

F.B. Hole

**Comments on
the book of
“The Revelation”**

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Introduction

THE BOOK WHICH is now to occupy our thoughts has certain very definite characteristics. It is the one book of the New Testament which calls itself a "prophecy," and in which the final victory of the Divine will and purpose is clearly seen. The very word for victory, though more often translated by overcome or prevail, occurs in it nearly as often as in the rest of the New Testament put together. It was evidently written when the first century was drawing to a close; when, as the Gospel and Epistles of John show, false and even anti-christian teachers were beginning to abound, and when as a consequence true-hearted saints might well have had dejection and a feeling of defeat creeping over them. How fitting then that a book portraying the final victory should be given to close the inspired record. Other distinctive features will come to light as we proceed.

Chapter 1

IT IS, "THE Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him," that is, the unveiling of things to come, for the simple meaning of revelation or apocalypse is unveiling. It is of course true that the unveiling of these future things all hinges on the unveiling or revelation of Jesus Christ in His glory, but the primary meaning is that God gave to Jesus this revelation of things to come that He might show it

to His servants. Every clause of this first verse is worthy of careful notice.

It is remarkable, in the first place, that the revelation should be spoken of as given to Jesus, rather than as originated by Him. He is presented then as the servant of God's will and purpose just as He is in the Gospel of Mark, and it is in that Gospel that we find the passage in which He disowns knowledge of the day and hour of His advent. Here, too, He is the Servant of God to make known things to come as they had been given to Him. Moreover John, who received from Him the revelation, speaks of himself not as an Apostle but as a servant, and those to whom it is conveyed are not spoken of as saints but as servants. It was a day when defection was becoming pronounced, so while there are messages to churches — which reveal the defection — the revelation is given to those who really are servants of God, and who therefore will appreciate it. It is a fact that remains to this day that men who are but unconverted professors of Christ universally decry, if they do not ridicule it; and worldly-minded believers make nothing of it.

Another remarkable feature is the indirectness of the revelation. God gave it to Jesus, and Jesus signified it to John, not directly but by mediation of His angel. Moreover He did not declare it: He "signified" it. In the Gospel John uses the word "sign" for miracle. Here it is a verb formed from the same root. He signed these things to John; and

this exactly gives us the character of the book. The prophecy is conveyed not in plain literal speech as elsewhere, but in symbols or signs. Now all this is surely intended to make us feel that there is reserve and distance in the method of revelation, suited to the sad defection that had already begun in the church. How different the method of those revelations made earlier to Paul, as for instance Acts 26:16-18; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.

The things signified are such as "must shortly come to pass." This expression helps to establish the fact that the messages to the churches in Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 have a prophetic bearing. What was signified by the church at Ephesus was beginning to come to pass when John received the prophecy, which carries us right on to the coming of the Lord, and even to the eternal state. The reader is also admonished by this expression that he must not adopt the attitude taken by the Jews when they received the prophecies of Ezekiel. Then they said, "The vision that he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesies of the times that are far off" (Ezek. 12:27). It is an inveterate tendency of our hearts to avoid the force of the Word of God, not by denying it but by relegating it to so distant a future that it can conveniently be ignored.

Having received the revelation John bare record of it, and he describes it in a threefold way. It is "the word of God," and this fact at once invests the book with full authority and puts it on a par with the

other Holy Writings. Then it is "the testimony of Jesus Christ," and later we are told that this testimony is "the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). This testimony declares that the Jesus, who suffered and was set at nought here, is the coming Lord of all things in heaven and on earth, and that all might and dominion, power and glory is in His hands. He will execute judgment and bring to pass all the counsel of God. Now this is the spirit of prophecy. As we survey the prophetic field a great drama unfolds before our eyes, and we see beasts and Babylon and other anti-christian forces, but if we do not see them in relation to the testimony of Jesus we shall miss their real instruction and power. In the third place he speaks of "all things that he saw." for the revelation reached him in the form of visions. The words, "And I saw," or "And I looked," occur very frequently in the book.

Then a special blessing is pronounced on the reader, the hearer and the keeper of the words of the prophecy. Let us particularly note that we are to keep — that is, observe — these things. This indicates that the prophecy is to exert a powerful influence upon us. It is to enlighten our minds and guide our footsteps. The main point is not that we should be able to explain with accuracy every symbol used, or identify with certainty every "beast" or "locust," but that we should realize how all these actors in the sad drama of man's rebellion and judgment are like a dark background for the glory of the coming

Lord, and that all is to lead to the separation of our hearts from this present evil age. In this way we shall "keep" the things that are written.

John addresses the book to the seven churches in Asia, as verse 4 says. In these seven churches all church history was portrayed, as Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 show; we may therefore accept the book as addressed to the whole church during the centuries of its sojourn in this world, and appropriate to the whole church the grace and peace of this opening salutation.

The grace and peace proceed from the three Persons of the Godhead, but each of the three is presented in a way that differs from the rest of the New Testament. First we have God in His unchanging greatness; eternally and immutably He IS, and therefore as regards the past, He was, and as regards the future, He is to come. He sits therefore above the storms that in this book we are to see raging on the earth, and even in the Heavens.

The second Person named here is the Holy Spirit. He is not presented as the one Spirit of the Epistles but as "the seven Spirits," an allusion, we suppose, to Isaiah 11 : 2. In our verse they are "before His throne," as being ready to act in the government of the earth. The Spirit is one as to His Person, and this fact is greatly emphasized in connection with the formation of the church, and his activities

therein, as we see in 1 Corinthians 12. Yet in His governmental activities He is viewed in a sevenfold way, and the final actions of Divine government are contemplated in this last book of the Bible.

In the third place grace and peace proceed from Jesus Christ, who is presented in a threefold way. He is the faithful Witness in contrast to all others who have borne witness of God. They have each and all failed somewhere. In Him God himself has been perfectly declared, and all truth maintained in full integrity. In considering Him thus, our thoughts have mainly to travel into the past.

But He is also the First Begotten of the dead, and it is this that characterizes Him at the present moment. The church is based upon Him as risen from the dead. Indeed, it was not until He was risen and ascended that the Holy Ghost was shed forth so that the church might be formed. Then thirdly, He is the Prince of the kings of the earth. He is this in title at the present moment, but He will not publicly assume that place until His second advent, so that considering Him thus our thoughts travel to the future. How comprehensively then — past, present and future — is He set before us. All this He is, and all this He would be, even if no soul of man had received salvation through Him.

But we have received eternal blessing through Him, and hence we know Him in a very intimate way which calls forth an outburst of

praise. He loves us and has declared that abiding fact firstly in a work of purification, washing us from our sins in His own blood, and then in a work of exaltation, making us kings and priests to His God and Father. Only as washed from our sins could we be introduced into such a place as that, and it is worthy of note that directly we have Christian blessings mentioned we have God presented in the light in which we know Him — the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ — rather than as the eternal I AM, as in verse 4.

To such an One as this, known through grace, we heartily ascribe the glory and dominion for ever and ever. Glory and domination have ever been pursued by fallen men. Not one of them has been worthy to receive it, and if in any measure they have attained to it, nothing but oppression has resulted for the masses, and ultimately disaster for themselves. Here at last is One worthy to have it, and wield it to the glory of God and the blessing of men — worthy by reason of who He is as well as what He has done. It is remarkable that we have exactly the same words in 1 Peter 5:11. What is there ascribed to "the God of all grace" is here ascribed to Jesus Christ: pretty clear proof, this, of WHO He really is.

Verse 7 gives us in very small compass the main theme of the book. The consummation is announced before we see the steps that lead up to it. The same feature characterizes many of the Psalms in the Old Testament. The public and glorious appearing of Christ will bring

everything to a head. Every eye shall see Him in surroundings that indicate His Deity, for it is Jehovah, "who makes the clouds His chariot: who walks upon the wings of the wind" (Ps. 104:3). Zechariah had declared, "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10), and this shall be fulfilled. He had also declared that there should be those of Israel who should see then the enormity of their national sin in His rejection, and mourn for it in deep repentance. Our verse here announces that all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him; not in repentance evidently, but because it seals their doom, and they realize it. Plain proof, this that the world is not going to be converted as the preparation for His coming.

The correct reading in verse 8 appears to be "Lord God," and not "Lord" only. This being so, we hear in the verse the voice of the Lord God Almighty, the eternally existent One, who guarantees the fulfillment of the Advent in its appointed time. Jesus Christ is viewed, as we have pointed out, as the holy and perfect Servant of His glory; the exalted Man, by whom He will administer the world in righteousness. Nothing can possibly defeat One who is the Beginning and the End of all things.

Thus far we have had what we may call the preface. From verse 9 to the end of the chapter we have John's account of the vision of the Lord that was granted to him, out of which sprang the writing of this book. In recounting it, he does not present himself as an Apostle, but

as a brother of those to whom he wrote and as a sharer in their present trials and future prospects. This is the time marked by tribulation for the saints below, and of patience for Christ glorified on high. He waits in patience for the hour to strike when the Kingdom will be His. We are called to enter into that same patience, as we shall see when we read Revelation 3:10, and as the Apostle Paul indicated in 2 Thessalonians 3:5.

At that time John was suffering the tribulation that is involved in isolation. Banished to Patmos, he was cut off from his fellow-believers, yet he was in no way isolated from His Lord. On a certain first day of the week, which is the Lord's Day, he was carried outside himself by the special energy of the Holy Spirit of God, and so he was brought into a condition in which he was enabled to see and hear heavenly things. It is well for us to remember that though we have never needed, and therefore never come under such a special action of the Spirit, yet it is only by the ordinary action and energy of the Spirit that we discern and apprehend anything of the things of God.

He tells us first what he heard. A powerful voice of authority bade him write the things he was about to see in a book, and send it to seven selected churches in the Province of Asia. John was thus constituted a Seer. He was also told that it was the Divine intention that the revelation he was now to receive should be enshrined in a Book. In their eagerness to get rid of a written revelation from God, men

decry the Scriptures and accuse of "Bibliolatry" those of us who accept the Bible and reverence it as the Word of God. They would like us to regard a book revelation as something quite beneath the Divine dignity. We, on the contrary, regard it as exactly suitable to His dealings with men whom He has endowed with powers of reading and writing, and who have learned to hand on knowledge from one generation to another by means of books. The seven churches were to have the book, and that which they symbolized — the whole church throughout the centuries until the Lord comes — was to have it too.

The seven churches, whether we view them historically or prophetically, differed widely in their character and state, yet the same revelation of things to come would be salutary for each. Let those who decry the study of prophecy note this! Whatever our spiritual state as individuals may be, it will be for our health and blessing if we gain a clear understanding of the solemn scenes of judgment by which God is going to bring earth's sad story to a triumphant conclusion.

Hearing this trumpet voice of authority, John turned to see the majestic Person who uttered it, and thus was he brought face to face with his Lord, and granted a sight of the One he had once known so well on earth, but now displayed in a character and amidst circumstances that to him were entirely new.

The Lord Jesus presented Himself to John as "like to the Son of Man." This was not an unknown title to John, for Jesus in the days of His flesh spoke of Himself thus. What was new was the fact that the Son of Man had exchanged conditions of humiliation for surroundings of glory. John had just been instructed to write in a book what he saw, and this he faithfully carried out. In the course of this book he describes a great many things that passed before his vision, but all of them hinge on this first great vision of the Son of Man in His judicial glory. The Lord's own words were that the Father had given Him authority to execute judgment, "because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:27).

The description given to us in verses 13-17 speaks entirely of judgment. John had once leant on Jesus' breast at supper, now that same breast is under restraint, girt about with a girdle of gold. The sight of His head was like to that of "The Ancient of Days" of Daniel 7, in whose presence "the judgment was set, and the books were opened." The eye symbolizes intelligence and discernment, and His were as a flame of fire, not only discerning but also resolving all things into their first elements. So too, His feet, which contact the earth, and under which all things are put, were as fine brass glowing in a furnace, just as once the fine brass of the altar glowed beneath the fire of the sacrifices. His voice was full of authority and majesty, irresistible like the thunderous roar of the ocean.

The right hand too speaks of power. His tongue was like "a sharp two-edged sword : " that is, His verdicts had all the discerning and cutting power of the veritable word of God. Finally, His whole countenance was clothed with sun-like glory, too bright for mortal eyes. No wonder, that in the presence of such an One — the Son of Man, arising to judgment, invested with the insignia and glory of Deity — John fell at His feet as dead.

But though he was a servant, and therefore a subject of His judicial scrutiny, John was also a saint, and hence a subject of His grace. His grace is as great as His glory. His right hand, which held the seven stars, was laid upon John, so that he might be lifted up and strengthened to receive and record the visions in which the revelation was to be conveyed. "Fear not," was the assuring word.

The judicial glory of the Lord had been conveyed in the vision; now we have His glory declared in His own words, and that in a threefold way. First, the glory of Deity. He is "the First and the Last, and the Living One." Compare this with verse 8, where the Lord God, the Almighty, proclaims Himself the "Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending." No one but God can be, "the First" or "the Beginning," but being a Person in the unity of the Godhead, Jesus is God.

Secondly, the glory of redemption, of death and resurrection. He "was" or "became" dead, but now is "alive for evermore," or "living

to the ages of ages." He, who is revealed as the universal Judge, has Himself tasted the judgment of death, and risen above its power into resurrection life.

Then, thirdly, the glory of dominion. Death and hell (Hades) are the great foes of sinful mankind, the symbols of the curse under which sin has brought them. Holding the keys, He is the complete Master of both. Thus Jesus presented Himself in His Deity; in His risen estate, redemption having been accomplished; and as the complete Master of man's ancient foes.

What an uplift this must have been to John! And what an uplift it should be to us! It prepared him to write as he was bidden in verse 19. It will prepare us to read and digest what he has written, and to face with undismayed hearts the searching unfoldings of the book.

Verse 19 should be carefully noted, as it contains the Lord's own division of the book. John was to write (1) the vision he had just seen. This he did in the few verses we have just considered. Then (2) he was to write "the things that are," and (3) "the things which shall be hereafter," or, "the things that are about to be after these." Now in Revelation 4:1 the voice from heaven lifts John in spirit to heaven that he may be shown "things which must be hereafter," or, "things which must take place after these things ;" so that as we pass into Revelation 4 we begin the third section of the book. Clearly therefore

Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 comprise section 2. We believe this verse 19 is an important key to the right unfolding of Revelation, so we ask our readers to note it carefully. We have no hesitation in saying that any explanation of the visions of this book which violates this distinction, or does not observe it, is bound to be defective, if not positively erroneous.

The last verse of chapter 1 is introductory to "the things that are," given in chapters 2 and 3. In the vision the Son of Man was seen in the midst of seven golden candlesticks or lamps, and holding seven stars in His right hand. The meanings of these symbols are given to us. Each lamp is a "church" or "assembly." Each star is an "angel" or "messenger" or "representative" of an assembly. We have not here, then, the whole church in its place of privilege, as presented through Paul in Ephesians, Colossians and elsewhere, but each local church in its responsibility to be a light for Christ during the time of His absence as rejected from the earth. The whole church in its oneness men cannot see, but a local church they can, and the practical state and condition of such widely differs. The angel may signify one or more in each church who are representative of it and of its state. The Lord conveys His verdict in each case not to the church as a whole but to the angel, thus again showing the reserve that marked Him in His judgment of their state, and the sense of distance that had super-

vened. This sense of reserve and distance characterizes the whole book, as we have already observed.

Chapter 2

CHAPTERS 2 AND 3 — "the things which are" — may be read in three ways. First, as a record of the state of seven churches in the Province of Asia as the first century drew to its close. By then all the Apostles, save the aged John, were gone, and their shepherd care no longer available. Various dangers were discerned and uncovered by the Lord, and various declensions, defections and defilements exposed. Of the seven only two churches, the first and the seventh, are alluded to elsewhere in Scripture. Ephesus was perhaps the crown of Paul's labours, and hence the Lord's verdict on it, 25 or 30 years after his death, is a searching lesson for our hearts.

We have two allusions to Laodicea in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, but these are enough to show he had some anxiety as to their state even then, and in that Epistle he ministered just the truth that might have preserved them. If the Laodicean saints had received the Colossian unfolding of the supreme excellence of Christ, the Head of His body, the church, He would have become "all, and in all" to them. Then Christ would not have represented Himself as standing outside their door and knocking, as in Revelation 3. Here again is something that should search us through and through.

But secondly, we may read the two chapters as giving us an exposure of conditions that may be found reproduced in local assemblies of saints that exist today. As we go through the seven addresses we may well see our own collective state as in a mirror, and learn our Lord's verdict as to it, and discover the corrective and remedy.

Then thirdly, since the whole of this book is a prophecy, as we saw in its opening verses, we have in the seven churches an unfolding of the historic course of the professing church, viewed as a body in which the light of God was to be maintained during the time of Christ's personal absence from the world. The church was to be the candlestick or light-bearer, till the moment when Christ should arise to execute judgment and assert the Divine authority in the earth. The number seven bears the significance of spiritual completeness, and in the seven addresses the complete history is surveyed. As we go through them let us consider them in all three ways.

To Ephesus the Lord presented Himself as the One who upholds the responsible angels, whilst critically surveying all the churches. Nothing escapes His eye. To Ephesus, as to each church, He says, "I know." Now in Ephesus He knew much that was good and commendable — works, labour, hatred of evil, careful testing of pretensions, endurance, care and zeal for the Lord's Name. But one great thing He had against them; they had left their first love. In our Authorized Version the insertion of "somewhat" weakens the sense. It

is, "I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love." This fundamental defect quite spoilt the otherwise favourable picture.

For, what did it mean? This: that while the mechanism was still moving with fair regularity the mainspring was seriously weakened. It was with the church as it had been with Jerusalem, indicated in Jeremiah 2:2. The church, too, had lost the love of her espousals, which had for a brief moment carried her even into a wilderness for love of her Lord. And if love for the great Head wanes the love that circulates amongst the members of His body cannot remain unimpaired. No outward zeal or activity or care can compensate for this inward loss. It is such a fall as jeopardizes everything, and demands nothing short of real and deep repentance, as verse 5 indicates.

If "first love" be recovered, the "first works" will naturally follow. These may look to human eyes exactly the same as the works mentioned in verse 2, but to His eyes they are very different. He estimates everything according to the motive that lies behind. The mainspring is of all importance to Him. So much so, that if first love be permanently impaired the ability to shine departs and the candlestick is removed.

This is the state of things that was developing as the last of the Apostles departed. If present day assemblies of saints are judged thus, what candlesticks will remain? There are not too many charac-

terized by even the outward zeal described in verses 2 and 3; but what is revealed if the mainspring be uncovered? A searching question indeed! Does not the word "Repent" sound loudly in our ears? It should do so, inasmuch as all who have ears to hear are called upon to hear the Spirit's messages to the churches. What is said particularly to one church through its angel is of importance to all true saints at any time.

It is worthy of note that the message, though spoken by "One like to the Son of Man," is also "what the Spirit saith." What the Lord says the Spirit says — the Lord objectively to John, and the Spirit subjectively through John, for he was "in the Spirit" (1:10) on this occasion. It was all "the word of God" (1:2). Thus the unity of the Divine Persons is manifest.

In verse 7 we have overcoming mentioned for the first time. The word thus translated occurs 17 times in the book. Even in the Ephesus condition of things overcoming was a necessity, and there is given the incentive of eating of the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God. Man never ate of the tree of life in Eden. The overcoming here must be the retaining, or the returning to "first love." As John's Epistle shows, there is the most intimate connection between love and life. Apart from the love of God we should have had no life at all. Having life, it manifests itself in love flowing from us both towards God and our brethren. To eat of the real Tree of life (Revela-

tion 22:2), of which Eden's tree was only a figure, is to be as filled with the life of Divine love as a creature can possibly be.

This overcoming was what was needed by saints at Ephesus as the first century closed. It was needed by saints generally in the earliest stages of church history. It is needed by us today.

The address to the angel of the church in Smyrna is the briefest of the seven. Four verses contain the whole of it. This is remarkable, since it shares with Philadelphia the distinction of receiving from the Lord no word of censure or blame. On the contrary, it receives a word of commendation.

Tribulation and even martyrdom characterized the outward circumstances of the church in Smyrna, and the Lord presented Himself to them in a character that exactly suited this. He is the first, and therefore none can forestall Him, so as to hinder. He is the last, and hence none but He can have the final word in any matter. Moreover He became dead and lived, and this guarantees that He wields the power of resurrection on behalf of those who belong to Him. If the Smyrnan saints apprehended Him in this way, they must have been greatly fortified against their approaching tribulations.

Having presented Himself thus, the Lord again said, "I know." Tribulation and poverty marked them to the outward eye. They must therefore have been most unattractive to any who could not penetrate be-

neath the surface. To the all-seeing eye of the Lord it was far otherwise, and His surprising verdict was, "but thou art rich." So we have here the exact opposite of what presently He says to Laodicea, who claimed to be rich, and in His eyes was miserably poor. Thus it is that the Spirit speaks to the churches, and if we have an ear to hear we shall be profited. All through the church's history times of poverty and tribulation have been accompanied by spiritual enrichment: times of affluence and ease by spiritual impoverishment. Thus too it is today.

They had to face also opposition of a religious sort. There were those who falsely called themselves Jews; that is, claimed to have an earthly religious standing before God, as the people that He acknowledged in the world. Saying that they were this, they naturally assumed that worldly prosperity and possessions would be theirs, and they would repudiate those in poverty and trouble. Consequently they slandered and reviled — for this seems to be the force of "blasphemy" here — those who were true saints of God. The One who has eyes as a flame of fire discerns their true character and exposes them. They were not Jews, but they were a synagogue, a word which signifies "a bringing together" — a "synagogue of Satan." They were probably people of the Judaizing type that so persistently opposed the Apostle Paul, only now further advanced in their evil, coming together as a party, and wholly disowned by the Lord.

In Ephesus there were those that said they were apostles. Here we find those that said they were Jews. Before we finish the seven churches we shall find others who claim to be somewhat, but in each case we shall hear the Lord utterly disallow their claim. This making of claims is a natural proclivity of the flesh, so we may very easily be betrayed into it in our day. Let us carefully avoid it.

Verse 10 shows that behind the world that persecuted, and the self-assertive "Jews" that reviled them, lay the power of the devil. He is the great instigator of the opposition that comes from both the pagan world and the religious world, persecuting even to prison and to death. But the One who wields the power of resurrection places Himself behind these saints in their tribulation and poverty, exhorting them to faithfulness, even to death, and holding before their eyes a crown of life. The power of death is the devil's great weapon: the power of resurrection life is in the hands of Christ.

The "ten days" of tribulation doubtless had reference to some definite but limited period of trial that lay before the church in Smyrna as the first century drew to its close. From the extended prophetic point of view the reference would be to the successive outbursts of persecution during the first few centuries, which are said to have numbered ten, and ended under the Emperor Diocletian. These persecutions had the effect, under God's governmental hand, of checking the downward trend in the church and preventing the inrush of worldliness

that later engulfed it, stimulating "first love" rather than extinguishing it. This accounts for no reproof being administered to the church in Smyrna. The much-needed lesson for us is that tribulation is the normal thing for Christians, if they are disentangled from the world, even as Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:12. The "Great Tribulation" is another thing altogether.

The promise to the overcomer also has special reference to that which lay before them. Many of them might be hurt of the first death, the death of the body, but none of them would be touched of the second death, which would come in due season on their adversaries. This fact was to encourage the martyrs then, and doubtless has done so with the martyrs through the ages.

There is a tendency sometimes to regard the various promises to the overcomers as being special and exclusive to them. This promise in verse 11 would show that it is not so, for no true believer will be hurt of the second death. They are rather to be regarded as the Lord promising with special emphasis things calculated to act as an incentive and encouragement, though they may be shared wholly or in measure by all the saints.

To Pergamos the Lord presented Himself as the One who has the all-discerning, all-powerful word of God, that pierces and divides asunder all that is entangled and indistinguishable to the eyes of men. The

church at Pergamos at that time, and the saints in the Pergamos stage of the church's history, needed to know Him in that light, since alliance with the world was being taught and consolidated in their midst. Nor do we need such knowledge less in our day, when alliance with the world is accepted as the proper thing with so large a part of Christendom.

All things at Pergamos were naked and open, and the sharp sword could divide and analyse, so again we have the words, "I know." The seat of Satan may have been an allusion to a particularly Satanic form of idolatry practised in ancient Pergamos, but viewing this church as prophetically indicating the third stage in the church's history, we see in it an allusion to the world system of which Satan is the god and prince. The church had begun to dwell in the world system; that is, to find its home there. This opened the door to the evils mentioned in verses 14 and 15.

Even so, the name and the faith of Christ had not been given up, but was still held fast, and there were some amongst them who were so true to both that they incurred the violent hostility of the world, even to martyrdom. Antipas is named and designated, "faithful," which was high commendation indeed. His name is doubtless intended to speak to us, since translated into English it signifies, "against all." The saint who by reason of his faithfulness finds all the world against him is an Antipas indeed.

But while they had faithful witnesses among them, they also had, without definite repudiation, those who held the doctrine of Balaam, and of the Nicolaitans. We are given here a summary of Balaam's teaching, for the full details of which we have to turn to Numbers 25:1-9; coupled with 31:16. Balaam remained in the background but prompted Balac to cast the stumbling block, enticing to idolatry and fornication, two things that are always joined together in the heathen world. The former is the most fundamental of all sins against God; the latter is against mankind as well as God. Both sins are seen amongst the heathen in their grossest forms, but in a more spiritualized way flourish in Christendom.

In 2 Peter we read of "the way of Balaam ... who loved the wages of unrighteousness." In Jude, of "the error of Balaam," and in this, as well as in his way, he set an example that has been followed by many to their destruction. But here we have his doctrine; that is, a system of teaching which maintains that alliance with the world is quite the proper thing for the people of God. There seems to be no certain knowledge as to the Nicolaitans, either as regards their deeds, denounced to Ephesus, or their doctrine, denounced here. Their name, however, is a compound of two Greek words, which translated mean, "Conquerors of the people"; so this may be intended to indicate that type of teaching which exalts a priestly caste, leading to that spiritual enslavement of the people which has risen to its heights in the Rom-

ish system. How bad priestly rule can become is borne witness to in Jeremiah 5:31, and this when there were earthly priests, instituted of God. How much worse and hateful to God is it today!

In Pergamos neither of these evils were full blown in such fashion that the whole church was characterized by them. It was that they had in their midst those who held these things; it does not go so far as to say that they taught them. The Lord's words evidently imply that the church should not tolerate in its midst those who hold things so fundamentally evil as these. A solemn thought for us today. Again the word is "Repent," and if that word is not heeded the Lord will take action and use the sharp sword with two edges against the teachers of evil. He will deal with them if the church fails to deal with them. May we be among those who have ears to hear the Spirit's voice in this.

There will be found some who overcome in this state of things, and the promise to them makes reference first, to the Old Testament, and then to a custom common in those days. The hidden manna was that deposited in the ark and so hidden from human eyes. It was typical of the graces of the humbled Christ, so beautiful in the Divine estimation but hidden from the eyes of men. The overcomer should feed upon, and thus have communion in, that which is the very delight of God, whereas communion with the world was becoming characteristic of the church in Pergamos. The white stone was given in those

days as a token of acquittal. The overcomer should have not only this, but in it a new name, known only to himself and the One who gave it; a token therefore that the Lord owned them as His, in view of communion with Himself. So we may say that the overcomer is promised communion with both the Father and the Son.

Let us all accept the solemn fact that communion with God and communion with the world are antagonistic and mutually exclusive. We cannot have both. It must be one or the other.

To Thyatira the Lord presented Himself as the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like fine brass. This is remarkable inasmuch as in the vision of Revelation 1 John saw these features as characterizing One like the Son of Man. But if, as we believe, the church in Thyatira represents prophetically the period which witnessed the rise to power and ascendancy of the Romish hierarchy, how much to the point is this change of designation. Rome admits that He is the Son of God, yet lays all the emphasis on His being the Son of Mary, so much so that ultimately Mary becomes the more prominent. But no, the Son of God is He who has the eyes that penetrate and discern all things, and the feet that will crush all evil. And again we have that word, "I know."

He knew even in Thyatira things that were good; not only works but love, faith, service, patience. Moreover their last works were more

than the first — they increased as time went on. Though things were very dark, as succeeding verses show, the eyes as a flame of fire discerned the good, where perhaps we should have seen none. An instructive thought for us today, for when things are really bad we are too apt to condemn wholesale without exception.

But on the other hand, having acknowledged the good, the Lord does unsparingly condemn the bad. In verse 20, the words, "a few things" should not be there. Their permitting the activities of Jezebel was a matter of great gravity. We have no doubt that the Thyatiran saints at the end of the first century would have at once known to what, or to whom, the Lord made allusion. Viewed prophetically, the symbolism exactly fits the Romish hierarchy. Note the four points following.

First, it is the woman Jezebel. Every attentive reader of Scripture knows that Jezebel was not a man. Then, why emphasize that she was a woman? Because in Scripture symbolism a woman is again and again used to represent a system, while a man may represent the energy that actuates it. As the Middle Ages drew on there was witnessed the development of the Romish system in all its enslaving power.

Second, the name Jezebel carries our thoughts back to the dark ages in Israel's history when Ahab ruled nominally, but sold himself to work wickedness under his wife's influence. Jezebel was a complete

outsider who entrenched herself in Israel, and became the determined opponent and persecutor of the true saints of God.

Third, she called herself a prophetess. In Ahab's day she did it by taking hundreds of false prophets under her protection. Rome had done it by claiming to be the only authorized exponent of the word of God. Their slogan became, and still is, "Hear the Church," but for all practical purposes this has always meant, hear the college of cardinals with the Pope at their head; that is, hear the Romish hierarchy — hear Jezebel! They claim to be the only teaching authority.

Fourth, the whole drift of their teaching is in the direction of spiritual fornication and idolatry, which means utter worldliness. What was beginning in Pergamos became rampant, and acknowledged as the proper thing, in Thyatira. In the four or five centuries that preceded the Reformation the Popes and the whole papal system practised and gloried in worldly abominations of the most pronounced and outrageous sort. Repentance was necessary, and ample time for it was granted without avail. History records how many were the centuries during which Romish abominations increased. Time to repent was certainly given.

But judgment, though lingering for long, will not slumber for ever. It is not exactly the church in Thyatira that is threatened, but Jezebel, and also her children; that is, the lesser but similar systems that have

sprung from her. Jezebel and her paramours shall be flung into great tribulation: her children smitten with spiritual death. It does not specifically say, the great tribulation, though we should judge that what Jezebel represents will develop into the mystical Babylon of Revelation 17, and be destroyed during the great tribulation period. The judgment when it comes will be final.

But meanwhile the Lord so deals, both with the parent and the children, as to manifest to all the churches that He is the Searcher of all hearts. His governmental judgments take their course before He acts finally and for ever.

The closing words of verse 23 are really an encouragement. The evil system will be dealt with, yet each soul will be judged on an individual basis. According to their works will each be recompensed. The individual is not lost in the mass. In the case of Thyatira it leads to the discovery of a remnant that is for God, as the following verses reveal.

In the church at Thyatira there comes into view "the rest;" that is, a remnant who can be distinguished from the mass. The words, "to you" in verse 24 lack authority and only obscure the sense. The Lord now addresses Himself directly to this remnant, who are marked by negative virtues rather than positive, rather like the seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. These had not endorsed

Jezebel's doctrine and, being simple, had not known the depths of Satan that were in it.

So in this New Testament Jezebel, the counterpart of the woman with "painted ... face and tired ... head," of 2 Kings 9:30, who mixed heathenism with Israel's pure religion, the depths of Satan were to be found! This need not surprise us, however, for at the end, when she changes her character somewhat, and in Revelation 17 and Revelation 18 comes forth as the woman with Babylon on her forehead, the enormous evils that are in her come to the surface. In the days of Thyatira they were still in the depths. Though there were found God-fearing saints who had never seen these evil things, the eyes like a flame of fire searched all those depths. What a revelation it is!

It is lovely to see the Lord treating these true but undiscerning saints with a compassion far beyond anything that their better instructed brethren would be likely to show them. He only lays upon them this; that what they had they should hold fast till He comes. This is the first mention of His coming in these addresses to the churches, and it clearly indicates that viewed from the prophetic standpoint, that which Thyatira indicates goes on to the end.

If they held fast what they had till His coming, they would also keep His works "to the end," and thus be overcomers, as verse 26 says. The promise to such is very significant. An itching desire to obtain

power over the nations has characterized the Romish system ever since it came into existence, and in the course of the centuries there have been times when it attained to a partial success, though never wholly achieving it. Now in this very thing the Thyatiran overcomer shall share in the coming day. The Lord will take this power from His Father, and He will delegate it to His saints, who are to judge the world, as we read in 1 Corinthians 6:2. What Rome has tried to grab before the time for its own glory shall be theirs by the gift of God. And further, "the morning star" should be given to them, which we understand as an allusion to the first move which the Lord will make in connection with His second advent — His coming into the air for His own. That will be as the harbinger of the coming day.

In this fourth church, and in the remaining churches, the call to the one who has an ear to hear comes at the end, after the special word to the overcomer. Viewing things prophetically, this is significant. It indicates that from this point those who have ears to hear will only be found in the smaller circle of the overcomers. The enormities of the Jezebel system are so pronounced that the whole professing church is no longer addressed. The footing lost is not regained; not even when Philadelphia comes into review.

Chapter 3

To SARDIS THE LORD presented Himself as the One who not only had the seven stars, as before mentioned, but also the seven Spirits of God. This is a fresh feature. In Revelation 1:4 they were said to be "before His throne," but now we learn they are in the possession of Christ. The fulness of spiritual power for the government of the earth, according to Isaiah 11 : 2, is His. And not only power but vitality also; which was much to the point in dealing with this church which was dead, in spite of having a name to live. Death characterized their general state, yet there were things amongst them not dead, though ready to die, and these could be strengthened if they were watchful.

We cannot doubt that here we have, from the prophetic view-point, a remarkable delineation of that political type of Protestantism that sprang out of the Reformation. That the Reformation was on the whole a powerful work of the Spirit of God we entirely believe, yet we cannot but recognize that from its beginning it was weakened by a large element of worldly politics entering into it, coupled with much reliance upon earthly potentates, and even the force of arms. In result the worldly element largely strangled the spiritual, and in result the works of Sardis were not found "perfect [or complete] before God." Earnest men of God laboured in it, but their works were arres-

ted and never reached completeness. They had "received and heard" a good deal more than they ever translated into their works.

Sardis is called upon to remember these things that had been committed to them, to hold them fast, and to repent; that is, to judge themselves in the light of them, and this of course would lead to a fuller acknowledgement in their works of all they had received. If they did not thus wake up from among the dead and become watchful, they would have to face the coming of the Lord just as the world will. Sunk in spiritual death as the world, they would be treated like the world. But this remark shows that Sardis also will continue to the second coming.

Verse 4 indicates that alliance with the world means defilement. But there were a few in Sardis who had escaped this, and the promise to them seems to identify them with the overcomers of the next verse. Again here the virtue of the overcomer seems to be negative, but when the defilements of the world are the general thing it is no small thing to keep clear of it, and the Lord owns it. Their purity shall be manifested in a coming day; their names shall stand in the book of life, and be confessed before God the Father.

We do most certainly need an ear to hear these things, for a political Protestantism surrounds us and we are more likely to be affected by it than by the corrupt Romish system. Are we not conscious that, the

flesh being in each of us, there is a continuous downward drag in favour of religion of a type that the world understands and even patronizes? To overcome in Sardis must mean spiritual vitality, and purity as well.

To Philadelphia the Lord presents Himself in characters which are new, as far as this book is concerned. He is marked by that intrinsic holiness which repudiates all evil, the truth that exposes all unreality, and He has the key that controls every door. The reference clearly is to Isaiah 22:20-23, where Eliakim is in some sense a type of the coming Messiah. Like Smyrna the Philadelphian Church was faced by opposition, and to know the Lord in these ways would be at once a challenge and a support: a challenge as they thought on His holiness and truth; a support as they realized that all was under His control.

The Lord knew their works, and like all the rest Philadelphia is judged on that basis. Not the creed we profess but the works we do is the crucial point. Indeed the works we do give the best index to what we really believe. Knowing their works, the Lord credited them with a little strength, with the keeping of His word and non-denial of His name. We may remember that in the farewell discourse to His disciples (John 14) the Lord emphasized both His Name and His Word. They were left with access to the Father in His Name, and His commandments and His word were given them to be kept.

As the dispensation of law drew towards its close Malachi was inspired to call upon the godly in Israel to remember all the statutes and judgments given through Moses, and in Luke 1 we find a pious couple "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." As the prophetic view of the Church draws to its close similar things come into evidence. But even so, the Lord does not credit Philadelphia with strength that is great. He says, "a little strength," which we do well to remember. To keep His word, as far as it is known, and not to deny His name is not the maximum but the minimum to be expected of those who really love Him.

We have before observed that Smyrna and Philadelphia are the two churches out of the seven to whom no word of rebuke is administered: we now notice that both had to face the same kind of religious opposition. Those who are the synagogue of Satan, falsely claiming to be Jews, reappear. In Paul's day Satan was transforming himself into an angel of light, so it is no new thing for him to assume a religious garb. Smyrna was fortified against the revilings of these people, and Philadelphia is encouraged by the assurance that a time of vindication will surely come when the love of the Lord will be manifested. The true Philadelphian can have the assurance and enjoyment of that love, while waiting for the day when it will come to light in a public way.

This leads to what we have in verse 10. The day of vindication and manifestation is future, both for the Lord and His saints. The present is the day of His patience and of theirs, for He is not publicly interfering at present with the course of man's days. For the moment He has accepted the rejection which was meted out to Him, and He sits at the Father's right hand in patience, till the hour strikes when He is to take the kingdom. The word of His patience has reached us, and we are to keep it by attuning our spirits and our whole manner of life to it. This the Philadelphian saints had done, and they are encouraged by the assurance that the Lord would differentiate between them and "them that dwell upon the earth," or "the earth-dwellers." These are a class of people that appear several times in this book — people akin to those who "mind earthly things," of whom Paul warns the Philippian saints. The Christian is called to be a "heaven-dweller," the exact opposite of this.

These earth-dwellers are of the world, and so they will have to face the governmental wrath of God which is coming on the world. From that the Philadelphian is to be exempted altogether. He will be kept not only out of the tribulation, but even out of the hour of it; that is, out of the limited period of time in which it falls. The great event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 will take place — the first movement in connection with the Second Advent — and of that Advent verse 11 speaks.

The Lord acknowledges, then, that Philadelphia did have certain things in possession. His injunction to them is, Hold it fast! They were not a people of great strength, who might go from one conquest to another; or of great possessions, who might be steadily acquiring fresh stores of light and understanding. They were to hold fast what they had. No small task this! How frequently in the history of the church do we see Christians being robbed of what once they had under cover of the enticement to spend all their energies in the pursuit of new things. It was in this way that the earliest heresies were introduced, as we see in 2 John 9; where the true reading seems to be "goes forward," and not "transgresses." Those Gnostics did not abide in the doctrine of Christ under pretence of going on to more developed understanding.

The promise to the overcomer is couched in figurative terms. A pillar speaks of support, and on pillars inscriptions were made. The overcomer who had but little strength here, and was outside the synagogue of those who said they were Jews, is to be a pillar of strength in the temple of God and go no more out. He is to be descriptive of God, of the city of God, and of Christ Himself. Not until we get to Revelation 21 shall we find the city of God described, but it is evidently a symbol of the Church as the centre of heavenly administration. The fourfold repetition of "My God," in this verse is very striking. God is known to us as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ," and

He is "the Father of glory" (Eph. 1:17). In our verse that glory is in view, and we are associated with Christ, and through Him with God.

It is evident from verse 11 that what Philadelphia represents from the prophetic point of view goes on to the coming of the Lord. We believe that since each of the last four churches run on to His coming, they represent four phases or states which have developed in the order given, and which persist to the end. The Thyatiran phase can be definitely located in the Romish system and the daughter systems springing out of it. Equally Sardis can be located in the political and national Protestantism that in later centuries was severed from the greater abominations of Rome. Philadelphia follows, but indicates a phase which cannot be located in just the same way. We cannot point to any body of believers, or group, which so displays the features we have been considering, that we can point to them and say, There is what Philadelphia represented. Many years ago now, certain believers did begin to think and say that they were Philadelphia, when one much wiser than themselves warned them that such claims would only eventuate in their becoming like Laodicea.

Equally of Laodicea we have to state that it does not describe some visible body that we can name, but rather it describes the sad phase or state which is to become very pronounced at the close of the story. During the past two hundred years there has been a gracious work of reviving in the professing church, which has brought to pass in not a

few quarters such a measure of faithfulness and devotion as Philadelphia indicates, and God grant that we — writer and readers — may be amongst them. But within the last century this has been damaged by a stealthy counter-movement of the enemy, the feature of which has been the glorifying of man and the powers of his mind. It has blossomed forth in the so-called "higher criticism," which in its turn has led to that attitude to the whole faith of Christ which is summed up in the term "modernism." Men are so lifted up in their fancied sufficiency that they feel competent to criticise the Word of God rather than allow the Word to criticise them. They have a highly inflated opinion of themselves.

To Laodicea the Lord presents Himself in a threefold way. Not only are all the promises of God amen in Him; that is, they are steadfast and carried to their completion in Him; but He Himself is "the Amen." He takes it to Himself as a title, reminding us of the way in which Jehovah speaks of Himself twice in Isaiah 65:16, as "the God of truth," literally, "the God of Amen." The Jehovah, in whom all is made verity, is the Jesus of the New Testament; and significantly the word verily, so often upon His lips, is really the word, Amen.

Connected with this, He is the faithful and true Witness. What He is, that He declares. The Church has been left in the place of witness, as is shown by each church in these chapters being represented by a candlestick; but alas, the adjectives faithful and true cannot be ap-

plied here. That in which the churches have failed — which failure is most pronounced in Laodicea — is found in its perfection in Him.

Thirdly, He is the beginning of the creation of God. Apart from Him therefore nothing of that creation can be known, and, as we shall see, in Laodicea He is standing outside. What part can they have then in that creation?

They have no part, as is evident, and that because two things characterized them. They were indifferent as to Christ, and inflated by self-conceit as to themselves. These are two very ominous features which should occasion much heart-searching with all of us. They abound in Christendom as it exists today, and we may very easily catch the infection of them.

Neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm, is the verdict. Some centuries ago men felt deeply about the things of God. We cannot approve the violence both in speech and act that so often marked their controversies, yet we can admire their strong convictions. The present tendency is in exactly the opposite direction. Convictions are shallow. Everything can be tolerated; anything condoned. No heat is generated; no zeal displayed. Lukewarmness is fashionable. Men may teach what they please as to Christ, and it does not matter.

It is always the case that those who think much of Christ think little of themselves, while those who think little of Christ think much of

themselves. Thus it was with Laodicea. They felt themselves to be rich, and making advances in wealth, and thus to be self-sufficient, having need of nothing. The wealth of which they boasted was not gold or silver but doubtless of a more intellectual sort. Modernism is the fashionable thing today, which claims to be the latest and most advanced thing in religious thought, and far in advance of the cruder notions of earlier days. The taint of this has crept into circles where in days gone by it would have been wholly refused.

Laodicea not only felt this and thought this of themselves, but they boldly said it. They claimed it and proclaimed it. This in its turn proclaimed their own folly and obtuseness, and their claim is decisively rejected by the One who knew all their works. Smyrna claimed nothing, but the Lord knew their poverty and yet declared them to be rich. Laodicea claimed to be rich and is told its poverty in scathing terms — wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked. The language is most emphatic for the definite article precedes the adjectives — the wretched ... That means that they were all these things in a pre-eminent sense.

Here is an illustration of that great word, "Not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor. 10:18). Let us take good heed to it.

Though the claims of the Laodicean church are so decisively rejected, and its true state so unsparingly exposed, the grace of the Lord still lingers. In verses 18-20 it finds expression in a three-fold way.

First, there is the Lord's counsel to the church through the angel. There was still available for them "gold tried in the fire," "white raiment" and "eye-salve." They had been boasting in their riches, of which gold is the symbol, but their fancied wealth had not yet faced the fire. When their "goods" went up in smoke, their pretensions would perish. But fire only refines true gold, while it consumes all the gaudy human things that glitter. They needed a righteousness which was divine in its origin, when the vain things of their own imaginings would be seen by them in their worthlessness.

Later in this book "white linen" is used as the symbol of "the righteousnesses of saints." Only the saint, who stand in righteousness before God, as justified in Christ, can produce these acts of righteousness in daily life. The Laodiceans, pleased with themselves and their acts, might imagine themselves to be well clothed, but in reality they were naked. Raiment of a sort they might have: the white raiment they had not.

And, worst of all, they were so blind that they did not see their own desperate need. When on earth the Lord had said, "The light of the body is the eye ... when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of

darkness. Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness" (Luke 11:34-35). A sad illustration of that is before us. They doubtless boasted of being rich in "light" amongst their other possessions, but in reality they were full of darkness; blind as to themselves and as to the Lord, and thus needing the eyesalve.

The Lord's counsel is, "Buy of Me" these necessary things. He is the only Source of them, and in speaking thus He was using the figure which occurs in Isaiah 55, at the mouth of Jehovah, where every thirsty one is invited to buy without money or price. Absence of thirst was the trouble at Laodicea, yet that did not alter the fact that all they needed was to be obtained from the Lord on the same gracious terms. In the New Testament Jesus speaks in just the same absolute way as Jehovah did in the Old.

Second, the rebuking and chastenings of the Lord are an expression of His grace. This is a point which comes to light in Scripture from the early days of Job, yet it is one very easily overlooked, if we get infected by the spirit of self-satisfaction, such as characterized Laodicea. There was a minority who were like that "afflicted and poor people," of whom we read in Zephaniah 3:12. These are in contrast with "them that rejoice in thy pride" and are "haughty," spoken of in the previous verse. The majority at Laodicea were of this haughty type, yet they did not come under the rebukings and chasten-

ings as did the minority. It is thus in our day, which is very Laodicean in character.

Because of this the haughty majority may feel themselves greatly fortified in their position. They may point out that the minority never seem to prosper as they do, but always to be in trouble, and under the governmental hand of God. It looks therefore as if the minority is disapproved, and by contrast they are the approved ones. Did we ignore the uniform teaching of Scripture we might think so too. But the reverse is the fact. The discipline comes on "as many as I love," that it may stir them to zeal and repentance. A zealous man is one moved to warmth of desire, the very opposite of lukewarmness. Repentance is the opposite of the self-satisfaction, which characterizes the haughty. The spirit of Laodicea is very strong in this our day, so it behoves us to pay much attention to these solemn words of our Lord.

Verse 18, then, is counsel to the haughty majority; verse 19 is discipline for the poor minority. But between the two a certain number may be found that it would be difficult to classify. They are not rooted in pride as the former, nor can they be distinctly identified with those who are Christ's and loved by Him. So, third, there is for such this gracious invitation and offer. The Lord is outside the door but knocking. He is excluded from that which professes to be His own church! What a tragic situation, and what a descent from that departure from first love, which was seen in Ephesus! The final end of this will be

utter repudiation. At His second Advent there will be a fulfilment of the word, "I will spue thee out of my mouth," for they will be wholly nauseous to Him. While He lingers, some may be found who have ears to hear His voice as He knocks and calls. For such there is hope in His grace.

The invitation is very inclusive. "If any man:" nothing could be wider than that. The only limitation is the having ears to hear His voice, and consequently a readiness to open the door to Him. This done, He will enter to commune with us in our small circumstances; and then lift us to commune with Him in His large circle of pleasure. This is a mighty privilege indeed! Let us be sure that we embrace His offer and enjoy it. It is also a strong evangelistic appeal for the last days, when so many are Christian as regards outward profession and yet lack all reality and life.

There will be those who overcome even in Laodicea. Repentance and reality will mark such, the result of hearing the Lord's voice, and they will be associated with Him in His throne. He overcame — in His case over all the power of evil that assailed Him from without — and is associated with His Father in His throne. Those who hear His voice, while He is in the outside place as regards a lukewarm church, will be associated with Him in the inside place in the day that is to come.

The last verse of the chapter must remind us once more that what the Spirit says to each church is not for that church alone, but for everyone who has an ear to hear. Judgment begins at the house of God, and the state of each church is severally scrutinized, yet the Lord's pronouncement as to each sheds valuable light which shines for all. What is necessary correction for one church is wholesome for all, if they have ears to hear. What is local is thus happily blended with what is universal.

Chapter 4

THE FIRST verse of chapter 4 is, we judge, a very important one. It introduces the unveiling of "the things which must be hereafter;" that is, according to Revelation 1:19, the third section of the book. The vision now takes a fresh departure, and John sees a door opened in heaven and hears an authoritative call to come up into heavenly scenes. Being, as he tells us, "in the Spirit," all that he experienced and saw had to him a vivid reality, and though a vision it conveys prophetic realities to us.

In the first place, then, John's own position was changed. He left earthly scenes for heavenly, so that he might view thence the Divine dealings with the earth in judgment. This change has symbolic significance, we believe. Revelation 3 ends with, "the churches," and these two words do not occur again until Revelation 22:16 is

reached; that is, the churches do not appear right through the unfolding of "the things which must be hereafter." The church as a whole is symbolized in Revelation 19:7, and again in Revelation 21:9, as "the Lamb's wife," but she is then manifestly in her heavenly seat. The catching up of John into heaven is symbolic of the rapture of the church, as detailed in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, and from this point begins the vision of things that take place on earth after the church is gone.

Next, we notice that before John is permitted to view the governmental judgments of God on the earth, he is shown the secret spring of all. In the coming day of the Lord, men cannot fail to see and feel the judgments, but they will be in the dark as to whence all proceeds. Now we are not to be ignorant of this, and so this chapter and the next are occupied with John's vision of the heavenly scenes and of the One in whom all judgment is vested. The record of what he saw furnishes us with a picture of the heavenly world in solemn session, preparatory to judicial action on earth.

John's attention was claimed first by the central throne and by Him that sat on it. He did not see heaven as "My Father's house" (John 14:2), the eternal home of the saints, but as the seat of authority and rule, and the Divine glory appeared to him as the rays of precious stones. Such stones reflect the light — the glory of God, which in itself is a light too bright for mortal eyes. The throne of judgment was,

however, encircled by a rainbow, showing that in judgment God remembers His promise of mercy, as in Genesis 9:13. Yet the rainbow was of a super-natural sort, of one colour, and that a tint not seen in the rainbows of our present world.

Then twenty-four lesser thrones encircled the central throne, and on these sat elders in the white raiment of priests, but crowned as kings. At once we perceive a resemblance to what Daniel saw some six centuries before, when he says, "I beheld till the thrones were cast down," or rather, "were set, and the Ancient of days did sit" (Daniel 7:9), and then not only did One like the Son of Man have the dominion but, "the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom" (Daniel 7:18). So here there is a sight not only of God, the supreme Ruler, but of the complete kingdom of priests, who are to judge the world, according to 1 Corinthians 6:2. We identify the elders with the saints raised at the first resurrection, and their number corresponds with the 24 courses into which David divided the descendants of Aaron — the priestly family under the law. Twelve is the number of administration, and so 24 suits the priestly company, composed of both Old Testament and New Testament saints, now glorified together.

Verse 5 declares that the throne is characterized not by grace but by judgment, yet judgment which is to be executed in the full light of the Spirit of God. In chapters 2 and 3 the churches were each a "candlestick," or "lampstand," and the Lord was He who had the seven

Spirits of God. Now the seven Spirits of God burn as lamps before the throne, illuminating the course of the Divine judgments. The "sea" is there, not filled with water for cleansing, as once in front of the Temple, but of glass, speaking of a state of fixed purity, and "in the midst" and "round about" the throne, as supporting it, were four "beasts," or "living creatures." There are strong similarities to the living creatures of Ezekiel 1, who later in that book are called cherubim. There are differences also: for instance, there only four wings are mentioned, whereas here there are six wings, agreeing rather with the seraphim of Isaiah 6.

The first mention of cherubim, in Genesis 3:24, certainly conveys the impression that they were some kind of angelic being. On the other hand Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4 and Revelation 5 are records of visions granted to prophets, and the living creatures appear to be rather symbolic of God's governmental actions in the sphere of creation. God's ways have the strength of the lion, and endurance of the ox, the intelligence of a man, the swiftness and elevation of an eagle. The living creatures are also "full of eyes," not only before and behind, but also within — they scrutinize all the future, and all the past, and the deep internal secrets of the ways of God. Hence they contribute to His praise, giving glory and honour and thanks to Him continually, declaring Him to be the thrice Holy, who lives for ever and

ever. Thrice Holy, notice! Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.

As the living creatures give thanks the elders fall in worship, casting their crowns before the throne. They ascribed all glory, honour and power to the Lord on the ground of His creatorial work and supremacy, and thus very suitably they discrowned themselves. Since all things came into being for His pleasure, His judgments must now operate to rescue for His pleasure all that had been marred by sin. But something more than creating power and cleansing judgment is needed. That something chapter 5 brings before us, even the redeeming blood of Christ.

Chapter 5

THE BOOK IN the hand of Him who sat on the throne, written on both sides and sealed with seven seals is evidently the book of judgment, now completed by man's sin. Men had filled to overflowing the cup of their iniquity, the record was complete, but as yet the seals restrained. Who was worthy to break the seals? This was the question now raised. The judgment is richly deserved, but who can execute it?

This was the question raised in the incident recorded in John 8:1-11. The sinner was undeniably guilty and the law explicit. But who was there so clear of every charge under the law as to be worthy to ex-

ecute this sentence? All the accusers slunk away, and the only worthy One declined the office at that time. His mission then was to save and not to judge. Now however the hour of judgment is come and He is about to act.

In the vision John wept much. He did not rejoice at the thought of judgment against evil failing by default of a worthy executioner. The very reverse: it outraged his feelings to imagine that it should fail in this manner. We know that, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccles. 8:11). It would be a crowning calamity if it were never executed at all, and John might well weep at the thought of this. The elders however, were in the secret of heaven and one of them gave John the key to all. It is by a Man that God is going to judge the world in righteousness, and that Man has prevailed and acquired the title to do it. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, an allusion to Genesis 49:9-10, and at the same time the Root of David — not merely the Offspring of David, but the Root, from whom sprang all David's authority and victory. The title to the crown was His to begin with. It is doubly His as the Overcomer. The closing verses of Psalm 78 indicate how definitely God's purposes for the government of the earth centre in David and Judah. All failed in David's immediate successors, for he had to lament, "Although my house be not so

with God" (2 Sam. 23:5) and yet all is accomplished in Christ. Nothing fails.

The Lion of Judah, then, has prevailed, and so is worthy to open the book of judgment. But how did He prevail? Verse 6 tells us. It was by dying as the Lamb of sacrifice.

The Lord Jesus is mentioned 28 times in the book of Revelation as the Lamb, and verse 6 is the first occurrence. It is worthy of note that here and all through the book a diminutive form of the word is used — "little Lamb" — emphasizing thus the fact that He, who now appears wielding omnipotence, was once the Lamb of sacrifice, minimized and depreciated by men. He now has sevenfold power — symbolized by horns and the sevenfold discernment of the Spirit of God, who as the seven Spirits of God is now sent forth into all the earth. Therefore no corner is hid from His penetrating gaze and intelligence, and nothing will escape His powerful hand.

The Lamb, in lion-like power, came forward to take the book and thus assume His rights and execute the judgments of God in the earth: an action which provoked an outburst of praise and worship, that reverberated to the utmost bounds of creation.

This outburst begins in the inner circle of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, who were involved in the earlier ascription of glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne,

when creation was in question. Now redemption was in question, and consequently the Lamb is the Object of worship. All gladly honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Indeed the Father refuses honour professedly offered to Himself, if the Son be not honoured.

The elders had harps, golden vials of incense and a new song: symbols taken from the Old Testament. The temple worship as ordained through David was based on Asaph with his harpers, the priests with their censers of incense, and then also there was "the song of the Lord," as mentioned in 2 Chronicles 29:27. So the elders are seen functioning as priests both in song and in prayer. The Psalmist said, "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense" (Ps. 141:2), and here are prayers which arise as incense and song which is based on redemption. The song is new, since it is based on a redemption out of every nation, instead of having a national character as in Exodus 15; and also inasmuch as it celebrates His worthiness to judge rather than to save.

The worship of the elders is characterized by three things. First, by intelligence and personal directness. They understand that the basis of all God's purposes is the redeeming blood of the Lamb, and they address Him personally, saying, "Thou art worthy." They do not merely sing about Him in the third person — "Worthy is the Lamb." Second, they sing, whereas the angels of verse 11 and the creatures

of verse 13 are marked by "saying" and not by singing. Song, as we have remarked, belongs to those who have been redeemed.

Third, though redeemed themselves, they celebrate in an abstract way the Lamb's work of redemption by blood, being carried in spirit far beyond themselves. They are occupied not so much with their part in it as with the supreme worth and excellence of the redemption in itself for the pleasure of "our God." This we say, because the better attested reading omits the "us" which occurs twice, and has, "they shall reign," rather than "we." The glorified, heavenly saints are lifted out of themselves to view things and worship from the Divine standpoint. This feature should surely be seen in the worship of the church today, though the reigning time is not yet come. In Revelation 5 we are on the threshold of the time when "the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (Dan. 7:18), and consequently it can be said, "they shall reign [on or over] the earth."

Now comes the voice of the innumerable angelic band, followed by the voices of all created things. In both these cases, as we have noted, they praise the Lamb without addressing Him personally. The ascription of praise is sevenfold on the part of the angels; fourfold on the part of every creature — four being the number indicating universality in creation. The angels declare that the Lamb, who was adjudged by men to be worthy of death, and who was led to the slaughter, is

worthy of all glory in sevenfold completeness. Every creature sees the Lamb to be associated with Him who sits on the throne, and inheriting all blessing, honour, glory and power. To this the living creatures add their Amen. The elders are moved afresh to worship.

Before passing to chapter 6, we may again remind ourselves that John is recording for us a vision He was permitted thus to see and hear things heavenly and earthly, and so put on record in advance the ultimate outcome of the Lamb intervening in judgment. This particularly applies to verse 13. In subsequent chapters he records much evil and blasphemy, rather than praise, from creatures on earth; but ultimately all creatures will have to declare His praise.

Chapter 6

CHAPTER 6 GIVES US the opening of the seals. Judgment dealings with the earth begin. The words, "and see" in verses 1, 3, 5, 7, are doubtful, and the "Come," uttered by the four living creatures, seems to be a call to the respective riders to come forth. The living creatures speak with a voice like thunder, which befits a call, which has governmental justice and judgment as its object. One after the other there appear four riders, mounted on horses, white, red, black and pale or sallow. Each has his own special feature, but all under the controlling hand of God, symbolized by the living creatures.

First in order, there is the going forth of a great conqueror — bloodless conquest apparently, since white is the colour. Second, an outbreak of war, especially civil war with its lawless horrors. Third, black famine and scarcity. Fourth, pestilence ending in death and Hades, but over a limited area — the fourth part of the earth. It is certainly remarkable how in recent times colours have come to be identified with human movements and confederations. We have heard of armies both white and red, and of blackshirts, etc.

All the activities indicated in these verses are oppressive and destructive: human activities, and yet called forth as retributive judgment under Divine control. They remind us of what the Lord Himself called, "the beginnings of sorrows" (Mark 13:8). Then the next verse in Mark 13 speaks of the persecution of those who will be witnesses for God in those days; and similarly, the fifth seal follows here. It is opened by the Lamb as before, but no "Come" is uttered, for it only revealed to John the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God. The movements under the four seals, which meant oppression and misery for men generally, had meant persecution and death for these, and their souls cried out for vengeance. They had to wait, however. They had fallen under these beginnings of sorrows and other martyrs were to follow. Vengeance on their adversaries and the full vindication of themselves would not take place until the end of

God's ways was reached. But meanwhile they were given a more secret token of approval, symbolized by the white robes.

The contrast between the cry of these martyred souls and the dying cry of Stephen is worthy of note. No request for vengeance came from his lips, but the very reverse — "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." But he lived at the beginning of the present dispensation of grace, and the church is still here as the exponent of the grace of God. These souls under the altar belong to the age of judgment, that follows the calling out of the church. Their cry coincides with that which we so often find in those Psalms, which men have called, "imprecatory." What would not be suitable on our lips is quite suitable on theirs, for when God is going to take up His "strange work" of judgment it is in order to ask Him to do it speedily. He is going to make it a short work in the earth, only what is short to Him may seem long to the creature.

So verses 10 and 11, we judge, confirm the thought that we have left the church dispensation behind; and the opening of the sixth seal makes this yet more plain. Again there is no "Come," for agencies that are superhuman, and more directly from the hand of God, come into play. There are great convulsions both terrestrial and celestial, which result in the overturning of all that had seemed firmly established. What more firm than sun, moon and stars in the heaven and mountains and islands on earth, though stormy seas surround the lat-

ter? They symbolize established authorities and powers, whether in the heavens or on earth, and all are involved in a catastrophic fall or at least thrown into a state of flux. Recent happenings among the shaken nations of Europe have shown how disconcerting it is when those who have been like established luminaries are cast down. The allusion to the fig tree, which is so often symbolic of the Jew, may indicate that this upheaval will specially affect that people, thus preparing the way for the acceptance of antichrist.

How all these upheavals will affect men, from the greatest to the least, is shown in the close of the chapter. Apparently they will discern that the hand of God is behind them, and the wrath of the Lamb will strike them as dreadful beyond words. Better be crushed out of existence on earth than face that! Psalm 2 had said, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little;" and at this point there was only a little wrath, for we are at the beginning of sorrows, yet perishing from the way was plainly before them. Though the climax of "the great day of His wrath" was not yet, they had entered upon that day, for the day of God's grace in the Gospel was closed. Men may stand in God's grace but no one can stand before His wrath.

Chapter 7

THE SIXTH SEAL had now been opened, and John does not see the opening of the seventh till Revelation 8 is reached. Chapter 7 therefore presents us with a parenthetical interlude in which we have recorded Divine activities and their fruits before we see even more serious judgments falling on the earth. True to the order which runs consistently through the Scriptures, we have the Jew first and after that the Gentile.

There is a brief pause in the Divine dealings. The sixth seal had produced what is likened to a "mighty wind," but now the four winds of the earth are entirely restrained by angelic power. They were not to blow until the servants of God had been sealed in their foreheads — the most prominent part of their persons. These servants of God were found in the twelve tribes of Israel; but Levi coming into the reckoning and also both the tribes that represented Joseph, the number twelve is maintained by the omission of Dan. It has been thought that the way Jacob prophetically referred to Dan in Genesis 49:16-18, may throw some light on this. If the "serpent by the way," and the "adder in the path," are an allusion to the antichrist, instigated by Satan, rising out of the tribe of Dan, it may do so.

The numbers cited might of course be literal, but more probably are to be understood symbolically, especially as twelve and the square of twelve occur elsewhere in the book in a symbolic sense. The godly

remnant of Israel are to have a place of administrative importance in the coming age, and twelve is the number of administrative completeness.

It is to be noted that at this point in the book angels again come into prominence. The Lord's parables in Matthew 13 have told us that they have a large part in the work of selective judgment at the end of the age. They "gather out of His kingdom all things that offend;" they "sever the wicked from among the just." What we see here is that they seal the just of Israel, so that they may be preserved and carried through. Until such are sealed the winds of judgment may not blow.

John heard the number that were sealed, and that recorded, he tells us the next vision that passed before his eyes. He saw a great multitude that came out of all nations, who appeared as standing before the throne and the Lamb. This was clearly a vision of a great host gathered from the Gentiles, as distinguished from the sealed remnant of Israel, that has just come before us. Another thing also differentiates the two companies. The elect of Israel are sealed, and thus marked for preservation, before the more direct judgments of God begin. The Gentile multitude is arrayed in the white robe of righteousness and holds the palms of victory as having come out of the great tribulation. The one case, therefore, shows that God knows how to secure those already in relation with Him, before the judgment begins: the other shows how God can overrule tribulation, even of the

fiercest sort, to reach people not previously in relation with Him, bringing them into relationship with Himself, and carrying them victoriously through the tribulation.

In the vision this Gentile multitude acclaimed God and the Lamb as the Source of their salvation. They did so with a loud voice that all might hear, and it met with an immediate response from the angelic throng. The multitude was before the throne, whereas the angels encircled the throne and also the elders and living creatures, who formed an inner circle. The angels are moved to worship. They add their Amen to the ascription of salvation to God and the Lamb, though they do not themselves experience salvation, and consequently they do not name it in their own ascription of seven-fold praise, as given in verse 12. Though they do not share the salvation, they can see the excellence and glory of God in it. They ascribe honour and power to eternal ages to Him who has wrought it.

It is remarkable that one of the elders should have raised with John the two questions that would naturally rise in all our minds. Who are these people in their multitudes, and whence did they come? John's response, "Sir, thou knowest," was justified in the result. The elder did know, and gave the information. Consistently through the book the elders are characterized by the spirit of worship and by a very full understanding of God and His ways. As representing the glorified saints, this is what we should expect of them, in keeping with the

Apostle Paul's saying, "Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

The elder's reply shows that this great company have a special place inasmuch as they have experienced special sorrows and tribulation. The whiteness of their robes was not produced by their own works, or even by their much suffering, but only by their having been washed in the blood of the Lamb; yet they have a recompense which is a suited answer to their sufferings, and for which their suffering had educated and qualified them.

Their place is "before the throne," a phrase which indicates, we believe, the place they have morally and spiritually: they are put into close touch with God. They have moreover a priestly place since they serve Him day and night in His temple. All the burden and oppression which they have suffered has ceased for ever, and on the contrary the Lamb Himself becomes the Minister of their joy and satisfaction, God having removed for ever anything and everything that causes a tear.

Thus it is a beautiful picture of millennial recompense and blessedness, which will be enjoyed by multitudes called out of the Gentile peoples and carried through the tribulation period. We have not yet reached the millennium in the orderly unfolding of the book, but in this parenthetical chapter we are permitted to have a glimpse of how

God will preserve His people in view of it, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

There will of course be other multitudes, born during the progress of the age to come, also enjoying its blessedness. They will not belong to this company, however, nor share its special nearness, not having had the spiritual training involved in passing through the special tribulation. For us the principle is stated in the words, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12). The principle is the same for them, though the exact recompense may be different.

Chapter 8

THE OPENING OF the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12-17), produced great convulsions, affecting both the heavens and the earth, which brought terror into the hearts of all. Then came a pause; the winds of heaven being arrested until the servants of God were sealed. Chapter 8 brings us to the opening of the seventh seal and again there is a pause, described as "silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." What transpires on earth during that time is not stated. Divine judgment, when it falls, is not only sure but swift, yet it is never hurried. During this interval of silence the seven angels "prepared themselves to sound" their trumpets. There is a calm serenity about the Divine action in judgment, and it is postponed to the last possible moment.

Angels now come into prominence. This is in keeping with the Lord's own words in Matthew 13:39, 41, 49; and again in 24:31. Angels of special importance are indicated here — "the seven angels which stood before God." To Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, the angel announced himself as "Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God" (Luke 1:19). These seven angels had that peculiar privilege also. In the trumpets that were given to them we have a symbol that differs from the seals. The breaking of the seals not only set in motion the providential judgments that came on men, but also revealed their secret source. Such things, in a less intense form, had come to pass before. The hand of God in the judgments might not have been discerned, had not the seals been broken. The trumpet, on the other hand, is the symbol of what is clearly avowed, constituting an unmistakable call to all. The trumpet was commonly used in Israel, whether for calling an assembly or sounding an alarm. In our chapter the alarm is sounded with great emphasis.

But again, there took place during the half hour the action of "another angel," detailed in verses 3-5. This great Angel acted in high priestly capacity, adding the fragrance of His incense to the prayers of all saints. Many therefore see in Him a symbolic representation of Christ Himself, and we think they are right. His action was twofold. First, He acted on behalf of living saints, so that their prayers might ascend before God as "an odour of a sweet smell." There were still

saints on earth, though many had been martyred as Revelation 6:9 showed. Those uttered their cry for vengeance but they did not need the action of the High Priest as these did.

In the second place, His action indicated the fire of judgment. The same censer, that was used for incense and fragrance, was now filled with fire from the altar, and flung to the earth as a signal for the trumpet judgments to begin. The censer was golden in keeping with the golden altar, symbolic of that which is divine in its intrinsic excellence. So whether it was the prayers of saints ascending in fragrance, or fire descending in judgment, all was executed in a righteousness which is divine.

In verses 7-13 we get the sounding of the first four trumpets and the results. The language continues to be highly symbolic, and a feature common to each is that the judgments only fall upon a third part of the things affected. This shows that for the moment the effects are not universal but limited. The phrase, "the third part," occurs again in Revelation 12:4, where the Roman Empire, energized by Satan, is in question. This leads to the conclusion that here it is used to indicate the Roman earth, which is practically to be identified with the western European powers, or perhaps we may say, Christendom.

Another thing we notice in these verses is that the judgments fall on things rather than men. Yet the things specified — earth, trees, grass,

sea and creatures in it, ships, rivers, fountains, sun, moon, stars — are not themselves moral agents, and so accountable to God. Man is the rebel sinner who has to be dealt with. The things are symbols of man and of what is connected with him.

For instance, "earth" signifies the stable organized nations, in contrast with "sea" — the restless, disorganized peoples. "Trees" signify the great men of the earth, in contrast with "green grass," which indicates the common people, but in a prosperous state. "Ships" would be the symbol of commerce. "Rivers" and "Fountains" of the channels and sources of life and refreshment. The darkening of part of both day and night would indicate the disturbance of the whole course of nature to the blinding of men.

The judgment inflicted is symbolic in each case. "Hail and fire, mingled with blood," must signify judgment from heaven of a crushing and searching nature, bringing death in its train. "A great mountain burning with fire ... cast into the sea" — some imposing and apparently stable institution crashing under divine judgment into the restless masses of humanity. A "great star" burning as a lamp and falling from heaven, speaks rather of some prominent individual, who had shone as a luminary utterly apostasizing, and spreading death-dealing poison of a spiritual sort. The smiting of the third part of sun, moon and stars indicates the partial putting out of the sources of light and direction for men.

It is of course quite possible that we may have here reference also to great sights and signs and catastrophes in the realm of nature. But such things are not, we judge, the main objects of the prophecy, which has to do with what is spiritual and moral rather than what is physical and material.

After the fourth trumpet a very grave warning was sounded. "Eagle" rather than "angel" is the better attested reading in verse 13, which is significant in view of the Lord's words in Matthew 24:28. The state of "the inhabitants of the earth" is becoming like that of a putrid carcase, and hence the three following trumpets are to unleash judgments of threefold intensity. This phrase or the equivalent, "them that dwell on the earth," occurs a number of times in the book, and usually indicates a special class, whose interests and hopes are completely centred on the earth, and who have excluded all that is of heaven from their thoughts. As Christians we have a heavenly calling, and yet the present trend of religious thought is to concentrate exclusively on the earth, and to treat our hope of heaven with derision. When the church is gone, the earth-dwellers will be striving for their earthly paradise and expecting it as a result of their efforts. These apostates will specially come under the governmental wrath of God.

Chapter 9

THE FIFTH AND sixth trumpets follow in chapter 9; both of them are termed a "woe," so severe is the judgment they inflict. In general there is a resemblance between them, but the fifth brings torment so fierce that men will desire death and yet death will elude them. The sixth does bring death. In reading this chapter we need hardly remind ourselves that the descriptions are couched in symbolic language. If taken literally we should have to picture something very grotesque.

Under the fifth trumpet infernal influences are let loose upon the earth. The star that falls from heaven to earth indicates some person of eminence that apostasizes, and to him the key of the abyss was given. The personal pronoun, "him," certainly infers that a person is meant. In the light of what follows later in the book, this may well be the Antichrist himself. The immense cloud of smoke that arises from the opened pit, darkening the air, graphically figures the sending forth of dark and even demonic influences, which shut out from men the light of heaven. In our times we have witnessed something like a preliminary essay of Satan in this direction. About the middle of the nineteenth century a puff of smoke from the pit arose and shaped itself into the mystic word, "evolution." Think of the darkening influence that puff of smoke has thrown over the minds of millions! The light of God has been obscured in their minds by an imaginary ape-

man, or even a mere speck of protoplasm. It is the god of this age who blinds the minds of them that believe not.

Out of this darkening influence comes the swarm of "locusts." Here is another graphic figure. The locust is an insignificant insect in itself, but terrifying when it arrives in countless hordes. These had the poison of scorpions, and unlike the natural locust that preys upon every green thing, these were only to afflict the unsealed of men. This refers us back to the opening verses of Revelation 7, where we find that those sealed were the servants of God out of the tribes of Israel. We presume, therefore, that those of Israel who were not sealed are particularly in question here. If this inference is correct it would strengthen the thought that the fallen star is the Antichrist, for the darkening influence of his apostasy would specially affect the mass of Israel who are still in unbelief. The effect produced is described as the torment of a scorpion's sting, which is very acute but does not usually kill. There is a limit to the period of this infliction — 5 months; that is, while the torment is so acute that men would prefer death, it is not prolonged.

The details given in verses 7-10 have a meaning which is not really obscure. Battle horses surely signify aggressive might. The crowns they wear are not the diadems of royalty but the wreaths of victory, which they have assumed. To the eye they looked like gold, but they were not really what they appeared to be, but only, "as it were." The

face of a man speaks of intelligence: the hair of women of subjection: the teeth of lions of ferocious power. Breast plates of iron would indicate complete imperviousness to attack. Their sting being in their tails is reminiscent of Isaiah 9:15, where we read, "The prophet that teaches lies, he is the tail." Another reference this, which directs our minds to the Antichrist.

Finally, these symbolic locusts were under the direction of a king, whose name means "The Destroyer." He is described as "the angel of the bottomless pit." This indicates that these locusts are an organized force, and under the direction of a controlling destructive power, just as in nature the locust swarms of countless millions act like a well-directed army. Though under the direction of the destroyer, this woe falls upon man not to death — for death flees from them — but into the destruction of all that makes life on earth worth living. Darkness and torment of a spiritual sort is what is indicated.

At the sounding of the sixth trumpet the golden altar is again mentioned. Not now the priestly offering of incense with the prayers of saints, but forth from it a voice of Divine authority, commanding the loosing of the four angels that had been bound in the Euphrates, who were prepared to bring death upon men — not torment now but death. Four speaks of universality, and the Euphrates was the great river that divided the lands of the east from the land of Israel. In chapter 16:12, we find this great river mentioned again in connection

with the sixth vial. It may well be that what happens here has a bearing upon the happening indicated then. This woe is strictly limited, not merely to the day but even to the hour of its execution.

The loosing of the four angels of death precipitates upon men the immense army of 200,000,000 horsemen, who were their instruments in this dreadful task. Verses 17-19, give us details of these horses and their riders, which are again symbolic and figurative. The "third part of men" appears again here, so we gather this woe from the east falls especially on what we have called the Roman earth. It is indeed a woe, for even the breastplates — normally a piece of armour wholly defensive are of fire and jacinth and brimstone, and therefore bear an offensive character. This time too the "power" is in the mouth as well as in the tail; but the tails were like serpents with heads dealing out "hurt," while the mouths cast forth fire and smoke and brimstone. All this is indicative surely of something that is very satanic on the one hand, and what is suffocating and death-dealing and full of judgment and pain on the other. If the earlier woe was more applicable to the unsealed apostates of Israel, this falls rather on the Gentile nations and the proud Roman Empire, which in its revived form will be the dominant political power in the earth in the last days.

The "death" spoken of here we understand to signify utter and irremediable apostasy which sinks a man into final alienation from God. Those smitten with this death would be past all feeling or judgment

as to what is right and what is wrong. We have recently had some striking examples of this kind of thing in those who fell under the Nazi delusion and became the instruments of its appalling cruelties. It may well be, of course, that literal death of the body follows in many cases, but it is not, we believe, the primary thought.

Verse 20 speaks of "the rest of the men" who were not smitten by death. They did feel the weight of the plagues but they did not repent. Here for the first time in Revelation we get this word, "plague." It at once turns our minds to the plagues in Egypt, recorded in the early chapters of Exodus; and this, we think, not without reason. God's judgments run a course which is consistent with Himself. Judgment is His "strange work;" He does not delight in it, and therefore He does not strike the final overwhelming blow without giving ample warning by preliminary blows of a lesser sort. He may well know that these lesser judgments will not produce repentance and so avert the final intervention, nevertheless He justifies His ways in judgment in the sight of all heavenly intelligences, and permits them to see how right He is when at last He strikes overwhelmingly. So in the case before us: men did not repent. We are permitted to see the depths to which men will have sunk in those days; worshipping demons on the one hand, and the insensible works of their own hands on the other.

Is it possible that men, who live in lands where the light of the Gospel once has shone, can sink to such a level? It certainly is. Millions of men and women were recently worshipping Hitler, who apparently was in touch with a demon by means of clair-audience — hearing voices from the unseen world. He would have been next to nothing without his "familiar spirit," and in worshipping him men were really worshipping the demon that inspired him. The worship too of the material grows apace, as more and more men are obsessed with their great discoveries, and the works of their own hands by which these discoveries are made available, whether for good or for ill. In worshipping these works of their hands, man really is worshipping himself. In those days then, men will worship themselves and demons. They are not very far away from it today.

The last verse of our chapter shows that along with this will go complete moral breakdown. Sorceries or witchcraft indicate traffic with demonic powers, in all its various forms; the other three things specified we are all acquainted with. When life is held cheaply, when personal purity is quite disregarded, when the rights of property are ignored, a state of things must be produced reminiscent of the state of the earth before the flood, or the degradation that prevailed in Sodom and Gomorrah at a later date.

Such is to be the state of things on earth when these "woe" judgments are unleashed. But we have heard the Lord's own words, "As it

was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man ... Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot ... Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:26-30). So we are not surprised.

Chapter 10

THE RECORD OF the things that come to pass, under the sixth trumpet and second woe, does not come to an end with Revelation 9. We have to read on to Revelation 11:14 before we get the words, "the second woe is past." After the opening of the sixth seal and an account of the immediate results, we had the angelic action, recorded in Revelation 7 and the early verses of Revelation 8, as a kind of appendix to it. Now, after the sounding of the sixth trumpet, angelic action is recorded, and also the way in which a witness to God and His claims will be raised up on earth, as an appendix before the seventh and final trumpet sounds.

The close of Revelation 9 showed us a state of affairs amongst rebellious men which could hardly be exceeded in its depravity and wilfulness. Chapter 10 opens with a vision of an Angel of peculiar majesty and glory, who announces a speedy ending of God's mysterious dealings with the earth. Thus the final blow that is to fall is preceded by solemn and ample warning in the mercy of God.

In this mighty Angel we see again the One who formerly acted as the Angel of Jehovah's presence — our Lord Jesus Christ. The description of Him in verse 1 agrees very much with that given in Revelation 1:14-16. None but He has a face like the sun. Cloud and rainbow and pillars of fire are also characteristic of Deity. His voice moreover was of highest power and majesty, which had as its echo or reverberations the seven thunders, which surely speak of further judgment actions. The seals, the trumpets, the vials are all made public but the thunders are unrecorded by express command. It is a solemn thought that though many details of the Divine judgments are revealed, there are to be judgments beyond anything made known to us.

The Angel stood with His right foot on the sea and His left on the earth: that is, the whole world is dominated by Him, whether the unstable, turbulent masses or more stable and organized kingdoms. This will be the true situation then — as seen by John and revealed to us — just before the time arrives when God will publicly put all things under His feet. Thus He is viewed as dominating the entire scene, though for a short time yet His supremacy is not manifested nor acknowledged by men.

There is, however, the solemn oath and proclamation, of which verses 5-7 speak. If we are right in identifying this "mighty Angel" with our Lord, in swearing "by Him that lives for ever and ever," He was really swearing by Himself, as when the promise was made to

Abraham (Heb. 6:13). That was an oath for blessing: this an oath for judgment; but both are alike immutable. The word, "time," at the end of verse 6 should be, "delay." The full stroke of Divine judgment had been held back in the long suffering and patience of God, but the atrocious nature of the evil, together with the utter lack of repentance, exposed at the end of chapter 9, was now precipitating the climax, to be reached when the seventh trumpet sounded. At last the cup of man's iniquity was full.

"The mystery of God" (verse 7) is of course the mystery of His ways and dealings with men in relation to their sin. Contemplating more particularly God's ways and judgments with Israel as a nation, the Apostle Paul had to exclaim, "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). What is this but a confession that to the most enlightened of the Lord's servants His ways and judgments are full of mystery. At present God is acting behind the scenes and we cannot penetrate the veil, but when He brings His judgments into the light of day, the mystery of it will vanish away and be finished. What the prophets have declared will be fulfilled, and the rightness of all His dealings through the ages will be seen, as well as of His final judgment at the Second Advent.

The episode, which John relates in verses 8 - 11, reminds us of the similar incident in the visions of Ezekiel, related in Ezek. 2 and Ezek. 3. Take note of the underlying thought that what the servant of

God gives out in the way of prophecy or instruction must first be eaten, digested, assimilated by himself. Nothing is more ruinous spiritually than to proclaim and parade our knowledge of truth, which as yet we have not really made our own in meditation, in prayer, in experience. The acquisition of fresh truth is sweet and exhilarating as honey, but when inwardly digested and assimilated it ever displaces flesh and self and the world, and that is a bitter process. This is so, even if, as here, the little book is concerned with judgment which is to fall on others and not on oneself. Twice the book is spoken of as "open," so in this short chapter we get things that were uttered and yet sealed and not to be published, and also things which though open were to be eaten by the prophet before he conveyed them to others. Even in the solemn matter of judgment there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak.

Chapter 11

IN THE OPENING verses of chapter 11, John has not only to see and hear, but to act. He was to measure the temple, the altar and the worshippers with a divinely-given reed. Once again the language is symbolic, for though a measure of length may suit a temple or an altar, it is quite inapplicable to worshippers in a literal sense. The thought seems to be that these three come under divine scrutiny and are taken account of, whilst the outer court is ignored as being under

Gentile feet. This indicates, we gather, that God is going to support what is of Himself in the midst of His earthly people, Israel, and also maintain a remnant according to His election, but the "court," the large outer circle, identified with "the holy city," is to be defiled for the stated period. We ourselves are now in the "times of the Gentiles," during which, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). This period has been running since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, but there is to be a specially intense treading under foot of the holy city for these 42 months. The court is not measured so that the hostile powers are given full scope.

But though they act unhindered, they are not permitted to pollute without God raising up a witness against them, and verse 3 speaks of this. The witness lasts for 1,260 days, which according to Jewish computation is exactly the 42 months of the previous verse. As to external things, the witnesses were marked by deepest humiliation, expressed by being clothed in sackcloth, but from a spiritual standpoint marked by the shining of a light, which is divinely given and supported. The reference clearly is to Zechariah 4, only here each witness is symbolized by an olive tree and a candlestick. The olive tree supplies the oil, and the oil feeds the light. God is the God of the earth, and though the holy city is trodden down He has not relinquished His claim to the earth. So before He makes good His claim in irresistible power He maintains His witness in the face of the foe. So much so,

that for the time of their testimony they are invulnerable. It is their assailants who die, not they.

Verse 6 shows that these two witnesses have the characteristics of both Elijah and Moses, so evidently they wield immense power. Yet it is not the kind of power we find characterizing believers of this dispensation, who are rather to be "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, to all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness" (Col. 1:11). In the earliest years, when apostles still wielded miraculous powers, none of them slew men, or shut heaven, or smote the earth with plagues. Such displays of power suit the Old Testament, but not the New. What then shall we deduce from verse 6? Simply that here we are no longer in the present dispensation of the grace of the Gospel and the calling out of the Church. We are again on the ground of government and not of grace. It confirms what has been advanced; namely, at this time the Church has been taken to heaven.

The witnesses are invulnerable only until their testimony is completed. Then they are slain under the beast that ascends from the abyss, of whom we get details in Revelation 13. Their witness was centred in Jerusalem, and there their dead bodies lay. Jerusalem had been called the "holy city" in verse 2: it is that in the purpose of God. With the slain witnesses lying in its street it is called the "great city," which from a spiritual point of view is just "Sodom and Egypt." It is

clearly identified by the statement, "where also our Lord was crucified."

Sodom has become symbolic of the world in its unbridled lust and wickedness, where man degrades himself below the level of the beasts, so that the cry of it arises for God's intervention in judgment. Egypt symbolizes the world with its magnificent exterior, the supplier of all that ministers to man's pleasures and fleshly gratification, but withal itself dominated by an idolatry that degrades, and which even enslaves the people of God if they fall under its power. All this may be great in man's eyes but it certainly is not holy. This is what Jerusalem is to become by the treading under foot of the Gentiles and the domination of the beast from the abyss. In such a city the witnesses die, and the rejoicings over their end are to be great.

Verse 10 mentions, "they that dwell upon the earth," — the earth-dwellers, of whom we have before spoken. The people generally, according to verse 9, will be glad, but these earth-dwellers rejoice exceedingly and hold high festivity, because the witness of the two prophets "tormented" them. We can quite understand this, for the same kind of thing can be seen today. True witness to Christ in the Gospel is opposed by the careless world, but it arouses specially fierce resentment and repudiation by present-day modernists, whose effort is to degrade the faith of Christ to a mere scheme for earthly

improvements, denying its heavenly origin and the heavenly end to which it leads. Its truth they simply cannot abide; it torments them.

The jubilation of the earth-dwellers, and of the persecutors generally, is however to be short-lived. After 3.5 days they rise from death and ascend to heaven in a cloud. Their enemies behold it, so that their triumph is complete. They suffer under the beast, but are caught up to a heavenly portion, not an earthly one. Their going-up presaged the speedy fall of the beast and his satellites.

The question naturally arises: are we to understand these verses as predicting the rise of two actual men, or is it rather that God raises up and maintains, for as long as suits Him, a sufficient and powerful testimony having the characteristics of both Elijah and Moses? We incline to the latter view and that especially because of the symbolic character of the whole book. We think then that they indicate — not a large and abundant testimony; that would be indicated by 3 and not 2 — a sufficient testimony, divinely, indeed miraculously, preserved and sustained at this epoch — the darkest in the world's history since the cross of our Lord. If we are right in this, the witnesses may be identified with, or at least included in, those "beheaded for the witness of Jesus," in Revelation 20:4, who "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." The great point of instruction for us today is the way in which God maintains His own testimony and yet ter-

minates it as soon as its work is done. This instruction stands, whichever view of the two witnesses we take.

At the finish of their story the triumph of the two was complete, and this will be the finish of the story for all God's rejected and persecuted witnesses. They went to heaven; at the same time a great earthquake smote the earth. They ascended; a tenth part of the city that persecuted fell. The Spirit of life from God had entered into them; seven thousand of their foes were plunged into death. Those not slain were filled with fear and compelled to give glory to the God of heaven. It looked as if they were still reluctant to admit Him to be the God of the earth.

This episode concludes the second woe, which is the sixth trumpet, and we are told that the seventh trumpet and third woe follows quickly, for there is to be no longer delay, as we saw in Revelation 10:6. There is therefore hardly any interval between the resurrection and ascension of the witnesses and the final act, which brings man's day to a close and ushers in the kingdom.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet does not bring to pass some fresh infliction similar to the preceding trumpets. Great voices in heaven proclaim that which is the end of all God's judgments — the establishment of the kingdom "of our Lord and of His Christ," This phrase reminds us of Psalm 2:2, where, "the kings of the earth set

themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed." This they have done all along, but here their proud opposition is quelled, and the reign of the Lord by His Anointed is established. Once established, His dominion abides. Other Scriptures inform us how the kingdom of a thousand years will end, and the eternal state begin. But the tragic rebellion which is to close the thousand years will not mean any interruption in the reign. Our verse says, "He shall reign for ever and ever." From this point of view the millennium and the eternal state are considered as one.

Verses 16-18 give us the reaction of the 24 elders — the heavenly saints — to this tremendous climax. The first thing is their worship. Today false professors of religion abound, whose reaction is criticism, when they hear of the kingdom of God, enforced by righteous judgment. They denounce the idea of a God who acts in righteous judgment. In heaven it will provoke not criticism but worship. This is a striking fact.

This merges into thanksgiving. They address God by the names in which He revealed Himself of old as the Governor of men and nations — Jehovah, Elohim, El Shaddai, the Eternal One — nothing before Him; nothing beyond Him, supreme and unchallengeable. He is known to us as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but this name of love and near relationship would not come in suitably here, where His acts in judgment are being proclaimed. His reign in

righteous authority, and not His saving grace, is what is now before us.

Verse 18 summarizes in a remarkable way the things that come to pass when God establishes His kingdom. They are not mentioned in chronological order, as we might have been inclined to place them. For instance, the judgment of the dead does not take place till the end of the thousand years, as Revelation 20:12 shows. Our verse states the results achieved, first in wrath, and then in discriminatory judgment, and not the order in which they will be achieved. Each statement is worthy of careful note.

When Jehovah and His Christ take the kingdom to reign for ever and ever, "the nations were angry." This statement is sufficient to demolish altogether the false idea that the Gospel is going to convert the world, so that the kingdom will be established as the fruit of Gospel effort, and the nations will be delighted to see it! Again, the kingdom will be established as the result of the coming of (God's wrath. This tells the same tale, and is in agreement with Psalm 2 also. When the age of the Gospel closes and wrath comes, bringing with it righteous judgment, it will extend over a long period, only ending in "the time of the dead that they should be judged" — the final scene of wrath, as we have just seen.

But then, as well as the outpouring of wrath on manifested evil, there will be a condition of mixture, where discrimination is necessary. This had been predicted by our Lord in Matthew 13:41 - 43, and here it is fulfilled and accomplished. The prophets, the saints, the God-fearing will have their reward in the glory of the kingdom, whereas the destroyers of the earth will be themselves destroyed.

All sin is destructive in one way or another. As man has become increasingly inventive and wilful, his powers of destruction have increased. In Europe and elsewhere today we see a sample of what is coming. But underlying all these powers of physical and material destruction, now so manifest, there is the propaganda of the destroyer himself — the deceiver, the father of lies. The real root of the terrible mischief is here. The primary destructive force is found in the region of mind, not matter: in false religion false philosophy, - masquerading as science, but really, "science, falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20). These false ideas reach into the moral, the political, even the material world, and today they are manifestly leading men, who are intoxicated with them, into uncontrollable violence. "Them that destroy the earth," under cover of improving conditions, whether materially, socially or religiously, are becoming more and more numerous and powerful.

The establishment of the glorious kingdom of our Lord will mean the destruction of all such. Then at last earth's golden age will begin.

The last verse of chapter 11 is evidently the preface to the visions that follow, marking a fresh division of the book. Revelation 4 and Revelation 5 are a magnificent preface to the visions recorded from Revelation 6:1 to Revelation 11:18. There the sign was the rainbow and the throne. Here it is the temple and the ark of His testament. In that the visions deal with God securing a remnant for Himself, whether of Israel or of the Gentiles, and at the same time breaking the pride and power of men in the earth, and finally establishing His kingdom, and what is involved in this is stated succinctly in 11:18. In this fresh section we are now to cover part of the same ground, but from another view-point.

The ark had been the throne of God in the midst of Israel, and the temple was the shrine for it in the days of the kingdom established through David. All had been desecrated and destroyed on earth, but we are permitted to see that the real things, of which the others were only the shadows, were secured in heaven. David's greater Son is to be the supreme Ruler, exerting His authority through Israel on earth, and yet more widely through the church, as we shall presently see. God will fulfil and establish His covenant through judgment, hence the opening of the temple is accompanied by judgment, whether directly inflicted from heaven, or generated on earth — lightning, hail, etc., indicates the one; an earthquake indicates the other.

The point in this fresh section seems to be, not so much the establishing of the throne, as the question — Who is going to ascend the throne and thus dominate the earth? There is "that Man whom He has ordained" (Acts 17:31). But there is also a rival, as we are quickly notified — Satan, represented as a dragon. We shall also see his three chief agents — the two beasts of Revelation 13, and the harlot of Revelation 17. We are now to see these rival powers one by one disposed of, and thus the way cleared for Christ to ascend the throne.

Chapter 12

IN VERSES 1 and 3 of chapter 12 we should substitute "sign" for "wonder." Two signs appeared in heaven, but that which they signified transpired on earth. The woman we judge to be Israel. She is invested with sun, moon and twelve stars, symbols of authority, for it is through Israel that the Divine authority will at last be made effective on earth. Clearly then we view Israel ideally, according to that which is in the purpose of God, and therefore in a light which up to the present has only been realized in that small part of the nation that we speak of as the godly remnant, and even there only imperfectly. Out of that godly remnant the Man-child sprang.

The second sign was that of the great red dragon. The woman had the symbols of heavenly authority: he had not that, but he was invested with heads and horns and crowns — really "diadems," the symbols

of royal estate — which indicated the wielding of immense power in the earth. Here, then, we have Satan, but clothing himself in the pomp and greatness of the fourth great world-empire of Daniel 7; that is, the Roman. There is, however, the further feature that his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven; an allusion, it would appear, to Isaiah 9:15. We have "the prophet that speaks lies" in the latter part of Revelation 13, and he seduces and draws after him a third part of the lesser luminaries, who should shed light on the earth, and in result they apostatize from the position in which originally they were set.

Who shall occupy the throne? Judging as the world does, there would seem to be only one answer. What more helpless than a man-child newly born? What more vigorous and powerful than a great red dragon? Yet ultimately it is the Child who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron. The devil is set to frustrate if possible the purpose of God; and hence through the dragon he was prepared to devour the Child as soon as born.

The sign appeared in heaven before the gaze of John, but historically the thing signified took place at Bethlehem soon after our Lord was born. Divine action frustrated the dragon's design. The action is described here as, "her Child was caught up to God, and to His throne." The life of our Lord, His death and resurrection are passed over in silence. There may also be here an allusion to Micah 5:3, where Israel

travails and brings forth Christ in a mystical sense — Christ at last recognized and acknowledged in the hearts of the remnant — only one could hardly speak of that being followed by the catching up to God and His throne, but rather by Christ seating Himself on His own throne of glory. The design of Satan as the devourer of the Man-Child is defeated.

This being so, the dragon turns his attention to the woman, and in this the sign carried us on to things yet to come at the extreme end of the times of the Gentiles. The true Israel of God will not be called upon to resist the dragon but to flee to a place of no human resources where she will be under Divine protection and care for the stated period. Elijah, we may remember, fled into the wilderness to a place ordained of God, and later to Zarephath, and in both places was miraculously fed, and the time of trial for him lasted three and a half years. Now the 1,260 days of our verse is exactly 3 years, according to Jewish reckoning. This same period appears again as "a time, and times, and half a time," in verse 14, and we have had it already in chapter 11, as 42 months as well as 1,260 days. It is doubtless the fateful latter half of Daniel's 70th week (see Dan. 9:27).

We have had signs in heaven; now in verse 7 we have "war in heaven." To some it may be a strange thought that the heavens, in part at least, have been polluted by the presence and action of Satan, but the first chapter of Job should have prepared us for this. Then

again, Daniel 10:10-21, gives us a glimpse of angelic powers in the heavens acting both for and against saints of God on earth. In that passage we have mentioned, "Michael, one of the chief princes," spoken of elsewhere as the Archangel, and in Daniel 12:1 he is spoken of as "the great prince which stands for the children of thy people." Here again, where the Israel of God are in question, Michael appears with his angels, and Satan and his angels are cast out of heaven to the earth. Their place in heaven is finally lost, as verse 8 indicates.

Verse 9 is very striking. The great dragon, though externally bearing marks which identify him with the Roman Empire, yet personally is Satan. This terrible spirit of evil, like so many human criminals, has several aliases: he is the devil, and also the old serpent of the Garden of Eden. He is also the deceiver of mankind, either directly or through his agents — in this book he is spoken of in this character seven times, the first occurrence being in this verse. In deception he is a practised hand. He deceives the whole world, and Matthew 27:63 shows how effectively he did it with some of the most religious men the world has ever seen. He deceived them into regarding the One who was the truth as "that deceiver."

In Luke 10:18, the Lord Jesus used the past tense, "I beheld," in announcing prophetically this great event, yet future; just as Daniel said, "I beheld till ... the Ancient of days did sit," and other prophets

spoke similarly, using the past tense in describing things to come. It is an event of far-reaching import as verse 10 indicates. Heaven sees in it the presage of the complete establishment of the kingdom and power of Christ, and the complete overthrow of the adversary. Moreover it will bring to an end an evil work in which he delights at the present moment; that of accusing the saints before God, as also is illustrated in the first chapter of Job. His work in this is incessant — day and night. Those whom he accused heaven acknowledge as "our brethren." There is no need for saints to accuse each other before God. This is done most efficiently and incessantly by Satan.

But here certain "brethren" are specially in view. They overcame him and his accusations, firstly by the blood of the Lamb. In a judicial sense nothing but that could meet the accusations, as we all know right well. But secondly, on practical lines they overcame by adhering to the word of their testimony, even to death. Like their Master, only in a lesser sense, their death was not their defeat but their victory.

The heavens rejoice at the ejection of the devil, but his fall means woe to the earth and the sea; that is, as we understand it, to men generally whether in nations of comparative stability or in restless, unsettled communities. The devil will realize that since he could not maintain his footing in heaven, he will not be able to maintain it upon earth. His time is short and this stirs him up to great wrath,

which, as he cannot vent it directly upon God, he will upon all that represents Him on earth. The godly remnant symbolized by the woman, become the special object of his persecuting hatred.

Let us not fail to notice, and put together, the four characters in which the devil appears in this chapter — verses 4, 9, 10, 13. As regards Christ, he was the devourer: as regards the world, the deceiver: as regards the brethren, the accuser: as regards saints in testimony on earth, the persecutor. Before he is dealt with in unsparing judgment his malign character is fully revealed.

His persecution of the woman is going to fail. That the woman had a place of refuge, prepared of God, was mentioned in verse 6: we now find that by means of an extraordinary sort she will be enabled to flee, as verse 14 indicates. The effort of the devil to hinder her is frustrated by more ordinary means, according to verse 16. It would appear from verse 17 that while the majority of the God-fearing will be thus miraculously protected, there will be others who do not flee and so are specially a target for his animosity. They are marked by obedience, and they have "the testimony of Jesus." They are called to a special place of testimony, whilst the mass are to flee, as indeed the Lord Himself had indicated in Matthew 24:15-21.

Chapter 13

THERE CAN BE no doubt, we think, that the 3.5 year period, mentioned in several different ways in this passage, is the time of the great tribulation. It will be a time when the devil is excluded from heaven and consequently concentrating his wrath upon earth, and, as we shall see presently, the time when the vials of the wrath of God are poured out on the earth: a much more serious matter. It will also be the time when human lawlessness and iniquity rise to mountainous heights, and as a result the most fearful oppressions are instituted and wrongs are perpetrated. Chapter 13 now brings to our notice the two chief human instruments of Satan's power, by whom these evils are brought to pass.

John is now transported in his spirit to the sand of the sea, and out of the sea a wild beast arises. This beast has features which clearly connect him with the fourth beast seen in vision by Daniel, and described in his seventh chapter, and also with the red dragon we have just been considering. The symbolism is not obscure. Out of the restless, surging sea of nations the Roman Empire in its dosing form will emerge. For the significance of the seven heads and the ten horns we may consult Revelation 17:8-13; a passage we must deal with later. It will suffice here to notice that in the case of the dragon the diadems are on the heads: in the case of the beast they are on the horns. The heads signify the varied forms which the ruling power has assumed

through the years, and whatever they have been the devil has claimed to wear the diadem; and has, in fact, dominated the scene. When the Roman power reappears in the last days, it will be in a ten-kingdom form, and each king will claim a diadem under the beast.

Verse 2 indicates that this beast of the last days embraces within himself the characteristic features of the first three empires mentioned in Daniel 7. The Babylonian was like a lion: the Medo-Persian like a bear: the Grecian (or Macedonian) like a leopard. This beast had the features of all three. All their forms of beastly violence will be incorporated here, and even worse features of its own added. Here is blasphemy, a form of sin directed specially and definitely against God. Moreover the power that is wielded is directly Satanic, for "power and his seat and great authority," was delegated by the dragon. Evidently when the Roman dominion reappears it will be a distinctly Satanic production.

In these early verses we pass almost insensibly from the kingdom to the remarkable man in whom the dominion is to be headed up. When we read of one of the heads of the beast being wounded "as it were" to death, we think of it as figuring the empire. The deadly wound is healed in the surprising uprising of the beast energized by the devil; and now the beast figures the imposing individual, who will wield the power of the Empire in the last days. The word, "seat," in verse 2 is really "throne." Solomon, we may remember, inherited from David

a throne that came from the hand of God, and there was added to him riches and power from the same hand. This individual will accept all from the hand of the devil.

Let us recollect also that Satan approached our Lord in the temptation in the wilderness with an offer of all the kingdoms of the world, if only He would worship him. The Lord's answer was, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." He utterly refused it. But the offer which the Lord in His perfection refused, will appeal to this man, who is called, "the beast," and he will do homage to the devil and get the kingdom for a brief spell. For that same brief spell Satan will be publicly acknowledged as "god," and thus seem to achieve what he has coveted from the beginning. We find a prophetic reference to it in Isaiah 14:12-14. "I will ascend ... I will be like the Most High." Yet in result, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" The achievement of his darling desire is the prelude to his fall.

As the chief political agent of the dragon, the beast will be a very powerful and imposing personage; so much so that men will worship him, and regard his power as irresistible. Men will feel that here at last is the superman and the super-kingdom, which can effectively impose its will and subdue all opposition. This it is, we judge, that will induce men to say, "Peace and safety," as foretold in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, but which leads to "sudden destruction."

We have recently had striking and terrible proof of the superhuman influence and power that can be exerted by a man of the basest description, if he traffics with demons, as the late ruler of Germany did. In what we are considering not a mere demon is at work but Satan himself. In all the greatest crises that Scripture records it would appear that Satan employs no inferior agency but acts himself. This is so, for instance in the fall of man; in the temptation in the wilderness, when the Deliverer came forth; in encompassing the death of Christ through Judas Iscariot; and here, where the final bid is made to completely dominate the earth.

Inspired by Satan, the beast acts as Satan; his mouth is filled with promises and boastings on a great scale, coupled with blasphemy against God and depreciation of everything divine. Not only the Name and dwelling of God but also those who have their dwelling or tabernacle in heaven, come under the lash of his tongue. Satan has just been cast out of heaven, and previously to that, saints have been caught up into heaven. They are therefore beyond Satan's power, but the more therefore the objects of his hate.

There will be saints still on earth and on these he will make war successfully. His rage is against everything of God. Those that dwell in heaven he can only speak against. Those on earth get different treatment. Some, represented by the woman in the previous chapter, flee and are protected from his animosity. Some are overcome, presum-

ably by death. Some, represented by the two witnesses of Revelation 12, have a special place of testimony, and are only overcome for a moment, and just before the end.

As to men generally, he completely captures their imagination. They will see in him all that they desire. Only the elect, whose names from the foundation of the world have been in the book of life of the slain Lamb, will fail to worship him. It will be a time of intense testing and patience, and faith will be tried to the uttermost.

And for ourselves, the revelation of these things is a test, and if we have not "ears to hear," we shall not profit. It is a revelation that runs counter to every thought of the natural man.

Another beast now engages the attention of John, the seer. If the first holds a dominating position in the government of the world, the second is equally dominating in the sphere of religion. The government of God in relation to the earth is largely the theme of the Old Testament, whereas the New Testament unfolds the grace of God in Christ and brings heaven within our view. The devil will introduce his counterfeits, acting in both directions, and when men are brought under the power of both his grip upon them will be complete. They will be held by "totalitarianism" as in a vice. Our chapter predicts this, long before the word "totalitarian" had been coined.

The second beast rises not from the sea, but from the earth; that is, from a settled state of things. The rise of the first beast will have quelled the surging sea of nations, and prepared his way. He impersonates a lamb, but his true character is revealed by his speech. Jesus came as THE LAMB of God, as John 1 shows, and John 10 shows that as the true Shepherd of the sheep He was recognised by His voice. Here the false "lamb" proves himself to be no true shepherd but a slave-driver, speaking with the voice of the dragon.

Tyrannous power marks him, power derived through, and exercised in favour of, the first beast, who supports him. This interplay of forces has always been sought through the centuries by the civil rulers on the one hand and the religious leaders on the other — particularly by the Roman hierarchy. It will be attained in very full measure at the end of the age. We do not forget that there will be the apostate "church," symbolized by the harlot in Revelation 17, but this is to be destroyed by the ten kings under the first beast, whereas the second beast continues to the end and meets his doom together with the first beast. He is supported by the worldly power of the first beast, whom he supports religiously by displays of supernatural power, even to the extent of bringing fire down from heaven, thus claiming Heaven's approval.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, we read of the coming lawless one, "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and ly-

ing wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." Here John sees him deceiving the nations, and particularly "them that dwell on the earth." These earth-dwellers will doubtless feel that their dreams are to be realized in these "super-men;" that here at last has been organized the ideal condition of things, wherein great MAN may display himself in all his glory. It will be the apotheosis of Humanism; that is, of religion which finds its centre in man and not in God. Hence the suggestion to set up some great image of the super-man will be a very natural one.

It is remarkable that at the beginning of the times of the Gentiles, Nebuchadnezzar, the first head, arrogated to himself almost divine honours and made a great image, the worship of which was to institute a kind of super-religion, thus unifying the diverse religions that prevailed in his wide dominions. Thus he glorified himself; but he was defied by a mere handful of godly Jews, defeated when he attempted to exterminate them, and soon after was debased below the level of the beasts and made to appear one of the greatest fools that ever crawled on the earth, by the mighty hand of God upon him. He learned a salutary lesson, as the end of Daniel 4 shows. Our chapter is showing us that the times of the Gentiles will end just as they began and with apparently greater success, for those who refuse to worship the image of the beast will be killed. This time God will not intervene to frustrate the intentions of these wicked men as He once

did with Nebuchadnezzar. Their judgment will fall on them in one overwhelming blow at the finish, as we see in Revelation 19.

The lying wonders performed are evidently Satanic in origin, and their effect is to subjugate the minds of men and make them completely subservient to the designs of the devil. The system instituted being totalitarian, its tentacles are spread over matters of a commercial nature as well as religious. Every man will have to bear a mark. Just as the ancient slave-owners used to brand their slaves, so men will carry a mark which will brand them as slaves of the devil through the puppets of his creation. The brand employed will apparently have three forms; either "the mark," whatever that may exactly mean, or "the name of the beast," or, "the number of his name."

As to the last we are informed that it is 666. Verse 18 has intrigued many minds and led to much speculation as to its significance; and hitherto all to no purpose. Nearly sixty years have passed since we ourselves first heard confident solutions put forth, all to be falsified by subsequent events, as many since have been. We believe that when the time arrives, and those who fear God need a distinguishing mark, this point will be illuminated by the Spirit of God and so all will be clear. For us let it suffice that just as seven is the number of completeness and perfection, so six is the number of human incompleteness and imperfection. It is significant that six is a number stamped upon the Philistine giants — see 1 Samuel 17:4-7; 2 Samuel

21:20. Goliath's height was six cubits and a span; six pieces of his armour are specified; his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels.

His brother had six fingers on each hand, six toes on each foot. Yet the giants fell like ninepins before David and his warriors. The imposing beast, whose number is six thrice over, will similarly fall before the presence of the Lord.

With steady gaze John had observed the scenes unrolling before him. He had looked at the sea and seen a beast rise therefrom; then at the earth and seen a second beast arise. But now chapter 14 opens and his gaze is directed to Mount Zion, and there he sees the Lamb, whom he had previously seen in Revelation 5. What a delightful change! No longer is it a beast of grotesque and frightful appearance, or a pseudo-lamb that is a dragon at heart, but the true Lamb, who is indeed the Son of the Father, and He stands on Mount Zion, which is symbolic of that royal grace which is the only hope for any man. That being so, we are permitted to see others associated with Him.

Chapter 14

CHAPTER 14 GIVES US a series of visions, all of which set before us in various ways God's thoughts and actions from heaven during the period when the two beasts are dominating the earth, persecuting and even slaying the saints. In the first of these visions we see how

God will preserve for Himself faithful souls who will be true to the Lamb and free from the corruptions that the beast is enforcing on all under his power. The number given is symbolic. Twelve is the number of complete administration, and here we have the square of it multiplied by a thousand. We have had it before in the number sealed of the tribes of Israel in Revelation 7, but we must not infer from this that the two companies are identical. There it was a question of securing the elect of Israel before the judgments were permitted to burst forth. Here we have a company redeemed from among men as firstfruits for the millennial earth, who have been preserved in virginal purity, and who have "His name and the name of His Father" — as it should read — written on their foreheads, instead of the name or mark of the beast. As a result of their unique experiences they sing a new song which is peculiarly their own. The tried saint of today may well take courage from the fact that, if special trials are endured with God, we are thereby qualified to sound His praise in a special song. When the heavens and the earth join in the great orchestra of praise in the millennial age, what a variety of tone and utterance there will be! Yet all will be in harmony.

The better attested reading in verse 5 is, "and in their mouths was no lie found; for they are blameless." The propaganda of the two beasts of Revelation 13 was one huge lie, just as Paul indicated in 2 Thessalonians 2. The miracles wrought by the beast he characterizes as "ly-

ing wonders," and he tells us that God will send men a strong delusion "that they should believe a lie." These saints were wholly separate from all this. They were true followers of their Master, who would not take up the names of evil into His lips, as Psalm 16 prophetically puts it. Hence they were without blame in a course of practical righteousness. The words, "before the throne of God," lack authority; so it is evidently not the point that they were judicially righteous by the blood of the Lamb, but practically right in their course below.

The second vision of the chapter is in verses 6 and 7. In that very dark hour in earth's story there will be rendered to all men everywhere a clear testimony to God in His creatorial greatness, which demands that He be feared and glorified, especially in view of the fact that the hour of His judgment is come. Two things may be noticed. First, it is called "the everlasting gospel ... to them that dwell on the earth." The presentation of God in the glory of creation is always "glad tidings," no matter what the age or dispensation. We have lived to a day when the earth-dwellers have been grievously deceived by the devil's lie of evolution, so we can appreciate how glad is the tidings of a Creator-God. The word "everlasting" may also carry back our thoughts to the "everlasting covenant" of Genesis 9:16.

Second, this gospel is committed to an angel, flying in the midst of heaven. We often say, rightly enough, that no angel can preach the

gospel which speaks of the redeeming blood of Christ, inasmuch as no angel has any experimental knowledge of redemption. But when creation is in question angels can speak in a way that men cannot. Angels saw its wonders and shouted for joy. Men only know of it by revelation. By angelic ministration this testimony will be diffused through the earth in that solemn hour.

Verse 8 gives us a third vision of a second angel. The fall of Babylon is briefly announced; full details of which are given to us in Revelation 17 and Revelation 18. The wording of our verse suggests first a city and then a corrupt woman, just as we find Babylon portrayed in those chapters. It clearly symbolizes the corrupt ecclesiastical system, headed up in the papacy, which will rise to great heights of splendour and influence after the true church is gone, and which will for a brief moment dominate and seduce all the nations. So in the second vision we have the proclamation of the true Creator-God, just when men are deifying a man in the person of the beast; in the third vision the judgment of the false religious system, which was aiding and abetting this evil.

In the fourth vision a third angel appears — verses 9-13. On God's behalf he utters the sternest possible warning of the judgment that will fall on all who accept the mark of the beast and worship him. It will indeed be a solemn hour when men have to face such alternatives. If they do not worship the beast death is the penalty before

them, as we saw in Revelation 13:15. If they do, the far more awful penalty will certainly come upon them, as verses 10 and 11 of our chapter state. If we were asked what two verses in the whole Bible present us with the darkest and most terrible picture, we should select these. We may well ask. Why language of such tremendous intensity here?

The answer we believe to be, that here we have the climax of all the preceding ages. Mankind started on its fallen and lawless career fascinated by the lie of the devil, "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5). Under the same evil leadership and through the two beasts, mankind will make its supreme and last bid to reach the goal of its desire. At this point then human sin reaches its climax and rises to its highest expression. Is it not fitting that the most bitter judgment is to fall on the highest sin? Testimony to the eternity of punishment is quite uniform throughout the New Testament, but at the same time the Lord's own words — Luke 12:47-48, for instance — have indicated that with God, as with men, there are degrees in the severity of judgment. Here, then, we have eternal judgment of the utmost severity which will lie on those who will have carried sin to its most outrageous lengths; the very reading of which fills the soul with horror. Those who fall under it will have "no rest," and they will stand as an eternal witness to the severity of God's judgment against sin. The "smoke of their torment" will be something for every eye to see.

Verses 12 and 13 speak of the saints who will not bow to the beast. It will be a supreme test of patience and endurance. When men generally are being forced to comply with the demands and commandments of the beasts, these will keep the commandments of God; and this they will do because they cling to "the faith of Jesus." They may not know Him in that full way, which is the portion of the Christian today, but they will know that Jesus, who once came and was despised and rejected, is the true Christ of God, and the faith of this will possess them in spite of everything, and they will brave the wrath of the devil.

Some of them will escape his power, but many of them will fall as victims before the beasts, and a peculiar blessedness is the portion of such. The beast-worshippers will pass out of this life into eternal damnation of special intensity — out of apparent glory into the torment. Saints with the faith of Jesus may be martyred in circumstances of utmost distress and apparent defeat, but "henceforth", from that very moment, their blessedness begins. Great emphasis is added to this by the way the whole Godhead is introduced here. These saints keep the commandments of God; also the faith of Jesus; they die in the Lord; that is, because owning His authority; the Spirit endorses their blessedness. We have just seen that the damned have no rest, but these "rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" into the eternal world, that they may receive their due reward.

The chapter closes with a vision which comprises two sections — the reaping of the harvest, and the gathering in of the vine of the earth. John beheld a white cloud. The cloud indicated the presence of God: its whiteness, the pure and spotless character of the judgment which the presence of God must now involve. One like the Son of Man sat on that cloud — not in it, as though concealed by it, but fully manifested — crowned and with the sickle of judgment in His hand. All judgment is committed to the Son of Man, as we know. He acts mediatorially, and therefore thrusts in His sickle when the word of direction reaches Him from the inner shrine through an angel, and the earth is reaped.

The figure of a harvest is used in connection with judgment in both Old and New Testaments — Joel 3:13; Matthew 13:38-43. It is more particularly a figure of discriminatory judgment, as Matthew shows. The wheat will be reaped as well as the tares. In the final result there is the shining forth as the sun for these, and the furnace of fire for those.

But another angel comes forth; this time not from the sanctuary but from the altar where the fire of judgment burned, and over that fire he had power. The instruction now is to cut down the clusters of the vine of the earth, which were fully ripe. The grapes were gathered and cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God. This indicates overwhelming judgment falling upon that which is so wholly evil

that no discrimination is necessary. It is remarkable that Joel 3:13, which predicts the harvest, also predicts the winepress judgment. It is of this terrible moment that Isaiah 63:1-6 speaks also. It is, "the day of vengeance," according to verse 4 of that passage, but also, "the year of My redeemed," inasmuch as the total crushing of the adversaries will mean a final redemption of the godly, just as it happened when Israel was redeemed at the Red Sea and the Egyptians crushed. It is "the day of vengeance of our God," the words which the Lord did NOT read in the synagogue at Nazareth.

The last verse of our chapter gives us in symbolic language an idea of the devastating and widespread effect of this judgment. Jerusalem is, of course, indicated by "the city," and 1,600 furlongs is about the whole length of Palestine. There will be a complete and crushing sweeping away of all the adversaries who will at that time gather themselves together against God — see again Joel 3:9-16.

The Lord Jesus is not treading the winepress today, nor is He reaping the harvest of the earth. He is sowing the seed through His servants, and fruit therefrom is being reaped. But it is for heaven, and not earth.

Chapter 15

CHAPTER 15 BEGINS another sub-section of the book. Chapter 14 gave a series of visions, in which things were presented to us in brief summary. In verses 9 and 10 the wrath of God against the beast-worshippers was announced. We now learn in much more detail how that wrath will be poured out.

The seven angels having the seven last plagues are introduced to us as "another sign in heaven." This expression has occurred twice before at the beginning of Revelation 12, though our Authorized translators used the word "wonder" instead of "sign." The three signs in heaven are, then, first, that of the elect Israel, out of whom Christ sprang; second, that of the dragon, the great opponent of the Man Child, operating by means of the two beasts; third, that of the angels to whom it is given to pour out the vials filled with the wrath of God, which wrath is specially directed against the beasts and all who own their authority. The wrath of the dragon and the beasts is against the Man Child and all who own Him. The wrath of God is against the dragon and all who own him.

It is evident, then, that Revelation 15 does not follow Revelation 14 chronologically, but rather breaks back to a time preceding the execution of the harvest and vintage judgments by the Son of Man; just as we find the wrath of God against Babylon announced under the seventh vial at the end of Revelation 16, and then full details of

Babylon's fall given in Revelation 17 and Revelation 18. Its fall indeed had been briefly announced in Revelation 14:8.

But before John had to contemplate the outpouring of the vials in detail he was given a vision of those who will be carried in triumph as overcomers through that terrible period and then ascribe the glory of their victory to God. The mingling of fire with the sea of glass would indicate that these victors had been subjected to the fiery trial of death but from their martyrdom had stepped into victory. Consequently their song is not only that of Moses but of the Lamb. The first song recorded in Scripture is that of Moses in Exodus 15, celebrating Jehovah's victory in crushing the might of Egypt and redeeming His people. Our verse gives us the last record of a song in Scripture, and again the song of Moses appears for once more and finally God is crushing the adversary and redeeming His people. But coupled with that is the song of the once suffering but now triumphant Lamb, for in their suffering they had trodden in His steps, and it is never to be forgotten that He triumphed in and through His suffering and apparent defeat.

The song celebrated God's works and ways in judgment. They may be full of mystery while in process of accomplishment, but once completed they are seen to be great and marvellous, righteous and true. The names by which He is addressed are not those indicating the peculiar relationship in which He stands to the church, but those

relating to Israel and the nations - the Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai, of the Old Testament. And then again, the correct reading here is evidently, "King of nations," and not "King of saints." There is a strong resemblance here to Jeremiah 10:6-7, where the wrath of God against the nations is prophetically announced. The King of nations will subdue all nations in His wrath, and vindicate and glorify His elect.

The song closes in giving three reasons why God should be feared and glorified. First, because of what He is in His gracious holiness; second, because of His supremacy, which will ultimately command the homage of all nations; third, because the rightness of His judgments is now being made manifest. The word here is literally, "righteousnesses," the same word as is used for the righteous acts of the saints in Revelation 19:8. God's judgments are so righteous that the prophet could say, "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9). In contrast to this, Israel will at last have to confess, as we do today. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

Having been granted the vision of these, who though victims under the beast were nevertheless victors over his power, a wholly new scene unrolled itself before John's eyes. He saw the seven angels with the seven last plagues come out of "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven." This is a remarkable phrase. In the Old Testament we read of "the tabernacle of testimony" in the wilderness

and also of the "temple" when the people were in the land; both of them figures of the true. Here both figures are coalesced. Out from the inner shrine of the Divine presence, where the testimony to all His purposes had been preserved, came the seven angels, empowered to deliver the final strokes of judgment, previous to the manifestation of His purpose for the earth by the appearing of Christ.

The two verses which close chapter 15, emphasize the exceeding solemnity of this moment. The vials handed to the angels were full of the wrath of God, who lives to the ages of ages — the eternity of His Being adding an infinitude of weight to His wrath. They were handed to them by one of the Living Creatures, that we saw in chapter 4, symbolizing the power, endurance, intelligence and swiftness of the Creator's ways in dealing with a rebellious earth. And again, the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God. We had smoke from the pit in chapter 9, symbolic of Satanic influences which excluded all that is Divine. Here we have the Divine glory excluding all men and all that is merely human, while these last plagues were in process. There is an analogy between the plagues of Egypt, preceding the death of the firstborn, and these seven plagues, which will precede the revelation of God's Firstborn from heaven.

Chapter 16

AS WE READ chapter 16, we shall notice that these last plagues are very specially God's answer in judgment to the enormous evil which reaches its climax in the beast and his followers. This is mentioned specifically in verses 2, 10, 13, but it is also inferred, we think, in other details that are mentioned. The first plague will affect the more stable and ordered peoples, the masses of whom will have received the mark of the beast. Upon these God puts His mark in the form of "a noisome and grievous sore." The sixth plague in Egypt was of this sort, but bearing in mind the symbolic character of the Revelation, we regard this as indicating a fretting evil in the region of mind and spirit, while not denying that it may also have a more material application. Their lives will be made a misery to them under the mighty hand of God.

The second vial affects the sea; that is, the less formed and stable masses of mankind. They too come under judgment for though the beast specially dominates the ten kingdoms, power is also given him "over all kindreds, and tongues and nations" (Revelation 13:7). The second plague means spiritual death to all who come under it. The figure is very graphic. The sea became dead blood, bringing death on all within its compass.

The third vial affected rivers and fountains in the same way. These are symbolic of the sources and channels of spiritual life, just as are

literal fountains and rivers as regards our natural lives. The sources being corrupted, apostate, dead, all hope of a revivifying is gone, and men are hopelessly shut up to their doom. It will be with them even as it was with Pharaoh, when the Lord hardened his heart. Are men today inclined to cavil at this, even as they do regarding Pharaoh? It is just at this point that there comes in a two-fold angelic testimony to the rightness of this stroke of judgment; and angels have powers of observation, and opportunity for observing, far exceeding that of the greatest and wisest of men. Those smitten had themselves been smiters of saints and prophets, and this of course would be specially true of the beast and his followers. Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai, by His angel, is acting and they are simply getting what they richly deserve.

The fourth vial affects the sun; the symbol of supreme authority. Here, however, it is clearly the symbol not of anything Divine but of the supreme power in this lower scheme of created things. The power of evil, vested for the time in the beasts, becomes oppressive and intolerable like burning heat. When their power was assumed men accepted it as great and wonderful (see Revelation 13:4, 14), but now it becomes under the Divine judgment a terrible infliction. Yet such is the moral and spiritual death into which men are plunged, as seen in the third vial, that instead of humbling themselves in any way they only blaspheme the God of heaven: in other words, like Pharaoh, they only harden their hearts.

The similarity that exists between the objects of judgment under the first four vials and those under the first four trumpets is too clear to be missed; only in Revelation 8 the sphere is limited to a third part. Here the judgments are more complete and more intense, and appear to be on God's part an answer to the defiant and persecuting actions of the beast and his followers.

This is seen more particularly in the outpouring of the fifth vial. A concentrated judgment falls upon the seat of the beast, and it presents us with a terrible picture. In Egypt the last plague before the death of the firstborn was "a thick darkness," even "darkness which may be felt" so dark that it stopped all movement. But it is even more terrible when a thick darkness descends upon the minds of men, blacking out from them every ray of light from God. There are heathen today still in very dense darkness, but it is even worse when atheists or agnostics, living in Christendom, have to say — as sometimes they do — to some simple believer that they envy him his faith, and wish they could believe but they cannot. Their experience is, they confess, a painful one. Here apostasy is complete, and their darkness painful to the last degree. Their pains and sores only provoke them to blasphemy, and they are far from repentance, which is the only door into recovery and blessing.

The sixth vial also has a resemblance to the sixth trumpet. Again the Euphrates is affected, which is one of the great natural barriers

between the East and the West. Under this plague the barrier between the great masses of Asiatic peoples and the nations of Europe is removed and the assembling of both East and West becomes possible. The door is thus opened for the gathering of all the nations, as predicted in Joel 3. They little realize that they assemble for Jehovah to "roar out of Zion," and "to sit to judge all the heathen round about." But such is the case, as Joel says.

To begin with, it does not look like it, for verses 13 and 14 of our chapter show that the power of the devil will be exerted to gather the nations together. The unclean spirits that go forth to influence men in this direction go forth from the trinity of evil — the dragon, the beast and the false prophet — and they wield superhuman powers to sway the minds of men in the desired direction. But in all this, unconsciously to themselves, they do what God in His ways of wisdom and judgment has determined before to be done. They are simply preparing themselves for the last stroke of overwhelming judgment — that treading of the winepress of the wrath of God that has already been mentioned. It is spoken of here as, "the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

Verse 15 is clearly a parenthesis. It is as if the voice of the Lord Himself breaks in at this point, announcing His appearing when He will come as a thief on the nations wrapped in their darkness. In contrast to this, His coming for His saints is spoken of as the coming of the

Bridegroom. Still there will be a remnant of Israel who will be carried through this terrible time without falling as martyrs, as well as some from among the Gentiles, represented by "the sheep" in Matthew 25:33. These will be marked by watching and keeping themselves clear of defilement. But the reality of this will be tested, and apart from it a moment must come when all pretence will be stripped off and the nakedness and shame of the unreal and the untrue will be exposed.

Verse 16 picks up the thread from verse 14, though we might have expected it to read, "they gathered," since the three unclean spirits went forth to do the gathering. It appears, however, that our thoughts are directed away from the Satanic agents employed to the Almighty God, who overruled their actions for His own purpose and glory. To Armageddon, meaning the Hill of Megiddo, were the multitudes called. In the valley of Megiddo the last godly king of David's line fell before the advancing nations. At last on that very spot the far greater Son of David will deal the swift death blow to all the proud might of the Gentiles. The incitement to gather together for their destruction takes place, however, as an act of Divine judgment under the sixth vial. We do not get details of what takes place when they are gathered together until we reach Revelation 19, though we do get the fact of all nations being gathered predicted in Zechariah 14:2.

There, too, it is God who does it, though as our chapter shows, He makes the power of the adversary serve His purpose.

The pouring out of the seventh vial completes these terrible strokes of wrath. This was declared by a voice from the inner shrine in heaven. The vial was poured into the air, which had been the seat of Satan's power, but from which he had been dislodged. Air is the life element for man, and now destruction begins to fall on him out of that very element. Thunders and lightnings are entirely beyond man's control, but there were voices controlling them. Moreover the earth was affected as well as the air.

Literal earthquakes there will doubtless be, but the earthquake of colossal magnitude here predicted signifies, we think, the complete shattering of all man's organized systems. Verse 19 speaks of "the great city," of "the cities of the nations," and of "great Babylon." We understand by these the break up and collapse of the imposing civil system or empire which will find its centre in Rome, and also of similar systems, but subsidiary, which will be found among the more distant nations; and thirdly, of the great system of religious craft and deceit, which Babylon represents. The special fierceness of the Divine wrath is fittingly reserved for this last. Moreover, every island and mountain disappeared in the convulsion. Things that are detached from the mass like islands will not escape, and all that is lofty will go.

Verse 21 seems to connect itself with the thunders and lightnings of verse 18. Hail is symbolic of sharp, crushing judgment, inflicted directly from heaven, so direct that men cannot possibly attribute it to any other than God. Every stone is said to have the weight of a talent; that is, about 125 lb. We believe that in historic times storms of exceptional violence have been recorded in which stones weighing 1 lb., or even a little more, have fallen with terrible effect, similar to that recorded in Exodus 9. We are clearly intended to understand by stones weighing over 1 cwt. each, a judgment from God of a supernatural and crushing kind.

And what is the effect of all this? Simply additional blasphemy hurled against God. As in Egypt the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, so in this day the hearts and consciences of men will be hardened beyond any possible point of recovery. They are no longer atheists, even if once they were. There is a God, and they know it to their cost by these crushing judgments, but they defy Him. When the creature reaches such a pitch of defiant hardness as here indicated, what can be expected but the delivery of the final stroke? Two parenthetical chapters intervene, however, before we have the record of that stroke in Revelation 19.

Chapter 17

CHAPTERS 17 AND 18 give us with full details the judgment of Babylon. We shall find it helpful to read Revelation 21:9 — Revelation 22:5, by way of contrast. Having done this, we shall note that in both cases, the vision is introduced by one of the angels who had the vials, and that what is seen is figured as a woman and as a city. The similarity ceases with this: all else is in sharpest contrast. There we view "the bride, the Lamb's wife;" here, "the great whore." There we have the true church, loved by Christ, redeemed and cleansed by Him, under the symbol of a city. Here we have the false religious system, which claims to be the church, also under the symbol of a city.

Babylon played a considerable part in Old Testament history. It was founded in defiance of God, as Genesis 11 shows; and the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom was there. It was also the fountain head of the idolatry that overspread the earth after the flood. This is indicated in such a verse as Jeremiah 51:7, and historical records seem to corroborate it. Very appropriately therefore the mystical Babylon of our chapter symbolizes the harlot "church" centred in Rome, which has been in the present age "a golden cup ... that made all the earth drunken." After the true church is gone all that is Laodicean, and spued out of Christ's mouth, will gravitate to Rome, we believe, so

that the mystical Babylon will represent the sum total of apostate Christendom.

John is called by the angel to see the judgment of the great whore "that sits upon many waters." In the Old Testament Israel in her apostasy is treated as an adulterous wife, because she had been brought nationally into an established relationship with Jehovah. The Church is espoused to Christ "as a chaste virgin" (2 Cor. 11 : 2), with the marriage day still in the future; hence the false church, wholly allied with the world, is with accuracy called not an adulteress, but a whore. She "sits upon," that is, dominates "many waters," which in verse 15 is explained as "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." She practices unbridled worldliness in order to become the mistress of the masses of mankind. In keeping with this, verse 2 shows the kings of the earth seduced by her, and the inhabitants of the earth intoxicated by her wiles.

John is carried in spirit into a wilderness to see this great sight of the woman, riding the beast that he had previously seen in the vision of Revelation 13. No colour is mentioned in that chapter, but in Revelation 12 the dragon who gives his power to the beast is spoken of as red. Here we find the colour, which denotes the glory of this world, characterizing not only Satan but the revived Roman Empire, and apostate Christendom, which for the moment is exercising control over the empire.

Of the three, the woman presents the most gorgeous spectacle. She has in addition the imperial purple, since for this brief moment she seems to have attained the object for which she has always striven — recognized sovereignty over the nations. Gold, precious stones and pearls are elsewhere symbolic of all that is beautiful and of God, but here she is "decked," or "gilded" with them. All is superficial, and these things, excellent in themselves, are perverted to base uses. Similarly the cup in her hand is golden, as may be seen viewing it externally, but internally full of filthiness. The sin of the Pharisee was similar, as we see in Luke 11:39, but here it is carried to its highest pitch of iniquity.

Her name, however, was carried on her forehead so as to be visible to every eye. The first word, "Mystery," instructs us that "Babylon the Great" is not to be understood in a literal, but in a mystical or symbolic sense. All the principles of evil that first sprang up in the literal Babylon of ancient days are found in their most virulent form in this abominable system. It has been said very truly that in Scripture symbolism a system is represented by a woman, whilst the power or energy marking a system is represented by a man.

The Romish system, enlarged by the inclusion in it of all that is corrupt in Christendom after the church is gone, is represented by the woman here. She has become "the mother of harlots and abominations;" that is, the source of lesser yet similar systems of corruption,

when she should have been the "chaste virgin" for Christ. How fearful is this charge laid against her! Notice too how the word "earth" occurs frequently here. We have had it twice in verse 2. It occurs again in verses 8 and 18, and also several times in the next chapter. Earthly religion is her stock in trade.

In Philippians 3, Paul reveals how he entered experimentally into the heavenly calling made known in Christ, but before the chapter closes he mentions certain "enemies of the cross of Christ," and he states of these, "whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." The system that the woman represents may boast of "apostolic succession:" they have succession indeed, but not apostolic. It proceeds rather from these whom Paul had to denounce — a succession of self-gratification and earthly-mindedness. In its final development it has come to this.

Then again, the adjective, "great," is applied to her, and this is a feature that appeals very much to the world. Earthly greatness and abominable corruption reach a climax in her, whereas the true church is to have on her the stamp of heaven and holiness, as we see in Revelation 21:10, where the adjective, "great," as applying to the holy Jerusalem, ought not to appear.

Verse 6 adds another sinister feature. The system that the woman symbolizes is a great persecutor of the true followers of Jesus, and is

so full of their blood that she is intoxicated therewith. All down the centuries their blood has flowed at the hands of the Romish church and her harlot offspring, but at the close this feature too will reach a climax. The sight of all this, even in symbol, so filled John with wonderment that the angel offered an explanation of the mystery, or inner meaning, both of the woman and of the beast. This explanation follows in the rest of the chapter; yet it is to be noted that it nearly all concerns the beast. That concerning the woman is only given in the last verse.

In the light of the explanation, the beast is evidently to be identified with the one described in the early part of Revelation 13. Additional features, however, appear here. The empire that it symbolizes had an early existence, then it became extinct — to outward appearances at least — and then it is to reappear. It "shall ascend out of the bottomless pit;" that abyss into which Satan shall be cast for 1,000 years, as we are told in chapter 20. This means that it will be revived in a very evil form under Satanic influence, and be of so remarkable and sensational a character that all the earth-dwellers, who had no part in the book of life, will be filled with wonder, and fall easy victims to its enslaving power. That the empire in its revived form would be Satanically supported and directed, Revelation 13 showed us. Here we discover that it will be Satanically produced, and that in such a way as to enslave the minds of all those false religionists, who have debased

the faith of Christ to a mere religion of earthly things. We think there must be a definite connection between this and that of which 2 Thesalonians speaks — the "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

The seven heads of the beast have a twofold meaning. They represent firstly, seven mountains on which the woman sits, and this helps to identify with Rome both the beast and the woman; that is, both the empire and the religious system. In John's day Rome was without doubt the city of the seven hills.

But seven kings are also signified, and these distinct from the ten kings signified by the horns. The ten are kings who rise up in the last days, when the beast will represent not only the empire but also the empire's last and imposing head. In verse 10 the kings are clearly different, and represent successive heads of the empire, or rather successive forms of despotic government, and not individuals. Emperors held the power when our Lord was crucified and when John wrote, and they continued to do so until the empire broke up, but they had been preceded by five other forms of rule. A seventh was to come, that would continue but a short time and then be replaced by the eighth, who would be "of the seven;" that is, not entirely new but a reproduction of one of the earlier seven — of the imperial form.

This eighth, then, we should identify with the beast of Revelation 13:4-8, and again with the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8. If this be so, we may understand the seventh head, who continues for a short time only, to be a personage of importance and in control when first the empire reappears, but to be replaced by the "little horn" — Satan's nominee — when he rises up with a "look ... more stout than his fellows," and three kings fall before him, as Daniel 7:20 predicts. But the eighth, in spite of his dazzling splendour, is not permitted a long course. God intervenes and he "goes into perdition."

The ten horns, according to verse 12, are the actual individuals who attain to kingly power for the brief spell during which the beast wields supreme authority. They are his willing vassals and support his Satanic schemes, even to the point of madness in making war with the Lamb. Men are going to reach such a pitch of mental inflation and self-confidence and arrogance, that they will actually fling themselves against the mighty power of God. We may say — borrowing the language of 1 Corinthians 8:5 — that however many lords and kings there may be in heaven and on earth, the Lamb is Lord and King of them all, the beast and his satellites included. They inevitably fall before Him; and He has His associates, called, chosen and faithful. They too were rejected by men but are chosen of Him.

Verse 15 mentions the woman, but only to emphasize how complete her dominating power had been. It is remarkable that in this chapter

she is seen sitting on the waters, on the beast, and on the seven mountains. Putting the three together, we are helped to identify her, and conducted to the last verse of our chapter. Two verses, however, intervene, in which we are shown her miserable end.

The ten kings, represented by the horns, are to be distinguished not only from the seven kings of verse 10, but also from "the kings of the earth," spoken of in verse 2, and who reappear in the next chapter. These kings of the earth are seduced by her, have illicit commerce with her — the "fornication" that is spoken of — and they greatly lament her destruction. They are doubtless the kings or leaders of many peoples who are outside the revived Western empire. The ten kings are leaders within the empire, who favour her at first and help to support her, but finally find her yoke intolerable, hate her and fall upon her with such fury as to destroy her.

When the corrupt religious system, symbolized by the woman, shall have reached the height of its influence, its apparent success and glory, it will be completely overthrown by the worldly powers that have been its main support. It is God's way to permit each successive form of evil to come to a head in fullest manifestation and apparent success before His judgment falls upon it. Here the judgment falls mediately through the ten kings and not immediately from the hand of God. The two beasts are to be dealt with immediately, by the Lord Jesus in person, as we shall see in Revelation 19, for in them the vi-

olence of sin reaches its climax. In the harlot the corruption of sin reaches its most horrible expression. God does not put His hand upon the filthy thing but uses the violent to destroy the corrupt.

That God lies behind the violence of the ten horns is made quite clear in verse 17. The horns act with an agreement and unanimity which is very rarely found amongst men. Usually there are dissentient voices, and the majority prevails over the minority. Here all act together as with one mind under the guidance of the beast, and as a result vengeance falls in a stroke of swiftness and completeness.

The completeness of her judgment is expressed in four ways in the latter part of verse 16. Bearing in mind that she symbolizes a religious system, the significance of each item becomes clear. She is made desolate; that is, forsaken by all who formerly were friends and supporters. She is made naked; that is, stripped of everything that had formerly hid her true character. They eat her flesh; that is, appropriate to themselves all her wealth and luxuries. They burn her with fire; that is, utterly destroy the whole framework of her system. A clean sweep is made of the whole accursed thing. Little as they may realize it, the kings are acting as the executors of God's vengeance.

The identification of the woman and the great city, which is Rome, is made quite clear in the last verse of the chapter; and following this, in chapter 18, the city aspect becomes much the more prominent.

Chapter 18

ANOTHER ANGEL OF special power and glory now appears, coming down from heaven and announcing Babylon's fall. In Revelation 14:8, John saw an angel who made this announcement, but here it is given with greater impressiveness and with more detail. The evil system which is thus represented had long been fallen morally, now it is fallen under Divine judgment. Yet it is acknowledged as "great" even by this angel, who himself had "great power." Men are naturally inclined to worship what is great, especially if it is something produced by themselves, though this had really been Satan's masterpiece.

When God judges any system or individual their real character is made wholly manifest. This feature is seen here. Babylon had become infested with evils of the most virulent type. Demons had made it their habitation or dwelling place, and not merely a spot that they visited occasionally. Moreover every foul or unclean spirit was there. Demons are spirits but men have spirits that sin has made utterly unclean, and every kind of spirit is included in this statement. Thirdly, there are hateful birds. We may remember that in the parable of the sower the Lord used the birds as figures of agents that Satan uses in the world of men. So Babylon had become a place where demons were perfectly at home, and where every kind of evil spirit and evil man had been held as in a cage or prison. A fearful and crushing indictment indeed!

Verse 3 again emphasizes what had been stated in the previous chapter. This abominable system by her very corruption had exercised a controlling fascination over the kings of the earth — the leaders of earth's politics. And her wealth and luxury had equally fascinated and controlled the merchants of the earth — the leaders of earth's commerce. So in the last days religion, politics and commerce will find for a brief moment in Babylon a centre that unifies. And the religion will be as earthly as the politics and the commerce.

A voice from heaven gives the final cry, "Come out of her, My people." One can hardly imagine that many of those, who can be owned as God's people, will be in any sense inside such a system as it faces its final overthrow, yet doubtless there will be some like Lot, who was only dragged out of Sodom at the last moment. It is ever God's way to give such a final warning. Another illustration of it is seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews, written a short time before the destruction of Jerusalem, and calling upon Jewish Christians to go forth to the rejected Christ without the camp, and reminding them that they had no continuing city on earth.

Those who in the last days might remain in Babylon would run the risk of partaking of her sins and of the plagues visited upon her sins. This also is vividly illustrated by the case of Lot, his wife and daughters. But do not let us miss the application of all this to ourselves. Verse 4 plainly declares that association with evil has a defiling ef-

fect. By remaining in an evil and defiling system we become a partaker of its sins, and eventually of the governmental judgments of God that fall upon it.

In our day religious evil and sin is not yet headed up in one great system, but is surrounding us in many lesser and apparently conflicting systems. There are many traps for our feet though smaller ones. The situation is more confused, but no less seductive. Let us be careful to obey this injunction to come out; cutting our links with associations that defile. And having come out, let us keep out.

It is God's way to sever His people from the ungodly, and take them out of their midst, before His judgment falls. He acted thus before the flood, and again in Egypt, as well as in the case of Sodom, and with His people before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Thus it will be with the Church before the vials of wrath are poured out, and with earthly saints who may be entangled in Babylon before it is judged. This is shown in verse 4.

Verse 5 shows that judgment only falls when the cup of iniquity is full to the brim; or, as it is stated, "her sins have reached to heaven." This is striking language, for the ancient city, Babylon, started when men began to federate, with the idea of self-aggrandizement and influence by the building of a city and tower, "whose top may reach to heaven" (Gen. 11:4). The ancient Babylon reached the height of its

splendour under the famous Nebuchadnezzar, who wielded the widest influence and reached the top-stone of self-aggrandizement. Shortly after this, the city lost its supremacy and descended into ruin. The principles for which it stood were, however, perpetuated in Rome; first in the imperial, and then in the papal form.

In this mystical Babylon, then, we see all the old evils displayed in their intensest and most virulent form, and at last the "tower" of man's iniquity does indeed attain such dimensions that it has "reached to heaven." In drastic fashion the well-merited judgment then falls and the hateful thing sinks out of sight for ever.

Verses 6 and 7 emphasize how apposite are God's judgments. They fit the case exactly. The same thing may be noticed in the enactments of the law of Moses, which brought upon the offender the very penalty he had inflicted on another, and relieved the offended party. Babylon is to get her exact "double" or equivalent, and her torment and sorrow is to be the counterpart of her previous self-glorification and luxury.

There is an allusion in verses 7 and 8 to Isaiah 47:8 and 9. What was said, in predicting the fall of the literal Babylon by the Euphrates, is duplicated in the judgment of the mystical Babylon, but with one addition. It is the mystical Babylon who says, "I sit a queen." This again is striking, for here we have the full-blown result in display of

the apostate "church." The true church is the bride of Christ, and destined to be His partner in the day of the glory of the kingdom. The apostate church is "no widow," though her Lord has been slain upon the earth, and she claims to be "queen", though He is absent, and the day of His power not yet come. She aims at queenly influence and a life of delicious self-indulgence and self-glorification, while He is still absent and rejected.

But judgment is to fall upon her "in one day." A stroke of terrible severity and swiftness falls upon her; described as plagues, death, mourning, famine. Nothing mitigates the stroke; no time for a parley to avert it. The overwhelming stroke is administered by the ten kings, as the end of Revelation 17 showed, but behind their action is the hand of God. The Lord God who judges her is strong, and all her tinsel glory vanishes beneath His avenging hand.

Verses 9 to 19 indicate how the kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, and the shipmasters of the sea will react to her judgment. The ten kings, who had been dominated by her, rise up and destroy her, but outside the ten-kingdom empire are many kings who had profited by their connection with her, and they lament. By "kings" we understand national leaders: by "merchants of the earth" leaders of trade and commerce: by "shipmaster and all the company in ships" leaders in transport. For all these her destruction is a disaster, for she

was the great trafficker in all earth's luxuries. The list of verses 12 and 13 begins with gold. It ends with the bodies and souls of men.

Even today there is no sadder scandal than Rome's traffic in the bodies and souls of men — more particularly in their souls. Souls become most profitable "merchandise," when it is a question of extricating them from an imaginary "purgatory;" merchandise which has brought into her coffers more gold and silver and precious stones than all the trading in other objects of luxury put together.

The lament of verse 16 has a familiar sound to those who know Rome's ways in lands where her sway is nearly absolute. Many years ago we stood in the great Cathedral of "Our Lady of the Pillar," in Saragossa, Spain, and watched some kind of "mass" being performed by ecclesiastics, gorgeous in "fine linen, and purple, and scarlet." Then some visitors were being shown the great collection of gifts, left by deluded votaries, housed in a kind of side chapel. We slipped in with them, and beheld enormous cases reaching up the walls, which, when the lights were turned on, sparkled with "gold and precious stones, and pearls" in dazzling variety.

And just when all this greatness and costliness and outward glory reaches its finest display, her outrageous sin reaches its climax, and the judgment of God falls. The action of the mighty angel, recorded

in verse 21, gives us an idea of the violence of the overthrow from the hand of God.

How great is the contrast between earth and heaven! Their respective reactions could not be more opposite. The casting of dust upon the head, weeping and wailing, on the one hand; rejoicings, on the other. Holy apostles and prophets are now avenged on her: further proof, if it be needed, that mystical Babylon represents the great system of false and corrupted religion, which from the outset has persecuted the servants of God. This interpretation is further reinforced by the last verse of the chapter. The day of reckoning had now come. Individual sinners have an eternity to spend. Evil systems do not pass into eternity. Their judgment in its full weight falls upon them in this world.

Chapter 19

HOW DELIGHTFUL IS the contrast as we pass into chapter 19! As before remarked, a word that characterizes Revelation 17 and Revelation 18 is "earth." The Christian faith, which is centred in a heavenly Christ, has been debased into an earthly religion — a scheme for producing an earthly paradise where men may have their fill of earthly joys. That kind of religion very well suits "the kings of the earth," and "the inhabitants of the earth," and "the great men of the earth," and "the merchants of the earth;" though it may involve "ab-

ominations of the earth," and lead to saints being "slain upon the earth." Now, "after these things," says John, "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven." Consequently we step into a scene of purity and praise. The characteristic word is "Alleluia."

Let us note that while Babylon is being judged on earth there is "much people," or, a "crowd," in heaven. All the saints, who gathered to Christ at the rapture, are there. They understand the significance of what has taken place. They see that, God having dealt with the seat of earthly corruption; He will swiftly deal with earth's violence. They ascribe the salvation to God, and give Him the glory, the honour and the power. However evil men may be in this day of salvation, it hardly becomes the saint to shout "Alleluia" if he sees judgment fall upon any. But here we are contemplating the day of judgment, and God's acts of judgment are to be praised then as much as His acts of grace now.

Men's judgments are never absolutely true and intrinsically righteous, for selfish elements can never be wholly excluded from them. What men's judgments are not, God's judgments are. The great whore had corrupted the earth, and heaven's pure and holy judgment had fallen upon her. The smoke of it should rise up for ever and ever. A memorial this of God's judgment against corruption, which should utter its warning voice to the ages of eternity.

Heavenly scenes again being before us, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures appear once more. God is on the throne in judgment, and in the light of this they fall down in worship. They say "Amen" to His destruction of Babylon, and join in the "Alleluia" of praise. The praise and worship described in Revelation 5, started with the elders and the living creatures, and spread out to angels and all creation. Similarly here, their praise being uttered, a voice from the throne calls upon all the servants of God to follow suit, and the thunders of praise reverberate through heaven. God is manifestly on the throne in His omnipotence. God is equally on the throne today, but it is to us a matter of faith. We can sing,

"God is still on the throne,

And He will remember His own."

though the fact is not displayed at present as it will be then.

The false, harlot "church" being judged and destroyed on earth, the moment has come for the true church to be acknowledged as the "wife" of the Lamb in heaven. There is a peculiar majesty about the language of verses 6 and 7. A terrible drama of unspeakable corruption and violent judgment has passed before us, and far above the evil and turmoil the Lord God omnipotent has sat upon the throne. All things have served His might and nothing has diverted Him from His purpose. He has been working behind the scenes that the One, who here is called the Lamb, may see fully the fruit of the travail of

His soul, and secure for Himself the "bride," for whom He died. His purpose as to this is now accomplished, the saints are in glory, and moreover, "His wife has made herself ready."

Our meetness for glory is of course altogether the fruit of Divine workmanship; but there is also a readiness of an experimental and practical nature, and it is this which is mentioned here. On the day when the church is acknowledged as the wife of the Lamb, she will be arrayed in the "fine linen, clean and white," which is interpreted for us as "the righteousnesses of the saints" (New Trans.). Every act of righteousness, wrought out in the lives of saints composing the church, will be woven, as it were into the robe, which will adorn the wife of the Lamb in that day.

In this there is immense encouragement for us today. If we look around us at that which professes to be the church, there is nothing but discouragement. Nor are we much relieved if we confine our attention to those we can recognize as true Christians — including ourselves. We might easily become obsessed with the delinquencies of saints — their worldliness, their follies, their errors. But all the time there has been the working of the Spirit of God in them and amongst them; there have been all those right things, often unnoticed by man but ever before the eye of God, and these things will be brought to light at the judgment seat of Christ, and be for the adorning of the church when her relationship to the Lamb is publicly ac-

knowledge in heaven. If our eyes were as quick to discern the right as to detect the wrong, we should get the encouragement of this today.

The elders together with the living creatures appear for the last time in verse 4. They were first mentioned in Revelation 4:4. In Revelation 2 and 3 we have the seven churches of Asia — local churches — and they are mentioned once more in Revelation 22:16. The word, "church," is not used in the Revelation as referring to the whole body of Christians. Immediately we commence "the things which shall be hereafter," in Revelation 4, the churches disappear, and the elders in heaven take their place. But in our chapter the church is acknowledged as the wife of the Lamb, and in the glory of this relationship the "elders" disappear. Henceforward it is "the Bride, the Lamb's wife," and only when at the end we are brought down again to the testimony to be rendered on earth, while we wait for the Lord, do the "churches" again appear. Observing these changes, we find confirmation of the thought that the elders represent the saints raptured to glory.

But besides the Lamb's wife, there are "they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb." These, we judge, are the glorified saints of Old Testament days. Though these were never baptized by the one Spirit into the one body, which is the church, they were raised at the same time as the saints composing the church, for they

were Christ's, purchased by His blood, and the Scripture says, "they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:23). Risen and glorified, they enjoy a rich heavenly portion, far beyond the blessedness that may be enjoyed upon the millennial earth. They are called in their heavenly seats to participate in the joys of the marriage supper of the Lamb. In them too the Lamb will see some of the fruits of the travail of His soul. So great is the blessing they enjoy that John is particularly instructed to write it down. It is delightful to us to know how rich is the reward of the beloved servants of God of whom we get a glimpse in Hebrews 11, and of many less known saints like them.

In a small way we have surveyed and contemplated these things. We have seen the false and corrupt church system judged and destroyed. We have seen the true church acknowledged in heaven, and the once suffering Lamb thus finding His abundant recompense in having the object of His love with Himself for ever. We have heard all heaven filled with praise and worship like the voice of mighty thunderings. What has been the effect upon our spirits? Are we not all saying in our hearts — This is wonderful, wonderful, wonderful! But is it not too good to be true? This was doubtless the effect upon John; so the angel assured him, "These are the true sayings of God." We may rest assured that all is true, and to come to pass in its season.

Assured of its truth, John was moved to worship, though his worship was misplaced, since he fell at the feet of the angel who was showing

him these things. Being a holy angel, he repudiated it instantly. Only the fallen angel, Satan, aspires to divine honours, indeed it was in aspiring to such that he fell. The angel acknowledged himself to be but a servant, or "bondman," and therefore a fellow to John, and a fellow to all John's brethren who had the testimony of Jesus. As originally created man belongs to an order in creation a little lower than the angels, yet both men and angels are but servants, and thus fellows in that respect. God alone is worthy of worship. The fact that our Lord Jesus accepted the worship of men is a tribute to His Deity.

In his closing words the angel gave the key that unlocks all the prophetic scriptures. It is, "the testimony of Jesus." All Old Testament prophecy looked forward to the coming of Jesus — Jehovah, appearing as Saviour. All New Testament prophecy is the testimony of Jesus, coming in power and glory, that His work of redemption by blood may be crowned by His work of redemption in power. This key to prophecy is also the test of men's prophetic systems. Any system which makes prophecy a testimony to Israel or to the British people, imagined to be Israel, or to millennial conditions on earth and schemes for attaining to them, stands condemned.

Everything in heaven has now reached a climax of Divine order, and nothing remains but to deal with the rebellious earth. So in verse 11 the heavens are opened for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. We know it to be He, though symbolic

language is still used. Judgment will be in absolute righteousness at last, and His name — Faithful and True — is the guarantee of this. At last the long period of man's unrighteousness and sin is to reach its end.

All the symbols used speak of purity, of searching discernment, of all authority and power being vested in Him, yet of there being that in Him that defies all creature investigation. He has a name that no man knows but He Himself. In His manifestation all other power, all the might and majesty of the creature, shrivels into nothingness.

The Divine Names are full of significance. In His glorious appearing the Lord Jesus is presented to us with a fourfold Name. Seeing that He appears for judgment, His Name as "Faithful and True" stands first, securing the absolute rectitude of His every judgment act. Next comes the Name that no man knows but Himself. This Name, though unknown to us, signifies that there is in Him — true God and yet perfect Man — that which surpasses all creature apprehension. That being so, we are not surprised to read, "How unsearchable are His judgments" (Rom. 11:33).

Thirdly, "His Name is called, The Word of God." This is most significant. We read, "The Word was God ... All things were made by Him" (John 1:1-3); so God has been expressed very really in creation. Again, in the same chapter, "And the Word was made flesh,

and dwelt among us," so that there might be a full declaration of the Father in grace and truth to us. But now neither creation nor redemption is involved but rather judgment. That in judging His Name should be called "The Word of God," signifies that God will also be declared and made known in judgment — particularly in His righteousness and holiness, without a doubt. Thought is expressed in word. The Lord Jesus is the expression of the Divine thought in all three connections.

Lastly, His Name, "King of kings and Lord of lords," is written on His vesture; that is, externally, where every eye may see it. It is also on His thigh; internally, in the place of His secret strength. It is hardly an eternal designation like the others, for it could hardly be assumed until kings and lords came into existence as created by Him. Still it will be of the first importance in His glorious appearing. Kings are earthly potentates, whereas "lords," we think, would-cover heavenly as well as earthly dignitaries. In His appearing the Lord Jesus comes forth "to subdue all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:21). The many crowns, of which verse 12 speaks, being kingly diadems, are in keeping with this.

We have before us, then, "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:13). In our passage we have "the armies which were in heaven," representing the saints in a symbolic way. They ride upon white horses too, for the time is being ushered in

when "the saints shall judge the world." Their "fine linen" raiment, "white and clean," identifies them with "the wife" of the Lamb, who was similarly adorned. The righteousnesses of the saints will be their adorning in the inside place when the marriage of the Lamb is celebrated. It will adorn them in the outside place also, when they are displayed to a wondering world with Christ in His glory.

It will be good at this point to read again Revelation 16:13-16. At Armageddon the kings of the earth and of the whole world are gathered together to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. The armies of the earth gather to battle, but the armies of heaven have not to inflict one stroke. The decisive blow proceeds out of the mouth of their glorious Leader, like the stroke of a sharp sword. No man can stand before the incisive word that proceeds from the mouth of the Word of God. By the might of His word all creation came into being. By the might of His word this warrior judgment will be inflicted. But redemption, which lies between these two, was not thus accomplished. No wonder-working word brought this to pass; nothing short of His own death and resurrection achieved it.

He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood. But this, we judge, does not allude to the blood of His cross, but rather to what is predicted in Isaiah 63:1-6, where His work of judgment is foreseen. When reading in the synagogue at Nazareth, the Lord Jesus closed the book before reaching "the day of vengeance of our God." In chapter 63 we

have the words, "the day of vengeance is in Mine heart," and blood — that of His foes — is sprinkled upon His garments, when He treads the winepress alone. This is a work of judgment, as we saw when considering the end of Revelation 16. The overthrow of men in their pride is to inaugurate a period when the nations are to be ruled with a rod of iron.

The eyes of John are now directed to an angel, who stands in the sun, a symbol setting forth supreme power. The clash between the might of proud men and the Christ, appearing in His glory, is about to take place. There is no doubt as to the issue. The call of the angel to the fowls of heaven declares it in no uncertain terms. There may be kings and captains and mighty men and horses, but all of them will be but food for vultures. We may adopt the words of one of our poets, and give them a meaning beyond his thoughts.

*"The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart."*

Human pride and violence rise to their climax and are brought low. The leaders, who looked so imposing, depart to their doom.

In vision John sees the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together under the beast for the express purpose of making war against God, as represented by the heavenly Christ and His army. That mortal men, even in combination, should for one moment con-

template fighting against God might have seemed to us incredible not so long ago. We have lived however to see a day when the marvelous discoveries and inventions of men have so inflated them and turned their heads that not a few are imbued with just that spirit. Some years ago a Russian revolutionary leader boasted that, having disposed of Tsar and earthly authorities, they would deal with the Lord God in due time. So far had he travelled on the mental road which belittles God and glorifies man.

Verse 19, then, gives us the climax of this spirit. Verses 20 and 21 indicate the completeness of its overthrow. The two men in whom it had found its fullest expression are singled out for condign punishment of a most extraordinary kind. In the "Babylon" of Revelation 17 and Revelation 18 full-blown corruption was seen. In the beast, described in Revelation 13, violence comes to a head. The "times of the Gentiles" finish with him, even as they began with the tyrant, Nebuchadnezzar. The false prophet we identify with the one our Lord predicted, saying, "I am come in My Father's Name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye shall receive" (John 5:43). He is the false Messiah, the "idol" or "worthless" shepherd, who will be raised up "in the land," of whom Zechariah 11:15-17 speaks. An apostate Jew himself, he will be eagerly received by apostate Jews. On the political plane he will find it a paying proposi-

tion to play a secondary part to the great Gentile monarch, following the example of the Herodians, of whom we read in the Gospels.

Both these men are seized by the irresistible power of the Lord. No future day of judgment awaits them. Taken red-handed as leaders of the most violent, God-defying enterprise ever undertaken, they do not first pass into death — the dissolution of soul and body — but are flung direct into the burning lake. The language here, as throughout the book, is symbolic, no doubt, but it is terribly expressive of God's judgment in its searching power. The very word translated "brimstone," has in it the thought of "divine fire." In Old Testament history two men were taken to heaven without passing through death. Here two men pass alive into hot damnation.

The mighty hosts, that follow the two, are men that have received the mark of the beast and supported his enormous wickedness. They do not immediately share his fate. They die, smitten by the all-conquering word of Him who is the Word of God, that they may await their judgment in the great day of which the next chapter speaks. Their cases will be tried in solemn session. The sin of the two leaders is so outrageous and open that summary judgment can righteously be inflicted. The principle of it is seen in 1 Timothy 5:24.

Chapter 20

IT IS REMARKABLE that while our Lord will deal personally with men, it is an angel, a spirit being, who will deal with the great spirit being, who is the originator of all the evil. He is described in a fourfold way so as to identify him without a doubt. As Satan he is the adversary. As the devil he is the accuser. He is the old serpent of the opening book of the Bible, and the dragon of the closing book. All through the ages his aim has been to "deceive the nations," as Revelation 20:3 shows us. How effectively he has done so all history bears witness, and coming days will show even more disastrously.

His activities will reach their climax in provoking this climax of human corruption and violence, but only to fail ignominiously before the might of the Lord. He is to find himself bound and a prisoner in the abyss for a thousand years. The "great chain" necessary to bind him is in the angel's hand — symbolic language again, for no literal chain could bind a spirit being. The "bottomless pit" is not the lake of fire but the dungeon in which he is confined while the millennial age runs its course. The seal of God is put upon him there by the angel's hand. It was an angel who broke the seal which men put on the sepulchre of the Lord Jesus.

The author of all the evil being dealt with, John turns to contemplate those who are blessed in association with Christ. Three distinct groups are mentioned. First comes those who are enthroned and to

whom judgment is given. Daniel the prophet foresaw this great day, as he records in his seventh chapter. When the Ancient of days did sit, then the thrones were "cast down," or "set." But there is no mention of any who sat on them. In our passage the enthroned ones appear and are described by the simple pronoun "they." To whom does the pronoun apply? Where is the noun? We answer unhesitatingly it applies to "the armies in heaven," of the previous chapter, which were composed of "much people in heaven," covering both the wife of the Lamb — the Church — and those called to the marriage supper — the Old Testament saints.

The pronoun "they" covers, then, the saints who were raised and changed at the rapture, as to whom Paul asked the Corinthians, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" But another and much smaller class follows. There were those who, subsequent to the removal of the church, had suffered death for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God. Again, there were those who were martyred under the beast because they would not receive his mark. We have read of these two groups before. The former in Revelation 6:9-11; the latter in Revelation 13:15. Both are now seen as living and reigning with Christ in the day of His glory.

Verse 4 indicates, then, that all the saints who suffer death between the coming of the Lord for His saints and His coming with them will be raised when He does come in His glory. In that risen life they will

reign with Him, while those who did receive the mark of the beast and worship him will suffer the dreadful penalties described in Revelation 14:9-11.

There is a sharp line of demarcation between verses 4 and 5. The one gives us the saints in risen life and power. The other speaks of "the rest of the dead," who remain in their graves during the thousand years. Then, referring back again to verse 4, comes the remark, "This is the first resurrection." This is corroboration of the fact that the "they," at the opening of verse 4, indicated the saints raised, as prophesied in I Thessalonians 4:15-17. It also establishes quite clearly that "the resurrection of life" and "the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29), are separated by a thousand years.

Verse 6 also makes it abundantly clear that only those who are blessed and holy have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, though it has over those who are left for the second resurrection. Their blessedness is described in a twofold way. It is not that they enter into things entirely new in their character, for even now Christ has "made us kings and priests to God and His Father" (Revelation 1:6), and in Revelation 5 the twenty-four elders were presented in those characters. Here, however, what the saints have been made, and which is known now to our faith, comes into full display in the millennial age.

Still, there is one new feature here. They are "priests ... of Christ;" it is really "of the Christ." Nowhere else does this expression occur, and it reminds us of Aaron and his sons in Exodus 29, who, when together, typified the saints as a priestly company. The sons of Aaron were priests of God and of Aaron — if we may so say. The risen saints will be manifested as priests of God and of the Christ, as taking their character and place entirely from Him. And they will share in His kingly reign.

Verse 6 gives us in brief summary the power and blessedness of the millennial age on its heavenly side. More instruction is granted us when we come to the latter part of Revelation 21, but still it is as to the heavenly side of it, just mentioning "the nations of them that are saved," and "the kings of the earth," but giving us no details as to the earthly blessings enjoyed in that delightful age. Such details were not needed here as they had been fully given in Old Testament scripture.

We know that the earth will rejoice and prosper under the beneficent reign of Christ; that it will be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. Let Psalm 72 be considered for there we see Christ as the priestly King, absolute in His rule-but sustaining the poor and needy. In Revelation we are let into the secret of how He will dispense His power and goodness through His heavenly saints — even such as ourselves.

Do we really believe it? If we do it will take the shine out of the present age through which we pass, and out of all its achievements.

The Millennial age will be characterized by righteous yet beneficent rule. At the end of the ages of sinful misrule by men, with all their attendant miseries, there is to be displayed the excellence and glory of Divine rule, under Christ as Son of Man and King of Israel. Yet sin will not be entirely absent, as Isaiah 65:20 shows.

Moreover, during the thousand years human life on earth will continue as at present and multitudes will be born as the years pass, and the Lord's words, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," will be as true then as now. If a work of grace does not take place in the hearts of such, all the old fleshly tendencies will be there, repressed only by Divine rule from without; Satan, the instigator of evil, not being there to work upon them. This accounts for the solemn facts of verse 8, which otherwise might seem inexplicable.

At the end of the millennium Satan is to be released from his prison and allowed to work his will. He has learned nothing and received no correction. He is absolutely unchanged. Out he goes at once, again to deceive the nations. Men of Adam's race, apart from the new birth, are unchanged also, in spite of having lived for centuries under a regime of absolute righteousness. In the Gospel we have learned that, "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the

law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8). Hence nothing but a new birth will do. This will again be shown in striking fashion at the close of the millennium. Men in the flesh cannot please God, and God and His righteous rule does not please them. So at the first opportunity, when instigated, they rebel.

Out of all nations the rebels come, though "Gog and Magog" are specially designated. Ezekiel 38 and Ezekiel 39 predict the destruction of this great northern power as the millennial age begins — the last stroke, it would appear, of the great Armageddon conflict. A thousand years have passed, but again we find the representatives of that power taking a leading part in the anti-God movement. The great Russian territories are pretty clearly indicated in the chapters in Ezekiel, and even in our day the anti-God spirit seems to have come to a head there. Their objective is the camp of the saints and the beloved city, in the centre of which will stand the Temple of God, whence will proceed both the authority and the blessing of the millennial age. It is unadulterated rebellion against God. It merits condign punishment, and it gets it.

Fire from heaven devours them, and this dreadful episode brings to a close the millennial age and all the ages of time, so that we stand on the threshold of the eternal state. Our chapter goes on to relate God's acts in the judgment of sin, both governmental and eternal. There is

no mention of what happens to the material earth (save that "earth and the heaven fled away"), until the first verse of the next chapter is reached, and then we are only told that the first heaven and earth have "passed away." We have to refer to 2 Peter 3:7, 10, for more precise details, and then we discover that fire is to be the agent used for that. So it may very well be that this falling of fire from heaven to devour the rebels is also the act of God which releases the atomic forces which will produce what Peter predicts.

The last six verses of our chapter give us the results of God's last judgments; not the material side of them but the moral and spiritual. The fountain-head of all evil is first dealt with. In all the wide universe, that the Scriptures reveal to us, Satan was the original rebel. Into this world he introduced sin by way of deceit. His name, devil, means accuser, calumniator, and by his calumnies against God and His word he deceived Eve, as Genesis 3 bears witness. As a mighty spiritual being, possessing powers of intelligence vastly beyond anything human, he has no difficulty in deceiving fallen men. He is doing it today, and will do it to the end. But the limit determined by Omnipotence is now reached, and he is cast into that "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," of which the Lord spoke in Matthew 25:41. Here the fire is spoken of as a lake, which gives the idea of a place circumscribed and confined. Into it the beast and the false prophet were cast as the millennial age began, and now at

the end of that age we read that there they still "are," and not that they were. The fire had not destroyed them.

We are well acquainted with fire and its effects in material objects; but, as far as we know, it has no effects on spiritual beings. We judge therefore the phrase to be symbolic, as so much else in this book, but it stands as the symbol of the hot displeasure, the scorching judgment of God, which even for the devil will mean that he "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

The originator of sin and his two chief lieutenants being disposed of, the great mass of sinful mankind, who have fallen a prey to his deceits, now appear at the final assize. The language is deeply solemn and impressive. John sees the throne of judgment, which he describes as great and white. The second resurrection, that of damnation, has taken place, and the earth has fled away. This earth is but a tiny spot in God's great universe and all the limitations which it would impose upon this scene are gone. In result, "the dead, small and great, stand before God." They have been raised and reclothed in bodies, as verse 13 clearly indicates, but they are still the dead in a spiritual sense — dead towards God.

The One who will sit on that throne, from whose face the very earth and heaven will flee, inasmuch as they have been defiled by sin, must be our Lord Jesus Christ, since, "the Father judges no man, but

has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). His face was once marred more than that of any man. In it now there shines the glory of God. Then it will be characterized by the penetrating understanding of omniscience, and the severity of a judgment which springs from righteousness and holiness, of which the whiteness of the throne is a symbol.

Yet the judgment will not be apart from the divine records, nor apart from their works. It will be based not on what God knew them to be but on what they had manifested themselves to be in their outward actions. Of those actions a record had been kept before God. It is remarkable that the Old Testament as it closes should speak of "a book of remembrance" written before the Lord in favour of the godly: the New Testament at the close speaking of "the things written in the books," on which the ungodly are condemned. In recent years men have discovered how to record human speech and actions in such a way as to preserve them for future generations. What they are learning to do imperfectly God has done in perfection through the ages. A terrifying thought for the sinful sons of men!

About three-quarters of the earth's surface is sea. If any of the dead could be overlooked in that hour, it would be some who found their burial in its wide expanse and its immense depths. But the sea will give them up. Death is viewed as having held men's bodies and "hell" or "hades," had held their souls. Both yield up their prey that

soul and body may be reunited. They had sinned in their bodies, and in their bodies they will be condemned. Again it is emphasized — "every man according to their works."

At that time death and hades will contain only the unsaved, so that verse 14 records the solemn fact that all that they contain will find their place in the lake of fire, and thus death and hell will disappear. Neither of these two were marked by finality: each was a provisional arrangement, and now they come to an end. Verse 15 states the same terrible fact in another way. If the record of "the books" condemned men in a positive way, the "book of life" did so in a negative way. If their names were not there, it sealed their doom.

Chapter 21

FROM THESE DREADFUL scenes John lifts his eyes to behold scenes of everlasting felicity in a new heaven and a new earth. In our present earth the sea is the great dividing element, and into its salt water flow the impurities created by man in his sinful state, and they are rendered harmless. It will not be needed in that blissful day when the impurities and the divisions are no more. The first eight verses of chapter 21 give us, then, the eternal state, which will succeed the millennial age, and abide.

Its chief feature will be God dwelling with men in His tabernacle, which is identified with the holy city the new Jerusalem, which city is likened to "a bride prepared for her husband." This might seem a strange mixture of symbols did we not remember that we have already, in Revelation 17 and Revelation 18, seen that which falsely claims to be the church represented as great Babylon and as a seducing woman — a harlot. In this new Jerusalem we have in symbol the church of God, which is the bride of Christ. It descends "from God," since it is altogether His workmanship, and it comes "out of heaven," for its calling was from heaven, and to heaven it had gone at the coming of the Lord Jesus for all His saints.

In that eternal order of things the prominent thoughts are GOD and MEN. The Persons of the Godhead are not thrown into prominence, though of course they are there, just as They were enfolded in the Elohim, translated God, in Genesis 1:1. Distinctions amongst men, such as nations, only came in as the result of sin, so here they disappear. It was ever in the purpose of God to dwell with men; an indication of this being found in Proverbs 8:31. When man was created in innocence the Divine approach did not go further than a visitation, "in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8). When in type Israel was redeemed from Egypt, God took up His abode on the tabernacle in their midst. Now by the Spirit the church is His habitation. In the

eternal state His desire to dwell will be finally accomplished; and it will-be in fullest measure — the dwelling of "God Himself."

The holy city is called "the tabernacle of God," thus directing our thoughts to the earliest type of God dwelling amongst His people. Two words in the New Testament are translated "temple." One signifies the whole of the sacred buildings and the other the inner sanctuary only. The first word is never used in the Revelation; always the second. So in chapter 15:5, we get, "the temple of the tabernacle;" that is, the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle. Again later in our chapter we read that there is no inner sanctuary in the heavenly city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the inner sanctuary of it. This may help us to understand why tabernacle rather than temple is the suitable word in the verse we are considering, though in Paul's epistles the church is called the temple (inner sanctuary) of God.

All God's redeeming activities have been in view of His dwelling, and then, having taken up His abode, He exerts His power in blessing. Very little is said, however, as to the positive side of this. It seems to be summed up in two facts. First, that men will dwell in the presence of God. Second, that they will be in relationship with Him as sons, and thus as overcomers inherit all things. But how much is involved in these simple facts! To know God and dwell before Him in a near relationship must exceed in its blessedness even the inheriting of all things.

Verse 4 gives us the blessing on its negative side, and this we can understand more easily. The things that will never enter those blissful scenes are all painfully familiar to us at present. We know them only too well! We may remark that the "crying" is not the same as the "tears." It means "outcry," and the world is full of that today. Cries of dissatisfaction, resentment and threatening fill the air. All the five things mentioned are the fruits of sin. As men multiply on the face of the earth the volume of them increases. The advent of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom will largely assuage them, but they will never be wholly and for ever abolished until the eternal state is reached. And then, God himself will do it. His hand it will be — sweet thought! — that wipes the tear from every eye.

In the eternal state everything will be new in the fullest sense of the word. The material heavens and earth will be new, and "all things" found therein will be new according to verse 5. All those things that we know at present, spoken of as "the former things" will have passed away. He who acts, to produce these new creation things, is "He that sat upon the throne," — our Lord Jesus Christ. He acted to bring into existence the old creation, according to Genesis 1. He acts again to bring into existence the new. As before, so here, the word of His power is sufficient. Formerly "He spake, and it was done" (Ps. 33:9). Now again He speaks and His words are, "It is done." Both are accomplished with equal ease.

But we must never forget what lay between these two points. Redemption had to be accomplished, and far more than His word was needed for that. Apart from redemption and its wonderful fruits the new creation scenes and blessings would lack a solid foundation.

He who sits upon the throne asserts the fulness of His Deity, for no one but God can be the A and the Z — as we should speak — the beginning and end of all things. In this light He presented Himself to John, speaking as One who dwells in the eternal present, above and beyond all questions of time. But at the end of the verse He again speaks in view of time conditions, for thirst is not something that characterizes the eternal state. Thirst is a symbol of unsatisfied desire, and that eminently marks the present time. For the thirsty there is still the water of life, which springs up like a fountain and is freely given. Such is the grace of our God, persisting to the end.

From the grace of verse 6 we pass to the overcoming of verse 7. At first sight it looks like a complete change, but after all, no one does overcome save those who have received the grace. This is the last mention of overcoming, or victory, in the book, which, as we before remarked, is the book of victory. The victorious saint will enter into full possession of the inheritance, but no saint at all would overcome had not the Lamb prevailed (same word), as we see in chapter 5.

The terrible import of verse 8 is apparent. It stands in contrast to the victors in verse 7, and in both verses we are carried outside the bounds of time and into the endless expanse of eternity. There is that confined region, burning with the holy judgment of God, which will be the second death to those that are cast there. The first death is not annihilation. If it were, there could be no second. It is dissolution of soul and body. The second death will be the complete and absolute dissolution of every link that connects with God; complete severance from all that is summed up in the words, life and light and love. There will be existence but not life in the full and proper sense of the word.

The list of those on whom this doom falls is sadly instructive. It begins with the fearful and unbelieving. Being without faith, they feared man and did not confess Jesus as their Lord. Those who bore the character of the devil, who is a murderer, and were marked by lust and traffic with the powers of darkness, come next. The list finishes with "all liars," for lying is another characteristic of the devil, and deceit takes a variety of subtle forms. The overcomers of verse 7 are sons of God. The damned of verse 8 proclaim themselves as sons of the evil one. They share his doom.

Beyond the point we have reached, the Scripture does not carry us. An eternal state is something which lies beyond the compass of our minds. God then will be all in all, but no description of it in detail is

given. Were it given it would be unintelligible to us in our present state. We may gather this from what Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12:4. We may find however deep instruction in what we are told.

John is now granted a fresh vision, the description of which begins in verse 9. Two remarks of a general nature may be made as to it. First, it stands in very definite contrast with the vision he was given of Babylon, the great whore, in Revelation 17 and Revelation 18. In both cases the vision is introduced by one of the angels who had the seven vials, but to see Babylon John was carried in spirit into the wilderness, while to see the holy Jerusalem he is carried into a great and high mountain. A wilderness is a region where is specially seen the curse that rests upon creation because of man's sin, according to Genesis 3:18. In ascending a high mountain a man travels as far as his feet can carry him towards heaven, and away from the mists and defilements of earth.

Second, in this vision John sees the holy city, the bride, the Lamb's wife, not as it will be in the eternal state, as in verses 2 and 3 of our chapter, but as it will be in connection with the millennial scene. The fact that we read of the twelve tribes of Israel, the nations who are to be healed and saved, and the kings of the earth, make this manifest. So when John sees the city descending out of heaven from God, in verse 10, he is viewing it coming down to take up its connection with the millennial earth at the beginning of that epoch. When he saw it

coming down, in verse 2, it was at the beginning of the eternal state, the millennium being over. The recognition of this fact enhances the value of the words in verse 2, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." A thousand years have rolled, yet her bridal beauty for the heart of Christ is untarnished and as fresh as ever.

As with Babylon so here we have brought together the two symbols of a woman and a city. They appear, on the surface, to be quite incongruous, but not so when we come to their significance. The one sets forth what the church will be to Christ; the other what it will be for Him: as the bride, the object of His love; as the city, the centre from which His powerful administration will proceed.

The adjective, "great," in verse 10 lacks authority and should be omitted. The harlot city, Babylon, was characterized by greatness, the bridal city, New Jerusalem, is characterized by being from God, and hence it is holy and heavenly and has the glory of God — not the glory of man. This being so, it descends over the earth as a luminary, and "her light" is likened to "a jasper stone clear as crystal." Jasper indeed is mentioned three times in the description of the city, and the only other occurrence of the word in the book is in the description of the One who sits on the throne in Revelation 4:3. That which is descriptive of God is descriptive of the city.

Verses 12 to 21 are occupied with the wall, the gates, the foundations, and the city itself. We may consider them in that order. The wall is described as great and high. No adverse power could force an entrance. Evil is totally excluded. Its measure was 144 cubits, the square of 12, which is the number of administration. Here at last then is administration in such perfection as to shut out all that is wrong.

The wall, however, was not absolutely continuous: there were twelve gates, three on each of its four sides. Now gates are made in order that there may be going out and coming in, so that the city, though amply protected by its wall, is not a self-contained and isolated unit. There is to be happy intercourse between it and the millennial earth. He who approaches it finds an angel at each gate, so that all come under inspection. Moreover each gate is a pearl; a reminder this, we should say, to all who approach, that the city itself as "the bride" represents that "pearl of great price" for which the Saviour "sold all that He had." Those who go out find on the gates the names of the tribes of Israel, as indicating the route by which one travels to the happy earth beneath. All the administration of that day will proceed from the throne in the heavenly metropolis, and reach the earth by way of Israel.

Here too is a city which has foundations, and God is the Builder and Maker of it. Twelve again appears, as the number of the foundations, and on each the name of one of the apostles of the Lamb. The church

is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, according to Ephesians 2:20, so this confirms us in thinking that in symbolic way the city sets forth the church. Again the foundations are garished with precious stones, a stone to each foundation. The first has jasper, which, as we have just seen, is peculiarly descriptive of God Himself. That which speaks of God lies at the very foundation of everything here, but each stone in one way or another acts as a prism, reflecting the various hues that go to make up light. The very foundations of the city sparkle with the light of God, but so reflected that men may appreciate its colourful details.

The city itself as well as its gates and wall is measured by the angel, using a golden reed. Thus the measuring standard was divine, and it was found to be a perfect cube of immense dimensions. A furlong (or stadium, as the word is) was about 200 yards, so 12,000 would equal about 1,375 miles. The fact that its height was this as well as its length and breadth, helps to confirm the thought that we are dealing not with literal language but symbolic. In this measurement we again meet with twelve, the number of administration, and the very street of the city is gold like transparent glass. In earth's cities the street is the place where dirt accumulates. There all is divine purity and transparency, and as is the city so is the government that proceeds from it.

Verses 22 and 23 unfold to us that wherein the glory of the city consists. The earthly Jerusalem of the millennial age will have the

Temple of Jehovah as its crowning glory. Ezekiel sees this in vision, and records it and the measurements of it in Ezek. 40 - 48. The glory of the heavenly Jerusalem is that it has no temple for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it, that is, there They shine in Their glory without the necessity of a covering or screen. In "Lord God Almighty" we have reference to the three names under which God was revealed in Old Testament times, and with Him is coupled on equal terms the once humbled Lamb, depreciated and set at nought by men. There is no mention of God as Father here, but that is, we judge, because the emphasis is not on the relationship, in which the church is set, but on the administration, which is committed to it.

Amongst men administration is so often a failure by reason of unrighteousness or ignorance. Here all is marked by the perfect light of God. The glory of God illuminates the city, and the "light," or more accurately "lamp" of it is the Lamb. In Him the light will be concentrated and made available for the city. All natural light is superseded and no longer needed there. Verse 24 shows that though the light has its seat in the city it is diffused upon earth so that the saved nations enjoy it. All their activities will be governed by it, and thus we see how at last heaven and earth shall be brought into sweet accord, as was hinted in Hosea 2:21-22.

But just as the light of God streams out of the heavenly city so into it shall flow the glory and honour of the kings of the earth and of the nations. In Revelation 17:2, we saw the kings of the earth trafficking with the false Babylon before the advent of Christ. They have now departed to their doom, as also the nations who forgot God. The kings and nations of our chapter are those who have passed into millennial blessedness in happy subjection to the Lord. Heavenly light shines forth upon them and glory and honour streams back into the city from them on earth. Here is a scene portrayed which may well enrapture every heart; only to be exceeded by the joys of the city itself.

This delightful intercourse is uninterrupted as far as the city is concerned. Its gates are never shut, for within it is continuous day. If we compare this with Isaiah 60:11, we find an instructive contrast. In that glad day the gates of the earthly Jerusalem will be open continually. There will be night there for it says, "they shall not be shut day nor night." Into that city, the "forces" or "wealth" of the Gentiles, and their kings, will be brought. Thus on earth things will be on a lower footing, though there is some similarity with the heavenly city, which will be more clearly seen if all the latter part of that chapter be read.

From the heavenly city every form of evil and defilement and untruth will be wholly excluded, and only those written in the Lamb's book

of life will enter it. This could hardly be said of the earthly Jerusalem, even in the millennial age.

Chapter 22

WE HAVE ALREADY seen that there is no temple in the heavenly city inasmuch as God and the Lamb are the Temple of it. The opening verse of chapter 22 shows that the throne of God and the Lamb is there, and this is again stated even more definitely in verse 3. Out of the throne proceeds the water of life like a flowing river. No earthly throne — not even the best of them — has proved itself to be a fountain of life. Their rule has been too oppressive or too weak, or their decisions before reaching the people have been too polluted in passing through lesser human channels. Here at last is a throne of absolute righteousness, which is exerted in beneficence, and life is the outcome. Moreover the city from which it flows out to men, is protected from every kind of defilement, and therefore no pollution reaches it as it flows. It is "pure" and "clear as crystal." We read of Zion on earth as the spot where, "the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3). We are now contemplating the heavenly source whence all flows.

The river of life nourishes and supports the tree of life, and that tree is in the midst of the golden street of the city. Our thoughts are carried back at once to Genesis 2 and 3. In his condition of innocence

Adam had two trees within his reach. The tree of life was not forbidden him: the tree of knowledge of good and evil was. The one open to him he passed by: the one forbidden he took. As a fallen man the tree of life was placed beyond his reach by angelic action, never to be reached by anything that any man can do. There was no solution of the fearful problem raised until the Son of God appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Then, and only then, the responsibilities incurred by the knowledge of good and evil were met, and the risen Christ becomes the true Tree of Life for men. It is as true today as it will be then, that "the tree of life ... is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).

On this glorious tree the number twelve again is stamped. Its fruit is in twelve-fold diversity, and yielded twelve times a year. The fruits are apparently for the heavenly city, but its very leaves are to bring healing to the nations. The mention of months, of nations and of healing, show that the whole scene is concerned with the millennium and not with the eternal state.

When considering the eternal state, at the beginning of Revelation 21, we saw that much of the detail given is of a negative order — the mention of what will not be there. We find the same feature here. The city has no temple, no need of sun and moon, and no possibility of pollution. Now we find that there is no more curse, and it is repeated that there is no night there. Directly sin entered a curse entered, as

Genesis 3 bears witness. The entrance of the law only made the curse more emphatic, and Malachi, the last prophetic word to the people under the law, uses the word freely: it is indeed the last word of the Old Testament.

The disobedience of the first man brought in the curse. The obedience of the Second, even to death, laid the basis for its removal. When the throne of God and of the Lamb is established in the city then the curse goes out for ever. All disobedience will have disappeared. The Divine authority will be fully acknowledged, and righteousness, having nothing to challenge it, will be exercised purely in blessing.

Therefore it is that we read, "His servants shall serve Him." But, if they were His servants, did they not always serve Him? — we may ask. The answer would have to be — only in part. So often, alas! selfish motives were mixed in with their service to Him, and the more spiritually minded they were the more they were conscious of it. Now at last the flesh in them has been eliminated and they really do serve Him. All that is entrusted to them, in carrying out the will of God and the Lamb, will be perfectly accomplished.

Then comes that glorious statement, "they shall see His face." His face is connected with His glory in the revelation of Himself. When the law was given, and broken, Moses found grace in God's sight,

and thus emboldened he said, "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory." The answer was, "Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live." Under grace the contrast is great. We can say, "God ... has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." But what we have here far exceeds that. Brought into favour, we shall dwell in the full light of the knowledge of God, perfectly revealed in Christ. The prayer of our Lord will be fulfilled, "that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory." We shall see the face of God for ever, in beholding Him.

Out of this, surely, springs the next statement, "His name shall be in their foreheads." In Revelation 13, we learned that the followers of the beast had to have the mark or the name in their foreheads, thus declaring their allegiance to him, and that they represented him. Such come, as we have seen, under the wrath of God. We shall bear the name of God and the Lamb in the most prominent place, declaring our everlasting allegiance to Him, and reflecting His likeness as His representatives.

It would be difficult to conceive of anything more blessed than this — dwelling in His light, and reflecting His likeness for ever. Note the striking fact of "His" thrice repeated — not "Their." God and the Lamb are both brought together under a pronoun in the singular.

They are clearly distinguished; but They are one. Another indication this of the Deity of Christ.

Brought thus into this blaze of living light, all the darkness of night is for ever gone, and no feeble candle of man's making is needed. Our chapter began with life and has proceeded to light. Love is not mentioned, it is only inferred, inasmuch as the city is the bride, the Lamb's wife. That doubtless is because it is the city which is dwelt upon, and that sets forth not love but a centre of Divine administration.

So the closing words of the description are, "they shall reign for ever and ever." As we learned at the opening of the book, the saints are made a kingdom of priests to God; that is, they are priestly kings. Further, as Paul told the Corinthians, "the saints shall judge the world." And again, "we shall judge angels." This is the thought of God, long purposed. Now we find it brought to accomplishment.

Here, then, are things that rise far above our feeble powers of apprehension at present. Nevertheless they are, blessed be God, profoundly real and, accomplished in their season, to be established for ever.

In verse 5 we have read the last utterance of prophetic revelation, and in it we were conducted to a condition of blessedness far beyond our highest thoughts. In Genesis 3 we have seen man departing from the

light of God — such as was vouchsafed to him — plunging into spiritual night and becoming a slave of sin. Here we see redeemed men, who have received "abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness," established in everlasting light, and they "reign in life by One, Jesus Christ," as the Apostle Paul had written in Romans 5:17.

We are not surprised therefore that verse 6 gives us a solemn affirmation of the truth of the wonderful prospect unfolded. The Apostles made known the power and coming of the Lord, and Peter assures us that they had not followed cunningly devised fables in so doing (see, 2 Peter 1:16). Here we are contemplating glories which stretch out into eternity and which would be beyond belief were they not guaranteed to us as "faithful and true."

Moreover they are "things which must shortly be done." This statement surely is intended to intimate to us that we must reckon time according to the Divine estimation and not according to ours. The word translated "shortly" is almost the same as that translated "quickly" in the next verse, where we have the first of the three declarations, "I come quickly," that occur in these closing verses. Our centuries are but so many minutes in God's great clock! We incline to think however that this word is also intended to signify that when the Divine action takes place it is marked by swiftness, as it says in Romans 9:28, "A short work will the Lord make upon the earth." When

Jesus comes it will be no slow and long drawn out manifestation but rather like the lightning's flash.

While we wait for His coming our blessedness lies in keeping the sayings of the prophecy we have been considering. We shall "keep" them if we bear them in mind so effectually that they govern our lives. We have heard the study of prophecy decried on the ground that it is but an intellectual exercise. It may be merely that of course, but it is not intended to be. If we keep the sayings of the prophecy we shall be enriched by the understanding of God's purpose, of the objectives He has before Him, and of the way in which He will reach them. We shall also be blessed by the assurance of the complete victory that will crown all His judgments and His ways.

The effect of all this upon John was very great, as indeed it should be upon us who read it. The impulse to worship was doubtless right though falling at the feet of the angelic messenger was wrong. This was instantly repudiated by the angel for he took the place merely of a servant, and in that respect on a par with John or the prophets, or indeed with all who take the place of obedience to the word of God. God alone is to be worshipped. No holy angel will accept it, though it is the dearest desire of Satan, the great fallen angel, as is shown in Matthew 4:9.

Verses 8 and 9 are parenthetical in their nature. We must link verses 10 and 11 with verse 7. These sayings of the prophecy which are so profitable to the one who keeps them, are not to be sealed but kept open for any to inspect. The contrast to the close of Daniel's prophecy strikes one at once. He was to "shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end." The epoch in which we live — the Christian dispensation, we may call it — is "the time of the end," or as John calls it in his epistle "the last time" (1 John 2:18). The Holy Ghost is come and that which formerly was sealed is open, and that now revealed is not to be sealed. No doubt it is also true that we are now in the last days of the last time, so that all this unsealed prophecy should have a special interest for us.

Verse 11 also is connected with the "Behold I come quickly" of verse 7, as also with the same announcement at the beginning of verse 12. The coming of the Lord will give fixity to the state of all, whether good or bad. Today there are the unjust and the filthy; the righteous and the holy. But today the unjust may be justified and the filthy may be born again and enter the ranks of the holy. The Lord having come, the state of each is unalterably fixed. May this tremendously solemn thought weigh heavily with us all!

Moreover, as verse 12 shows, the coming of the Lord will mean the judgment seat, where every man will have his work valued and rewarded according to its deserts. This is a very solemn thought for

each believer. After the rapture of the saints comes the judgment seat of Christ.

It would seem as if, having uttered what is recorded in verse 11, the angel disappears, and the voice of Christ, the coming One, is heard alone. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. There could hardly be a stronger affirmation of His essential Deity than this. Obviously no created being, however exalted, could speak thus. It guarantees the rectitude of all His judgments, and that every reward He bestows will be in exact keeping with deserts.

Again we find the two classes in verses 14 and 15 — the holy and the filthy. In verse 14 the better attested reading seems to be, "Blessed are they that wash their robes;" that is, once they were filthy but they have been cleansed. Only thus can anyone have right to the tree of life or be given access to the heavenly city. Those washed are within. Those characterised by the evils of verse 15 are without. The Apostle Paul had issued the warning, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers" (Phil. 3:2), and here we find such excluded for ever. Moreover he had plainly indicated that today in the assembly of God there is a divinely recognized "within," and there is the world "without" (1 Cor. 5:12-13), so here we find the same separation maintained and carried into eternity.

Verse 16 has in it an element of contrast if compared with the first verse of the book. The prophetic unveilings, given by God to Jesus Christ, and conveyed to us by His angel through John, are now completed. The angel through whom they were communicated has disappeared. Jesus Himself remains, and in this verse and those succeeding it His voice only is heard. In the first place He endorses all that had been conveyed by the ministry of the angel, who had been sent by Him. We are not to think that the prophetic witness was anything less than Divine, though it has reached us in this way, The testimony was given in the seven churches which are in Asia, as stated in Revelation 1:4, but through them is intended for the enlightenment of the whole church until He comes.

Having thus endorsed the whole book, the Lord Jesus, using only His personal Name, presents Himself to us in a twofold way. First, as the root and the offspring of David, which gives us His title in Manhood to the kingdom and all dominance on the earth. Let Psalm 78:65-72 be read, and then 2 Samuel 23:1-5. These passages show that by a special intervention of Divine Power David was raised up to kingly estate, and how he was but an imperfect forecast of the infinitely greater One who was to spring from him after the flesh. Hence, in Isaiah 11:1, Christ is spoken of as a "rod" or "shoot" out of the stem of Jesse, and as a branch who is fruitful out of his roots. Here He is dearly presented to us as the "Offspring" of David.

But in the same chapter in Isaiah, verse 10, He is presented as "a root of Jesse" which shall be "in that day," which answers also to what we have in our chapter. He is both "shoot" and "root" in Isaiah; both "offspring" and "root" in Revelation. In the former words His Manhood is the prominent thought; in the latter words, His Deity. And then — again reverting to 2 Samuel 23 — when at last He rules over men in justice and in the fear of God, He will be "as the light of the morning, when the sun rises, even a morning without clouds." In this striking and poetic imagery is set forth the opening of earth's bright millennial day, when He comes.

But as the Revelation closes He presents Himself to us, not only in a way that refers us back to the Old Testament predictions of the rising of the Sun of righteousness, but in a second way more distinctly connected with New Testament hopes. He had been predicted as coming "a Star out of Jacob" (Num. 24:17), without any reference to the morning. As the bright Morning Star, Jesus presents Himself as the Forerunner and Pledge of the uprising day. Now Israel does not know Him thus, for it has rejected Him and treated Him as an imposter. The Church, and the Church alone, knows Him in this character, and is authorized to entertain those heavenly hopes, centred in Him, which are to be realized before the day of glory breaks for Israel and the earth.

So in verse 16 the Lord Jesus addresses us personally as the One in whom all hope is centred both for the heavens and for the earth and He strips Himself, if we may so say, of all His titles and honours that more simply and effectively He may present HIMSELF. It is this that most directly appeals to the hearts of His own. Consequently there is an immediate response.

We may find encouragement in the fact that at the end of this book, and indeed of the New Testament as a whole, the Spirit is discovered as still remaining and the bride as a still existing entity on the earth. The failure which has so grievously marked the professing church, as indicated prophetically in Revelation 2 and Revelation 3, has not grieved away the One nor destroyed the other. The Spirit indwells the bride, and hence as with one voice the response, "Come," is uttered. Such is the fact; but we may well challenge ourselves whether we are altogether in harmony with this cry. It is to be feared that all too many Christians are still looking for improvement on the earth, or at all events to an ideal condition of things being produced by the preaching of the Gospel, laying great stress on its social implications, and hence hardly joining in the cry.

This is it, we believe, which accounts for the next sentence, which contemplates some who hear, but who so far have not joined in the cry. Is any reader one of these? If so, you are invited to fall into line with the Spirit and the bride and add your "Come" to theirs. The

more we realize our part in the Church and the place which the Church has as the bride of Christ the more ardently we shall desire the coming of the Bridegroom.

The third and fourth sentences comprised in verse 17 give us the happy assurance that until He comes the living water that the Gospel bestows is available for every thirsty soul. If our Lord speaks, as He does here, we who are His humble servants may boldly address men in the same confident terms. It is a joy to know that just as we may turn to Him who is the bright Morning Star and say, "Come," so we may turn to men generally, and to the thirsting and the willing in particular, and bid them come to take of the water of life freely. Until this era of grace is replaced by an era of judgment the Gospel invitation is to go forth. It is for "whosoever will" and we may be sure that to the end there will be found some who by the working of God's Spirit will be willing to take.

There is great solemnity about verses 18 and 19. To tamper with the Word of God is a great sin of which it is assumed no true believer will be guilty. Be it noted that the sin may be committed by adding to the words as well as subtracting from them. In olden days the former sin was that of the Pharisees, the latter that of the Sadducees. The one added their tradition, which had the effect of neutralizing the true word of God. The other adopted rationalist views and refused to believe in resurrection or in angel or spirit, and so took away much

from the Divine word. Though the names are obsolete the spirit of both is very much alive today and this warning is greatly needed. The threatening at the end of verse 19 is perhaps the graver of the two. The taking away of his part from the tree of life, as the margin reads, seems to be correct.

Be it noted also that it is tampering with the "words" that is forbidden. At the very close we have a final intimation that the words of the Divine Writings are inspired. Verbal inspiration is claimed right up to the finish. If we have no verbal inspiration we have no inspiration at all. It is easy to see this if we transfer our thoughts to mundane affairs. The laws of our land are certainly not inspired but they are authoritative, and they have been enacted by Parliament in written form, sentence by sentence and word by word. In our Law Courts appeal is frequently made to the very words of our laws, knowing that they are valid and cannot successfully be impeached or altered. If counsel in some legal action waived the words of the law aside and pretended to interpret what he called "the spirit of the law" apart from the words, he would be quickly shown the emptiness of his contention and that the words had the authority and governed the case. Let us reverence the WORDS of this prophecy and of every other part of the Divine Writings.

In verse 20 we have what we may regard as the closing utterance of our blessed Lord in the Holy Scriptures — His last inspired word to

His Church. He had just testified to the integrity and authority of His holy word, but in saying "these things," we believe He referred to all contained in this wonderful book; indeed to all that we have in the Scriptures. And His last word of testimony is, "Surely I come quickly." Thus for the third time in this closing chapter He announces His coming. In view of this how extraordinary it is that the very thought of His coming should have so largely slipped out of the mind of the church for ages, and even have been denied or explained away.

The explanation doubtless lies in the fact that the church slipped into the world and set its mind on the earth, as was indicated in the addresses to Pergamos and Thyatira in Revelation 2. Enticed by earthly allurements, the coming of the heavenly Christ lost its attraction. Let us see to it that the same process does not take place in our own hearts and lives. If we know what our portion and prospect really is we shall find His coming to be attractive beyond words, and our response will surely be, as indicated here, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." We cannot desire delay and we add our hearty "So be it" — Come quickly, as Thou hast said, Lord Jesus. God grant that this may be the true response of all our hearts.

We have had in verse 20 the closing affirmation and promise of our Lord, and the closing response from the hearts and lips of His saints. Now finally in verse 21 we have the closing benediction from the Lord through the Apostle John, who was the vessel of these commu-

nications. The better attested reading is, "The grace of-the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints." His full title is used here, and the closing note that is struck is that of His well known grace. This grace is to rest on ALL the saints and not on a few only, who may be specially faithful. And it will rest upon them ALL the time while we wait for Him.

The last word of the Old Testament is "curse." That is because its main theme is the government of God and His law, ministered through Moses. And we read, "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Gal. 3:10). The New Testament introduces that "grace and truth" which "came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Hence the great contrast furnished by the closing words of the New Testament.

We may well bless God that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ shines like the sun upon every saint, while we all wait for the coming of our Lord.