tree' (Isa. 34:4).

that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place: Every known point of identification disappeared, so that only non-recognition existed, and no normal place or state of security remained.

Verse 15 *Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong:* i.e. those who, to this point, had governed and directed the affairs of the human race but without primary reference to God.

and every one, slave and free: i.e. none excepted of the human race upon whom was the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18f.).

hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains: We observe that had everything literally vanished, as in verse 14, then there would be no rocks and mountains, but in apocalyptic this is no problem; here

the state of confusion and insecurity is part of the active wrath of God.

Verse 16 *calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:* i.e. anything is better than to face the awesome holiness of God, and the eyes like a flame of fire of the Lamb, and inwardly the excruciating accusation of conscience (cf. Rom. 2:15–16).

Verse 17 *for the great day:* 'Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it' (Isa. 13:9; cf. Joel 2:11; Zeph. 1:14–15).

of their wrath: i.e. the wrath of both the Father and the Lamb, Christ having been appointed as God's Judge (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31).

has come: The desire of those under the wrath of God to escape is understandable. There is no protest that such wrath is wrong and unjust. Mankind will have to face that 'wrath to come' which is the climactic crisis of judgement by God (I Thess. 1:10; cf. Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:3–6; II Thess. 1:7–9; Rom. 1:29–32; 2:5ff.), Who has, all the time, been revealing His wrath from heaven (Rom. 1:18; Ps. 7:11; 38:1–8; Ezek. 7:8).

and who can stand before it?': In the ultimate all human arguments against wrath cannot stand in the light of moral reality. Man has no refuge from the wrath he fully deserves. Nahum said (1:6),

Who can stand before his indignation?
Who can endure the heat of his anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire,
and the rocks are broken asunder by him.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter is indeed filled with solid food for spiritual consumption. We would have to admit that the apocalyptic figures are difficult to interpret into literal understanding. Do we, then, have to have such an exercise? Is it not better to let the thrust of the persons and actions simply soak in and be absorbed, so that when we meet the same principle in action we can recognize it, and be better off for knowing it? The fact of the three sets of events within the breaking of the six seals should teach us 'apocalyptic sense'. Romans 1:18–32 expounds God's wrath being revealed all the time from heaven upon

the ungodly—by giving them up to their guilt and sin—but here we have direct interventions of God into history, with catastrophic actions. Because of this we may have to ruminate over the nature of judgements and the reason for them in God's history.

We will see similar themes in later chapters, as there is one thread woven into the fabric of history: the just judgements of God. We need to see the purpose and significance of what God does, and rejoice in it, as the prophecy develops. We personally need to understand that God is working in history, through the Lamb, by the seals, trumpets and bowls, and that the later battle with evil—from chapter 11 onwards—is linked in with all this. We will also need to ask ourselves whether we have held this view of history, and, if not, what view of history we have or should have. Certainly the awareness of God's continuous working will affect the way we go about life.

Chapter Seven

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

CHAPTER 7 has been called ‘an interlude’, but it is only that in relation to the opening of the seventh seal which happens in the next chapter. It is not, however, an interlude; it is another part of the action of God. The first section relates to the 144,000, i.e. the twelve tribes. The commentary will discuss this matter, but what strikes us is the ‘sealing’ of this people of God, especially against harm which can come to them. It is a prelude to a later sealing by the beast of his own with his peculiar mark. We then see the multitude of the redeemed who are at last in heaven before the throne, and they are gloriously cared for, by contrast to the beast, who is cruel to his own—‘those taken captive at his will’.

COMMENTARY

¹ After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³ saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.’ ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel, ⁵ twelve thousand sealed out of the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand of the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand of the tribe of Gad, ⁶ twelve thousand of the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand of the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand of the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷ twelve thousand of the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand of the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand of the tribe of Issachar, ⁸ twelve thousand of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand of the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand sealed out of the tribe of Benjamin.

Verse 1 *After this*: i.e. 'the next event was'.

I saw four angels: i.e. four who are at the command of God.

standing at the four corners of the earth: a picturesque way of covering the entire earth.

holding back the four winds of the earth: since their task was not to let havoc loose until the appointed moment, *that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree*.

Verse 2 shows us that the four winds would have harmed the earth and sea and trees. The 'four winds' in Jeremiah 49:35–36 are a terrifying scattering force. In Ezekiel 37:9 they are the source of a great regeneration of Israel. In Daniel 7:2 the four winds stir up the great sea, and as a result four beasts emerge from it. In Zechariah 6:5 the four chariots with their variously coloured horses go 'to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth'. On some counts the earth and the sea are the nations from which the beast and the second beast (or false prophet) arise (cf. Rev. 13:1, 11; 17:15; cf. Dan. 7:2). Trees can be just men (Judg. 9:8–15) or righteous men (Exod. 15:17; Ps. 1:3; 92:12–14; Isa. 56:3), but they may simply represent the general flora.

Verse 2 *Then I saw another angel*: the one who is to seal the 144,000.

ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice: i.e. the voice of Divine authority.

to the four angels who had been given power: for this was their function and mandate—to *harm earth and sea*.

Verse 3 *saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads'*: Not until the servants of God are sealed may these angels fulfil their task. We are not told that they ever did (cf. 9:13ff. where four angels are released to fulfil the task of killing a third of mankind). The point of the people being sealed and protected is made, as in Ezekiel 9 where the chapter is given to the judgement of Jerusalem, excepting only those marked, i.e. sealed by 'a man clothed in linen', who was probably an angel. Doubtless this picture was in John's mind.

Verse 4 *And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand*: i.e. a set number—no more, no less—*sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel*: and the emphasis is that these shall not be hurt by the 'four winds'—the angels of judgement which God uses.

Verses 5–8 *twelve thousand sealed out of the tribe of Judah, twelve thou*

sand of the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand of the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand of the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand of the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand of the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand of the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand of the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand of the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand of the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand sealed out of the tribe of Benjamin.

Comment: It can be seen that the 144,000—as a number—is somewhat artificial, since tribes were of different numbers. The square of twelve is significant, no doubt, as twelve is a primary number in Israel, and in the ultimate Holy City. The fact that the names of the tribes differ somewhat to the tribes in the Covenant—those of Genesis 49 and Ezekiel 48 also differ—may indicate the naming is not a primary consideration (Joseph is named in Genesis but not in Ezekiel; Dan is named in Genesis and Ezekiel but not in Revelation; Ephraim is named in Ezekiel but not in Genesis and Revelation—and so on). Who, then, are the 144,000? They are mentioned again in Revelation 14:1–5, where they have the Father’s name written on them—a true seal of their filial relationships with God—and they follow the Lamb wherever he goes. 14:3 says they have been ‘redeemed from the earth’, and 14:4 ‘redeemed from mankind’. These two statements seem to indicate they are not selected from one nation, but from all mankind. It seems safe to see them either as ‘first fruits for God and the Lamb’ (14:4) and so a proportion of the entire redeemed, or as the entire redeemed, i.e. the true Israel (James 1:1; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; I Pet. 1:1; 2:9–10; Titus 2:14; Gal. 6:16).

Some see the 144,000 as a special group—a new Israel within the new Israel—as though they are prophets or special holy ones—but then they could not be different from the rest of the harvest if they were the first fruits. Even so, some refrain from making the 144,000 exactly equal to ‘the multitude which no man can number’.

* * *

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!’ ¹¹ And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹² saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.’

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?’ ¹⁴ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’

- 15 *Therefore are they before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night within his temple;
and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his
presence.*
- 16 *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;
the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.*
- 17 *For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water;
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'*

Verse 9 *After this:* i.e. another and new event, though not necessarily following the former in sequential order.

I looked, and behold, a great multitude: i.e. surely more than the 144,000, even if not wholly other than them.*

which no man could number: i.e. the full harvest of the gospel, and greater than often accredited to the preaching of the same.

from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues: i.e. the nations for which both Satan and God have fought down through the ages. Satan's powers try to deceive and win the nations, and Christ claims the nations as God's elect people given to him, all of which began with the covenantal promises to Abraham, for in his seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3; 13:16; 15:5; 32:12; Gal. 3:7, 29).

standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes: (*stola*)—the sign of salvation, holiness, and dignity.

with palm branches in their hands: the sign of salvation, jubilation (cf. Lev. 23:26–32, 39–44) and victory (cf. Palm Sunday and the victorious entry into Jerusalem).

Verse 10 *and crying out with a loud voice:* so vast was the multitude, how powerful the cry!

'Salvation: i.e. the victory Christ has wrought, *belongs to our God who sits upon the throne:* for He is 'king over all the earth' (Zech. 14:9).

and to the Lamb!': The Lamb is the one who has cleansed them, who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Verse 11 *And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God:* Notice that *all* the angels are standing around the throne, as though this is a special event. As in Luke 15:10 the angels rejoice over one sinner that repents, here they rejoice in the

* Refer comment after v. 8.

salvation of this innumerable multitude. They are standing around the throne, around the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, and so it is a total celestial gathering, and in adoration they all fall on their faces before the throne.

Verse 12 *saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen'*: Notice that doxology always reveals the true nature of the one worshipped, since the worshippers are in fellowship with the object of their worship. The ascribing of blessing, glory—and so on—are not gifts the worshippers give, but acknowledgements of the nature of God Himself. Notice that in the doxology of 4:11 some elements are not named which are named in 5:12, and here in 7:12. It may be that this is because 4:11 pertains to creation, and 5:12 and 7:12 to redemption.

Verse 13 *Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, clothed in white robes: such as the martyrs had been given, and whence have they come?'*: i.e. how do those of the human race come before the Divine throne in heaven, and with such joy, worship and festivity?

Verse 14 *I said to him, 'Sir, you know.'* And he said to me, *'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation'*: that tribulation which they faced in their particular times, tribulation which Jesus prophesied personally for his followers, and for the last times of eschatological conflict, which is the lot of them who will 'live a godly life in Christ Jesus', and which is part of the convulsive suffering man and the creation know until released into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

they have washed their robes: which is an act of response, of appropriation by faith.

and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: i.e. the blood which redeems (Eph. 1:7; I Pet. 1:19), frees (Rev. 1:5), brings forgiveness (Matt. 26:28), and cleanses (I John 1:7; Heb. 9:14).

Verse 15 *Therefore*: i.e. because they have been washed, purified before the Holy One, for this reason *are they before the throne of God, and serve him*: i.e. at least they see Him (cf. 22:4), and this is their great reward. So they worship Him (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 9:14) *day and night within his temple*: i.e. the new temple, the heavenly temple, the very temple which they are (I Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:20–22; I Pet. 2:4–10; cf. Isa. 56:6–8; 2:2–5), and which God and the Lamb are (Rev. 21:22). This is, of course, a mystery: how can His people be the temple, and

yet He—the Father and the Lamb—be the temple? The understanding of this mystery lies in the indwelling of God with His people, and their indwelling Him. For that is personal, the deepest intimacy human beings can know—their unity with God, being partakers of the Divine nature, without themselves being Divine.

and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence: the very statement reminding us of Israel in the wilderness and their helplessness without their Covenant-God, for this was their ‘great tribulation’.

will shelter them with his presence: is a reminder that He is ‘God with us’ (cf. 21:2–3), never absent, for He was never absent from Israel’s ‘great tribulation’ of the wilderness, any less than He was absent from their ‘great tribulation’ of the Exile. The manifestation of His presence is the Shekinah Glory, the Cloud of His Presence. It is as ‘the Shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land’. No wonder they are moved profoundly to worship this One Who has redeemed them by the suffering of the Cross.

Verse 16 *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat:* These words, from Isaiah 49:8–10, were intended to comfort the Pilgrim People in Exile, and John the Seer now sees their fulfilment, so that the Isaianic passage and the Revelation passage now comfort the people who look to the coming time before the throne:

Thus says the Lord:
 ‘In a time of favour I have answered you,
 in a day of salvation I have helped you;
 I have kept you and given you
 as a covenant to the people,
 to establish the land,
 to apportion the desolate heritages;
 saying to the prisoners, “Come forth,”
 to those who are in darkness, “Appear.”
 They shall feed along the ways,
 on all bare heights shall be their pasture;
they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them,
for he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them (Isa. 49:8–10).

Likewise the statement in Psalm 121:5–7:

The Lord is your keeper;
 the Lord is your shade
 on your right hand.

The sun shall not smite you by day,
 nor the moon by night.
 The Lord will keep you from all evil;
 he will keep your life.

Verse 17 *For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd:* for he is ‘the good Shepherd’, i.e. the David-Shepherd of Ezekiel 34: 23–31; the Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep (John 10: 1–18); ‘the chief Shepherd’ of the flock (I Pet. 5:4); ‘that great Shepherd of the sheep’ who led them through the wilderness (Isa. 63:7–14) into Canaan—now heavenly Canaan!

and he will guide them to springs of living water: i.e. to God Himself, the ‘fountain of living waters’ (Jer. 2:13), the One after Whom the spirit of man pants as does a hart after the water-brooks, to be quenched in His great fullness.

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes: for now the time of great tribulation, of sorrow and suffering, is finished—‘he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away’, i.e. in ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

What possible significance could this chapter have for us within our daily living? Much in every way, for it tells us that no eternal harm will come to us, that redemption is ours, and that one day we will see Him face to face and give Him worship and praise. We will for ever be in His holy temple, worshipping Him, and being led by the Good Shepherd to streams of living water.

The beautiful prospect is what builds a robust hope, and hope assists us to live now with fortitude, for the prospects ahead are good. Yet they are not only good for us as separate persons, but good for all the nations, tribes and tongues, so that we are not left with insularity of spirit, but have a great looking forward to the day when those out of every nation shall assemble, a countless multitude. Because the multitude is so great it also takes us out of minor thinking into major assurance. We need, however, to have these elements strongly imprinted in our minds, for sight does not tell us what the revelation proclaims.

Chapter Eight

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THIS is the chapter which opens with the breaking of the seventh seal, the result of which is not directly a plague or a judgement, but silence in heaven for the space of half an hour. This is followed by the offering up of the intercessions of the saints—with incense—by an angel who was not one of the seven. The effects of these prayers are dynamic, and undoubtedly are linked with the new series of the seven trumpets, each to be blown by an angel. In this chapter, four trumpets are blown, each with dramatic and catastrophic results. Finally the cry of an eagle is heard high up in midheaven, announcing woes which are to come upon the earth—a salutary warning indeed!

COMMENTARY

¹ When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; ⁴ and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Verse 1 *When the Lamb opened the seventh seal:* i.e. after the interlude between the sixth and seventh seal in chapter 7.

there was silence in heaven: i.e. all praise was suspended, all commands, opening of seals, voices of command, thunderings and lightnings. Why? Habakkuk 2:20 has it, 'But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him', and Psalm 46:10, 'Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I

am exalted in the earth!', and Zechariah 2:13, 'Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling'. These references seem to show silence is needed to contemplate the coming action of God, since heaven—the throne—is the 'head-quarters' for all action.

for about half an hour: Not a full period—an hour—but unique in any description of heaven, for doubtless it was a moment of breathless suspense.

Verse 2 Then I saw the seven angels: The seventh seal leads to the seven trumpets, and so seven angels—i.e. a complete course of angel powers—and we ask whether they are the seven angels of the churches.

who stand before God: i.e. they are angels who are being commissioned; in Luke 1:19, Gabriel says, '[I] stand in the presence of God [i.e. perpetually] and I was sent to . . . you,' *and seven trumpets were given to them.*

Comment: We need to examine the matter of trumpets in the Scriptures. We saw in 1:10 that John heard a *voicē* like the sound of a trumpet. In Israel trumpets were used for many things:

- (a) In Numbers 10:1–10 instructions were given for fashioning two silver trumpets which were to be used for summoning and breaking camp. Alarms were also to be blown on them, both in the camp and in times of war, when needed. Under pressure from the enemy, the blasts of the trumpets would act as prayer to God. They were to introduce the new moons each month (Ps. 81:3), and they were to be blown over peace offerings and burnt offerings 'as remembrance towards God', i.e. they would be memorial trumpets.
- (b) In Exodus 19 a celestial trumpet sounded out at the giving of the law, summoning the people to Sinai, but forbidding them to come on to it.
- (c) In Leviticus 23:24 (cf. Num. 29:1f.) a blast of trumpets was to announce 'holy convocation' on the day of the atonement.
- (d) Trumpets were to be used for praise and worship (II Chron. 5:13; Ps. 47:5; 150:3)—in II Chronicles 5:12 there were 120 priests who were trumpeters; for anointing of kings (I Kings 1:39; II Kings 9:13); the rams' horn trumpets were blown at the fall of Jericho (Josh. 6:4–20), and for many declarations throughout the land.
- (e) In Isaiah 27:12–13 an eschatological trumpet will be blown to summon true Israelites to worship at Jerusalem.

In the New Testament the trumpets have to do with the end-time. In Matthew 24:31 the angels blowing the loud trumpet-call will summon the elect throughout the universe; in I Corinthians 15:52 the last trumpet will announce the resurrection and summon the dead into life, and in I Thessalonians 4:16 it will announce Christ's Parousia and the resurrection will take place. In Revelation it is the trumpets of the seven angels which attend the great judgements. We can see, then, that trumpets carry rich meaning.

Verse 3 *And another angel came:* i.e. not one of the seven.

and stood at the altar: which was the altar of incense (Exod. 30:1–10; Heb. 9:3–5).

with a golden censer; and he was given much incense: which would sweeten the prayers of the saints, and perhaps take out elements not fitting.

to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne: i.e. such praying and prayers as taught by Christ to his disciples (Luke 11:1ff.; John 14:12–14; 15:7; 16:23–24, 26–27).

Verse 4 *and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God:* i.e. it was acceptable to God (cf. Gen. 8:20–21).

Verse 5 *Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake:* i.e. the prayers of the saints were greatly effective, hence the signs of Divine presence, action and judgement, for ‘peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake’ signify this. Such terms are found not only in the Revelation, but in the Old Testament, e.g. Isaiah 29:6 and Joel 3:16.

* * *

⁶ *Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them.*

⁷ *The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, which fell on the earth; and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.*

⁸ *The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea; ⁹ and a third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.*

¹⁰ *The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the fountains of water. ¹¹ The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died of the water, because it was made bitter.*

¹² *The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.*

¹³ *Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice, as*

it flew in midheaven, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets which the three angels are about to blow!'

Verses 6–7 *Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them. The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire:* cf. Job 38:22f.; Isaiah 28:17.

mixed with blood: which may well represent 'blood for blood' (Isa. 26:21; Joel 3:19ff.; Ps. 79:10).

which fell on the earth: reminding us of the plagues of Egypt but surpassing them, and yet reminding us that the actions are judgements, and judgements are evoked by the evil done.

and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up: though whether this is literal, and whether it all happens in one burst or is distributed over a period of time, is not told. It is enough for readers to see that God is about His judgements—whatever they are expected to effect. Whilst the destruction of the earth seems to come as judgement by God, it is, in fact, the moral degradation of man which pollutes the earth (Isa. 24:4–13; cf. Jer. 7:20; Zeph. 1:2ff.; Nahum 1:6).

Verse 8 *The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain:* the mountain generally symbolizing a force of power—such as Jerusalem (Ps. 48:1f.). Mount Zion is a holy mountain (Isa. 2:2–4; 11:9; Micah 4:2; Heb. 12:22). Babylon is prophesied against in Jeremiah 51:25, 42:

Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain . . .
 which destroys the whole earth;
 I will stretch out my hand against you,
 and roll you down from the crags,
 and make you a burnt mountain . . .

The sea has come up on Babylon;
 she is covered with its tumultuous waves

so that we can assume a great world power has been judged—*burning with fire, was thrown into the sea.*

Verse 9 *and a third of the sea became blood:* which is a horrible plague, reminding us of Egypt under judgement (Exod. 7:14–21).

a third of the living creatures in the sea died: as a consequence, and diminishes the survival resources of the human race.

and a third of the ships were destroyed: demonstrating (as with the *Titanic*) that man is not master of his own fate.

Verse 10 *The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star:* as in Isaiah 14:12 the fall of Babylon—and perhaps Lucifer himself—is described:

How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!

fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the fountains of water: i.e. in the vital drinking water needed for crops and stock and humans.

Verse 11 *The name of the star is Wormwood:* a bitter wood often connected with idolatry (Deut. 29:18 'a bitter root', cf. Hebrews 12:14–15), so that here is a judgement on idolatrous man (cf. Jer. 9:15; 23:15).

A third of the waters became wormwood and many men died of the water: although wormwood is not lethal, *because it was made bitter:* for this kind of bitterness and suffering is the terrible fruit of idolatry.

Verse 12 *The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night:* All of this speaks of a terrible abnormality and aberration in the order of things. Indeed, nothing is normal. Sun, moon and stars have deep significance in the Old Testament—and indeed, in the New—and although astrology is connected with the occult, yet the significance of these 'light-bearers' (cf. Gen. 1:14–19) signifies a terrifying change in the 'fixed order' of things (cf. Ps. 148:5–6). Of course this is another judgement (cf. Isa. 13:10; Joel 3:15; Amos 8:9). So Ezekiel spoke of Egypt under judgement:

When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens,
and make their stars dark;
I will cover the sun with a cloud,
and the moon shall not give its light.
All the bright lights of heaven
will I make dark over you,
and put darkness upon your land (Ezek. 32:07).

Verse 13 *Then I looked, and I heard an eagle:* which is sometimes an omen of disaster (Matt. 24:28) and is not distinguished in Scripture from the vulture.

crying with a loud voice, as it flew in midheaven: where it could be seen by all.

'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets which the three angels are about to blow!': Two of the woes of the trumpets are seen in 9:12 and 11:14, but the third woe is not verbally distinguished, though perhaps it is the descent of Satan from heaven, as mentioned in 12:12.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

John, being 'in the Spirit', saw all things, and doubtless came to understand them—by the same Spirit. As he saw them he would understand more and more of the ways of God, and fill out his knowledge of the plan. We, too, need to be in the Spirit to grasp the meaning of the half-hour's silence, of the powerful effects of intercessory prayer before the throne of God, and the place of this prayer prior to the move of the blowing of the trumpets. Again, we see the dramatic effects of the trumpets as a third of the earth, the trees and the green grass were burned, as the fiery mountain was cast into the sea, as a third of the fresh water was made to be bitter with wormwood, and then a third of the powers of the air—the sun, moon and stars—were affected. The final crying of 'Woe, woe, woe!' to those dwelling on earth seems frightening. Even so, we are to remember that this is not literal but symbolic, not physically as it appears, but apocalyptic. The apocalyptic is that action in history which we do not initiate or control, and its visionary elements are not always understood rightly.

Only slowly, then, we come to understand that these things are enormous in their moral, spiritual and relational significance. Instead of thinking that all things happen from causes and effects, we see they begin with God as the One Who first causes them; therefore they are all in His hand. We who are mortal and are proud of our abilities might think to change our human situation. If physical plagues and famines cannot really be controlled, then what of these visions which affect creation and its creatures? This thought is at once stunning and encouraging. Since God is sovereign, and all these acts spring from Him, then that will affect the way we view them and what we set about to do with them. It is surprising on the one hand how little man relates to apocalyptic, since it seems to be out of his human range and beyond understanding. At the same time man

is impressed by apocalyptic. Western society thinks in terms of doom and judgement, even though it may not vocalize its thinking this way.

Chapter Nine

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

WE come now to one of the most fearsome chapters of the prophecy. With the blowing of the fifth trumpet, a star—i.e. an angel—falls from heaven, and is authorized to open the bottomless pit, and as a result horrible creatures emerge to bring terrible suffering, not to the creation—as the other trumpets had brought—but to mankind. Inflicting terrible pain they are yet not lethal in their stings, but the pain, to human creatures, is so fearful that they would rather have death than it. This is called ‘the first woe’. With the blowing of the sixth trumpet another horror comes upon the human race. Horses with riders present a terrible appearance, and they kill a third of mankind. Far from sobering the others of humanity who were doing evil, these redouble their actions of sin in idolatry, murders, sorceries, immorality and thefts.

COMMENTARY

¹ And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit; ² he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth; ⁴ they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads; ⁵ they were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion, when it stings a man. ⁶ And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death will fly from them.

⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses arrayed for battle; on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like

human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails like scorpions, and stings, and their power of hurting men for five months lies in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

¹² The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

Verse 1 *And the fifth angel blew his trumpet:* Joel 2:1–11 prophesies a dreadful time, something which approximates to what we read here in Revelation 9:1–11:

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
 Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near (Joel 2:1).

and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth: and Jesus said he saw Satan fallen as lightning from heaven, a thought repeated in Revelation 12:9, 12, for this is the angel of the abyss—Satan.

and he was given: i.e. he had no right to it, and he did not earn it.

the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit: and this is the pit the demons referred to in Luke 8:31. Out of it come hellish creatures (11:7; 17:8), and it is here Satan is bound for a thousand years (20:2, 3). There is an abyss mentioned in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 49:25; Deut. 33:13), but it is mentioned in good terms, as the deep of waters which, whilst they may sometimes threaten, generally are the basic source of needed moisture. Whilst 'bottomless' cannot literally be a fact, yet all of us know the meaning of the term.

Verse 2 *he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft:* The locusts come from the smoke and are not the smoke. The smoke is the opposite of the Shekinah Glory. Whereas it is light and white and filled with glory, this other is noxious, pungent and acrid, dark and full of deception, obscuring reality, and blinding in its effects (II Cor. 4:3f.).

Verse 3 *Then from the smoke came locusts:* reminding us of the plagues of Egypt, and also of God's warning to Israel that He would visit them, also, with locusts if they turned from Him (Deut. 28:38; I Kings 8:35–37; II Chron. 7:13f.; cf. Joel chs 1 and 2).

on the earth: i.e. where human beings are.

and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth: whose

stings can prove deadly to creatures, although it is rare for a man to thus die.

Verse 4 *they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree:* things which locusts normally destroy.

but only those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads: for which see Ezekiel 9:1–11 and Revelation 7:3. In Revelation 13 we will see those who are attacked have the seal of the mark of the beast.

Verse 5 *they were allowed to torture them for five months:* Like other periods of time in this prophecy, the time is set, and the scorpions cannot stop short of or overstep it, and the sufferer likewise.

but not to kill them: for God decides, ‘I wound and I heal. I kill and I make alive’.

and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion, when it stings a man: Anyone who has suffered a scorpion sting, or has witnessed those who have been stung, will know it is the worst pain a human can have to endure, and it defies normal pain-killers like morphine.

Verse 6 *And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death will fly from them:* Whatever the pain is, often mental and emotional pain is far more terrible, even, than physical pain.

Verse 7 *In appearance the locusts were like horses arrayed for battle:* and this reminds us of the parallel in Joel 2:4f.: ‘Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run’.

on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold: We have already seen that *crowns* denote authority, and *gold* royalty linked with this, but here they only *looked like* such crowns.

their faces were like human faces: i.e. they have something like human intelligence, and therefore can attack humanity with knowledge. How often demons display such knowledge, and desire to inhabit and control human beings. Matthew 12:41–45 speaks of demons inhabiting men and concludes, ‘So shall it be also with this evil generation’. Whilst demonic infestation and vicious oppression may be terrible, no less terrible is the confused and distorted state of man under the terrible accusation and guilt that faces him when he is out of kilter with God, creation and himself. It is as though he has—or is—an abyss within himself, and every thought is as one of these horrible creatures.

Verse 8 *their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth:* Paul said that it is unnatural for men to have hair like a woman's (I Cor. 11:14ff.), and likewise lions' teeth are unnatural in creatures that look like humans, but it is the fearsome that terrifies, the demonic that shocks the victims of their cruelty.

Verses 9–10 *they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings, and their power of hurting men for five months lies in their tails:* Is this the pain of accusation (Rev. 12:17; Jude 9), the sting of death (I Cor. 15:55–56; cf. Heb. 2:14–15) which Satan distributes and intensifies through his demonic minions?

Verse 11 *They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon:* We are no longer left in doubt. Satan—his name meaning 'Destruction' or 'Destroyer' in Hebrew (Job 31:12) and in Greek—is the king. In Job 26:6, Proverbs 15:11 and 27:20, Sheol and Abaddon are equated, and in Job 28:22 and Psalm 88:11, Abaddon and Death are one. Jesus said Satan was a liar and a murderer from the beginning (cf. Gen. 3:1–6; I John 3:10f.; Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15; II Tim. 2:26; Eph. 2:1–4).

Verse 12 *The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are to come:* This is the first of the woes predicted by the eagle flying in midheaven (8:13), and the next is in chapter 11, spoken of in verse 14.

* * *

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' 15 So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the troops of cavalry was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. 17 And this was how I saw the horses in my vision; the riders wore breastplates the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur issued from their mouths. 18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur issuing from their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, with heads, and by means of them they wound.

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot either see or hear or walk; ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts.

Verse 13 *Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice:* speaking for God or from God.

from the four horns of the golden altar before God: this being the altar of incense, the place of the offering of the prayers of God's people. Is the voice, then, still to do with the prayers of the saints (cf. 8:1–5) and is it intended to encourage them to go on with prayer since 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much' (James 5:16, AV)?

Verse 14 *saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels:* These are not said to be the four angels mentioned in 7:1–3 who were not bound, and were holding back the harmful winds.

who are bound: The fact of their being bound seems to indicate they were angels who had some evil intention, and certainly they seem, almost, to parallel Satan who had liberated horrible creatures upon the human race; even so, the visitation is under the hand of God: He ordered it.

at the great river Euphrates': It was from this direction that so many military nations arose and plagued nations with destruction, i.e. Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian invaders.

Verse 15 *So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year:* Again we are taught that God does nothing before—or after—the appointed time. The time of judgement has come at the right and ripe moment, *to kill a third of mankind.*

Verse 16 *The number of the troops of cavalry was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number:* Again the number required is also set. We are reminded of the invading host in Joel 2:4–9.

Verse 17 *And this was how I saw the horses in my vision; the riders wore breastplates the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur:* this mixture of red, green and yellow must have been horrible to behold.

and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads: most fearsome, and so, frightening.

and fire and smoke and sulphur issued from their mouths: these elements being associated with the lake of fire (20:10, 14–15) speak of terrifying plagues and judgements.

Verse 18 *By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur issuing from their mouths:* The plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur are distinct plagues, yet combine to destroy a third of the human race. Whilst these three elements certainly can kill, yet the language is apocalyptic, and the plagues may have taken many forms, whether physical plagues or plagues that torture the spirit within until a person is destroyed. Again, are these plagues distributed across the time of the human race, not happening climactically at any particular point of time?

Verse 19 *For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, with heads, and by means of them they wound:* There have been grotesque interpretations of these creatures and the torment, such as modern weapons, but ‘mouths’ speak of utterances, and ‘tails’ of pain-inflicting devices such as in the fifth trumpet’s creatures (vv. 3–10), and one cannot help thinking again of the demonic.

Verse 20 *The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues:* shows us that the destruction of a third was not a haphazard event, but planned even to the right number of deaths. The fact that *The rest of mankind, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot either see or hear or walk* shows that they rejected one of the purposes of the plagues—to bring redeeming repentance, such as Nineveh had come to under Jonah’s preaching. The incorrigible spirit of evil man is thus delineated. Judgements are part of God’s kindness, to free us, but when rejected become grounds for further judgements.

Verse 21 *nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts:* The battle for the throne does not cease until the day of the destruction of the powers of darkness—Satan, his fallen angelic colleagues, the beast and the false prophet—along with Babylon. That, however, is part of the story that is along the track. The state of impenitent man confirms that he is incorrigible. Nothing but elective grace could change that!

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter has not been for the faint-hearted. Only those who understand the dreadful nature of sin, such as is described in Genesis 6:5, 8:21 and Proverbs 5:22–23, and man's heart that goes with it, described in Jeremiah 17:9, Mark 7:20–23, Romans 1:18–32 and 3:9–18, can understand how essential is judgement and the execution of that judgement. As we will see in later chapters, the extent of these judgements set out in these early chapters is not extreme. If we think of them literally then we will fall into the trap of seeing weird creatures such as are described in science fiction, but this cannot be the case. We must understand that the suffering man experiences, through his own sin and guilt, is the deepest and most corrosive anguish that a human being can know. Psalm 38 is a case in point. It tells very powerfully the anguish that comes to a person when he is under judgement and the wrath of God.

Only when we understand the utter holiness of God, the dreadful moral and spiritual pollution of man, and the tragedy that is man in his evil, will we be able to understand the rightness of the judgements which come through seals, trumpets and bowls. No one delights in them, least of all God (Ezek. 18:32): 'I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn, and live'. It is those who have suffered heavily under the evil of man who see the sense and necessity for such strong judgements of God.

Chapter Ten

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THIS chapter might be called 'an interlude', i.e. between the sixth and seventh trumpets, and in one sense it is. Even so, it is an event in its own right—a very important event. In fact it gives great point to the whole prophecy. The angel himself is a magnificent figure and surely does not come on an ordinary mission. The very nature of him has caused some to say he can be no less than Christ. Yet it is what he is about that is important. During his coming and standing—legs astride—upon both land and sea, seven thunders sound and John hears them, is about to write the message of them, but is forbidden. The thunders in one sense are for him alone—though what exactly they are for him we cannot say. The angel then explains his coming. It is to assure listeners and readers that the mystery of God's will—His plan, purpose and counsel for His creation—is about to come to fulfilment.

COMMENTARY

¹ Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. ² He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, ³ and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring; when he called out, the seven thunders sounded. ⁴ And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.' ⁵ And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven ⁶ and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there should be no more delay, ⁷ but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.

Verse 1 *Then I saw another mighty angel*: i.e. a strong angel as in 5:2 who likewise called with a loud voice (see verse 3, below). In 18:2 is another angel with great authority and a 'mighty voice'.

coming down from heaven: to John, for the scene is set on earth.

wrapped in a cloud: i.e. of the heavenly glory.

with a rainbow over his head: as a halo, as was seen in 4:3 around the throne, speaking of peace and covenant.

and his face was like the sun: See 1:16.

and his legs like pillars of fire: The Divine Presence of God with Israel was in a pillar of fire (Exod. 13:21ff.). This description has convinced people that he could be no less than Christ himself, but that could also be said of the angel in Daniel 10:5–6 whose appearance was similar to that of Christ in Revelation 1:12–16. If it were Christ there seems to be no reason why John did not recognize him as such and call him such.

Verse 2 *He had a little scroll*: i.e. not like the seven-sealed book—a larger scroll—which was to open up all events of history, but a prophecy of one event (cf. Ezek. 2:9—3:3 where Ezekiel was also given a scroll to eat, i.e. a prophecy to give of one event).

open in his hand: i.e. it is not sealed.

And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land: i.e. he was to compass all creation (in ch. 13 the beasts arise from land and sea).

Verse 3 *and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring*: i.e. a voice that would be heard throughout the entire creation, as in Jeremiah 25:30–31:

The Lord will roar from on high,
and from his holy habitation utter his voice;
he will roar mightily against his fold,
and shout, like those who tread grapes,
against all the inhabitants of the earth.
The clamour will resound to the ends of the earth,
for the Lord has an indictment against the nations.

when he called out, the seven thunders sounded: Thunders are significant in the Old Testament, accompanying lightnings, being part of the plagues, and Job (26:14) asks, 'the thunder of his power who can understand?' David said (Ps. 29:3–4),

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord, upon many waters.

The voice of the Lord is powerful,
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

The question is, 'What does that glory thunder?' In the Revelation, thunders issue from the throne, linked with action and judgements (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). They are revelations of God's intentions and actions.

Verse 4 *And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write: thinking it would be natural to write down the revelations.*

but I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.' It would seem that what John heard and understood was not necessary for the readers of his prophecy, the reason for this being in God's mind. It must be that the revelations were for John himself, and must have had significance for his ministry as a seer. Paul, too, had had revelations which were not to be passed on (II Cor. 12:1–10), but which he was given as necessary for him. Such revelations undoubtedly strengthen and fortify the seers, but are not to be known to others.

Verse 5 *And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven: i.e. with the gesture of one taking an oath (cf. Deut. 32:40; Dan. 12:7).*

Verse 6 *and swore by him who lives for ever and ever: see Daniel 12:7.*

who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it: showing that what is to be revealed has to do with God as Creator and His plan for His creation.

that there should be no more delay: In fact there has been no actual delay but that which seems like delay to such as the martyrs, and those who look with eager expectation to the fulfilment of His Divine plan—for creation—as in Romans 8:18–25, i.e. emancipation from bondage to corruption, and the obtaining of the liberating glory of the children of God.

Verse 7 *but that in the days: not 'day' but days, i.e. in the times of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God: i.e. His plan, counsel and will: as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.*

Comment: The *mystery* here is a strong theme in Paul. In Ephesians 1:9 'the *mystery of his will*, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ' is 'a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and

things on earth'. This will happen since God 'accomplishes all things according to the *counsel of his will* Will and *counse* here are much the same as in Isaiah 46:10, 'My *counse* shall stand, and I will accomplish all my *purpose* Isaiah 48:3 says, 'The former things I declared of old, they went forth from my mouth and I made them known; then suddenly I did them and they came to pass'. In Ephesians 3 Paul speaks of 'the *mystery* of Christ' which is, that in him 'the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.' Paul then says he is to 'make all men see what is the *plan of the mystery* hidden for ages in God who created all things,' i.e. that what this very creation is concerned with is *the mystery*, which is that 'through the church the *manifold wisdom of God* might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,' for 'This was according to the *eternal purpose* which he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord.' In Colossians 1:26–27 Paul talks of the *mystery* having been hidden for ages, but now made manifest, and says that the glory of this *mystery* is 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' *The mystery*, then, is the unification of all creation in Christ (Eph. 1:9–11; cf. Col. 1:19–22) and the bringing of God's people to their inheritance of all things (Eph. 3:6), that is, to their full glorification—along with the whole creation (Col. 1:27; I Cor. 2:6–10; Rom. 8:18–25).

We conclude that God has planned all things from before time (cf. Eph. 1:3–14; I Cor. 2:6–10), and it is this plan in Revelation 10:7 that has been 'announced to his servants the prophets', and is to be fulfilled in *the days* of the trumpet call of the seventh angel. Some commentators point out that this must have been only a subsidiary plan of the major or total plan of God, since the seventh trumpet was sounded and the plan of God was not finally fulfilled. The trouble with this reasoning is that it involves a chronological time factor in an apocalyptic event, whereas we cannot be sure that the seals are followed by the trumpets in time, and then the trumpets by the bowls in time. The prophets prophesied of this total plan, i.e. 'the mystery of his will' which is fulfilled by Christ (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; cf. II Cor. 1:20). This is 'the mystery of God' that the mighty angel is speaking about.

* * *

8 *Then the voice which I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, 'Go, take the scroll which is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.'* **9** *So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, 'Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.'* **10** *And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.* **11** *And I was told, 'You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.'*

Verse 8 *Then the voice which I had heard from heaven:* i.e. the one which commanded the sealing up of the thunders, *spoke to me again, saying, 'Go, take the scroll which is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.'*

Verse 9 *So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, 'Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach: i.e. when you have digested the word, you will find it unpalatable to those who will hear it, those to whom you must speak a word which is not sweet (cf. Jer. 15:16–18).*

but sweet as honey in your mouth.: How sweet the word of the Lord is when consumed! Ezekiel (2:2—3:3) had found the scroll to be 'sweet as honey' in his mouth, but as result he went later 'in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me' (3:14), because of the word, the scroll.

Verses 10–11 *And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. And I was told, 'You must again prophesy:* It may seem strange to John that the words 'again prophesy' are used, for it would seem that he had not yet prophesied. We do know that John had in fact preached the word of God long before this prophecy, but he has already disclosed much of this prophecy—up to this tenth chapter—yet all God's people prophesy when they proclaim the word (cf. Acts 3:24ff.), since they are the prophetic community. John would yet prophesy, but in fact wherever this Book is taken and read, John has prophesied to its readers.

about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.: The word *about* here is translated by some as 'to' or 'over', but it seems the best translation is 'concerning'. In fact the remainder of the Revelation is greatly concerned with *many peoples and nations and tongues and kings*.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter should be of great comfort to the believing reader. It should reassure him that the things and happenings of this prophecy are not arbitrary—off the cuff—but they are part of a plan that God has set out for the movement of time. The prophets have always pointed to God's ultimate goal, and have always said that as God created all things in wisdom He will cause all things to come to their destined end, no matter how much evil may seek to deter and impede that goal-fulfilment.

The reader, then, should be filled with gratitude and joy that God's sovereignty has planned all things well. He should not be deflected by some human pessimism which says the goal will never be fulfilled, nor the plan completed. Fierce events are yet to happen but the reader can go on his way, rejoicing.

Chapter Eleven

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THIS chapter has much in store for us, for it speaks of many things. The first is the measuring, or securing, of the temple-shrine within the city of God. The period of the operation allowed to evil—forty-two months, or three and a half years, or one thousand, two hundred and sixty days—will be the time in which the nations will trample all but the shrine of the temple. Then there arise two witnesses or prophets, whose nature has been foretold in the Book of Zechariah. These will witness, i.e. prophesy, and such are their words that they will be like fire to destroy the enemies who oppose them. In turn they will be killed by a creature called ‘the beast’ (cf. Rev. 13:1ff.). The world will rejoice at their death and leave them to humiliating exposure, but they will be raised from the dead and so bring fear to the people of the world, in whose sight God will vindicate the two servants of His by causing them to ascend to heaven, and at the time of their ascension terrible damage will come to the city. This is looked upon as the second woe.

Then another event takes place with the blowing of the seventh trumpet. This time there is no plague, but there is much activity in heaven, and a great worship commences in which ascription and praise is made to God regarding the triumph of God and Christ, who have brought the Kingdom to pass.

Another unexplained happening is the opening of the temple in heaven, the sight of the ark of the covenant, and then the dynamic activity of lightning, voices, thunders, and the like, which always portend further action and judgements.

COMMENTARY

¹ Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: ‘Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, ² but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that

out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months. ³ And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.'

Verse 1 *Then I was given:* This is John's first involvement within the prophecy, apart from eating the scroll.

a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: 'Rise and measure: Measuring in Zechariah 2:1–5 is the sign of Divine protection of the area or element measured.

the temple: The holy place (*naos*), not the whole temple (*hieron*) with its buildings and porches.

of God and the altar and those who worship there: i.e. in accordance with Zechariah 2:1–5, those measured will be protected by God's sovereignty.

Comment: In the New Testament the church is the temple (*naos*) of God, the place of God's habitation (I Cor. 3:16–17; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21f.), and is made of living stones—its members (I Pet. 2:5)—who form a holy priesthood (I Pet. 2:4–10) and offer spiritual sacrifices (I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15–16). They have a New Covenant and a new worship (John 4:20ff.; Phil. 3:3; cf. Rom. 12:1; Heb. 9:14). Their intercession is headed up by Christ (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; I John 2:1–2) who is their great High Priest (after the priestly order of Melchizedek), and so they use the golden altar of incense, as they have used the altar of the Cross—Christ having been offered on it as a propitiatory sacrifice (Rom. 3:19–26; I John 4:10). They are washed in the laver of regeneration (Titus 3:5), and are the true circumcision (Phil. 3:3; Gal. 6:15f.). Christ is the new Temple, as he is also the true Body, and all believers are members of him, so that we can call the temple 'the eschatological temple', i.e. the 'house of prayer for all nations' (Isa. 56:6–8; cf. Isa. 2:2f.), and so there is no limit to its dimensions. Because Christ has 'broken down the wall of hostility' and established the new temple, there is no need for us to see Ezekiel's temple, and the temple here in Revelation 11, as other than 'eschatological' or 'visionary', so that the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem ought not to be thought of in other terms than Christ and his people. We need this understanding in order to know that the old order has given way to the new, and we must not seek to re-establish the old.

Verse 2 *but do not measure the court outside the temple:* which at this time of the prophecy was in ruins, thus showing the temple to be visionary.

leave that out, for it is given over to the nations: i.e. what was formerly holy ground will be possessed and profaned by the nations, although the holy place (*naos*) will remain unviolated.

and they will trample over the holy city: From one point of view the temple and Holy City cannot be thought of apart from each other, so

that in fact the true worshippers of God, i.e. 'the Israel of God', will be trampled down.

for forty-two months: This period of time needs to be understood. It equals the same period covered by the twelve hundred and sixty days (11:3; 12:6, 'a time, and times, and half a time' (12:14) and the 'forty-two months', and so is the 'time, two times, and half a time' of Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, i.e. three and a half years. In Daniel 7 the little horn which arises out of the ten horns of the fourth beast will oppress the saints of the Most High for this period of time. In Revelation 11:2–3 this is the time of oppression of the Holy City, and the two witnesses. In 12:6 and 14, it is the time of the preservation of the church in the wilderness, and in 13:5, the time the beast is allowed to exercise its authority, the main point being that all times and seasons are in the Father's hands and He sets limits upon all periods for the reasons best known to Him.

Verse 3 *And I will grant my two witnesses:* One may not witness alone; two are required for authentic witness (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Num. 35:30; cf. Matt. 18:16; John 8:17; Luke 10:1; II Cor. 13:1; I Tim. 5:19). Who are the two witnesses? Various answers are given, such as Enoch and Elijah who did not die but were translated; the Holy Spirit and the apostles who were together witnesses (Acts 1:8; John 15:26–27; Luke 24:48–49); and some have thought they are the only two churches who were not rebuked by Christ (Smyrna: Rev. 2:8–11, and Philadelphia: 3:7–13). The fact is we do not know, and do not need to know—as is the case with so many other things in this Book. What we do know from the passage below is that they are to be identified with the two olive trees of Zechariah 4, and in particular 'the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth' (4:14). We simply know they have *power*. Here the word 'power' is not in the Greek text but is certainly understood as both power (*dunamis* ability) and authority (*exousia* authority) *to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days*.

clothed in sackcloth: the traditional garb of the prophets (II Kings 1:8; Isa. 20:2; Zech. 13:4).

* * *

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And if any one would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; if any one would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed. ⁶ They have power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying,

and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. ⁷ *And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them,* ⁸ *and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.* ⁹ *For three days and a half men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,* ¹⁰ *and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.* ¹¹ *But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.* ¹² *Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up hither!'* *And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud.* ¹³ *And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

Verse 4 *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands:* as spoken of in Zechariah 4:1–5, 10–14, the prophet seeming to presuppose the reader will likewise understand (cf. Rev. 1:4, 13, 20; 4:5 regarding the seven-branched candelabra and the sevenfold Spirit).

which stand before the Lord of the earth: identifies the two witnesses with 'the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth' (Zech. 4:14). In Zechariah 4 the two olive trees—it would seem—pipe oil into the seven-branched candelabra, the two witnesses being Joshua and Zerubbabel—the priestly and royal persons typifying the high priestly and kingly offices. Because God is 'Lord of the whole earth' (Zech. 4:14) He has the resources to supply the two witnesses with the power they need for their ministry. The statement *the Lord of the earth* also brings us back to the primary idea of God being the 'faithful Creator'.

Verse 5 *And if any one would harm them:* i.e. resist the royal priestly ministry (cf. I Pet. 2:9–10; Exod. 19:5–6) and so resist God, then *fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes:* i.e. the word of God is that fire, as we see in Jeremiah 5:14,

behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire,
and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them

and again in Jeremiah 23:29, 'Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?' whilst fire has come from heaven in Numbers 16:35 and II Kings 1:9–12 to devour

enemies. In Revelation 20:9 fire comes down from heaven to consume the enemies of the saints of God.

if any one would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed: i.e. by the lethal word uttered—the word which would be otherwise life-giving.

Verse 6 *They have power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire:* i.e. to cause the judgemental signs to operate against perverse humanity.

Verse 7 *And when they have finished their testimony:* Whilst it is not said what the testimony is, we gather it is ‘the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ obviously delivered for the good of the hearers, though it seems to be hated and rejected (1:2, 9).

the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them: In these words the whole matter of the conflict of the two kingdoms—God’s and Satan’s—is introduced. The beast, which is a clone of the red dragon, carries on the battle of that dragon in cloned form. Thus the royal priestly ministry is destroyed, i.e. seemingly so.

Verse 8 *and their dead bodies:* i.e. one carcass, *will lie in the street of the great city*, which we will come to see is Babylon, but then Jerusalem was Babylonish when it crucified Christ. It was out of Babylon that Christ was crucified *which is allegorically* [i.e. by way of allegory] *called Sodom and Egypt*—two places known for their evil and moral perversity (cf. Isa. 1:9f.; Ezek. 16:46, 56)—*where their Lord was crucified*.

Notice here the use of the future tense, relating to the predictive, but in verse 9 the present tense is used, and then in verse 11 following a past tense is employed.

Verse 9 *For three days and a half:* which is a set period for the purposes of the Lord, the ‘three and a half’ being the principle of a time of trouble as in the ‘three and a half years’.

men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations: i.e. in conformity with the rebellion of the nations in Psalm 2:1f.

gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb: i.e. the humiliation of the prophets of God is their savage delight and revenge.

Verse 10 *and those who dwell on the earth:* even in the face of 'the Lord of all the earth'.

will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment: i.e. with their testimony and the fire that issued from their mouths, and although it is not said explicitly that they caused droughts, famines and plagues, it is surely to be assumed that they did—that this was the torment *to those who dwell on the earth.*

Verse 11 *But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them:* as God had originally breathed the breath of life into man (Gen. 2:7), and as we see it happen in Ezekiel 37:1–14, where the dry bones become living beings.

and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them: This act of God was a vindication of the martyr-witnesses and doubtless is intended to encourage the people of God—both the martyrs under the altar and others who may well be on the way to martyrdom.

Verse 12 *Then they heard a loud voice:* intended to convey the message of vindication to all. The ascension of Christ was—among other things—his vindication.

from heaven saying to them, 'Come up hither!' And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud: i.e. the Glory-Cloud, the sign of God's presence and His vindication.

Verse 13 *And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven:* As stated in Isaiah 24:18ff. and other places (cf. Ezek. 38:19–20; Hag. 2:6–7; Zech. 14:5; Matt. 27:51–53; Heb. 12:26–28), earthquakes were judgements of God, and in this case there is an horrific shaking of the city, although the city is not further defined. Is it Jerusalem-as-Sodom or Babylon, or the world? It does not greatly matter. We see some kind of a change. At least momentarily the terror wrought causes all who were not destroyed to give glory to God. Previous judgements brought no such right attitude. Doubtless when, ultimately, 'every knee shall bow . . . and every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil. 2:10–11), not all will do it out of a willing and glad heart.

14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.' *16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God,* *17 saying,*

We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast,

that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.

18 The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.'

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Verse 14 *The second woe has passed:* i.e. the woe of the two witnesses, their operations, and the things consequent upon their death, namely earthquake and the death of a tenth of the inhabitants. We note that *behold, the third woe is soon to come:* i.e. nine tenths survive, yet they have to face another woe.

Comment: Whilst we read the prophecies and note the facts of the opening of the seals, the blowing of the trumpets and the consequent punitive judgements of both series, and—of course—will see the elements of the seven bowls of wrath as they too come upon mankind, we may miss the wood for the trees or the trees for the wood, when we fail to understand the cumulative effects of these historic acts of God. What does one great sorrow or woe do to one person? We know that the effects may be many. Today when a disaster happens, such as the holocaust of a bushfire, the tragedy of a death-dealing flood, or a sudden road accident, a train smash or the crash of a jetliner, then psychologists and psychiatrists are called in, and therapies are applied to help the victims. Indeed the very word 'victim' which is always applied reveals the kind of compensating treatment the welfare authorities seek to effect. There are questions we need to ask: Are the events of disaster to be called 'acts of God'? Should the doctrine of retributive punishment be taught? Is there really such a thing as victimization? There are also questions regarding the corporate nature of the human race, such as: What are the effects God intends to happen as a result of the seals, the trumpets and the bowls? How do these affect nations, especially in regard to their destinies? What of the matter of ultimate and universal blessing in the light of the covenantal promises to Abraham that in his seed all the nations will be blessed?

It is difficult for us to interpret and state the effects of these historic acts of God, but the sensitive reader who lives and walks in God's word, and is led by His Spirit, will have a general sense of those effects. He will agree that they are necessary, indispensable to the plan of God, and that they are achieving their purposes as history moves steadily to its climax, its triumphant *telos* intended by

God. The question of whether the seals, woes and bowls follow each other chronologically, or are acts of God which emanate from the one centre and flow out as successive waves, intensifying as they go, does not altogether matter: God's actions—redemptive and retributive—are happening all the time. We should not be bewildered by their nature, nor confused by their happening. We can live in the assurance that they are true and righteous altogether and that we are one with the Lord of history in His wise and effective workings. This attitude will ensure that we pass through the troubled and troublous times as servants of God who believe He is 'a faithful Creator', and that He works all things appropriately 'according to the counsel of his will'.

Verse 15 *Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet*: indicating the final climactic act of God in His intentions for the creation.

and there were loud voices in heaven: probably being those of the four living creatures and the attendant twenty-four elders, along with the strong angels and archangels.

saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ': The nations set against God (as in Ps. 2), and the people who opposed the two witnesses and who received the actions of God in both seals and trumpets, have all been defeated by 'our Lord and his Christ', a phrase used in Psalm 2:2: 'The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against *the Lord and his anointed*[Messiah]'. The triumph of the universal Kingdom of God predicted by the prophets (especially as set out in Dan. chs 2 and 7), Christ himself, and his apostles, has now come to pass. The climax of history has been effected!

and he shall reign for ever and ever: is the guarantee of the irreversible nature of this victory, as it is the assurance of eschatological peace.

Verses 16–17 *And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, 'We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign'*: Not that God has not always reigned—for He has—but that now He is reigning with finality, His plan for destroying the destroyers and setting up His Kingdom of peace having now been effected.

Verse 18 *The nations raged*: is a clear reference to Psalm 2:1–3 (Ps. 46:6; Acts 4:25–26).

but thy wrath came: wrath also being a theme of Psalm 2:

Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the Lord with fear,

with trembling kiss his feet,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way;
for his wrath is quickly kindled.

and the time for the dead to be judged: is linked with Daniel 7:9–27 where the throne of God is primary, and other thrones are placed for the court of judgement, the saints being given the Kingdom in the face of the four terrible beasts, and the books being opened.

for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints: just as Jesus told his disciples that he had appointed them a kingdom, i.e. the Kingdom of God, because they had been with him in his trials (Luke 22:28–30). The idea of rewards is a significant theme of the Scriptures, typified by Moses who had ‘respect unto the recompense of the reward’ (Heb. 11:26 AV).

and those who fear thy name, both small and great: for they, too, are included among the elect.

and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.: Here, the verb to destroy (*diaphtheiro*) does not mean to abolish or extinguish, but to corrupt or to change for the worst. So in 9:11 Apollyon was the Destroyer, and under Satan mankind becomes destructive of what is good.

Verse 19 *Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail:* This last verse is a fitting introduction to the events about to be described in chapter 12 onwards—i.e. the battle for the throne, the clash of the kingdoms, the conflict of God and Satan with the decisive outcome of the final judgement. Since the Kingdom has come (v. 15) then the heavenly temple is opened, just as the earthly temple was opened at Jesus’ death by the rending of the veil. For God’s faithful people the sight of the ark—still extant—is a powerful reminder and assurance that God’s covenant nature and promises still stand. Also there are manifestations of the Divine Presence in the lightning, voices, thunder, earthquake and hail, and these manifestations tend to new action and judgement.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

What conclusions do we draw from this chapter? How does it help us? Is it still apocalyptic without us being able to pin down something physical and practical? The temple stands for the people of

God, and they will be secure to remain the temple, but their environs will be attacked. God does not leave Himself without witness, even at the worst of times, and the two prophets, drawing their life from the Spirit, will proclaim the word with powerful effects, so much so that they will be hated, and killed. It is God who has power to raise up His servants and so the witnesses will be vindicated in the eyes of the world. At the same time the woe that accompanies their ascension is a judgement upon the world's enmity to God and His servants. The reader can take comfort in these principles for they are operative over the whole of the church era.

The second part of the chapter is also an encouragement to the reader who may think ultimate victory is a long way off. In fact ultimate victory is present victory, just as past victory is present victory. In one sense the Kingdom never becomes the Kingdom. It always was, is and will be, but the proclamation of its victory now is greatly heartening. By now the reader should be seeing the awesome moral power of God and the Lamb, and be reassured that history is in God's hands as Christ unfolds it.

Chapter Twelve

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

A whole new section begins in the prophecy. In 11:7 we saw the beast appear to kill the two witnesses. Now warfare between God and Satan appears in definitive form. First of all we see a special woman, for the rulers of day and night and the stars are all linked with her. She is about to give birth to a special child—one who is to rule the nations in conformity with the Messiah of Psalm 2. However, a ‘great red dragon’—one who must seem to be most impressive—appears, and he has heads and horns and crowns which make him a formidable figure. He tries to devour the child of the woman, but fails. The next scene is in heaven, where the red dragon and his angels battle against Michael the archangel and his angels, but the dragon is defeated and he and his angels are thrown down to the earth. Here is another major victory claimed, and the brethren of the church—the children of the woman—defeat the red dragon by the blood of the Cross.

The red dragon is so incensed by his defeat that he goes to war with the woman, who by now is secured in safety in the wilderness. He seeks to defeat her children, but is unable to do so. In this way the battle is joined and will not end until all history comes to fulfilment.

COMMENTARY

¹ And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; ² she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. ³ And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven

diadems upon his heads. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; ⁵ she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, ⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Verse 1 *And a great portent:* i.e. a sign. Signs are intended to be read and their directions followed; they are not to be thought of simply in terms of a miracle or a wonder. In the whole prophecy there are seven mentions of the word, three times referring to special revelations by God (12:1, 3; 15:1), and four times referring to deceptions practised by evil (13:13, 14; 16:14; 19:20).

appeared in heaven: i.e. in the sky.

a woman: who surely is to be understood as Israel since she brings forth Christ, and yet is 'the mother of us all' (Gal. 4:26), and at the same time, the new Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ; for in a vision these variant roles can all be caught up in the one person.

clothed with the sun: which means the most intense light of all, as the moon means reflected light, leading some to see the sun as the New Covenant in all its glory (cf. Isa. 6:1–3f.), which is only reflected in the Mosaic Covenant; but since sun and moon are rulers of day and night (Gen. 1:14, 16) it means the woman has the glory of both, and they—with the stars—remind us of Joseph's dream.

with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars: the latter reminding us of the twelve tribes of Israel. In other words, this woman is the Woman, wholly outstanding, especially because she is to bring Christ into the scene of history.

Verse 2 *she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth:* and this is a picture of Israel seen in the Old Testament (Isa. 66:7f.; Micah 4:10; 5:3; cf. Isa. 26:17–18).

in anguish for delivery: i.e. in travail, longing for the promised Messiah to come.

Verse 3 *And another portent appeared in heaven:* i.e. in the sky.

behold, a great: i.e. imposing, fearsome, and ferocious.

red: murderous, a blood-shedder, a life-taker (cf. John 8:44; I John 3:10–12).

dragon: which is the depiction in many religions of destructive bestiality; identified fully in verse 9 as 'that ancient serpent [i.e. of

Eden], who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'.

with seven heads: i.e. sevenfold or full intelligence.

and ten horns: which represent complete strength and power.

and seven diadems upon his heads: diadems being the head-dress of royalty.

Verse 4 *His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven:* i.e. the celestial angelic powers: if Satan was Lucifer, and if he was one of three leading archangels (ruler over angels), and if Michael and Gabriel were the other two, then it is possible that this third of the angels was the host that followed him.

and cast them to the earth: i.e. their work was to be primarily on earth, relating to the nations, as nations have folk-angels who work their destinies (cf. Daniel and the conflict of nations, and the 'prince of Persia' and 'the prince of Greece'—both folk-angels. See also Jacob's dream regarding the angels, and Jesus' statement to Nathanael in John 1:51).

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child: according to the Messianic promise of Genesis 3:15, and also in accordance with many other promises given to the covenant-people, Israel.

that he might devour her child: because the child was a great danger to him *when she brought it forth:* even to the massacre of the innocents (Matt. 2:16–18). Even so, the dragon could not defeat the prophetic promises; against these he is always helpless.

Verse 5 *she brought forth a male child:* the one called Jesus.

one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: as spoken of in Psalm 2:6–9 (cf. Rev. 2:27; 19:15).

but her child was caught up to God and to his throne: i.e. saved by God from the red dragon, and brought to the throne in the Ascension so that he could rule with a rod of iron, i.e. defeat the enemies and establish a strong government of the nations (cf. Ps. 2:6–9; 45:6; Heb. 1:8).

Verse 6 *and the woman fled into the wilderness:* the traditional and proverbial place of refuge, as with Elijah fleeing from Ahab and Jezebel, and Israel from Egypt.

where she has a place prepared by God: i.e. it was no choice of the woman.

in which to be nourished: by God Himself Who cares for her.

for one thousand two hundred and sixty days: the same period in which other things were to happen, such as the Holy City being trodden underfoot, the two witnesses testifying. Israel was nourished in the wilderness by the giving of heavenly manna, and there the church is fed by Christ who is 'the true bread come down out of heaven'. Eating of this true bread a person will never perish. Some do not see the wilderness as a haven because believers are martyred, but we must see what a horrible devastation the church would know if God were not to watch over them, and keep them.

* * *

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, ⁸ but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. ¹² Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!'

Verse 7 *Now war arose in heaven:* where the dragon has already subverted numerous angels. Thus such war has to be (i) so that the dragon does not gain the ascendancy, and (ii) so that he should be immediately defeated, and so checked in his wild ambition.

Michael: whose name means 'Who is like God?'

and his angels: i.e. those who belong to his concourse.

fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought: From Daniel 10:12–13, 20–21 we gather that Gabriel unaided could not defeat the angelic princes who came against him until Michael came to aid him. It would seem, then, that Michael is the leader of the angelic hosts, and is almost certainly the man Daniel saw in 10:5–6, whose appearance was so glorious, like the vision of Christ we see in Revelation 1:12–16. In Daniel 12:1ff. it is prophesied that 'At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people [Israel]', and it goes on to say that there will be a time of great trouble ('great tribulation') but that the people of God shall be

delivered. Is this warfare in heaven part of that fulfilment? If we link Jude 9 with Daniel, it seems Michael is the angel of the resurrection. Certainly if the 'man clothed in linen' in Daniel 10:5–6 is the same as in Daniel 12:6f., then he is like 'the mighty angel' of Revelation 10. It may possibly be that he is Michael.

Verse 8 *but they were defeated*: and here we may mistakenly think of the warring angels using brute force rather than untruth against truth, and truth winning victory as the dragon is outcountenanced.

and there was no longer any place for them in heaven: but note that Satan is called 'the prince of the power of the air', and that evil powers operate in 'the heavenlies' (*en toiepouraniois* Eph. 2:2; 6:12). That believers are seated with Christ in this realm shows that it is not heaven proper (cf. Eph. 2:6).

Verse 9 *And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent*: who was in the garden of Eden with the first couple.

who is called the Devil: i.e. 'Slanderer', as in John 8:44, 'a liar' and 'a murderer'; *and Satan*, 'adversary advocate', i.e. Legal Accuser; *the deceiver of the whole world* as he takes men captive at his own will (II Tim. 2:26), lies (John 8:44) and seduces (II Cor. 11:1–3), and sets the beasts on the same track (Rev. 13:5ff.; 16:13ff.; 19:20).

he was thrown down to the earth: as Jesus had seen in a visionary way: 'I saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven' (Luke 10:18), which does not mean that the two events were simultaneous, but simply that Satan is cast down when the battle obtains.

and his angels were thrown down with him: It is debated whether these angels are those of verse 4, and it would seem that they are. If so, then this verse indicates they were cast down for having union with Satan in his deeds.

Verse 10 *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now'*: i.e. time and again we see the climax of victory only to have the prophecy move off into some other action, and in this sense the triumphant statement here is parallel with 6:12–17 and 11:15ff.

the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down: in conformity with Christ's vision of Luke 10:18 and with the action of the Cross (John 12:31; 16:11), as shown in Hebrews 2:14–15 and Colossians 2:14–15.

who accuses them day and night before our God: as in Jude 9 Satan accused Moses of sin, which would give him the right over Moses'

body at the time of the resurrection. His accusations against the brethren are false, i.e. not in conformity with Romans 8:1 and John 5:24.

Verse 11 *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb:* by the victory of Christ's death in freeing them from guilt (Rom. 6:7; cf. I Cor. 15:55–56).

and by the word of their testimony: i.e. 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'—the proclamation of the gospel.

for they loved not their lives even unto death: Whereas Satan held men and women in his grip through fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15), the bearing of their guilt by Christ liberated them from him (cf. I John 4:15–18).

Verse 12 *Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell:* i.e. who live in the tent of heaven (cf. Rev. 21:3). In 13:6 the beast blasphemes those who dwell *therein!*

But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!': The last clause is self-explanatory—Satan's operations are confined to the earthly sphere (cf. 13:1, 11). Satan is in great wrath because (i) his heady plans have been thwarted, and (ii) he knows his doom has been secured by God. It is worth noting that we get angry when we cannot get our own way, and this is the prime cause of anger! The statement does not mean it will happen instantly, but 'soon' as in 1:1, i.e. quickly from God's point of view. Meanwhile the earth faces an angry devil.

* * *

13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child. 14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. 15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

Verse 13 *And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman:* i.e. the outstanding Woman who was radiant with astral glory and authority.

who had borne the male child: i.e. the one who was to rule the nations, which was the ambition of Satan himself.

Verse 14 *But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle:* which is possibly a reference to 'I bore you on eagles' wings', i.e. away from Egypt (Exod. 19:4; cf. Deut. 32:11), and may be linked with the gospel-eagle of Revelation 8:13.

that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness: which is to be a haven where she could not be destroyed but rather built up for her wonderful future.

to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time: See comment on 12:6, and look at Daniel 12:7–12, where this is the period the holy people of God must sustain themselves in the face of difficult times.

Verse 15 *The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth:* i.e. gave such utterances as were intended to destroy the woman, and Psalm 144:7 might be apt here: 'Stretch forth thy hand from on high, rescue me and deliver me from the many waters, from the hand of aliens', as also Isaiah 43:2: 'When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you'.

after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood: of invective, accusation and blasphemy.

Verse 16 *But the earth came to the help of the woman:* Whilst the earth often means something evil, it seems that here it is the opposite, though it could mean that the Satanic flood is absorbed by the earth, later to produce the beast of 13:1, but it seems we do not know.

and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river: as once it had swallowed the rebellious Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their families (Num. 16:25–35).

which the dragon had poured from his mouth: i.e. the volume of his opposition, blasphemy and vituperation.

Verse 17 *Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring:* i.e. Christ's brethren (cf. John 20:17; Heb. 2:11f.).

on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus: i.e. who proclaim and live the powerful gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:18).

And he stood on the sand of the sea: for it is from the sea that his beast-clone will arise and aid him to destroy the 'rest of her off-

spring’.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter is a critical one for us. It shows the promised Seed of the Woman (Gen. 3:15) linked with the Messiah-King of Psalm 2—an awesome and hated figure to the red dragon, who is Satan himself. It tells us that Satan seeks to destroy the King-Child who escapes him and is enthroned in heaven. The battle of the angels which ensues brings a dramatic change in the whole celestial order. The Woman in the wilderness can be seen as ‘the New Jerusalem above’, the Wife of the Bridegroom, the Mother of us all, and her being in the wilderness represents God’s care of her and His protection of her from the red dragon. Whilst she is the church, yet her children also constitute the church, so that failing to destroy her, the dragon—who knows that he has little time to effect anything—seeks out the children to destroy them.

Because the children ‘keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus’ they constitute a dangerous menace to the dragon. His standing on the sand of the sea is linked with his next move—i.e. to bring into being a clone of himself, the dreadful beast. In the light of these things, which are as contemporary to us as they were to the early church, we have to be alert to the menace of the dragon, and understand the foul origins of the beast who sets out to delude the world into thinking he is the great one of our age. We also have to learn that Satan—the red dragon and his clone—is only defeated by the victory of the Cross, i.e. ‘the blood of the Lamb’, and not fear the physical death these dark powers may seek to bring to us.

Chapter Thirteen

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

WE come now to what may be called the heart and plan of evil, the deliberate movement towards dethroning God. In Psalm 2—and other places—the peoples of the earth ‘set themselves . . . against the Lord and his anointed’. Behind this human rebellion is Satan and his powers, and we see the clone of the beast arising from the sea, which itself is that restless humanity of which Isaiah 57:20 speaks. Humanity as much gives birth to the beast as does the red dragon. However, it is what the beast is about which is so terrifying. Virtually a ‘son of perdition’ (II Thess. 2:3) as the clone of the evil ‘father’ (John 8:44f.; I John 3:10–12), he sets about conquering the children of the Woman, and winning the nations. He is aided by a second beast who is a further clone, and imitative of the Holy Spirit. This beast is an unholy spirit, who brings idolatry of the image of the beast to the world. Both beast and second beast put their seal on their followers, as God puts His seal on His (Rev. 7:1–3; 14:1; 22:4). This false trinity—dragon, beast and second beast—are on their way to dethrone God and set up the kingdom of darkness in the place of the Kingdom of God.

COMMENTARY

1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. 2 And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. 3 One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder.

⁴ Men worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?'

⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months; ⁶ it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, ⁸ and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. ⁹ If any one has an ear, let him hear:

¹⁰ If any one is to be taken captive,

to captivity he goes;

if any one slays with the sword,

with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Verse 1 *And I saw a beast:* the one already mentioned in 11:7.

rising out of the sea: which is the next step in the wrath of the dragon and his purpose of destroying the offspring of the Woman, the principle of which is seen in Daniel 7:1–9, 19–28.

with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns: which is a clone of the red dragon, the difference being that the dragon has seven diadems and the beast has ten diadems, the dragon having his diadems on his heads, and the beast upon his horns. It must be seen that certain interpretations of this Book trace the beast to a person in history, as in Daniel 7 the four beasts are traced to certain kings and historical events.

and a blasphemous name upon its heads: This was the place emperors had their names written, the sign of their kingship, and—they claimed—their deity (cf. Acts 12:20–23), and the beast has a name which blasphemes God upon its seven heads.

Comment: The Book of Daniel really requires close and thoughtful reading in order to understand its principles. In 7:1–9 the four winds, of which we spoke in Revelation 7:1–3 and saw in Zechariah 6, were stirring up the great sea—the sea such as the beast emerges from in Revelation 13. This sea appears to be the whole society of man with its various nations. Four beasts—which are nations—emerge from the sea and they are fearsome to look at. In Daniel chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar saw four kingdoms, which in fact are the one developing to their ultimate. Another kingdom is brought into view which is eternal—in fact the Kingdom of God—and it destroys the fourfold kingdom represented by the image of gold, silver, bronze and iron. In Daniel chapter 7 the four beasts are generally interpreted as the Babylonian kingdom (the lion) of Daniel's day, the

Medo-Persian kingdom (the bear) which came to power during Daniel's time, the Macedonian Empire, represented by the leopard, and then the Roman Empire which was the terrible fourth beast, combining all the characteristics of the three previous kingdoms.

In Revelation there is one beast, but reading Daniel we see it had elements of the four beasts, such as those of a lion and a bear and a leopard, along with the ten horns of the fourth beast. We can say the beast of the Revelation is a composite of the four in Daniel. Whilst the outward similarities seem to end there, the nature of the fourth beast is like that of the Revelation beast. It makes war on the saints and prevails over them (Dan. 7:21), as does the Revelation beast (Rev. 13:7). It speaks against the people of God in Daniel (7:25), as does the Revelation beast (13:6), and has some kind of authority for 'a time, two times, and half a time', which we see is the time of the beast in the Revelation. Whilst all details are not identical—of the four beasts (the fourth being the triumphant one in Daniel) and the Revelation beast—yet the principle is the same. In both cases beasts arise from the sea, persecute the saints, and have dominion for 'a time, two times, and half a time'. This should help us to know that this principle has been working throughout history, and appears in a climactic way in the Revelation, where the matter is resolved, the beast being defeated and ultimately destroyed, along with the devil and his powers. In both chapters 2 and 7 of Daniel the great powers are overcome by the power of the Kingdom of God—a theme we see appearing and reappearing in the Revelation.

When we go back to the principle of the sea, we can be sure that it is society as a whole, and nations in particular. In Daniel 7 the nations or beasts arise from the sea; in Revelation 17:15 John is told, 'The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.' Nothing beastly arises which has not come from what is already beastly. Beastliness we understand—it is being animal-like in the worst forms, when we have been created human. No one can criticize a beast for being 'beastly', but humans are not essentially beasts. The truth of history is that beasts have always arisen from human beastliness of pride, ambition, selfishness, anger, hatred and wrath. The principle in history—found in Daniel—burgeons out in terrible ways in the dragon, his first beast and his second beast, the latter also being known as 'the false prophet'.

We will miss the whole point of this prophecy of Revelation if we do not recognize the elements working in the world today, understanding the principle of beastliness, of seeming defeat of the people of God, but of the ultimate triumph of God and His Kingdom. We could be wrong if we linked the beast with some past kingdom—say Rome—or some present kingdom—say Hitler's Germany—or put it all into the future when we will not be here to see it!

Verse 2 *And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power [dynamic: *dunami*] and his throne and great authority: i.e. the seat of ruling his kingdom, and the authority which goes with it.*

Verse 3 *One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound: i.e. the wound appeared to be mortal, and if it were mortal then the beast would*

have died. The wound came from a sword (13:14) which did not destroy it.

but its mortal wound was healed: i.e. here is a form of resurrection.

and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder: Just as the Resurrection was the powerful claim of the early church—especially to the Lordship of Christ—so an imitation wounding to death (the Cross) and an imitation resurrection would give lordship and a following to the beast.

Comment: What we have to see now is that Satan, who has been called ‘God’s ape’, is compelled out of rivalry, jealousy and ambition to ape God in what He does. So Satan must have a fatherhood (John 8:44; I John 3:10–12), a son (cf. II Thess. 2:3), a ‘crucified’ son, a trinity—the dragon, the beast and the false prophet who are ‘father’, ‘son’ and ‘holy [unholy] spirit’. It may sound like a fantastic idea but it is there, and the centre of it is this chapter 13 of the Revelation. In 16:13–14 three foul spirits like frogs form a cloned trinity and seek to assemble the nations against God. Whilst the children of God have His name written on their foreheads, i.e. have ‘the mark of God’ (7:3; 14:1; 22:4), so the beast marks out his own, i.e. ‘the mark of the beast’. If Satan will be ‘like the Most High God’, then he must do what God does. Because he is essentially a creature he never can do what the Creator does, but he is compelled to try to do so. The most he can accomplish is a parody. A certain kind of interpretation does not accept this principal understanding, but goes for actual events in history, i.e. Rome is the seven heads, the wounded heads one of the Emperors—e.g. Nero—but other emperors take his place. The beast can surely be no less than Antichrist, for Antichrist desires to take the place of Christ (I John 2:18).

Verse 4 *Men worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’:* Just as the Roman Empire represented an undefeatable power, and men went its way rather than fight it—‘If you can’t beat it, join it!’ was their policy. Later the beast is disposed of very smartly by Christ, but at the time it seems to have great power, e.g. communism in the Eastern Bloc, which seemed so invincible, crumbled quickly at a given point.

Verse 5 *And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words:* The beast utters such, but it is his seeming usurpation of God’s position which is the total blasphemy, as though God were not there, and was without power. The blasphemy was intended to put people off coming to God.

and it was allowed: i.e. he could not do this unless permitted by God Who uses all things to accomplish His will, and Who delegates all authority, for ‘the powers that be are ordained of God’ (Rom.

13:1), and they all have to give an account of how they have used that authority. Here the beast is permitted *to exercise authority for forty-two months*: i.e. for three and a half years, etc.

Verse 6 *it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling*: which is now the church as much as it is heaven (Eph. 2:21–22; I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16–17), *that is, those who dwell in heaven*.

Verse 7 *Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them*: as in Daniel 7:21, ‘As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them’.

And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation: which has ever been the desire of the dragon (Satan). In Luke 4:5–8 the devil claimed that all the kingdoms have been delivered to him, and he may give them to whom he wills. Whether this is a lie or not was not debated by Jesus, who refused the temptation. It appears that Satan—as an angel, a son of God—was given authority. Also the angels of II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, who sinned and ‘did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling’, seem to have been given authority which *they continued to exercise* but out of order of the original mandate given them. Peter and Jude speak of them being ‘kept . . . in eternal chains in the nether gloom’, but it would appear they also exercise *limited* action, such as is seen here and other places where principalities and powers are described as opposing the Kingdom of God.

Comment: What is puzzling to many thoughtful readers of the Bible is the often-presented principle of evil powers having authority, i.e. being given authority by God, for that is the inference. In this chapter (13) in verse 5 we read, ‘the beast *was given* a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and *it was allowed* to exercise authority for forty-two months’. Verse 7 has it, ‘And *authority was given* ~~it~~ over every tribe and people and tongue and nation’. Whilst God is not in any sense immoral, He says, in Isaiah 45:7,

I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe,
I am the Lord, who do all these things.

He also says, in Deuteronomy 32:39,

See now that I, even I, am he,
and there is no god beside me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

What these statements—along with many others—amount to is that whatever happens in creation is initiated by God. Whilst secondary causes may be related to the powers of evil or humanity, God is the first cause of all things. This would have to be, otherwise God would not be sovereign. When, then, we meet the phrase ‘it was allowed’, or ‘it was given’, we must understand that all these things have to do with God’s sovereign plan. Probably it is all too subtle for us to fully grasp, but the wills of evil creatures—celestial and terrestrial—in one sense are free to *will* what they will, but they are only allowed to execute what—in the ultimate—will fulfil God’s will. Speaking in a very human way we say that God not only utilizes all things that are wrong and evil, but in some way they have to come to pass—by nature of the case, and order, of all things. One helpful example of this is Acts 2:23: ‘this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men’. God had planned the event, but those crucifying Christ were morally culpable for what they did. All authorities will have to answer for the wrong use of the authority given them.

The great question of theodicy is involved here—i.e. how God works in the universe He created as good, but which has been invaded by evil—but what is helpful to us is to know that nothing is outside God’s control and all things lead to Him accomplishing His will. None of this justifies evil in any way, but its presence does not have to dismay us, and we do not have to fight back furiously and with rage in order to ensure justice in history. God does that, even if, at times, He calls us to be the instruments of that justice. Outside of such a call we dare not try to put life and history to rights!

Verse 8 *and all who dwell on earth will worship it:* for to worship is to serve, and all must serve the beast (cf. Rom. 1:25), worship being what Satan desires more than any other thing (cf. Luke 4:7).

every one whose name has not been written: this inferring, of course, that there are those whose names have been written in the book of life of the Lamb.

before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain: The thought is repeated in 17:8, ‘the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world’. What is emphasized is not so much the book of life, but the fact that there are two sets of humans—those whose names have been written in the book of life, and those whose names are not written in it. Those written in it refuse the mark of the beast, and the others receive the mark of the beast.

Comment: In regard to ‘the book of life’, what is acceptable to many is that one’s name should be written there *when one has earned* that inclusion. What is objectionable to many is the predestination that is inferred—God chooses to write some names and not others. That anyone’s name should be written there must be of grace, and not of works (Eph. 2:8–10). The book of life really means ‘the roll of the living’. In Exodus 32:32f. Moses is prepared to have his name

blotted out of the book if Israel is destroyed by God. In Daniel 12:1 those written in the book will pass safely through the tribulation. For other references to this book of life see Psalms 56:8; 69:28; 139:16; Daniel 7:10; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 21:27. In Revelation 20:15 those whose names are not written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire.

Verse 9 *If any one has an ear, let him hear:* and the question is, 'Who is here addressed?' Generally the one who will benefit by hearing, and there are two possible interpretations of the stanza below. Some see it as encouraging the believers to see that captivity and slaying will come to the followers of the beast, in which case the text is intelligible, and some see it as telling believers they must suffer, but to endure it patiently without fighting back since they will be imprisoned. If they fight back with the sword they will be slain. If they are imprisoned they must accept and patiently endure imprisonment. It seems to me that the latter interpretation fits the text much better. The text is taken primarily from Jeremiah 15:2 and refers to the people of God under punishment, but this does not mean it may not refer to the saints. In Daniel 7 the terrible beast makes war on the saints and it prevails over them, but the saints know they will eventually have the Kingdom, so they endure patiently. Here, in Revelation 13, the saints are to endure patiently, knowing they will ultimately receive the Kingdom. In 14:9–12 the judgement comes upon the beast and his followers, and in the light of this the saints are to endure patiently. Enduring patiently is also a theme of 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; and 3:10.

Verse 10 *If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes:* i.e. without resistance, knowing that the weakness of the saints is their great strength (II Cor. 12:1–10; 13:3–4; cf. I Cor. 1:25–31), and this is not the doctrine of passive resistance. It is the principle of the Lamb allowing himself to be slain and thereby winning the victory. Today such systems as Liberation Theology urge the *praxis* of using violence and weapons to obtain liberty for the oppressed masses. Believers are to use weapons, yet not worldly but spiritual ones (II Cor. 10:3–5; Eph. 6:10–18). They are not to resist the civil powers (Rom. 13:1ff.; I Pet. 2:13), for God raises up and puts down kings, even if He does it by zealots for justice!

if any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain: for 'they who live by the sword must die by the sword'. *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints.*

11 Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. 12 It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. 13 It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; 14 and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived; 15 and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast should even speak, and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. 16 Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, 17 so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. 18 This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

Verse 11 *Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth:* i.e. not from heaven, but the earth, the earth which swallowed up the river-emission from the dragon's mouth (Rev. 12:16). In Daniel 7:17 the four beasts arise out of the earth, but were first said to rise out of the water (Dan. 7:3).

it had two horns like a lamb: doubtless wishing to give itself out as mild and peaceful, but its voice betrayed its real nature (we judge people by their voices). It is surely an imitation of the Lamb that was slain, seeking to exploit the dynamics of (assumed) humility.

and it spoke like a dragon: which was its origin, from which it was cloned.

Verse 12 *It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence:* The dragon had given the first beast authority, and now it delegates some of this to the subordinate beast.

and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast: since the principle of the day was to worship the Emperor, and this was enforced by the Proconsul and the Commune who were—as it were—a second beast with two horns supporting the first. Even if the second beast is not these—the Proconsul and the Commune—it illustrates the principle.

whose mortal wound was healed: It is interesting that constant reference is made back to this wound, as in the church constant reference is made back to the genuine Cross—the place of power (I Cor. 1:18, 24f.).

Verse 13 *It works great signs*: in fulfilment of Christ's prophecy (Matt. 24:24), 'For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect'. Paul also warned that the coming of the man of sin would be 'with all power and with pretended signs and wonders' (II Thess. 2:9).

even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men: which is what will happen at the last conflict, only it will be upon the forces of evil—Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:8–9). As we saw in 11:5 the fire is the word of God, and so there will be a false word, and this is consistent with the fact that the second beast is also called 'the false prophet' in 16:13, 19:20 and 20:10. It is in Jeremiah 23 that God speaks of His word being fire, and exposes the false prophet.

Verse 14 *and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image*: for images are a way in which the devotee visualizes his god, and—so to speak—his god is always with him. It was this custom God forbid to Israel, since He was ineffable. The image was *for the beast which was wounded by the sword*—the word of God—*and yet lived*: for there can be no doubt that mankind looks to signs and wonders, i.e. 'an adulterous and sinful generation' (Mark 8:38) and 'Jews demand signs' (I Cor. 1:22). This is because man wishes to see supernatural workings of power, for he will not believe without them and then does not really believe with them! See John 2:23–25 and 4:48.

Verse 15 *and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast*: i.e. to make it alive (Gen. 2:7).

so that the image of the beast should even speak: i.e. give his own word as against God's word.

and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain: This was the case at Rome: one had to listen to the voice of the Emperor, through his subordinates and their system, under pain of death.

Verse 16 *Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead*: We have seen that Satan must emulate all that God does, since all that God does is ontological—the truth—and has its own power. Satan wishes to tune in on this power. God marks His own, i.e. seals them for Himself and their well-being (7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). In 3:12 Christ promised he would write his name on the foreheads of the conquerors.

Verse 17 *so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name:* In our day we have seen systems and parties that seek to cater only for their own members being exclusive to those outside. Believers know the odds that are against them in many anti-Christian societies.

Verse 18 *This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six:* Neither the Hebrews nor the Greeks used numbers, so that the letters of the alphabet had each its own value. Based on this system of evaluation, called *gematria* the early Christians tried to evaluate the name. It does not matter what the names were—people are still working in names—it is still the mark of the beast, i.e. the name of the beast, with which human beings are marked. John is saying it is a human number, i.e. a number which humans use, but he is not saying it is the number (name) of a man. Since sevens are used for fullness, completion and perfection in the Revelation, and seven–seven–seven would represent a triune perfection, is then six–six–six short of that perfection? At best we can say that a humanly understood name must be the name of the beast by which its followers are known. There is no shame in not detecting that name: in wisdom it shall be known at the appropriate time.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

The plan of evil—at least in its beginnings—has been unveiled to us. The revelation which God gave to Christ, who in turn gave it to John, who has given it to us, is not only a revelation of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, but also of Satan and his stratagems. We have seen a false or counter-trinity arise, and just as all peoples, tribes and tongues belong to God by creation, Satan seeks to possess them by his creation—so-called—of a counter-kingdom. Thus he seeks to deceive the nations, to conscript them into his service by giving himself out to be stronger than God, and by making his kingdom exclusive. Those who refuse to come under the beast and receive his mark will be bitterly persecuted and made to suffer, which is the case in this phase of history. The lesson the children of the Woman have to heed is that they do not use the same weapons as the beast. They must submit, even to imprisonment and suffering, to whatever comes to them. We will see in chapter 14 that this is the true way of victory. In any case the enemies of God and His true people have been exposed.

Chapter Fourteen

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

IF in chapter 13 we have felt the defeat of the redeemed, then chapter 14 encourages us in a number of ways, primarily because we see the triumph of God in the 144,000—the special people of God, as against those who receive the mark of the beast. The message is that we can be loyal to God and the truth. By the evangelist-angel all mankind is warned that judgement is on the very doorstep, whilst the second angel forecasts the fall of Babylon. Babylon is introduced in this way for the first time. A further warning is given by the third angel against receiving the mark of the beast in the face of dire judgement.

Two events follow the first, being the harvest of the earth—whatever that may mean—and the second is the awful judgement of the wrath of God with its high and bloody flood.

COMMENTARY

1 Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, 3 and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. 4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless.

Verse 1 *Then I looked*: There are three *looks* John has in this chapter: here and verses 6 and 14.

and lo: 'lo' turns our attention to an unexpected but wonderful event:

on Mount Zion: and when we ask, 'Where is this Mount Zion?' we must answer, 'Where there is the church of the living God, the New Temple, the Holy City, and where there is the Lamb.' If we further ask, 'On earth or in heaven?' then the answer—keeping in mind this apocalyptic description—is, 'Both,' for Hebrews 12:22–24 speaks of a *now* and a *then* a *there* and a *here*; it is a situation and it is the people of God; it is in the Lamb, and the Lamb is in it.

stood the Lamb: for he has been installed on Mount Zion, as Psalm 2:6 says: 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill'. Just having seen the dragon clone himself, the beast arises to have victory over the people of God, and the second beast to emerge and force worship of the beast. John needed to see (and we also) that in the midst of this history the church is inviolate, the Lamb present, and—so to speak—the battle song of the Redeemed is thundering out.

and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name: for they are one with the Lamb, and the Lamb one with them. See my comment after chapter 7, verse 8.

and his Father's name written on their foreheads: the true mark of God, as we saw in 7:1–3 (cf. 22:4).

Verse 2 *And I heard a voice from heaven*: i.e. its origin and quality is heavenly and not earthly, and comes from the victorious throne of the Lamb (cf. 10:4; 18:4). It is at once the voice of God and the Redeemed also. Its quality is that of glory, as we saw in 1:15–16 and Ezekiel 43:2.

like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder: for these were all elements of God's glory, His Shekinah Cloud.

the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps: so that it is both the inspiration for, and the source of, the song it accompanies.

Verse 3 *and they sing a new song*: as we saw in 5:9 (cf. 15:2–4).

before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth: for only they can have that song in their hearts, which doubtless has in it the elements of praise for redemption, insistence on being in the battle of the Lamb, and which recognizes the rightness of God's judgements, for these are the

elements of the songs in the Revelation.

Verse 4 *It is these who have not defiled themselves with women:* This cannot mean 'have remained celibate' since marriage is honourable (Heb. 13:4) and ordained of God (Gen. 2:18–24), so that chastity here must mean the purity that comes from the refusal to participate in the adultery and fornication of idol worship (cf. Isa. 1:2; Jer. 2:20—3:11; Ezek. 16:43; Rev. 2:14, 20–22).

for they are chaste: i.e. as Israel was chaste (II Kings 19:21; Isa. 23:12; 37:22; Jer. 14:17; 18:13; 31:4; Lam. 1:15; 2:13).

it is these who follow the Lamb: as against following the idols; *whenever he goes:* for to follow is to be a disciple, and to be involved in the plan of God being executed by the Son.

these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb: a matter we dealt with in verses 1–3.

Verse 5 *and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless:* i.e. they lived and spoke the truth only, in conformity with not bearing false witness, witnessing to the truth of Christ, so that their words were with grace (cf. I John 1:6–7; Eph. 4:15, 25; I Tim. 1:10–11; Rev. 21:7–8).

Comment: One of the problems the reader of the Book of Revelation faces is that of the place and time of events. How can some of these be now and then in the past or the future, and how can they be placed on earth and yet seem to be in heaven? Part of the difficulty in understanding lies in our heavy reliance upon the three tenses of time—a situation in which we have to live. It is not easy for us to think of what is future to us as—in one sense—being present now. This is indicated in Romans 8:30, where Paul says, 'And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.' Those reading Paul's letter were to see themselves glorified, even though as yet they were still in the mortal body. Glorification here is proleptic—it will happen but is now as though it had already happened. This is the language of faith and hope. Mount Zion in the Old Testament was a local hill in Jerusalem on which was the temple and which represented the throne of God—'the city of the great King' (Ps. 48:2). It was the stronghold of God's people because He was there (Ps. 48:3, 12–14). Hence God set His Son, the Messiah, on this holy hill. Throne and altar are seen to be the one since the temple was the dwelling place of God (Ps. 9:11; 135:21; Isa. 8:18; Joel 3:17).

The Exile brought rich eschatological views of Mount Zion. The Messianic King on the throne (Ps. 2), the nations would be defeated. There would be a restored dominion which would excel what had been before. The rod of the New Prince's strength would go forth out of Zion, for he would judge his enemies and fill places with the dead (Ps. 110:1–2, 6). Mount Zion would stand inviolate whilst judgements would come upon the nations (Joel 2:32) and many

would wish to go up to Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2f.). They would come with singing to Zion:

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isa. 35:10).

So beautiful would be this renewed Zion, following the day of vengeance of God, that He would comfort all who mourn in Zion:

to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified (Isa. 61:3).

In the New Testament Mount Zion is a theme of the writers. In the Gospels Zechariah 9:9 is quoted of Jesus' entrance into the city (Matt. 21:5; John 12:15). In Romans 9:33 and I Peter 2:6 both apostles quote Isaiah 28:16 as referring to Christ:

therefore, thus says the Lord God,
'Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation
a stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
"He who believes will not be in haste."'

In Romans 11:26 Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20 of Christ: 'And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression'. When to these New Testament usages we add Hebrews 12:22–24,

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel

then we realize that the apostolic church saw themselves as one with all God's people down through the ages, and were gathered with them as being at a *new* mountain. In one sense we are in heaven, although we have yet to arrive there. In another sense heaven is upon this earth, though the new heavens and the new earth are yet to be (Rev. 21:1–3). Paul can speak of 'the Jerusalem above' who is free and who is our (present) mother. It is not impossible, then, to see the whole church—in the form of the 144,000, the 'first fruits'—as being both on earth and in heaven at the one time. In apocalyptic thinking and expression this is no great problem. If, however, we leave the apocalyptic mystery and say literally that we are both in heaven and earth, then we are not faithful to the thought which is apocalyptically expressed.

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7 and he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgement has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water.'

8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion.'

9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.'

12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!'

Verse 6 *Then I saw another angel*: i.e. one other than the seven angels, and one of the three of this chapter.

flying: one of the rare places we are told that angels fly, even though we have been told distinctly that cherubim and seraphim are flyers.

in midheaven: the place where the eagle pronounced the woes of coming judgement (8:13).

with an eternal gospel: i.e. the gospel of the Kingdom as announced by John the Baptist and Jesus, and later proclaimed by the church. Doubtless here the elements of Christ's triumph are emphasized, as well as the salvation his gospel brings.

to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people: for we have seen, time and again in this Book, and throughout the Scriptures, that God is concerned with nations. Here one is reminded of Paul's claim in Romans 10:18, where he quotes Psalm 19:4: 'But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."'

Verse 7 *and he said with a loud voice*: for all to hear who would hear, since only he who wills to hear really hears.

'Fear God: for the Preacher of Ecclesiastes 12:13 had said, 'Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man,' because, according to the writer of Proverbs, 'fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' and 'the fountain of life': true fear is reverence of God. In this case it is the rebellious who are primarily addressed.

and give him glory: since they had not had respect to God's glory, i.e. His Kingdom, authority and power (Rom. 1:21).

for the hour of his judgement has come: i.e. on the whole world; the judgement which appears time and again, and in so many forms in this prophecy: men must constantly keep the judgement in mind.

and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water.: i.e. it is God Who is Creator, and Whose creation is constantly reminding the human race of His Person, His work and His presence (Ps. 19:1f.; Rom. 1:20).

Verse 8 *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen:* this is another proleptic statement, but its reality was intended to be an encouragement to the faithful, and a warning to the rebellious who put their trust in this fleshly kingdom.

is Babylon the great: this being the first mention of this city-system which is evil.

she who made: i.e. enticed, seduced, and manipulated.

all nations drink the wine of her impure passion.: which we see in 17:4 is from 'a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornications', i.e. idolatry and related evil practices (cf. Rev. 2:20–21).

Verses 9–10 *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath:* the doctrine of God's wrath is unintelligible to sinful man, who resents it more than anything because guilt makes it appear irrational to him; but God's wrath is simply upon evil, and is His implacable insistence that He will destroy it in every form (Rom. 1:18; Ps. 7:11; Eccl. 8:11–13).

poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur: Here verses 8–9 warn of the judgement of God in giving way to the beast and worshipping its image. Worship—as we have seen—is man's primary occupation in time, and is the deepest drive he has (see comments on 7:15 and the word 'serve'). To worship any idol was to blaspheme God, Who as Creator had made all

things, and nothing could possibly 'image Him' to men and women. 'Unmixed wrath' is undiluted judgemental anger, and not the equivalent—in principle—of human wrath, which is arbitrary and rarely just. The language of 'fire and sulphur' is not to be taken literally, but it is to be taken seriously, since the fear of judgement is always with man because he knows what is wrong (Rom. 1:32).

in the presence of the holy angels: The holy angels were the functionaries who had opposed the red dragon, the beast and the false prophets. Now they witness the judgement of these enemies.

The phrase *and in the presence of the Lamb* is a terrifying one. It is stated without explanation. To be in the presence of the Lamb who died to take away the sin of the world but who has been rejected by men reminds us of 6:16, where the rebellious among men cry to be hidden 'from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb'.

Verse 11 *And the smoke of their torment:* for, as John said, 'fear has torment' (I John 4:18, AV); *goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.:* for guilt carries this judgement within it (Rom. 1:18, 24, 26–28).

Verse 12 *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints:* i.e. in 13:5–10 life was burdened for the Redeemed, but here it is a burden for those having the mark of the beast, and this should encourage the faithful to remain faithful, i.e. *those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus* which is the equivalent to keeping 'the word of God and testimony of Jesus'. The *faith of Jesus* is undoubtedly the faith of Jesus, and the truth that is inherent in it, but it is also the faithfulness of Jesus in which believers live and so remain faithful.

Verse 13 *And I heard a voice from heaven:* i.e. an announcement of great importance is being made which is especially one of encouragement for believers.

saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!': i.e. nothing of the deeds done in love—deeds of faithfulness, of resisting the beast and Babylon, proclaiming the faith of Christ, and witnessing—will be lost. Sowing to the Spirit (Gal. 6:8) brings a rich harvest, since 'he that endures unto the end shall be saved' and shall reap a rich reward (Matt. 25:34; Rom. 2:6–11; II Cor. 5:10; II John 8–9).

14 Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, 'Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.' 16 So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

17 And another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has power over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.' 19 So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God;

20 and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.

Verse 14 *Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud:* which, being the only mention of a white cloud in Scripture, must be significant. Doubtless the pillar of cloud that led Israel may have been white—white signifying purity, and perhaps judgement, as in 'the great white throne'.

and seated on the cloud one like a son of man: reminding us of Daniel 7:13–14 when one like a son of man was coming with clouds and to him was given the Kingdom—dominion over 'all peoples, nations, and men of every language'. Some do not believe this is Christ since he is given an order from the temple, by an angel, but this is an absurd view, namely that Christ could not take an order from an angel, since the order came from God, anyway.

with a golden crown on his head: which, as we have seen, was royal authority.

and a sharp sickle in his hand: the symbol of harvesting.

Verse 15 *And another angel came out of the temple:* i.e. from the presence of God with the command of God.

calling with a loud voice: i.e. giving the command of God to be heard by more than the one like the son of man.

to him who sat upon the cloud, 'Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come: and we remember that the Father had the times and seasons in His authority and is now declaring such—*for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.*' This one must be 'the Lord of the harvest' (Matt. 9:37–38; Luke 10:2) who had predicted such a harvest (Matt. 13:24–30).

Verse 16 *So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped:* There is no statement as to the quality of the harvest, but because the next event is a harvest for judgement and wrath, it is supposed that this is the harvest of the good, i.e. the harvest of the gospel (cf. John 4:35–36).

Verse 17 *And another angel came out of the temple:* i.e. from the throne of God.

in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle: The harvest of the Son of Man has been completed.

Verse 18 *Then another angel came out from the altar:* i.e. from God.

the angel who has power over fire: i.e. meaning the fire of the altar, the altar in this case being the altar of incense from which, when prayers are offered to God, the result is that fire is thrown upon the earth, i.e. judgement is effected (8:3–5), but it may further mean that all judgement is fire (cf. Isa. 4:4, ‘a spirit of judgement and . . . burning’, and as in Matthew 3:11–12, ‘the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire’).

and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.’: i.e. the earth is ripe for judgement. We have seen God does not move before or after the time of ripeness (Gen. 15:14–16).

Verse 19 *So the angel:* who had been commanded by the angel of the fire *swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God.*

Verse 20 *and the wine press was trodden outside the city:* i.e. the City of God.

and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse’s bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia: This terrible picture of judgement is based upon the prophecy of Isaiah 63:1–6, where the judgement is not on the people of God but ‘the peoples’ (vv. 3–6):

‘I have trodden the wine press alone,
and from the peoples no one was with me;
I trod them in my anger
and trampled them in my wrath;
their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments,
and I have stained all my raiment.
For the day of vengeance was in my heart,
and my year of redemption has come.

I looked, but there was no one to help;
 I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold;
 so my own arm brought me victory,
 and my wrath upheld me.
 I trod down the peoples in my anger,
 I made them drunk in my wrath,
 and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.'

Again, in Joel 3:12–13 we read,

Let the nations bestir themselves,
 and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat;
 for there I will sit to judge
 all the nations round about.

Put in the sickle,
 for the harvest is ripe.
 Go in, tread,
 for the wine press is full.
 The vats overflow,
 for their wickedness is great.

God is here judging the nations and working out His wrath upon them. This matter of God's wrath is a solemn one. Yet the story of the wine press and the wrath of God would have been intelligible to the martyrs under the altar, for the outworking of the wrath on the day of avengement would have made full sense for them. Martyrs or not, the world has to learn that God's wrath is not arbitrary. 'God has indignation with the sinner every day' is a statement which should induce in us the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, and which leads to repentance not to be repented of.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter is full of practical significance and application for the Christian reader. It tells us that God's people can keep themselves from idols (the meaning, here, of 'fornication', i.e. defiling oneself with women), can follow the Lamb in whatever he is doing, and wherever he is going. This can all be done to the accompaniment of worship and praise.

The angels who bring the three messages pertaining to judgement, to the fall of Babylon and the defeat of the beast, encourage believers to persist in the face of the seeming triumph of evil powers. The rewards promised for faithful endurance are attractive, and

motivate to steady endurance.

The reaping of the harvest at the end of the age, taught by our Lord, encourages the believer to be on the right side of such a harvest, whilst the final act of wrathful judgement also helps to keep the believer steady, knowing that evil will never win and that God will judge in righteousness.

Chapter Fifteen

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

WE come now to the matter of the seven angels and the seven plagues, or as they are called, 'the bowls of wrath'. This is another portent or sign, and is to fill up the wrath of God, i.e. complete its outpouring. The sea like glass which we saw in chapter 4 is present, and beside it stand those who have not surrendered to the beast. They sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, to the accompaniment of their harps. Their song is one of praise and vindication of God in His judgements. The last part of this chapter is given over to the matter of the seven angels and their bowls of wrath, and the preparation that is necessary before they are launched into their work.

COMMENTARY

¹ Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended.

² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

*'Great and wonderful are thy deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are thy ways,
O King of the ages!*

*⁴ Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord?
For thou alone art holy.
All nations shall come and worship thee,
for thy judgements have been revealed.'*

⁵ After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶ and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles. ⁷ And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever; ⁸ and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended.

Verse 1 *Then I saw another portent in heaven:* the first sign having been that of the radiant woman in 12:1, and the second that of the great red dragon (12:3). Those two signs had followed the blowing of the seventh trumpet, and the seven trumpets have followed the opening of the seven seals. The portents (signs) of the radiant woman and the great red dragon had initiated the birth of the King-Child, and the celestial defeat of Satan, which in turn had precipitated the Satanic conflict with the church, and spawned the first and second beasts.

great and wonderful: i.e. marvellous, for these seven angels must have presented a fearsome and terrible sign to the prophet, because they were *seven angels with seven plagues* and these plagues being even more intense than the previous ones—terrible as they proved to be.

which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended: This does not mean that God has ‘run out of wrath’, but that in accordance with Habakkuk 1:13 (‘Thou . . . art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity’, i.e. ‘thou canst not look on iniquity without pouring out upon it thy due wrath’), God must bring judgement to bear on all that is evil in His own creation. See my comment on the wrath of God below, following verse 8. The statement *the wrath of God is ended* is repeated at the end of this chapter 15, and is important for understanding God’s action in history.

Verse 2 *And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass:* i.e. the sea we saw in 4:6, and which seems to correspond to the laver used by the priests to purify themselves.

mingled with fire: i.e. fire that portends judgement as it is about to happen, or, possibly, red with the blood of the defeated evil ones who have been judged in accordance with 14:17–20, although the thought of that glorious sea being blood-stained seems to be unacceptable. There can be no denying that the triumph of Israel at the Red Sea is being repeated in this chapter, as the conquerors stand by the sea.

and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of

its name transports our minds back to 12:11 where they had conquered the red dragon. His stratagem of the two beasts has not succeeded: his defeat is effected, which is no small thing, seeing how vast had been that empire of evil. That they conquer is one of the most encouraging statements in the prophecy of the Revelation. Just as it has seemed in our time that communism was invincible and the nations under it for ever in its grip, yet suddenly that power crumbled. Christian persecution has shown that the dragon and the beasts are defeatable. So then, they are now *standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands* much in the same way as Israel had stood by the Red Sea and, realizing the defeat of Egypt, had burst into the song of Moses (Exod. 15:1–18), a few extracts of which we produce here:

‘I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
 the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.
 The Lord is my strength and my song,
 and he has become my salvation;
 this is my God, and I will praise him,
 my father’s God, and I will exalt him.
 The Lord is a man of war;
 the Lord is his name . . .

‘Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?
 Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,
 terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?’

Verse 3 *And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God:* God’s prophet and great leader.

and the song of the Lamb: God’s great Prophet, Priest and King, about whom the *new song* of 14:1–3 had been sung by the 144,000.

saying, ‘Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!: i.e. by comparison with what the beasts had wrought, a repeating of the thought expressed in the second stanza we have quoted above.

Just and true are thy ways: i.e. although they seem not to be so to perverse men and angels.

O King of the ages!: That He is ‘King of the ages’ means He is sovereign over all creation, over all history. Zechariah 14:9 prophesies, ‘And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one’.

Comment: We note that before the seven plagues are outpoured, the prophecy is vindicating God in what He does, since evil minds accuse Him of cruelty and injustice. David said (Ps. 18:25–26),

With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal;
 with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless;
 with the pure thou dost show thyself pure;
 and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.

Of course God is not perverse, but as Paul has said (Titus 1:15), ‘To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted.’ Evil men and angels will accuse God to the last, and we see that in the latter part of this prophecy God’s justice and holiness are vindicated. Here in chapter 15, then in 16:4–7, and later in 18:10 and 19:1–5, statements are made justifying God for what He has done. Abraham had said, ‘Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?’ and Jesus had said, ‘And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? I tell you he will vindicate them speedily.’ Those who fight the dragon and the beasts are willingly convinced of the true righteousness of God in the acts of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven plagues, but the unrighteous are not. Ultimately they will be convicted of God’s righteousness and true justice, but *against their wills*. Nevertheless God shall stand vindicated in history. This is the true heart of theodicy. The day will come when all will acknowledge before God,

*Great and wonderful are thy deeds,
 O Lord God the Almighty!
 Just and true are thy ways,
 O King of the ages!*

Verse 4 *Who shall not fear*: as against ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes’ (Rom. 3:18; Ps. 36:1) and Jeremiah’s statement (10:7),

Who would not fear thee, O King of the nations?
 For this is thy due;
 for among all the wise ones of the nations
 and in all their kingdoms
 there is none like thee.

and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy: God’s holiness is a mystery to creatures with evil consciences, with damning guilt. Only to the pure in heart is God pure, and only the pure in heart will dare look upon Him, as is clear from Isaiah chapter 6. His holiness (Exod. 15:11; I Sam. 2:2; Ps. 99:3, 5, 9; Isa. 6:3; 57:15; Hosea 11:9; Matt. 19:17; I Tim. 6:16)—often thought of as transcendence and ethical spotlessness—is in fact a very ‘down to earth’ holiness. Constantly God says to Israel, ‘I am the Holy One of Israel—your Redeemer,’ for His holiness goes out to redeem His elect, and to destroy the very bastions of evil, seeking out impurity to its last lair and destroying it—at the Cross of Christ. So then, *All nations shall come and worship thee*, for this is God’s ultimate goal of history—the universal submission of all creatures (Phil. 2:11; I Cor. 15:28), and the reason for this will be *for thy judgements have been revealed*: i.e.

God's holiness and righteousness will have been vindicated, not merely by theological argument, but *by His actions in history*. Confronted with the holiness and righteousness of God, the fear of the Lord will come to all creatures, and the elect will worship with joy, and the rebellious with dread conviction.

Verse 5 *After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven:* i.e. the holy shrine, the *naos* was *opened*, i.e. so that the seven angels could emerge.

Verse 6 *and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen:* which was the sign of purity (as with the Bride in 19:8).

and their breasts girded with golden girdles: as we saw the Lord in 1:13, signifying a high order of rank. Some think these were priestly robes (Exod. 28:26–29, 39–43; Lev. 16:4), but this does not seem to fit the kind of robes the angels were wearing.

Verse 7 *And one of the four living creatures:* showing that the giving of the bowls is an act of God, from the throne, via these high creatures.

gave the seven angels seven golden bowls: There are other golden bowls full of incense which are in the charge of the four living creatures and the elders (cf. 5:8; 8:3–5), but the bowls here seem to be libation bowls, i.e. those connected with sacrifice.

full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever: i.e. the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, who never dies. The idols, the dragon and the beasts, along with Babylon, are only temporary (cf. 17:9–14, where temporary life is accorded to the beast and the kings), but God's lives for ever and so is Lord over all.

Verse 8 *and the temple was filled with smoke:* i.e. the Shekinah, the Presence of God in the Glory-Cloud (cf. Exod. 40:30–38; I Kings 8:10–11; II Chron. 5:11–14; 7:1–3).

from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended: i.e. until God's judgements had been executed, and the temple was open for the elect, and the worship of all creatures.

Comment: The subject of the wrath of God is one which should be understood by God's people. Human anger is a cause of concern to many, not only because it can be quite dangerous since many cases of homicide and suicide result from it, but because relationships can be—and generally are—greatly disturbed by it.

Partly because human anger is unacceptable to human beings, so the wrath of God is unacceptable. We tend to see Divine wrath in the light of human wrath, but the comparison is not tenable. God's wrath is not the result of pride and ambition, nor is it from pent-up emotion and forms of frustration. God's wrath is from His steady hatred of evil, and of all that pollutes and destroys His creation, His creatures and especially the humanity He has made in His own image. Human anger springs from not being able to get our own way or fulfil our own will, from being thwarted in our intentions and plans. We would hate God's wrath simply to be on the same level as ours, but it seems that our guilt is the major element in fearing and disliking the wrath of God. Often we rationalize God as being unreasonably angry, or as failing to pursue justice. We consider ourselves as more just than God. Our outraged sense of justice is often the prime mover in anger. Hence the indignation we have against others for their failure to do what we think they should do in regard to many things, such as poverty, political oppression, militarism, exploitation and spoliation of the environment, failure to provide true justice on many scores—and so on. The truth is that we fear God's wrath as being warranted, and we refuse to face the fact that we are 'the sons of disobedience', and 'the children of wrath' (Eph. 2:1–3). Self-righteousness deludes us into thinking we need no judgement of God.

Some, in believing that God is love, think that Divine wrath would be impossible. They simply refuse to accept the proposition that God, whilst being love, can and does, nevertheless, punish evil and bring retributive punishment to the sinner. This is in spite of the fact that God's love is shown in and by the death and resurrection of His Son, whom He has sent into the world for the sin of the world. Human guilt is an objective fact in the world, and if God does not deal with this guilt through grace, then the judgement of it must come on man without grace.

The wrath of God is seen in Romans chapter 1, where man, in rejecting God, has gone his own way and suppresses the truth in acts of unrighteousness. God's wrath is that He gives man up to the guilt of his sin, and such guilt works in man's conscience in painful and terrifying ways. As God successively gives man up to his guilt, man becomes more depraved in his mind and actions. There has to be a final and climactic wrath upon all of this, and it is called 'the wrath to come'. Romans 3:19–26, I John 4:10 and Galatians 3:10–14—amongst other references—tell us that Christ was made sin for us, and bore the wrath of God *on* sin which is inherent in sin, and *of which* sin is deserving. Thus a sinful human being, through faith in the work of Christ as God's propitiation, can be justified by the grace of God and the faith he has in that work. He is then free from wrath. Where that grace of God is refused, the sinner still lies under the wrath of God, and can only anticipate the final 'day of wrath' when he will be judged.

Whilst the time of history proceeds, God must judge and execute, especially where there is no repentance.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

To see those who had conquered the beast is to encourage us to likewise conquer him, especially when we know his devices and

stratagems. The substance of the song sung by the conquerors links it with the ancient defeat of Egypt and the present defeat of the powers of darkness. There is no way in which the dragon and beasts can triumph!

The importance given in this chapter to the seven angels and their bowls of wrath tells us that God is serious about the judgements. The temple is—as it were—closed to all business and traffic until the judgements are finished. That shows their great importance.

Chapter Sixteen

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THIS chapter covers the action of the seven bowls being outpoured, the first four being poured out on mankind and on the creation, so that abnormal situations—situations of terrible suffering—come into operation. The fifth bowl is poured upon the kingdom of darkness, in fact on the throne of the beast, and men being in this darkness come into terrible pain. The sixth bowl results in the drying up of the river Euphrates, thus removing a great impediment to the assembling of rebel forces for a battle at Armageddon, though nothing is said about a battle actually happening.

The last bowl produces results of enormous consequence, and what is called 'the great city' is split into three parts, and with that catastrophe all other cities fall. Babylon comes in for especially drastic treatment, and yet—as with the other six bowls—no repentance comes to man. Indeed, knowing that it is God who has sent the plagues, men curse God for the plague.

COMMENTARY

¹ Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.'

² So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and foul and evil sores came upon the men who bore the mark of the beast and worshipped its image.

³ The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

⁴ The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water, and they became blood. ⁵ And I heard the angel of water say,

*'Just art thou in these thy judgements,
thou who art and wast, O Holy One.*

⁶ *For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and thou hast given them blood to drink.
It is their due!'*

⁷ *And I heard the altar cry,
'Yea, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are thy judgements!'*

⁸ *The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was
allowed to scorch men with fire; ⁹ men were scorched by the fierce
heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these
plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.*

¹⁰ *The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and
its kingdom was in darkness; men gnawed their tongues in anguish
¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did
not repent of their deeds.*

¹² *The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates,
and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from
the east. ¹³ And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and
from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet,
three foul spirits like frogs; ¹⁴ for they are demonic spirits, perform-
ing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble
them for the battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ¹⁵ ('Lo, I
am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his gar-
ments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!') ¹⁶ And they
assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon.*

¹⁷ *The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud
voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'* ¹⁸
*And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a
great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the
earth, so great was that earthquake. ¹⁹ The great city was split into
three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered
great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰
And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; ²¹
and great hailstones, heavy as a hundredweight, dropped on men
from heaven, till men cursed God for the plague of the hail, so
fearful was the plague.*

Verse 1 *Then I heard a loud voice from the temple:* i.e. the sanctuary (*naos*), *telling the seven angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth:* Is it the earth as being created, or the earth as that from which the second beast came (13:11), and so, does it stand for evil men?

the seven bowls of the wrath of God.: We need to see that God's wrath is not directed against the creation: it is directed against stubborn, rebellious and evil men—see my comment on the wrath of God after verse 8 of chapter 15.

Verse 2 *So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and foul and evil sores:* i.e. such as God had brought upon Egypt, and which He had said would come to Israel if they rebelled and became idolatrous (cf. Deut. 28:58ff.), *came upon the men:* i.e. not, at this point, upon the created earth.

who bore the mark of the beast and worshipped its image: for God does not let history pass without giving us timely and graphic reminders of His holiness, and of the evil of worshipping any other creature or thing. This prophetic revelation would—at the same time—encourage those who resisted the beast and refused his mark, and would warn those who gave in to the beast.

Verse 3 *The second angel poured his bowl into the sea:* Again, is this the created sea, or the sea from which the beast came and which is, in 17:15, ‘peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues’? If so, then society is putrefied by the wrath, and without doubt such moral putrefaction exists in Western society today.

and it became like the blood of a dead man: as in the third plague upon Egypt (Exod. 7:17–21), such blood being the essence of putrefaction.

and every living thing died that was in the sea: If this bowl contaminates the sea, and the sea is the created sea, then the action is not primarily against the sea but against mankind who has to use the sea for survival.

Verse 4 *The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water:* i.e. on fresh water, the source of life, *and they became blood* (as was the case in Egypt), so that humanity was cut off from its true supply of life—whether this be moral or physical.

Verse 5 *And I heard the angel of water:* a statement which is not explained. In 7:1 we have the four angels of the four winds, and here an angel of water. Is it the third angel? In any case it shows us that various elements may well be under the care of angels, in which case we are led out into a wider view of the creation, assuming that it is literal water, and not spiritual life that is here indicated.

say, ‘Just art thou in these thy judgements, thou who art and wast, O Holy One: thus vindicating God against those who would limit God’s actions to what we would call ‘humanitarian considerations’.

Verse 6 *For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due!:* so that here we have a rationalization of the judgement. This is a judgement of blood for blood

that has been shed (cf. II Chron. 13:15–16; Luke 13:33; Acts 7:52), and all innocent blood must be expiated by the hand of man (Num. 35:33; Deut. 32:42), and so another timely reminder that God is not slow in vindicating His servants, especially those who have been martyred—the ones under the altar.

Verse 7 *And I heard the altar cry*: i.e. a voice from the altar, as in 9:13, or from the angel of the fire of the altar, as in 14:18, being the expression of the holy ones in the temple.

'Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgements!': This, by comparison with human judgements which are never wholly unbiased, is the highest source of God's justification, by creatures.

Verse 8 *The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire*: such a plague being unique, not having happened before. It is not said how this operated, and we do not have to know. If the plagues were successive in a continuity of time, then the 'earth' has oceans of blood, waters of blood, and so is in a terrible state. If this heat is not literal, it is nevertheless even more terrible if it is 'moral' or 'spiritual'.

Verse 9 *men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God*: so that far from being brought to the fear of the Lord and then to saving repentance, they are angry and curse the name of God, which is to revile Him and speak blasphemy.

who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory: Primarily repentance is evoked in us by 'the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience' (Rom. 2:4) and refusal of this heaps up more wrath, but the bold and crude evil of man is rendered more hideous when fear will not strike the calloused heart. It is totally deserving of judgement. Passages such as these will not permit us to say that God will allow His holiness to be violated and not punish. See Luke 13:1–5.

Verse 10 *The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast*: i.e. striking at the heart of evil's power.

and its kingdom was in darkness: cf. the plague in Egypt (Exod. 10:21–23; Ps. 69:23) and the darkness over the land for three hours during our Lord's crucifixion. Already a kingdom of darkness, its darkness was darker darkness, a thought too horrible to contemplate. Man's darkness came when he refused the light and glory of God (Rom. 1:21f.; cf. John 3:19–20). Plunged into darkness, man

suffers because it is not his natural habitat, and his existential anguish and horror comes from the practice of evil.

men gnawed their tongues in anguish: trying to kill the pain they were experiencing by the pain they could give themselves.

Verse 11 *and cursed the God of heaven:* In verse 9 they cursed the name of God, here His heavenly being, and if so-called gentle spirits think man is simply in ignorance, then they have underestimated the vicious nature of evil men. They castigated God *for their pain and sores*, which would seem to indicate the successive nature of the plagues, since sores belong to the first plague, and they would be added to by other plagues, especially the scorching of the sun.

and did not repent of their deeds: Repentance brings joy and relief. Paul said, 'For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death,' and this statement is most applicable to those under wrath. Repentance heals and gives life, but remorse brings deeper pain and produces death.

Verse 12 *The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates:* which was the northernmost frontier of Israel's territory, but which perhaps here stands for the perimeter of God's people. It was significant because in 9:13ff. the four angels who were bound there were released and wrought terrible havoc, killing a third of mankind. Here the matter is different.

and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east: i.e. 'from the rising of the sun'. Who are these kings? Are they those of 17:9–14? We do not know, but they are indicated as being hostile to God's people and would seem to be a part of 'the kings of the whole world' (16:14), and so part of the nations of Psalm 2:1–2.

Verse 13 *And I saw:* i.e. something new comes into sight other than the pouring out of another plague.

issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet: From the mouth of Messiah comes a sharp two-edged sword, but from the utterances of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet *three foul spirits like frogs* (cf. 12:15 the terrible flood attempting to drown the radiant Woman), for such were designated by the law as unclean creatures (Lev. 11:10f.).

Verse 14 *for they are demonic spirits:* creatures of the kingdom of darkness.

performing signs: such as an adulterous generation seeks, and also Jews who will not hear the gospel (I Cor. 1:22), but which, when they are genuine, demonstrate the power of God (Acts 2:22; 10:38; 14:3; Rom. 15:19).

who go abroad to the kings of the whole world: and convince them by signs and wonders that they can defeat God.

to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty: i.e. the Day of the Lord, the day of rejoicing for the people of God, but of great calamity for those who oppose Him (cf. Isa. 13:6, 9; Joel 2:1–2; Amos 5:18–20; Zeph. 1:14–18; cf. II Thess. 1:5–10), those who imagine that they could defeat God Himself in a showdown; but because He is *the Almighty*, i.e. the Lords of Hosts, they are deluding themselves.

Verse 15 (*‘Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!’*): This warning, suddenly interposed here, comes as a surprise, but since the whole Book was written for the sevenfold church, it should not surprise us. We need constantly to be awakened, as such passages as Romans 13:11–14; Ephesians 5:15ff.; Hebrews 12:12–14; I Peter 1:13 and Revelation 3:2–3 tell us. Jesus means he will come when least expected—no thief is ever expected! So Revelation 3:3, ‘you will not know at what hour I will come upon you’. The picture here is of a person who should be in action but is found sleeping and naked when he should be awake, clothed, and in action.

Verse 16 *And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon*: i.e. Mount Megiddo (*Har-Magedon*) mentioned in Joshua 17:11; Judges 1:27; 5:19; II Chronicles 35:22 and Zechariah 12:11, although nowhere is it called a mount. Many famous battles have been fought in its area. Armageddon has become a proverb in Christian circles, but a physical battle as such is scarcely likely. In any case no battle is described here, although one is described in 20:7–10, but there it is one in which Gog and Magog are simply defeated, i.e. by fire which comes down from heaven, consuming the antagonists of God. Its location is not given as Armageddon, and indeed the mention of ‘the beloved city’ helps us to understand the moral–spiritual nature of the conflict with spiritual weapons (II Cor. 10:1–4).

Verse 17 *The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air*, for whilst the earth and the sea have received plagues, the air has not. Now it is its

turn, but when we think of air we think of 'the prince of the power of the air' who is also the god of this world, and judgement must come to him.

and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne: i.e. from God Himself.

saying, 'It is done!': i.e. the battle for the throne, or the battle of the thrones, has been completed and is finished, and the judgements which are true and righteous have had their fulfilment in the pouring out of the seven bowls.

Verse 18 *And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder:* all of which are signs of God's actions and His judgements.

and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth, so great was that earthquake: This is the last bowl to be poured out, and its action is dynamic. Those who have been in an earthquake know the utter instability that results. Nothing can be depended upon. Everything is terrifying and confusing. No one can control an earthquake.

Verse 19 *The great city* is difficult to define, because in chapter 11 it is at once Jerusalem, Sodom, and Egypt, but because Babylon is mentioned it can be said to be that place, or even a composite of all these cities.

was split into three parts: probably meaning it was entirely flattened.

and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath: Babylon being included in the last outpouring of wrath, the actions and effects of which we read in chapter 18. Babylon has always stood for the worldly way of life—a city of delicacies for those of its world, but the place of intolerance, cruelty and death for those who will not go along with this 'Vanity Fair'.

Verse 20 *And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found:* showing us that a purely literal interpretation cannot be satisfactory, for men cannot exist when this happens.

Verse 21 *and great hailstones:* which in Scripture generally depict judgement and punishment (cf. Exod. 9:18–26; Ps. 78:47; 105:32).

heavy as a hundredweight, dropped on men from heaven, till men cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague: Here we have God pouring out His wrath in strong fashion until it is ended.

Comment: Again, if we think this is one simple climactic act, we need to read Romans 1:18 thoughtfully, for it tells us God's wrath is continually being revealed from heaven. Down through the ages earthquakes have shaken men's souls and the bombardment of grievous burdens has become part of the life of the guilty. The way of the transgressor is hard, even though he thinks he can live life without difficulty. The judgements are always hanging over his head. The judgements of the seven bowls do not speak finality to the doom of the human race, for there are still left those who curse God. Even so, we see the judgements and the wrath spaced out across human history, and God is satisfied when the cry goes up, 'It is done!' Almost, then, the point of finality is reached, yet it is this Doomsday which hangs over the transgressors, whilst the redeemed wait with joy for the same Day of the Lord.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

The seven bowls of wrath are very important. We saw in 15:1 that 'with them the wrath of God is ended', that is, there will be no more wrath poured out. What will happen as a result of the pouring out of the seven bowls will be the defeat of all evil powers—including Babylon—and the rebellion of the dragon and the beast will be brought to its climax, the so-called Battle of Armageddon, which may well be that of 20:7–10, although we are not told. In the midst of this—and in parenthesis—there is a warning to the faithful to remain steady and not be deceived.

The concluding seventh bowl brings wrath to 'great Babylon', and she must receive this in all fullness. Not only is Babylon shattered, but also the cities of the kings who have joined with the beast and who are customers and patrons of Babylon, as we will see in succeeding chapters. This last plague seems to obliterate all known landmarks and identities, and is extremely confusing and painful to those linked with the beast.

The message of this for the faithful is to endure patiently because the end of all evil has been determined and is in sight. Also, it is indicated that with evil forces there is no repentance, so obdurate are they and so worthy of the Divine wrath.

Chapter Seventeen

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THE Babylon of which we have already heard twice is now fully described. We see her wide influence on the actions and movements of mankind. The elements of her and her operations are unholy, and bring together all actions of idolatry. She rides on the beast himself, surmounting all his actions, as though he were under her control. John the Seer marvels at her, but is told not to do so but to see her true nature and what she is about. She has to do with the beast and kings who have power on the earth. Babylon becomes hated even by the beast and the kings, and they destroy her, though it seems they might not have done this had God not put it into their hearts to carry out her destruction, for she has dominion over all the kings of the earth—an opponent of him who is 'King of kings and Lord of lords'.

COMMENTARY

¹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgement of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk.' ³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; ⁵ and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: 'Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations.' ^{6(a)} And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

Verse 1 *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls:* thus giving continuity in the matter of the wrath outpoured and the judgement which is to come upon Babylon, for in 16:19 it was written, 'God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath'.

came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgement of the great harlot: i.e. not simply show John the harlot, but the judgement of the harlot.

who is seated upon many waters: which, as we see in verse 15, represents the nations. Jeremiah had addressed Babylon as, 'O you who dwell by many waters' (Jer. 51:13).

Verse 2 *with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication:* All the nations belong to God and should worship Him and He should be their Lover. We remember that 'fornication' and 'adultery' are two words used in the Old Testament for the worship of idols, or going after other nations.

and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk: They have all been involved in the heady relationship their kings have had with the harlot, Babylon. Isaiah gives a powerful description of Babylon in chapter 47. Other cities are accused of 'playing the harlot', such as Jerusalem (Isa. 1:21; cf. Jer. 2:20), Tyre (Isa. 23:15–17) and Nineveh (Nahum 3:1, 4).

Verse 3 *And he carried me away in the Spirit:* i.e. just as the Spirit had carried Philip away from the Gaza road to Azotus (Acts 8:39f.), so John is caught up. It also means that he was 'in the Spirit' (cf. Rev. 1:10; 4:2), as on former occasions, in order to understand 'the mystery of Babylon'.

into a wilderness: and we might observe that wildernesses play a big part in Scripture, some of them being good (e.g. where the church is protected, 12:14), and some bad (as here, where beast and harlot are one).

and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast: which appears to be the first beast, and if so, then we are told of its colour for the first time.

which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns: the description given of it in 13:1–5. The dragon had seven heads and ten horns also, but he had seven diadems upon his heads, whereas the beast had ten diadems upon his horns.

Verse 4 *The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet:* which signified luxury, and in her case even more. If we read Isaiah chapter 47 then

she sees herself as ‘the mistress of kingdoms’, i.e. she sits as a queen.

and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls: likewise signs of affluence, though earned by her evil harlotry in this case.

holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication: i.e. the fruits and products of her unholy alliances with the kings of the earth. Generally Babylon has been interpreted as being Rome, since in verse 9 she is seated on seven mountains or hills, and Rome has seven hills. At the same time, the beast is seen as Rome, for the seven heads are the seven hills. How can the woman and the beast both be Rome, since the woman is seated on the beast but is not the beast? In apocalyptic presentation it is possible that both can represent Rome. Even so, our view of prophecy allows us to say that the beast and Babylon are not even confined to Rome, but have an application to a yet wider principle of being—wider even than Berlin or Moscow or Beijing. In one sense Babylon is time-wide and world-wide and history-wide, and the beast has ever existed from the day the primal couple rebelled in the garden, thinking, ‘We will not die’, from which the beastly murderer Cain was spawned (cf. I John 3:10–12).

Comment: Some interpreters feel there is no meaning to apocalyptic unless it can be linked with objective situations such as actual nations, persons and historical events. Whilst this is understandable—as in the case before us of the beast and Babylon—the question is whether such historical events and things exhaust the meaning of a prophecy like that of the Revelation. Jerome likened prophecy to throwing a stone into a pool, and suggested that the ripples that moved constantly outwards were repetitions of the primary happening, and that they repeated themselves in each age. Thus, whilst Rome might represent the beast in its time, other kingdoms might also take over the principle and represent it in other times. If all the prophecy is linked only with the past—or for that matter only with the future—then the value of the Book is limited for its readers, who will not see themselves in an age when these principles are still being evidenced.

Verse 5 *and on her forehead was written a name of mystery:* i.e. a secret not disclosed except to the initiated, and Babylon has reason to conceal her secret, delightedly known by the wicked but having to be unmasked for the godly, just as ‘the mystery of lawlessness’ and ‘the man of lawlessness’ (II Thess. 2:1–12) can only be known by revelation, and not by mere explanation.

‘Babylon the great: i.e. considered great by godless people and nations, as the beast also was marvelled at.

mother of harlots: i.e. the initiator of idolatrous nations which in one sense constitute an international brothel of which she, Babylon,

is 'mistress'.

and of earth's abominations: We must not limit Babylon's evils to the realm of political intrigue and alliances. The world is affected deeply by her perversions and other unnatural and immoral elements, all of which are an excrescence upon a creation created in purity.

Verse 6a *And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus*: The hatred of the dragon, the beasts and Babylon for God is deep and incorrigible. Seductive and charming as Babylon is to her customers, she has a deadly animosity to the truth, the gospel, and to those who hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. To shed their blood is her desire, 'And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth' (18:24).

* * *

*6b When I saw her I marvelled greatly. 7 But the angel said to me, 'Why marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition; and the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. 9 This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; 10 they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the
beast; 14 they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.'*

15 And he said to me, 'The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, 17 for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. 18 And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth.'

Verse 6b *When I saw her I marvelled greatly*: The harlot sets herself out to be impressive, and from worldly standards has achieved brilliant success. John is in the Spirit, and yet he marvels. Something of ‘the world’ can appeal even to a prophet! Sometimes Christians are impressed by what the world accomplishes, and even try to imitate the principles by which Babylon seems to have achieved success.

Verse 7 *But*—here is a ‘but’ that is shaping into a rebuke—*the angel said to me, ‘Why marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her:* i.e. when you understand the ‘mystery’, all that this woman is will be unmasked, and you will see nothing to marvel about—to the contrary you will be shocked, repelled, and will find nothing to marvel at. John already knows the *fact* of the beast, but the *mystery* of it and Babylon he is now to hear.

Verse 8 *The beast that you saw was in action, in a powerful way and in a commanding position, and [now] is not in authority, and is [yet] to ascend from the bottomless pit* as indicated in 11:7 (‘And when they [the two witnesses] have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them’).

and go to perdition: i.e. to destruction, to utter ruin.

and the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast, because it was in power and authority, and is not so now, and is to come to revive its fortunes and again have power and authority: they will marvel at the seeming great future it will have, as a power and a system.

Verse 9 *This calls for a mind with wisdom*: i.e. a mind or ability to understand what is said above about the beast, and then the working out of this in the following text.

the seven heads are seven mountains: such as the seven mountains bordering the River Tiber on which Rome was built.

on which the woman is seated: i.e. just as Rome was the political world power of John’s day, so ‘spiritual’ Babylon (cf. I Pet. 5:13) is the primary world power.

Verse 10 That is, *they*—the seven mountains—*are also seven kings, five of whom*—having reigned, having had power—*have fallen, one is*

at present exercising authority, *the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while* in control.

Verse 11 *As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition:* Paraphrased, John is saying that the beast belongs to the seven kings, i.e. is of their ethos, or their ethos is of him, and following their reigns he appears himself as a king, but goes on to destruction and ruin as he is ultimately defeated. It may be that John does not mean he actually emerges as a king in these successive reigns, but is the unseen (eighth) king that in reality reigns in the other kings, i.e. is incarnate in them. Whatever is the case, he goes on to destruction—*the evil sevenfold dynasty cannot succeed!* The principle by which the seven heads reigned is the same principle by which the ten horns are now said (below) to reign.

Verse 12 *And the ten horns that you saw, which, like the heads, are in-built in the beast on which the harlot is seated, are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.*

Comment: It is not quite clear whether the ten kings of verse 12 are the same as ‘the kings of the whole world’ in 16:12–14 and 17:18. In 16:13 these kings are manipulated by the three foul spirits who emerge from the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, so that their character is very evil. The ten kings of 17:12–17 may not necessarily be ten in number any more than the seven kings (the heads) of 17:9–11 are seven in number, but represent completeness in their reigning and nefarious activity. The number ten also has the meaning, symbolically, of power, and so the ten kings may represent all the kings of the earth, all the reign of the nations which are set against God as in Psalm 2. This does seem to be the case since the angel tells John that the waters on which Babylon is seated are ‘peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues’. Our text below seeks to explain why these kings of the nations are one with the beast in trying to destroy the very Babylon which rules over them.

Verse 13 *These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast:* i.e. their reigns and their actions are dictated by the mind of the beast—they will be beastly kings and part of the beastly plan to dethrone God and set up the kingdom of the beast.

Verse 14 *they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings:* i.e. by right of creation (Col. 1:15–17), and by conquest of redemption, all the nations belong to him in conformity with Psalm 2:8 (‘Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your

possession'), and Matthew 28:18–19 ('All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations').

and those with him are called and chosen and faithful: i.e. they are not of the beast, for they have refused his mark, endured his persecution and have remained faithful unto death. They are the 144,000 who follow the Lamb wherever he goes and they have overcome the beast.

Note: It seems that this verse 14 pre-empts what we see in 19:11ff. and 20:7ff. In the first case—19:11ff.—the one upon the white horse is the Lamb and is described as 'King of kings and Lord of lords', and in the second case—20:7ff.—the nations are again deceived and in the guise of Gog and Magog seek to destroy 'the camp of the saints and the beloved city' (i.e. *those with him* [who] *are called and chosen and faithful*).

Verse 15 *And he said to me, 'The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated*: i.e. where she has rule and authority and power, *are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues*: i.e. the nations which by right of creation and redemption belong to God and the Lamb, but which the dragon, the beast and the false prophet seek to subvert and rule over.

Verse 16 *And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot*: because although they are one with each other in their hatred of God and their desire to defile mankind and subject the human race to their slavery, yet the evil principle of selfishness and inordinate passion to rule without rival is the self-destructive force which will never allow the same unity as love brings to the people of God.

they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire: i.e. they will humiliate her, expose her for what she is, and destroy her system.

Verse 17 *for God has put it into their hearts*: i.e. whilst evil common sense dictates that they (the dragon, the beast and the false prophet) should form a solid phalanx against God, the Lamb and the faithful saints, yet it is God who dictates in the ultimate. He utilizes the innate disunity and rivalry of evil—the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and the ten kings under their sway—to carry out his purpose by being of one mind in their fear and hatred of the unholy harlot, Babylon.

and giving over their temporary, i.e. one hour of royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled: i.e. all the words which,

beginning with Genesis 3:15, the prophets had spoken regarding the doom of Satan and his powers, the triumph of Messiah and his people, the Kingdom of God and its victory over evil forces, the words which must come because God has spoken them—all of these ‘must be fulfilled’, as Jesus told his disciples (Luke 24:44; cf. Acts 26:22–23).

Verse 18 *And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth*: i.e. the very kings who turn on her to destroy her.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

One of the values of this chapter is that it introduces us to the fact and nature of Babylon. In the Old Testament Babylon represents all that is powerful, proud, idolatrous, and wholly independent of God. It is world power, materialism, commercialism, sensuality and cruelty, even whilst offering pleasure unparalleled by others. It is shown to be in cahoots with the beast, and has great power in directing the affairs of humanity and their leaders. At the same time, as the kings of the earth make war with the Lamb, believing they can conquer and unseat him, they are defeated. Their time for power is set by God. The fact that the beast and the kings conspire to destroy Babylon is encouragement to the faithful (the sealed of God) to persist. Prophetically—verse 17—Babylon is doomed. The fact of her fall is again an exhortation and motivation for believers to persist until the great day.

Chapter Eighteen

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THIS is the chapter which speaks of the fall of Babylon. In chapter 17 the beast and the kings are said to have made Babylon desolate and naked and to have eaten her flesh, but the picture here—as often in apocalyptic descriptions—is different. A special angel comes down from heaven to proclaim the fall of Babylon—this at the end of a long history within the creation. Another voice comes down from heaven as though warning those within to separate themselves from Babylon, for her doom is imminent. It is prophesied that all linked with her in her particular commerce will be shocked at the rapidity of the judgement on the harlot city. The order of her mourners are the kings, the merchants, the shipmasters and all seafaring people. They all alike mourn the passing of the city. A third angel threw a mighty stone into the sea, declaiming that this will be the fate of the great city. It will be silenced for ever.

The final note is that within her has been found the blood of the prophets and the saints whom she has killed and, indeed, ‘all who have been slain on earth’, i.e. all not of the order of Babylon.

COMMENTARY

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendour. 2 And he called out with a mighty voice,

‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

It has become a dwelling place of demons,

a haunt of every foul spirit,

a haunt of every foul and hateful bird;

3 for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness.’

- 4 *Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,
‘Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;*
- 5 *for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.*
- 6 *Render to her as she herself has rendered,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.*
- 7 *As she glorified herself and played the wanton,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning.
Since in her heart she says, “A queen I sit,
I am no widow, mourning I shall never see,”*
- 8 *so shall her plagues come in a single day,
pestilence and mourning and famine,
and she shall be burned with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.’*

Verse 1 *After this I saw another angel:* i.e. probably one who has not yet been mentioned.

coming down from heaven: which would appear to make John standing upon the earth; however, in visions there is no special need for location.

having great authority: i.e. having the right and power to act, and having authority makes his announcement both solemn and credible.

and the earth was made bright with his splendour: a statement not made about other angels, and which shows the universality of his message, a countermove to the authority and power of Babylon.

Verse 2 *And he called out with a mighty voice, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!:* Some of his words are a quote of Isaiah 21:9, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods he has shattered to the ground’. The angel indicates the greatness of Babylon, contrasting its past state with its present. In Revelation 14:8 and 16:19 this fall had been predicted.

It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird: This could mean that destruction has come to the city and it has been made desolate—its buildings torn down, its inhabitants scattered and the city become a wilderness—or it could mean that within the splendour of Babylon are these evil creatures which are part and parcel of its evil fabric and functions. It would seem the former interpretation is the correct one, and this is substantiated by reading chapters 13 and 14 of the prophet Isaiah. For example:

And Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms,
 the splendour and pride of the Chaldeans,
 will be like Sodom and Gomorrah
 when God overthrew them.
 It will never be inhabited
 or dwelt in for all generations;
 no Arab will pitch his tent there,
 no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there.
 But wild beasts will lie down there,
 and its houses will be full of howling creatures;
 there ostriches will dwell,
 and there satyrs will dance.
 Hyenas will cry in its towers,
 and jackals in the pleasant palaces;
 its time is close at hand
 and its days will not be prolonged (13:19–22).

Verse 3 *for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness*: The reason for her fall is the judgement of God on her for the evil she has done—her seduction of the nations and the great barons of commerce as she unites the kings of the earth and all merchants with herself against the true God. We have previously noted that the terms ‘impure passion’, ‘fornication’ and ‘wantonness’, whilst no doubt having some reference to sexual impurity, perversion, pornography, and the like, primarily refer to idolatry, and idolatry which is not only sensual, but is political, and is a placing of trust in the cities rather than God.

Verse 4 *Then I heard another voice from heaven*: and as in other cases this must be from the temple, the altar, or the throne. It is interesting to ask why the glorious angel could not have made the second statement, but it seems John must see it as coming directly from God Himself, so important is the *saying*, ‘Come out of her, my people’ (cf. Isa. 52:11; Paul quotes it in II Cor. 6:17). There are some scholars who think Babylon here represents apostate Israel—finally rejected by God when they rejected their true Messiah, and so now essentially evil. This does not appear to comport with the universality of Babylon, and when Paul quotes it he is not speaking particularly of Israel.

lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues: i.e. they that are one with Babylon must also fall with her.

Verse 5 *for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered*

her iniquities: In Acts 17:30 and Romans 3:25 it would seem God has passed over, winked at, and ignored the sins of certain people, i.e. that He had not 'remembered' them. To 'not remember', in Jeremiah 31:34 and other places, is really to forgive. Yet there can be no forgiveness apart from repentance. Babylon's iniquity had not been ripe (Gen. 15:15f.), but now it is, and God 'remembers' her.

Verse 6 *Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double* (cf. Exod. 22:4, 7, 9; Isa. 40:2) *for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed*: i.e. 'the cup of the fury of his [God's] wrath' (Rev. 16:19). She had meted out her cup to the nations: let her now drink it herself. Jeremiah chapter 50 is one of the oracles pronounced against Babylon, and verses 14–16 call for her destruction. Who, then, can destroy her, for God seems to be telling Israel to carry out penal judgement and retributive vengeance? In Revelation 17:16–17 we saw that God put it into the hearts of the kings of the earth and the beast to destroy her.

Verse 7 *As she glorified herself and played the wanton, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning. Since in her heart she says, "A queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning I shall never see"*: The latter words of this verse derive from Isaiah 47, which is another oracle against Babylon. In verses 8–9 God declares,

Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures,
 who sit securely,
 who say in your heart,
 'I am, and there is no one besides me;
 I shall not sit as a widow
 or know the loss of children':
 These two things shall come to you
 in a moment, in one day;
 the loss of children and widowhood
 shall come upon you in full measure,
 in spite of your many sorceries
 and the great power of your enchantments.

Verse 8 *so shall her plagues come in a single day*: and it is this suddenness, that Babylon should be destroyed in one day, that astonishes, puzzles and dismays the merchants who have had intercourse with her; three times (vv. 10, 17, 19) they use the term 'in one hour'. Doubtless Babylon had a history from Cain onwards, and doubtless it was thought to be permanent, and as such was revered greatly. Suddenly it is no more, for 'in a single day' come *pestilence and mourning and famine, and she shall be burned with fire; for mighty is the*

Lord God who judges her: In His judgements on Babylon God is vindicated as a righteous and just God. Just how this judgement operates, i.e. how it operates on world-wide Babylon in any age, is not stated. Doubtless God's wrath is revealed from heaven upon this unholy city, and doubtless such wrath will have its climax in the apocalyptic words describing that judgement—and all of this in the face of the incredulity of all Babylon lovers.

* * *

⁹ And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and were wanton with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; ¹⁰ they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

*'Alas! alas! thou great city,
thou mighty city, Babylon!*

In one hour has thy judgement come.'

¹¹ And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, ¹² cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, ¹³ cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

*¹⁴ 'The fruit for which thy soul longed has gone from thee,
and all thy dainties and thy splendour are lost to thee, never to be found again!'*

¹⁵ The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

*¹⁶ 'Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet,
bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!*

¹⁷ In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste.'

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off ¹⁸ and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

'What city was like the great city?'

¹⁹ And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out,

*'Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth!
In one hour she has been laid waste.*

*²⁰ Rejoice over her, O heaven,
O saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgement for you against her!'*

²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

- 'So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and shall be found no more;*
 22 *and the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and
trumpeters,
shall be heard in thee no more;
and a craftsman of any craft
shall be found in thee no more;
and the sound of a millstone
shall be heard in thee no more;*
 23 *and the light of a lamp
shall shine in thee no more;
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
shall be heard in thee no more;
for thy merchants were the great men of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery.*
 24 *And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.'*

Verse 9 *And the kings of the earth:* i.e. those who had hated her, and destroyed her, *who committed fornication and were wanton with her*, are perhaps now regretting their lost pleasures and *will weep (klaiō)*, i.e. giving loud expressions of grief, *and wail (kaptō)*, 'beating their breasts', passionately grieving *over her when they see the smoke of her burning*.

Verse 10 *they will stand far off, in fear of her torment:* which must have been terrible and terrifying in its nature, and no less for them to watch.

and say, 'Alas! alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon!: for Babylon has always been the mighty city of the godless and the idolaters.

In one hour: The speed of the coming of judgement is unbelievable. Like most catastrophes, there was nothing that could be done about it.

has thy judgement come': They recognize that whilst it was they who did it as a second cause, yet it had come from God Almighty, the First Cause.

Verse 11 *And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more*, most of which was luxuries, and may symbolize the requirements of the cruel rich and the indolent gourmets. The cargo was such that merchants from all over the world would need to supply it, and so it would be costly. The subject of riches is a wide one, but generally riches mean one can—

seemingly—live independent of God. Now all trade collapses. The mind that calls for such luxuries has always been Babylonish, i.e. sees itself as free-standing in the creation.

Verses 12–13 *cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls*: Slavery was imposed upon the human will without question, as slaves, too, were a required luxury.

Verse 14 ‘*The fruit for which thy soul longed has gone from thee, and all thy dainties and thy splendour are lost to thee, never to be found again!*’: i.e. ‘the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life’—after which the primal couple lusted—can no longer be satiated, and they are doomed to live without such things since this judgement is for ever.

Verses 15–16 *The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, ‘Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!’*: all the sign of prosperity, comfort and social station.

Verse 17 *In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste*: thus showing the transitory nature of wealth, success, pleasure and power when it is apart from God.

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off: Since the city is not an actual material city but represents what evil has built, it means that much of the world is invested in it, and it stands to lose everything when it falls. The fact of the matter is that when Babylon is destroyed there is no place for the worldlings to go. Like the rich man in hell, they need satiating, but hell is where lust and human pride cannot find fulfilment, where the soul and spirit cannot be satisfied, especially in fulfilment of the only desires it has—those which are base. Lust—even proud, cultured lust—being denied, becomes the most painful of all deprivations.

Verse 18 *and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, ‘What city was like the great city?’*: This is an echo of the same principle in 13:4, ‘Who is like the beast?’ The beast, too, was doomed to the abyss and then the lake of fire. So Babylon, for all her brilliance, is not incom

parable. Had they a desire for a truly great city then there was the City of God, but they had no eyes for the City of God—the Holy City—since it did not pander to their lusts, their power and their seeming success.

Verse 19 *And they threw dust on their heads:* the sign of grief and repentance, but here it is repentance-in-reverse or ‘the sorrow of the world’ (II Cor. 7:10), for ‘the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs’ (I Tim. 6:10).

as they wept and mourned, crying out, ‘Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth!’: Paul’s admonition, then, is here apt: ‘As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy’ (I Tim. 6:17).

In one hour she has been laid waste: See commentary on verse 17.

Verse 20 *Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgement for you against her!:* This is an important verse because it speaks of vindication and avengement, the avengement for which the souls cried under the altar. It is the settling of the score with evil—the evil of the evil city. A number of versions make ‘all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea’ (v. 17) address the saints, telling them to rejoice, but other versions imply that ‘some voice’ tells them to rejoice. Whatever the case, the destruction of the city is put down to God’s account, showing that He speedily vindicates His elect, and in a sense this is one of the greatest events in history. How miserable and pathetic the saints and the martyrs had seemed in the eyes of the scornful members of the great city of the harlot, but their greatness has now diminished to nothing, and the misery they know in defeat is a testimony to the endless patience of God, as it is to their intransigent rebellion and incorrigible impenitence.

Verse 21 *Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, ‘So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more:* Violence is what this city of the harlot has always understood. They who live by the sword shall die by the sword. They who persist in violence shall suddenly be cast down by violence and be no more. The taste of their own cruelty shall come upon them, and they will know the justice of God in repaying double for their sins. This will show that the end of Babylon

is final, is irreversible. The time for repentance has passed and the proud metropolis passes into ignominious nothingness. The famous city will never be rebuilt. It will be lost to sight for ever.

Verse 22 *and the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more; and a craftsman of any craft shall be found in thee no more; and the sound of the millstone shall be heard in thee no more:* i.e. all the pomp and splendour of the grand events, the pleasures and entertainments, the vast treasures of many cultures, the beautiful art and sculptures, the lovely lyrics, the music of a million composers, and the brilliant literatures of many centuries—all of which had once satiated this city's noble yet godless spirits—now have no place in the nature of eternal things. The massive art galleries, the vast museums, the incredible accoutrements of human history, are not even left to be silent monuments to a race that was, but all are immolated in the funeral pyre of the godless metropolis. There will never be some 'restoration period', some new Renaissance, for the time of opportunity has passed. The harvest is ended, the summer is past, and they are not saved—they of great Babylon. All human nostalgia, if ever it is permitted, will be bitter as wormwood and as eternal gall to the impenitent members of the once merry metropolis of man.

Verse 23 *and the light of a lamp shall shine in thee no more; and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall be heard in thee no more, for thy merchants were the great men of the earth, and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery:* The whole thing had been a hollow deception, a fantasy of the imagination, a dream structure of the lusts, a religious substitute for God Himself Who is 'the fountain of living waters' and 'at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore'. How beautiful is life when there is family and familial joy, when there is eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, as there was prior to the Flood, and as there will be prior to the coming of Messiah to establish his Kingdom for ever. In all this life and festivity, the note of purity and true holy joy was now missing. Babylon—for all its brilliant activity—had suddenly become a hollow kingdom. In one day, the shouting of joy, the rioting of merriment, the pomp and circumstance of festal living, and the triumphant unity against the God of heaven, became exchanged for a silent city, and an entombment of its multitudes.

Verse 24 *And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of*

all who have been slain on earth: The horrible secret of the unholy city was suddenly unmasked, the genocide of the holy ones of God—the saints and people of God in every generation—was revealed to the entire human race, and the proud and great city was suddenly at the bar of justice. The blood that in every century had cried from the ground, as well as from under the altar, had not been heard amidst the Vanity Fair of the pagan and secular city. Then the war crimes' trial came into session, and the guilty were arraigned before the Eternal Judge. 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay!' the Lord had always told His suffering people. Now they see Him as He pronounces the avengement. The seemingly beautiful and successful courtesan of history, the haughty mother of harlots—the one who has spawned her evil children into the history of man, that one who has been viciously cruel all the time—faces the Holy One Whose spurned Mercy has now become inexorable Judgement. The torment of her end-time is no less than she has always deserved, and the smoke of her torment ascends for ever.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

Surely the message of this chapter has come through powerfully. Babylon had escaped outward judgement down through the centuries, and now—in one hour—is destroyed, so easily and utterly. The actions of the nations in having alliances with her—as though she were the ultimate city—have also been punished. They are now denied the source of livelihood. Babylon is not only discredited, the nations are unmasked and unhanded.

The source of pleasure for the luxury-loving world is destroyed utterly. Not only an angel from heaven declares the demise of the unholy harlot, but a voice from heaven also. Those who are aghast are 'the kings of the earth', 'the merchants of the earth', and 'the shipmasters and seafaring men and sailors'.

Finally, the judgement is shown to be just, as the cruelty and selfishness is unmasked. Babylon is not really a 'fun city' for it has vicious hatred of the pure, of the people of God, and has martyred them. Now judgement has come. It is on this note we enter chapter 19.

Chapter Nineteen

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

CHAPTER 19 has four sections, the first being the adulation of the great multitude in heaven to God for His judgements on Babylon for having corrupted the earth with her idolatry, and for her cruelty to the saints and martyrs. This causes the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures to exhort God's servants to further praise.

The second section deals with the great praise of the multitude as though in response to this exhortation, their adulation being for the coming marriage of the Bride and the Lamb.

The third section is to do with the one who is on a white horse, called 'King of kings and Lord of lords', who leads a heavenly army into battle. The sword of his mouth smites the nations of the earth.

The final section is to do with the victory of the one on the white horse. Again, this is not called Armageddon, but it is a decisive battle which defeats the kings and leaders of the opposing army and captures the beast, the false prophet, and all their adherents. Carrion birds devour the flesh of those who have the mark of the beast, whilst the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire which is later called 'the second death'.

COMMENTARY

¹ After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying,

*'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
² for his judgements are true and just;
he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication,
and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.'*

- ³ *Once more they cried,
‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.’*
- ⁴ *And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who is seated on the throne, saying, ‘Amen. Hallelujah!’*
- ⁵ *And from the throne came a voice crying,
‘Praise our God, all you his servants,
you who fear him, small and great.’*
- ⁶ *Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude,
like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty
thunderpeals, crying,
‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.*
- ⁷ *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;*
- ⁸ *it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and
pure’—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*
- ⁹ *And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are
invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me,
‘These are true words of God.’* ¹⁰ *Then I fell down at his feet to
worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a
fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony
of Jesus. Worship God.’ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of
prophecy.*

Verse 1 *After this:* i.e. after the events of Babylon, especially the destruction of that city.

I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven: which was probably the same multitude as in chapter 7—that of the redeemed.

crying, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God: In 18:20 they had been called upon to rejoice over Babylon’s fall, and so they do, for God had given judgement for them against Babylon. The term ‘Hallelujah’ is used only in this one chapter in the New Testament in an acclamation, its mentions being four in this one passage. The meaning is ‘Praise the Lord’, i.e. ‘Praise ye Jah’. In all, the great multitude, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders use the term.

Verse 2 *for his judgements are true and just:* This has been the claim for some chapters now (15:3; 16:7; cf. Ps. 19:9), and the judgements concern two things: (i) they are against the harlot and the corruption she has brought to the earth, and (ii) they are His avengement of the blood of the martyrs.

he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication: i.e. this one entity had effectively corrupted the pure creation—a nefarious deed deserving of the greatest retribution.

and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants: The highest form of presumption which can be executed is the killing of a person, for that is the prerogative of God. To kill one of God's holy ones is a terrible evil.

Verse 3 *Once more:* i.e. a second time.

they cried, 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever': In 14:11 the smoke of the torment of those who had worshipped the beasts was likewise said to go up for ever. Again, in 18:9 'the smoke of her burning' is a great torment. Physical smoke can be a great torment, and can quickly prove lethal on being inhaled. Its spiritual-moral counterpart must be dreadful. Whilst torment is something visited upon the guilty, it is basically their guilt which is the heart of all torment.

Verses 4–5 *And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who is seated on the throne, saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!' And from the throne came a voice:* whose origin we do not know, though it would not be that of God.

crying, 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great': Romans 1:21 tells us that the evil of men began when they did not praise (honour) Him or give Him thanks. Now that wrong is reversed. The creation is in true health again.

Verse 6 *Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters* (cf. 1:15; 14:2; Ezek. 43:2) *and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns:* i.e. the Kingdom of God has triumphed over all its evil opponents, and God reigns (cf. Isa. 52:7, 'Your God reigns!'). This is 'the gospel of the kingdom', i.e. God is triumphant—ultimately—in all things.

Verse 7 *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory:* All of the praise and adoration relates to two things: (i) the defeat of evil, and (ii) the climax of history, the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb.

for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride: i.e. the Bride who is the true one, of which the great harlot is the evil counterpart, *has made herself ready:* for she is willing to do the Father's will, and has gladly anticipated this great day. See Ephesians 5:21–33, where

Paul says that the Divine marriage is a 'profound mystery', meaning that human marriage can only be understood from its ontological source, which is the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. All history has been moving towards this day when God and His people would be one in this 'profound mystery' of Divine relationship.

Verse 8 *it was granted her*: Anything 'granted' is a gift of God, and in this case a 'grace-gift'.

to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure'—for the *fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints*: (cf. Titus 2:14; Eph. 2:10). It is not fanciful to say that the bridal gown is composed of all the true works of the people of God.

Verse 9 *And the angel*: though which angel it is not said (cf. 17:1; 18:1ff.), but since it is a beatitude, perhaps the one of 14:13, *said to me, 'Write this: Blessed—the fourth beatitude of this Book—are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb'*: Those who related to the unholy woman—the mother of harlots—and consorted with her and her friends, are not invited to the marriage feast; their names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb. The intensest of all joy is denied them, but it comes to the true people of God. They ultimately triumph, whereas the people of the woman and the beast do not.

And he said to me, 'These are true words of God': The sort of statement which is often said when things are unbelievable for their very wonder. They are words of deep assurance.

Comment: There are seven beatitudes in this prophecy:

- (1) 'Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy' (1:3);
- (2) 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord' (14:13);
- (3) 'Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!' (16:15);
- (4) 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb' (19:9);
- (5) 'Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection!' (20:6);
- (6) 'Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book' (22:7);
- (7) 'Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates' (22:14).

An invitation is thus given to participate in joy, security, happiness, and pleasure, by means which are accessible to those who will use them.

Verse 10 *Then I fell down at his feet to worship him*: (cf. 22:8f.). Why

would John worship an angel? Let us first see an angel and then decide! Angels are glorious things, shedding light and power, awe and joy, but perhaps the beatitudes so moved John that he felt he must worship the speaker. (See the Essay 'Angels in the Book of the Revelation' on pp. 317–320.)

but he said to me, 'You must not do that!': The words are written in highly emphatic form.

I am a fellow servant: i.e. 'I am a fellow slave'.

with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus: i.e. the people of God are a concerted fellowship, gripped by God and the gospel, stopping at nothing for the joy and wonder of 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'.

Worship God: i.e. 'Do not worship me—a slave-being. Do not deprive yourself of the highest and noblest in worship—worshipping God.'

For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy: See commentary on 1:2 and 1:9. The heart of all prophecy is Jesus. The subject of all prophecy is Jesus. The action of all prophecy is Jesus. Worshipping angels is not part of the testimony of Jesus (cf. Col. 2:18–19).

* * *

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. 13 He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. 15 From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, 18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.' 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns

with sulphur. ²¹ *And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.*

Verse 11 *Then I saw heaven opened:* Seeing, for John—in regard to heaven—has been a thing of degrees. In 4:1 he saw a door opened in heaven; in 11:19 he saw the temple in heaven opened and was permitted to see the ark of the covenant; in 15:5 ‘the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened’ so that he could see the seven angels with the seven bowls. Now the entire heaven is opened for the coming and conquering of Christ.

and behold, a white horse!: ‘White’ of course refers to purity (cf. 6:2; 14:14; 19:8).

He who sat upon it is called Faithful: i.e. ‘the faithful and true witness’ (3:14; cf. John 18:37).

and True: i.e. he is the Word of God (19:13; cf. John 1:1–3, 14).

and in righteousness he judges: God’s righteous judgements have been the great theme in these last chapters, and this One is executing them.

and makes war: i.e. not human militaristic war, much less the warring evil executes through deception, seduction, threatening and the like. The warfare is that of the truth and the word (cf. II Cor. 10:3f.; Rev. 19:13, 15). On the only true basis of righteousness, this battle will be fought and won, and references to this righteous principle can be seen in Psalm 75:2; 96:11–13; Isaiah 11:3–4; Jeremiah 23:5–6.

Verse 12 *His eyes are like a flame of fire:* cf. 1:14; 2:18.

and on his head are many diadems: i.e. both the dragon and the two beasts had diadems—seven and ten in that order—but this one has ‘many’, i.e. authority over all things, as he himself claimed (Matt. 28:18–19; cf. Eph. 1:19–22). Diadems are crowns of authority.

and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself: See commentary on 2:17 and 3:12. The uniqueness of his nature and character is known only to himself, but much of it is revealed to his people since it is a ‘mystery’, just as the name of the beast (13:1) and of the harlot (17:5) were ‘mysteries’. Here it means his name is above every other name (Eph. 1:19ff.; Phil. 2:9–11). The name inscribed on his robe and on his thigh is ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ (19:16; cf. 17:14).

Verse 13 *He is clad in a robe dipped in blood:* which may well be his own blood, since in 5:6 he is ‘a Lamb standing, as though it had

been slain', thus bearing the symbolic marks of his crucifixion, yet at the same time the blood must be that of 19:15, from treading the wine press of the wrath of God (cf. 14:19–20). Apocalyptic is difficult to keep in literal order and form.

and the name by which he is called is The Word of God: i.e. here he not only proclaims God's word, but is God's Word, in that he enacts all that God says and is (cf. John 1:1–3, 14; I John 1:1).

Verse 14 *And the armies of heaven:* and although these armies are not designated as being only celestial creatures (cf. Dan. 7:10—the hosts of the Lord of hosts), or only those who overcame the beast (15:2)—i.e. the human redeemed—we can assume, surely, that both are included, especially as I Corinthians 15:24–28 must involve both, as Christ puts down all enemies under his feet (cf. Ps. 110:1f.; Heb. 10:12; Rom. 16:20), and his church, which is filled with his fullness, wages spiritual warfare (II Cor. 10:3f.; Eph. 6:10–18).

arrayed in fine linen, white and pure: This is the clothing of unfallen celestial creatures and the redeemed, purified and sanctified saints of God, who *followed him on white horses*.

Verse 15 *From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.*

Comment: In the verse above, the 'sharp sword' (cf. Heb. 4:12–13; Eph. 6:17; Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16) is the utterance of the dynamic word (cf. Isa. 55:10–11) which effects the plan, purpose and counsel of God. It is interesting to see that the war is not a human militaristic one. Not even the Battle of Armageddon is that, especially if it is the one described in 20:7–10 where fire comes down from heaven and consumes the enemy, i.e. Gog and Magog. Fire is the word of God. (cf. Jer. 23:29; Matt. 3:12; Rev. 11:5). In this verse it is difficult to distinguish between the word and the rod, as they seem to be synonymous. Quoted from Psalm 2 in regard to (i) the defeat of the rebellious nations, and (ii) ruling them with firm discipline, it is clear that the word of God is what is effective. If we can take an example, then that of Marxism is relevant. It was the word which went forth out of the mouth of Karl Marx and was both feared and effective. Even so, it did not have in it the dynamic to sustain what it initiated and sought to accomplish—rulership over the nations. Marx's word was that there is a dialectic built into history which will inevitably, ultimately, produce a wonderful (secular) kingdom. He claimed this dialectic was undefeatable. That was the eschatology—and the apocalyptic—which he provided and which was so attractive to its devotees. However, since the Marxian word was not eternal, since it did not issue from God, and since its utterer—Karl Marx—was not 'the faithful and true prophet', it could not succeed. Already history is showing that. Doubtless Marx's word is being refined by others, but Marx and his followers are

not arrayed in fine white linen, nor are they on holy steeds, therefore they must fail, and their little tin sword shall not cut for victory, nor for eternity. It is interesting to note that from the mouth of the Lamb issues the sharp sword: from the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet issue three unclean spirits—pathetic, ugly and unclean, by comparison.

Verse 16 *On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords:* i.e. no one else can go out and conquer all creatures in all history but he who is at the same time 'the Lamb . . . as it had been slain'. The humility of the Cross defeats the arrogance of the mighty dragon, beast and false prophet.

Verse 17 *Then I saw an angel:* i.e. another significant messenger of God.

standing in the sun: i.e. a messenger to be seen by all and heard by all.

and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven: i.e. the feathered carrion crew whose symbolism here is undoubted and understood.

'Come, gather for the great supper of God: i.e. that which is supper to carrion crew but is not the victorious Messianic feast for the conquering saints, for humiliating carrion-eaters are called.

Verse 18 *to eat:* 'eating flesh' and 'drinking blood' are terms for the judgement of *the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great* and do not need to be taken literally. Here nothing and no one is excepted from judgement which was linked with the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (cf. 14:10–11).

Verse 19 *And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth:* i.e. those deceived by the second beast (false prophet) in 16:14 and in 17:9–14.

with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army: Note: The question arises whether the events mentioned in 16:14 ('the great day of God the Almighty'), the event mentioned here in 19:15–21, and the event mentioned in 20:7–10 are the one event, seeing the millennium is interposed between the latter two. In apocalyptic it is difficult to insist upon chronological development or sequential order of events. There is no reason why these three descriptions cannot be the different aspects of the one event.

Verse 20 *And the beast was captured:* although the method by which

this happened is not described. It is best to say that evil and deceit were outcountenanced by the truth—the word of God, the sword of the Lamb.

and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs: false and deceptive signs, indicating something which they could not substantiate.

by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image: Christ's signs were signs *of* the Kingdom, and not mere miracles and wonders (cf. John 2:23—3:3). They pointed *to* the Kingdom and were actions *of* the Kingdom (Matt. 4:23f.; 12:28) and therefore effective, and lasting. They were done 'in the presence of' the Father' (Acts 2:22; cf. 4:16; 14:3).

These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur: i.e. the 'second death', (cf. 14:10; 20:14–15; 21:8).

Verse 21 *And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh:* Nothing could gainsay the word of truth, the sword of the Spirit. As Luther put it, of Satan and his forces in the face of the word of God, 'One little word shall fell him'.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

For the believer reading this prophecy, the chapter is most important, especially if he or she is in the events described in chapter 13, or is a victim of Babylon. Here Babylon is seen to meet her judgement, and others are exhorted to praise God for the things He is doing. One of these is requiting the past for the persecuted saints and martyrs. Another is the coming marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. All are to be joyful. The believer sees in these things the victory of God and so he can be content with what is happening.

The event where John would worship the angel but is forbidden leads us to one of the core truths of this prophecy, 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'. Following this event comes the revelation of the rider on the white horse from whose mouth goes out the sword, the word of God, which smites all nations. The believer can rest secure in Messiah's battle against evil. He can also see that Christ is not someone who has appeared late in time, but is the one who from the first has fought the good fight of faith. All prophecy has to do with him.

The final section which—as we have seen—deals with the defeat

of the armies of the kings of the earth, is such as to strengthen us in the knowledge that Christ is Lord over all kings, and so defeats them, leaving them to the carrion crew of predators, whoever they may be. The capture and judgement of the beast and false prophet encourage the believer to go on in the ascendancy—a great victory indeed!

Chapter Twenty

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

NOTE: In conformity with the mode of exegesis in the other chapters, we continue examination of the text in this chapter. However, the special attention required for this chapter outside its text has meant it needs special commentary. This is given in the Essay ‘The Matter of the Millennium’ on pp. 321–343, and readers should refer to it both before and after reading the commentary on this (20th) chapter below.

This chapter is perhaps one of the most intriguing of the Book, for it speaks of the same abyss we saw in chapter 9. Here an angel comes down from heaven with a chain and a key, and binds Satan for a period within the abyss. During that period—often called ‘the millennium’—the devil is bound and cannot affect the nations. First described are thrones, and those who sit on them having the power of judgement, although no judgement is actually revealed. The martyrs come to life and reign with Christ for the thousand years.

The second section speaks of Satan being loosed from the abyss and immediately setting about his work of deceiving the nations, who, under and as Gog and Magog, come from the four corners of the earth to fight against the people of God, i.e. ‘the camp of the saints and the beloved city’, but achieve nothing. Again this is not nominated as the Battle of Armageddon. Fire comes down from heaven and consumes them, and the devil is cast into the lake of fire.

The final section is of the judgement before the great white throne. Judgements are according to works, but salvation is according to whether or not the names of persons are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

COMMENTARY

¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and

bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

Verse 1 *Then I saw*: Notice that this statement ‘Then I saw’ is mentioned six times in chapters 19–21 (19:11, 17; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1), and notice also that John does not mention a time sequence, i.e. what happens here does not necessarily follow sequentially on the action of 19:11–21.

an angel coming down from heaven: i.e. an angel authorized by heaven, and sent from heaven.

holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit: i.e. the very key which the ‘fallen star’ (i.e. a fallen angel) had been given to open the bottomless pit. It would appear that the fallen star did not have the key permanently, but that heaven retained the key, and now the angel uses it at God’s bidding. We note that in 1:18 Christ has the keys of Death and Hades.

and a great chain: that thing or entity by which Satan can be bound, and we see in Jude 6 that fallen angels are kept in ‘eternal chains’ (cf. II Pet. 2:4).

Verse 2 *And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan*: cf. 12:9 where this description is used, and note that the angel is more powerful—i.e. has been delegated more authority—than the dragon, who is at this point bereft of the aid of the beast and the false prophet.

and bound him for a thousand years: Is a thousand years to be taken literally when a dragon, a bottomless pit, a key, and a chain are not to be taken *literally*, though they are to be taken *actually*? II Peter 3:8 says, ‘But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day’ (cf. Ps. 90:4). Again, ‘So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they

seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her' (Gen. 29:20). Time, then, may seem to be relative. Another view of the millennium is that ten is an ideal time—note the use of tens in this prophecy—and a thousand equals the third power of ten, i.e. the cube, a cube being perfection.

Comment: What is meant by the binding of Satan? How could he be bound? If we take Hebrews 2:14–15, then we deduce that Satan was destroyed through the death of Christ. 'Destroyed' does not mean 'eliminated' or 'eradicated', but 'paralysed', 'put out of action', 'made unemployed'.

Verse 3 *and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended:* The inference is that in this period of time Satan will not succeed in deceiving the nations (cf. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:8, 10): *After that he must be loosed for a little while.*

Verse 4 *Then I saw thrones:* Thrones are mentioned forty-seven times in this Book, and nearly all (cf. 2:13; 11:16) are located in heaven, so that these may well be in heaven.

and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed: Since this matter of thrones is linked with Daniel 7:9–27, that passage should be studied closely: thrones are placed in the vicinity of the special throne of the 'ancient of days', and one 'like a son of man' is given authority (a throne), and the other thrones must be occupied by 'the people of the saints of the Most High' (v. 27), since 'all dominions shall serve and obey them'.

Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands: 'the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God' are not specified, and it is possible they are a certain group of believers, or are 'the martyrs'. John's language here can be interpreted either way, so we are safe only when we say simply 'the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God' and leave it at that.

They came to life: or, strictly speaking, 'lived', i.e. lived on in heaven with Christ, since believers never die (John 11:25f.) *and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*

Comment: The question is whether martyrs or other believers actually die, and remain dead until the resurrection. Jesus said (John 11:25), 'He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,' and this comports with John 5:24, 'Truly,

truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life.' It is clear that from the material point of view every human dies, but it is the *nature* of the death that must be understood. In John 11:26 Jesus said, 'whoever lives and believes in me shall never die,' so when a person dies he never actually sees death, i.e. others see his death, but he does not see death. Another way of saying this is that there is no sting to death since the sting of death is sin, but Jesus has removed this sting (I Cor. 15:55–56; cf. Heb. 2:14–15; I John 4:18) because he has taken human guilt and destroyed it (II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 2:24; 3:18). The idea of the believer who has died being in a state of sleeping until the resurrection cannot be correct. Certainly from the point of view of those who have seen believers die in Christ, they—the so-called dead—are sleeping, but the moment of death—as observers here see it—is the moment of dynamic presence with Christ: 'absent from the body . . . present with the Lord' (II Cor. 5:8 AV), so that Paul longs to 'depart and be with Christ which is very much far better' (Phil. 1:23: literal translation)!

Verse 5 *The rest of the dead*: i.e. the saints who have died but are not martyrs, or those persons who have died out of Christ but in some way can be said to be coming to a resurrection—as in John 5:28–29: 'Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, *to the resurrection of judgement* ~~and~~ both.

did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection: We note that John never speaks of a second resurrection, even though the words 'first resurrection' seem to imply a second one. If there is no second resurrection then all the saints at least participate in the first resurrection, though not at the same point as the martyrs. Notice that scholars speak of a *spiritual* resurrection as being the first resurrection (such as is found in Rom. 6:10 and Col. 3:1), and then of a *physical* resurrection on the day of the Lord, speaking of the physical resurrection as 'the second resurrection'.

Verse 6 *Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power*: because the saints will not go into it, seeing they are saved from the lake of fire (19:20; 20:14–15; 21:8), for their names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years: Notice that *all* the saints are 'a kingdom, priests to his God and Father' (1:6) and that as such 'they shall reign on earth' (5:10), and 'they shall reign for ever and ever' (22:5), so that if it is the martyrs only reigning for the thousand years, then the rest must await their reigning until after the thousand years. Of course it

could mean that all the saints reign in the thousand years and then also for all time.

* * *

7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Verse 7 *And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison*: This period of incarceration and restraint does nothing to change Satan's attitude to God and the Lamb and the people of God. The millennium—whatever was its form (see comment above, following v. 4)—was a time for the ripening of the people of God, and Satan. By the time the period is ended he has one thing in mind.

Verse 8 *and will come out to deceive the nations*: as the dragon, the beast and the prophet had been doing, especially with the ten kings—the tenfold domination of nations.

which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog [see note following this verse], *to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea*: i.e. as many in number as the children of Abraham, and rivalling them, as Satan seeks to do with every reality which God creates (Gen. 22:17), only to be thwarted in the end.

Note on Gog and Magog: The names Gog and Magog can be understood by reading Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. Gog was the chief prince of the land of Magog. According to the prophecy in Ezekiel, Gog, with his people of Magog, was to go against Israel. Israel would first be overwhelmed by Gog and his great army, but then God would intervene and defeat Gog. All of this was to show His holiness, since (i) Israel deserved to be chastised, and it would be seen that it was God who was chastising them because of their idolatry and apostasy, and (ii) God would cause great harm to come upon Gog, and by this the nations would see God as holy. The parallel between Ezekiel chapters 38–39 and Revelation 20:7–10 is a strong one. Just as Gog was to go against Israel and cause great destruction, but then be defeated and decimated—and so much so that 'the Valley of Travellers' was to be a place of mass burial of Gog—so the anti-God forces of Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8 will be enormous, and they will surround

the 'camp' of the people of God, and the Holy City, but they will be punished for this. In Ezekiel Gog is the prince of Meshech and Tubal, i.e. provinces. Magog is the name of the land, but it is also used as a name for the people (Ezek. 39:6), and this is certainly the case in Revelation 20, where the peoples from the four corners of the earth become one, marching as Gog and Magog upon the people of God. In Ezekiel 39:1-6 God foretells the doom of Gog and the people Magog, in a passionate section:

. . . I will turn you about and drive you forward, and bring you up from the uttermost parts of the north, and lead you against the mountains of Israel; then I will strike your bow from your left hand, and will make your arrows drop out of your right hand. You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your hordes and the peoples that are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the wild beasts to be devoured. You shall fall in the open field; for I have spoken, says the Lord God. I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands; and they shall know that I am the Lord.

Verse 9 *And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints:* Israel was a camp when it settled on its nomadic travels in the desert.

and the beloved city: i.e. Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the place of the temple, the beloved city of Israel, but now in this prophecy 'the Holy City' as it is shown in chapters 21 and 22.

but fire came down from heaven and consumed them as was prophesied of Magog in Ezekiel 39:6, and in one sense there is no difference between the sword that goes out of the mouth of the Lamb, and the fire that comes down from heaven. Heavenly fire is the heavenly word of God and it defeats the nations, as the sword of Messiah also defeats the nations.

Verse 10 *and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever:* The smoke of Babylon's torment goes up for ever (19:3; cf. 18:9, 15, 17f.), and the burning of the beast, the false prophet and the devil, all show the ultimate triumph of God, as evil is immolated in 'the second death'.

* * *

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged

by what they had done. ¹⁴ *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire;* ¹⁵ *and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Verse 11 *Then I saw a great white throne:* there being forty-seven mentions of thrones in this prophecy, yet this throne is unique: *white* is for its holiness (cf. 14:14; 19:11), for the one seated on it is the Holy One, the Eternal Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25), this particular reference being to Daniel 7:9–10 where Daniel said,

thrones were placed,
 and one that was ancient of days took his seat;
 his raiment was white as snow,
 and the hair of his head like pure wool;
 his throne was fiery flames,
 its wheels were burning fire.
 A stream of fire issued
 and came forth from before him;
 a thousand thousands served him,
 and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
 the court sat in judgement,
 and the books were opened.

The One Who was seated on the throne in Revelation also brought a white intensity of light to the throne, so that the whole scene was awesome, vital and dynamic, and the great moment of history—the moment of the conclusive judgement—had arrived.

and him who sat upon it would normally be understood as God, although throughout this prophecy the principle of Christ also being on the throne is present (e.g. 3:21; 22:1), but see comment below.

from his presence earth and sky fled away: i.e. His holiness and His judgemental presence are such that all creation will be reverent before Him, as Binney's hymn 'Eternal light! Eternal Light' so powerfully puts it:

O how shall I whose native sphere
 Is dark, whose mind is dim,
 Before the Ineffable appear,
 And on my naked spirit bear
 The uncreated beam?

and linked somewhat with this is the superb line from Walter Chalmers Smith:

'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.

and no place was found for them: Some commentators see this as the

old heavens and the old earth passing away (21:1–3; II Pet. 3:10; cf. Ps. 102:25–27; Heb. 1:10–12). This is probably not the case, for the apocalyptic language simply conveys the sense of the awesomeness of this holy event. Isaiah in the temple was awed and shocked by the holy vision of the Lord seated on his throne.

Comment: The ‘Judge of all the earth’ is undoubtedly God, and the One we call ‘the Father’, yet Christ is also said to be ‘seated at the right hand of the Father’, as ancient Christian creeds and liturgies constantly assert. This derives from Stephen seeing him standing at God’s right hand (Acts 7:56), and from Hebrews 10:12–13 where Psalm 110:1 is quoted of Jesus, ‘The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool”’. This is the basis of many statements in the New Testament of Christ being at the right hand of God (e.g. Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1). Christ is also spoken of as being the Judge in the conclusive judgement (Acts 10:42; 17:31). Jesus spoke of himself being Judge in John 5:25–29 and Luke 22:28–30, both references seeming to relate to Daniel 7:9–14 where—especially in verse 14—one like a Son of man is given sovereignty over all nations. Sovereignty always involved the prerogative and action of judgement. That the Father and the Son can be One is clear from John 10:30, and in Isaiah (9:6) the ‘son’ that is born to Israel can be also ‘Mighty God, *Everlasting Father* Prince of peace’, and whilst this may appear to confuse—or fuse—the first two Persons of the Triune Godhead, relationally this is not the case.

Some who do not see Christ on the throne of judgement say this is because he is Intercessor (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; I John 2:1), and cannot be both Advocate and Judge at the same time. The biblical idiom lacks such literalism. The passage of Romans 8:31–34 presents believers as already judged and acquitted—i.e. justified—so that Christ’s intercession (as the context shows) is intercession *against* evil persecuting powers, and not for God’s acceptance of sinners. In any case both offices of Judge and Intercessor are not necessarily in conflict with each other.

We can safely conclude that the Lamb on the throne is the Judge, but that this judgement is delegated by the Father in His giving of sovereignty to His Son (cf. Eph. 5:6; Rev. 11:15). Luther always dreaded Christ as the Judge until he saw that Christ had taken the judgement of sinners in his propitiatory death of the Cross, whereby sinners were acquitted for ever (Rom. 3:24; 5:1; 8:1; cf. I John 4:10).

Verse 12 *And I saw the dead:* i.e. those brought back to conscious existence to be judged (John 5:28–29; II Cor. 5:10), but see my comment below.

great and small: the judgement being the great leveller of all.

standing before the throne, and books were opened: as was stated in Daniel 7:10: *Also another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.*

Comment: *And I saw the dead* and the question arises, 'Who are these dead?' It is clear that those who have partaken in the first resurrection will not be called 'the dead', nor will they be judged before the throne, but then we have to settle for the meaning of 'the first resurrection'. If it is simply martyrs who share in reigning in the millennium, then it leaves the remainder of believers as 'the dead', or among 'the dead', now coming to life in accordance with John 5:28–29, i.e. to 'the resurrection of life'. Are such judged, since Jesus said (John 5:24), 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life'? Again, Paul said (Rom. 8:1f.), 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death,' i.e. the believer will not be judged by the law since 'he who has died is freed from sin' (Rom. 6:7). Even so, the same Paul said, 'we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ' (II Cor. 5:10). In its context this reference can mean, 'Because all sinners will be judged, I, Paul, proclaim the gospel', or it could mean, 'All human beings will be judged according to works, *receiving back* the things done in the body whether good or bad', which is a literal translation of II Corinthians 5:10b, and seems to fit with Romans 1:27, '*... receiving in their own persons* the due penalty for their error'. Of course no one receives salvation for the works he has done, since by works of the law no man is justified (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–10). When the works are assessed, the judgement is made (cf. Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Matt. 16:27; John 5:28–29; Rom. 2:6–13; 14:12; I Cor. 3:13; II Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:25; Rev. 2:23; 22:12). It is useful to note that in I Corinthians 3:9–15 Paul appears to be speaking to believers, and the testing of their work on 'the Day' (v. 13). Whether there will be an enacted judgement is not stated. It could be that such 'judgement' normally proceeds throughout life.

We may come, then, to one of two conclusions, i.e. *either* 'the dead' are all mankind—excepting, perhaps, the martyrs—and all are judged so that those whose names are written in the book of life (i.e. the redeemed, the elect) are rewarded for their genuine (good) works, and suffer losses for their useless or unauthentic works; *or* 'the dead' are the unredeemed, the finally impenitent, and the judgement of their works will determine the *measure* of the punishment they will receive.

Verse 13 *And the sea gave up the dead in it:* Here the sea can be literal and mean that no matter where (i.e. on land or sea) anyone dies, he or she will be yielded up to judgement on 'the Day'.

Death and Hades gave up the dead in them: No one shall remain concealed, anywhere.

and all were judged by what they had done: See comment just above.

Verse 14 *Then Death:* which comes to all human beings (Rom. 5:12ff.; cf. Gen. 2:17), whether redeemed or the finally impenitent, has no 'sting' for the believer (the sting of death is sin, I Cor. 15:55–56; cf. Heb. 2:14–15), because the believer will never see death

(John 11:25–26), since he has passed from death into life (John 5:24); *and Hades* [i.e. the situation into which all human beings go who die] *were thrown into the lake of fire*: because death is the last enemy to be destroyed (I Cor. 15:26) and Hades is required no more since the faithful are with God (in paradise, heaven, and upon the earth as a reigning royal priesthood). *This is the second death, the lake of fire.*

Verse 15 *and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life* [see 3:5; 13:8; 17:8], *he was thrown into the lake of fire*: It is to be noticed that the One on the throne was not explicitly said to judge, and in fact the judgement follows from the works themselves—perhaps, as Paul says in Romans 2:15, via the conscience. It is not clear that those whose names are in the book of life are necessarily at the great white throne. It may be that only ‘the dead’ are there. What is sure is that no one will escape judgement, whether it be at ‘the great white throne’, or ‘the judgement seat of Christ’, or through the judgement of sin upon the Cross whereby the sinner was declared free of judgement (Rom. 8:1–3; I Pet. 3:18; John 5:24).

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

The very fact that Satan is locked up and bound in an abyss should show us the extreme creatureliness of this personage. The reigning of Christ over all the nations—along with martyrs and saints—tells us the power of Christ and his people. It would seem that this is not so much a period of time as it is a certain situation. We should not lose sight of the fact that Gog and Magog are still an entity during this situation–state, and that they respond to Satan as he is given his ‘last fling’—an endeavour which ends abysmally.

The matter of judgement is a deep one with all the human race. The wonder of having one’s name in the book of life of the Lamb should make us both grateful and stable, and be a constraint to holy living. It should also eliminate any fear in regard to the matter of judgement, although holy reverence is what should obtain.

Chapter Twenty-One

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

ALL evil having been put away, the climax of history is now appearing. The Seer sees a new heaven and a new earth, for the old have gone (cf. 20:11), and the sea has vanished. The Holy City, the new Jerusalem, now descends from the new heaven. A loud voice from the throne pronounces that all pain and suffering and death has ceased, and God announces that He makes all things new. He invites all to drink of the water of life, promises His conquerors will inherit all things, and those who have gone their own way in evil will be in the lake of fire—the second death.

John is again in the Spirit as one of the seven angels takes him to the heavenly Jerusalem, the true Bride of Christ. This city is filled with the glory of God. The description of it follows as to its composition and appearance. Then its importance in the affairs of God and man is pointed out. The temple in heaven that figured in previous chapters is no longer in its former form, for God and the Lamb are the temple, as they are also the light of the city. The city has its gates open always, and the kings of the nations and their people stream in, bringing their glory and honour into the new Jerusalem.

COMMENTARY

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; ³ and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.'

⁵ *And he who sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'* ⁶ *And he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment.'* ⁷ *He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son.* ⁸ *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.'*

Verse 1 *Then I saw*: i.e. John is given yet another vision which is sequential in action if not in time.

a new heaven and a new earth: If the first heavens and the first earth had actually 'fled away' (20:11) so that 'fled away' equalled 'passed away', then this would explain the need for the new heaven and the new earth, but we cannot be sure. Certainly the old was regenerated. See Matthew 19:28 'in the new world' or 'in the regeneration', and the comment below this verse.

for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away: i.e. as they had been, only to be replaced by a newer and better order.

and the sea was no more: i.e. the sea as a created thing had always been a problem (as well as useful) to man. If 'sea' here means that out of which the first beast emerged (13:1), then we understand it as in Isaiah 57:20, 'the wicked are like the restless sea . . . that casts up mire and dirt'. This is best destroyed for ever.

Comment: The idea of a new heaven and a new earth was not foreign to Israel. Psalm 104:30 says, 'When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground'. Isaiah speaks much of the *regeneration* of the earth. In Isaiah 65:17–25 there is a magnificent prophecy that speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. We reproduce part of it here:

'For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth;
and the former things shall not be remembered,
or come into mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever
in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing,
and her people a joy.'

Again, in Isaiah 66:22–23 the new heavens and the new earth are presupposed:

'For as the new heavens and the new earth
which I will make
shall remain before me, says the Lord;
so shall your descendants and your name remain.'

From new moon to new moon,
and from sabbath to sabbath,
all flesh shall come to worship before me,
says the Lord.'

We might wonder why they should have to pass away. II Peter suggests they need to be immolated (3:11–13). Isaiah 51:6 has it,

'Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment . . .'

and possibly this because some of the celestial inhabitants have rebelled against God, and so may refer to the fact that the heavens have to be absolutely purified of such an infection. There can be nothing wrong or inferior about the heavens as created by God, but in Job 25:5 Bildad goes close to saying there is:

'Look to the moon; to him it shineth not;
The stars, to his beholding, are not pure.'

Certainly this would be the case with the earth, i.e. it needs purification. Whereas in Ephesians 2:2 Satan is 'the prince of the power of the air' and wicked spiritual hosts have their abode in 'the heavenlies' (Eph. 6:12), so Satan is 'the god of this world', and likewise he and his cohorts have their abode on earth, so that both realms need purging of evil. The 'earth' could also mean that humanity out of which the beast emerged (Rev. 13:11).

Verse 2 *And I saw the holy city*: i.e. holy as against the unholy city of Babylon.

new Jerusalem: where 'new' is both renewed and beyond that which was the former city—the Jerusalem of Palestine (cf. II Cor. 5:17).

coming down out of heaven from God: This city has always been in the making, within heaven (3:12; cf. Gal. 4:22–31; Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22–23), and formed by God; it is heavenly as against earthly, yet now will be on earth, where, in another sense, it has also always been (cf. Heb. 12:22, 'But you *have cometo* Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . .').

prepared as a bride adorned for her husband: as we have already seen in 19:6–8. She is now pure, 'without spot or wrinkle'; utterly pure, ready for her pure Bridegroom.

Verse 3 *and I heard a loud voice*: i.e. a voice of the highest authority emanating from God, whether through an angelic agent or not.

from the throne saying, 'Behold: i.e. 'Look! Take notice! This is significant!'

the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them: for God has long prophesied this would come to pass. In Leviticus 26:11–12 He had spoken

of immediately being among them, the covenant people: 'And I will make my abode among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.' In Ezekiel 37:26–28 He had used words like those in this very verse:

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore.

The nations that will know will be those who flow towards Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2–4) and in Revelation 5:9 and 7:15 these were the peoples mentioned as being in heaven and redeemed in conformity with Genesis 49:10—'to him shall be the obedience of the peoples'.

Verse 4 *he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away*: This is a passage which parallels 7:15–17, which itself is a compound of Scriptures from the Old Testament. Of course, all causes for tears and pains will have been removed. The last enemy, 'death', has been defeated by Christ's resurrection. The phrase 'passed away' is also used in II Corinthians 5:17 of the man in Christ. He is 'new', not in the sense of 'other than what he was', but in the sense that he has been renewed.

Verse 5 *And he who sat upon the throne*: which could be the Father, or the Lamb, or both.

said, 'Behold, I make all things new': i.e. the heavens and the earth, all inhabitants—everything! In verse 7 it is these 'all things' that the conqueror inherits.

Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true': Often things are said in this 'Truly, truly' or 'Amen! Amen!' vein because they seem far too good to be true.

Verse 6 *And he said to me, 'It is done!'*: i.e. all that has been needed to bring history to its goal has been done, and history has come to that fulfilment.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end: As we have seen*, this One has always been working, is working and will always

* See commentary on 1:4. 8.

work, with the view to fulfilling the counsel of His own will.

To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment: There are echoes and assertions here of many wonderful passages in both Old and New Testaments, such as Isaiah 12:3–6; Isaiah 55; John 4:13–14; 6:35; 7:37–39; Revelation 7:16; 22:17.

Verse 7 *He who conquers:* which statement we saw seven times in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, and which has much meaning in the light of the battle between God and Satan in chapters 12–20.

shall have this heritage: this wonderful heritage or inheritance spoken about so many times throughout history, and which now encompasses the ‘all things’ of 21:5 and other places.

and I will be his God: as Romans 5:2 says, ‘we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God’, and now it has come to pass!

and he shall be my son: i.e. one now wholly in the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29) and living in ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21), and knowing God as ‘Father!’ (Rev. 14:1; 22:4; cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5–6).

Verse 8 *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars:* These are the ones of Romans 1:18 upon whom the wrath of God has always been revealed, and now has come to its terrible *telos* climax. These, whose condition is too sad and horrible to comment upon, are the finally impenitent of mankind. Paul once asked (Rom. 10:18), ‘have they not heard?’, to which he gave his affirmative answer,

‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world,’

and that is why *their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.*

* * *

⁹ *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.’* ¹⁰ *And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,* ¹¹ *having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.* ¹² *It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed;* ¹³ *on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three*

gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Verse 9 *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb':* This was an extraordinary thing for a notable angel to do—to address John—but then he was the chosen prophet to convey this great prophecy to the world.

Verse 10 *And in the Spirit:* Again we note the times of John being in the Spirit (1:10; 4:2; 17:3), this time to see the Bride, whereas previously (17:3) it has been to see the unholy harlot, the unclean city doomed to destruction. In all cases John needs the Spirit to give him understanding of these great and marvellous things.

he carried me away to a great, high mountain: a noble place, lofty and notable, and not a wilderness as had been the case with the unholy woman, *and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.**

Verse 11 *having the glory of God:* i.e. the Shekinah, the Glory-Cloud, the sign and seal of God's presence in it, and not as in Ezekiel, where the Glory-Cloud lifted itself above the city and departed because of the evils of the covenant people. It was the sign of God's Eternal Presence. Also notable is that the Woman has 'all the glory of God' in contradistinction with I Corinthians 11:7, where man—the male, the husband—is 'the image and glory of God'.

its radiance: literally 'her light' (*phostera* light-giving body, cf. Phil. 2:15, 'you shine as *lights* in the world').

like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal: as God appeared on the throne in 4:3.

Verse 12 *It had a great, high wall:* which is the symbol of impregnability and would be an assurance to the prophet and us, for cities of the day had to be secure, but 21:25 shows that its gates will always be open, since doubtless all enemies by this point have been destroyed and it stands in no danger (cf. Ezek. 48:30–34). Even so, the symbol is reassuring.

with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels: angels often being guardians (cf. Gen. 3:24).

and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were

* See commentary on verse 2.

inscribed: i.e. not as monuments of past greatness and as such static, but constituting the portals through which the twelve tribes pass to their eternal destiny. These are the 144,000 of 7:4 and 14:1ff.

Verse 13 *on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates*: as set out in Ezekiel 48:30–35, i.e. the order of the tribes.

Verse 14 *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*: The city is the temple, is the people of God, is the body of Christ, is the sanctuary of God, set out so beautifully in Ephesians 2:19–22—the fulfilment of Ezekiel 37:2–28—and, in I Peter 2:4–10, the prophetic transference to the church of Exodus 19:5–6.

* * *

15 And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. 16 The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal. 17 He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's. 18 The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

Verse 15 *And he who talked to me*: one of the seven angels who had had the bowls of wrath, now on a different operation.

had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls: the measuring being an assurance of its unchangeable authentic being. In 11:1–2 it was John the Seer who measured the sanctuary, and whilst the city and the sanctuary are one, this is the end of the age, or in the new age, and constitutes a different situation.

Verse 16 *The city lies foursquare*: and in fact it is a cube, i.e. the measure of perfection.

its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal: The literalist will be baffled here, for the wall would have to be 1,500

miles long, and 216 feet high! It is interesting that all the measurements are in twelves, i.e. linked with the tribes of Israel and the apostolic 'team'.

Verse 17 *He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's:* The measurement is human, but it is an angel who uses the human measurements—an accommodation to our humanity. It has been thought by some that it is intended to show that men and angels are intimately linked and can work together. Certainly angels work for humans (cf. Heb. 1:14), and must have some affinity.*

Verse 18 *The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold:* i.e. of the royalty of God, with His purity.

clear as glass: A city deriving from Him but fit for His saints.

Verses 19–20 *The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel:* as indeed was the high priest's breastplate, which had four rows of three jewels—twelve in all, the number of the tribes of Israel which it represented before God (cf. Exod. 28:15–21; Gen. 2:10–12; Ezek. 28:13), each jewel representing the name of a tribe.

the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst: so that all the stones together represented the glory of God (cf. 4:3; 21:11, 'its radiance like a most rare jewel'). This picture of a bejewelled city reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy (54:11–12):

O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted,
 behold, I will set your stones in antimony,
 and lay your foundations with sapphires.
 I will make your pinnacles of agate,
 your gates of carbuncles,
 and all your wall of precious stones.

How Israel must have dreamed of such beauty, and how, when it came, it was to be more beautiful than their dreams, more wonderful than the mind could conceive (I Cor. 2:9).

Verse 21 *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls:* A thought which was not new to Rabbinic thinking.

each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure

* See my Essay 'Angels in the Book of the Revelation'. pp. 317–320.

gold, transparent as glass: This kind of gold is not found in earthly structures, but since it is celestial it can be transparent. Even then, however, it is symbolic of something which transcends the natural.

* * *

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; ²⁶ they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Verse 22 *And I saw no temple in the city:* for all temples in mundane cities are set aside from the mundane, amongst the mundane, for those who must be rescued from the mundane. Here, in the Holy City, nothing is mundane *for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb:* All is God—without understanding that as a pantheistic notion. Just as all true life is in God and in Christ and in His Spirit, so now the city and the temple are one, and God is the temple—for everything and everyone is in Him. This is the final open secret for all to know—*God and His people are one** So in 3:12 the Lord of the Lamps promised ‘conquerors would be pillars in the temple’, and now they are.

Verse 23 *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb:* God is the true light: all other lights are created, and the created lights cannot be greater than the Creator. All His people now live in this direct Light.

Verse 24 *By its light shall the nations walk:* for the city has all the glory of God. Its jewels get their light and beauty from Him, and yet such light is functional, for ‘In him was life, and the life was the light of men’ (John 1:4). So much for the gaudy unholy city and its light that was darkness—terrible darkness!

and the kings of the earth: though not the other kings of the earth who dreamed of defeating God in their Armageddons, but the true kings, redeemed and appointed by God, who acknowledge His sovereignty because of the Suffering Servant (Isa. 52:13–15):

* See commentary on 7:15.

Behold, my servant shall prosper,
 he shall be exalted and lifted up,
 and shall be very high.
 As many were astonished at him—
 his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
 and his form beyond that of the sons of men—
 so shall he startle many nations;
 kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
 for that which has not been told them they shall see,
 and that which they have not heard they shall understand.

shall bring their glory into it: for the same prophet once said,

And nations shall come to your light,
 and kings to the brightness of your rising (Isa. 60:3).

The glory they bring may happen to be the rich glory of culture and wisdom, gifts that have built up the treasures of mankind, but whatever it is, or whoever they are who come bringing gifts, all has come from the glory He has shared with created man, and the glory He has given back to it by redemption.

Verse 25 *and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there:* so that where cities were shut against invaders through suspicion and distrust, these things shall no longer obtain. All will be open to all, without shame in the eternal light of God.

Verse 26 *they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations:* for at last all the nations are His, as we have seen. This is the climax of history—all nations knowing and loving Him.

Verse 27 *But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood:* for all of these things are the things that once belonged to the unholy city, Babylon, but now there is no place for them in the new heavens and the new earth. They are only objects for the fiery lake.

but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life: Those whose names are so written have life, and enter into life, into the rich life of the Holy City.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

All of the things in this chapter are heartening to the reader who is a believer. The knowledge of the impairment by sin of the earth, and

the rebellion of angels in heaven, and the consequent curse, suffering and death that have resulted in the human race, have made many yearn that everything should be wholly new as is suggested in I Corinthians 6:11; II Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 9:14; 10:22; Titus 1:15 and 3:5. He who sits on the throne has the kind of advice to offer which will bring salvation to the thirsty, but death to the finally impenitent.

A sight of the Bride by those in the Spirit is a grand sight indeed. All the description further heartens the believer to persist in patient endurance and in holding the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, for the 'recompense of the reward' shows the glories that will belong to believers—the people and church of the living God. The knowledge of the Holy City has kept millions going down through the centuries. The sight of the end things brings rich hope in the present. The sight of the Holy City brings a deep longing to the true people of God. They see the gates open day and night, and they desire to see Him intimately and personally. Knowledge of the future things makes the present rich and strong.

Chapter Twenty-Two

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

THE angel takes the Seer intimately into the things of the Holy City, and he sees all that man lost at the Fall, namely the tree of life, as it grows on both sides of the river of life, the river of life flowing from the throne of God. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations—those very nations which now appear to be healed. It is a thing guaranteed that there shall be nothing unclean in the city—all that has been banished and destroyed. At last the saints shall see Him face to face, and will bear His seal upon themselves.

The remainder of the chapter is given over to instructions regarding the importance of the prophecy for the churches. So important is it that, as with the law of Israel (Deut. 4:2), nothing should be added to it, nor anything be taken away from it, and this command is a solemn one. Infringement of it will bring the plagues described in this Book, and there shall be no inheritance in the city. The final yearning of the Book is for the Coming One—the Lamb—to come!

COMMENTARY

¹ Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

³ There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him;

⁴ they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.

⁵ And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Verse 1 *Then he*—the same angel—*showed me the river of the water of life*: doubtless this river is Edenic. Genesis 2:6 speaks of water coming up from the ground and watering all. In any case the river is in Paradise. Again we must see it as symbolic, just as a spring welling up within a person (John 4:13–14; 7:37–39, doubtless the Holy Spirit on this occasion). Water sustains and gives life. So, as God is the Temple and the City, He is also the very river of life itself. In Revelation 7:17 it is the Lamb who guides the redeemed to ‘springs of living water’ (cf. Jer. 2:13, where God is ‘the fountain of living waters’). The main point is that the means of eternal life are always at hand. ‘There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God’ (Ps. 46:4).

bright as crystal: as is the glass-like sea before the throne (Rev. 4:6; 15:2).

flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb: In Ezekiel 47:1–9 the river—also having life-giving trees on both sides of the river—flows from south of the altar, and this may be intended to show that it comes from the altar. If so, then ‘throne’ in the Revelation and ‘altar’ in Ezekiel may be seen symbolically as the one—a very rich thought. Joel 3:18 has a beautiful prophecy of a fruitful river proceeding from the house of God, and there is a similar prophecy in Zechariah 14:8.

Verse 2 *through the middle of the street of the city*: i.e. central to all living creatures.

also, on either side of the river: i.e. on both sides, thus constituting a forest of sustenance and healing.

the tree of life with its twelve kind [again this covenantal and redemptive symbolic number] *of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were* [note here that the verb is understood: different versions translate either past or present or future tenses]: it would seem that all nations will be healed before entrance into the city, but by these very leaves of the healing tree, i.e. the Cross of Christ.

for the healing of the nations: Note that healing is a vast subject in history. Always it is God Who is the Healer, as also He is the Wounder (cf. Exod. 15:26; Deut. 32:39). That there shall be no more pain is a wonderful promise of no sickness (cf. Rev. 21:4; 7:15–17).

Verse 3 *There shall no more be anything accursed*: since the old heavens and earth have been purged with fire, and the new heavens and the new earth contain only new creatures whose guilt has been purified,

and the curse which was upon them has been purged (Jer. 33:8; Gal. 3:13–14; Heb. 9:14; 10:14).

but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him: i.e. the redeemed and all celestial creatures, for they will continually serve Him, i.e. worship Him, since both are the one.

Verse 4 *they shall see his face:* promised in Matthew 5:8; Psalm 24:3–6 (cf. Heb. 12:14).

and his name shall be on their foreheads: as in Revelation 7:3, 14:1, meaning that they are sealed—as sons of God, children of the Holy Father—for ever.

Verse 5 *And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light:* as has already been said in 21:22–26—so important an announcement it is.

and they: i.e. the Kingdom of priests, *shall reign for ever and ever:* 5:10 telling us it will be upon the earth, and 20:4 telling us they reign throughout the millennium.

* * *

⁶ And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. ⁷ And behold, I am coming soon.'

Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

⁸ I John am he who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; ⁹ but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.'

¹⁰ And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.'

¹² 'Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practises falsehood.

¹⁶ 'I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.'

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.

¹⁸ I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Verse 6 *And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets*':* which could mean:

- (a) all those true prophets who 'hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus', which is the spirit of prophecy (Deut. 18:18; II Pet. 1:21; Acts 1:16; cf. I Pet. 1:10–12; Acts 26:22);
- (b) simply the prophets of whom John has spoken in this Book;
- (c) all saints who are part of the prophetic community (cf. Acts 2:17f.);
- (d) the seven spirits who are before the throne and go out into the whole earth (1:4; 4:5; 5:6);
- (e) the spirits of the prophets who confirm the prophetic utterance of another prophet (I Cor. 14:32).

The latter seems hardly likely. The term 'God of the spirits' links with 'the Father of spirits' (Heb. 12:9) and 'the spirits of just men made perfect' (Heb. 12:23), meaning that He has always inspired the prophets, and cared for them and for all His elect, as their Father.

has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place: For 'soon take place' see 1:1, 19 (cf. 17:1; 10:7), meaning what will quickly take place, even if 'soon' does not appear to be immediate.

Verse 7 *And behold, I am coming soon':* In this Book Jesus is always coming (1:7; 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11; 16:15; 22:12, 20), and the saints are to keep alert and be encouraged.

Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book: i.e. 'Blessed is he who hears what God is doing, and knows how to conduct

* See commentary on 21:5. 1:4–5 and 4:5.

himself in obedience in the context of God's plan, the counsel of His will.'

Verse 8 *I John am he who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me:* John is so overwhelmed by the prophecy, the magnificence of the angel, and in fact all things, that he is moved to worship the angel.*

Verse 9 *but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book:* The revelation here is that men and angels, together, serve God.

Worship God': i.e. there is no other object of worship (cf. Exod. 20:1–3; Matt. 4:10; Deut. 6:13–14).

Verse 10 *And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near:* In 10:4 John was told to seal up what the seven thunders had said. In that sense Paul 'sealed up' the visions he had seen, since it was not lawful to utter them (II Cor. 12:2–4), and Daniel was told to seal up the vision he had seen, for its meaning was to be unsealed, i.e. revealed, later (Dan. 8:26; 10:14; 12:4, 9). In other words, those who have spiritual enlightenment must read the prophecy, understand and keep it.

Verse 11 *Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy':* The point has now been reached in history where he who has a will to hear has heard, and he who refuses to hear has sealed his own future. Now each must act consistently with the decision he has made—the prophecy having been read, the seals, trumpets and bowls having been loosed on the earth, the judgements of the dragon, beast, false prophet and Babylon having been executed. One is 'fixed for ever', according to that decision of will. In Ezekiel 3:27 God tells the prophet, 'he that will hear, let him hear; and he that will refuse to hear, let him refuse.'

Verse 12 *'Behold, I am coming soon†, bringing my recompense:* i.e. 'reward' (*misthos*) as in 11:18, 'rewarding thy servants'. *to repay every one for what he has done* (cf. 2:23; 20:12–13): though the emphasis seems

* For comments on 'angelolatry' see 19:10 and my Essay, 'Angels in the Book of the Revelation' on pp. 317–320.

† See commentary on 1:1.

here to be reward in a good sense, not that retribution will fail to come to those who deserve it. Losses and rewards are a prominent and significant subject in the New Testament (cf. I Cor. 3:10–15; Rom. 2:7–11; I Cor. 9:24–27; Gal. 6:7–10; II John 8).

Verse 13 *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end*: This is clearly Christ speaking, and the significance of his unceasing working from beginning to end now shows up powerfully, as we have scanned the prophecy from 5:1 to 22:21.

Verse 14 *Blessed are those*: The seventh and last beatitude in the Book.

who wash their robes: i.e. they get themselves washed, as was the case in 7:14 with the redeemed multitudes. Although the salvific work is of God (cf. 'justification by grace' in Rom. 3:24), yet Christ's often repeated principle is true: 'Go in peace: your faith has saved you' (cf. Eph. 2:8–10; Titus 3:5–7). Other ancient manuscripts have, 'Blessed are they who do his commandments', and undoubtedly this is true (cf. John 14:15–23; I John 2:3–6; 5:1–3). It is a fact that those who are washed are those who obey (II Cor. 5:14–15).

that they may have the right to the tree of life: i.e. the same tree of life denied the primal fallen couple—the way to which has always been guarded by the cherubim—is now freely available to the redeemed believers.

and that they may enter the city by the gates: i.e. this marvellous Holy City is open to the purified.

Verse 15 *Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practises falsehood*: It may be thought from this sentence that in the *ultimatè* there will still be this sort of people existing *in the* universe, free to do their wickedness, though prohibited from entering the Holy City. This will not be the case, although at present it is. John is simply saying that this kind of evil person is presently prohibited and always will be. When we look at what man can do and be, we are struck with horror, and no less so when we see what we can be, and—but for the grace of God—we would surely be, if not always in deed, then no less in thought (Eph. 2:3; Matt. 5:28; I John 3:15). Revelation 21:8 speaks of the destruction of the morally polluted.

Verse 16 *I Jesus have sent my angel to you*: as stated in 1:1.

with this testimony for the churches: i.e. for the seven churches (cf. 1:11) which is the sevenfold church, and so the church in all ages, thus being appropriate and mandatory for the present church to read.

I am the root: so that whilst he is truly the offspring of David, he is more than that. In him the line of David has its true origin—its spiritual origin and continuing being, we may say.

and the offspring of David: i.e. 'according to the flesh' (Rom. 1:3).

the bright morning star': as we can see in Revelation 2:28, where the morning star points to the coming day of glory. Also it has its prophetic origin in Numbers 24:17, as Balaam involuntarily prophesied:

I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not nigh:
a star shall come forth out of Jacob,
and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel;
it shall crush the forehead of Moab,
and break down all the sons of Sheth.

Verse 17 *The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come':* i.e. they say this to Christ the Beloved, the true Husband. For the most part he has been saying, 'I will come,' but the loving hunger for this one is so strong that the Spirit and the Bride, as in the Song of Solomon (8:14), say in effect, 'Make haste, my beloved.'

And let him who hears: and so has come to know the gospel and Christ, loves him personally, and yearns for his coming.

say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price: as in John 4:13–14, 6:35, and 7:37–39. Again this unconditional gift of life reminds us of the beautiful fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, and the gifts God gives unconditionally (cf. II Cor. 9:15; Rom. 3:24). The thirsty know how good God is to satiate their thirst for Him and from Him.

without price is of course from Isaiah 55:1, and is of the essence of grace. It is of the nature of God to give gifts: 'Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change' (James 1:17). Of necessity we must receive gifts given, without patronage or haughty condescension. Without those gifts we are lost, and we need the Holy Spirit to teach us—'that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God' (I Cor. 2:12).

Verse 18 *I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this*

book: For these are the words of Deuteronomy 4:2: 'You *shall not add to* the word which I command you, nor *take from it* that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.' To add can be to alter the nature of the commandment. To add is to lack reverential fear for the holy word of God, hence the dreadful punishment which would follow.

Verse 19 *and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy*: Deuteronomy 4:2 also covers this 'taking away', as does Deuteronomy 12:32: 'Everything that I command you you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it or *take from it*.' In Jeremiah 23:30 God says, 'behold, I am against the prophets who steal my words from one another.' Being able to pretend to have the authority of the true word of God is a terrible pretension, and justifiably calls for judgement, since God's word is the only thing of the truth that man has. No wonder *God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

Verse 20 *He who testifies to these things*: i.e. 'the faithful witness', 'the true one', 'the Amen, the faithful and true witness', the one 'called Faithful and True' who is indeed 'the way, and the truth, and the life' and 'who has borne witness to the truth'—that is, the one who tells us that the things of this prophecy are true. This is because 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'; this prophecy *is* the testimony to him because it is *his* testimony—his life, his action.

says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen: This, then, is the irrefutable truth, is the primary fact of history to which all sainthood is oriented—anticipation of the coming King. No wonder we cry *Come, Lord Jesus!*

Verse 21 *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen*: This is no formal closing. The 'great grace' that man has always needed, and which is upon the church, and which will be the grace that will come with the revelation of Christ, is what John desires for all who read the prophecy. The prophecy itself is great grace.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION OF THE CHAPTER

Every verse of this final chapter is filled with either revelations of God in the city or with exhortations as to listening to the prophecy and acting upon it, and so the demand on every reader is to go over

it all thoughtfully, and with a will to observe what is said.

We have come to the end of a marvellous prophecy, but the very reading of it places us under strong obligation to know it and obey it. That is why we will need to read it time and again, soak ourselves in the language and thought of it, desisting from trying to interpret it literalistically or absurdly by confining its fulfilment to certain persons, places and times. Because of its symbolical nature we should learn to think in terms of those symbols, and allow their message to come through to us.

SECTION TWO:

The Essays

Introduction to the Essays

THE *Essays* are intended to be helpful in understanding the topics in the *Revelation*. A reading of them will give a better knowledge of the text. Each *Essay* has been written as an entity in itself, so that a certain amount of repetition will be found through the *Essays*. Even that may not be a bad thing. Repetition is supposed to be the soul of teaching, and gradually the major themes of the *Book* should become clearer to the thoughtful reader.

Because the *Revelation* was written by an author who already had the whole of the apostolic thinking as his background, it has been necessary to give some of this background, especially where it is not explicitly given in the text.

As far as possible the order of the *Essays* has been arranged to give the maximum progression of thought. When the text becomes well known then the *Essays* should prove of increasing interest and value.

Essay One

The Vision of the Lord

INTRODUCTION TO THE VISION

Revelation 1:9–20

⁹ *I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.*

¹² *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; ¹⁴ his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*

¹⁷ *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter. ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

THE prophecy of the Book of the Revelation was the revelation given to Jesus Christ by God the Father, and then given by the Son through the angel to the prophet John. A great principle of God in the giving of a prophecy was first to take the prophet into Himself, and by this the prophet would first know God, and then God would send him out. The classic example is found in Isaiah 6, where God reveals Himself in a vision to the prophet, convicts him of his sinfulness, redeems him from that sinfulness, and so instils in him the knowledge of His grace. The prophet is now ready to be sent out with the message of the holiness and eternity of God, and with the message, also, of His loving redemption. In Numbers 12:6 God says He generally gives prophecies to His servants by means of dreams and visions (cf. Jer. 23:23ff.), but in Moses' case He speaks to him 'mouth to mouth and not in dark speech'. In Acts 2:17–18 God gives prophecy by pouring His Holy Spirit upon the men and women present at Pentecost, and predicted that others would receive prophecies—'before the day of the Lord comes', i.e. from Pentecost to the Parousia His people would be a prophetic community.

In John's case he was 'in the Spirit on the Lord's day', i.e. a man generally filled with the Spirit, he received a special affusion on this day, for a special purpose. This principle can be found in the Book of the Acts, when the servants of God are drawn into acts which require the leading and aid of the Spirit (2:4; 4:8ff., 31–35; 7:55; 13:9). Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, 'no one can say, "Jesus is Lord!" except by the Holy Spirit'. By the Holy Spirit John saw the vision we are about to contemplate. The vision is one of many in this Revelation, but we will look at this one because it provides the setting for the whole prophecy. Without it we could scarcely be launched into the prophecy.

ELEMENTS OF THE VISION INDICATING THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

We remember that the apostles had seen Jesus as a man. The apostle John wrote of him, 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'. He also wrote, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands . . .'. He had known him as a man, even if an extraordinary man, but then he had known him as the wonderful revelation of God as Father (John 1:14, 18): '. . . glory as

of the only Son from the Father . . . the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known'. John had also seen him transfigured on Mount Tabor by glory which shone out from within him, and he had seen him as the resurrected Christ. Now, in this apocalyptic vision, he sees him not as he literally is, but as he is manifested in visionary manner.

Once he was in the Spirit he heard a loud voice like a trumpet, and since trumpet calls generally preceded significant announcements he turned to see the proclaimer. The voice had told him something of great importance: 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.' At first sight this may not unduly impress us, but when we realize that these seven churches, though contemporary and localized in Asia Minor, nevertheless represent the sevenfold church of this whole age, then the command is highly important, since the whole prophecy is to go to the sevenfold church.

As John turns, he sees seven golden lampstands. These speak of worship—and in particular the worship of God—as they are undoubtedly linked with the seven-branched candelabra of the Holy Place of the temple. Exodus 25:31–40 gives meticulous prescriptions for the making of the candelabra. In Zechariah 4:1–14 the golden lampstand and two olive trees who feed it are of great note. In the vision John saw they certainly were important, for, as we shall see, they represent the whole people of God in this age. The One walking amongst them was Lord, Guide, Teacher, Protector and Exhorter of the seven churches they represented. He was personally present to them.

The fact that this One was 'like a son of man' immediately takes us to Daniel 7:9–27, where one 'like a son of man' is in fact the one to be appointed over all the nations, and whose kingdom (in reality the Kingdom of God) was to be for ever. This 'Son of man' in the four Gospels is also of high authority and notability. He has authority over the Sabbath, authority to forgive sins, and will ultimately come in the clouds, i.e. the eschatological Shekinah Glory, and will set up the new world (cf. Matt. 9:6; 19:28; 26:64). Here he walks among the golden lampstands. The fact that he is 'son of man' means he is human, incarnated by God (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 2:14–17).

The description of his white hair and head are descriptions first of deity (Dan. 7:9–10) and then of holiness, dignity and kingship. His eyes 'like a flame of fire'—and indeed much else about him—remind us of the 'man clothed in linen' whose 'face was like the appearance

of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire'. His robe of white is celestial clothing and represents the same purity, but also royalty, as does the golden girdle. His feet are pure and strong, pointing back to Isaiah 52:7 (cf. Rom. 10:15):

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good tidings,
who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'

Also this One needs strong feet—'refined in a furnace'—for he is not only to proclaim the gospel but also to trample the winepress of the fury of God's wrath. His voice being 'like the sound of many waters' leads us to Ezekiel 43:2:

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; and the sound of his coming was *like the sound of many waters* and the earth shone with his glory.

This beautiful description tells us that the One of the vision has the very voice and glory of God—a high and awesome fact. No less astounding is the reality that the seven stars which are the angels of the seven churches—i.e. the sevenfold church, the church of this age with all its action, proclamation and history—are solely in his right hand, which is the hand of authority and control. The sharp two-edged sword issues from his mouth, the sword which is to prove powerful to smite all the nations of the earth (19:15), the sword of his mouth by which he wars (2:16), which is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) or 'the breath of his mouth' (II Thess. 2:8; Isa. 11:4), and which is like fire (Jer. 23:29; Rev. 11:5; 20:9), so that its strong word makes him King over all the nations (Ps. 2:6–7; Rev. 19:15). His face 'like the sun shining in full strength' is the light that Paul saw on the road to Damascus, for 'in him is no darkness at all' and such light is 'the life of men'.

How powerful, then, this vision, and so much so that John the Seer falls at his feet as though dead, as had many before him at the sight of such celestial beauty (Exod. 19:10–25; Heb. 12:18–21; Judges 6:22; Isa. 6:1ff.; Dan. 8:17f.; 10:8, 9, 15). And—as if this were not enough—it goes on to the declaration of this holy One:

Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

We know, then, that this is the Christ, the Son of God. The vision brings to us the reality of the spoken words, that this is the One who

died on the Cross and rose on the first Easter morning, and so defeated Death and Hades, and broke the fear of death and judgement, and who 'abolished death and brought life and immortality to light'. This is the vision which sets the Seer on his feet, which prepares him for the great prophecy, having shown him the vast dimensions of the person and character of Christ the Messiah and Lord. Likewise it prepares us who read the vision—especially as we read it 'in the Spirit'—to understand that it is this One who has power over life and death who is our Lord, a truth we shall increasingly see as we read 'the prophecy of this book'. Its practical implications and ramifications for living in this time of God's history are many, are wonderful, and are demanding. Armed with this knowledge the early church could face both life and death with equanimity, could be faithful unto death, knowing that death held no terrors, for they were in the hands of the Lord of life and death.

Essay Two

The Testimony of Jesus in the Book of the Revelation

INTRODUCTION

THE term 'testimony' (*marturià*) is found in the Book of the Revelation in 1:2, 9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4, and each mention is significant. When the references are considered thoughtfully, a term emerges which can be called 'the testimony of Jesus'. The key one, it would seem, is in 19:10 where it is said by the angel to John the Seer, 'I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.' In the same verse John adds this, 'For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.' The term 'the testimony of Jesus' stands without any qualifying addition, only in 1:2 and—in one sense—in 19:10. In 1:9 we have 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus', in 12:17 'those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus', and in 20:4 'those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God'. In 19:10 the saints 'hold the testimony of Jesus', which is much the same as 14:12 where the saints are those who 'keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus'. The term 'witness' (*martu*)* is also used as a noun and Jesus is 'the faithful witness' (1:5)

* We cannot understand 'witness' in the N.T. unless we first understand it in the O.T. For a helpful understanding of the whole subject I am indebted to a monograph by Allison A. Trites entitled, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977). Trites has thoroughly researched the concept of witness in both the O.T. and N.T. His primary conclusion is that witness is juridical, i.e. that God is actually amassing the evidence concerning Himself and His character against the false ideas which the human race—and even Israel—have regarding Him and against Him. In some cases He even invites His listeners to enter into the very courtroom, state their cases, amass their evidence and assess the verdict. This verdict is always weighted for God and against rebellious man.

and 'the faithful and true witness' (3:14; cf. 19:11). In 2:13 we read of 'Antipas my witness, my faithful one', and in 11:3 of 'my two witnesses'. The use of the verb 'to witness' (*martureō*) is used in 1:2, 'who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus'. In 1:2 it is John 'who bore witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, even to all that he saw', and what he saw was called 'the prophecy'. Thus—as in 19:10—'the testimony of Jesus' and 'prophecy' are linked inseparably.

If we look at the passages relating to the nouns 'testimony' and 'witness', and the verb 'to bear witness' or 'to testify', then we see that the saints are those who bear testimony to Jesus, and hold the testimony of Jesus—along with his words and the commandments of God. The question is whether 'the testimony of Jesus' is (i) something the saints give to the world, or (ii) something Jesus gives to the world in the sense that he testifies to God and the truth in accordance with John 18:37, 'I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth', and in the sense that he *is* the truth (John 14:6; cf. 8:40). It seems to me that 'the testimony of Jesus' is the person and work of the man Jesus to which the prophets have always borne witness, and to which the saints also have borne—and still do bear—witness. The way in which the saints bear witness is to be *participants in the action of Jesus* the Son of God, for his very action is his—Jesus'—testimony. This testimony of his is his witnessing to the Father, which is his witnessing to the truth (John 18:37; 8:40; 14:6). Later in this Essay the views of various commentators are quoted, and, as I see it, the substance of their views amount to what I have here stated.

THE CHURCH IS THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY, I.E. THE WITNESSING COMMUNITY

When we come directly to the Book of the Revelation we may miss the fact that from Pentecost, when the new community was born, it was always the *prophetic* community witnessing to Christ (Acts 1:8), and this by proclaiming the word of God, and living out the life, action and plan of Christ. Friedrich in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* sees the new community as wholly prophetic. 'According to Acts 2:4; 4:31 all are filled with the prophetic Spirit and according to 2:16ff. it is a specific mark of the age of fulfilment that

* Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 1968. Vol. vi. p. 849.

the Spirit does not only lay hold of individuals but that all members of the eschatological community without distinction are called to prophesy'. Certainly the statements 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy', 'on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy', show the community was—and is—the prophetic community, i.e. the witnessing community.

The 'testimony of Jesus', then, is the life of the community as it is the living, active witness to Christ and of Christ. In order to catch the continuity and flow of this witnessing we will look at the Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation.

The Witness in the Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation

The Book of the Acts is studded with the words 'witness' and 'testimony'—1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 18, 20; 26:16. Acts 1:8 sets the pattern—the apostles are to bear witness to Christ in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Undoubtedly, by the proclamation of the word of the gospel, those of the apostolic band were witnesses to Jesus, i.e. they were telling what they had seen of, and heard from, Christ. Indeed, one could not be an apostle unless one had witnessed Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection showed Jesus to be 'both Lord and Christ', and was the heart of the message which was intended to bring men and women to repentance, faith and salvation (cf. 2:36–38). So 'with great power the apostles gave their witness to the resurrection'.

In the Epistles various aspects of witnessing are set forth. Timothy is admonished, 'Do not be ashamed then of witnessing to our Lord' (II Tim. 1:8). Paul tells Timothy (I Tim. 6:13) that Christ witnessed a good witness before Pilate. He reminds Timothy that he, Timothy, had 'made a good confession before many witnesses'. Paul claims, in writing to the Corinthians, that 'the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you' (I Cor. 1:6), and in I Corinthians 2:1 he speaks of proclaiming 'the testimony of God' amongst the Corinthians. He has the witness of his own conscience that he has witnessed well (II Cor. 1:12; cf. Rom. 9:1). In II Thessalonians 1:10 he has an important statement, namely that in the Parousia of Christ many will be present 'because our testimony to you was believed'. Peter speaks of being a witness of the sufferings of Christ (I Pet. 5:1). John speaks of having seen and heard and felt the word of life, Christ himself, and says that he, with others, bears witness to Jesus (I John 1:1–3). He

has a remarkable passage in I John 5:6–12 in which he shows that the Spirit, the water (baptism of Christ), and the blood (the Atonement), all bear witness to Christ. He says that God's testimony is that He has borne witness to His Son. He adds that he who believes has the witness in himself, but an unbeliever has rejected the very witness which God has borne to His Son, and such rejection is utterly reprehensible.

In the Book of the Revelation the principle is undoubtedly prophetic. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit (essence, substance, subject) of prophecy. This is Jesus' own testimony to God. Believers 'hold' or 'have' the testimony of Jesus to God, and in so doing they testify to the testimony. In 1:5 and 3:14 Jesus is the faithful and true witness. In 19:11 he is called 'Faithful and True'. In 1:2 and 9 John speaks of bearing witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. In 6:9 we see the souls of the martyrs who had been slain for the word of God and their testimony to Jesus. They are mentioned again in 20:4 where it is said they were beheaded for the witness to Jesus. In 12:17 the dragon (the Devil) makes war 'on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus'. In 19:10 the angel speaks of those who have (or hold) the testimony of Jesus. 12:11 speaks of those who overcome the dragon by 'the word of their testimony', which is undoubtedly their testimony to the testimony of Jesus. In 11:1–13 we have the account of the two witnesses—whoever they may be—and in this passage the word 'prophet' is synonymous with 'witness'. In verse 3 they are called witnesses and they prophesy. In verse 7 they finish their testimony (witness). In verse 10 they are called prophets again. It is obvious then that 'to prophesy' and 'to give testimony' are the one thing. We must also notice that their testimony is in the 'spirit of Elijah'. That is, they can prevent rain from coming and can cause plagues to happen. Also their testimony is a torment to the hearers who resist them because of its dynamic nature and the hurt it brings to the opponents of God.

It remains only to see that John calls the Revelation 'God's prophecy' and also that the prophecy is really 'the testimony of Jesus'. The Book is called 'the prophecy' in 1:3, and 'the book of this prophecy' in 22:18–19. In 1:1–2 John calls the Book 'the revelation of Jesus Christ', and adds that he himself bore witness 'to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw'. This confirms the idea that the prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. In 1:9 John says he was on the island of Patmos 'on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'. He may mean that because he has always proclaimed the word of God and the testimony of Jesus he

was therefore exiled to Patmos, or he may mean God sent him there to hear the prophecy so that he could proclaim it. In 10:11 he is told by an angel, 'You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.' This will doubtless constitute 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'.

THE WORD, THE WITNESS, AND THE TRUTH

We have seen that whatever the mouthpiece of God is, it is in some sense prophetic. Whenever the voice of God speaks there is prophetic proclamation, whether it be by creation, providence, angels or prophets. In this age, we have been told, we will prophesy (Acts 2:17–18). In the Acts this proclamation was known as 'the word of God'. So many times the early church's main concentration is on proclaiming the word. We may call this 'apostolic proclamation' or 'evangelistic proclamation', in which case we could speak of apostles and evangelists making proclamation. That is, of course, correct. Yet the overall proclamation is the prophesying of Acts 2:17–18. Thus wherever and however the word is proclaimed, it is prophetic. Doubtless when Peter says, 'If any man speak, let him speak as uttering the oracles of God,' he means specifically that those given the gift of proclamation must be prophetic, for they are undoubtedly the mouthpieces of God. Generally he may mean that no such proclamation should be made by any person without it being the oracles of God.

We must also keep in mind that without the witness of the community *no person can know the truth*. Without the word of God *no truth is proclaimed*. Without the Spirit of God *no effective proclamation of the word, i.e. of truth, is made*. The truth is 'the testimony of Jesus' to God. Unless God gives this through His servants, there is no effective proclamation.

CONCLUSION: THE MEANING OF 'THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION'

We may now conclude that the statement 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' means:

- (a) the prophets have always spoken of Christ, i.e. testified to him, his coming, and his work (cf. I Pet. 1:10–12);

- (b) Christ is the substance of all prophetic action, i.e. the action which is the plan and will of God;
- (c) Christ's people are the prophetic community, testifying to Jesus as the Christ by their proclamation of God's word, and living consistently with that; and
- (d) the community of Christ is Christ himself working out the will and purpose of God through the acts of Christ, which are thus the acts of the church.

**Some Comments on Revelation 19:10,
'For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'**

Because of the importance of this term, the following comments by scholars should help us to understand the various aspects of what has been written above.

Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*

'Those who have the witness of Jesus' are those who carry on His witness in the world. (Macmillan, London, 1907, p. 249.)

Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit that inspires the prophets. It is the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus that the Spirit takes and puts into the mouth of the Christian prophet . . . It is the Gospel of the Cross that gives to the prophets the assurance of their mission and its ultimate success (cf. 10:7). To be a prophet in the streets of the great city is to follow in the steps of the master (11:3, 10). (Adam & Charles Black, London, p. 238.)

Wilcock, *I saw Heaven Opened*

Does it mean, 'He who has the spirit of prophecy will witness to Jesus', or does it mean, 'He who has the witness of Jesus will prophesy'? The more acceptable meaning will be the one which fits in better with the general sense of the passage; and the view taken here is that the second interpretation is more likely . . . John himself has 'the witness of Jesus'; therefore he too can prophesy, and has words to proclaim which are just as amazing [as the words of the angel]. (Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1975, p. 174.)

Eller, *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible* paraphrases as follows:

'I, the angel, like you, John, the prophet, have significance only in the testimony I bear to Jesus; so let's keep our attention on that *martyria Jesu* rather than upon the bearers of it!' (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1974, p. 173.)

Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*

. . . the . . . sentence must mean, 'The testimony given by Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy' . . . We should, therefore, interpret verse 10 as meaning that the testimony borne by Jesus is the concern or burden of the Spirit who inspires prophecy. (Oliphants, London, 1974, p. 276.)

Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*

The *testimony of Jesus* might mean 'the testimony which Jesus bore' (and is now committed to His servants), or it might mean 'the testimony borne to Jesus'. If we take the former meaning the whole will signify that the message of Jesus is the spirit, the heart of all prophecy . . . If we accept the latter meaning, then the significance is that the true prophecy always manifests itself in bearing witness to Jesus. The Old Testament prophets, New Testament prophets such as John, and the angels, all alike bear their witness to the Son of God.

Morris quotes Preston and Hanson (Torch Bible Commentaries, 1957), ad loc. 'Jesus and his revelation of God, which Paul calls "the mind of Christ", is the content of the prophet's message as it is of what John has been told to write in his book'. (Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1969, p. 228.)

Hailey, *Revelation—An Introduction and Commentary*

The testimony of Jesus is that truth to which He bore witness (John 18:37), which was the word given to Him from God (John 8:28; 12:47; 14:24; Rev. 1:1; et al.). This testimony borne by Him must be held faithfully by all disciples. (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 380.)

Simcox, *Cambridge Greek Testament*

. . . what is said to St. John as a prophet is in its measure true of all Christians. All in their measure are witnesses for Christ, and all are partakers of His Spirit; and therefore all are prophets in the same sense that they are all priests and kings. (Cambridge University Press, London, 1893, p. 177.)

Moffat, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* vol. v:

'for the testimony or witness of (i.e., borne by) Jesus is (i.e., constitutes) the spirit of prophecy'. This prose marginal comment specifically defines the brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus as possessors of prophetic inspiration. The testimony of Jesus is practically equivalent to Jesus testifying (22:20). It is the self-revelation of Jesus (according to Rev. 1:1, due ultimately to God) which moves the Christian prophets. He forms at once the impulse and subject of their utterances (cf. Ignat. *Rom.* viii.; *Eph.* vi.). The motives and materials for genuine prophecy consist in readiness to allow the spirit of Jesus to bring the truth of God before the mind and conscience (cf. 3:14, 22). (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1951, p. 465.)

Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*

What the 'testimony of Jesus' is, the speaker states: it is 'the spirit of prophecy', which may be explained: By holding firmly to the testimony which Jesus made and conveyed to us, thou and I and all the brethren hold the actual spirit of the prophecy, the inner content of the divine prophecy. 'The prophecy' is defined like 'the Word', 'the salvation.' Some restrict this to the prophecy contained in these visions of Revelation, but there is no need for such a restriction. Because we have and hold this testimony, which is no less than here stated, we worship no one but God while we are here on earth or, like this speaker, in heaven and on the throne. (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 546.)

Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*

In other words, 'it is the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus that the Spirit takes and puts into the mouth of the Christian prophet'. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, p. 157.)

Essay Three

The Lordship of Christ

INTRODUCTION: 'JESUS IS LORD!'

WHILST the Lordship of Christ in the Revelation is without doubt, it was an established doctrine and belief long before that Book was written. The message of the early church was, 'Jesus is Lord!' Whilst he was addressed as 'Lord!' in the Gospels, he was not thought of as the equivalent to the 'Yahweh' of the Old Testament. The closest to this form of address would be in Luke 5:8, when the distressed Peter cried, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,' and in John 20:28 when Thomas cried to the risen Christ, 'My Lord and my God!' It was on the day of Pentecost, and at subsequent preachings, that Peter told his audience, 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.' This teaching was reiterated by the apostolic band, and no less by Paul, who said, 'For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord . . .' He claimed that 'no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.' Salvation was only obtained by this confession, 'because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'.

The Lordship of Christ was not simply a credal article, but was the driving doctrine of the proclamation of the Gospel. The man Jesus who had been crucified had risen again from the dead, and thus showed himself to be stronger than death, i.e. Lord over death. This meant he was also Lord over sin. The Epistles delight to show him outfacing Satan and the principalities and powers—i.e. fallen celestial creatures opposing God—and being Lord over them all. His

was the name above all names, and so he was and is Lord over all history. In particular we have the famous passage of I Corinthians 15:24–28 where Jesus is depicted as defeating all enemies which still persist to the last in opposing God and His Messiah, even though they were defeated at the Cross, and their ultimate doom was sealed there. We have observed elsewhere that this Corinthian passage is really a précis or mini-plan of the Book of the Revelation. It declares the fact that the apostolic church believed Christ was, and is, Lord of all history. Colossians 1:15–17 and equivalent passages (e.g. I Cor. 8:5–6; Heb. 1:2–3) show that the Son who created all things (in John 1:1–3 he is called ‘the Word’) was always Lord, whilst other passages regarding his saving work show him to be Lord by the work and victory of the Cross and Resurrection.

Christ’s Lordship is part, also, of the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. In Ephesians 5:5 it is called ‘the kingdom of Christ and of God’ (cf. Rev. 11:15). In Philippians 2:9–11 the climax of history will be when ‘at [in] the name of Jesus every knee [shall] bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’. In I Corinthians 15:24–28 Jesus, having defeated the enemies, will turn and give the Kingdom to the Father. This doctrine of Christ’s Lordship was filled out long before the Book of the Revelation was written. As we will now see, this Book is not only confirmatory of the apostolic doctrine of the Lordship, but expands it and shows its outworking in history.

Before we see the Lordship of Christ, we should also realize that its roots are way back in the Old Testament, where Christ is outlined under the titles of Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, the Davidic King, the Righteous Branch, the Suffering Servant, and other such offices. Each of these is highly significant, and all being contained in his person means his Lordship is far-reaching, and no novelty suggested arbitrarily by his followers. Even so, we understand that Lordship more in the acts of submission and devotion than in the merely theological apprehension of it as a doctrine, although this too enhances our living comprehension of him who is ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’.

Summing up, we can say that the early Christians had a rich and wonderful view of Christ as their Lord, as the Lord of all events, of all history, and they knew time and eternity to be in his hands, so that there was no need for fear on their part—come what may to them. They saw every earthly and celestial power under his control and direction, and they knew history could not be a catastrophe, no matter what catastrophes happened within, for those catastrophes

were his judgements, and they all issued from the throne. The high victory of Christ would ultimately be seen in the end things, when evil would be overtly defeated, and the Kingdom appear in its glory, its majesty and its irreversible triumph. This was the hope in which they lived, and the gladiators' ring seemed a small thing, and success and prosperity simply matters that were 'by the way'.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

The Book of the Revelation is the revelation of God which He gave to Jesus Christ, who then showed it to John. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of all prophecy, and this prophecy is all about Christ, i.e. about what he is *doing*. This is more fully explained in the Essay 'The Testimony of Jesus in the Book of the Revelation'. It is clear, however, that all which happens in the prophecy happens under God and the Lamb. Whilst below we pick out certain passages which relate to Christ's Lordship, yet so do the things which are in between them. This is how we must view his overall Lordship. Christ's Lordship, then, is revealed in the following things:

Christ, as Son of God, is Lord

The reference is 2:18: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze'. For a full understanding of these things, see the Essay 'Sonship in the Revelation' (pp. 281–288). In 21:7 a son is one who is an overcomer, and being so, inherits all things. In 3:21 Jesus said, 'He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.' Jesus was the conqueror and so earned the throne on which he now sits. All of this is intelligible in the light of Psalm 2, where Messiah is seated on the throne as King, and is given the nations of the earth for his inheritance. All the nations belong to him, and this fits with Genesis 49:10, where the sceptre is not to depart from between the feet of Judah until he comes to whom it belongs, and to him will be the obedience of the nations. It is this 'obedience of faith' of the nations of which Paul speaks in Romans 1:5, 15:18, and 16:26, which was spoken of widely by the prophets, and which is the thrust of Matthew 28:18–20, where the apostles are to make disciples of the nations and baptize them into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The matter of conflict in the winning of the nations is seen from chapters 13 to 20 in general (see esp. 13:7–10; 16:12–16; 17:7–14; 19:15–21; 20:7–10), whilst 7:9–14 shows the outcome of the tribulation through which the saints have gone, i.e. those out of all peoples as the redeemed elect.

Passages Which Speak of Christ's Lordship

Passage One: 1:4–7

⁴ *John to the seven churches that are in Asia:*

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Here Christ is *the faithful witness*, meaning he uniquely tells the truth, practises the truth and bears witness to the truth, especially the truth of God (cf. John 18:37). In John's Gospel Jesus is borne witness to by many things (5:30–47), so that being utterly true he can witness to God. The term *the first-born of the dead* (cf. Col. 1:18) means that as the first he has triumphed over death, 'that in everything he might be pre-eminent', that is, he is the Lord of life, and so has that supremacy. Paul says that by this resurrection he has been 'declared to be the Son of God with power' (Rom. 1:4), and Peter said that as a result of his resurrection and ascension he was the one to pour forth the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32–36), as well as give repentance and remission of sins to Israel (Acts 5:31–32). *the ruler of kings on earth* If we link 'the first-born of the dead, the ruler of kings on earth' with Psalm 89:27, as the author seems to have intended us to do, then we have God saying of His King, 'And I will make him my first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth.' That is, he is King over all—the thought we have already seen in the apostolic message and writings.

Passage Two: 1:17–18

¹⁷ *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the*

last, ¹⁸ and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

John has heard the Lord God say that He is the Alpha and the Omega, and these words 'I am the first and the last' mean virtually the same. As we see in 22:13, he says clearly, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega.' It is a tremendous claim to make, for it means he is the Initiator and Completer of all things. '... the living one' is again a claim to deity, but 'the living God' always means the One Who gives life from His life, and the One Who acts. To be living is to be active. He then goes on to say, 'I died,' i.e. he was truly a man. The Epistles say he suffered the death of the sinner and the unjust (II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 2:24; 3:18). '... and behold I am alive for evermore' means that his humanity could not be held by the grave, and he is in command of Death (i.e. the event of dying), and Hades (the state or situation in which the dead find themselves). Ultimately—as Judge—he casts these things into the lake of fire, the Second Death.

All of these things are an enormous acknowledgement of Christ's Lordship. Nothing in this world or beyond it is outside his rule and control. They are also the basis on which the believer is able to proceed serenely in life, and in the present environment in which he finds himself, i.e. in the clash of the kingdoms of God and of Satan.*

Passage Three: 5:1–7

¹ And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals; ² and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, 'Weep not; lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth; ⁷ and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

This is one of the most significant passages in the entire prophecy, because it tells us that the mightiest monarchs and conquerors and makers of vast empires have not the slightest ability to take the seven-sealed book of history and open it. Those who are great in the

* For further study on this subject, see the author's *The Clash of the Kingdoms* SCPI. 1989.

eyes of men are pallid and insubstantial when it comes to directing the affairs of the world and the events of history. Succeeding chapters show the true might of Christ. John is told to behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah—the ‘Shiloh’ of Genesis 49:10 (cf. AV) who takes up the sceptre and reigns, and the Davidic Son-King of Isaiah 9:6–7, Psalm 2:6–7, Psalm 89:27f., and Ezekiel 34:23–24 (cf. John 10:11–18). When John looks to see a Lion he sees a Lamb, but one which has been slain, i.e. ‘a Lamb crucified’ and for that matter ‘crucified in weakness, but [who] lives by the power of God’ (II Cor. 13:4). His Lordship lies in his humility (Phil. 2:5–11), and his triumph in his submission to the Father’s will. Through the Cross and Resurrection this man Jesus has become the Lord of the universe.

Passage Four: 5:8–14

⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; ⁹ and they sang a new song, saying,

‘Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

¹⁰ and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth.’

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!’

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, ‘To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!’ ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshipped.

What we have here is the ascription of Lordship to him—the Crucified Lamb—and it tells of the magnificent work of the Cross, and the incredible fact that the Atonement has taken the elect from all nations and made them into a ‘kingdom and priests unto our God’, and given them an everlasting reigning upon the earth. It is no wonder that every creature in the universe, creatures celestial and terrestrial, fall down in adoration before their Redeemer-King.

Passage Five: 11:15–18

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the

kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.’ ¹⁶ *And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God,* ¹⁷ *saying, ‘We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.*
¹⁸ *The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.’*

All the events of the opening of the seven seals, and the blowing of the seven trumpets have been completed, and ‘loud voices in heaven’—which may have come from the four living creatures or even the throne itself with its great and mighty angels—declare the sovereignty of God and the Lamb. Whilst the adulation of the elders seems to be to God, it necessarily includes the Lamb, for his, too, is ‘the kingdom and the power and the glory’—as Lord.

Passage Six: 12:10–12

¹⁰ *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.* ¹¹ *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.* ¹² *Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!’*

Again we have an ascription to God and the Lamb of their victory over the red dragon. The Kingdom’s primacy is asserted in the defeat of the dragon and the establishment in the faith of the redeemed. Christ’s Lordship is effective for them against the onslaughts of the dragon, a fact which ‘the loud voice in heaven’ gloriously proclaims.

Passage Seven: 14:14–20

¹⁴ *Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.* ¹⁵ *And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.’* ¹⁶ *So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.* ¹⁷ *And another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too*

had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸ Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who had power over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.' ¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; ²⁰ and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.

Not all commentators agree that the one who reaps in verses 14–16 is necessarily the Lord, i.e. Christ the Lamb. They cannot believe that Christ could be commanded by an angel, but that is a superfluous comment, for the command comes primarily from God Himself. That he is on a white cloud (the Shekinah Glory), is like a son of man, and has a golden crown on his head, all point to a high office and dignitary. In this section the harvest seems to be a good one, the one Christ spoke about in Matthew 9:37–38 and John 4:35–38, namely a good and godly harvest. We know elsewhere that the Lord is the Judge (Acts 10:42; 17:31), and so this harvesting of the good is part of the ministry of his Lordship—another understanding which fills us with awe, admiration and delight.

The second section of this passage speaks of the judgement which the one with the sickle has to effect, i.e. the harvest of 'the grapes of wrath', for these grapes are trodden down in the wine press of the wrath of God, an evident reference to Isaiah 63:1–6, and in particular verses 3–6, when, in answer to the question 'Why is thy apparel red, and thy garments like his that treads in the wine press?', the treader in the wine press says:

I have trodden the wine press alone,
and from the peoples no one was with me;
I trod them in my anger
and trampled them in my wrath;
their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments,
and I have stained all my raiment.

The terrible wrath of God is not an easy matter to execute, and yet the Lord must do it. It is part of his responsibility as God's appointed Judge (Acts 10:42; 17:31; John 5:25–30). This certainly makes him Lord over all the earth if he is to judge all men, an act we see set out in 20:11–15, i.e. at the great white throne. In 6:16 we read of 'the wrath of the Lamb', and in the next verse of 'the great day of their wrath', showing that the Father and the Son both have great wrath. That wrath has been poured out in Christ, and it has been satisfied, so that man can now be at peace with God, with cre-

ation, and with himself. The Lordship of Christ, then, is revealed in so many ways.

Passage Eight: 19:11–21

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. 13 He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. 15 From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, 18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.' 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. 21 And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

This passage is indeed a powerful one when it comes to the matter of Christ's Lordship. Time and again in the prophecy of this Book the powers of evil incite man to defy God and seek to defeat Him, and they marshal their forces to do so—as here. The figure of the Lamb is indeed fearsome and awesome as he is seated upon the white horse, his eyes a flame of fire, whilst there are many diadems upon his head. The inscription 'King of kings and Lord of lords' leaves no doubt as to who it is, and the sharp sword going out of his mouth by which he smites the nations, and the fact that he treads the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty, all lend weight to the sovereignty of this one. The consequent destruction of the forces pitted against him, and the casting of the beast and the dragon—by him—into the lake of fire, completes the great picture of his Lordship. When we remember that men had worshipped the beast—as they had also once worshipped the dragon—and had cried, 'Who is

like the beast, and who can fight against it?', then we see the might of this holy Lord who destroys the mighty empire built up by the beast and the false prophet.

Passage Nine: 20:1–6

¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

Christ reigns in the millennium with those who are saints and martyrs. This is not only an evidence of his Lordship, but the very out-working of it. The nature of the millennium is discussed in our Essay on the theme. Whatever the millennium may be—and there are various ideas on its nature—one thing is clear: that Satan cannot take control of the millennial age. The first resurrection gives birth to conquerors who preside over history. The implications of the Lordship of Christ in this era or situation are dizzying in their grandeur.

Passage Ten: 21:22—22:5

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; ²⁶ they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

¹ Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the

middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
³ *There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him;*
⁴ *they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.*
⁵ *And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.*

The Lordship of Christ is here shown as the Lamb being one with God the Father, being on the same throne, directing all the traffic and life of the Holy City, and being the very light and temple of it—concepts which are as startling as they are stunning. It is here we come to the climax of history, which is at the same time the very norm and flow of ‘the age to come’, i.e. eternity. If we have had difficulty before the great white throne in knowing who is the Judge, so here we may have similar problems in understanding whose face we shall see and whose name shall be upon our foreheads. Since the Lamb has been appointed Judge, then he is one with the Father, and so here he is one—on this throne from which pours the river of life, and who is the source of the tree of life. Such is the Lordship that we tremble at it, and yet our trembling is not only from holy fear. It is also from holy joy.

Passage Eleven: 22:12–21

¹² *Behold, I am coming soon, and bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done.* ¹³ *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.’*

¹⁴ *Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.*

¹⁵ *Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practises falsehood.*

¹⁶ *‘I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.’*

¹⁷ *The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.*

¹⁸ *I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book,* ¹⁹ *and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

²⁰ *He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

²¹ *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.*

The close of the prophecy is particularly moving. Jesus pictures himself as Rewarder and Judge. He quietly says he is God: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.' This would be breath-taking if we had not already seen this fact in so many ways through the prophecy. He also points out that he has sent his angel to bring this prophecy to the churches—the prophecy which is the very testimony of Jesus himself. In the same breath he speaks of himself as 'the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star,' and these, too, are high claims. Indeed the vast material throughout the prophecy is so rich that it is beyond our conscious comprehension. We wonder how any reader can contemplate it in such calmness that he is not deeply moved, and drawn to fall at the feet of his King and Master and cry, 'My Lord and my God!'

The Spirit and the Bride are desirous of this one coming to his people, and of the scenes seen here becoming the reality now, as they will when the now is the ultimate moment, the perfect time, i.e. the true *kairos* of God and the Lamb. His Lordship, then, is well established in our eyes and in our hearts, and we cry with strong and high conviction, 'Jesus is Lord!'

At this point we are ready to receive the benediction of the prophecy, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.'

Essay Four

The Lord Who is the Spirit

THE LORD WHO IS THE SPIRIT

THE phrase, ‘the Lord who is the Spirit’ comes from II Corinthians 3:18. One verse previously Paul said, ‘Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.’ Scholars have long argued over the passage. It is clear elsewhere in Scripture that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord, so that it is rather strange to hear him being described as ‘the Lord who is the Spirit’. There can be no doubt about the text, for it states the fact plainly and states it twice. It should not seem strange to us to think of him as ‘the Lord who is the Spirit’. It is just that he is generally ‘the Spirit of’, and to find him standing alone—as it were—is somewhat unusual. Even so, here is also ‘the Spirit of the Lord’. Yet why should it be strange, for the church has affirmed for almost two millenniums:

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.*

The Lord the Spirit, the Giver of Life

We are wonderfully moved with awe to contemplate the procession of the Spirit from the Father Who is the Lord God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and from the Son by whom, and unto whom, all things were made. We are enthralled that this Lordly

* From The Nicene Creed.

procession reveals the One by whom all life emerges and subsists, this holy *Ruach* (breath, wind) of the Old Testament, this holy *Pneuma* (breath, wind) of the New Testament. All created and re-created life proceeds from him:

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light (Gen. 1:2-3).

When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed;
when thou takest away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.

When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created;
and thou renewest the face of the ground (Ps. 104:29-30).

The spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life (Job 33:4).

Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath [*ruach*], prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host (Ezek. 37:9-10).

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
and all their host by the breath [*ruach*] of his mouth (Ps. 33:6).

But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit (Rom. 7:6).

God . . . has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life (II Cor. 3:6).

Not only has he always been the Lord of life; he was Lord in Israel. He was ever with them, as Haggai reminded the returned exiles of that nation: 'My Spirit abides among you; fear not' (2:5). Isaiah informs Israel that God had 'put in the midst of them his holy Spirit' (63:11), 'But they rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit' (63:10) with dire consequences. In Ephesians 4:30 Paul warns the saints of the new covenant, 'do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption'.

The Spirit of Christ the Son and the Spirit of the Father

It is not surprising, then, that we find him as the great Lord of life in the Book of the Revelation. In the Gospels Jesus is 'the man of the

Spirit', whilst in Acts and onwards the Holy Spirit is 'the Spirit of the Man'. In Mark 1:12 the Spirit *drives* Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. Matthew 12:28 and Acts 10:38 tell us Christ could do nothing without the Spirit, whilst he could do all things through him. That the risen Christ pours out the Spirit in Acts (2:33) tells us that he—Christ—is Lord. The Holy Spirit is thus 'the Spirit of Christ' (Rom. 8:9–11), 'the Spirit of his Son' (Gal. 4:6), 'the Spirit of Jesus' (Acts 16:7), and 'the Lord who is the Spirit' (II Cor. 3:18). He is also 'the Spirit of God' (cf. I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 3:3), and 'the Spirit of your Father' (Matt. 10:20), i.e. the Spirit by whom we cry 'Abba! Father!' (Rom. 8:14–16).

The Spirit of Judgement

The Spirit is also the Lord of Judgement. Just as the Father is the great Judge of all men, so is Christ, to whom judgement has been committed (John 5:22–29; Acts 10:42; 17:31; cf. II Cor. 5:10). In Isaiah 4:4 God says He will cleanse Israel 'by a spirit [*ruach*] of judgement and by a spirit [*ruach*] of burning.' In some translations marginal readings have 'Spirit'. Certainly the Holy Spirit is spoken of as fire, as in Matthew 3:11–12: 'he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire . . . the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire'. In Revelation 4:5 the sevenfold Spirit is depicted as constituting 'seven torches of fire'.

In Isaiah 11 the 'shoot from the stump of Jesse' will be anointed with the sevenfold Spirit, and as a consequence he will do many significant things, one of which is:

. . . he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath [*ruach*] of his lips he shall slay the wicked (v. 4).

In the New Testament the sword of Christ's mouth is the word of judgement (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15). In Revelation 19:15 'the sword' and 'the rod' are linked together. In Ephesians 6:17 Paul says 'the sword of the Spirit . . . is the word of God'. This was 'the breath of his mouth' by which God created in Psalm 33:6, and as the word was associated with the Spirit in Genesis 1:2, so in creation (Ps. 33:6, 9) and also in judgement in Isaiah 11:4 and Revelation 19:15, 21. In II Thessalonians 2:8 Paul says of the judgement of the 'man of sin', 'And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath [*pneuma*] of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming.'

Knowing all these things, awed by them, and fearful lest we

grieve the Spirit who is the Lord, we turn as those better equipped to see 'the Lord the Spirit' in the Book of the Revelation.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

The Spirit is the Spirit of Prophecy

The Spirit is the one who brings prophecy to the churches (Rev. 1:10–11). 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (19:10) can mean that all that has ever been at the heart of prophecy is the person and work of Jesus—a fact seen in I Peter 1:10–12 and II Peter 1:20–21. It can also mean 'The testimony of Jesus is the *Spirit* of prophecy', i.e. that all that Christ does is his testimony—i.e. to God, to the truth—and in all this the Spirit works. Both elements are really the one. Thus, in Revelation 1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:11, 17; and 20:4 we have mention of the people of God who bear this testimony by reason of the Spirit, for they are the people of prophecy and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prophecy. Once we see he is the Spirit of prophecy, then we see he is the one by whom this whole prophecy of the Revelation comes to man, as it is he who enables men and women to hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

This is not a new idea or phenomenon, for Acts 1:8 was spoken by Jesus to his disciples: 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and *you shall be my witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and *to the end of the earth*.' If we look at the word *witness* throughout Acts, then we will see that all *witness* comes by the Spirit. This accords with Luke 24:48–49 and John 20:22–23 (cf. John 15:26–27), for the Spirit leads us into the truth (John 16:12–15). *He* is the witness, because he is the truth (I John 5:7). If we look at the phrase *to the end of the earth* then we see it is from Psalm 2:6–8, which speaks of Christ inheriting the nations *to the ends of the earth*.

Since John saw all the prophecy when he was 'in the Spirit' (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), then we need to be in the Spirit to understand it, and to obey it. This is always a source of wonderment to us, for when we read the Revelation with our own human thinking, then the Book seems unintelligible and even bizarre, but when the Spirit gives comprehension then the truth comes richly to us, and we are inspired with awe and joy at its amazing revelation. Such is the work of the Spirit of prophecy in our hearts.

The Spirit is the Sevenfold Spirit

In 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6 we read of ‘the seven spirits of God’. Some think this term means ‘seven celestial spirits of God’, i.e. ‘seven angelic spirits’, but the contexts would appear to rate them higher in the order of things than even the highest of angels. In 1:4–5 the benediction of grace and peace comes from God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the seven spirits which are ‘before his throne’, so that this appears to be a Trinitarian benediction. In 4:5 they are called ‘the seven spirits of God’, whilst in 5:6 they are the eyes and horns of the Lamb—so intimately are they one with him. When we remember that in Isaiah 11:2 there are seven elements or qualities of the Spirit, then we may speak of ‘the sevenfold Spirit’:

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Of course, in the Book of the Revelation the groups of sevens are numerous. Seven means fullness and completion, and so it is right to think of ‘the seven spirits’ as a unity, as One Spirit, as the sevenfold Spirit of God. In 1:4–5 he dispenses grace and peace. In 4:5 he is the Spirit of light and fire. In 5:6 he is intimately one with the Lamb—the Spirit of discernment (seven eyes: the completeness of discernment), and authority (seven horns: the completeness of rulership and strength), and his ministry is universal—‘sent out into all the earth’, i.e. *to the ends of the earth* i.e. he brings the whole of Christ to all the world, as in Acts 1:8 and related Scriptures.

The Spirit Speaks to the Church and the Churches

We have seen the whole prophecy of the Book is to the whole church, i.e. the sevenfold church (1:11; 22:6, 16), and even when it is Christ writing his seven letters to the seven churches—the complete message to the seven churches—yet it is the Spirit writing to each one of those churches, for ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ is a statement at the conclusion of each letter. The whole prophecy, then, is the Spirit speaking to the church down through the present age to the coming age itself. His speaking is full and complete, and sufficient for the church in all its vicissitudes and triumphs. If other exhortations and promises are necessary, then they too are given. In Revelation 14:13 we have another word of the Spirit in the statement:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!'

This statement is made in the context of the punishment of the beast and his cohorts and those who follow him and bear his mark. From this point onwards, those who die in the Lord—especially because they have not denied him and have invoked the wrath of the beast upon themselves—will rest from the conflict of the battle, and their works of faith will be with them in the glory and presence of God. They will receive their great reward: 'Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master'; 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'; 'In thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore'.

Another command of the Spirit is found in 22:17:

The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.

There are certain difficulties in this verse, for it seems that the Spirit and the Bride address Christ, calling him to come. Those who hear this request are to join theirs with it, in which case the second part of the verse is urging those who are not in Christ to hasten and drink of him, of the water of life. Whilst this is a possible interpretation, it seems that the 'Come' is addressed to the world. The prophecy having been given, the Spirit now makes a call to all to partake of Christ, and receive life from him. The '*Maranatha*'—'Lord come!'—is finally given by John the Seer, in verse 20. This being the case, the Spirit and the Bride are utterly one in their invitation-command, 'Come.' This shows the oneness and total union of the Spirit and the church.

The Spirit the Water of Life

The prophecy having been given in full, what now matters—as we have seen above—is the evangelistic invitation to believe in Christ and receive the gift of eternal life. This is typically Johannine thinking. In John 4:13–14 Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, 'Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' In John 6:35 Jesus says, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.'

Then in 7:37–38 he proclaims, ‘If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.”’ John adds, ‘Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.’

We saw previously that the Spirit is the Spirit of life—the *ruach* (Hebrew) and the *pneuma* (Greek) who gives all creatures their created life, their power to live. More deeply, we saw that the Spirit gives man the life of God, i.e. life from God. It is clear from Ephesians 3:16–17 that Christ dwells in the heart by the Spirit of Christ so that his life—eternal life—is ours by the Spirit. Jesus in John 7:37–38 spoke of that life as a river flowing out of us, and insisted it was the life and power of the Spirit. When, then, in Revelation 7:15–17 the Lamb as the Shepherd guides his beloved sheep to ‘springs of living water’, we are surely to believe this is the life-giving Spirit. Likewise in Revelation 22:1, where the river of the water of life flows freely from the throne, we are surely to believe this, too, is the Holy Spirit. It was from the throne that Christ poured out the Spirit at Pentecost and in the whole age that followed it (Acts 2:33; cf. 2:17–18). The Spirit brought the life of Christ to the church, the Bride. The final ‘Come,’ of the Spirit and the Bride is couched in terms of Isaiah 55:1 and consequent verses of promise:

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
 and he who has no money,
 come, buy and eat!
 Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.

This wonderful grace-appeal speaks of the joy and the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel, of Christ, and of his Spirit. The fullness of God was for Israel, but here we see it is for all His people. This is indeed as awesome as it is glorious.

CONCLUSION TO “THE LORD WHO IS THE SPIRIT”

Doubtless we have been limited in this survey of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, as the materials for it are found in the Book of the Revelation. To some degree we have had to go outside the Book, since the understanding of the Spirit needs to be seen from Genesis to this last prophecy. He is certainly, “The Lord the giver of

life', and 'The Lord the Spirit'. How majestic is his work in creation, in the lives of the patriarchs, in the covenant with Israel, in the mighty prophecies which open up vistas beyond men's natural imaginations. The glories of God as Covenant Father-King, the riches of Christ in his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and session are all revealed by the Spirit. The saga of the church as it is born at Pentecost and then faces the battle of Satan and his evil powers—through beast's, false prophet's and Babylon's onslaughts—is a remarkable story, none of which could be apart from the Spirit.

So we see his wonderful Lordship in history, over life and death, one with the Father, one with the Son, and one with the Bride whom he leads into glorious holiness and eternal union with the Godhead. His great commands in history—as also his revelation of that history—cause us to tremble with both awe and joy, and to fall down before him as the light and fire before the throne. All these things cause us to fear lest we grieve and vex him. What we desire most of all is to be continually filled with the Spirit, to be always aglow with the Spirit, and to walk in the Spirit and drink of him eternally.

Essay Five

The People and the Plan of God

INTRODUCTION

THE people of God and the plan of God throughout history are two great related themes throughout the Scriptures. Beginning with Adam, and going through the first eleven chapters of Genesis, we see God's preoccupation with all the nations, and especially with the descendants of Noah—Shem, Japheth and Ham. Out of Shem comes the Semites, and from them Abraham, to whom in chapter 12 onwards the covenantal promises are given. Some would say that from Seth came the 'sons of God', and from Cain a race containing 'the daughters of men', and that the joining of these two lines brought the high corruption and violence that was on the earth prior to the Flood. After the Flood it seemed that the Hamites were as the ungodly line, for they formed the Canaanite peoples, who were idolaters, whilst the Semites—especially Abraham's descendants—were the true people of God, the covenant-people. I John 3:10–11 speaks of the children of God and the children of the devil, and in John 8:44 Jesus confirmed this idea. The new covenant-people under Christ's leadership form the 'new' people of God, having both continuity and discontinuity with 'old' Israel. It is these we meet in the Book of the Revelation.

God has His plan for history, and this is virtually His plan for His people. In Revelation 10:1–7 the fact of this plan is discussed. The mighty angel swears by God that there shall be no more delay 'but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh

angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.' What, then, is this plan? The following is the comment we have given under 10:7 in the text-commentary:

Comment: The *mystery* here is a strong theme in Paul. In Ephesians 1:9 'the *mystery of his will* according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ' is 'a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth'. This will happen since God 'accomplishes all things according to the *counsel of his will* Will and *counsel* here are much the same as in Isaiah 46:10, 'My *counsel* shall stand, and I will accomplish all my *purpose*'. Isaiah 48:3 says, 'The former things I declared of old, they went forth from my mouth and I made them known; then suddenly I did them and they came to pass'. In Ephesians 3 Paul speaks of 'the *mystery of Christ*' which is that in him 'the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.' Paul then says he is to 'make all men see what is the *plan of the mystery* hidden for ages in God who created all things,' i.e. that what this very creation is concerned with is *the mystery*, which is that 'through the church the *manifold wisdom of God* might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,' for 'This was according to the *eternal purpose* which he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord.' In Colossians 1:26–27 Paul talks of the *mystery* having been hidden for ages, but now made manifest, and says that the glory of this *mystery* is 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' *The mystery*, then, is the unification of all creation in Christ (Eph. 1:9–11; cf. Col. 1:19–22) and the bringing of God's people to their inheritance of all things (Eph. 3:6), that is, to their full glorification—along with the whole creation (Col. 1:27; I Cor. 2:6–10; Rom. 8:18–25).

We conclude that God has planned all things from before time (cf. Eph. 1:3–14; I Cor. 2:6–10), and it is this plan in Revelation 10:7 that has been 'announced to his servants the prophets', and is to be fulfilled in *the days* of the trumpet call of the seventh angel. Some commentators point out that this must have been only a subsidiary plan of the major or total plan of God, since the seventh trumpet was sounded and the plan of God was not finally fulfilled. The trouble with this reasoning is that it involves a chronological time factor in an apocalyptic event, whereas we cannot be sure that the seals are followed by the trumpets in time, and then the trumpets by the bowls in time. The prophets prophesied of this total plan, i.e. 'the mystery of his will' which is fulfilled by Christ (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; cf. II Cor. 1:20). This is 'the mystery of God' that the mighty angel is speaking about.

It is clear from Ephesians 1:4–14 that the plan of God is to glorify His children, that they in turn will glorify Him (cf. Isa. 43:6–7). He glorifies them by making them to be holy and blameless before Himself, by predestinating them to be His sons, by redeeming them through the grace of forgiveness, by unifying all things in Christ their Head, and bringing them to ultimate glorification. If we combine this with Romans 8:28–30, then we see that 'all things' work to

conform the children of God to the full image of His Son, i.e. they grow up into the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ, to full manhood, and so are wholly in the image of His Son.

THE OUTWORKING OF THE PLAN

Once we have the picture of (i) the plan of God, and (ii) the people of God, and so (iii) the working out of the plan in regard to the people of God, then we can pursue that part of it which we see in the Book of the Revelation. We need, of course, to distinguish between the plan of the Book itself (see the Essay, 'The Relevance and Value of the Book of the Revelation For Life and Pastoral Ministry', pp. 348–360), and the plan of God in all history. In the Revelation the action of the Book commences in chapter 5, where the Slain Lamb begins the movement of history by opening the seven seals, which in turn lead on to the action of the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls of wrath. In 12:1–6 we have an event which encompasses the birth and ascension of Christ, after which the conflict with God and His people gets under way through the cloning of the beast and the false prophet by the red dragon. This conflict proceeds virtually to the end when the enemies of God are defeated and the people of God triumph. We will now trace the actions and destiny of the people of God.

(a) In 1:4, 11, chapters 2 and 3, and 22:16 we have material addressed to *the people of the seven churches*—the ones to whom the prophecy of the Revelation is sent. These readers must encompass all saints down through the church-age, if we assume that the seven churches stand for the sevenfold church of this age. Elsewhere in the prophecy they are called 'saints', 'servants', 'the children of the woman' and 'the brethren'. They are the true people of God—those who hold 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' and who refuse the mark of the beast, and have the mark or seal of God.

(b) In 5:13 we have mention of '*every creature in heaven*' participating in worship of the Lamb, and this must include the elect people of God. Even so, they are not mentioned specifically as such.

(c) In 6:9–11 we have *the martyrs* and they are depicted as being under the throne, i.e. in the most intimate and secure place of heaven. They share in the throne, but are not as yet on the throne

(3:21) or reigning (20:4; cf. 5:10; 22:5). They are those who have been slain 'for the word of God and the witness they had borne'. In fact they are true conquerors. They have been 'faithful unto death' (cf. 2:10) and will receive 'the crown of life'. They are a rich part of the entire numberless multitude. Although here they are seemingly separated from the rest, this does not mean they are actually separated, as visions have a way of particularizing and emphasizing certain important elements, and, having done that, allowing them to resume their part and place in the whole order of things.

There can be no question that these are especially picked out, and their case thoroughly attended to. At this point of the vision the martyrs are asking when they will be avenged. They have no doubt they will be. They are not asking for revenge. Their question is, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, when will you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' They are told to be patient, for others are yet to join them before the final avengement is made. Some readers think it is almost immediate and see 6:12–17 to be that avengement, but this is not likely. It is better to see this in 18:24—19:3:

'And in her [Babylon] was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.'

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying,

'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for his judgements are true and just;
he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication,
and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.'

Once more they cried,

'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.'

Whether this avengement takes place climactically in one event or in many, and whether it precedes or follows the appearance of the great multitude in chapter 7, does not really matter. Here we are simply seeing that in one sense the martyrs are a group apart—so magnificent is their martyrdom—although that would not necessarily be how they would see it. In another sense it is no greater than the life and witness of those who 'patiently endure unto the end'—i.e. the saints in general. For both the promise is true: 'their works shall follow them' (14:13; cf. 13:10b; 15:2).

(d) In 7:1–8 and 14:1–5 we see *the 144,000*, who are called 'the servants of our God' in 7:3, and the 'redeemed from mankind as first

fruits for God and the Lamb' in 14:4. Some readers see these as two different groups of 144,000—though that idea seems difficult to believe since both have the seal of God on them (7:3; 14:1). Generally there are two views of the 144,000—assuming they are the one group—namely that (i) the group represents Israel since it is the multiple of the square of 12 (Israel's number)—i.e. 12 x 12—with the cube of 10 (the number of perfection)—1,000—making 144,000; or (ii) it is the church 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16), since the church is the new Israel (cf. James 1:1; I Pet. 1:1; 2:9–10—the transfer of Exod. 19:5–6 to the church; Eph. 1:12–14; I Tim. 3:15 (cf. Num. 12:7; Heb. 3:1–6; Gal. 3:29; Phil. 3:3; Titus 2:14).

The 144,000 certainly seem to be a special group, and some readers have come to the conclusion that they are of better quality than the generality of the saints, as though they are more holy, more successful and more of note. Since 14:4 says they are 'first fruits for God and the Lamb' we must assume the 'general harvest' would be of no less quality.

(e) In 7:9–17 (cf. 5:9–10; 19:1, 6) we have '*the great multitude*' which cannot be numbered. These are standing before the throne of God, and they are clothed in white robes (representing victory, purity, and new life), and praising God for salvation:

'Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!'

Then they are falling down on their faces worshipping God and giving great praise and honour to Him. They are said to be the ones who have gone through much tribulation, and have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, and at the same time are being wonderfully protected and cared for. Some see the 144,000 as identical with the numberless crowd, though others see them—the 144,000—only as first fruits of the entire assembly of the elect. Doubtless this visionary glimpse of the great multitude is a view of things to come—things as they will be at the completion of history, though not all the completion of history itself. It would seem that its place at this point in the prophecy given to the Seer is to indicate that the multitude will not have been overcome by the events which will transpire, but will have overcome the opposition which had confronted them in the form of dragon, beasts and Babylon. Such a visionary sight will encourage the readers to face the dragon, beast, false prophet and Babylon with courage, assurance and equanimity.

Comment: This would seem to be a good point to pause and view those of the people of God who are 'conquerors' or 'overcomers'. Often when we are shown

one group or another we are likely to think of them almost as elitist groups, e.g. the martyrs, the 144,000, and the conquerors. This cannot be the case. Technically speaking, martyrs are 'witnesses'. So, too, are the 144,000, as also the ones called conquerors. Certainly all are urged to be overcomers. In chapters 2 and 3 the members of the churches are called upon to be conquerors (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Those who are overcomers and conquerors are seen in 12:10–17, where they conquered the red dragon himself. They did this 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony' (i.e. they 'keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus', 12:17), 'for they loved not their lives even unto death' (12:11). The 144,000 of 7:1–8 and of 14:1–5 are most evidently conquerors. In 15:2–4 those who have 'conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name' are certainly overcomers.

What, then, of the people of God in chapter 13:7–10 who are conquered, who are taken into captivity? Are they, then, not conquerors? They are certainly conquerors, but they conquer by not using the sword, which is a carnal or worldly weapon (cf. II Cor. 10:3–4). They use the spiritual weapon of accepting persecution, and 14:12–13 tells us that those who thus die are blessed, and 'their deeds follow them'. The 'great multitude' of 7:9–17 must also be conquerors, since they have been through 'great tribulation' and have emerged successfully, having 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'. In Romans 8:35–39 Paul speaks of the saints being subject to many cruel things, saying, 'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered,' and then claims, 'No, *in* all these things we are more than conquerors *through* him who loved us,' meaning that we are not conquerors *over* these elements or *in spite of* them but *in* them, and this is *in* or *through* Christ, and not by one's own efforts (cf. Phil. 4:13). Thus to be physically defeated by the beast and brought into captivity is not to fail, but to succeed—to conquer. Conquering lies *in* the captivity. As for avengement for death or suffering, that must be left to God, and this leaving it to Him is a form or mode of conquering.

The final scene of conquering is seen in 19:14–21, where 'the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses'. We cannot be sure as to whether the saints are in this army, but it does not matter. Worldly or fleshly weapons are not used in this battle.

We conclude that all the saints are intended to be conquerors, that being so is not a thing out of the ordinary, and that conquest must not be thought of in terms of material and physical success or victory. Certainly the people of God do not achieve political victories. They are wonderfully rewarded for conquering, as chapters 2 and 3 tell us, and of course there is the statement of 21:7 that the one who conquers will have God as his Father, and he will be a son to God, who will cause him to inherit 'all things', these being no less than the new heavens and the new earth.

(f) In 12:10–17 we see *the children of the woman* whom we have mentioned in our 'comment' above, namely those who overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and who loved not their lives even unto death. They are the ones against whom the red dragon wars through the beast and the false prophet,

and who are also persecuted by the 'mother of harlots'—great Babylon herself. They are seen refusing the beast in 13:5–10, and in 14:9–13, for the principle of 'the blood of the Lamb', holding 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' and not loving 'their lives even unto death' is the way in which they conquer the beast, the false prophet, and Babylon. They are then seen in 15:1–4, where they are clearly said to have 'conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name', and so 'sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb'. It is at this point of action that the action of the seven plagues—i.e. bowls of wrath—is introduced.

(g) In 19:1–10 we have two events in which '*a great multitude* is vocal in praise to God. If—as we have suggested above under '(e)', involving 'a great multitude which no man could number'—the multitude of 7:9–17 and the multitudes mentioned here are the one, then we are seeing the same people of God in three events. In 7:9–17 they are praising God *for salvation* in 19:1–5 for *His judgement on Babylon* for her persecution and killing of the saints and His vindication of the martyrs; and in 19:6–9 for the glorious coming of *the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb*. All these are events of triumph, further showing that the people of God are not defeated by the evil powers pitted against them, and that their reward is to be participators in the triumph of history—the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. We need to note that the 'great multitude' of 19:1 and 19:6 most probably includes all the celestial creatures as well as the redeemed people of God. Again, the 'armies of heaven' of 19:14 probably include *both the celestial and human hosts*.

(h) In 21:1–4, 9–27, and 22:1–5 (cf. 19:7–8) we see *the Holy City, the Bride of the Lamb*. This, indeed, is the ultimate gathering of God's people, the fulfilment of passages such as Genesis 49:10, 'to him shall be the obedience [gathering] of the peoples', and Isaiah 43:6–7, 'bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made'. These are the ones whom the New Testament calls 'an habitation of God', 'the temple of God', 'the household of God', 'the Israel of God', 'the sons of God', 'the children of God', and 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people'. They are now one as the Holy City, having been formed as such in heaven, but now descending to the earth to be the sanctuary of God, the place of His eternal dwelling.

This City is open always to the inflow of the nations—those promised to God’s Messiah-Son-King in Psalm 2, and whom the evil powers sought to seduce to Satan but failed so to do—and the kings of the nations bring their glory into this holy habitation. Yes, this is the true people of God which He has initiated, protected, fostered, redeemed, sanctified and finally glorified. These are the ones now called ‘a kingdom of priests’, who are lords over all the creation—having inherited from the Father—and who are priests both to that creation and to God and the Lamb.

CONCLUSION TO ‘THE PEOPLE AND THE PLAN OF GOD’

We now repeat our statement that whilst the theme of the plan and people of God does not begin in the prophecy of the Revelation—for it began with the primal couple—yet it is in the prophecy of the Revelation that everything becomes crystal clear, and we see the nature and purpose of the plan of God, and the nature and the purpose of His people. It is all so breath-taking that we wonder how it is possible for any to understand them apart from the Book of the Revelation. Knowing this great truth puts us into the right perspective of history and imparts to us both the sense and knowledge of our true identity and destiny, and so much so that we easily become one with the great multitude in heaven, glorifying God and the Lamb.

Glory to His Name!

Essay Six

The True Worship and the Worshippers

CREATION AT WORSHIP

GOD told Job that when He created, then:

. . . the morning stars sang together,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

That is, all things worshipped for the wonder of creation, and—for that matter—they are still praising Him. Psalm 19:1–4 speaks of endless praise:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

Psalm 103:22 commands:

Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion;

and Psalm 145:10 responds:

All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O Lord,
and all thy saints shall bless thee!

There are many similar words of praise. Romans 8:18–25 tells of the

frustration of creation as it has been subjected to futility by the curse man brought upon it, and how it longs to be freed from the bondage of corruption, to obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. Praise, then, comes naturally to the creation.

Sadly enough, we read in Romans 1:19–25 of man’s refusal to worship God even though he knew Him and His eternal power and deity. The two primary elements that constitute true worship are honouring (glorifying) God and giving Him thanks. This man refused to do, and instead turned to the making of idols and worshipping them: ‘[He] exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator’.

Worship is simply giving due worth to the Deity, a person, or an object of the creation. Because God has wholly created man, man is expected to worship Him wholly. Man worships continually—without cessation—but he worships what he wishes to worship. Paul said that no idol has real existence (I Cor. 8:4–5), and elsewhere he says that to have fellowship with idols is to have fellowship with demons, so that idolatry is not a neutral matter. Satan has high ambitions and wishes to have the worship of all things. ‘The son of perdition’—a sort of incarnated evil—wishes to be worshipped as God in the temple, giving out to all that he is God (II Thess. 2:4). The Devil sought Christ’s worship—worship by the Son of God!—and would have given him all the kingdoms of the world for such adoration.*

The Book of the Revelation can be called *the* Book of worship, and the Book of the battle for man’s worship. This is better understood when we realize throughout the Scriptures that *worship* and *service* are virtually identical. The primary words in both Testaments can be translated equally as worship and service, for to worship is to serve, and to serve is to worship.

REVELATION AND TRUE WORSHIP

One thing is quite clear, namely that on earth, whilst human beings are human beings, the utter purity of worship cannot fully obtain. There will always be some deficiency in such worship, however rich it may be. In heaven this purity will be utterly pure. It is a great privilege then to study the passages which speak of worship in

* In regard to the whole theme of worship, see my book *The Way and Wonder of Worship*, NCPi. 1990. p. 325ff.

heaven. There we can see true worship, although of course we will need to be 'in the Spirit' to properly observe and understand such worship-service.

The Four Living Creatures and Their Worship

We can look at our commentary on the text to discover the nature of the four living creatures. H. B. Swete in his commentary has described them as 'the noblest, strongest, wisest and swiftest' of creation, in that order. In 4:8 we are told,

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing,
 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
 who was, and is and is to come!'

From that point onwards in the Book these creatures are shown to take the initiative in worship (4:9; 5:8–10, 11–14; 7:11), i.e. they lead the elders, the angels and others. This is appropriate since they represent all creation and its creatures, whether celestial or terrestrial. In Isaiah 6 the heavenly creatures are described as seraphim or 'burners'. They too have six wings, and there it is said that they use two to cover their faces from the glory of God, two to cover their feet—normally understood as the place of defilement—and two for the purposes of flying, i.e. worshipping and serving. Doubtless the six wings of the living creatures signify the same.

We are told they never cease to sing night and day, although 4:9 seems to indicate there were breaks in the singing, for it says, 'And *whenever* the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks', the *whenever* suggesting they sing from time to time.

We see, also, that the living creatures serve, not only by worship, but by giving commands in relation to the opening of the first four seals (6:1, 3, 5, 7). It is fairly certain that when a great multitude break out into singing that they have been led into it by the living creatures. It is also possible that often when a loud voice is heard from the throne, it is that of one or more of the living creatures. They are said to be 'full of eyes in front and behind', and to be 'full of eyes all round and within'. We surmise that *eyes* mean special discernment and knowledge, and this would be of God, man, and the various events God initiates.

Worship, then, as led by the four living creatures, would be of the highest order possible, and would be wrought with great dignity and awe. What it is that causes them to worship we will discuss under a

later heading in this essay, namely, 'The Causes, Grounds, and Bases of Worship'.

The Twenty-Four Elders

Again, we have discussed these elders in our commentary on the text (4:4), but briefly they are the elders of creation. Some think they are glorified human beings who have been given this high office, others are sure they are celestial creatures. In Isaiah 24:23 we read:

Then the moon will be confounded,
and the sun ashamed;
for the Lord of hosts will reign
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
and before his elders he will manifest his glory.

Perhaps the elders here are part of His heavenly council spoken of in Jeremiah 23:18–22 (cf. Job 15:8; Ps. 82:1; 89:7; Rom. 11:34), but they certainly play a large part in the worship of God. Their white garments in 4:4 are a sign of purity and life, whilst their golden crowns represent royalty and authority. In 4:9–11 they subject this authority to God on the throne as they worship Him. They do this by casting down their crowns. Here they join with the living creatures in giving worship, and likewise in 5:8–15, whilst in 7:11 they join with the four living creatures who have been inspired to worship by the worship of the great multitude. In 11:16–18 the living creatures are not mentioned, but the elders fall down on their faces from their thrones and worship God. They are last seen in 19:1–9, where they follow the 'great multitude in heaven', and again falling down they praise God.

They—like the four living creatures—render service. It has been observed that the number twenty-four—as also the number 144,000—is a multiple of twelve. In chapter 21 the twelves are numerous—twelve gates with twelve angels, the gates having the names of the twelve tribes inscribed, and then twelve foundations on which the twelve names of the apostles are inscribed. It has been thought that Israel can be considered as twelve tribes and the Gentile nations as a parallel twelve—especially as the twelve apostles represent the church—i.e. twenty-four in all, of which the twenty-four elders are representatives. This could easily be.

The service rendered is the gathering of the prayers of the saints in the golden bowls (5:8), the prayers being offered up by 'another angel' (8:3–5). One of the elders addresses John (5:5), and encour-

ages him in regard to the seven-sealed book, and again speaks to him about the multitude which no one can number (7:13–17), explaining who they are, and what wonderful things are happening to them. In 11:16–18 they worship God with a song that shows their wisdom in knowing the events of God's plan. In 19:4 they concur warmly with the defeat of Babylon.

The main purpose of the elders is to rule—as is indicated by their garments and golden crowns. What or whom they rule is not made clear, and does not much affect our investigations here. We are simply content to see they are high up in the leadership of worship, and the singing of songs that are new but which fit each phase of God's history for the world.

The Elect—the Redeemed of God

We have already seen—within the commentary on the text, and the Essay, 'The People and the Plan of God'—that it is difficult to define every case singly as 'the redeemed of God', when the 144,000 are mentioned, the 'great multitude which no man could number', the martyrs, the ones who 'conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name', and others who join in universal worship (such as in 5:13; 19:1, 6). Whether actually in groups or not, they are all the elect of God, those whose names are written in the book of life of the Lamb (13:8; 17:8; 20:15). We see their worship in 5:13—of the Lamb that was slain—and in 7:9–15, having made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, so serving him day and night in the temple. In 15:2–4, having overcome the beast, they are found singing the Song of Moses and the new Song of the Lamb—worship indeed! In 19:1–4 they are caught up in great praise to God for His vindication of the martyrs and His destruction of Babylon. They also praise God for the coming marriage of the Bride and the Lamb.

What is as remarkable as the worship of the redeemed is their refusal to bow down to the beast or worship its image—often under pain of death. The seal with which they are both defined as the people of God and protected from the beast is the seal of the Father and the Lamb—i.e. the names of the Father and the Son written on their foreheads (7:3; 14:1; 22:4). Worship of God as Father is a large theme in the New Testament (Luke 11:2; John 4:20–22; Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–7). Their hatred of the beast and its image, and their love of the Father and the Son, are what inspire such rich worship. They are spoken of as serving God 'day and night within his

temple'. To cap all, they are constituted 'a kingdom of priests' for the new age, and all come together in the bond of serving worship.

All Creation

We have seen in the Old Testament that all creation praises God. This fact is repeated in Revelation 5:11–14 and 19:1, 6. The creatures we have not specifically mentioned are the angels, and they join the elders, the living creatures and the redeemed on many occasions. It is quite clear that they serve God. Worship, as we have observed, is the very heart and life of the creation, and so the battle wages back and forth with men and angels and other creatures for the purity of worship or capitulation to the Prince of evil, who passionately covets such esteem and adoration. It is only when we look at the causes and grounds and bases of worship that we more fully understand this important matter.

THE CAUSES, GROUNDS, AND BASES OF WORSHIP

Millenniums before the Book of the Revelation was written the creatures we have mentioned had long worshipped God. Worship is the primary matter of our universe, and it is understandable why Satan covets the highest of all honours. The Revelation does not go into details about the nature of worship, or the conflicts that arise on account of it. It does not matter. Worship of God is what gives man stature. Worship of idols, self, and that which is evil, is what degrades man. It is a fascinating and edifying exercise to ponder the worship passages in the Revelation. We will now quote them, context them, and look at the elements which caused the worshippers to give expression to their praise and adoration. Although the prophecy of Revelation does not always say that the Lamb is one with God—the Father—yet it is often assumed, for in 2:26–27 he is one reigning with God; in 3:21 he can speak of God's throne as 'my throne'; in 6:16 the Lamb is coupled with God on the throne; in 7:10 and 7:17 this is the case, whilst in 12:5 the child is caught up to the throne of God from which he will rule the nations. In 20:4 the martyrs reign with Christ, which must mean he is seated on the throne. In 22:1 and 3 the throne is called 'the throne of God and of the Lamb'. It is God and the Lamb who are worshipped. Worship is given to God, and honour should be given to all creatures, consonant with their standing in the creation.

The passages, then, are as follows:

Revelation 4:8

‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is and is to come!’

The four living creatures worship God in heaven for His holiness and His eternity. God’s holiness is dynamic, being part of His perfection and being the element which destroys evil. His eternity is not measured in terms of time. It means God has ever been active in what we call the past, present and the future. All being and action is determined by His eternity, hence the immense joy and worship it inspires.

Revelation 4:11

‘Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for thou didst create all things,
and by thy will they existed and were created.’

This majestic hymn was uttered by the twenty-four elders, who were stimulated by the four living creatures. God is worshipped for being Lord and God, and for His action of creation and His providence in upholding what He has created—all of which is connected with His will.

Revelation 5:9–10, 12, 13

‘Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God
from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on earth’ (vv. 9–10).

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing this in heaven to the Lamb. This is the first time the Lamb is worshipped, thus making him equal with God. The basis of the worship is his sacrifice which ransoms all men—no matter what their race or culture—and not only redeems them but lifts them to the highest man can know, namely being made ‘a kingdom and priests to [their] God’. So powerful is this song that firstly all the angels ascribe great worship:

‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!’ (v. 12);

and secondly all creation then joins in with the wonderful ascription:

‘To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!’ (v. 13).

Revelation 7:9–17

In 7:9–17 we have the great multitude of the redeemed out of every nation, tribe, tongue and peoples, who are in festive state—in white robes, with palm branches in their hands—and who are filled with joy and adoration, and their cry of worship is:

‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!’ (v. 10).

On hearing this thunderous applause and thanksgiving, the living creatures, the elders, and all angels around the throne fall before God on their faces for the wonder of the great and vast salvation, and they cry:

‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.’ (v. 12).

Revelation 11:17–18

‘We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those that fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.’

This worship is given by the twenty-four elders, and is an evidence that the elders are linked with the action of the nations, and the course of history. First there is the name of God—Lord God Almighty—an Old Testament term translated as *Pantokrator* in the Greek, and then His eternity is named—His active initiation and participation in all things. Then follows their gratitude that God has moved to assert His sovereignty in the affairs of men and creation. Psalm 2 is then brought into focus, i.e. the rebellion of the nations against God who subjugates them by judgement, rewarding the faithful by ‘destroying the destroyers of the earth’. All this is equal to saying that it is wonderful that God should judge, and of course His judgements are righteous. God’s deliberate action in history is what matters.

Revelation 15:3–4

‘Great and wonderful are thy deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are thy ways,
 O King of the ages!
 Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord?
 For thou alone art holy.
 All nations shall come and worship thee,
 for thy judgements have been revealed.'

The living God is the God of action. God does deeds. They are great and they are wonderful, as against deeds done by any other. Rich echoes of such passages as Exodus 15:11 and Psalm 99:1–3 are present:

'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?
 Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,
 terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?' (Exod. 15:11).

The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble!
 He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
 The Lord is great in Zion;
 he is exalted over all the peoples.
 Let them praise thy great and terrible name!
 Holy is he! (Ps. 99:1–3).

Revelation 16:5–6, 7

It is at this point that the matter of judgements enters. The judgements that have been revealed are those of the seven seals, and the seven trumpets, as indeed the seven bowls of wrath are about to be revealed. Considering human criticism of God that He either does not judge quickly and savagely enough, or He judges without mercy, the saints who have triumphed over the beast insist that universal worship will be God's, especially when all see how just are His judgements. It is on this theme that the angel of water then cries:

'Just art thou in these thy judgements,
 thou who art and wast, O Holy One.
 For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
 and thou hast given them blood to drink.
 It is their due!' (vv. 5–6).

And then the altar—under which are the martyrs—cries,

'Yea, Lord God the Almighty,
 true and just are thy judgements!' (v. 7).

Again the rightness and justice of the Divine judgement are praised. No accusation can be brought against God, for it is men who have killed the saints and the prophets. God's judgement is to

make them drink the blood they shed, an Hebraic way of saying He will bring retributive judgement.

Revelation 19:1-5, 6-8

The final two acts of worship are recorded in 19:1-5 and 19:6-8:

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying,

‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for his judgements are true and just;
he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication,
and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’

Once more they cried,

‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.’

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who is seated on the throne, saying, ‘Amen. Hallelujah!’ And from the throne came a voice crying,

‘Praise our God, all you his servants,
you who fear him, small and great’ (vv.1-5).

This is again worship because of the righteous judgement of God, this time upon the ancient system of Babylon—the ‘mother of harlots’—which has corrupted the whole earth. Judgement has been coming a long time, but God acts only when the moment is wholly ripe. The avengement of the martyrs is one of God’s great acts.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying,

‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure’—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (vv. 6-8).

Now the worship is filled with great joy. The wonderful climax to history is to take place, the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the uniting of humanity to the Lamb, and the oneness of the human race with the God Who created it! In both these acts of worship it is ‘the great multitude’ which pours forth its praise. If, then, we add up all the elements which cause worship, we see why there is such thanksgiving and praise. It is a useful exercise to see what constitutes the heart of our own embodied worship. Ancient liturgies generally embrace and repeat the things we have seen in this prophecy, but much of it is found to be missing in contemporary worship. More, then, the pity!

THE PLACE AND MODES OF WORSHIP

We must have discovered by now that the place of worship is always in heaven—often called ‘Mount Zion’, and latterly ‘the holy city’. Also it is always before the throne, for here there is the most glorious action, the heavenly business. This is seen in 4:2ff.; 5:6ff.; 7:9ff.; 11:16ff.; 14:1ff.; 15:2ff.; 19:4ff. The throne is most dynamic since it is the place of authority, the place of commands, the place where God’s glory is shown, the place of the Father and the Son—God and the Lamb. From it the seals are broken, the judgements sent forth. Before it all worship takes place, and from it flows the river of life with the tree of life on either side of it, with leaves for the healing of the nations, and with fruits to sustain the nations. This seems sometimes to be one with worship in the temple (cf. 7:15; 11:16–19), though by 21:22 there is no temple, for then God and the Lamb are the temple, so much have the saints become ‘partakers of the divine nature’ whilst in no way becoming divine. This is surely the fulfilment of our Lord’s wonderful prayer of John 17:20–26, i.e. the saints are one in God, as He is in them, as intimate as the Father being in the Son and the Son in the Father!

The general mode of worship is prostration before God and the Lamb and the throne. Far from being an act which humiliates, it is an act which is humble, and which brings great joy to the worshippers. It is fascinating to know that the worship is in utter purity, the garments of white being worn by the elders (4:4), the martyrs (6:11), the redeemed multitude (7:9, 13) and the 144,000 (14:4). Worship expresses itself in saying, crying out, singing and music (4:8, 10; 5:9, 12; 7:10, 12; 11:15; 15:3; 16:5; 19:1, 4, 6). In 19:1 it is said to be ‘the loud voice of a great multitude’, and then in 19:6 ‘like the sound of mighty thunderpeals’.

Essay Seven

History in the Revelation

THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'HISTORY'

THE *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that the word 'history' comes from the Greek word *historia*

learning or knowing by inquiry, narrative, history, f. *histor* knowing, learned, wise man, judge . . . 2. *spec* A written narrative constituting a continuous methodical record, in order of time, of important or public events, esp. those connected with a particular country, people, individual, etc.

The word 'history' generally conjures up the idea of a stream of happenings, usually of the cause-and-effect kind. For some it is associated with one or another of the theories regarding history, e.g. its linear nature, its cyclic-repetitive nature, or even—as in Marxism—its nature of dialectical materialism, i.e. that there is a determinism built into history which will inevitably and ultimately result in a kingdom of equality for all, in which peace and plenty will obtain.

There can be no doubt that all human beings have some sense and theory of history, albeit a partly unconscious one. Ideas of history are necessarily linked with theology, anthropology and cosmology. Western thinking has been greatly coloured and conditioned by the Judaic-Christian world-view as found in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures. This, generally speaking, commences with creation, and moves in linear fashion towards the eschatological 'new creation' and involves an *apocalypse* i.e. a time of the unveiling of God's purposes by His visitation of judgements on evil powers and evil people, whilst effecting the regeneration and perfection of all creation, including His elect people. It has been observed that Marxism could only have derived from Judaic-Christian thinking since it has a gospel of history which is evangelical and—ultimately—apocalyptic in nature. The dualism inherent in Eastern religions and ancient Greek thought is absent from Marxism.

HISTORY AND APOCALYPSIS

It has been noted that there are 404 verses in the Book of the Revelation and 518 references in them from the Old Testament. This means that Old Testament ideas are strongly present, and doubtless—at first sight—the same world-view and time-view appear to be present. It would seem best, then, to interpret it in linear fashion, i.e. to treat all things that happen as sequential, one happening following another—and so on. For many this is the only authentic way of reading and interpreting the Book. However, there are other ways of approaching the Book, especially when we keep in mind that it is an apocalypse, i.e. an unveiling of the mind, purpose and action of God, written in language that is symbolic rather than literalistic. There can be no such literal thing as a bottomless pit, and to have a literal key to such a pit is equally impossible. This is not, however, to say that there is no *idea* of a bottomless pit, and that a *metaphorical* pit does not exist. There are such literal things as thrones, but a throne of the nature described as the throne of God does not literally exist, since God cannot be contained in one localized situation, even though He can be represented as occupying a throne-like locale. Of course, there is the throne of God—an eternal reality symbolized by a localized throne. We have mentioned that problems arise when readers agree that a certain thing is symbolic and then link it with something literal, mixing the symbolic figure with a literal one. This goes for time-figures as well as for space-figures. Peter says that with God a thousand years is but as a day, and a day as a thousand years. If we literalize this statement, then we must choose which it is. The millennium cannot be posited as a day *and* a thousand years or even as a thousand years *or* a day. Having cleared this sort of ground—we *hope!*—we may proceed to ideas of history. Insistence on literalism and upon the narrative being fully in the linear or sequential mode of action will pose insuperable problems. *Apocalypsis* does not easily fit into these modes.

SOME VIEWS OF HISTORY AND THE APOCALYPSE

The famous preacher, theologian and revivalist, Jonathan Edwards, once wrote *The History of Redemption*. Whilst there appeared to be nothing radical or novel in the writing of such, it was an experiment

* Associated Publishers and Authors Inc.. Grand Rapids. Mich.. n.d.

that has been rarely repeated. The idea of a history of redemption was well known to Israel. Its writers, narrative-tellers, psalmists and songsters delighted in what we now call 'salvation history' (*heilsgeschichte*). Christians see this redemptive history extended in and by the coming of Christ. Some would say that salvation history is all history—i.e. there is nothing of history that is not included in it. Others think there is room for seeing history generally as apart from salvation history, whilst salvation is the special action of God—in the midst of all history—which saves the elect. Yet others see salvation history as supra-history, i.e. a history or action of God which is above the history of the world as man knows it. It operates in a supra-mundane sphere—whatever that may be.

Whatever views one may have of salvation history, it does appear that such a history would be incomplete without the prophetic revelation of the Book of Revelation and the prophetic information it gives. Even so, it requires a thoughtful study of the Book to see its historical emphasis and the prophetic mode in which it is written.

GOD, ETERNITY, AND TIME

All Things Happen From God, Under His Sovereignty

God—according to the Old Testament, and this Book—is 'the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end', and in similar words is the One 'who was and is and is to come'. It is interesting that such statements are placed in the first and last chapters, and elsewhere only when such sayings will be immediately significant. These terms really mean He is the living God, i.e. the God Who acts, and He has always been acting, is acting and always will act. This means that everything stems from Him in creation, providence and salvation. God, of course, is not caught within time, although He works in time for the good of His creation.

The Powers of Evil Are Defeated Conclusively

By contrast with God's dynamic eternity, in 17:8 the beast is limited within time:

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition; and the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

This must mean that the beast was working, but is not now work-

ing, and this will cause its human followers to marvel because it had working power, at present does not have it, but at some future time it will have power. The remainder of the passage (17:9–14) goes on to explain that the seven heads of the beast represent seven kings, five of whom have fallen, the sixth is at present working, and the seventh, when it comes, will be temporary. The beast belongs to the seven kings—i.e. is at one with them—but the beast is as an eighth (a most temporary time of power) and then goes to perdition. Its ten horns represent ten kings, but their power is for one hour—i.e. quite temporary—and their minds are ruled by the beast who, with them, will make war on the Lamb and be defeated. These things show us the transitory nature of the beast and the kings who are one with him. Under the sovereignty of God they are permitted to do certain things, but they have no hope of success. They cannot make history. Only He ‘who was and is and is to come’ can do this.

Again, the statement in 12:12 to the earth that ‘the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!’ shows the transitory nature of the power and operation of Satan, and so of all that he plans to do in that ‘short time’, i.e. the cloning of the two beasts and the co-operation with Babylon. The locking up of the Devil in the bottomless pit for a set period also tells us that the times and seasons are in the Father’s hand, and He controls them. In 2:10 Jesus assures the church they will suffer for a set period of time—‘for ten days you will have tribulation’—i.e. no more than that, even if no less. In 6:9–11 the martyrs under the altar ask how long it will be before their blood is avenged, and they are told to ‘rest a little longer’ and that time will come. All of this is in accord with Ecclesiastes 3:1, ‘For everything there is a season [*chronos*] and a time [*kairos*] for every matter under heaven’. We conclude that nothing happens other than what God has planned and ordered. Our problem is that we look at second causes and their effects, and think that the results directly come from these second causes, which we think are first ones. God is the First Cause, and so the others follow.

TIME AND THE EVENTS IN THE REVELATION

The One Victory of the Lamb, or the Battles and the Victories?

In the Essay ‘The Relevance and Value of the Book of Revelation For Life and Pastoral Ministry’, we have given a section—‘The

Purposive Structure of the Book’—which is really a précis of the prophecy. Does the narrative of the Book proceed in a sequential order, i.e. are chapters 5–22 the way history happens and moves towards the ultimate climax? Many things make us say, ‘No!’ For example, we see the Lamb in heaven in chapter 5, and he opens the seals and causes the seven trumpets to be blown before chapter 12. In that chapter the child—who is eventually the Lamb—is caught up to the throne out of the reach of the designing red dragon, who, having been cast out of heaven, pursues first the woman and then her children, who are undoubtedly the church. The time of the child is surely the time of the events of the life, death and resurrection of Christ—events which happened well before the opening of the seven-sealed book.

Again, in 16:12–16 we see the three foul spirits go abroad to assemble the ‘kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty . . . And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon’. In 17:12–14 the ten kings and the beast ‘will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful’. Again, no battle is described as having happened. In 19:11–21 a battle is described, but it is not called ‘Armageddon’. It is initiated by the Lamb who is on the offensive, whose great weapon is the sharp sword that goes out of his mouth. Finally, in 20:7–10 Satan, being released from the pit, deceives the nations—i.e. collectively called ‘Gog and Magog’—and they gather and surround ‘the camp of the saints and the beloved city’. Fire comes down from heaven and destroys the enemies. There is no great battle. The question is ‘Are these four occasions mentioned really the one?’ If not, then what are they? We are not really told, but certainly only the last occasion is conclusive for all history, although the account in chapter 19 is conclusive in itself, the beast and the false prophet having been judged and cast into the lake of fire.

The One Act of Establishing Authority and Giving Judgements, or Various Steps of the Same?

In regard to the matter of reigning, Jesus tells the churches at Thyatira and Laodicea that he has already done this. In 11:15 ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ’, and the twenty-four elders then praise God that He has

already taken His great power and has commenced to reign. In 12:10 a loud voice in heaven cries, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been cast down.' This would seem to be a repetition of the same victory. In 15:1–4 the defeat of the beast takes place and the triumph of the saints is proclaimed, and with the song of Moses and the Lamb the judgements have been revealed. Even so, in 16:4–8 the judgements are again revealed, whilst in 16:17–21 Babylon is made to 'drain the cup of the fury of his wrath', even though this does not happen until 18:1—19:3. In 20:1–6 Christ reigns with the martyrs for the period of a thousand years, after which the judgements are brought to bear upon the dead. Doubtless the reigning with God and the Lamb begins to take place in chapters 21 and 22, but the various transitions to victory and reigning must either be seeing the same victory from different angles, or the victories are steps to the ultimate and permanent reigning.

We have seen enough in this section to tell us that the narrative of the Book does not happen in a wholly sequential manner, that the battle which is known as 'Armageddon' is either shown to us from at least four angles, or there are different battles of the same magnitude; and the time of victory and reigning is also seen from various vantage points, or there is more than one event. These things being so, we are forced to see that the Book does not follow in chronological order.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE APOCALYPTIC NATURE OF HISTORY

If we remember that whilst apocalyptic language is telling of reality and the truth, yet cannot be taken literalistically, then we shall not be misled or confused by trying the literal approach. This can mean, for example, that the three sets of judgements can all be parallel rather than happening in linear fashion, i.e. the trumpets follow after the seals, and the bowls after the trumpets. They may fan out from the same centre simultaneously and be more intense as they range from seals to bowls. Jerome had a principle of prophecy, namely that as a stone is thrown into the centre of a pool and causes waves to ripple outwards, so in every age the same principle can be repeated, i.e. there is antichrist operating in every age, as also 'the man of sin' seeking to take pre-eminence, wherever—and whoever—he is. Thus

Nero can be the beast in one age, and Napoleon or Hitler or Stalin in another age. This does not mean that there will not be an actual person or creature operating as the antichrist or the man of sin at the eschatological conclusion. Indeed it may be that all who act as antichrist and the man of sin may simply add up to them corporately. Likewise, judgements may be spaced out through the centuries and not just happen in one cataclysmic disaster at one point in history. There may be many judgements, and of varying intensity, as the seals, trumpets and bowls seem to indicate, but they may all add up to a judgement upon the corporate race and creatures whose names are not in the book of life.

In regard to what we have just observed, it is even conceivable that the millennium is not a time separated from other times, but may constitute the same time as the time in which the believers are being persecuted and defeated. If we look at the forty-two months in 11:2 when the nations (Gentiles) will trample over the Holy City, we find it is exactly the same time—one thousand two hundred and sixty days—during which the two witnesses will victoriously witness. It is also the same period of time in which the woman will be nourished in the wilderness (12:6, 14)—a time, and times, and half a time (three and a half years, or forty-two months, or one thousand two hundred and sixty days). This is exactly the time the beast is allowed to exercise authority, i.e. for forty-two months (13:5). Our conclusion will look something like this:

In the period that the woman is being protected and nourished in the wilderness and the two witnesses are victorious in their witness, so for the same length of period the nations will be trampling down the Holy City, and the beast will be triumphant. If we add to this the fact that those who refuse the beast and are brought into prison are the same ones who have 'conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name', then simultaneously they are defeated and victorious; and whilst this seems to be a contradiction, it is not. Only by being defeated can they win, for Christ 'was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God', since only when believers are weak are they truly strong (II Cor. 12:1–10).^{*} In regard to the millennium possibly being co-extensive with the time of defeat there need be no problem. For Christians, Satan was—and is—bound: they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb (12:11), as did also the 'young men' who were the recipients of John's First Letter (2:13–

^{*} For further study of this theme, see the author's *Christ the Conquering King* (CPI, 1985).

14), for greater was he that was in them than he that was in the world (4:4), and the victory that overcame the world was faith (5:4). It has to be accepted that whilst Christ and the true witnesses (martyrs) reigned during the millennium, so, nevertheless, Gog and Magog were still present. Not until it was God's time was Satan allowed to influence them, i.e. not until he was liberated from the bondage of the pit. If we read II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, we see that the angels who fell with Satan and 'did not keep their own position' were (are) kept in chains until judgement, yet in another way these angels seem to constitute the principalities and powers which are Satan's allies and oppose both God and man (cf. Eph. 1:19–21; 6:12; Col. 2:15; Rom. 8:36–39, esp. v. 38), and in that sense are active even when within chains. This shows us that two systems can run concurrently and be successful. Only the battle at the end—e.g. when Satan is given full liberty to do his work—can the outcome determine who is strongest and victorious.

If, further, we accept the fact that there is no literal dragon with horns and heads, nor a beast of that sort, and no second beast which is a false prophet, then we also accept the fact that there is an actual dragon and beast and false prophet, even though these do not have a form which is literally as apocalyptic describes it. The form is there, but it is even more terrible than the shape of its symbolic representation. Personal evil powers—Satan and his hosts—have always persecuted the faithful of God (cf. Heb. 11:32–40), always brought numbers to martyrdom, and so their period or situation of operations cannot be limited to a future space of time, or even a past space of time. When we realize the rise and fall of nations has always been linked with 'the powers that be', i.e. evil principalities and good principalities in conflict (cf. Dan. chs 10–11; John 1:51; Eph. 6:12; cf. 3:10–11), then we realize the believers can be at peace—a millennium—and yet be in conflict when Gog and Magog are still planning their rebellion against God, awaiting only *God permitting such a conflict*

THE VALUE OF APOCALYPTIC HISTORY

The Book of the Revelation is of immense value. It shows us that we can recognize both the triumph and judgements of God—in principle—as also the activity and evil of Satan, along with his representations in the red dragon, the beast and the false prophet, and Babylon. In this sense the historicist is right in seeing the fulfilment

of these principles in actual kingdoms, actual persons and actual incidents, whilst the futurist is right in not seeing things fulfilled only in the past. All who proclaim a millennium are correct, since a millennium is stated, but the situation of that millennium may not be confined within any given system—much as its adherents are powerfully convinced there can only be one form, i.e. theirs. The very nature of apocalyptic writing should make us wary of interpreting it finally as one thing and confining it to that.

Apocalyptic history, then, does not allow us to literalize it or apply it to a limited range of events and situations. It gives us a great view of the mighty plan of God, the powerful Lordship of the Lamb, the place of the celestial throne in all history, and the great personal powers which move at the command of God. It also makes us aware of the stratagems and devices of Satan, and helps us to live triumphantly—even when seemingly defeated by the beast and Babylon—because the Lamb lives in us, and God is above all, and through all, and in all, and we are the people of God.

Essay Eight

The Temple and the Witness

INTRODUCTION: THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE HIS TEMPLE

IT is clear from the Scriptures that the Tabernacle has (i) always represented God's presence among His people, and (ii) signified the very people of God themselves. Exodus 19:6 (cf. I Pet. 2:9–10) makes Israel the priest-nation amongst all the nations of the earth, thus meaning it is God's witness to the nations. Likewise 'the Israel of God'—the church, the new people of God—is His priest-people amongst all the peoples of the earth (I Pet. 2:9–10).

Practically, now, the church is the (new) temple of God (cf. I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; I Pet. 2:4–10). The word *naos* (shrine) is used in the Epistles and the Revelation, and not *hieron* (the whole temple building). Christ is the New Temple (cf. John 2:19–21). The new people are the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, the Bride of Christ, and as the church is the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25–33), so she is the Temple of God. See Ezekiel 37:26–28 (cf. chs 40–44; Rev. 11:1–2; 21:1ff.). See also Isaiah 56:6ff., with 2:1–4 and 66:1–2.

THE TEMPLE IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

The following are points relating to the nature, function, and action of the temple or the church in the Revelation:

- (a) The true believer will be part of the temple (3:12). See I Peter 2:4–5, Ephesians 2:21–22, and I Corinthians 3:16 for the fact that believers are part of the temple.

- (b) The true believers worship in the temple (7:15).
- (c) The temple is measured, i.e. measuring is either for destruction (Ezek. 40:3ff.) or preservation. 7:3 shows the church sealed for protection, and now measured for protection.
- (d) In 11:1–3 the temple appears *on earth*. In 11:19 it is *in heaven*. Also it is in heaven in 14:15; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1, 17.
- (e) The altar in heaven is mentioned in 6:9; 8:3, 5; 9:13; 14:18; and 16:7. Possibly 6:9 and 16:7 refer to the sacrificial altar, and the other references to the altar of incense. In fact they may both be represented by the one altar. See Ezekiel 47:1 and Revelation 22:1, where the 'altar' and the 'throne' seem to be one. The altar is before God (9:13). In 14:15 an angel comes from out of the temple, and in 14:18 from out of the altar. In 16:7 the altar cries (cf. 6:9–10).
- (f) In 11:19 'the ark of his covenant' is present. It is not hidden from view by the curtain, showing grace is available to all, and God is present to His people. In this regard see Jeremiah 3:15ff.

THE WITNESS AND THE TEMPLE

The people of God are God's witnesses. In the Old Testament (Exod. 19:5–6) Israel was the priest-nation. In the New Testament (I Pet. 2:9–10) this has passed over to the 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16). How the people of God behave *in* and *as* the temple of God—i.e. worship God and serve Him—is part of their witness. Yet, also, how they live, and how they operate in the face of the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and Babylon is the full witness. That we can see partly in our Essay 'The People and the Plan of God', and even more in 'The Lords of Evil'.

If we look at Revelation 1:2, 9; 6:9f.; 12:10–11, 17; and 19:10, we will see that the true witness to God, to Christ, and to the truth lies in keeping 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus', 'the word of God and the testimony they had borne', 'keeping the commandments of God and having [holding] the testimony of Jesus'. This means they hear the word of God and do it, and in this sense they are Christ in history, working out his plan according to the will of God.

Being the temple of God *on earth* (I Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:12–22; I Pet. 2:4–10; Heb. 13:15–16; Isa. 56:6–8) means that their daily

worship witnesses to God and the Lamb who are seated on the throne. No less when they worship Him in His temple *in heaven* (7:15) are they testifying to His grace which has brought them there, and which has made them the people of God. To have the names (marks) of the Father and the Lamb on their foreheads (14:1; 22:4) is to proclaim that they have refused the mark of the beast, and are prepared for the suffering that is entailed in this confession. Thus martyrdom is part of the witness. See 2:13, 'Antipas my witness, my faithful one'; 6:9, 'slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne'; and 1:5, 'Jesus Christ the faithful witness', with 3:14, 'the Amen, the faithful and true witness'. Note also 19:10, 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'. *Witnessis* one of the key words to the Revelation.

Essay Nine

Sonship in the Revelation

THE SON AND THE SONS IN THE PROPHECY

THE following two verses are the only ones in the Book of the Revelation which explicitly speak of sonship:

The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze (2:18).

He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son (21:7).

The first is of the Sonship of Christ, i.e. he being Son of the Father, and the second one is the sonship of a believing person under God. Whilst the term 'Son of God' appears only once in this Book, the term 'Father' appears five times, four of these referring to God as the Father of Christ, and one to God being 'Father'. The mentions are as follows:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father . . . (1:5–6).

. . . and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father (2:27).

He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels (3:5).

He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne (3:21).

He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son (21:7).

These verses are sufficient to show us that there is a Sonship of God and a sonship of Man and the Fatherhood of God to Christ, as

also the Fatherhood of God to him who is a conqueror. Before examining the Fatherhood, the Sonship, and the sonship, we should look at the matter of Fatherhood, Sonship (Christ being Son of the Father) and sonship (the elect being sons of God the Father) in other parts of Scripture—especially in the New Testament. That will help us when we return to examine these things in the Book of the Revelation.

SONSHIP AND THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES

The command to pray 'Our Father' (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2) tells us that God's Fatherhood is not metaphorical, i.e. merely figurative. At least those in covenant-relationship with God are His sons. It was so in Israel (cf. Deut. 14:1; 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:19; Mal. 1:6; 2:10) and more so in the New Testament, i.e. under the New Covenant. The four Gospels speak in one way or another of Christ being the Son of God. Matthew's Gospel speaks much of God's Fatherhood in the Sermon on the Mount (chs 5–7), where 'Father' is the most used word. Matthew 11:25 and 23:9 are important verses. John's Gospel tells us that the Son came to show us the Father. This is seen in such passages as 1:14, 18; 5:17–47; 6:32–65; 8:12–58; 10:20–38; 12:28; 14:1—17:26; 20:17, where the relationship of Christ as Son to the Father is most powerful.

There is little mention of God as Father in the Acts, but see 17:28 for a truly significant verse. What Acts may lack the Epistles make up in good measure, Christ being the Son of the Father. Both Paul and John primarily emphasize God's Fatherhood of Christ, but also speak of the elect as the children of God or the sons of God. Being regenerated, i.e. born anew, is mostly linked with being children of God, whilst adoption or 'sonship' is linked with being sons of God.

The great truth of adoption or sonship of God is one which never ceases to amaze readers and scholars alike, i.e. readers and scholars of the New Testament. High and powerful as the doctrines of forgiveness and purification from the guilt and pollution of sin are, it seems that adoption is yet higher. So high does it seem to some nervous readers that they think they must have shot past the real meaning. They cannot believe that believing men and women can be classed as sons of God, except in some metaphorical way. We grant that even to be sons of God after a metaphorical way is dynamic enough, but the Scriptures go beyond figurative sonship to actual sonship. Romans 8:29 says, 'For those whom he foreknew he also predestined

to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren'. Whilst 'first-born' refers to Christ's pre-eminence amongst the brethren (Col. 1:15, 18; Rev. 1:5; Ps. 89:27), yet they *are* brethren, and Hebrews 2:10–18 speaks of us being sons of God and in the same breath as being Christ's brethren, deriving from the one stock, having the one origin:

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, 'I will proclaim thy name to my brethren . . .'

His use of the term 'brethren' in relation to the apostles (Matt. 28:10; John 20:17) is only a post-resurrection one—a fact which is highly significant. Hebrews 2:10–18 is saying that by both incarnation and the Atonement Christ became a participator in our humanity that we might become participators in his Sonship, for II Peter 1:4 speaks of us as becoming 'partakers of the divine nature' without necessarily becoming Divine.

THE DERIVATIVE NATURE OF HUMAN SONSHIP OF GOD THE KING

That our sonship is derivative is a teaching of the New Testament which can be seen from Galatians 3:26–27: 'For *in* Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized *into* Christ have *put on* Christ.' That is, on the one hand we have come into *union* with Christ and in another we have *put on to ourselves* all that he is, thus deriving our sonship from his Sonship as we put on to ourselves (or have had put on to ourselves) that sonship. Again, in Galatians 4:4–7 we 'receive adoption as sons [sonship: *huithesia*]', and also *the Spirit of God's Sons* sent into our hearts crying, 'Abba! Father!' Thus we are sons through redemption, and participate in Christ's Sonship through the Spirit, and so become *heirs* where once we were slaves.

When this passage (Gal. 4:4–7) is linked with Romans 8:14–17, we see that (i) if we are led by the Spirit of God we are *sons of God* because he too was led by the Spirit as he was the Son of God (cf. Matt. 4:1; 12:28); and (ii) we have received *the spirit of sonship* through *the Spirit of the Son* and so (a) cry 'Abba! Father' and (b) thus are the children of God, which makes us 'heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ'.

Our conclusion, then, is that we are sons of God in a derivative sense through union with Christ the Son, and through the Spirit who brings that Sonship to us as we are in union with Christ. Thus in Christ we have sonship with the Father as he (Christ) has Sonship with the Father. This means that 'as he is, so are we in this world', and that what he inherits so do we, in him. Participation in Christ as the Son also has many other marvellous implications, such as participation in Christ as King, as Prophet, and as Priest. For this study we simply take our participation in him as the Son, the King.

PARTICIPATION IN THE SON THE KING IN THE EPISTLES

We know Christ's Sonship and his Kingship cannot be separated. Psalms 2 and 89—especially when linked with Psalm 110—are proof of this, for they demonstrate its reality. God sets His Messiah on the hill of Zion as King. He gives all the nations to him: they are under his suzerainty. He sits at God's right hand—the Son-King with the Father-King. This is the message of the Gospels and the Gospel. It is the claim of the whole New Testament, for he is 'King of kings and Lord of lords'—exalted above all (cf. Eph. 1:19–22; Phil. 2:9–11). It is certainly the thrust of the Book of the Revelation. How then do we participate with him in his Son-Kingship?

The answer is that in the Sonship of the Father given to us by salvation through the Son, by union with him in baptism, and sharing his life by the Spirit, we too reign with him. Romans 5:17 says, 'If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness *reign in life* through the one man Christ Jesus'. Ephesians 2:4–6 says that God has raised us up with Christ 'and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus'. I Peter 2:9–10 says that we have been made a 'kingdom of priests' (cf. Exod. 19:5–6), and this principle is repeated in Revelation 1:5–6, 5:10 and 22:4–5 (cf. 20:4).

All of the references immediately above are clear. To be sons of God is to share in Christ's Son-Kingship. We reign now, and we will reign in the new age. This is an extraordinary concept, let alone practical operation. What are the roots and origins of this, and how should we view it all? This we will look at in the idea of coming to mature sonship.

Coming to Mature Sonship

The idea of believers being *the children* (Gr. *tekna* pertaining to birth, being children in the family, etc.; John 1:12–13; Rom. 8:16; I John 3:1) of God is present in the New Testament. Being sons (*huioi*) does not mean we are not children, but has the connotation of maturity and of being heirs—i.e. ready to receive and use our inheritance. Children, too, are heirs but not whilst they are minors, which is Paul's argument in Galatians 3:26—4:7, and to some extent in Romans 8:14–25.

The doctrine of Christian maturity is a strong one in the New Testament, and refers not to perfection as flawlessness but as fullness of growth, i.e. maturity. In Ephesians 4:11–15 Paul shows this growth is a corporate or 'body' thing, but each is to grow 'to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'. Ultimately the outcome will be—as stated in Romans 8:29—to be conformed to the Sonship of Christ. In Ephesians 1:4–14 this plan of God for our full sonship is revealed, and this in conformity with Isaiah 43:6–7.

In the Gospel of Matthew true sons are peacemakers—not an easy task—and those who love their enemies (5:9, 43–48). In Hebrews 12:3–11 they are matured by discipline when and where it is needed, whilst in John 5:17ff. they are those who do their Father's will, and listen to His teaching. In Romans 8:14 they are those led by the Spirit of God. In Romans 8:17–25 they are those who go through suffering, which, as II Corinthians 4:13–18 shows, is the way of being glorified (cf. II Cor. 3:18).

All in all, then, the apostolic teaching was that God is firstly 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', and secondly that the elect are the children of the Father. They can cry 'Abba! Father!', and all familyhood is derived from Him Who as Father is 'above all and through all and in all'.

SONSHIP OF THE LAMB TO HIS FATHER, AND SONSHIP OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD TO THEIR FATHER IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze (2:18).

He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son (21:7).

Special teaching is given in the Book of the Revelation. Here the term 'conquering' or 'overcoming' is used. 21:7 says simply that God will be the God of the one who overcomes, and that one will be His son, and will be given 'all things' to inherit. Chapters 2 and 3 also speak of conquerors who are given special rewards. Two of these promises are related to kingship: 2:26–27, which quotes Psalm 2 and says (of the conqueror), 'and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father', which means the conqueror has authority and power over the nations; and 3:21, which says, 'He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne'; and both of these are in the light of 21:7, 'He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son'.

We note that it is the Son who will confess the overcomer before his Father, for, 'He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels' (3:5), all of which tells us two things: (i) we are conquerors only when God is Father; and (ii) we are conquerors only as sons under the Lamb, i.e. as sons in the Son. Let us then look at these two things.

We Are Conquerors Only When God is Father

It would appear at first sight that 21:7 ('He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son') is saying that when we conquer, God will make us His sons, but the reverse is true. God is the One Who conquers in all things, or creation and history would not make sense. His Son is the Conqueror, and so His sons must be the same. In Genesis 1:28 God gave man his mandate for being upon this earth. To be an overcomer was his vocation:

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

After the Flood (Gen. 9:1–2) this mandate was renewed, though in somewhat different terms:

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.

Psalm 8:5–8 states explicitly the nature of man's dominion—i.e. lordship—over the entire creation:

Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
 and dost crown him with glory and honour.
 Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;
 thou hast put all things under his feet,
 all sheep and oxen,
 and also the beasts of the field,
 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
 whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

So then, man who is created in the image of God has a high office in creation and history. This he receives from his Creator-Father. The mandate was not taken away because he fell, for the post-flood renewal of the mandate assures us this was never the case. However, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:8) observes, 'As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him'. The same writer then says that 'to bring many sons to glory'—the sons who had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God—God had to liberate them by the death of Christ. By that death He enthroned Christ the Son, and is putting all things under his feet, a fact which Paul repeats in I Corinthians 15:24–28:

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 'For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under him,' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

What we should note is that the verb 'to subject' is exactly the same as 'to subdue' in Genesis 1:28. The conclusion we draw, then, is that *man was intended to be a conqueror, a true son of God*. He failed to be this, but Christ was the true Son and he conquered. This leads us to conclude that we can only be conquerors through Christ the true Son and Conqueror.

We are Conquerors Only as Sons Under the Lamb, i.e. as Sons in the Son

In the Book of the Revelation the Son of God is Conqueror, King of kings and Lord of lords, and this we have discussed in the Essay on Christ's Lordship (see pp. 230–241), so we need not outline it here.

What we do see is that the people of God are persecuted heavily by Satan—the red dragon—and his clones, namely the beast and the false prophets. They are also persecuted—even to martyrdom—by Babylon the mother of harlots, yet ‘in all these things [they] are more than conquerors through him who loved [them]’ (i.e. Christ). This quote from Romans 8 also says that the elect are ‘being killed all the day long’, and that they are ‘regarded as lambs to be slaughtered’. Just as Christ was led as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7) and as the Slaughtered Lamb (Rev. 5:6) is the triumphant Lion of Judah (5:5), so the saints—the true sons of God—are the overcomers even in the midst of persecution and martyrdom. In the Essay on the people of God (see pp. 250–257) we discussed the ways in which they triumphed over the beasts and Babylon, but here we note it was all ‘through trials to glory’. They suffered with Christ that they might be glorified with him. It was their suffering that made them so mature, so fully sons of God under the Father, and in the Lamb. They knew ‘the fellowship of his sufferings’ and participated in that. Of themselves they could never triumph, but in Christ they were more than conquerors, thus being the sons of God their Father, and as sons they must inherit ‘all things’, i.e. the heavens and the earth, and all that God once appointed as their domain and to be under their dominion.

GENERAL CONCLUSION TO THE ESSAY

It is essential as we read the prophecy of the Revelation that we grasp our part in it—the part we must play in this prophetic history. Every day we must remember that ‘greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world’, that we ‘can do all things in Christ’, and that ‘we are more than conquerors in him who loved us’, realizing that it is our sonship of the Father and our brotherhood of Christ that make us true sons and true brethren, and that the Father is not ashamed of His sons, and the Elder Brother is ‘not ashamed to call us brethren’.

Essay Ten

Judgement and Judgements in the Book of the Revelation

THE MATTER OF JUDGEMENT

SOME folk will not read the Book of the Revelation because they cannot face the fact of God as Judge, and His being the God of judgements. This bias against judgements must spring partly from the fact of human guilt, which rationalizes judgement as unfair. It is a curious fact that often those who most strongly oppose judgements in regard to themselves, and who deny God's right to judge, are themselves strong judges of God and others, and are more likely than most to call down judgements and punishments on those who do wrong in their eyes. In fact they often accuse God of not being severe enough in His judgements, and look upon Him as tardy in executing such punishments. Of course, all this makes sense when we realize that man wishes to evade judgement, but, deeply down, knows that 'those who do such things deserve to die' (Rom. 1:32).

There are two main aspects of judgement in the Book, the first being the judgements which come upon man and the creation through the opening of the seals, the blowing of the trumpets and the outpouring of the bowls (vials) of wrath. The second aspect is the judgement of evil supernatural powers and their human followers in defeat and consignment to the lake of fire, along with the last judgement before the great white throne—this being the judgement of all sinful creatures. Human aversion to judgement lies in the reality of these two aspects. We do not wish to face the fact of our own guilt and evil, and then the consequence of it in judgement. Even so, we have to admit the reality of it.

THE QUESTION OF THEODICY

Linked with the fact of the judgements is the matter of theodicy, which *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines as:

The, or a vindication of the divine attributes, esp. justice and holiness, in respect to the existence of evil; a writing, doctrine or theory intended to 'justify the ways of God to men'.

Thus it is the explanation of how God can be Creator, holy and just, and yet allow evil to enter and work within His creation, and Himself still be holy and just. It is linked with judgements because judgement tells us that God will ultimately deal with all evil. Simply to punish evil is not to deal wholly with it, but it is linked with it. One of the most potent treatments of theodicy is P. T. Forsyth's *The Justification of God**. The main thing about judgements and theodicy is that the Revelation reiterates the theme that God's judgements are just (righteous) and true altogether—a point we will consider at some length. We will see that God is wholly justified as Creator because He is Law-giver, Redeemer, and Judge.

THE CREATOR-LAWGIVER

All creation is functional (Gen. 1:31; cf. Eccl. 3:11). As functional, it works by laws or principles. Those laws are not merely standards to be met, but principles by which to function. To oppose or disobey them brings the inevitable kickback of guilt. Guilt itself is dynamic, causing lawlessness to compound itself, guilt to increase, and so a cyclic reaction to be set up. In the midst of this, conscience is most dynamic. If the human will sets itself against God, then it sets itself against His law, for God and His law are inseparable. When the mind detaches the law from God—which it must do, for it thinks it can deal with law apart from God—then the law and the conscience tyrannize their object. It is clear that to oppose the law is to bring guilt, and that guilt ultimately destroys its object. What is most painful of all is not to be judged. Once judgement is pronounced and is executed in punishment, then the guilty person is liberated. In this sense judgement is a merciful thing!

It is also interesting to note that the law is a beautiful thing to the obedient person, as is shown in Psalms 1, 19 and 119, but is a fearful thing to the disobedient in spirit, as is shown by I Timothy 1:8–11:

* NCPI. 1988.

Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

In history God did not simply add to His creational law (best known by the simple term 'the law of God') when He formulated what we may call 'covenantal law', for it was creational law linked with the redemptive and liberating action of God amongst His people. Covenantal law has reference both to creational (functional) principles and the principles of redemption whereby the conscience is eased from its guilt, and the person liberated. Now to be disobedient, and to do this in the face of covenantal law, is to call down the wrath of God which comes from a rejection of His true grace, for covenant is all grace.

GOD'S WRATH IN CREATION, COVENANT, AND GRACE

Like so many of the themes of our Essays, we need to have the background of thinking that John the Seer would have had before he saw the prophecy and by means of which he would better understand the prophecy. Romans 1:18–32—the story of man's rejection of God—when linked with Genesis 3:1–6—the story of man's fall—shows us that man changed his view of creation and law, and set about to suppress the truth 'in acts of unrighteousness'. For this God's wrath is upon him, i.e. His righteous anger against the wrong use of His creation, and in Romans 1:24, 26, 28 the *form* of that wrath is the giving up of man to his own sin and guilt which compounds itself and brings great distress in its wake. We might term this 'God's creational wrath'. We have examples of God's creational wrath in the Flood, and in the events at Sodom and Gomorrah. We also have a grace-creational covenant following the Flood.

The next form of wrath is what we might call 'God's covenantal wrath', for out of grace God gave His covenant to Abraham and his descendants, especially to Israel, which bound itself to be obedient (Exod. 24) and was told what the consequences would be if it became disobedient and idolatrous. In other words, God is not going outside His own promises when He is wrathful. The promises of blessing

and cursing are found in Deuteronomy chapters 27 to 30. What we discover of great importance is that—short of Israel going into apostasy—God will be unchanging in His mercy, steadfast love, longsuffering, and faithfulness towards Israel. If they rebel then He will send them into exile, but will not abandon them in exile. He will bring them back out of exile and so have mercy on them whilst, at the same time, showing the nations He is the Holy One of Israel—their Redeemer.

This latter act of forgiveness and rehabilitation shows us what a wonderful thing is judgement. Judgement—as we have said above—is liberating. If, however, there is not repentance and a turning back to God (cf. II Chron. 7:14), God will not forgive. He does not forgive those who persist in impenitence: ‘I will by no means clear [acquit] the guilty’. Thus judgement can be *either* liberating *or* destructive. This is an important insight for our understanding the judgements in the Book of the Revelation.

WRATH AND JUDGEMENTS IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

All we have said above regarding creational and covenantal judgements is found in this Book. It helps us to understand to whom the judgements are given. God’s wrath is not an arbitrary irritation with mankind for its sinfulness. It is God’s unswerving intention to destroy every bit of evil so that ultimately none of it remains. Human anger comes with impatience, with frustration in doing one’s will, and is illogical and irrational for the most part. Not so God’s wrath. That wrath is bent on destroying evil. For those under covenant, and who are penitent, it is as follows:

In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
says the Lord, your Redeemer (Isa. 54:8).

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over, O Israel!
How can I make you like Admah!
How can I treat you like Zeboiim!
My heart recoils within me,
my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my fierce anger,
I will not again destroy Ephraim;

for I am God and not man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come to destroy (Hosea 11:8–9).

In the Revelation judgement is upon the nations not only for their rebellion that stems from the Fall, but for their alliance with the red dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and Babylon. In-built into that rejection is hatred for Jesus the Son of God, the crucified Lamb, the King of kings and Lord of lords. The kings of the earth (cf. Ps. 2:1f.) seek to overcome the Lamb and the people of God. Thus when judgements come to them they are well deserved. If God does not judge in this way then He is not righteous. There is, then, no true theodicy. Whilst we need not here trace our steps through the three sets of judgements and the final judgement, we can see that they are 'true and righteousness altogether'.

What is most noticeable is that no one actually repents and turns to God. Indeed they become even more angry, obstinate and impenitent. Isaiah 30:18 embodies a great truth:

Therefore the Lord *waits* to be gracious to you;
therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who *wait* for him.

That is, God does not act hastily with His judgements, but acts on time. He exalts Himself to show mercy and Israel sees Him in that exaltation and longs for His judgement! They wait for Him to execute it! Only then does He judge. Not so in the Revelation—no matter how much opportunity they have for repentance, they would rather 'gnaw their tongues in anguish' than repent before Him. Indeed they 'cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds' (16:11). So they are further hardened—a part of the process of God's judgement, anyway. II Thessalonians 2: 9–12 gives us some explanation of the intransigence of evil men:

The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

We conclude, then, that God's judgements are upon those—men and fallen heavenly creatures—who seek to suppress the truth in unrighteousness, and that such judgements come in the form of punishment, which, if it were received properly, would bring repentance and deliverance from further and ultimate judgement, but

if resisted becomes punishment of a terrible sort and locks the resisters into eternal judgement.

GOD'S JUDGEMENTS ARE RIGHTEOUS ONES

By this we mean that they are according to true justice, that they are in conformity with all God's Being and His attributes of righteousness, goodness, holiness, truth, and love. The following excerpts from the Revelation show that, speaking for themselves:

The nations raged, but thy wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and the saints,
and those who fear thy name, both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth (11:18).

Great and wonderful are thy deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are thy ways,
O King of the ages!
Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord?
For thou alone art holy.
All nations shall come and worship thee,
for thy judgements have been revealed (15:3-4).

And I heard the angel of water say
'Just art thou in these thy judgements,
thou who art and wast, O Holy One.
For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and thou hast given them blood to drink.
It is their due!

And I heard the altar cry
'Yea, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are thy judgements!' (16:5-7).

Rejoice over her [Babylon], O heaven,
O saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgement for you against her! . . .
And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on the earth (18:20, 24).

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for his judgements are true and just;
he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with
her fornication,
and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants (19:1b-2).

It can be seen, finally, that these judgements are because of the persecution of the saints and servants of God. In chapters 19 and 20

the beast and the false prophet—along with their followers—are defeated, the beast and the false prophet being thrown into the lake of fire. The Devil, who incited Gog and Magog against the camp—the City of God—and who deceived all nations, is also cast into the lake of fire. The dead—meaning primarily those not in Christ—are also judged in the final judgement. Of them God says:

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death (21:8).

Whilst in one sense these judgements are too terrible to contemplate, yet in another sense they are also an occasion for great joy. Such joy is indicated in some of the quotes above. The joy lies in the fact that God is righteous, and gives only such judgements as are just—so much so that no one can or will object to them. Also in those judgements there is avengement for the terrible wrong done. When we see these things we say, ‘Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgements!’

THE FORMS OF JUDGEMENT

We have said that the judgements of the seals, the trumpets and the bowls of wrath are followed by the ultimate ‘day of wrath’ when Babylon, the beast, the false prophet, and Satan are destroyed, this being followed—or perhaps concurrent with—the judgement of the dead, great and small, before the throne of God. We need to see the forms of the judgements that the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls take. They are as follows:

The Seven Seals

The first four seals when opened cause the four living creatures—one by one—to command the four horsemen of the Apocalypse to go forth to execute the judgements which the Lamb authorizes. We must see these in relation to Christ’s Kingship over all creation: ‘All authority is given unto me . . . go therefore!’ The first horseman has been called ‘Christ’ by some and ‘Antichrist’ by others, but all we know is that he is under Christ and sent through the first living creature, and that his work is to go conquering and to conquer. The second horseman takes peace from the earth so that men slay one another, i.e. restlessness and suffering come through him. The third

horseman has to do with want, wheat becoming very dear, barley available but not so dear—to the poorer people—and luxuries not touched. The fourth horseman is 'Death and Hades', i.e. he brings death, and the victims go to Hades—the place of the dead. The four means of judgement are the sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. Whether these judgements are literal or not we are not told. They are actual judgements, but if sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts are figurative—as also the actions of the first three horsemen—then the judgement is even more terrible.

The fifth seal is not a direct judgement, but it does speak of judgement—the avenging of the blood of the martyrs. The sixth seal is a most dramatic and drastic one. The language is apocalyptic, signifying that man's independent system is doomed, and all familiar landmarks are blotted out, whilst chaos and confusion reign. We see similar language in Matthew 24:29–31, where the Day of the Lord is indicated. The 'great day' is 'the day of the wrath of the Lamb' (cf. Isa. 2:17; 24:21; I Thess. 5:2ff.), so that terror comes upon all who are not in Christ. The seventh seal—which is opened after an interlude—really initiates the judgements which come with the seven trumpets.

The Seven Trumpets

These judgements seem more severe than those of the seven seals, which themselves are terrible enough. The trumpets are strongly reminiscent of the ten plagues in Egypt, and this may be a key to their significance. The first trumpet is—so to speak—against the earth, for hail and fire—mixed with blood—fall upon a third of the earth, destroying a third of the green grass and trees, both of which are essential to human living. The second trumpet likewise destroys a third of the aquarian creation—creatures in the sea and ships upon it. Again the apocalyptic language suggests terrible confusion and privations. The third trumpet deprives life to a third of the creation because of the contamination of water, and the poisoning of it with wormwood, though wormwood is not literally a poison. Wormwood means judgement (cf. Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19). For bitterness see Hebrews 12:15 and Deuteronomy 29:18. Pure water means life, and perhaps here means life which is of God and is eternal—the judgement denying it to a third of mankind. The trumpets, then, are moving against mankind more directly. The fourth trumpet brings the terrifying action of darkening a third of creation both of earth and sky—which, if the action is figurative, is again more terrible

than the literal (cf. Exod. 10:21ff.; Isa. 13:10; Joel 2:31; Amos 8:9; Acts 2:20).

At the point of the completion of the fourth trumpet three woes are announced, the first being the effects of the fifth trumpet, the second being the effects of the sixth trumpet combined with the events of the angel declaring the plan of God (ch. 10), and the two witnesses witnessing against the evil of man (ch. 11). The third woe is not explicitly described, but must include the triumph of God in history, the rising of the red dragon, and the 'beastliness' that follows the cloning of the first and second beasts.

The fifth trumpet itself moves judgement into an even larger dimension. The star—a heavenly body or being—is not so much *sent* as it *falls* (cf. Rev. 1:20; 6:13; 8:10, 12; 12:4; Isa. 14:12–17; Luke 10:18; Job 38:7). For the terrible creatures which are loosed from the bottomless pit, see Exodus 10:2ff., and Joel chapters 1 and 2. Notice that those who have the seal of God are protected from the judgements. The 'locusts' are not allowed to hurt the creation as such, but they bring terrible pain to human beings who are not in Christ. Even so, the pain inflicted does not prove lethal.

The sixth trumpet is the most frightening of all. Its terrible 'cavalry', through plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur, destroy a third of mankind, which—it would be thought—might bring the rest of mankind to repentance; but to the contrary, for mankind persists in its dreadful idolatry and occultic practices, which include murder, immorality and theft. We note, then, that the judgements do not produce a change of heart.

We have seen above, in regard to the seventh trumpet, that significant events take place which lead up to it, and away from it, virtually preparing for the judgements of the seven bowls of wrath.

The Seven Bowls of Wrath

The angels and their bowls are described in 15:5—16:21. The temple is opened (cf. 11:19), the angels emerge from it, described in detail. They are pure and holy: the bowls are not to be poured out in an evil way. The bowls are 'full of the wrath of God'. A voice from the temple commands them. The seven bowls contain 'the seven plagues'. Note also that the seven plagues are really the ending of the seven seals, including the seven trumpets. This is really an unbroken action of history as planned by God and executed by Christ.

In the first bowl wrath comes upon those who bear the mark of the beast and worship its image. It takes the form of sores or ulcers

(cf. Exod. 9:10ff.; Deut. 28:35). Note that God will not tolerate false worship. This first judgement is on man.

The second bowl brings a reminder of another Exodus plague (Exod. 7:17–21; cf. Rev. 8:8–9: the second trumpet and one third of the sea becomes blood). This, however, is more horrific: ‘like the blood of a dead man’, i.e. dark and congealed. Every living thing (lit. ‘living soul’) died, so that the judgement is not only on man. Blood, of course, stands for life, and is treated with great reverence throughout all Scripture. The horror of dead blood is indescribable, and a terrible judgement upon ‘bloody men’, i.e. those who are violent and murderous.

In the third bowl not only the sea but the rivers and fountains of water, i.e. the source of life for all creatures, are affected. Note ‘the angel of water’, just as there were ‘angels of the winds’ (7:1–3). It is ‘blood for blood’; however, it need not be taken literally, but rather, ‘as they have destroyed, so shall they be destroyed’ (cf. 6:9–10; 18:24; 19:2). Here is God’s vindication in the justice of retributory judgements.

In the fourth bowl ‘was allowed’ (i.e. ‘was given’) shows the wrath is under God’s sovereign control. Whatever the meaning of ‘the sun’ (cf. 6:12; 8:12; 9:2), its judgement is linked with fire (cf. 11:5; 20:9; 13:13). Rather than receive the grace of judgement (judgement releases from guilt) men curse the name of God, knowing their plague came from Him. They do not repent.

In the fifth bowl darkness happens (cf. Exod. 10:21–23; Rev. 9:2) and is a fearful visitation. It is poured on the centre of evil (‘the throne of the beast’), and causes great pain: ‘men gnawed their tongues in anguish’. The counter-irritant of self-inflicted pain seeks to neutralize the fearful effects of the former plagues, and—now—the plague of darkness. The beast can do nothing about this revelation and experience of his evil kingdom, which had doubtless seemed to be ‘light’ to its members. Again God is cursed for His actions, and men are impenitent.

In the sixth bowl the river is dried up, becoming a pathway for invasion. This river (Euphrates) is used as a symbol for evil and judgement (cf. 9:13–19; Isa. 8:7f.). Who are ‘the kings from the east’? They are not mentioned again. Are they the instruments of judgement who aid the forces of evil for Armageddon, as in 16:14, i.e. among ‘the kings of the whole world’?

In the seventh bowl ‘It is done!’ (cf. 21:6) is pronounced from the temple, from the throne, and causes great activity (cf. 8:5). It means ‘It has happened!’ The ‘great city’ is Babylon (cf. 11:8)—as against

‘the Holy City’—and is ‘great’ but not ‘holy’, as we see in chapters 17–19. The cities allied with it also fell. It is certain that here is not literal happening, but the symbol for the reality is powerful. The vast complex of Babylon comes under God’s wrath. ‘God remembered Babylon’ is evidence of His ‘righteous judgement’. The crushing burdens that come upon devotees of Babylon do not cause them to repent, but only to curse more deeply.

CONCLUSION TO GOD’S JUDGEMENTS

Much of the Revelation is given over to what has been called ‘the vindication of God’, i.e. He is just, does bring about judgements at the right (ripe) moment, leaves no evil unpunished and undestroyed. He avenges injustice only when opportunity and incentive have first been given for repentance. Thus His love and holiness are one together. Whilst evil and impenitent humanity goes on cursing Him, yet His ‘judgements are true and righteous altogether’. The creation is not a moral hotch-potch, nor God arbitrary in His actions. He is a ‘faithful Creator’ and this is in His redeeming and judging as well as in His upholding of all that is.

Essay Eleven

The Lords of Evil

THE BEASTS OF HISTORY

DANIEL in his prophecy sees beasts of terrible visage. They vie with one another for power over the nations. Of course the beasts are figurative—or ‘apocalyptic’, as we describe such creatures. We have no modern carnivorous dinosaur roaming the earth, seeking out victims, but predatory nations have always been. They oppose Paul’s thesis that God has set the times and boundaries of nations, for they seek to feed on the nations they capture. If we wonder how this system could have arisen, then we need to know the Divine order of nations, peoples, tribes and tongues set by God. A reading of Daniel chapters 10 and 11 tells us there are celestial powers set over nations, and the rise and fall of those nations depends upon the success or otherwise of these ‘peoples-angels’. Jacob, seeing angels ascend and descend—so Jewish tradition tells us—looked in vain to see his angel, the angel of his nation, only to be told by God that He was the angel of Israel, a point not difficult to prove from Scripture. When Jesus told Nathanael that he might see angels ascend and descend upon him—the Son of Man—then Nathanael would know Jesus was claiming that the rise and fall of nations depended upon him, and this in accordance with Psalm 2 and borne out powerfully in the Book of the Revelation.

Yes, there have always been beasts, but beasts are born of beastliness—both supernatural (celestial) and natural (earthly)—and that is the point of our Essay.

'THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY'

An important eschatological passage is that of II Thessalonians 2:1–12, and because it has some parallels with the Book of the Revelation it would be good for us to read it here and seek to understand it. We will include verses 3 to 12 and try to comment upon that part of the text.

³ Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? ⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, ¹² so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In this passage Paul is telling the believers at Thessalonica that the day of Christ's appearing will not happen until certain things take place. So important are these things that certain men will try to deceive the church into thinking the appearance—i.e. the *Parousia* of Christ—has already taken place. Not so: the first thing is that the Rebellion or the Apostasy (*apostasià*) must happen, i.e. without its taking place the *Parousia* cannot come. Such an *Apostasia* has already taken place in history, according to Paul in Romans 1:18–25, and this would appear to be man's rebellion against God in Genesis 3:1–6 (cf. Rom. 5:12). Yet in history all the forces of evil will band together to reject every form of Divine control and government—much as is seen in Psalm 2 where the nations rage against God and His Anointed, and try to free themselves from Divine control and set up their own anarchic system of government. What form this will take Paul does not say.

The second thing that will happen is an *apocalypsis* (revelation; unveiling) will take place, not of Christ the Son of God, but of the man of lawlessness. That is, when the lawlessness of the human race and

fallen angelic powers comes into concerted operation then the one leading it—the man of lawlessness—will be revealed, i.e. shown for what he is, thus being unmasked in history. The man of lawlessness will be a man, a person, and as such the evil equivalent of the Man of God, the Son of God: Satan's counterpart to the true Son of Man, Christ. 'Son of perdition' can have two meanings: (i) the incarnation of perdition—the thing spawned by the Devil as a son (cf. I John 3:10–12; John 8:44); and (ii) the man who is doomed to go to perdition, i.e. to destruction. The unmasking of him will be to believers, the 'appearing' of him will be to unbelievers who will see him as a great personage, a messiah of sorts.

The third thing will be that the man of lawlessness will desire to show himself as being God and will brook no rival—not even an evil rival. He will take the place of the true Son in the temple of God (the people; I Cor. 3:16) and proclaim himself to be God! Whilst something—Paul does not tell us what it is—is restraining him until the *Apostasia* arrives, it is doing so in order that the full revelation of him may eventuate at the right time, i.e. the time when he will lead the Apostasy which will also be the time when his judgement is ripe and Christ will destroy him. The one who is at present restraining him will cease to do this so that the evil may head itself up in the Rebellion, thus warranting the destruction. It appears that Paul had taught what was (i) the restraining force, and (ii) who was the restrainer, but these things are not explained to us.

Paul speaks of 'the mystery of lawlessness', and in the New Testament a 'mystery' (Gr.: *mysterion*) is something which defies understanding where a person has not been given revelation. In the Mystery Cults one had to be initiated in order to understand the secrets of the teaching. In I Corinthians 2:6–16 Paul says that he is imparting a 'secret and hidden wisdom of God', and claims that such a mystery is only understood by the power of the Holy Spirit. The antithesis of 'the mystery of lawlessness' is 'the mystery of piety' (*to tes eusebeias mysterion*) of which Paul speaks in I Timothy 3:16. Lawlessness (sin) carries within itself the deceit which conceals its true nature (cf. Heb. 3:13–14). In that sense it is a mystery. In Romans 7:13 Paul says that sin so uses the law to deceive that it unwittingly unmasks itself in doing so, so that sin 'through the commandment might become [i.e. be shown to be] sinful beyond measure'. In II Thessalonians 2:8 the 'mystery of iniquity' is exposed so that it might be destroyed by Christ, i.e. 'with the breath of his mouth' (cf. Isa. 11:4) and 'by his appearing and his coming'.

When we advert to the Book of the Revelation and ask ourselves

what are the parallels in that *apocalypsis* to the *apocalypsis* in II Thessalonians, then parallels appear. The Great Apostasy of all evil powers is the gathering together of all evil forces to fight God, as we have seen indicated in 13:1–18; 16:12–16; 19:11–21; and 20:7–10. The red dragon—who is Satan—has the incarnation of his ‘son’ in the beast who is the counterpart of Christ, i.e. who is the Antichrist. He has a ‘death’ and a ‘resurrection’ (cf. 13:3), and the power of his death and resurrection is to make all men worship the beast. The second beast, who is the false prophet—the evil counterpart of the Holy Spirit—causes humanity to worship the image of the beast, and the beast is in collusion with the unholy woman Babylon, who is the foul counterpart of the pure Bride—the church of Christ.

In II Thessalonians the Apostasy does not succeed. Nor do the attempts against God in the Revelation succeed. The sharp sword of the Warrior-King defeats the nations, and fire comes down from heaven and destroys Gog and Magog in the final endeavour of the Devil to defeat the camp of God. It is surely the same fire that came out of the mouths of the two witnesses in chapter 11, and must be the word of God. In II Thessalonians 2:8 Christ slays the man of lawlessness with ‘the breath of his mouth’, i.e. by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:4) and the word of God.

What, then, in the Revelation, is ‘the mystery of lawlessness’? It is simply—as in II Thessalonians 2—that evil works undetected in the sense that it cannot be shown for what it is—unmasked, judged, and denounced. It works to achieve its ‘plan of the mystery’, a counterpart to God’s pure plan to unify all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9–10). Secondly, it is simply that evil has its inbuilt deceit, and deceives its adherents into thinking it is achieving a worthwhile goal—even if that goal is simply dethroning God! Its real mystery is that it cannot succeed. So in 17:7 the angel says to John the Seer, ‘I will tell you the *mystery* of the woman,’ i.e. Babylon. He then goes on to speak about the beast, about the seven kings, and then the ten kings which adhere to the beast. The mystery of the beast is that it ‘was, and is not, and is to ascend . . .’ and then that it ‘was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition’ (vv. 8, 11). That is—unlike God, ‘who was, and is, and is to come’—it has temporary periods of being active, does not have an entity of its own which endures for ever, creates nothing, is dissolved back into the seven-king system, even though it appears to be an eighth king, and then it goes to perdition, i.e. is virtually ‘the son of perdition’ and is destroyed. That is, evil—for all its endeavours, scheming, plans of action and its activity—never finally accomplishes anything of a

lasting nature. Like all mysteries—and counter-mysteries—when it is exposed it is understood. If what a mystery purports to achieve is not authentic (i.e. ontological), then that falsity will be unmasked.

Before closing off this section we should see that the bottomless pit is that which restrains Satan for a certain period of time, and so the angel who casts Satan into the pit is the restrainer. We are told, simply, that Satan will be loosed after a thousand years, so that the restrainer-angel no longer has the command to restrain his inmate. We should also conclude that Satan—otherwise known as the red dragon—the first beast, the second beast (the false prophet), and Babylon constitute the evil lords of the New Testament. Each is involved in ‘the mystery of lawlessness’, each is deceptive, each seeking to oppose God, and each seeking to have great power. The mystery of their lawlessness is that it will never succeed, that all will be revealed, and all will meet the judgement which will destroy them.

THE ACTION OF THE LORDS OF EVIL

The Rising of the Conflict

We can now look at the lords of evil in the Book of the Revelation and trace what they are about, especially in the light of our section immediately above. What we have to see is that the action of evil does not begin with the Revelation, but in what we might call pre-history. Certainly we see the devious nature of the serpent in the wilderness, and the outcome of the curse of Genesis 3:15 upon that creature is reflected in the terror of the red dragon in Revelation 12 at the birth of the woman’s seed, the Seed which was to crush him at his head. We also have to keep in mind what we saw at the opening of the chapter: that the Devil seeks to control the nations of the world. He made the claim to Jesus during the time of the temptation in the wilderness that all the kingdoms had been given into his authority. A reading of Genesis shows us that God is concerned for the nations of the earth, and of course Psalm 2 shows the nations combining to defy God.

The People of God and Conflicts: Rebellious Humanity and Judgements

We might be deceived into thinking that the actions of personal evil—Satan, the beasts and Babylon—do not appear in the early part

of the Book. The sharp sword depicted as going out of Christ's mouth in 1:16 speaks of battle. The churches are in the midst of a spiritual conflict, there being 'a synagogue of Satan' at Smyrna, 'Satan's throne' at Pergamum, a false prophetess called Jezebel at Thyatira, people who have soiled their garments in Sardis, another 'synagogue of Satan' in Philadelphia, and worldliness of the highest order at Laodicea. The decadent nature of mankind is shown in that the four horsemen of the Apocalypse are sent forth in judgement against the human race. The martyrs bear witness to the cruelty of the human race which has spilt their blood—cruelty which is later traced to the evil system of Babylon. In the judgement of the sixth seal the leaders of the nations are terrified at the just punishment which comes upon them. The suffering intensifies with the seven trumpets, and it is made clear that the visitations are upon those who worship 'demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood', and are involved in murders, sorceries, immorality and thefts (9:20–21).

The battle against such evil is wrought by those who 'hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'. The two witnesses in chapter 11 fight with the fire of their mouths, i.e. the word of God articulated by the Spirit. Here the hatred of the beast and 'men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations' is exposed, for they rejoice over the death of the witnesses. The overt battle commences in chapter 12, but it is simply a revelation of part of 'the mystery of lawlessness'. The red dragon appears when the Woman appears, and the conflict is joined. There is war in heaven when Satan is cast down—a remarkable parallel to the time when Christ 'saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven' (Luke 10:18). Both the Woman and the church—the children of the Woman—have a certain protection from the red dragon.

The Evil Trinity

For his part the red dragon—'that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'—now seeks in every way to destroy the people of God and set the nations against God. As our commentary explains, the first beast is like a composite creature, having the fearsome qualities of the four terrible beasts in the prophecy of Daniel. A dreadful trinity now appears—the red dragon who corresponds to God, the first beast who corresponds to the Son of God (since it is wounded mortally but then has a 'resur-

rection'), and the second beast or false prophet, which is highly 'spiritual' since it can make an image of the first beast and then give it breath, i.e. is 'an enlivening spirit', so that it corresponds to the Spirit of God.

This evil trinity parallels all that the Triune God does, though as the very antithesis of the true God. Whereas the prophetic word goes forth out of the mouth of the Son as the true Word of God, evil utterances come from the mouth of the beast. Whereas God does good for the nations even to judgement of them, the evil trinity dominates and oppresses them. Whilst we are writing these words all this action is happening throughout the world. Satan, the beast, and false prophet are deceivers of the worst kind. They deceive the human race into thinking they are powerful—more powerful than God Himself. They infect the nations with a lethal dread, an expectancy that evil will triumph! The cruelty of persecuting those who do not follow their lead, and exclusion of them from the right to live, tells us how evil are these lords. Yet even their demand that men receive the mark of the beast is but an imitation of the sealing of the saints.

The Conflict Continues

If God were to remain passive, not warning and not sending judgements so that all evil creatures might repent, then God would indeed be secluded from the conflict. To the contrary: He sends out His judgements. He attends meticulously to the affairs of nations. He preserves His people, and He has a day of reckoning for all evil men and creatures. The saints unceasingly war against the beast, though not with carnal weapons but with 'weapons which are mighty to the pulling down of many strongholds', weapons which have been described elsewhere as being pathetic in the eyes of the beasts and evil men, but which are the weapons which will decide the outcome of the conflict. What weapons? Simply the armour of light—the armour of God, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the footwear of the preparation of the gospel of peace, the belt of peace, and the sword of the Spirit, i.e. the word of God. This sharp two-edged sword—wielded by the Prince of Peace—will smite the nations. The fruit of the Spirit will be more powerful than the works of the flesh. The 'patient endurance of the saints' will ultimately wear out those who persecute them. Since there are those 'who have conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name', then the defeat of the beasts and

Babylon must be possible. John the apostle said, 'I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.'

We trace the rising of the first beast from the sea, the sea itself being the nations; and the second beast arises from the earth—also a name for the nations which oppose God. There can be no beast which is not born of beastliness, and that beastliness is not only of fallen angels but of depraved human creatures, and of the dreadful realm of the idols and their demonic forces. The actions of the beasts are as political as they are personal. Because evil powers lack the pure power of God they cannot accomplish anything which will remain inviolate and eternal. Imitation is far from that which is real, authentic, ontological. So special signs and wonders are designed to deceive the kings of the nations, who then unite with the beast in order to defy God at their Armageddon, and hopefully break His power for ever.

To write and think like this is like a matter of fantasy. Were this conflict not the unmasking of 'the mystery of lawlessness' we, too, would think it fantastic, lacking the nature of reality; but history is a strong testimony to the unremitting conflict that has perpetually ensued between God and Satan, between Satan's world-system and the eternal Kingdom of God.

The Tale of Two Cities

As if all this were not enough, there is the matter of the unholy city, Babylon. It is the evil counterpart of the pure City of God, the new and heavenly Jerusalem. It is a city with a long and dreadful history. The invectives against Babylon in the Old Testament are strong, but at least that Babylon was national and political in the immediate and perceptible sense, but this Babylon is more than ordinarily political. It is political in the most pervasive and dreadful sense. It is called 'the mother of harlots', and harlotry is to do with idolatry, and Babylon has involved in deep idolatry 'the kings of the earth', i.e. those who oppose God and would meet Him at Armageddon. Babylon is so richly attired that the nations marvel at her, at her wealth and the delicacy she has developed to satisfy the gourmet-pleasure of the nations. She is sensual to the highest degree. This commerce of pleasure appeals to the hedonistic thrust of all humanity.

Like all forms of evil she is deceptive. She promises pleasure where

there can only be destruction. As of all harlots, it can be said of her:

. . . in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
 sharp as a two-edged sword.
 Her feet go down to death;
 her steps follow the path to Sheol;
 she does not take heed to the path of life;
 her ways wander, and she does not know it (Prov. 5:4–6).

All the nations are drawn towards doom because of her. In Revelation 17:3 she is seated on a scarlet beast, the clone of the red dragon, the evil son of perdition, and this indicates that she directs the beast as to where he is to go, or he is taking her where he wills. It does not much matter; for the time they are one in their combined evil, just as in the higher sense Christ and his Bride are one. The ‘mystery of the woman and the beast’ is that they seek to use the kings of the earth to strike at God, to make war on the Lamb. In this they will be unsuccessful, as the kings will be defeated, and they and the beast will attack the harlot out of hate—so unified are the forces of evil!

And the ten horns [kings] that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled (17:16–17).

There is no future for the unholy harlot. Chapter 18 depicts her as utterly destroyed, and it all happens in one hour! Ungodly mankind mourns her destruction, but her cruelty is unmasked. There is no longer any ‘mystery of the woman’. She is judged and destroyed. The end of the beasts is also in sight. In chapter 19 the Lamb goes out to war and destroys the followers of the crimson beast, and the false prophet (also known as the second beast), and the two mighty forces in the empire of evil are thrown into the lake of fire. As with Babylon, so with them; their power is finished for ever.

Linked with the destruction of Babylon and the beasts, Satan is locked up in the bottomless pit for a millennium. Being released he draws together all the rebellion of the nations which has been inhibited during the millennium, inciting Gog and Magog to come up against the camp of the saints, i.e. the Holy City, the very Bride of Christ; but the great plans for hideous destruction and anarchy are foiled simply by fire coming down from heaven, and this fire—as we have seen—is the word of God. The Devil is captured and thrown into the lake of fire. The defeat of evil has been accomplished.

A CONCLUSION REGARDING THE LORDS OF EVIL

Since most of the Revelation is in symbolic or apocalyptic language, we are more or less constrained to think in such terms. So we tend to talk in principles rather than in practices, and we must be wary of interpreting those principles of operation by saying dogmatically that they are this or that. Commendable as this caution is, it may lead us to speak so generally that we do not speak specifically and so lack direct exhortation and practical application of the prophecy of the Book of the Revelation. Since the prophecy is to be read, understood and obeyed, it must be applied.

The principles are so clear that we should recognize the outworking of them, and practice of observing them. Readers and commentators of this Book have not hesitated to name the seven kings of chapter 17 as Rome and its seven hills and the kings as those of the Roman Empire, and this may well be so. Principially it must be so, but one application does not exhaust the matter. 'The man of lawlessness' has been present in every generation, and not only in one person. A man of lawlessness will be found in most communities, and often in churches, and we must accordingly understand 'the mystery' of this proud, arrogant and worship-seeking person. At the same time there must come a definite point (*kairos*) in history when 'the man of lawlessness' will be revealed—as Paul intimated—and he must be destroyed by the breath of Christ's mouth. So with all the other climactic events—i.e. the long series of happenings with Satan as the red dragon, his clones which are the two beasts, and Babylon the great—they must all meet their historical defeat in the ultimate events.

We will know when this happens. Meanwhile we must understand the principles of evil and of the judgements of God. Paul speaks of the 'stratagems' or 'devices' of Satan, and we must know them in order to fight spiritual battles. We must also understand the judgements that God is meting out in history to evil men and evil powers, knowing that we will one day see the ultimate judgement of all these forces. By nature of the case, they cannot succeed. We must therefore cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. We must fight with spiritual weapons and not with carnal or worldly ones, trying to match Satan with Satan! We must learn the principle and action of 'patient endurance'. We must accept persecution joyfully. We must resist the pressures of the beast and the false prophet, and we must come out of Babylon and touch nothing of her unclean things. We must live as citizens of the Holy City, and

live in hope of the ultimate victory over Satan. Our Lamb has opened the seals, called forth the judgements of them, the trumpets and the bowls, and when all is completed we will see it is the victory of his Cross which has been worked out in history to its ultimate victory. Then shall we worship God our Father as 'all in all', and know that in defeating 'the kings of the earth' Christ has made us 'a kingdom and priests unto our God'.

For some, all of this is not practical enough. They would like to define which are the kings and what are their kingdoms. They would like to know who are the peoples under the title of 'Gog and Magog'. They would like to define the nations which are linked with Babylon, and those which are not. They would wish to know whether physical Israel of today and physical Jerusalem of today are the recipients of the prophetic promises, or whether these are only 'spiritual', i.e. for the church, and hence wholly non-political. We must admit that knowing a thing principally, and seeking to discern events, groups and persons via these principles, is less attractive than interpreting them outrightly as this or that, these or those, but we must keep in mind the basic principle of prophecy: that when a thing is coming to pass we will know it. It is easier and much more convenient for our thinking to relate the seven kings and the ten kings only to Rome and the Roman Empire. It may be simple to call the church of Rome 'Babylon' or to say that the modern commercial system is Babylon, but we may be oversimplifying our sight of history. It is easier to call this man or that 'the man of lawlessness', but it may not be wholly biblical. We have, then, to press on, understanding principles, knowing that in every generation they will apply here and there, but in the ultimate they will apply only to one place, one situation, one person, one time, but then we will know that to be the climactic fulfilment.

How and why will we know? We will know because we hold fast to Christ the Head, we are sons of the Father, knowing His will, and we are men and women who walk in the Holy Spirit of God. John knew that we would know, that is why he wrote:

Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the

Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life (I John 2:18–25).

Essay Twelve

The Holy Bride and the Unholy Harlot

THE HOLY AND THE UNHOLY

WE are about to look at the realities and contrasts of the Holy Bride—the church—and the unholy city—Babylon. In Revelation Babylon is looked upon as unclean, and the Bride as pure. The word ‘holy’ is used for God in 4:8; 6:10; 15:4 and 16:5, for the Lamb in 3:7, for the temple in 11:2 (cf. I Cor. 3:16), the angels in 14:10, for redeemed man in 20:6 and 22:11, and for the city in 11:2; 21:2, 10 and 22:19. Throughout Scripture holiness is dynamic, not only being pure, but attacking and destroying that which is impure. This principle we also find within the Revelation.

THE HOLINESS OF THE BRIDE

Something of the History of the Bride as the Holy City

The history of the holy city is a long one. In Matthew 5:35 Jesus calls Jerusalem ‘the city of the great King’ (cf. Ps. 48:1–2; 99:2–5; Lam. 2:15), meaning it is God’s city. Yet the earthly holy city in the Old Testament is a type of the city-to-come—the Holy City. In Hebrews 11:10 Abraham is said to look forward to ‘the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God’. Hebrews 11:40 and 12:22–23 direct us to the city built for ‘the spirits of just men made perfect’. In both Old and New Testaments, the ‘Jerusalem above’ (Gal. 4:26, *passim*) is the object of the hope of God’s people. It is

worth noting that the temple and the holy city (Jerusalem) are always linked, and are, indeed, the one (cf. Jer. ch. 7; Rev. 11:1–2; Ezek. chs 40–48).

The Holy City in the Revelation is a vast theme. speaks of the tree of life in God's paradise, and 22:2 confirms the tree of life being in the Holy City, so that the Holy City is paradise. 3:12 speaks of conquerors being pillars in the Holy Temple, and (thus) being identified with the Holy City. 11:2 speaks of *the earthly holy city* being trampled underfoot for a set period. In 20:9 'the camp of the saints and the beloved city' are identified as *God's people on earth*, beset by their enemies. Note that the 'new Jerusalem' had been prophesied in the Old Testament (Isa. 2:1ff.; Micah 4:1ff.), and the 'new temple' was linked with such prophecies (see Isa. 56:6ff.), and these would seem to be *on earth*. The Holy City (whether on earth or in heaven) is contrasted with 'the unholy city', i.e. Babylon. In chapters 21 and 22 the Holy City is seen *in heaven*, and described in great detail.

The Sanctified Bride

In Ephesians 5:25–27 Christ purifies his Bride. This purification is firstly by his blood (Acts 15:9; 22:16; I Cor. 6:11; I Tim. 1:5; Titus 2:14; Heb. 10:22; I Pet. 1:22; I John 1:7), secondly by the word (John 15:3; 17:17; Eph. 5:25–27), and thirdly by the Spirit (I Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5), although these are all the one. Thus all persons who constitute the corporate body of Christ are personally washed and made holy.

The church is the sanctified people of God, set apart to be His people, as Israel in its time was holy to God and His special holy nation (Exod. 19:5–6). This is seen in I Peter 2:9–10 (cf. Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; 6:11; 7:14f.; II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:2, 15; Lev. 11:44). This being the case, the people of God live in a holy manner. For example, the rebukes of Christ are recognized in the letters of chapters 2 and 3 of the Revelation. His exhortations to true holy living are also accepted. Terrible forms are beginning to invade the church and Christ speaks against them, calling for repentance. The holy people reject the impurity and evil of the red dragon, the first beast and the false prophet, as indeed they reject Babylon—the evil counterpart of the Holy City. The 144,000—surely representative of the true people of God—'have not defiled themselves with women', i.e. with idolatrous practices. In 19:7–8 the Bride has made herself ready, and her wedding garment is 'fine linen, bright and pure', a

symbol of her virginal purity, and in fact the garment is composed of 'the righteous deeds of the saints'.

Rightly understood, the Bride is the holy temple (cf. I Cor. 3:16; I Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:21–22; I Pet. 2:4–10; Isa. 56:6–8), and she serves God within it (7:14–15), and in chapters 21 and 22 the temple is really the Holy City, although no temple appears in it at the last—other than the Temple which is God and the Lamb. So holy is this City that nothing that is evil or abominable is permitted to enter into it. Only the pure in heart will see God (Matt. 5:8; Ps. 24:4–5), and in 22:4 this is what happens to those who are part of the Bride. The Bride, truly, is holy.

THE UNHOLY HARLOT

We must keep remembering that Satan (the crimson dragon) seeks to imitate or devise counterparts to all that is God and all that God does in creation and redemption. God is Father and so Satan will be a father (I John 3:10–12; John 8:44), and this means he will have his (impure) family. There is an evil trinity—as we see elsewhere—comprising the dragon, the beast, and the second beast. From them issue 'foul spirits like frogs' (16:13). So there is an impure father, impure children, and an impure woman who is not married. Far from wearing a robe of shining white, she wears crimson—for sin (Isa. 1:18)—and purple—for a false royalty. Whereas the people of God worship God and the Lamb, and do this in all purity, Babylon is the instigator and inciter of idolatry, which is known in the Scriptures as fornication, adultery, and harlotry. The magnificent golden cup of this woman promises much, but it is full of abominations, impurities of her fornication.

The great Harlot and the beast are one in the wilderness, the woman riding on the beast. John is so impressed with the sight that he is forbidden by the angel to marvel. She is a great political power since she is linked first with the seven kings and then with the ten kings, who—in their turn—seem linked with all 'the kings of the earth', i.e. those who oppose God and His Christ. The 'many waters' where the Harlot is seated are 'peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues', and it is notable that the beast came out of this (13:1). They are those who have been deceived by the delicacies and gourmet promises of the infamous city. There is something so strong about the Harlot that the beast and the ten kings hate her, and eventually destroy her.

THE CONTRAST OF TWO WOMEN

The following are contrasts which tell us much about both:

- (a) The Bride is one with Christ, the Bridegroom. Babylon is one with the beast and the dragon in an illicit relationship. Whereas the evil 'bridegroom' (paramour) of the gaudy harlot destroys his female 'helpmeet', Christ unites himself to his Bride in holy wedlock.
- (b) The Bride is dressed in pure linen, i.e. the righteous deeds of the saints. She is radiant with 'all the glory of God'. The gaudy whore is decked out with the evil deeds of humanity and lacks 'the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit'.
- (c) The Bride is the Wife of the Lamb—'the Mother of us all'—and has the name of the Father and of the Lamb on her forehead, but the evil woman is an illicit mother and has written on her forehead, 'Babylon, great mother of harlots and of earth's abomination'.
- (d) The Holy City is set high—New Jerusalem—and it descends out of heaven to be upon the earth. The unholy city is in a wilderness and upon 'the restless sea'.
- (e) The unholy city is in total darkness, but the light of the Holy City is God and the Lamb, and these two constitute its Temple also.
- (f) The unholy city offers delicacies of all kinds for the gourmet tastes of the sinful, but 'the fruits of the tree of life' are for all; and whilst the unholy city could only wound, kill, or bring about the plagues of judgement, the Holy City has 'the tree of life' and 'its leaves were [are] for the healing of the nations'.
- (g) Holy worship is the true keynote of the Holy City and its inhabitants, as against the unholy worship of dragon, beast, and image of the evil trinity.
- (h) Evil people and creatures worship the image of evil, but the Holy People see God 'face to face', and become like Him, and are His priestly people, for ever.
- (i) The Bride is the Holy City, and into her shall come all the nations, the kings bringing their glory into it; but Babylon is the city which shall be destroyed, leaving its devotees bereft.

- (j) Whereas the Holy City is eternal and gives joy, delight and vocation for ever, 'the great city' of Babylon is transitory, passing into destruction and oblivion, taking its devotees with it.

THE CONFLICT OF THE HOLY AND THE UNHOLY

We need to have some idea of the two cities. They are really two different systems—systems which are diametrically opposed. In history readers of this Book have interpreted Babylon in many ways, and probably most of them have fitted. However, that world-system which operates by means of 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life' takes many forms. These may be what we call religious, sacred, secular, political, social, economic, and so on, but we must be careful not to give away this created world to the red dragon, his beasts, and Babylon. It is God's world—all of it—for 'the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof'. The writer of Ecclesiastes has shown us that if we view things only from a horizontal point of view then we will think all is emptiness, but if we view it from a vertical–horizontal standpoint then we will see its reality. So anything may one moment smack of Babylon and the next be seen to be clearly of God. In other Essays we have seen—or will see—that the battle between the true Bride and the Unholy Woman is truly a spiritual battle, provided of course we do not equate 'religious' with 'spiritual'. Of course, Christ leads his Bride in this conflict. He also gives her 'spiritual weapons' by means of which she can counter the 'carnal weapons' of the Babylonish system. Holiness of itself is the most potent power in all creation and history.

That is why the Bride cannot fail to succeed, and why the Unholy Woman can only end her career in disaster.

Essay Thirteen

Angels in the Book of the Revelation

IT is here that we derive a mine of information regarding angels. There are nearly eighty mentions of them in this one prophecy. Probably the easiest way of seeing these angels and their powers and functions is to trace them through in a concordance.*

In 1:1 God sends *His* angel to John with the revelation (prophecy) which John must see. In 22:16 Jesus says, 'I have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches.' In 1:20 to 3:14 the seven angels of the churches (seven churches, each having an angel) are mentioned. Some see these 'angels' as simple messengers to the churches, others as the leaders or pastors, or bishops of the churches, whilst some see them as the 'watchers' or 'guardians' of the respective assemblies. They have responsibility for the churches. In 3:5 Christ speaks of confessing the names of the faithful saints 'before my Father and before his angels'.

Angels in this prophecy often 'proclaim with a loud voice' (5:2), 'a loud voice, like a lion roaring' (10:3). In chapter 14 four times different angels cry 'with a loud voice'. In 18:2 an angel cries 'with a mighty voice'. In 19:17 another angel cries 'with a loud voice'. There are also loud voices and mighty voices from the throne, so that a loud voice must mean that it is authoritative and far-reaching, indicating the special position that angels hold.

Worship is part of the ministry angels hold. In 5:11-14 the countless angels and celestial creatures cry with a loud voice in praise

* For more information on angels in general, see my booklet *What's all this about angels* NCPI, 1982.

to Christ. In 7:11–12 the angelic throng bursts into praise when the fruits of salvation are seen—a multitude of people out of every nation and people and kindred and tongue, standing before the throne. In 19:1–8 it seems impossible that within all the celestial praise there are not the angels present.

For the rest we have angels who exercise authority in their various spheres, and at the times appointed for them. There are the seven angels of the seven churches (1:20); the angel who proclaims concerning the book with the seals (5:2). The four horsemen of the Apocalypse might well be seen as angels (6:1–8). In 7:1–3 we see four angels who have authority over the four winds. At this point they are holding them back.

In 8:2 we read of ‘the seven angels who stand before God’, that is, they are seven who serve Him. In 8:6ff. these are the seven angels who will blow the trumpets of God’s judgements. In 15:1; 6ff.; 16:1; 17:1; and 21:9 seven angels are also spoken of, and they, too, pour out judgements from the seven bowls of plagues which they hold, so that they are of great importance and function. These last two sets of seven angels certainly figure largely in the execution of God’s judgements. One of these seven angels carries John away in the Spirit (17:3) to explain the ‘mystery of Babylon’ to him—a most important matter, especially in relation to the destruction of Babylon as the world-system. In 10:1–10 there is ‘another mighty angel’ who has ‘a loud voice, like a lion roaring’. He proclaims that God’s plan is about to be completed. In 12:7ff. Michael and his angels battle with the red dragon and his angels. The first angels have great authority, enough to cast the dragon and his angels down from heaven to earth. In 14:6 we have ‘another angel flying in mid-heaven, with an eternal gospel’. He uses a loud voice to proclaim a message to every nation. He is followed (v. 8) by an angel announcing the (imminent) fall of Babylon, and a third angel (vv. 9–11) warns against receiving the mark of the beast, i.e. against being part of the system controlled by the Devil and his angels. In 14:14–20 we see two great harvests or judgements on the earth. The first reaper may be Christ or—it is possible—an angel. Certainly the second reaper is an angel, and his harvest is one of terrible judgement. In 18:1ff. an angel ‘having great authority’ comes down from heaven to proclaim the present fall of the great city, Babylon, and to explain why it has been judged and the judgement executed.

Following this judgement the angel has a more pleasant task (19:9) regarding the invitation to the marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb. Doubtless in 19:14 ‘the armies of heaven’ are equivalent

to 'the heavenly host', of which Christ is Leader. At this point there is 'an angel standing in the sun' and he, too, uses a loud voice to invite those who will to come to 'the great supper of God'. This is to destroy (eat the flesh of) kings, captains, mighty men, etc.

Following this judgement of evil there is 'an angel coming down from heaven, holding . . . the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain'. This one has the power and authority to seize the devil and lock him in the pit for one thousand years.

In 21:9 another (presumably) of the seven angels comes to show John the Bride, the wife of the Lamb, and he, too, carries John away in the Spirit. He shows John the heavenly City and then gives him the dimensions of it, and reveals the nature of that City. In 22:8–11 the same angel speaks of the time being near for the fulfilment of the prophecies John has heard and seen.

It can be seen then that the angels have great authority in the affairs of heaven and earth, yet even so are the servants of God, and do not merely have authority of their own.

ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF ANGELS

Here we see—as in chapter 9—that evil angelic powers torment mankind and seek to gain control of him and the creation. In chapter 12 the dragon (the devil) and his angels foment rebellion and conflict in heaven. Doubtless the actions of evil seen in chapters 11, 12 and 13 are part of evil angelic action, as indeed the evil that has always operated in Babylon, the Anti-Holy City. Doubtless, too, the judgement of the lake of fire (19:20–21; 20:10) was for the evil angels as well as evil men, in accordance with Matthew 25:41, as Jesus had prophesied.

In all the events manipulated by evil, the Book of the Revelation speaks of them having been given authority (i.e. they were permitted) to do certain things, but they do not innately have that authority.

CONCLUSION ON ANGELS IN THE REVELATION

It would be difficult to draw together all the activities of angels. Each action as it is described is real, but then it is symbolic in form, hence we do not know the actual action. Generally, however, we can gather that angels are involved in the universal authority of God.

They have areas of operations, particularly regarding the judgements of God. They are involved in praise, but perhaps most of all in the carrying out of God's salvific plan for man and creation. They are filled with joy at the fulfilling and fulfilment of that plan. At the same time they do not seek to be worshipped. In 19:10 and 22:8–9 John is forbidden to worship the angel, the angel himself chiding the prophet. He is told, 'Worship God.'

Regarding the militant aspect of this heavenly host (cf. 19:14, *passim*), we must not make the mistake of thinking of angels in direct military terms. Their Lord (Christ) wins the nations by the Sword, i.e. the Word of God (1:16; 2:12; 19:15), and the last battle is won by the very fire of that Word (20:9).

Essay Fourteen

The Matter of the Millennium

CHRIST THE MEANING OF HISTORY*

IF we would understand the millennium we cannot properly understand it by commencing our study directly from the 20th chapter of the Book of the Revelation of John the Seer. It is virtually impossible to understand that chapter unless we have reasonably traversed the previous nineteen chapters, and then go on to understand the 21st and 22nd chapters. What is more, we must study and know this material in detail, for the whole Book of the Revelation is the setting of the millennium. Even more, the Scriptures as a whole are its full setting. A piecemeal study of the millennium which takes its beginning in the 20th chapter is inadequate. The whole Book is a full prophecy of Christ (Rev. 1:3, 11; 22:18, 19). Since 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy',[†] we must realize that all history takes its meaning from Christ the Son.[‡] Only then can we proceed to discuss the millennium.

* This is the title of a book by Hendrikus Berkhof (Baker, 1979) and is an excellent treatment of the subject.

[†] This statement—'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'—is capable of a number of interpretations, such as (i) 'the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy', i.e. the Spirit testifies to Jesus through the prophets or wherever there is prophecy (cf. Luke 24:26, 27, 44–49); (ii) the testimony which Jesus gives to the truth (John 18:37) and to the Father is the essence of prophecy; (iii) the testimony of Jesus is given by the people of God as they are aided by the Spirit (Rev. 1:2, 9; 4:9; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4), and such is the thrust or meaning of prophecy (cf. Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17–18); (iv) the testimony of Jesus is worked out through the community of Christ, i.e. his action in history, which is his testimony to the truth and to the Father, is worked out through his people—they are him in action (Rev. 1:2, 9; 4:9; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4).

[‡] A reading of history, in which Christ is the meaning of it, requires us to see that the O.T. is primarily speaking of Christ, but then Christ as fulfilling the plan of God. The N.T. leaves us in no doubt that this is the case, and that the fulfilment comes through the person and work of Christ. Recommended reading is a salvation history account, *Salvation History* (G. Bingham, NCPI, n.d.), *Christ the Conquering King* (G. Bingham, NCPI, 1985), and *Christ's People in Today's World* (G. Bingham, NCPI, 1985).

WHAT IS THE MILLENNIUM?

What do we mean by the millennium, especially as it is set forth in Revelation chapter 20? A millennium is one thousand years, and that is how it is represented in the chapter mentioned. For some it is an actual time—one thousand years or ten centuries. For others, who would quote Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8, the length of time is not important, since a day can be as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. For yet others, what seems to be a time span is not a time situation but an action or 'power' situation.

A QUESTION OF DEBATE

It may well be that no chapter has been as much discussed—and debated—as the 20th chapter of the Book of the Revelation.* In particular the debate relates to the thousand years mentioned here. This period is not stated elsewhere in Scripture, even though some think it is referred to in one way or another. The interpretative systems of prophecy called 'pre-millennial', 'post-millennial' and 'amillennial'† have been devised to cover the meaning of this 20th chapter. In or-

* It has been pointed out many times that the millennium—far from bringing joy to the readers of the Book of the Revelation, and far from bringing the very peace it espouses—has been made the basis for much debate, bitter recrimination and much division. It seems obvious that the various views must start from wrong presuppositions or deficient exegeses. Probably most of it is not insincere, but it would seem the answer does not lie either in one system or the synthesis—if that is possible—of all the systems. Eirenic discussion on the four main views on the millennium, as set out in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* by G. E. Ladd, H. A. Hoyt, L. Boettner and A. H. Hoekema (IVP, 1977), is a good illustration of the difficulty of integrating the various views.

† Readers are recommended to do an exhaustive study of the millennial positions in biblical and theological dictionaries and other available sources. Very briefly, we describe the *pre-millennial* position as claiming that Christ will come and bind Satan and set up a millennial reign on earth. Two of its main forms are (i) *dispensationalism* which relates the events of the Book of the Revelation to Israel and its restoration, and (ii) *a system* which relates the events of the Book of the Revelation to the church and its actions. The position of *amillennialism* is that there is no millennium or, rather, that the age from the Ascension to the Parousia is the millennium, but that this is by no means ideal. Some amillennialists say there is a millennium but it is in heaven and only the martyrs reign. The system of *post-millennialism* is that Christ will not return until the Kingdom of God has been established by the church in human history. Thus the millennium is the golden age of history, after which Christ will return to inaugurate the 'end things'. The position taken in this Essay is that the age from the Ascension to the Parousia is the millennium, is the Kingdom of Christ in action, and will consummate when Christ returns, but 'the little while' of Satan does not follow it, but is rather within the actions of that system. We must note that there are many variations on these four positions. That is why each ought to be studied. The first three all put the millennium in the future, but the fourth covers the entire church age. Strictly speaking, these four systems agree that there is a millennium, although they differ concerning the nature of it. The systems which are not amillennial all see the millennium as wholly rooted into this world and its history. Pre-millennialism is futuristic and tends to see the church in this age as sadly limited by the events that happen. Post-millennialism has great hope for this present age—that the gospel will succeed in winning the nations. Amillennialism has a practical understanding of the events of this present era and seeks to preach the gospel for the elect. In the fourth system the amillennial strength is present, but it exceeds every other system in that it insists on the present, continuing and climactic victory of Christ prior to—at—his coming.

der to enter into the debate—if that is necessary—we need not only to know these systems, but why they have been brought into being. Pre-millennialists see Christ's return to earth as prior to the millennium, post-millennialists see it happening after the millennium, and amillennialists see the period between Christ's ascension and his return as being the millennium. In that sense all are millennialists. There are variations of each of these three views, so that millennialism becomes quite complicated.

The view taken in these studies is not that of the above three systems, but it is close to the amillennial system in that it views the period from Christ's ascension to his return as the millennium, but differs from the classic amillennial position in that it insists the events of Revelation 20:7–10 are contained *within* the millennium and do not happen *after* it. This is because the millennium is viewed not as a time situation so much as a power situation. This view seems to be contradicted by the text itself, i.e. verse 7—'When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison [etc.]' Linked with verse 3b—'After that [the thousand years] he must be loosed for a little while'—it would appear that the event of the loosing of Satan must surely follow the millennium, and this is what all three classical positions (mentioned above) claim to be the case. If, however, it can be shown that 'the little while' (cf. Rev. 12:12) is *within* the millennial session, and does not follow it, but is concurrent with it, and that by comparison with one thousand 'a little while' is but a small power against a fuller or total power, then the situation would change vastly.

THE PRESENT VICTORY AND REIGNING OF CHRIST

We must see that Christ is reigning at this present time. I Corinthians 15:24–28 speaks of that present reigning and should be seen in its fullness—'Christ has had all things put in subjection under his feet'—and this is undoubtedly with relation to both Psalm 2 and Psalm 8. In Psalm 2 the Son is given the nations for his inheritance when he is declared the Son.* So the kings of the earth and the nations of the earth who rebelled against the Lord and His anointed

* We ought to keep in mind the statement to the serpent in Eden that the seed of woman would crush his head (Gen. 3:15), and the statement of Gen. 49:10 that the nations would come to *shiloh* i.e. to Messiah, and be obedient to him—a contrast to the rebellion of the nations as seen in Ps. 2. This psalm in fact tells us the nations will be forced to become obedient (cf. I Cor. 15:24–28; Phil. 2:11). See also my book *The Clash of the Kinedoffs* (CPI. 1989).

now have to kiss the feet of the Son. This is because 'he has been designated Son of God in power' (Rom. 1:4; Ps. 2:7; cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5), and as Son of Man (Ps. 8:4–8; Heb. 2:6ff.) all things belong under his feet. So in I Corinthians 15:24–27 'he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet'. It is he who is 'destroying every rule and every authority and power'. His reign, then, purposes (i) to destroy enemies, and (ii) to give the Kingdom he has won to the Father, that God might be all in all.

The Resurrection and the Ascension were the means by which the man Jesus came to be declared 'both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36; 3:15; 5:31; cf. John 16:11). Ephesians 1:20f. speaks of the great power of God:

... which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come, and he has put all things under his feet.

Psalm 2 is again the reference—if not Psalm 8 also—which shows his present reigning over the powers which in I Corinthians 15:24–28 Paul says Christ is destroying, i.e. bringing to be of no account.

Linked with these references to Psalm 2 and the overcoming Son is Revelation 2:26–27, in which Christ says, '... I myself have received power,' i.e. over the nations, which he 'rules with a rod of iron'—a reference to Psalm 2:9. In Revelation 3:21 he invites conquerors to share his throne: 'I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.' In this latter statement, reference to Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 2:6f. is given. The throne on which Christ is seated is the throne of the Kingdom. Paul speaks of 'the kingdom of Christ and of God' (Eph. 5:5), and Revelation 11:15 speaks of 'the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ'. By Resurrection and Ascension—as we have seen—Christ is presently reigning in heaven.

This reigning is in accordance with Psalm 110:1: 'The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool."' There are at least sixteen direct quotes of this verse in the New Testament, and many more indirect quotes of it. Some are made by Jesus in the Gospels, and others are in the Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation. They point to Jesus the Messiah as sharing the throne of God, i.e. sharing God's reigning over all creation, not only in this present age but the age to come. Believers are to believe in his present reigning. Ultimately 'every knee [should] shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and

every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2:10, 11).

In the Book of the Revelation Jesus is depicted as the present 'ruler of the kings on earth' (1:5; cf. 17:14; 19:19); as 'the first and the last' (1:17; 2:8), i.e. 'the Alpha and Omega' (22:13); as 'the Son of God' (2:18); and as 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (17:14; 19:16). In 5:8–14 the same honours are accorded to him as are given to the Creator in 4:7–11. Christ's name and person are linked with that of God in 7:9–10. The throne in heaven is that of 'God and the Lamb'. The Lamb is Lord of history because he alone can open the seals of the seven-sealed book. His opening of them is really his opening of history. Often in the chapters following there are repetitive revelations of the present reigning of God and the Lamb, such as in 11:15f., 12:10 and 15:3f. These flashes of revelation seem to have the purpose of showing that it is not in the ultimate that God will be shown to reign, but it is very much so in the present that He reigns.*

Christ, Who is Presently Putting Down All Evil Forces, has Already Defeated Them

The New Testament makes it clear that Christ's victory is complete. His proleptic statement in John 12:31—'Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out'—speaks of an immediate defeat of Satan. In John 14:30–31 he gives some indication of this: '... the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.' The Father commands him to go to the Cross (cf. John 10:17, 18) where Satan will have power, but it will be in that Cross that he will be defeated.† In Luke 22:53 Jesus acknowledges that the hour of the Cross is the hour of the power of darkness. Even so, it is Christ's hour, for by taking the

* If we recognize the fact that the Book of the Revelation was not simply a coded message for the elect, but was an apocalyptic communication to be understood in the present, then we will realize that it was intended to encourage its readers who were already under persecution. That is why the victory of God was repeated from time to time within the seven cycles of the Book. 'What will be already is', is a theme of the Scriptures, epitomized in Rom. 8:30.

† It should be seen from Jude 9 that the Devil has power where there is guilt of sin, i.e. Moses' corpse—the Devil argues—is his because Moses was a sinner. The Devil is seen in Job chs 1 and 2 to be the Accuser. This is so in Rev. 12:10. On the Cross Jesus bore the sins of all humanity and so was under the accusation of the Adversary, Satan. This pain of accusation is part of the excruciating guilt that sinners know, especially of existential guilt for failing to achieve the fullness of their humanity. Christ defeated Satan on the Cross by bearing the totality of the guilt of the human race, thus robbing Satan of authentic accusation. Doubtless the shield of faith (Eph 6:16) alone can 'quench the flaming darts of the evil one', because the darts are the accusations, but the faith of the believer is in the finished work of Christ. No accusation from Satan can be painful, since it is now an empty one.

guilt of man on himself he destroys the power of the enemy. Two references (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:13–15) make this clear:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public show of them, triumphing over them in him.

So then, Christ by his death, resurrection and ascension 'led a host of captives' (Eph. 4:8), i.e. 'led captivity captive' (Ps. 68:18 AV), so that the powers of darkness were then—as also now—his prisoners, defeated by his work on the Cross in his bearing the guilt of humanity. In the first quote (above) those under the power of Satan through the fear of death are obviously delivered from him by the death on the Cross, i.e. Christ's penal atonement which delivers from the fear of punishment (cf. I John 4:16–18) via the love of the Cross. Satan is thus destroyed. Destroyed (*katargeō*) does not mean abolished or obliterated, but made ineffective. Likewise, 'disarming' and 'making a public show' refers to the defeat and making ineffective of the principalities and powers. It refers to the custom of parading the defeated enemies in a humiliating show before the victor nation, sometimes in the city centre or the stadium. In such cases the decisive defeat of the enemy cannot be in doubt.

Such a defeat of Satan Christ prophesied in Matthew 12:29 (cf. Luke 11:21–22), saying that he, as the stronger-than-the-strong man, would bind the strong man, i.e. Satan, and he would take the spoils from him.[†] Doubtless at the Cross Christ despoiled Satan and his powers, and these forces are now tethered, i.e. they can go no further than they are permitted, seeing they have been defeated. In Luke 10:18 Jesus spoke of seeing Satan 'fall like lightning from

* This verb is used with various meanings, such as 'to destroy' (Rom. 6:6; I Cor. 6:13; Heb. 2:14; II Thess. 2:8; II Tim. 1:10), 'to fade or fade away' (II Cor. 3:7, 11, 13), 'to annul, remove or make void' (Gal. 3:17; 5:4, 11)—and so on. It is also used with the ideas of to paralyse, to put out of employment, to pass away. Thus to destroy the Devil does not mean to obliterate or annihilate, but to put out of effective action, something which approximates to his being chained in the abyss for a thousand years—the time in which he is made ineffective in deceiving the nations.

† If Jesus refers to Satan in John 10:10a as the one who steals, then Satan has spoiled Man in the Fall, and has 'the spoils' of war from that defeat of Man. Now Christ retakes the spoils. These are spoken of in Isa. 53:12, and there is a possible reference to them in Eph. 4:8, for Ps. 68:18 (from which the quote is taken), speaks of Christ *receiving* gifts, rather than *giving* them, though doubtless he shared them with his victorious army.

heaven’—a picture paralleled in Revelation 12:9, where Satan is cast down out of heaven, and this event is linked in principle with Isaiah 14:12–15, where the king of Babylon—a type of Satan—falls from heaven and is brought down into the abyss.

All these references show Christ has already defeated Satan and his forces, and has indeed tethered them, i.e. has set the distances to which they can go under the allowance of God.* II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 show that the rebellious angels were cast into Tartarus and are in ‘eternal chains . . . until the judgement of the great day’. It is these fallen angels which still work their evil deeds even now, but like Satan they have been ‘destroyed’ (Col. 2:14–15) but are permitted to do those things God chooses to use as part of His plan. In the situation of the thousand years, they and Satan are not permitted to deceive the nations. It would appear that although they are restricted in their operations, yet there is another sense in which they are permitted to work out *all they set out to do* that (i) it cannot be said that had they been given their full opportunity then they could have succeeded in some plan that might have outclassed God, and (ii) God always judges when iniquity ripens to its fullest (cf. Gen. 15:12–16). They are permitted to deceive Gog and Magog, but the judgement falls on them when they oppose God (Rev. 20:7–9; cf. 16:14, 16; 17:12–14; 19:11–21; 20:10; 21:8).

What has happened so definitively at the Cross and Resurrection to defeat evil is all that needs to happen to destroy evil powers and evil mankind, so that the time between the Cross (likened to ‘D-Day’) and the Parousia (likened to ‘V-Day’) has often been called the ‘mopping up’ operations. It is more than that, however, because the principles of judgement, retribution, the participation of the church in history and numerous other things are involved. The main point for our thinking is that all evil has been irreversibly defeated. Its place is the abyss and it is tethered.

Christ’s Power Total in This Age

What we conclude from the section above is that Christ’s power is total in this age. His authority (*exousiā*) is total—‘All authority . . . is given unto me’ (Matt. 28:18)—and the period of exercise of that power is ‘unto the consummation of the age’, and this is the time

* This is seen in Rev. 13:7, where the beast is *allowed* to make war on the saints—a thought which derives from Dan. 7:21, 22, 25–27, where the beast prevails over the saints but is ultimately defeated, and the saints are victorious.

when Christ is present to the world and to his church. Ephesians 1:19–22 speaks of him being given authority over all things—in heaven, on earth, and under the earth—so that he is head over all things, and this is—among other things—*for the church*. In this context the church is given his fullness—the fullness that is working itself out, in, and for the plan of God, as the Epistle so clearly shows. To say that he does not reign in this age is to contradict all that we have said above. To show him as detached and as operating only in heaven—above the action but not present to it and in it—is to contradict the facts, since he said, ‘Behold, I am with you, even to the end [i.e. the consummation] of the age’ (Matt. 28:20b).^{*} In this he has *tes sunteleias tou aionos*—‘the completion of the age’—in mind. This means that all his exercise of authority is teleological. Paul gives the parallel to this in I Corinthians 15:24–28, where the triumph of the Kingdom is in mind.

Christ Present in This Age

Whilst the Ascension spelled a separation from the disciples—and so from the church—which was a separation to sight, the separation was not a separation to faith. Since Christ had said he would be with the apostles, then he was! They attributed the healing of the crippled man at the Gate Beautiful to Christ. Throughout Acts signs and wonders are attributed to Christ as Lord (cf. 4:30; 14:3),[†] thus showing he was present. He appeared to Paul, and this more than once (Acts 22:17). In Acts 26:16 Jesus tells Paul that he is to witness ‘to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.’ This means Jesus showed himself to Paul on a number of occasions. In II Timothy 4:16–17 Paul spoke of all deserting him, but ‘the Lord *stood by me* and gave me strength to proclaim the message fully.’

We will see now that for the Spirit to be present with believers was—and is—for Christ to be present. Christ was present to them, and is still present to his people *by the Spirit*

^{*} What we should see here is that Christ not only remains with them *until* the consummation of the age, but he remains for the purpose of consummating the age, i.e. he remains *for* the consummation of the age. This is because his people cannot—of themselves—consummate the age.

[†] In Acts 2:22–23 the signs are from God, but then they are through Christ, and doubtless this is the case in Acts 19:11. See Rom. 15:18–19.

Christ Always Present in Today's World Through the Spirit

In Acts 1:1 Luke talks of 'all that Jesus *beganto* do and teach', this being what he has described in his Gospel. He is inferring that Acts will be an account of what Jesus was *going on* doing and teaching, to which we might add that church history describes what he has been going on doing and teaching to the present moment. This, as against the idea that the Ascension meant—and means—'the real absence of Christ' in history until his Parousia. We have seen above that Jesus was—and is—present with and in his church, and in the actions of history.

Until his ascension Jesus was 'the Man of the Spirit', but when seated at the right hand of the Father he became 'the Man sending and directing the Spirit'.* The Spirit became 'the Spirit of the Man'. Thus the Spirit is variously called 'the Spirit of Christ', 'the Spirit of the Lord', 'the Spirit of the Son', and 'the Spirit of Jesus'. In this way he is closely identified with Christ, who once called him 'another Counsellor' (John 14:16), so that the Spirit has been called Jesus' *alter ego*. Certainly in II Corinthians 3:17–18 the Spirit and Christ seem to be almost the one, and so much so that most exegetes find difficulty in distinguishing them. A passage such as Acts 16:6–10 speaks of the guidance given to the apostolic band as being by 'the Holy Spirit' and 'the Spirit of Jesus'. Again, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 Christ writes his seven letters to the churches in Asia, but their contents are described as 'what the Spirit is saying to the churches'. The Spirit is not to speak 'from himself', i.e. 'on his own authority', but is to glorify both the Son and the Father. In Romans 8:9–11 Christ and the Spirit both indwell the believer, and in Ephesians 3:16 Christ is said to indwell the believer through the Spirit. In I John 3:24 we are told that we know through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us. Thus all the sayings about believers dwelling in Christ and Christ in them—which we have mentioned above—tell us that where the Spirit is, there is Christ, and where Christ is, there is the Spirit.

What, then, do we make of the sayings regarding the Parousia—the appearing of Christ, often called 'the second coming' and 'the return of Christ'? Apart from what may be a deficient understanding and use of the terms, we are assured Christ and the Father both dwell in us (John 14:23; cf. I John 4:16), and that Jesus is Immanuel—

* This can be seen in John 16:7 and Acts 2:33.

‘God with us’. We also are to know that we ‘walk by faith and not by sight’ (II Cor. 5:7), so that whilst Christ is not present to sight he is certainly present *to* faith, though not *by* faith, i.e. our faith does not make him present but simply apprehends his presence.

We are bound to conclude, then, that Christ is wholly present in this age of ‘the last days’. The Spirit is present in these last days (Acts 2:17–21), and is indeed the eschatological Spirit in relation to these days (cf. Isa. 11:1–3, 4; cf. II Thess. 2:8). What has often been missed is the enormous significance of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit, for this was the beginning of a new era—the outworking of ‘I will draw all men unto me’ (John 12:32). This was to follow ‘the casting out of the ruler of this world’ (John 12:31), since the Devil was not to be allowed to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:3) during the time of the millennium, and so the nations were to be drawn to Christ and ultimately to be brought into the Holy City (Rev. 7:9–14; 21:24—22:2).

The Present Reigning of Believers

One might question whether believers reign in life, now, in face of the powers of evil. That they do is clearly seen in Paul’s statement of Romans 5:17:

If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man [Adam], much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Some commentators see this reigning as wholly eschatological* and doubtless it is that, but it is not only that. The whole passage of Romans 5:12–21 speaks of something which happens now. The believer, then, reigns *now*—‘in life’—and does it through the one man Jesus Christ. This is much the same as Ephesians 2:4–7 in which it is said that God raised us from the dead—now—and ‘made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus’. In both these instances we share the reigning with Christ—the promise that Christ gives to those who conquer—as set out in Revelation 2:26–27 and 3:21. No

* When we ask ‘What does “wholly eschatological” mean?’, any answer must contain the two notions: (i) that what is eschatological belongs to the *eschaton* or the last era, and (ii) that in one sense all history is the last era, so that all prophecy is linked in time with what we call ‘the continuing present’. In some sense, then, what is eschatological is in the *now* as well as the *then*. What is proleptic is as what will be, and this is illustrated by Rom. 8:30, where we are now both justified and glorified. In Gal. 5:5 Paul gives an eschatological note to justification which is mostly spoken of as *now* in the Pauline Epistles. C. H. Dodd’s ‘realized eschatology’ is an extension of these ideas: for him nothing will happen in the future which is not wholly so now, so that nothing can be said to be of the future. Adrio König, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology* (Eerdmans, 1989) says that Christ himself is the *eschaton*—hence all eschatology is in him and from him. This helps us to understand the time factor more intelligently.

person is a conqueror by his or her own efforts or power, but every believer is a conqueror in Christ. John said, 'Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world,' and he also wrote, 'I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one' (I John 4:4; 2:13–14).

In Romans 8:35–39 Paul speaks of the things which seek to separate believers from the love of Christ, and states that it is impossible for them to do so, even though 'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long,' and 'we are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.' He says emphatically, 'No, *in all these things* we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.' Notice the *in all these things* It is not *in spite of them* even *over them* but *in them* that we are conquerors. That is, the opposition may seem to be strong and powerful but it is no match for us—in Christ Hence Paul says in Philippians 4:13, 'I can do all things *in him* who strengthens me.'

We see the enemies which the believer overcomes in Christ—namely sin, the world, the flesh, Satan, the principalities and powers, the judgement of the law, and the fear of death. In one way of speaking these are monstrous enemies: in another way, these enemies are weak in the face of the believer's union with Christ and his atonement. The Devil makes a great noise—going about as a roaring lion—but when the believer humbles himself under the almighty hand of God and resists the Devil, then the Devil will turn tail and flee from him (James 4:7; I Pet. 5:6–9; cf. I John 2:12–14), i.e. 'one little word shall fell him'. Paul says we have been crucified to the world, as also the world has been crucified to us (Gal. 1:4; 6:14), and John says, 'this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith' (I John 5:4). Revelation 12:11 says that the saints of God have overcome the dragon 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony' and that they are not afraid of death. In Revelation 15:2 John speaks of those 'who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name', showing that believers do not have to give in to the beast, however much others may marvel at it and say in wonderment, 'Who is like the beast and who can fight against it?'

AN INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION 20:1–10

The foregoing materials have been presented to help us in our interpretation of the passage. We need also to realize that the Book of the Revelation and its actions are not necessarily in chronological order. In 19:11, 17; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1, 22 John says 'then I saw' (six

times) and 'and I saw' (once). The 'then' does not necessarily place these events John saw in sequence. It is his *seeing* which is in sequence and not necessarily the events. When it comes to the matter of the thousand years we do not necessarily have to think of it as literal—since an abyss, and a key to it can scarcely be *literal*, even if they are *actual*—so that it does not even have to be a *time* matter.* Thomas Torrance in his *The Apocalypse Today* says in this regard:

The visions of this chapter, which are among the most difficult in the book, have to do with the prelude to eternity which is mysteriously bound up with a thousand years. We must remind ourselves again that these are apocalyptic visions and not history. We have glimpses of an unseen world, and of its bearing upon world events here and now. We are given also intimations of what shall be. But all this is clothed in mysterious symbolical language and measured out in its span by an apocalyptic calendar. It is expressed thus precisely because it cannot be expressed in the straightforward way of direct speech. Extraordinary symbols have been thrown upon the screen of vision, strange uncanny creatures in fantastic mixture of the mythical and the recognizable, and now on the same screen of vision we have the symbol of a thousand years. It is quite evident that we have no more right to take this thousand years literally than we have to take the ten-headed and seven-horned monster literally. It is entirely out of place therefore to bring down the thousand years out of its apocalyptic setting and place it on the ordinary plane of history, as if it could be handled by a worldly arithmetic and manipulated in calculations about the dispensations of time or about the end of the world. Such an intrusion into the secrets of God is utterly foreign to the Bible, and, as we have seen again and again in this book, it is always denied to us. God's time is different from our time . . .

What kind of time is it in the Kingdom of God? It is time like a thousand years, perfect in duration and complete in itself, time in which the dragon of guilt is bound, time therefore which can mature and find its perfect fulfilment in the eternal life of God—the time of Christ, the Alpha, and the Omega.†

Now 'was, and is, and is to come' does not refer to God being in time—since He could not be—but it does refer to Him *acting* in what we call time (was, is, to come). Therefore we should not look at the time statement as a time concept but rather as a power-in-action

* It should be kept in mind that the matter of time in the Revelation does not equal our idea of time. For example, when it is said of God 'who was and is and is to come', it is not speaking of Him having 'been, being, and yet shall be', for such a concept of God is foolish. He is not in time, and does not pass the time, and there is no future for Him to look into. Whilst 'who was and is and is to come' certainly appears to us as a time sequence—seeing we are creatures of time, and God speaks to us as creatures of time—yet the emphasis here is the *action* that God does in what to us is past, present and future. God is always being, i.e. being Himself, no matter what time we may view Him to be in. The statement 'who was and is and is to come' means 'who was acting, who is acting, and who will always be acting, i.e. doing'. This can be seen in Rev. 17:8, where the beast 'was', i.e. was acting, but now is not (acting) but yet will be (acting).

† James Clarke. 1960. pp. 162–164.

concept. God has always been, is being, and will always be, powerful in action. Hence 'a thousand years' here compares with 'a little while'—*mikron chronon*—(20:3; cf. 20:7; 12:12), 'his time is short' (*oligon kairos*). In principle, then, the situation of reigning is a complete and perfect one of power and action, whilst 'a little while' is a minor action by comparison. It is not full, complete, and effective, but partial, momentary, and ineffective. In respect to this, Torrance says of the thousand years (p. 165):

This is the apocalyptic account of what goes on behind history, the story from the angle of the Kingdom of God, of its breaking into the midst of our sinful world, and its reign in the midst of our time. No doubt we may here recall the words of Jesus in the parable, 'No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man. And then he will spoil his house' (Matt. 12:29). That is precisely what happened when the Kingdom of God invaded our world in the person of Jesus Christ, for through Him the Kingdom of God is here amongst us even now. Already the end-time has come upon us. The time of Alpha is also the time of Omega. Already the Kingdom-of-God-time runs throughout our time, and presses to its manifestation in the Advent of Christ. Behind the course of sinful history the reign of Christ is actually taking place.

All of this seems clear enough: the 'thousand years' is a power concept on a major scale, and the 'little while' is a power concept on a minor scale. What, then, do we make of 'after this he must be loosed for a little while' (v. 3) and 'And when the thousand years are ended' (v. 7)? There will be no explanation if we try to resolve a time sequence. If we see them as power concepts then there will not be a sequence in their operations. There will simply be a conflict of the two 'systems' or 'situations', i.e. the 'thousand years' will prevail over the 'little while'. The power of the thousand years does not alter or terminate when Satan in his 'little while' gathers Gog and Magog and seeks to destroy 'the camp of the saints'. Satan does not do this 'after' the thousand years—since there can be no 'after' in a power situation. To say that the 'thousand years' and the 'little while' run concurrently is to go back into a time sequence and so to abandon the power-action concepts.

We need to note that John does not tell us where this reign takes place. Commentators argue as to whether it was in heaven or on earth that the thousand years' happening took place. He said, 'I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed.' What were these thrones? In Daniel 7:9 it is simply said that the thrones were placed, but in 7:22 it is said that 'judgement was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom'. This is amplified in 7:26–27

when it is said:

the court shall sit in judgement, and his [the beast's] dominion shall be taken away to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.

If we transfer the passage of Daniel 7:1–27 and use it as in interpretative key, then we would need to apply it first to Revelation 13:1–17; 14:9–13; 15:3; 19:11–21, as these passages show us the dragon, the beast, and the second beast (or false prophet) in their power and then as defeated, which then opens up the way for the saints to reign over the Kingdom. Since in Daniel 7 the saints are linked with 'one like a son of man' who is given sovereignty over all the nations, it would seem this principle is wholly applicable to Revelation 20:4–6:

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

If we ask, in regard to verse 4, 'To whom is judgement committed?', we have an indication in Luke 12:32 and 22:28–30:

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

In the first reference Jesus tells his disciples 'it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'—obviously a reference to Daniel 7—whilst in the second reference they are told they will 'sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel'. It may well be that in Daniel 7 the saints sit on the thrones of verse 9:

As I looked,
 thrones were placed
 and one that was ancient of days took his seat;
 his raiment was white as snow,
 and the hair of his head like pure wool;
 his throne was fiery flames,
 its wheels were burning fire.

but in verse 26 it simply says the court sat in judgement:

But the court shall sit in judgement,
and his dominion shall be taken away,
to be consumed and destroyed to the end.

It has been thought that the thrones are those of the twenty-four elders (Rev. 4:4), and whilst the elders do sit in judgement it does not seem clear that the thrones here are those of the elders. We note that those on the thrones are not said to reign, even though, perhaps, it may be inferred. What is said clearly is that the martyrs (cf. Rev. 6:9–14)—those beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and the word of God—reign with Christ, having come to life. It neither says they were on the thrones nor not on thrones. (Note that the ‘also’ of Rev. 20:4 gives us two sets of beings or persons—those on the thrones *and* the martyrs.)

Much depends on what is meant by ‘came to life’ and ‘this is the first resurrection’. It can easily be argued that all believers have ‘come to life’ by participating in ‘the first resurrection’, i.e. that described in Romans 6:1–10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:5; and Colossians 3:1–2. It can also be argued that there is no ‘second resurrection’ as it is not mentioned in Revelation. It could be argued that there is a second resurrection—the resurrection of the body—and these both—the first and the second resurrections—seem to be contained in Romans 6:1–10. It can also be argued from John 11:25 that believers never die: ‘Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,” ’ so that in John 5:29 there is a conflation of John 11:25 and the statement of John 5:29: ‘. . . and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgement’. If this is linked with John 5:24 then the picture is complete. Certainly all believers will never meet ‘the second death’, i.e. being cast into the lake of fire (cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:14–15; 21:8).

We can now come to some conclusion, even if we may not be dogmatic about it. It is this: the thousand years is that situation which is the Kingdom of God, over which Christ reigns, and judgement is committed to certain of his elect. The martyrs also reign with him. It could be that certain of his elect reign as on earth and the martyrs as in heaven. This is not inconceivable in the light of Hebrews 12:22–24:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the

assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

Here all the elect in heaven—all who are ‘enrolled in heaven’—and on earth, worship together. Certainly the second death cannot touch such, since their names are in the book of life. If all of this is so, then the millennium is now, i.e. it has been since the Ascension and will be until the Parousia.

Before we reject this idea, let us remember we have seen that Christ is now present on earth, that he reigns here now, that his saints all reign with him in the Kingdom, that Satan and his powers are bound now, and that Daniel 7 is being fulfilled in the operations of the beast (in Revelation the dragon, the beast, and the second beast), the defeat of the beast, the defeat of the false prophet and of the Devil. In Ezekiel chapters 38–39 the matter of Gog and Magog is taken up. God tells Gog that He will bring judgement against him, his land (Magog), and his people. He will bring them against Israel in great hordes but they will be destroyed and be given over to birds of prey (cf. Rev. 19:17–18), and ‘I will send fire on Magog [cf. Rev. 20:7] and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands; and they shall know that I am the Lord’.

Problems Regarding the Placing of the Millennium in History

One of the problems in interpretations of chiliasm—the view of the thousand years as a period* and not a power situation—is that it sees the millennium as in the future (post-millennial and pre-millennial views). When the millennium is seen as *now*, and the work of the Devil as being a pitting of Satan against Christ—who is ruling the Kingdom and his people who are in ‘the camp of the saints’—then this event is pushed even further than the millennium into the far future.

A second problem is fitting the millennium into the teaching of the whole Bible. There can be no question that there will be an age of peace, and this principle is found in the Old Testament† (such as

* We are not saying that the millennium does not constitute a period, but if that is the only way it is viewed, then the understanding of it is lost. Even if it is viewed as an ideal period its value is still not seen. We may say—with the amillennialists—that it is the period from the Ascension to the Parousia, but the amillennialists see the events of Rev. 20:7–10 happening after the millennium, so that the event of ‘the little while’ is not seen as happening now but after the millennium, so that it is in the future.

† This seems to give great encouragement to the post-millennialists. They believe Christ will draw all

in Isa. 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–3; Isa. 9:5–7; 11:6–10), and many references to the establishment of the Kingdom of God tend to point that way. However, no such block of teaching is given of an idyllic epoch which will happen when Satan and evil powers will be tethered, and the saints shall reign. Without doubt, Daniel 7 fits the picture in Revelation regarding the beast, the beast's defeat and the reigning over the nations, and judgement by the saints, but no time era is envisaged before the Day of the Lord. It is this which makes some scholars uneasy at the principle of chiliasm.

Another problem facing those who study the Revelation is that of the relevance of the millennium to any age in which its account is read. Adrio König says:

Broadly speaking, the circumstances under which Revelation was written were these: The young churches of Asia Minor were subjected to persecution and martyrdom (Rev. 2:9–10, 13; 3:10). This made them confused and doubtful, because the gospel as it was taught to them asserted that Satan had been defeated (Col. 2:15; Matt. 12:28–29; Luke 10:17–18; 11:20–22; John 12:31). Why then were they under attack? Had not Christ conquered Satan by his life, death, and resurrection? Neither chiliast nor anti-chiliast takes proper account of the confusion being experienced by the Asian Christians. Revelation 20 is often explained in a way which would have conveyed nothing to its original recipients—as if it were really written to us. John never expected that one or two thousand years would elapse before Christ returned. Jesus himself forbade all calculations of when he would return (Matt. 24:36–50; 25:13; Mark 13:33–37). Further, both Christ and his apostles taught that his return was near (I Cor. 7:29; Jas. 5:8–9; I John 2:18; Rev. 22:12). In I Thess. 4:15 Paul clearly considers it possible that he will be one of those to see the second coming . . .

Revelation 20 could have offered no consolation whatever to those original readers if the thousand years were meant literally . . . How could it have helped the confused, persecuted congregations of ancient Asia Minor to learn that Satan would be bound at some remote, future time? They needed help then! This means that futuristic chiliasm is unacceptable.*

The way in which we have presented the matter above would have met the needs and understanding of the early Christians and—for that matter—all Christians in all ages. They could have understood that 'a little while' was a minor pressure to living when the thousand year strong reign of Christ could so easily overcome it. There was the victory! In all things they could be conquerors. Christ was the one

men unto himself (John 12:32), that the nations will be disciples and baptized into Christ (Matt. 28:18–20) and the Kingdom of God established on earth by the proclamation of the gospel (cf. Rom. 15:18f.; Rev. 19:15). Even so, it is still a form of chiliasm and makes the thousand years not a power system, but an era followed by Satan inciting Gog and Magog against the church—the Holy City.

* *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology*, Erdmans, pp. 129–130.

reigning, and not the dragon or the beast. They would see that all believers are sealed so no actual harm can come to them. Suffering may come, but its degree was most minor (cf. Rom. 8:18). The church was (is) protected in the wilderness (Rev. 12:6, 14). No eternal harm or destruction can come to the church. Even the earth opened up its mouth to receive the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth.

So then—as we have pointed out above—the true millennium in action is from Christ's Ascension to his Parousia. By comparison, the things the Devil was doing to the early church were only for 'a little while' in comparison to the millennium of power. Thus the church in every age can live in peace, sure that one cannot be harmed* when one is sealed by God for Himself (Rev. 7:1f.), that seal being the Spirit and received in baptism.† The relatively small power of the 'little while' is nothing against the mighty power of Christ who—with his Father—reigns over all. The early church had in its *corpus* of faith the important passage of I Corinthians 15:24–28, which stated that 'he [Christ] must‡ reign until he has put all enemies under his feet', and when we ask, 'When would that be—that he would be putting down all enemies?', the answer must be, 'In this last age'. If we see the millennium as this present age then it can contain all that we read of the Revelation from 5:1 through to 20:15, for in that section of the Book is the account of the rise and fall of Satan and his kingdom, and the triumph of Christ, so that his Messianic Kingdom ultimately becomes co-terminal with the Kingdom of God. He then is able to give the whole Kingdom to the Father, to the glory of the Father, and that God may be 'all in all'. This being so, the doctrine of the millennium, far from being something in the future and absent from present reality, becomes a doctrine of great encouragement, as it insists that Satan's power is minimal and that of the Kingdom is maximal. All that happens in this age in regard to persecution and sufferings§ is little against the brilliance of freedom, the victory of being in Christ, and the hope of glory. The kingdom of darkness has no future, the world-system is passing away (I John

* By 'harmed' we do not mean no physical harm will come to believers. Harm may well come, but there will not be that kind of harm which will damage the essential being of the faithful person.

† As in Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30; cf. II Cor. 1:21–22.

‡ The *dei* here is not simply the 'must' of inevitability but of indispensability. This is what has to happen.

§ Suffering is a rich teaching of the N.T. Suffering is not something to which believers simply have to resign themselves, but it is a gift of God (Phil. 1:29), it is intimate fellowship with Christ (Phil. 3:10), it is life lived consistently with his (Col. 1:24), it makes the life of Christ manifest in our mortal bodies (II Cor. 4:11), it is the way *of* and *to* glory (Rom. 8:17–18; II Cor. 4:16), and it is not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed *tous* and *in* us (Rom. 8:18–25).

2:17; cf. I Cor. 7:31) and everything about it is doomed to the lake of fire.

THE PERSONAL AND PASTORAL VALUE OF MILLENNIALISM

According to the system espoused so will be its value. Both pre-millennialism and post-millennialism have their systems rooted firmly in this world. Each in its own way has given rise to utopianism—the belief that a perfect situation can happen in the time of human history. The futuristic nature of pre-millennialism and dispensationalism does not give much value to things present, as they are seen to be of no permanent value: indeed they are virtually irrelevant. For some, pre-millennialism motivates to determined evangelism, but for others it is simply the ingathering of a small remnant. Post-millennialism has a strong constraint to evangelism and the discipling of the nations. Whilst amillennialism is also rooted in history, it sees it as the time in which Christ is working, followed by a final working of evil's defeat, but it primarily looks to his return to consummate all things. Likewise, the fourth millennial position we have presented is rooted in history, but it does not look to anything as happening on the earth after the coming of Christ: he will then consummate history.

When each system is taken on its own it has certain values because of what it teaches. Unfortunately some systems seem to see Christ as absent from the earth in this present time, even though present in heaven. This raises a personal and pastoral problem and tends to pessimism and conspiratorial phobias—sometimes to the point of paranoia. This present age seems to offer little to them—adherents are often primarily futuristic in their thinking, seeing little value or hope rising from the present. There is a tendency to minimize what can be done in evangelism, conversion, and holiness of life. Those who see the millennium as being in the *now* of history, and know Christ to be reigning *now*, have more confidence in the sovereign action of God, and expect much that is great to happen before the Parousia.

Victory or No Victory?

The New Testament is redolent with the victory of Christ over all forms of evil—his victory over Satan, the principalities and powers,

their world-system and their so-called wisdom. Prior to his incarnation, it would seem they did as they would, even to Satan's temptation of Man so that he fell, his inciting and control of the nations, his manipulation of rebellion in heaven, and his attempt to destroy the Christ child* —set out in Revelation 12:1–6. Christ's victory over Satan at the time of the temptation in the wilderness, at the time of his ministry (cf. Acts 10:38; Matt. 12:28), and through the Cross and the Resurrection (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15), unhanded Satan as a dominant power. In addition, Christ's victory over the flesh (the fallen state of Man), over sin, over the dominating power of judgemental law, and over death, i.e. the *fear* of death, all constitute a wonderful and far-reaching victory.

It is unfortunate that some forms of eschatological teaching seem to show Christ's victory as minor in comparison to the power of Satan and his world-system. Only the return of Christ can topple him, and yet the truth is that he has been toppled. When John said, 'The whole world [lies] in the power of the evil one,' that is taken by some to mean the whole creation lies in Satan's power, which is obviously absurd. Those in his world-system are certainly in his power (cf. Eph. 2:1–3; II Tim. 2:26), but John also said, 'This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.'[†] Sometimes—and perhaps in reaction to their own misunderstood view of Satan's great power—some Christians emphasize the victory of Christ in an almost jingoistic fashion, singing songs of victory, shouting against the power of evil as a form of protest, but yet in their heart of hearts thinking Satan is nevertheless powerful.[‡]

The primary question is this: 'Is our eschatology and our view of the millennium such that in this present age we can proclaim Christ's present victory over all evil, and to that extent and degree that men and women will know themselves to be liberated from the power of Satan and sin, and believe they can "reign in life by one

* These things are dealt with more particularly in my book *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989). One side of salvation history is the attempt of Satan and his followers to usurp the throne of God and rule over creation—a ministry given to Man and not even to angelic powers.

[†] In the same breath that John says the world lies in the power of the evil one, he also says that those born of God do not sin and the evil one cannot touch them (I John 5:18–19). Here there is no despairing acknowledgement that Satan is in control—to the contrary—for the world-system is powerless against God and His Messiah.

[‡] This has been described as 'whistling in the dark whilst singing in the light'. The misgiving of this kind of Christian does not allow him to believe Satan is bound now, in spite of Christ's statements of Matt. 12:28–29 and John 12:31–32. In some worship situations Christians feel compelled to 'bind Satan' so that they can worship God. The fact is that Satan has already been bound and it is Christ who is 'the minister in the sanctuary' (Heb. 8:2), worship is offered through him (I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15), and by means of the Spirit of worship (John 4:23–24; Phil. 3:3). The statement in Rev. 12:10, 11 is that the brethren *have already* overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, not that they *are habitually* overcoming him in this way. They habitually see him as having been overcome. Only then do 'victory songs' become authentic.

Christ Jesus?”, or must the statement of that victory always be tempered with a caution of “Ah yes, but the victory is as yet not complete. It is only a provisional victory. Satan still has great power, and sin and the flesh can fell a believer at any time”? ’*

PREACHING THE MILLENNIUM

This is something the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher is not called upon to do. Each of these—and all together—are called to proclaim Christ and not the millennium. The millennium as an entity is almost hidden. The reason is that it is a situation, an entity of power, an environment in which the people of God live, and in which evil finds itself subdued and defeated. For this reason it is not proclaimed. At the same time the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher who does not understand its nature, who does not see it as the Kingdom of God in reality—if not yet in full consummation—will always be deficient in understanding the victory of God. His ministry is likely to be tentative, hesitant, lacking in power and assurance, and thus likely to be like the trumpet which sounds an uncertain note. His listeners, then, will also see the gospel as a tentative one.

For this reason it is incumbent upon proclaimers to live in the fullness of assurance of the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ, and not to be ashamed of it, and not to hedge it round with so much conditioning that hearers will be unsure of it. Whilst we are not called to proclaim the millennium, we are called to live in it and to proclaim the Lord who is over it. This will be persuasive in drawing all men unto Him, in bringing the nations to the obedience of faith and submission to Christ, in baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and thus fulfilling the mandate to preach Him throughout the world until those nations come in time to bring their glory into the Holy City and worship Him who lives for ever and ever.

* It is true that the defeat of Satan and sin must always be in the context of humility and dependence upon God (cf. James 4:6–7; I Pet. 5:6–9), but then all life should be lived that way. Pride has no place in proper Christian living, yet—pride or no pride—it is an objective fact that Satan has been defeated and bound!

CHRIST IS PRESENTLY AND ALWAYS KING

Try to imagine yourself without personal knowledge of the gospel, of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and purposive action throughout this present age—then apocalyptic is of immense value. Apocalyptic reveals Christ as King and Lord in history, controlling it with his sovereign powers, and bringing it steadily to its ultimate goal. If you could be without personal knowledge of the millennium then life would be without an object of hope—and a magnificent hope at that. It is good to record that the millennium—rightly understood and rightly proclaimed—is one of the most pondered, discussed and incentive-raising teachings of the New Testament. It is not speaking of a period of rare respite in the long haul from the point of Christ's Ascension to the point of his Parousia. No: it is speaking of the mighty victory of Christ over all creatures and powers—so much so, that he is Lord of history and King of kings and Lord of lords, and is ever able to lead his people in victory and his enemies in their defeat.

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Essay Fifteen

The Vision is For Now and For All

THE VISION IS FOR NOW

THE value of the Book of the Revelation is in proportion to its immediacy to the reader, that is, whether the reader sees it as relevant or puts it in the past or relegates it to the future. The following points show that it is relevant to readers of all times, and of course, those who are reading it now.

- (a) The vision of the Revelation is for all readers, in all time, because it is not limited in its address to any particular audience.
- (b) Blessing is promised to all who *read* it, and *keep* it (1:3; 22:6–7, 9), and cursing to those who would *detract from it* (22:18–19). Keeping it and detracting from it are both a form of response and reaction, respectively.
- (c) The vision is (i) for the seven churches of Asia (1:4, 11; chs 2 and 3). Note that each letter is for all the churches ('let him hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*'); (ii) for the sevenfold church throughout the whole church age (22:6). This age, of course, is the church age.
- (d) The action of the vision must not be placed simply (i) only in the past, or (ii) only in the future. See 1:1, 'what must soon take place'; 1:3, 'the time is near'; 4:1, 'what must take place after this'; 22:6, 'what must soon take place'. God's 'soon' and man's 'soon' are certainly different (Luke 18:8, 'he will vindicate them speedily'; II Pet. 3:3–10, 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand

years, and a thousand years as one day', v. 8). In most of the seven letters Jesus says he is coming—2:5, 'I will come'; 2:16, 'I will come'; 2:25, 'until I come'; 3:3, 'I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you'; 3:11, 'I am coming soon'; 3:20, 'I will come in to him'; 22:20, 'Surely I am coming soon'. Revelation 2:5 and 16 indicate that Christ will come if the churches do not repent of their evil.

- (e) The prophecy of the Revelation comports with all prophecy and Scripture (Jer. 23:23ff.; I Pet. 1:10–11; II Pet. 1:20–21; Luke 24:25–26, 44f.; Rev. 19:10; II Tim. 3:16f.), and biblical prophecy is incomplete without it.

JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOR EVER

- (a) As we say, the vision of Jesus Christ given in 1:12–20 is for all the church, for all this age, and for ever. Thus the ascriptions of Christ, taken from chapter 1 and given in chapters 2 and 3 at the headings of the seven letters to the churches, apply to all the church throughout this age.
- (b) The whole action of the Book of Revelation, commencing at chapter 5, is what is happening in this age. Thus the vision is for now. We should, then, be continually reading these prophecies, and seeking to see their principles working out in our present age. We should take warning from them, we should be informed by them, and we should take heart from them.
- (c) All history—as, too, all prophecy—is 'the testimony of Jesus'. Hence the immutable Christ will be working on the same principle in all the age (cf. Matt. 28:18–20; I Cor. 15:24–28). Thus the judgements, the defeat of evil powers, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, with the new heavens and the new earth, and the Holy City, must be a constant understanding of our minds, and in them, an incentive for the action of life, every day.

THE VISION IS FOR ALL

- (a) The vision is firstly for the saints—all those who read the prophecy.

- (b) The vision concerns all, i.e. those who read the prophecy and those who do not. It is a message proclaimed not only to saints, but sinners; not only for the good powers, but also for the evil powers. Paul has reminded us that supernatural powers look to see the plan and His manifold wisdom working out in history by viewing the church and its action (Eph. 3:7–11), hence the prophecy of John the Seer concerns all evil powers, the vast system called ‘the world-system’, including the crimson dragon, the beasts, and Babylon. It also includes impenitent mankind. It is God’s message for the whole creation, and those who do not read it, or refuse its message, do so at their own peril. They cannot plead ignorance as an excuse. To refuse the way out of evil will confirm the judgement. Evil will be finally judged. To read it and not obey it, of course, will be the basis of the final judgement.
- (c) The prophecy is especially for the saints, for it is they who will ‘receive the Kingdom’, i.e. they will ‘enter it’ and ‘inherit it’, for this will be their universal heritage (cf. Dan 7:13ff.; Luke 12:32; 22:28f.; Matt. 25:34; Acts 14:22; II Thess. 1:5).
- (d) The prophecy has personal concern and value for each saint. See the seven promises in the seven letters, and other promises such as 5:10; 7:15ff.; 14:13; 21:1–7; 22:4–5. In this Book there are promises and commands—both. The commands are a form of promise, just as promises are a form of command. The commands are directives, not leaving us directionless. Not only are there prophecies of life in eternity, but all these are grounds for present hope, for hope is a great dynamic to lead us on. Along with faith and love, hope is a great power for present living.

GRASPING THE PRESENT IN LIGHT OF THE FUTURE

Man is apt to procrastinate, to turn away the present moment, or, rather, to envisage most of his action as being in the future. He generally dislikes making present decisions. The Book of the Revelation tells us that God has always been working, is working, and will always work, i.e. is the One ‘who was, and is, and is to come’, ‘the Alpha and the Omega’. When we grasp the dynamic nature of history—knowing each season (*chronos*) yet knowing each season has its point of action and climax (*kairos*)—then we act at the point of

kairos Thus life goes forward, and we mature, looking for the day when we shall be conformed wholly into the image of His Son, and this is God's primary purpose for creation, and—for that matter—redemption and renewal of the entire universe.

Essay Sixteen

The Relevance and Value of the Book of the Revelation For Life and Pastoral Ministry

THE PROPOSITION BEFORE US

THE proposition is really that the Book of the Revelation is of indispensable value to people and pastor alike, that it ought to be read, expounded, discussed, understood, adhered to, and observed. It should prove to complete and tie off all major doctrines of Old and New Testaments, and help to give a full perspective of the Scriptures and their salvation history. For example, the following are some of the themes and elements which are significant in the Book—the nature of God as Creator, Redeemer, Father, and Judge; the nature of the Son as Lord over all, Lord of history and all powers; the nature of celestial and terrestrial creatures; the nature of the Spirit of God, and his work in heaven and history; the nature of worship and service; the nature of the people of God; the nature of the kingdoms of God and Satan, as also the clash of the two; the nature of history as invaded and dominated by Satan (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, along with their political actions); the nature of Babylon functionally, morally, politically, and as a power structure; the nature of God's judgements, the end things such as the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the battle against evil powers, the destruction of such powers, the Holy City, and the action of God, heaven, and the elect in eternity.

If we ask ourselves how well we know these matters, and how well

our people know them, and if such knowledge is not only helpful but essential to Christian living, then something of the value of the Book can be assessed.

THE VALUE OF THE REVELATION AS THE BOOK ITSELF CLAIMS IT

The Book has seven beatitudes, as, indeed, it has other sevens (such as churches, seals, trumpets, bowls, visions, spirits, torches, eyes, horns, and the like). The beatitudes (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14) are linked with the basic themes of the Book—i.e. prophecy, dying in Christ and resurrection, being awake and properly clothed, being invited to the marriage supper, sharing the first resurrection, and having robes washed in order to enter the Holy City and have life. Two of the beatitudes are regarding the Book itself (1:3 and 22:7):

Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are they who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.

Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

There is also a curse for a wrong reading of the Book (22:18–19):

I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

These references point to the seriousness of reading the Book, and of reading it wrongly. The two beatitudes are important, for they promise blessing for reading the Book, and for keeping (i.e. observing) it. Prophecy, then, is to be heard—even recited—until its message becomes clear, and as it is clear, then keeping it, i.e. obeying it, is required. This must mean that if one knows what God is telling by His word, then one must understand and work out one's practice of life by that word.

The Readers of this Book to Whom it is Addressed

The prophecy is addressed 'to the seven churches which are in Asia'. These churches had certain geographical locations. They existed in John's time. Letters of Christ, by which the Spirit was communicating, were written to these seven churches (cf. chs 2 and

3), but even beyond these letters John is commanded, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea'. One might think the matter of the letters to the seven churches would be enough, but there is the prophecy which is not the seven letters, for 22:6 says, 'These words [i.e. of the whole prophecy] are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place'; and in verses 9 and 10 the angel says, 'I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book . . . Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.' Then in verse 16 he shows that the Book is for all the churches: 'I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches.'

We may conclude, then, that the seven churches to whom the prophecy primarily is addressed are still the churches to whom the final beatitudes and warning are also addressed. Thus it seems right to conclude that the prophecy is for all the churches throughout this present church era. All in all, the churches must read or hear the Book of the prophecy, and all must observe it. This means that all are called upon to know the prophecy and to act upon it.

THE PURPOSIVE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

George Bernard Shaw once described the Book as 'the ravings of a drug addict'. Well, it might seem that to the natural man—the man who has not been regenerated by the Gospel and the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14; Jude 19; John 3:1–6; Titus 3:5–7). In fact the Book has a clear and sensible structure, falling into the following sections:

- (a) Chapter 1, in which John introduces himself and the prophecy, following which he describes his vision of Christ—the natural setting to the whole prophecy.
- (b) Chapters 2 and 3 constitute letters which the Lord writes to his churches, and which are messages from the Holy Spirit. The churches being sevenfold represent the people of God in this age, even if different churches portray certain aspects which are found reproduced in churches throughout the church age.
- (c) Chapter 4, in which the throne of God is a most important feature and forms the basis of the whole prophecy. God is wor-

shipped by the celestial family for the elements of (i) His eternity, (ii) His holiness and (iii) His creatorhood.

- (d) Chapter 5 introduces the matter of the seven-sealed book, the discovery of the only one who can open it, i.e. the Lamb, and then the praise of the Lamb by the celestial and other redeemed creatures.
- (e) Chapter 6 deals with the opening of the first six seals, and the devastation they bring about.
- (f) Chapter 7 introduces the people of God (i) as the 144,000, and (ii) as the countless multitude of the redeemed.
- (g) Chapters 8 and 9 introduce the power of the prayers of the saints, and then by the opening of the seventh seal introduce and execute the first six trumpets, describing the even wider devastation of their actions.
- (h) Chapter 10 introduces an interlude in which an angel prophesies that the seventh trumpet will complete 'the mystery of God', i.e. God's plan for history (cf. Eph. 1:9–11; 3:1–11).
- (i) Chapter 11 is to do with the measuring (protecting) of the temple-shrine, the actions of two prophetic witnesses, and the dynamic blowing of the seventh trumpet, which issues in the kingdom coming in fullness.
- (j) Chapters 12 to 19 cover the first phase of the battle of Satan against God. In chapter 12 Satan seeks to destroy the child of the woman, fails to do so, and in a battle of angels is cast out of heaven, and, coming to earth, seeks to destroy the woman and then her children, the church. The church overcomes Satan and is to a degree protected in the wilderness. In chapter 13 there is the spawning by Satan of two beasts—the latter called 'the false prophet'. These two set up a deadly system, conscripting mankind into a conspiracy against God. Chapters 14 and 15 both open with a sight of the triumphant people of God. In 14:14–19 certain woes are pronounced and two visions of harvests made by two angels are described, the latter ending in the trampling of the winepress of God's wrath. In chapter 15 the faithful redeemed give praise to God for His holiness and judgements, and then preparation is made to commission the seven angels who have bowls of the wrath of God.
- (k) Chapter 16 continues the battle between God and Satan: the

seven bowls of wrath are poured out on humanity, who are the worse for this terrible experience. The judgements are horrific, but God does not suspend them. The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet emit from their mouths three unclean spirits who seek to recruit the kings of the earth against God in order to fight Him at Armageddon.

- (l) Chapter 17 has to do with Babylon the city or mother of harlots, and the nature of the city is discussed, and its link with the kings of the earth who oppose God.
- (m) Chapter 18 describes the destruction of Babylon, the dismay of kings and people, and the doom of Babylon pronounced by a mighty angel.
- (n) Chapter 19 commences with the praises of a great multitude, firstly for the destruction of Babylon and secondly for the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Then a great Warrior who is the Lamb leads the heavenly armies into battle against the beast and the false beast and their human aides. The hosts of the beast are defeated, the beast and the false prophet being captured, and thrown into the lake of fire.
- (o) Chapter 20 concerns the matter of the millennium, the release of Satan from the abyss—following the closure of the millennium—and then the gathering of Gog and Magog, incited by the Devil; but the defeat of Gog and Magog and the Devil concludes the battle of Satan and his hosts against God. In the same chapter the final judgement of all creatures takes place, the Devil and his followers being cast into the lake of fire.
- (p) The final two chapters (21 and 22) are given over to the new heavens and the new earth and the Holy City, the last chapter closing with beatitudes for the elect, and a curse for the unredeemed and finally impenitent.

It can be seen, then, that a very clear pattern exists in this Book, and it will repay constant attention if given to it by both pastor and people. The more the Book is read, the more it will be seen that this is the only pattern it could really take.

We pause then to ask whether this sort of material is constantly taught, and taught intelligently and with relevance to our present world situation. Secondly, we need to notice the way in which certain elements are introduced before they are fully met in their action. For example, in 11:7 the beast is first mentioned, and is only fully

met in 13:1ff. Likewise in 14:8 the doom of Babylon is pronounced, although Babylon is only fully met in chapter 17. Both the beast and Babylon must be fully known by all of us because of the evil work they do in our world.

THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSAGES TO THE CHURCH AND CHURCHES

Chapters 2 and 3 are obviously important because of the amount of text given to them. We can see that only two of the seven churches receive full commendation without rebuke. As early as the end of the first century various churches faced various problems ranging from traditionalism, coldness and lack of love, to heresy, idolatry, and strange practices. One church was incredibly poor whilst another was incredibly rich, but the main problem seems to have been—with some of the churches—a loss of understanding of what God and Christ are about in history. That is, the historical perspective was lacking. God and the Lamb, whilst the objects of worship and service, were not seen for what they were about in history, i.e. that which Paul calls ‘the obedience of faith among the nations’ or ‘the obedience of faith of the nations’.

Test out a church today. Face it with the summary of the twenty-two chapters we have sketched above, and see whether people in the congregations have a sense of history, of God’s sovereignty, of the active Lordship of Christ, of the nature of the church, of the stratagems of Satan, and of knowing how evil goes about its work. What of the nature of Babylon in the world today? What of the mark of God and the mark of the beast?

The seven letters are an excellent guide to what the church ought to be about, so they are good for warnings and rebukes in order to bring about renewal of the flock of God. These letters could be expounded thoughtfully, and without hurry—not skimming over the points raised by Christ and the Spirit. If we study the ascriptions at the head of each letter, would those aspects of Christ’s person and work be well known by many? We need to assess where each congregation is at—as Christ did (and does) as he walked among the candlesticks.

As we know, each letter has a regular format: (i) the statement ‘the words of’—a most awesome fact demanding attention and hearing; (ii) a description of Christ in a particular aspect of his being and work; (iii) the statement ‘I know’, meaning Christ knows certain

aspects of the life of the church, and this being generally linked with 'works'; (iv) the heart of the letter which commends, advises, rebukes, and commands, as is necessary; (v) the regular statement, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (note: not to each single church, although that is so, but to the churches), so that the seven messages—being single in each case—are sevenfold and so have a unity of purpose and exhortation; (vi) the promises that attach to the exhortation to 'conquer' or 'overcome'. If the churches could be so dull and foolish in the first century then the pastor need not marvel at the deficient nature of any congregation in the twentieth century, even though there is no excuse for such a condition in any century.

Christ's statement in 1:11 that John is to write the whole prophecy to the seven churches, and they are to keep it, links with 22:6, 9 and 16, where the whole prophecy of the Book is to be for the whole people of God. For this reason the letters are still to be studied and obeyed, and they are, in fact, an integral part of the prophecy itself. How many times, then, are these letters expounded so that they confront present congregations? How many of us study their substance and truth?

THE BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OR SCHEMA OF HISTORY

We may not always think of history as something planned, ruled, and executed by God. The statement by God, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' with the accompanying comment of John, 'who is and who was and who is to come', must be understood as meaning, 'I am the Initiator and the Completer of all things. I was always working; I am always working; and I always will be working. Nothing is outside my orbit.' This is the same as the 'I AM' of Exodus 3:14, or the 'I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose"' of Isaiah 46:9–10. No human being can make such claims. In 17:8 the beast is described as 'was, and is not', and later 'was and is not and is to come', meaning that he has had a time of action in the past, is not having a time of action now, yet will have a time, but when that is finished, *he will be finished*.

The Book of Revelation presupposes a full doctrine of history, the history that the whole Scriptures espouse. Our summary above of the

Revelation delineates some of that history. I Corinthians 15:24–28 is a précis or plan of the history we find being outworked in the Revelation, and indeed in all the Scriptures. The Scriptures as a whole show us ‘salvation history’, i.e. God’s working in creation, with a view to His working in redemption, with a view to His completing history in the glorification of the creation and the elect people of God. That is why worship begins with praise to and for God’s holiness and His eternity: ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come’ (4:8). Praise is then given for Creatorhood (4:11):

Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for thou didst create all things,
and by thy will they existed and were created.

Then praise is given for redemption in 5:9–10, and later in 7:10–12. Praise goes on being given for the sovereign power God exercises, especially as He raises up His Messiah and faces the nations, defeating and judging them (11:17–18; cf. 12:10). Later, praise is given for the judgements upon all forces of evil (16:4–7; 18:10ff.; 19:1–4), but the matter of history is shown in the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls under the seven angels. They are all judgements which interact within the processes of history, both making history and drawing it to a pre-planned climax. In the face of these actions initiated by the Lamb, we see the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet trying to shape history, and seeming for a time to succeed, especially as they are in combination with Babylon, whose system is world-wide and involves international politicking and trafficking.

The system which Jesus and the early apostles called ‘the world’, understanding it to be under Satan—‘the prince of the power of the air’, ‘the god of this world’—incorporates the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and Babylon. History is to some degree the conflict between God and these evil forces. We see the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet emitting three unclean spirits from their mouths and these spirits try to seduce the kings of the earth, setting them up against God. That they ultimately fail is a good thing, but it does not alter the fact that in man’s history this conflict is his history, and proceeds perpetually.

We need to ask ourselves the following questions: ‘Do we as pastors and people really understand biblical history? Do we understand salvation history? Do we know the times in which we live? Do we understand or misunderstand the judgements of God? Do we try to

correct or alleviate suffering which sometimes comes from such judgements? Are we able to orientate ourselves to the processes of history? Do we understand the Lordship of Christ over history? Do we understand the often repeated matter of 'patient endurance' (cf. 1:9; 2:2, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12; cf. Rom. 5:3, 4; II Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:11; Heb. 10:36), or do we try to make history ourselves, e.g. via a system such as liberation theology, employment of the Marxian *praxis*—seeking to implement the eschatological hope—or do we use certain sociological *schemata* to fashion history, believing it to conform with a certain dialectic and to have its own apocalypse? Probably the most significant question is: 'Do we have a doctrine and a *praxis* of hope?' Marxism and other ideologies have an eschatology, and the Christian sects generally have a strong interpretation of biblical eschatology whereby they appeal to a strongly materialistic movement of history towards a *telos* (goal, climax) which is acceptable to the human mind. The new 'Greenie' gospel—which is generally thoroughly humanistic—has an evocative eschatology of doom, a humanistic hope of recovering the earth and so of achieving a 'kingdom of God' of sorts (cf. the more dynamic 'kingdom' of Marxism). This gospel has a doomful kind of apocalyptic which it uses to make people repent and believe its present gospel, i.e. when the creation is purified then it will be peace and joy upon earth.

The Power Struggle of God and Satan

Linked with our approach to history is the fact of the battle for the throne of this world and the age to come, and with it the hope of glory, i.e. the liberating glory. In religions there is generally the thought of a struggle between 'good' and 'evil', both of which are abstractions, though often concretized in mythical beings who fight for the supremacy. These beings are supra-historical and so is their conflict. In the Judaic-Christian approach to history, Satan struggles with God to win celestial and terrestrial creatures to his side, and so to dethrone God and thus enthrone himself 'above the stars of God'.

Many—if not most—people in our churches either see Satan as a powerful figure who dominates history, or simply as an irritant in the regulated pattern of God's history. Indeed the word 'history' does not figure largely, since most think of history as a thing that 'happens'—a travelling along a line from A to Z until some kind of terminus is reached. Our study of Revelation has shown us that the evil powers of Satan—as revealed in the apocalyptic personages of the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and Babylon—figure largely

in the ongoing action of the human race, especially in the movement of its constituent cultures, families, tribes, and nations. Again we ask ourselves, 'What do we know—pastors and people—of what is going on? What is our identity in the flow of history? What rationale do we have for history? How does this affect us in our personal and communal living?'

The answer must lie in having the *schema* of Revelation constantly in our minds. That *schema* does not originate with John's prophecy. Revelation has 404 verses, and in these some 518 references to the Old Testament. What is more, there is not one clear-cut direct reference from the Old Testament. One has to be in the ethos of the Old Testament in order to understand the Revelation, let alone to understand the whole of the New Testament. The primary apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament are Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, but there is a vast amount of it in Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as in the Minor Prophets. In the New Testament we have the apocalyptic and prophetic portions of the four Gospels, as well as references in most Epistles. Whilst the Revelation is not a synthesis of the apocalyptic and prophetic (eschatological) elements of the Old and New Testaments, yet it is a remarkable document incorporating those elements. Of course the Christian idea of history, whilst including the battle *for* the throne (as well as *of* the thrones), has two things in view, i.e. (i) the *eschaton* the last age which comes to a climax; and (ii) the *telos* i.e. what will be achieved in history and the effects of this for the ongoing of the Kingdom of God. By the *telos* we mean the settling of retributive judgements, the destruction of evil powers, and then the things of resurrection, inheritance, liberty of sonship, glorification of creation and the elect, and the new 'kingdom of priests', and the worship and service rendered by them, and all other creatures in the action of 'the age to come', i.e. eternity—the aeon (or, aeons) of glorious liberty. It is undebatable that the Revelation seals the eschatological and telotic hope set out in the whole of Scripture.

Again, then, we ask ourselves how all this figures for us, and how we figure in it.

The Functional Place of the Throne In and For History

Thrones are mentioned forty-seven times in this Book of the prophecy of John the Divine, and almost all are references to the throne of God. The throne is the centre of creation, redemption, and universal restoration of the creation, i.e. the new heavens and the

new earth. It is the place of actions, judgements, commands, and directions. Important as is all that work, it is the *Person* of the Father, the Son and the Spirit which are significant. The Revelation portrays God (the Father) as constantly initiating, empowering and sustaining the action of history. The worship of creation is towards Him for His actions, and He speaks, thunders, commands, and directs. Whereas other books and prophecies of the Bible have elements of this, the Revelation reveals the actions in consecutive narrative. Christ's Lordship—so powerfully stated in the Acts and the Epistles—is given a dynamic and a substance in the Revelation which sheds its effects back over the other Scriptures. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, alone Christ is God's statement of His counsel and will, in that he is over all things, and is filling them up, and unifying them for ever under his headship. In Colossians Christ is reconciling and harmonizing all things, bringing them to full creational pitch and glorifying them. Such revelations of Christ enhance the Lordship as seen in the Revelation, but the actions of Christ in John's prophecy show the *modus vivendi*

We are again forced to ask ourselves whether we understand the things of the throne, and see ourselves in this process of history which will culminate in the *telos*. Does such knowledge, then, affect the way we live in this world, this day, and this our community? Does it give new and rich substance to our worship—we being conscious of the Father, the Son, and the Sevenfold Spirit?

THE MATTER OF THE BATTLE FOR THE HUMAN MIND

The seven letters by Christ to the churches (i.e. to the sevenfold church) warn us that the initial dynamic impact of the Gospel can lessen and diminish, or can be dissipated in material wealth and security, or lose its distinctive nature because of the invading heresies and false moralities which seduce the church (cf. II Cor. 11:1–3). It is interesting to note, for example, that Marxism has derived from the Judaic-Christian view of history, having taken on board the dynamic ideas of redemption, the *eschaton* and the *telos*, but of course devising its own 'gospel'. The new conservationist gospel also has all these elements—though in somewhat differing forms—and, in fact, can become strongly sectarian. The battle for the human mind is in presenting to us an anthropology, cosmology, and theology which purports to be wholly ontological—thus appealing to the suppressed

truth within perverted man. The sects appeal to limited audiences because their gospels are limited, easily understandable, and they spell security within the cultic life of a small and tightly bound community.

The Christian pastor is not in competition with these elements. He simply lives in the context of them. It is not merely that he ought to hone up his own anthropological, theological, and cosmological understandings, but that he personally align himself with, and live in, the whole biblical truth. In doing this he does not have to think that the Book and Prophecy of the Revelation is the be-all and end-all of truth; that it is his answer, that it is complete in itself as his source of wisdom and action, but that it is significant, indispensable, and revelatory in his understanding of God, history, and present *praxis* of 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints'. Armed with this useful equipment he can better proclaim the gospel in all its elements, and effect pastoral ministry in a world and age which he knows the better for being a humble student and competent master of this prophetic Book of blessing.

The Glorious Hope: The Hope of Glory

If our congregations need to know the substance of the Revelation and related apocalyptic writings, then the heart of the matter is the Christian hope. The Book assures us that our hope is not misplaced. 'Christ in you, the hope of glory', was Paul's word to the Colossians. 'Give a reason to every man for the hope that is within you', was Peter's injunction. Hope is strengthened by the Lordship of Christ in history as he unseals the Book. To be liberated to experience 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' is part of the Gospel, and although the Revelation does not discuss glorification as such, it certainly shows God to be active in human history, contemporary history, and so we see 'the multitude that no man can number'. In the end man stands before God as a redeemed creature, and as a candidate for glorification.

Many of the things of this glory are spelt out in Revelation, e.g. whilst there is no 'glory for glory's sake' we are grateful for the sight of the numberless multitude, the worship in the celestial temple, the future of the Holy City, the glory of the Bride and the Lamb, the vast inheritance, i.e. 'all things' (Rev. 21:7), and the community that will be called 'a kingdom of priests'. It is not in order to escape a dull or terrible present that we seek to grow in hope. It is hope itself—Christ himself victorious in the eschaton—that draws us on.

We ask then—at the last: ‘Do we as pastors and people know these things? Are we really living in a mediocre hope, a hope that is poorly informed?’ We must give ourselves to this great Book—the Book of present history—and receive the blessings it promises us for so doing.

Biography

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