

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS COMMENTARY SERIES

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

by

© Geoffrey Bingham

OTHER COMMENTARIES BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Gospel of St. Mark
The Gospel of St. John
The Acts of the Apostles
The Epistle to the Galatians
The Epistle to the Ephesians
The Epistle to the Philipians
The Epistle of First Peter
The Book of the Revelation

www.newcreation.org.au

New Creation publications PO Box 403,
Blackwood 5051
1984

First published by New Creation Publications Inc., Australia
PO Box 403, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

to "New Creation" Commentary Series

© Geoffrey C. Bingham 1984

National Library of Australia card number and
ISBN 0 949851 48 5

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Inquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

The Commentaries which have been prepared, and which are in preparation for this series, are intended to be modest both in their material and format. There are reasons for this kind of production.

Although the first consideration is not that of cost, we will, nevertheless say that it is an important reason. Many books are made to be attractive, and welcome as this is, it adds to the cost. We have tried to keep the price within that range which makes it easy to purchase the volumes as they appear. Secondly we make no claim to have produced a work of either great scholarship, or one for the meticulous exegete. It is for those whose time is limited in looking up many commentaries. We have done this work for them, and in that sense the commentaries are the result of the fruits of other men's labours, with a modest addition by the writers, who themselves gather impressions by the way and often, even, have helpful insights.

Those who use these commentaries will not find them inspirational, for that was not their intention. They simply present valuable material and insights on the books with which they deal. Is it too high a claim to say that the material presented is worthy of trust, and should prove valuable to those who teach classes, groups, and who preach from pulpits and other places? We think they can be valuable, if not, always, wholly sufficient.

The Editors.

Wholly set and printed at

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.
Coromandel East, South Australia

INTRODUCTION

This book of “The Revelation of St. John the Divine” differs from other New Testament books, and it was debated whether it should be included in the Canon of Scripture, but it was. Luther did not see much value in it, and others have felt it is not in the more gentle spirit (so supposed) of the Gospels and the Epistles. However, it is in the Canon, and has been a book of countless encouragement and strength to many down through the centuries.

At the same time it has been a book over which wage more debates than any other. There are varying views of interpreting it, many of which are deeply convincing. Dr. Leon Morris in his excellent commentary says, “I have not felt able to align myself with any of the usual schools of interpretation.” We must of course, take cognisance of them. The various schools are listed hereunder, but before we look at them it is worth observing that in the 404 verses of this book there are 518 Old Testament references, though not one direct quotation. That should show us that in order to understand the book we should be soaked in the Old Testament. Of course, the New Testament ideas are also very strong, and echoes of Matthew, Luke, 1 & 2 Corinthians, I Thessalonians, Ephesians and Hebrews, as well as themes of John’s Gospel, are certainly present.

LITERATURE on this book is large. It would be impossible to include many of the commentaries written. Some valuable ones (many of them of different views) are by:- Leon Morris (Tyndale Series), G.B. Caird (A. & C. Black), R.H. Charles (ICC), H.C. Swete, Walvoord, W. Hendriksen (Title, “More than Conquerors” Tyndale Press), G.E. Ladd (Eerdmans), Preston and Hanson (Torch Series S.C.M.).

I. AUTHORSHIP

Leon Morris’ treatment of authorship is worth noting. Many scholars reject the authorship of John the Apostle, mainly on the grounds of writing, since the Greek of the Gospel and the Revelation are so different, both stylistically and grammatically. The Revelation, it is said, is written by a Hebrew thinking person, communicating in Greek. The argument is a long one. Some scholars do not believe this makes John’s authorship impossible, noting that he was “in the Spirit”, that he wrote not as an apostle, but as a prophet (Rev. 22:9), and that whilst grammatical rules are sometimes broken, they are sometimes kept, the writer being out for deliberate effect, rather than writing a calm Gospel or letter. whilst some conservative scholars like G.E. Ladd do not think John wrote it (but another John which was both experienced and mature) yet it cannot be stated dogmatically that he could not have written it.

II. DATE OF WRITING

Again Morris’ introduction is helpful here. The traditional date is AD 95–96, and although it may have been written a little earlier, discernible conditions, as the book reveals them indicates that a later date is more probable than an earlier one.

IV. VIEWS OF THE BOOK

The Revelation has been seen differently by those who differ in their methods of interpretation. Students should read the descriptions given by both L. Morris and G. Ladd. The following are the main views:-

(1) Preterist

Virtually this means “a tract for the times:”, i.e– all of the Revelation is couched in *what has happened* and what is about (immediately) to happen. Apocalyptic literature was written for its own time, generally, speaking of events which folk (with the code in their hands) could understand. Since the early church generally expected a quick return of the Lord, they would see the events as immediate. This would mean that the book would not relate in any sense, to the future. Our study of it, then, would be antiquarian.

(2) Historicist

The book ranges over *all* history, i.e. a forecast of it. The book then would be largely closed to the early readers of it, since it related to the future. It was written to churches in Asia, and most interpretations hold within Western Europe. The certainty of interpreting events in any age would be minimal. Various interpretations, from generation to generation, have varied, and even contradicted one another.

(3) Futurist

This places the events, not as a stream of events finally climaxing with the Lord's return, but as the events of the end-future only. Like the historicist view, it removes most of the material out of the age of the readers who would first receive it. It should be noted that there are two futurist views:

(a) The Dispensational This makes each of the churches in chapters 2 and 3 to represent an age, the last being the Laodicean age which will be one of decline and apostasy. Its *schema* is,

“The rapture of John symbolises the rapture of the church at the end of the age. Chapters 6–8 depict the period of church history when the Antichrist will all but destroy God's people. In the dispensational view God's people are Israel, restored to Jerusalem, protected by a divine sealing (7:1–8), with a rebuilt temple (11:1–3), who suffer the wrath of Antichrist. The church is no longer on earth, for it has been caught up to be with the Lord in the air.” (G.E. Ladd op. cit. p.12).

(b) Moderate Futurist does not see the seven churches representing seven ages, nor the rapture, nor does it distinguish sharply between Israel and the church, seeing them all as the people of God. However, it does place the events at the end-time.

The value of the futurist position is lessened if everything is thrown into the future. The historicist position makes more sense if it is an unfolding of a sequence of events being the final one, is that the same thrust is often given by the prophets of the Old Testament. Even here, however, they thought of the present, in the light of the future, i.e. the future prophecy dynamically related to the present, so that the time tension was vital and related to the present. By this we meant *present action is determined in the light of future events*. This is clearly the case in the Old Testament prophets who spoke of the Day of the Lord (at the end of the age) in terms of Israel's deliverance, sometimes prior to the Exile, sometimes following the Exile. The principle adduced is that “the imminent historical judgment is

seen as a type of, or a prelude to, the eschatological judgment. The two are often blended together in apparent disregard for chronology, for the same God Who acts in the imminent historical judgment will also act in the final eschatological judgment to further His one redemptive purpose.” (Ladd. op. cit. p. 13).

(4) Idealist

Set out by W. Milligan (Revelation of St. John 1186, pp. 153–154) the view is “While the Apocalypse thus embraces the whole period of the Christian Dispensation, it sets before us within this period the action of great principles, and not special incidents”, that is, it sets forth ideas and principles, and these happen throughout history. One is edified and informed of these principles, through the book, but they do not have actual historical roitage.

(5) Synchronistic or Parallelistic

This is not really a view as such, as a perspective of the action and events of the Revelation. Whereas many see the action (cause and effects) in a chronologically linear form, Hendriksen in his commentary sees the chs. 1–3 as spanning the entire dispensation of history, from a church point of view; see the chs. 4–7 likewise covering this whole period, described after a different manner; again 8–11 covering the time from the beginning Of the Gospel age to its end. Chs. 12–14 in their way also cover the same passage of time, described differently, but being essentially the same period. Chapters 15 and 16, although in another ethos – that of wrath – are related to the judgment, and the sixth cycle (chs. 17–19) describe the judgment of the harlot, Babylon and of the beast, whilst the seventh cycle presents another finale in which Satan (the Dragon) is judged, and the New Creation emerges. This in chs. 20–22. Thus the seven cycles are parallels of the same age, i.e. from the first to the second coming of Christ.

Such a view certainly by-passes the deficiencies of other views, for they do have deficiencies.

CONCLUSION: Without doubt, as in the Idealist view, certain ideas and principles are put forward, and these are most valuable. Much of the action must surely have been related to the day of the readers, as in the Preterist and Historicist views. Undoubtedly the book refers to the future, and is meant to be relevant in every age. In the spirit of Old Testament and New Testament prophecy the Futurist view must have validity. The Parallelistic interpretation obviates many difficulties and if it is valid then it covers the range of need in interpretation. Seeing these things should warn us against coming to the book with presuppositions.

Some of the finest scholars of prophecy have changed their views, not only from time to time, but even in later life. It behoves us to be gentle with those who differ from us, seeing men of Godly integrity hold differing views. This does not mean we may not hold one or other of these views. It would seem that one or another of these, only, could be correct, but it may be that none is really, of itself, correct. We must, then, be open to what the Book says, and seek, by the Spirit to unlock its practical value and truths to us, in the world in which we live today.

THE STRUCTURE AND ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK

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

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

I. PROLOGUE 1:1–8

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

II. THE FIRST VISION 1:9–3:22

1. The Revelator: The Glorified Christ 1:9–20
2. The Seven Letters 2:1 – 3:22
 - (1) The Letter to Ephesus 2:1–7
 - (2) The Letter to Smyrna 2:8–11
 - (3) The Letter to Pergamum 2:12–17
 - (4) The Letter to Thyatira 2:18–28
 - (5) The Letter to Sardis 3:1–6
 - (6) The Letter to Philadelphia 3:7–13
 - (7) The Letter to Laodicea 3:14–22

III. THE SECOND VISION 4:1–16:21

1. The Heavenly Throne 4:1–11
2. The Seven Seals 5:1–8:11
 - (1) The Sealed Book 5:1–14
 - (2) The Six Seals 6:1–17
 - a. The First Seal 6:1–2
 - b. The Second Seal 6:3–4
 - c. The Third Seal 6:5–6
 - d. The Fourth Seal 6:7–8
 - e. The Fifth Seal 6:9–11
 - f. The Sixth Seal 6:12–17
 - (3) Interlude: The Two Multitudes 7:1–17
 - a. The 144,000 7:1–8
 - b. The Unnumbered Multitude 7:9–17
 - (4) The Seventh Seal 8:1
3. The Seven Trumpets 8:2 – 14:20
 - (1) The Six Trumpets 8:2 – 9:21
 - a. Preparation 8:2–6
 - b. The First Trumpet 8:7
 - c. The Second Trumpet 8:8–9
 - d. The Third Trumpet 8:10–11
 - e. The Fourth Trumpet 8:12–13
 - f. The Fifth Trumpet 9:1–12
 - g. The Sixth Trumpet 9:13–21
 - (2) Interlude 10:1 – 11:13
 - a. The Angel and the Little Book 10:1–11
 - b. The Measuring of the Temple and the Two Witnesses 11:1–13
 - (3) The Seventh Trumpet 11:14–19
 - (4) Interlude 12:1 – 14:20
 - a. The Dragon, the Woman and Her Seed 12:1–17
 - b. The Two Beasts 13:1–18
 - c. Visions of Assurance 14:1–20
- Seven Bowls 15:1 – 16:21
 - (1) The Preparation 15:1–8
 - (2) The First Bowl 16:1–2
 - (3) The Second Bowl 16:3
 - (4) The Third Bowl 16:4–7
 - (5) The Fourth Bowl 16:8–9
 - (6) The Fifth Bowl 16:10–11
 - (7) The Sixth Bowl 16:12–16
 - (8) The Seventh Bowl 16:17–21

IV. THE THIRD VISION 17:1–21:8

- The Mystery of Babylon 17:1–18
- The Judgment of Babylon 18:1–19:5
 - (1) Angelic Announcement of Babylon’s Fall 18:1–3
 - (2) Warning to God’s People 18:4–5
 - (3) Cry of Vengeance 18:6–8
 - (4) The Lament of the Kings and Merchants 18:9–19
 - (5) Outburst of Praise 18:20
 - (6) The Destruction of Babylon 18:21–24
 - (7) A Thanksgiving for the Judgment of Babylon 19:1–5
- The Final Triumph and Consummation 19:6 – 21:8
 - (1) The Marriage of the Lamb 19:6–10
 - (2) The Coming of Christ 19:11–16
 - (3) The Battle of Christ and Antichrist 19:17–21
 - (4) The Binding of Satan, the Resurrection, and the Millennial Kingdom 20:1–6
 - (5) The Final Destruction of Satan and Death 20:7–15
 - (6) The New Creation 21:1–8

V. THE FOURTH VISION: THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM 21:9 – 22:5

VI. EPILOGUE 22:6–21

(G.E. Ladd, op. cit. pp. 14–17)

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

THE BOOK OF PROPHECY: PROPHECY COMMENCED

1:1-3

SUBSTANCE: This is the *revelation* which the Father gave to Jesus Christ. Thus it is *His*, and it was given to Him to show to His servants.

Must soon take place (cf. Dan. 2:28), i.e. the things revealed (revelation = apocalypse = unveiling) must soon, i.e. almost immediately, take place (cf. 4:1 “take place *after* this), always remembering that for the prophet *time* did not so much figure as *action*. What was to happen was not concealed (or “sealed up”, so as only to be known later) *to His servants*, i.e. to those who will read the book, and be involved in the events (not excluding those of later time.)

He sent and communicated, i.e. He acted and sent it, and signified (showed it by signs such as are in the book) *by His angel*, i.e. (see 17:15, 19:9, 21:9, 22:16) although the angel himself does not appear until later.

To His servant (slave) John, i.e. the revelation is made plain to the author, John, specially selected.

Bore witness, i.e. John, probably by writing the book.

To the word of God, “word” can be translated “purpose” but covers this dynamic revelatory *word* i.e. *what he saw*. “*To the testimony of Jesus Christ*” i.e. the word is borne witness by Christ Himself. All that is communicated is real.

Blessed i.e. if they read, hear and heed *the words of the prophecy* for it is this, and not a fantasy, i.e. it comes from the divine source, and is readable, hearable and heedable! It is essential to act on the book.

1:4-8 Salutation

SUBSTANCE: In this section John addresses the *seven churches* of the Lychus Valley, grown since Paul’s visit to Ephesus. *Seven* is the number of perfection, but not a holy number since the beast has seven heads. It is addressed to actual churches.

Grace and peace, regular, but not empty salutation, *from him*, etc. reminding them of God the Eternal, Who is ever active (so they need not fear).

from the seven Spirits (cf. 3:1, 4:5, 5:6). May be derived from seven-fold Spirit of Isa. 11:2f. Zech. 4:8 with the seven-fold candlestick = Holy Spirit. The Spirit operates in modes. Thus the Holy Spirit, as the Father, and the Son communicates with the churches.

before His throne, i.e. the place of authority, figuring much and significantly in this book. This letter comes from Jesus Christ *the faithful witness*, i.e. what John says is powerfully attested by this One. He is the first-begotten from the dead, the head of the line of the resurrected; *He is head over all rulers*, He is the One who goes on loving, and has actually *loosed us from our sins* at the cost of *His blood* and has *made us to be a Kingdom* (rather than kings) for which see Exod. 19:5-6, cf. I Peter 2:9-10. This Kingdom is a priest kingdom, each member having just that ministry of intercession, reconciliation, etc. relating to *His God and Father*. Caught in this vast wonder John bursts into a doxology which is not just formal, seeing he has seen the great things which are not to be unveiled.

Verse 7 develops out of the doxology. *He is coming with clouds*, clouds relating to the shekinah glory, cf. Acts 1:11, Matt. 16:27, 24:30, Dan. 7:13, etc.

every eye shall see Him in His second coming, as He Himself said, (Mark 14:61) whereas at His first coming they had not recognised Him; the result will be that *the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him*, i.e. the judgment will cause their anguish, since they are judged. This is not limited simply to the ones at the time of Christ. It is just; *even so amen*.

Verse 8 is significant because it shows John (as he shows us) that God is the Eternal One and the events which transpire do not in any way alter or affect Him.

1:9-11 John’s Commission to Write

SUBSTANCE: John’s identification with his Asian brethren is on the basis of being a *brother* and a *fellow-partaker* in three things:-

- a. *the tribulation* (John 16:33, Acts 14:22, Matt. 24:13).
- b. *the kingdom*, which after all is the theme of the book, and
- c. *the patience*, i.e. that positive element required for the whole matter.

All of these are *shared in Jesus*. It seems John is exiled because of his preaching of the Gospel (*word of God and testimony of Jesus*), although some see it that he is there *for* these things.

I was in the Spirit, etc. = I came to be in the Spirit, and this on the Lord's Day, i.e. the day the Christians primarily used (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2, etc.). In the Pauline sense he was habitually in the Spirit but here he is *caught up* in the Spirit for special revelations (cf. 4:2, 17:3, 21:10). The voice *like the sound of a trumpet* commands him to write in a book (scroll) *what he sees* (we do not know whether this is the whole description or that pertaining to the churches). However, it is to the churches to whom it pertains.

1:12–20 The Vision of the Glorious Lord

SUBSTANCE: The details in this passage concern Christ, walking amongst the seven golden lampstands. They are separate, since He walks amongst them. (cf. v.20 where they = the seven churches).

Like a son of man = Dan. 7:13ff, cf. Matt. 26:62f., i.e. Messiah.

The *robe reaching to the feet* denotes a high personage, and the *golden girdle* adds to this. The *hair white as wool* cf. Dan. 7:9, indicates deity, whilst the *eyes like a flame of fire* means penetrating discernment, and holiness in power. The *feet like burnished bronze* indicate strength, and the *Voice like the sound of many waters* (Ezek. 43:2) is the voice of deity. The *stars* are the *angels of the seven churches*, but here signify His care for them, even though the condition of some is bad. The *two-edged sword* (cf. 19:15, Ephes. 6:17, Heb. 4:12, etc.) is for judgment (throughout Scripture), showing the sterner side of Him. The *face like the sun shining in its strength* would be terrible to behold, and its brilliance causes John to *fall at his feet as a dead man*. This sudden manifestation of supernatural glory is too much for man in the mundane (even caught up in the Spirit) as Dan. 8:17, 10:9, Ezek. 1:28 and other passages show. The touch of Christ's *right hand* restores him, and the business in hand – writing – is commanded. Jesus is here equalled with God (as in v.8) and yet is true man, having defeated *death* and *hades* (the place of the dead). Having died he is now alive, and has the authority (*keys* to open and shut) over the destinies of all men. None other has this authority. John, then, is to write things seen, soon to be seen, and afterwards to be seen.

Note 1 Hendriksen (op. cit. pp. 33–35) shows that the descriptive details of Christ, eg. “in His right hand seven stars”, “I am the first and the last” and so on, are each quoted in the seven letters.

Note 2. The commentary above is an example of how closely the

text ought to be followed, interpreted and understood. From this point, however, we will confine ourselves to a less detailed examination, with a wider perspective, seeking to relate the themes. Students should, however, continue a detailed study, with the aid of a helpful commentary or two.

CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE – THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Note again that (i) *each letter* opens with part of the description given of Christ in ch. 1. Each letter is addressed to a particular Church, by *Christ*. (ii) Each letter closes with “*hear what the Spirit says to the churches,*” (i.e. to *all* the churches). Christ speaks to the churches, yet it is the Spirit speaking. This is an interesting view of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit. (iii) Each letter commences with “I know.” What Christ knows is good, or bad, or both. (iv) Each church is given instructions, with promise of rewards, the latter being dependent upon conquering. “He who conquers” is the theme in all the letters. The admonition, praise, encouragement and promises should be read carefully, and of course, applied to similar situations today. A brief summary is given of the seven churches:–

2:1–7 Ephesus

Commendation: The *Works* are good:– (a) *Labour*, hard work to the point of weariness. (b) Steadfastness. (c) Discernment of those posing to be apostles (special messengers with a special message). (d) Patient continuance in a wearying situation. The **rebuke** is:– You have abandoned your first love, i.e. not *lost* it but left it. Surely left His love, so losing the thrust to love. This is reprehensible.

Command:– (i) Remember (cf. 2 Peter 1:9), (ii) Repent, (iii) Do the first works of the first love. Further commendation for hating the *Nicolaitans*, of whom nothing positive is known, but seemingly heretics with immoral connotation.

Promise:– “eat of the tree of life” cf. Gen. 2 and 3.

2:9–11 Smyrna

Commendation: In tribulation and poverty, i.e. persecuted and kept poor, extremely in fact. Jews... synagogue of Satan, means the Jews are deliberate in their opposition, persecution to the Christians. Through them (perhaps Satan will have them on trial (tribulation). It could end in death, but whatever they will receive the crown of life, i.e. the crown *which is* life.

Promise:– not hurt by the second death, i.e. the death beyond death. Cf. 20:6, 14, 21:8 (where the *cowardly* meet death.)

2:12–17 Pergamum

Commendation: Living permanently in this city, where idolatry and emperor-worship is strong, you do not deny the faith. In the crisis where Antipas was martyred (thought to be roasted in a

brazen bull) you remained firm, right at Satan’s dwelling place, i.e. he was there in the whole thing.

Rebuke:– Some in the church are connected with idolatrous, immoral practices (cf Num. 31:16, I Cor. 10:14–22). Also you have Nicolaitans. Command:– Repent; i.e. the entire church. If not Christ will immediately come, and use the sword (of severe judgment) cf. v.12, against them.

Promise:– (a) Hidden manna, which can be variously interpreted. At the least, supply of heavenly bread to sustain one for ever.(b) White stone; also variously interpreted, but the name (new) meaning one will be a new character, person. Secret name, because “no man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man.”

2:18–29 Thyatira

Commendation: This church has love, faith, service, patient endurance and the works of the first love (cf. 2:5) do not even equal the works of continuing love. A high commendation.

Rebuke:– Jezebel! She professes the Christian faith and rationalises eating food offered to idols (and the emperor?), and commends living as the folk about, the result of which is idolatry/adultery, since these two are the one in Scripture. Her heresy was pointed out to her, and a time of grace presented – for repentance. She is adamant. She will be cast onto a bed of sickness, as also others. Her children will be struck dead. Note:– A prophetess would be highly regarded, perhaps, superstitiously. She taught them “the deep things of Satan” cf. I Cor. 2:10 “the deep things of God.” Probably calling the former the latter, she led them into Satanic involvement. She may have told them they must know Satanic things in order to conquer! Command:– “Hold fast until I Come” i.e. against all of these evil seductions.

Promise:– Who observes Christ’s works will have universal authority (cf. Psalm 2:7–9). The morning star (cf. Dan. 12:3, Job 38:7, Rev. 22:16) means righteousness and the presence of Christ for ever.

3:1–6 Sardis

Commendation: None.

Rebuke:– Warning to wake from the deceit of being alive. The embers are almost cold, the tree nearly dead to the roots. Drastic repentance necessary.

Promise:– Some have remained pure; they will walk with Christ, in white garments. Christ’s confession of them will leave their names in the book of life.

3:7–13 Philadelphia

Commendation: Total. In the address the *key of David* is mentioned (cf. Isaiah 22:22) signifying the key to David's house – the Messianic Kingdom (cf. Matt. 16:16–18). Hence Christ opens a door for them, and it cannot be shut. What is the door? Debates ensue concerning it. It is certainly a door to the local Jews who will ultimately “*come and bow down* and learn that I have loved you.” These who are not true Jews (as are the Christians) will acknowledge their wrongness. An hour of testing is coming upon the whole world. These will be kept in it, or *from* it.

Promise:– Much. The name of God, of the city of God, as “My new name” all signify that the recipient is sealed for God, the city of God and Christ.

3:15–22 Laodicea

Commendation: Nil. **Rebuke:**– Total. Reason – they are neither hot nor cold. They have not true riches, and are in a totally wretched condition. Like other churches they are given the opportunity to change. Christ is speaking from love (v.19). Repentance will bring Christ to the door, and when opened, He will come in to fellowship with them. Thus *the conqueror is one who obeys what Christ tells* him. In this case he will be seated with Christ, in authority (cf. Ephes. 2:6).

Note: In every letter Christ says directly or indirectly that He will come. On the one hand, it is to do something in judgment or chastisement, if they will not repent. On the other, it is to assist, aid or reward. His coming refers to (a) immediate action, and (b) His second coming or return.

CHAPTER FOUR: JOHN'S SECOND VISION – THE HEAVENLY THRONE

John had seen Christ *walking on earth*, amongst the seven candlesticks, the church. Now he sees heaven itself. (i) First *an open door* (cf. 3:8). (ii) *In the Spirit* he is in heaven, (iii) Christ's voice has invited him. (iv) All this pertains to the things that *must* be hereafter, i.e. they are decreed, and will come to pass. God's sovereignty is thus underlined. (v) The *throne* is the place of supreme authority. This would be comfort for contemporary Christians, and those to come, who view earthly thrones. The whole book is under this concept of the throne. (NB The word 'heaven' in the Revelation will repay study, cf. 4:6, 12:7, 13:1, where evil is said to be present, and 21:1f where this heaven passes away).

The vision. John's language is careful. He says “like”, “appeared”, “as it were”. The whole matter is in the atmosphere of awe and majesty. Its details are:– There is no *form* given to God (as, say, in Ezek. 1:26–28). He is in luminous splendour (jasper, cornelian). *The rainbow* reminds of covenant mercy (Gen. 9:16). Twenty-four thrones represent delegated (but warranted) authority. *Elders* cannot be stated as others than those who have authority closest to God. *Golden crowns* denote the highest order. *White garments* are of course righteousness and active purity. Flashes of *lightening, thunder, voices* all speak of dynamic majesty. The ceaselessly *burning lamps* constitute the action of light of the Holy Spirit, always with God (cf. Gal. 4:4, John 15:25–26). *The sea of glass* could mean many things but such seems to be purity, through which one must pass to God. So we see, awe-struck, the majesty and holiness of God.

The four living ones. Swete “The four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest and swiftest in animate Nature. Nature, including Man, is represented before the Throne, taking its part in the fulfilment of the Divine will, and worship of the Divine Majesty.”

Six wings (Cf. Isaiah 6:3) are of course for action; “*full of eyes*” means discernment, whilst *never cease* means perpetual praise. God's holiness is their theme, dynamic holiness of course. God's eternal nature of holiness and power is communicated. So much so that the elders are evoked to place their authority before Him (their crowns) and worship Him with the great ascription “Thou art worthy” God's worthiness for honour is seen to be the exercise of His divine will in creating. All creation must worship Him, because He brought it into existence. The great truth is borne along with it, that God had purpose in creation, and evil, however powerful it may appear, has no effective power – not ultimately.

NB In this book, evil is given power to do what it will; otherwise it could not even do evil! Obviously, God utilises this exercise of power for His own purposes.

THE SCROLL AND THE SEVEN SEALS 5:1 – 8:5

CHAPTER FIVE: THE BOOK, THE LAMB AND THE SEALS

Note:- Chapter four speaks of the *Creator*, and heaven's adoration of Him. Chapter five speaks of the Redeemer, and heaven's adoration of Him.

DETAILS: Verses 1–5 speak of the scroll *on* (Gk. “epi”) the right hand of the Creator. The scroll has seven seals, probably all affixed to the outside so that the scroll is not opened until all seals are broken. The scroll obviously is that of history, the total destiny of man and the world. The *strong angel* (cf. 10:1, 18:21) himself is not strong enough to open it. No one was *able* (strong enough) to open or look into the scroll. Verse 4 says no one was *worthy*; so *able*, because *worthy* i.e. of intrinsic moral worth. John wept *much*, i.e. noisily, wailing, comprehending what it signified. (Note:- Men through the centuries have sought the “why” of man's experience, and the being of the universe; none can work it out; none is worthy, or he could!) The import of verse 5 is that The Lion can open it for He has *conquered*. we see that Lion of Judah (cf. Gen. 49:9–10), the Root of David, cf. Isaiah 11:1, (messianic titles) is, in fact the Lamb (v. 6) i.e. the One sacrificed “has conquered” (aorist tense) means the action has happened, i.e. the Cross, hence He is worthy.

Verse 6ff. show the Lamb *standing*, the evidence of the *crucifixion*, present with seven horns – perfection of might and power (cf. Deut. 33:17) – and seven eyes – perfection of discernment, knowledge. The identification with the Spirit as in chs. 2 and 3 is thus repeated (cf. Acts 16:6–7), and the Spirit is sent out into all the earth. For the Lion (Lamb) to take the scroll is for Him to be attested as worthy. Now the four ‘living ones’ and the mighty elders fall down in worship of the Lamb, in the atmosphere of music (the harps) and incense (the gathered prayers of the saints, valued by collection into golden bowls). They sing a *new song*, i.e. this even is unique, and warrants, indeed occasions, a new song. The song itself tells of His victory, and the fruit of it – *the kingdom* which is the theme of the New Testament and the new people of God, all essentially constituted priests to God, designed to reign on the earth which was once the scene of the seeming victory of evil. “Every tribe and tongue and people and nation” takes this Kingdom far beyond Israel as such.

In v. 11f we see first the living ones, the elders and the countless angels saying that the Lamb that *has been slain* is worthy to *receive* (take) what are His, namely, *power*, (I Cor. 1:24), *riches*, (2 Cor. 8:9), *wisdom* (I Cor. 1:24), *strength* (Ephes. 6:10), *honour* (Heb. 2:9), *glory* John 1:14 cf. 17:5). *Blessing*, whilst not used

of Him, is from grateful, redeemed men. All *creation* worships *both* the Creator and the Redeemer. Man's true worship breaks loose at this point, and is fulfilled.

Note:– The breaking of the seals, and the consequences thereof, as also the trumpets and bowls, have one clear point in them, namely that *power is given them* to accomplish what they set out to do, or sent out to do. In no case is the action not within the sovereignty of God. The early Christians who knew Christ to be Lord, understood him to reign at the right hand of God, and knew He was to bring history to its ultimate conclusion, would well understand that the events which faced them were, in fact, in the hands of God. Later generations of Christians in whose time, also, many of these things are coming to pass, are expected to read the same message, and be reassured.

(i) The First Seal 6:1–2

We now reach the point in the Revelation where we wish to interpret.

Our interpretation must be careful, and first we must at least understand what the text is saying before we interpret it. Thus we see:

- (a) that the “living one” gives the command “Come”.
- (b) In response, the horseman proceeds to his appointed task.

It is scarcely likely that Christ is the horseman, since He opens the seal, and is not likely to be under the command of the living one. Whilst the rider seems to be the one of Rev. 19:11, yet also those who follow Him are thus. The bow symbolises warfare (Hab. 3:9, cf. Isaiah 42:2, 49:2–3, Zech. 9:13 and Psa. 45:4–5). The rider precedes other riders whose coming brings tribulation and desolation. Interpretations are: (i) It is Christ going out to conquer. (ii) It is the Gospel–Rider, the Gospel being preached to all the nations before the end comes. (iii) It is the preparatory action for warfare and destruction upon the earth. What we do know is that *he was given a crown*, i.e. victorious power to accomplish the task given, i.e. a task which relates to judgment.

Note:– Readers will now see that the presupposition espoused, i.e. historicist, preterist, futurist, will determine the kind of interpretation. We, necessarily, will have to avoid such. For example, if it is historicist, it is “the Roman prince of an empire that must arise again to fulfil the great prophecies of the book of Daniel” (The Dawn of the Scarlet Age, .p. 74. E. Ainslee). Or, “a mighty imperial ruler after the rapture of the church, who brings under his sway a vast territory in an endeavour to maintain peace, order, and prosperity.” (“Prophecy’s Last Word” F.A. Tatford, p.86). The trouble with any interpretation is that it cannot be undeniably true.

(ii) The Second Seal 6:3–4

The first rider is in the business of conquering by his weapon, but the second on a *bright red horse* (symbolising bloodshed) does not slay so much as men slay once peace is removed. The rider could not remove such peace were it not given to him. Without doubt this relates to Matt. 24:6 (cf. Mark 13:7–8, Luke 21:9–10) – “wars and rumours of wars”. History has seen hideous decimations, but none larger than in this generation. The point of the seal is that such carnage will take place, only under the sovereignty of God.

Note:– When it comes to the martyrs, we find them under the altar in 6:9, following the depredations of the horseman. There is surely great point to them being revealed in this context.

(iii) The Third Seal 6:5–6

The *black horse* signifies famine as the context shows. The famine is not total. Since a denarius is a day's wage a man may, virtually have one loaf of bread for a day's work. The “oil and the wine” are the finer foods, and they would be ample, perhaps only for the richer folk. Note: The situation is not dire. Perhaps “the *beginning* of woes.”

(iv) The Fourth Seal 6:7–8

The fourth horse is “pale” actually pale–green, a dreadful death colour. The Rider, Death, is followed by Hades, the grave, the era and area of that which is beyond death. Sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts are the cause of death to a quarter of the earth, through them. This is a dreadful prospect, and today would mean hundreds of millions. Matt. 24:21–22 speaks of a time of tribulation to Palestine, and Daniel 12:1 of a great tribulation which is coming. These four horses and their riders indicate such times of trouble. This in itself would have armed the Christians with such a knowledge of God's action, that they would not have been bewildered and defeated, but calmly understanding and equipped to take the shock.

Summary of the First Four Seals

We see that the scroll is not yet opened, only the seals. Christ alone was *worthy* to open the scroll, breaking its seals. It is the Slain Lamb, i.e. the Lamb of the Cross, i.e. His “Cross work”. Thus, in some sense the tragedy described under the four seals, relates to the Cross. In it lies the true answer to man's cry for understanding.

(v) The Fifth Seal 6:9–11

The venue is heaven. The participants the martyrs; the special place is ‘under the altar’. The cry is for avengement. The level of love may seem to have dropped from “love your enemies.” However, the righteousness of God and *His power over the universe* is the matter in question. (cf. Gen. 4:10). Luke 18:7 is the point, “Will not God vindicate His elect, who cry to Him day and night?” The inference is “Yes!” Jesus asks “When I come shall I find (this kind of) faith on the earth?”, i.e. “faith in vindication.” “Under the altar” could mean they had been sacrificed on the altar cf. Phil. 2:17. One Jewish writer had said, “Whoever was buried in the land of Israel, was just as if he were buried under the throne of God’s glory.” (Pirque Aboth. qu. IVF Bible Comm. ad.loc.) This altar relates to the Cross. The altar especially spoken of, is that of incense. When a “white robe” is given, we should not think of bodies, nor insubstantial people. White is the colour of victory (cf. “white” and Christ). That more martyrs were to join them, is evidence that martyrdom is a matter in God’s hand. “Rest a little longer” seems to indicate previous state of rest.

(vi) The Sixth Seal 6:12–17

Question? Are verses 12 and 13 literal? If everything is removed, then how can anyone hide in caves and among the rocks of the mountains? The answer is that the whole system shall be shaken, and change its appearance, drastically, dramatically. “Stars” can mean angels, but in this case with vast functional authority. It will be a weird, frightening Cataclysm. The terrible thing is the “wrath of the Lamb”, i.e. the Lamb that has been slain. This cosmic Lord is now the cosmic Judge. The question, “Who can stand before it?” i.e. the wrath and the judgment – for they are one.

The great personages in question are reprehensible because they have rejected the grace of the Cross. (Cf. Isa. 2:12–17, Hosea 10:1–8, Isa. 24:21, 2 Thess. 2:2, Phil. 1:10, I Cor. 1:8, 2 Cor. 1:14, Rom. 2:5, Ephes. 4:30.

CHAPTER SEVEN – AN INTERLUDE 7:1–17

Note:–The Seventh seal is not opened until later (8:1f) and an interlude is seen.

DETAILS:– The four angels restrain the four winds. Zech. 6:1–8 identifies the four coloured (sets of) horses with the winds.

Thus it may be said that the four horse–men restrain the winds on command especially as they are not to harm “the earth, the sea, or the trees” until God’s servants are sealed. An angel, having the seal, seals the 144,000. There are varying views as to the 144,000 (12 x 12) but roughly they are (a) Israel proper, and (b) The church, the true Israel (Jas. 1:7, Matt. 19:28, Luke 22:30, I Peter 1:1, 2:9–10, Titus 2:14, Gal. 2:29). John, in the seven letters, seems to indicate that the true synagogue is Christian, not Jewish (2:9, 3:9). It would seem difficult, whatever, to limit the number to a literal 144,000. Note, the naming of the tribes omits Dan. *God’s seal* is not described. In the Epistles the seal is from, or is, the Holy Spirit, for believers (Ephes. 1:14, 2 Cor. 1:22, Ephes. 4:30).

The great multitude is derived universally, and is oriented to the throne, and the salvation from God and the Lamb. This ascription of salvation brings the entire heavenly host to its knees in adoration. White robes carry the idea of justification, purity and victory, as well as dignity (Gk. stolas). That one of the elders should address John is interesting. The great multitude has come out of *the* great tribulation (affliction). It is clear that many will have been martyred (cf. Luke 21:16,18 cf. Dan. 12:1, Matt. 24:21–22). The picture here is not one of mere sight interest, but represents the triumph of the people of God who have “endured unto the end”. Their power lies in their cleansing through the Cross. The result of this is their eternal access to God, their worship and service of Him, in His temple, perpetually. Nothing shall cause them further discomfort or pain. The Lamb will be their Shepherd. They had thirsted, and now they will not thirst because of the eternal supply of the Living Water, God Himself, supplied by Christ, and God Himself will “wipe away every tear.” How the readers of this book would be reassured, in their suffering, as they read this final conclusion to their (suffering) history.

(vii) The Seventh Seal 8:1–5

Again, it is the Lamb who opens the seal – the last. The silence

is pregnant. We are not told why it is, and assume that it relates to God's awful majesty, and the severity of the judgment about to be poured out. Some see the prayers of the saints with-holding for some time these very judgments. The stage is set with seven angels standing before God with their trumpets, trumpets being much used in apocalyptic (Matt. 24:31, I Cor. 15:52, I Thess. 4:16). *Another* angel goes through a significant procedure. 5:8 says the golden bowls of incense *are* the prayers of the saints. Prayer needs to be understood from John 14:12,13, 15:7, 16:23-24, 26-27, where being in Christ, is knowing Him, doing. His will, and praying in and according to the Father's will. Thus prayer is dynamic. Hence the prayers of the saints, when the fire of the altar (with its dynamic action) is thrown to the earth, become powerful in their effect. It is time for the seven trumpets to peal!

Note: This should warn us against thinking prayer ineffective or making it lethargic. If angels gather prayers, and God uses them, then we should see prayer as dynamic.

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

Hendriksen points out similarities between the seals, the trumpets and the bowls of wrath, and says that (as other elements in the seven sections of the Book, as he sees them) they are not successive but parallel. However, in these three sevens, we see the sufferings which come upon man, and not, as such, upon the church, the people of God.

The First Trumpet (cf. Exodus 9:19, 25)

Here apocalyptic language makes it difficult to know what has really happened. A third of the world, trees and grass is totally affected. Hail and fire mixed with blood is a terrible physical display.

Conclusion: God sends His plagues on sinful men.

The Second Trumpet (cf. Exodus 7:20f)

It is not a mountain, but something like a mountain. It was burning with fire. A third of the land is affected in the first trumpet result, and here a third of the sea, and its inhabitants.

The Third Trumpet (cf. Exodus 15:23-25)

A great star could be physical, if the above trumpet actions are also symbolical. Rivers may have significance (it being suggested

that the star being angelic relates to river worship of deities), or it may be simply physical water contaminated (polluted!). Bitterness has wide connotation (cf. Heb. 12:15 cf. Deut. 29:18). Although wormwood is not lethal yet men die.

The Fourth Trumpet

A third of land, sea, and inland water is affected, now a third of the heavens, and their bodies. So a third of natural light, by day and night. This is not intended to be a scientific treatment, but an apocalyptic one. NB 6:13 is not here contradicted since it is not said all the stars fell. Cf. 12:4 "a third of the stars of heaven."

The Eagle 8:13

Some have translated "an angel", but it is an eagle. Often signifies disaster (cf. Matt. 24:28). Here it prophesies three woes although only two are actually described (9:12, 11:14). Some suggest the third is the descent to earth of Satan (12:12).

CHAPTER NINE

The Fifth Trumpet 9:1-12

The falling of the *star* in verse 1 warns against accepting as too literal, the stars of 6:13 and 8:10,12. The effects of the trumpets have reached heaven, and now action there causes a star to fall to earth. The star is a person, (cf. Isa. 14:12-17, Luke 10:18, Job 38:7). If the star is Satan – and it could well be – then we ought to remember that he is under God's control. The bottomless pit (cf. Luke 8:31 "the abyss") Rev. 9:2,11, 20:3. The abyss contains all that is evil and frightening, and the key indicates that it is in God's hand, as giving the key to the *star* signifies God's control. The scorpion-like locusts can be understood as literally in that form, or simply demonic forces under apocalyptic description. Whatever they are, they are fearful, their attacks bringing excruciating pain and lasting for an ordained period, rather than immediately being relieved.

It is to be noted, that a *scorpion sting* is one of the most excruciating pains known by mankind. *Seals*. The plague of the "locusts" is not directed against (a) nature, (b) the people of God, but (c) the godless. In Ephes. 1:13-14 and 4:30 the saints are sealed by the Spirit, and in 2 Tim. 2:19 "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His." God's people are sealed, and this is not limited to the

144,000. The *locusts* cannot be thought of as natural, but as demonic; not as a rabble, but as headed up by one (Abaddon, Hebrew, and Apollyon, Gk.) who is “the Destroyer”. Luke 11:18 speaks of Satan’s kingdom. In Matt. 25:41, 2 Cor. 12:7 and Rev. 12:9 we see Satan has angels. Satan takes many forms in the Revelation, so this may well be him.

NB v. 12 speaks of one woe being passed, and two to come; the latter two not being separated or defined as such.

The Sixth Trumpet

When the woe is described, we can see why the eagle cried (8:13). The invasion of supernatural “locusts” brought anguish to men; the invasion by the innumerable horse-creatures was to bring death to a third of mankind, whereas former woes related to a third of the earth, the sea, the waters and the sky; now it is to a third of mankind. A solitary voice comes from the golden altar (of incense) from under which the martyrs had cried (6:10) and on which prayer was offered (8:3-5). It appears, then, that prayer has called forth this invasion of man. Is this, then, in the interests of ultimate righteousness? We cannot say, but we may surmise. The released angels, are of course prepared specially for the precise hour (cf. Gal. 4:4. NB Only angels chained are as in Jude 6, and 2 Peter 3:7). The number of demonic creatures is 200,000. The smoke, fire, and brimstone are three different plagues (v.18) and are beyond the natural plagues we know. This dreadful catastrophe to man, does not cause him to repent, as the remaining two thirds insists on continuing in evil. As in Gal. 5:19-20 all the fleshly works relate to one another.

CHAPTER TEN

(Note: from 10:1 – 11:15 there is an interlude before the next trumpet).

Not an angel, but a *mighty angel*. Not Christ because this one swears by the Creator. An important fact is that he has one leg on the land, and one on the sea (2,5,8.) His voice causes seven thunders whose message is not to be known by other than John, but *it is known by John* (cf. Deut. 29, 2 Cor. 12:4). It may be for John’s own benefit, seeing the thunders said something. Also John is to take the scroll and eat it, and since it is to be in his mouth it means he is to utter it, surely (cf. Ezek. 2:9-10, 3:1-4, 4,14). It would seem that this relates to both land and sea, i.e. the entire world.

What is most significant is verse 7 “that in the days of the seventh trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God as he announced to his servants the prophets, *should be fulfilled.*” i.e. that history is coming to its fulfilment. So much would appear to make history seem otherwise. God’s historic plan is of course shown in passages like Ephes. 1:3f, 1:10, 3:8f, etc. In the light of this, John’s eating of the scroll makes sense, seeing he is to prophesy to many nations, peoples, tongues and kings. NB See the word “again” (v.11).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

(i) Verses 1–14

(a) Verses 1–2

Is the temple literal or symbolical? If it is symbolical, then it symbolises that which is real. What is the reality? Many answers are given:– (a) It is a literal temple, to be rebuilt. (b) It is the actual temple at the time of the Romans prior to AD 70. (c) It is the church (cf. Ephes. 2:20 cf. 2 Cor. 6:16, 1 Peter 2:5). (d) It is the Jewish people. If it is the latter, then John is saying God will preserve His people. Thus would be in accordance with Romans chs. 9–11. What then is the court outside the temple? Note the temple is really the shrine or the holy part, containing the altar of sacrifice, the holy place and the holy of holies. Whether it is the church the Jews, or the “true Israel”, the fact will be that the true remnant will be preserved no matter how much the generality of it seems to be trodden down.

(b) Verses 3–13. The Two Witnesses

We come now into difficult interpretation. The witnesses are called (a) the Olive trees, (b) Lampstands. The olive trees are seen in Zech. 4:12–13 where they feed the seven-branched candelabra, with their oil. They are called “the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” Thus Rev. 11:4 “These stand before the Lord of the earth”, identifies them. Are they then, Joshua and Zerubbabel? Malachi 4:1–5 speaks of a day of judgment, and mentions Moses, whilst predicting the coming of Elijah. The Gospels indicate that *in principle* Elijah has come in John the Baptist, but this does not exhaust the prophecy, necessarily. Both Moses and Elijah had powerful utterance (cf. Jeremiah, Jer. 5:14), and (a) Elijah commanded the skies and they rained not for 3.5 years (Luke 4:25, James 5:17) Rev. 11:3, 6 (3.5 years), and (b) Moses commanded the waters to turn to blood and plagues to come on the earth. If they are not Moses and Elijah they are in the ‘spirit’ of the same two. The point is they prophecy (cf. 10:11) for 3.5 years (v. 3)

Three and a Half Years i.e. “a time (1 year) and times (2 years) and half a time (0.5 year)” = 1260 days (11:3), Daniel’s timing – 7:25, 12:7 and in Rev. 12:6 as here 11:3. It is the same time as Daniel says will be in the treading down of the city by the Gentiles, as here for the prophesying of the two witnesses and the woman’s stay in the wilderness, when the beast exercises authority.

Their death is caused by *the beast* that ascends from the bottomless pit. The almost casual use of the term “the beast” seems to imply that he was known. In Daniel 7 there are four beasts, so that a beast representing an empire was not a new thought. Related to one of the beasts and a “little horn” the saints of the Most High were worn out, being given into the beast’s hand for “a time, two times, and half a time” (3.5 years, corresponding with this matter). This time of tribulation is mentioned in Mark 13:14, Matt. 24:15) and “if the Lord had not shortened the days, no human being would be saved.” (Mark 13:20). Whoever, whatever the beast (whom we meet in 13:1f.) he seems to have power to kill these two most powerful prophets who have ever lived. They lie in the “great city” which some would call Jerusalem, seeing that is where Christ was crucified, but may mean the city of this world, seeing it is in it, not simply Jerusalem, that Christ was crucified. All are rejoicing to see these terrible two destroyed. However, they are vindicated, as resurrected, they are called to heaven, and judgment comes upon the city, a tenth destroyed, and the remainder forced to give glory to the God of heaven.

Verse 14 tells of the final woe to come.

(ii) The Seventh Trumpet 11:15–19

“The third woe is soon to come” v. 14. Yet far from a woe coming – unless the triumph of God is a ‘woe’ to the defeated powers – it is a glorious triumph. The kingdom of this world has become that of God and Christ, and He shall reign for ever. The sovereignty of the world has passed over definitively to God. Not that it was not always there; but now, in history, it is unmistakably shown. This is an actual turning point, although some see this more as proleptic, i.e. in the future but *sealed in the present*. The twenty-four elders are again seen at worship. The text of their song is the triumph of God. A reckoning is now in process, indeed has come to a climax. “The nations raged” points to Psalm 2:1, speaking of the eternal battle between this world and the Creator. Now judgment has come to them, and reward to the ones patiently enduring in action for the Kingdom of God. “Destroying the destroyers of the earth.” These latter are the ones we have seen previously in the seals and the trumpets. The *process* of this judgment in its execution is about to take place, and is seen in the chapters following.

Verse 19 shows the shrine or temple opened, and the very ark (in the holy of holies) can be seen; not the ark made on earth but the real and heavenly ark. The ark relates to the covenant, and

here of course the new (or eternal covenant). The heavenly phenomena of lightning, etc. speak of dynamic action. In the ultimate there will be no temple, as in chs. 21–22.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Dragon, the Woman and Her Seed (12:1–17)

(Morris, “The Seven Significant Signs”)

Here are 7 featured from 12:1 to 14:20, the woman, the dragon, the man-child, Michael, Israel, the beast out of the sea, the beast out of the earth. So another seven appears although it is not described as such.

In ch. 12 we have hindsight in the woman, who seems undoubtedly to be Israel. One sees the moon as the reflected light of the sun which is the full revelation, thus the moon is the Old Covenant, and the Sun the New. The stars (12) represent Israel (cf. Genesis 37:9). Israel was always longing for the delivery of Messiah, and accordingly, is in anguish. Prior to the birth of Messiah there is rebellion in heaven, the dragon (Satan) draws into his following, a third of the angelic powers. He has immense powers as the horns represent might, and the crowns authority. The dragon seeks to destroy Messiah as He is born. Messiah is delivered from the dragon, and in accordance with Psalm 2:9 reigns at God’s right hand. We see that the woman is first Israel, and then “the true Israel of God”, i.e. the church. The 1260 days in which she is in the *prepared place* is surely the *place* and *time* of her witness (cf. 11:3). God’s protecting hand is over her. Some see the slaughter of the innocents related to Satan’s abortive attempt to destroy the child Jesus.

Verse 7 speaks of a conflict in heaven. The *time factor* in apocalyptic is difficult to discern. Does this refer to a pre-time struggle, or to one in history, or one yet to be. The answer lies partly in Luke 10:17ff. where the exorcism of demons by the disciples was the casting down of Satan. We know Michael to be the warrior angel (Dan. 10:13, 21, 12:1) and Jude 9 and Daniel 12:1 seem to make him the angel of the resurrection. Here as leader of the angelic hosts he unseats Satan and his angels. The point of v.10 surely is that *the kingdom of God has come* (cf. 11:16). Satan’s accusations have been silenced. The way of victory is the cross (i.e. faith in it) and the conquerors here seem to be the martyrs – “loved not their lives unto death” – who figure so largely in this book. Heaven is cleansed (a cause for joy) but the earth now faces the full impact of his wrath, or as other places have it “the great tribulation.” (Matt. 24:15–22).

It is the woman, God’s people (here the church) that is now attacked. The “wings of the eagle: can be understood by Exodus

19:4, Deut. 32:11–12, but we cannot always be sure of what is meant. The *fact* is clear – she has supernatural aid to protect her. The dragon (symbolised by Egypt) is unable to destroy her by the strange use of water. The offspring of the woman are Christian believers, and their marks are (a) they keep God’s commandments, and (b) they hold to the testimony of Christ, i.e. they are one with what He did, and was. They are consistent with that. Note:– v.17 (b) shows in some text that John stands on the sea shore, but the better text that the dragon stood there.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

(a) The Beast from the Sea (13:1–13)

The dragon is Satan, and the beast is one with him, indeed is no less than satanic in his operations. Just as in 2 Thess. 2:3 “the man of lawlessness” is “the son of perdition”, i.e. Satan incarnate, so here the beast is the same. Cf. 1 John 2:18 where he is called “antichrist”. This dreadful evil rises out of the sea. If we mean a literal sea, he would be terrifying enough, but if a moral sea of evil, then more frightening. Cf. Rev. 21:1 “the sea was no more” i.e. no resort for evil. Swete says, “The seething cauldron of national and social life out of which the great historical movements of the world arise.” In Dan. 7:2–7 we see a beast, but here the four beasts seem to constitute the one. We are reminded of 12:12 that Satan has come down to *earth* and *sea*. The *sea* has this beast, and in v.11f. the *earth* has the other beast. The essence of the beast is: Its power comes from the dragon (v.2). It has a parody of Christ’s death and resurrection in the *Wound* and the *healing*. (Some see this as Rome wounded, but ultimately recovering, either as the “church” or the “empire”). Its power captures man’s mind and loyalty. Its action is for forty–two months (cf. 11:3, 12:6) of persecution of the saints, defeating them. It has authority (“was given”) over all inhabitants of the world who do not belong to God.

Note:– Blasphemy. The beast utters such, but it is his seeming usurpation of God’s position which is the total blasphemy, i.e. as though God were not there, nor in power.

Verse 10 indicates that the saint who is taken captive, under this regime must accept the fact. The second half of the verse may mean (a) if he resists with the sword he will be slain (cf. Matt. 26:52), or (b) He who evilly slays with the sword will be slain, i.e. the martyr will be vindicated. Whatever the matter, the saints will have to endure unto the end, patiently.

(b) The Beast from the Earth (13:11–18)

It is interesting to note that in 19:20 and 20:10 this beast is called “the false prophet”. It arises from the earth (NB in Dan. 7:3 and 4 beasts arise out of the sea, in 7:17, out of the earth). This beast is not out to do anything but serve the first. It would seem, that in some sense he is a counterpart to Christ, corresponding in his relationship to the beast as the true Son to the True Father. He leads men into worship of the beast, and executes signs and wonders to do it. Just as God’s people have His seal, so these of the evil counterfeit have his, i.e. the 666

number, without which none can buy or sell. Note that there is no pretence in bringing the image to life. It “was given him”, as all evil power is given by God in accordance with His sovereignty and purpose. See Mark 13:22, and 2 Thess. 2:9.

The number 666 naturally enough has many explanations. It has been referred to Caesar Nero, to Caligula, and in more modern times to the dictators of different eras. The explanation lies in the values of letters, and the letters in a name. However, 666 is that which fall short of 777 (seven representing perfection). Thus it is said to be “the number of man”, rather than “the number of a man.” Difficult to solve, we should not be diverted from the nature of this dangerous beast.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE LAMB ON MT. ZION (vs. 1-5)

On Mt. Zion is *the* Lamb (not a Lamb). Mt. Zion, as seen in Joel 2:32, is the place of victory. In Psalm 2:6 it is similarly the place of victory, with strong Messianic reference. In Hebrews 12:22 (cf. Gal. 4:26) it is in heaven as probably indicated here. The 144,000 {see 7:1-8} are marked with the name of the Lamb and of the Father, as in 7:3 they have the seal of God on their forehead. Some see this as a proleptic vision, a foretaste of 21:1ff. where the Holy City (Mt. Zion) has come down from heaven, i.e. the eschatological victory. It is scarcely likely that it is another 144,000 and as we observed in ch. 7 would indicate the full true Israel of God.

The “voice from heaven” seems to be that of Christ (cf. 1:15 “the sound of many waters”) and is further described as being very loud (as loud thunder) and like the sound of many harps. Those before the throne sing the new *song*, and the 144,000 can also learn it, seeing they do not *belong* to the earth, i.e. they are not “of it”. The virginity of these should be seen (a) in the light of directions to Israel’s army for holy war (Deut. 20, 23:9-10, I Sam. 21:5, 2 Sam. 11:11), i.e. that men should be occupied with war alone, and (b) in the light of true, inner, spiritual virginity, as “the pure in heart” (Matt. 5:6, cf. 2 Cor. 11:2). This makes sense when they are called “first fruits” because such were “holy to the Lord” (Exodus 23:19, Neh. 10:35, Prov. 3:9, cf. James 1:18 “a kind of first fruits”). Without doubt they are God’s special ones. Some see them as the martyrs. Whatever they are they unquestioningly follow Him, in service.

The Harvest of the Earth Vs. 6-12

(i) Three Angels Proclaim Judgment vs. 6-12

Angel One

The angel is seen in mid-heaven, with “an everlasting Gospel” i.e. not “the everlasting Gospel”. However Rom. 1:1 lacks “the” also. It is suggested that this is a Gospel “at the end”, but why then “everlasting?” It seems best to think of it as a *universal message* (see v. 6) but at this time promising the climaxing of history in judgment. It is proper to see this Gospel in Acts as a command, all are to repent (Acts 10:42, 17:30-31). Judgment has now come; let all submit in repentance to Him.

Angel Two

The announcement that Babylon is fallen is again proleptic, (cf. 16:19, 17:5, 18:2, 10, 21). Babylon in Scripture stands for man's kingdom and his proud rebellion against God. The message here given is that she deserves her downfall, having defiled the nations, and mainly that she is fallen – an encouragement to the Christians who witness her evil.

Angel Three

The “loud voice” infers universal proclamation. There is universal warning against identification with the beast and its image, and the mark of the same; the outcome is eternal punishment, in terrible terms, because of God's holy wrath. The picture is of warning, but also to spur on believers to remain faithful.

(ii) The Dead who die in the Lord v. 13

Another of the beatitudes. It is uttered by a voice from heaven. The Spirit also reiterates the beatitude – an unusual thing in the Revelation. “They may rest from their labours” cf. Hebrews 4:10. To have finished the works God has given us (cf. chs. 2 and 3) means the plan of God has been completed. 2 Cor. 5:10 shows that the full reward comes to those who have done this.

(iii) The reaper on the cloud vs. 14–16

It would seem clear enough that the one seated on the cloud (the glory manifestation) is Messiah (cf. Daniel 7:13, Matt. 26:62ff., Acts 1:9, etc.). It may seem strange that the angel should issue a pre-emptory command, but it is simply the communication of the angel for God, at His time, and is accepted as such. The sickle of course is the symbol of judgment. Matt. 13:24–30 and 36–42, shows clearly that God always has a harvest growing. Here it is reaped. The statement “fully ripe” is significant because it shows that what has seemed to be evil operating in its own right, is only evil coming to full fruitage, now to be judged. That is, God, in all, is sovereign.

(iv) The vintage vs. 17–20

Joel 3:13 (cf. Isaiah 63:1–6) “Put ye in the sickle for the harvest is ripe; come, get you down; for the press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great.” Thus the angel from the altar (God's presence and holy power) who has *power*

Over fire, i.e. judgment, commands the angel with the sharp sickle to reap the grapes. This is the judgment of wrath upon the evil, and is surely intended to show the people of God that God is sovereign in His wrath. *The city* is not easy to define, but since the judgment happens outside of it, it is reasonable to assume that God's people are in it. Some see the action as a literal battle, but all must see it as that action of God in judgment which is to be feared, so that men ought to flee to God, and saints to trust Him for the final outcome of history.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES 15:1 – 16:21

This fifteenth chapter clearly shows that there are seven more plagues (v.1) which are to be delivered by seven angels in order to complete the wrath of God. Some see the blood of ch.14 as that of the saints of God, as in 17:6 Babylon is drunk with the blood, which in ch. 14 is wine. Whatever this may be the wrath of God is not complete, at least not from this vantage point, and it would seem (v.2) that the “sea mingled with fire” is the same sea of 4:6, with this difference, the fire, which could stand for judgment that has come. Anyway the sea is not quiescent. If those standing by that sea are the martyrs, then their martyrdom was what overcame the beast (cf. 12:10f.) and now they are equipped for God's praise, as their harps signify. Thus they sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. These could be two songs, or one, or two joined. The song of Moses (Exodus 15:1f) was that of liberation from Egypt, and theirs is surely of liberation from the Beast, by the Lamb, the New Covenant song of liberation. In a sense, both songs or sections are one. Notice in the song the sheer joy of the singers at God's judgment/s. In the song we see the significant things of *deeds, ways, the Name, holiness* and *revealed judgments*. These harpers have discerned the true nature of God, *the King of the ages!* The glory of the song is that “All nations shall come and worship thee!” (Cf. Ephes. 1:10, Phil 2:11, Psalm 86:9, Isaiah 2:4, Mal. 1:11).

Verse 5 combines the two ideas of the nomadic (moving) nature of the “tent of meeting” with the substantial idea of the “temple”. Both are one, here. However, the sanctuary is opened and the seven angels emerge. Typically they are pure and represent God, being dressed as was Christ in Ch. 1. The word “bowls” is the same as used for the bowl of incense (5:8), and it may be that it is the prayers of the saints which is going to bring this kind of judgment. However, they are filled with God's wrath. The smoke that fills the temple, is of course God's glory, as in the tent of meeting with Moses, and as with Isaiah in the temple. All of this continues the thought of God's sovereignty, and is a comfort to those who read this book.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The judgments, or bowls of wrath poured out, have certain similarities with those of the seven plagues of Egypt, and indeed with the seven judgments that come through the trumpets. However, these judgments are in the nature of final punitive judgments, and they are not just directed at the environment (as the judgments of the four trumpets) but at man, and in particular those who relate to the beast. So in **Bowl One** foul and evil sores come upon those who have the mark of the beast and worship its image.

In the **Second Bowl** everything living in the seas dies, as it becomes like blood. This time it is not a *third* of the sea (cf. 8:9).

In the **third bowl** all the rivers and fresh waters become as blood (cf. 8:10–11). Without something to drink what will happen to man? The words of the angel indicate that this is righteous judgment for the evil shedding of the blood of the saints and prophets. Verse 7 is unusual “And I heard the altar cry...” In 8:5 we know the altar is connected with the prayers of the saints. It is interesting to see the theme – time and again – of the vindication of God’s saints, as also of His plan.

The Fourth Bowl constitutes scorching by fire of the sun. The impenitence of men under punishment, shows their incorrigible wills, since the purpose of the judgment was that they “repent and give Him glory.” We see punishment progressively coming upon those who oppose God and espouse the beast and so cause suffering to the saints.

In the **Fifth Bowl** darkness is the terrible plague, and yet no change comes in the hearts of the sufferers. Their obstinate hatred of God is shown in their cursing.

The Sixth Bowl relates to the great River Euphrates, its water being dried up. Jeremiah 5:38 refers to this as a prelude to Babylon’s doom. Walvoord (op. cit. ad. loc.) sees the River as the eastern boundary of the (then) Roman Empire, as also the eastern boundary of the Land promised to Abraham by God (cf. Gen. 15:18, Deut. 1:7, 11:24, Joshua 1:4). Who the “kings from the east” are is the source of many conjectures, and since John does not follow this up, neither may we. These kings will conquer that which is west of the Euphrates. Verse 13 shows a foul trinity of spirits issuing from the foul trinity of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. Their froglike appearance is meant to disgust the reader, since they are called “foul”. We are reminded of Psalm 2:lf. (cf. Acts 4:25f.) where the rulers of the earth set themselves against God. The evil spirits go out to marshal man’s forces against God. The day-to-come, however, is not the day of evil, but the day of *God the Almighty*.

An *interjection* in the manner of 3:3, 11 is then given by Christ. It must surely relate to this day of God the Almighty,

the day when every saint will need to be at his best, and not be ashamed. Verse 16 shows that the world forces are assembled at Armageddon. Megiddo is the Hebrew word corresponding to the Greek word Armageddon, and may mean “Mount of Slaughter”. Geographically, it relates to the Mount of Megiddo, located adjacent to the plain of Megiddo in the west and the large plain of Esdraelon to the northeast. It was in this area that such battles of the Old Testament take place, eg. that of Barak and the Canaanites of Judges 4 and the victory of Gideon over the Midianites in Judges 7. Here also occurred the deaths of Saul and Josiah, so that it has many associations of death and strife. The valley of Edraelon is 14 miles long and 20 miles wide. 14:20 however, seems to indicate the length of the Holy Land (200 miles) is what is occupied by the armies.

The question is, “What happens when these armies gather against God? The action, as we have observed, reminds us of Psalm 2:1f and a flashback to Rev. 11:17–18 shows they are ultimately defeated. If we look at Rev. 19:11f espec. v. 19f. we see their defeat. Here, however, the battle has not begun. The action is suspended as the seventh angel pours his bowl, and the great *voice* comes out of the *temple* avowing “It has occurred”. Then there is repeated what we have seen in ch. 4:5, 8:5, 11:19, i.e. the signs (and action) of judgment. The *great earthquake* (cf. 6:12, 11:13,19) seems greater than before. The *great city* is of course the world system, Babylon, the capital of the Beast. Splitting into parts means the kingdom is divided, ruined. The other elements of the world-system are involved in this ruin (v.19), and Babylon is made to drink the cup of the wrath of God. The chaos and the judgment is so heavy as to draw out repentance, but here there is none, but, if possible, even deeper impenitence as men curse God in His judgment (cf. vv. 10–11).

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Introduction

From now on we see the judgments which have attended the seals, the woes, the trumpets, and the bowls. In some cases they get successively worse, but the slim of them is God's full judgment against evil, against those who seek to destroy the saints, His Kingdom and His universe. These evil powers have been given certain authority, and ability to exercise power. They are, however, moving to their doom. Each form and force of evil is to be destroyed. The action occupies chs. 17–20.

The Mystery of Babylon

One title of this chapter, in one commentary is "The destruction of ecclesiastical Babylon." Certain it is that for every reality, there is a foul counterpart, eg. God is *Creator*, Satan is the Destroyer. God is Truth; Satan goes out to deceive. The church is the true woman; the evil woman is the evil counterpart. The city of God is pure; the unholy city is Babylon. So the description could continue. It seems that Satan's jealousy would have him build up everything that God has in reality, so that he may emulate, and, if possible, surpass Him. However, we do not need to limit Babylon to an ecclesiastical connotation, eg. Rome – its reach is wider than that.

We noticed in 14:8 and 16:19 that John had introduced the subject of Babylon, but now we face the subject fully. The judgments of the seven bowls were not final, as more judgment was yet to come. It is interesting then that one of these angels portrays the scarlet woman, and points to her end. It is also significant that it is the Spirit who takes John into the wilderness. Introduced as "the great harlot" (porne) we remember the scriptures that fornication and adultery are, in fact, idolatry. In this case, the adulterous relationship relates to constant traffic with this evil woman.

It is in the *desert* (v. 3) that John sees the woman. It could be that she is in the desert, if so this would be a counterfeit of the true woman in the desert (cf. ch. 12:6, 14). However, what he sees is the woman on a scarlet beast, the colour, of course, typifying both adultery and glaring evil. Likewise, the woman is in scarlet. The seven heads and horns denote authorities. It is to be noted that Jerusalem (Isaiah 1:21, Jer. 2:20, 3:1, Ezek. 16:15 etc.), Tyre (Isaiah 23:17), Nineveh (Naham 3:4) are all spoken of as being harlots. Here Babylon is dressed as a harlot, for such

had their names on their foreheads. She is sumptuous in her possessions, and is the "mother of harlots", i.e. of such cities (and more) as we have just described. This helps us to see that Babylon is the great world power of human activity, however it may manifest itself.

Verse 6 reminds us of Jer. 51 from which it is taken. Especially v. 7 where Babylon is "golden cup in the Lord's hand"; in other words the golden cup she has is, in reality, the action of the Lord. It is a judgment on the nations, although here it is simply the evil of the nations.

John *marvels* when he sees her, because she is drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs (i.e. the prophets); he is marvelling because she is not destroyed – that God allows such carnage through her. The angel explains why there is no need to marvel. The mystery is in God's hand.

Verses 8–14 are an explanation of the mystery, showing that the woman is seated (situated) on seven hills, i.e. the seven horns of the beast, who are in fact seven kings, five of whom are gone, one is, and one to come. The beast, whilst constituted of these will *be* (not have) an eighth king. The ten heads of the beast are ten kings who have temporary reigning, alongside the beast to whom they will give their authority. The kings will make war on the Lamb but be defeated. The Lamb is "King of kings and Lord of lords" and so cannot be defeated.

As to who the seven kings are, and the ten kings, there can be certain reasonable explanation since Rome had seven hills, and (under one explanation) seven kings. Rome would reasonably be Babylon, seeing its commerce absorbed most nations of the earth. However, Babylon also represents all the city-principle (and cities) of the world system, and should not be limited to Rome however much Rome typifies this system.

Vs. 15–18 further explain Babylon showing that the waters (cf. v.1) on which she is seated, constitute the peoples of the world system. The ten kings will hate her and destroy her through the beast, for she has dominated the earth.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: BABYLON'S DOOM SONG

This chapter is so filled with events and voices (messages) and songs, as to tax the commentator. They may be summarised as follows:-

(i) First voice vs. 1-3

An angel, causing brilliant light over the earth announces Babylon's fall. Equivalent Old Testament scriptures are Isaiah 21:9-10 "Babylon is fallen!" Isaiah 34:11f (although referring to Edom, on the *principle* as Babylon), and Jer. 50:39. This message anyway, speaks of Babylon being thus judged because of her impure action with the nations of the earth who are, in effect, the created people of God and belong to Him. She has committed adultery with them. We might thus call Babylon "the evil principle of the city." (See Jer. 25:15, 27).

(ii) Second voice vs. 4-8

Obviously another angel, although it is not said as such. There is first a warning for God's people to have no part in Babylon's system, seeing she is doomed, otherwise they will share also in her doom. Her own evil (the cup) will be her own doom - doubled. Scriptures which relate to this passage are Isa. 48:20, Jer. 50:8, 51:9, Psalm 137:8, Isa. 47:8-9. She who prides herself on perpetual security will suddenly find herself in the judgment of plagues, pestilence, famine, and fire, much to her horror. This, of course, shows that God does vindicate Himself, and the martyrs - the prophets - who had asked Him concerning this very judgment.

(iii) The Lament of the Kings and Merchants and Seagoing People vs. 9-19

The kings had committed fornication with Babylon means that they had had social, and commercial intercourse with her, although in fact they had not directly related to the beast as such, but through her were joined to its purposes. Their sin was in not relating to the true Creator. They had received from her what they had wanted. The kings of course relate to the merchantmen who now mourn Babylon's loss since she represents the source of the supplies *which the world requires*. Now their source has been cut off. Likewise the shipmasters and seagoing folk. They mourn deep their loss equally.

(iv) A Doxology for judgment v.20

Note:- The RSV includes this verse with the lament of the seagoing folk, but it does not seem congruous. It is an ejaculation, almost certainly by John, who knows the suffering of the saints, apostles and prophets who are now vindicated for, as John says to them, "God has given judgment for you against her!" Thus the cry of Rev. 6:10 has its true answer.

(v) The actual destruction of Babylon vs. 21-24

The graphic demonstration of Babylon's fall, by the angel is then described as the cessation of all the delightful forms of life she had known. The reason for this judgment is given, that is, because Babylon had deceived all kings, nations and persons by her sorceries, and it was she who had slain the prophets and saints. In accordance with Luke 11:50 (cf. Matt. 23:35) she thus meets her judgment.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

(i) A thanksgiving for the judgment of Babylon vs. 1–5

In this section, which really follows on the theme of ch. 18 there is great praise in heaven for the defeat of Babylon, but its real purpose is to bring a doxology to God for His just and righteous being in judging “the great harlot” for her fornication, and for her shedding of the blood of God’s servants. They claim that the judgment is unceasing, that is, that Babylon will never escape. In this context all creatures everywhere are called upon to praise God. This call is a voice from the throne.

(ii) The marriage of the Lamb vs. 6–10

This is undoubtedly one of the greatest, if not the greatest, event in the plan of God. Acts 20:28, and Ephes. 5:25 show that the Bride of Christ was something planned before the world, and certainly before Pentecost. It has taken all history for Christ to court and win, and sanctify His bride! The Old Testament spoke of God as the husband, and Israel as the Bride (cf. Isa. 54:5–6, 62:5, Jer. 31:32, Ezek. 16:18ff) and in Hosea the theme is greatly developed. Hosea 2:19 f. has “I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in steadfast love and in mercy” In the New Testament in Ephesians the church is the Bride. She is this in Rev. 21:1f and so on. Verse 6 here states, in fact, “The Lord our God...has entered on His reign”, and so the Bride is now ready, her “fine linen, bright and pure” bring “the righteous deeds of the saints”. The fullest bliss is to be present at this great event. The marriage feast is referred to in the Gospels (see Matt. 22:3, Luke 14:17), and Jesus speaks of these as the Messianic Banquet (cf. Matt. 8:11, 26:29, etc.). Those invited are of course the saints who are anyway present in the Bride.

Verse 10 is a significant verse. It is strange that John should fall down to worship the angel, but the context of the announcement of the Marriage Supper must deeply overawe John, notwithstanding his other experiences. The angel forbids the worship, and places himself on the same level as those who “hold (have) the testimony of Jesus”. Thus he is in the same prophetic ministry. It is difficult to define “The testimony of Jesus” for it could mean (a) the testimony Jesus gives or (b) the testimony given to Jesus, or (c) the constant witness of Jesus as He goes on working, although it would include what he had done, and will do, as well.

(iii) The coming of Christ vs. 11–16

Whilst the announcement concerning the marriage is made, the actual marriage does not yet take place. In fact many announcements made, on various occasions, do not, at that point eventuate. They are proleptic in nature. Here, however, we see something actually happen. Heaven opens – and this is in fact for the first time – and Messiah comes forth. The white of the horse symbolises primarily, victory. The Rider here is not to be identified with the one of 6:2, for he has only a *stephanos* (wreath of victory) but this one has crown which are diadems – symbols of kingship and authority. His war is not as that of men whose conflicts are for self-aggrandisement. He is judging and doing righteousness by such war. His name of authority is known to Himself, as befits deity. In accordance with Isaiah 63:1–6 (cf. Isa. 13:4, 31:4, Ezek. 38–39, Joel 3, Zech. 14:3) He comes in judgment. The armies of heaven who assist Him could be the saints but are more probably the angels and holy ones (cf. Zech. 14:5, Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26, I Thess. 3:13, 2 Thess. 1:7). Some, however, see these as the martyrs. The sharp sword of v. 15 refers to Isaiah 11:4, cf. 2 Thess. 2:8 (cf. Heb. 4:12). The “rod of iron” relates to Psalm 2:9 (cf. Rev. 2:27). The wine press is the wrath of God (cf. 14:19). His name – “King of kings and Lord of lords” is to show that none can stand against Him and His authority.

(iv) The Battle of Christ and Antichrist vs. 17–21

We saw in 16:12–16 that demonic forces had gathered the kings of the earth to do battle with God. There is yet another conflict to come as is seen in 20:7–10, but this will be Satan directly conflicting with God, whereas here he does it by means of the beast and the false prophet.

The action is announced by an angel who can be seen (in the sun), and he announces victory, inviting the birds of prey to eat the flesh of the defeated (cf. Ezek. 38–39, Isa. 56:9). The actual battle is not described but simply the defeat of the beast and the false prophet who was cast into the lake of fire (the second death). The sword slays the rest, and it is well to remember that this sword is not physical, but the sword which is both the Word and Judgment. Note, too, that men of all gradations are involved in opposition to God, and that in their defeat they are humiliated. This may well be said to be the vindication of the martyrs.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Note:—This chapter is one which occasions more debate than any other, and its interpretations fall into:—

(a) Post-millennial

This says that Christ will not return until the Kingdom of God has been established by the church in human history. Thus the millennium is the golden age, after which Christ will return to inaugurate the “end things.”

(b) A-Millennial

There is, in fact, not a millennium as others understand it, but the events described here are a recapitulation of events already described from other vantage points. Some a-millennialists see an actual millennium, but this is in heaven, for it is the martyrs who reign, and not others. They see Satan bound in accordance with Matt. 12:29, Luke 10:18, this having been all the time, so that the millennium accords with the history constantly here described.

(c) Pre-millennialism

This speaks of Christ coming and binding Satan and setting up a millennial reign. It has two variations:

- i) *Dispensationalism* which relates the events of the Book of the Revelation to Israel, and its restoration
and
- ii) that understanding which relates the events of the Book to *the church* and its action.

In this commentary we will not come down on the side of any, but simply describe the events as they are put forward.

Binding of Satan, the Resurrection, and the Millennial Kingdom vs. 1–6

The “then” seems to indicate some continuity. The Beast, the false prophet, the worshippers of the image are captured, the latter destroyed whilst the former are held in bondage, in the suffering of the second death (the lake of fire). Thus peace has been won, or at least is secured, when Satan is, here, bound. His binding

does not seem to be incongruous, because, according to righteous judgment, this is what he deserves for raising up, fostering and inciting the evil caused by the beast and the prophet. In 9:6 we saw that an angel had the key and opened this abyss to release the demonic locusts. The *binding* of satan can be read in the light of Mark 3:27 where Satan is bound by the breaking down of his power. Also in Jude 6 fallen angels are bound. The question arises, “Is this binding so complete that the bound one has *no action*, or is this simply setting ‘bounds’ to his action?” However, the purpose of the binding is that he should deceive the nations no more, at least not in this period. Rev. 20:7f. shows he will yet deceive the nations. It is difficult to work out the time of 1000 years, even more so if we see 2 Peter 3:8, but it does seem for a period or session of some kind.

This period is taken to be a time of bliss, and to fit with the predictions of, say, Isaiah 11:1–10, and other similar passages. There is no description given of the nature of this reign, except that the *martyrs* “came to life”. Others reigned on thrones. We are not told whether this is on the earth or simply *over* the earth, but we do know they share (a) judgment, and (b) Christ’s reign, and the martyrs too reigned with Christ. This would seem to be the *reward* of the martyrs (6:9–11) who had rested “a little longer.” This also accords with 2:26, 5:9–10, Daniel 7:9,27, cf. Matt. 19:28 I Cor. 6:2. Undoubtedly the mention of the martyrs, and the cause of their death (v. 4) would be an encouragement to believers who feared death, even for Christ’s sake.

What is puzzling is this “first resurrection”. Some see this as entrance into spiritual life (cf. John 5:25) and others as actual resurrection. If actual resurrection then the martyrs have a special place in God’s order and system. However, the actual *nature* of the millennium is not disclosed.

The Final Destruction of Satan and Death vs. 7–15

This passage also represents problems, as “the camp of the saints” and “the beloved city” first have to be determined. Are they the actual site of Jerusalem and restored Israel, or the “true Israel of God”, the people of God, the spiritual city, as Babylon is (in an evil sense) the spiritual world-system? Whatever it may be, the forces that are against it are deceived by Satan into this final conflict, which would seem to be another than that of 19:17ff. Ezekiel 38:1f. should be read where Gog is the prince of the land of Magog. The “fire that comes down from heaven” is the symbol of God’s burning judgment, which is not primarily physical but moral. Now Satan is brought to final judgment and is brought into eternal suffering, the nature of which is in no doubt. Thus the ancient and corrupt system of evil comes to a conclusive end.

Now we see the ultimate triumph, the vindication of God in His righteousness. All the dead are judged. The judgment is just and fair – each according to his works. The question of salvation is not, however, on the basis of works, but of whether one’s name is in the book of life (see 13:8). It is difficult to understand whether “sea” here is literal, but is probably symbolic as in 21:1 “there was no more sea.” The sea was the source of the first beast. Death and Hades are obviously not literal in the physical sense, but their destruction (cf. 2 Tim. 1:10, 1 Cor. 15:26) is indicated. As the old system is finished, so is death, and the universe is once more pure. The judgment is God’s.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE: THE CONSUMMATION

(i) The New Creation vs. 1–8

The old creation, or the evil that had impregnated it, could not stand the sheer holiness of the white throne. The new has come. This is what was ever the intention of God. If God is to reign totally, it must be in a situation which is totally holy. The first verses of this section must be read with Ezekiel 37, particularly vs. 24–28. Also the theme of God’s people, of Him dwelling with them should be seen throughout Scripture. Indeed all these rich themes culminate here. We are not to see a new heaven and a new earth in the sense that they are different, but that they are renewed. Most important is that there is no *innate dualism*. Almost totally equated are (i) the holy city, i.e. the new Jerusalem, (ii) the Bride, the church, (iii) the tabernacle, i.e. God’s dwelling place. The effects of God and His people being one, is that eradication of all forms of sorrow and suffering. Death is abolished. The former things are passed away. It is difficult to conceive of the entirely new situations, although secular as well as religious eschatologies have thought and dreamed of such.

Vs. 5–8 show that God speaks with finality. He rarely speaks from the throne Himself, but here He does. Nothing is left that has not been made new. Even life is eternally supplied from Himself – the Fountain of Living Waters (Jer. 2:13, etc.). On the other hand, every form of evil is obliterated. This revelation urges the fainthearted on to conquest. God’s true sons are conquerors.

(ii) The Heavenly Jerusalem 21:9 – 22:5

The vision is significant, as is each revelation introduced

by the Spirit who takes John so that he might truly understand what he sees. The City is the Bride, is the Church, is God’s people, is His elect. The beautiful description in vs. 11–21 needs detailed study from some commentary. The main point is that of “having the glory of God,” (v.11) cf. Ezekiel 43:5. Israel lost its glory when God departed from the temple. His people are restored when He returns.

Vs. 22–27 follow the symbolic beauties and significance of the city of jewels, and shows that the temple is not needed since God and His Son themselves constitute this, and the glory and the light emanate from them, and the “kings of the earth” who are elsewhere depicted as being deceived by evil are here depicted as submitting to the light of God and bringing their own authority into the city. No longer do gates need to be shut – there is nothing to be feared, no one or thing to be locked out. This grace is always free to all. “No night there” surely means the darkness is past, and the true light is now shining, i.e. love and purity are the essential order. The nations are now rehabilitated; heaven knows God’s people. Nothing evil shall enter it for whilst there is nothing evil, the statement is simply to reassure God’s people that they will never again be confronted by sin. It is also to warn the ungodly reader (or listener) that he will not reach there, unless he repents.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO: THE CONCLUSION

One of the great themes of Scripture and of this book is the triumph of God, through His covenant love, in the peoples of the world. Ultimately salvation is not individualistic, although it is personal. In its true dimensions it is universal, though never simply universalistic. That is why the last verses of ch. 21 with “the healing of the nations”, i.e. the peoples of the world whom He has created. Literalistically speaking it is difficult to think of a tree growing on either side of a river. The river, which will be life, flows from the very throne itself. Man, at last, has admission to the tree of life from which by his sin he was rejected. Paradise opens up fully to him. This passage should be related to Ezekiel 47 where the throne is the altar. Cf. also v. 12.

The greatest of all is that, being healed, they shall

- (a) worship God. This is man’s greatest experience, being able to express full worship (John 4:22ff., Phil. 3:3, etc.) and
- (b) “They shall see His face”. This is the thrilling news. No more *mediated* revelation, by dreams, visions, prophets and the life, but *direct sight!* In this context they shall reign for ever – true royalty of the King! Cf. 1:4f, 5:10.

Epilogue vs. 6-21

The first section of this is designed to encourage present readers and especially those who are the prophets or servants of God. Prophets and servants. are the one in this book, as “servant” is a technical term for the prophet. In fact it can be shown that the prophets and the martyrs, the ‘sealed ones’ are identical. Thus the blessing of verse 7 means that as one reads and gives testimony to Jesus (19:5 where the testimony of Jesus is the spirit (breath) of prophecy). The Lord is the God of the spirits of the prophets, which is to encourage them.

John is again about to worship the angel, for the presence of such must have communicated the desire to worship (cf. 19:10). The angel will have no worship, but includes himself in the prophetic ministry (v.9). *Verse 10-11* show that the prophecy is to be kept open, and not sealed, in which latter case things were to be opened only in some future and needful situation. The book is to remain as a constant exhortation, even to the evil ones, as to the holy.

Without introduction, the voice of Christ breaks through into this same hortatory warning (v.12), the angel having ceased speaking. A further exhortation in vs. 14-15 may come from John as he reviews all that he has seen and adduces the general principles that the blessed are fully committed and the cursed are the evil ones, but it is in the nature of an urgent exhortation. In verse 16 Jesus again tells John that He has given the prophecy as a warning and a testimony. In reply the Spirit and the Bride say “Come.” This would seem to be to Jesus, but the remainder of the verse may mean that it is a general invitation to those who have read the prophecy to come, as this is now their significant opportunity.

Finally there is a solemn warning, by John, to take the things of the book seriously. Strange and fantastic as some of its elements may seem, John firmly names it as prophecy, and claims that Jesus testifies to all the things within it, adding his own cry to the same Jesus “Come, Lord Jesus!” This was a great New Testament cry. Thus with a usual, but not simply formal grace, John ends the book, which, when read aloud, believed, obeyed, and understood, brings great blessing to the one who has ears to hear, and a will to obey!