

Crisis!

Volume 2



DESMOND FORD

CRISIS !

A Commentary on the Book of Revelation - Vol. 2

A VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY by Desmond Ford

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PART 2

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

"The crisis (iccapos) is at hand." Rev. 1:3

REVELATION--THE CROWN OF HOLY SCRIPTURE [\(TOC\)](#)

Chapter 14

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy. . . for the time is at hand.
Rev, 1:3.

Of all the books of the Bible none other is so solemnly introduced to us; none so specially urged upon our attention; and, we must add, none so generally disregarded, so shunned, and so neglected. Yet no other book opens with a gracious promise of blessing on him that readeth, on those who hear and keep the things written therein. And to no other book is attached such a warning lest anyone should take from or add to its message. It is a message therefore of the very highest importance, though by men often lightly esteemed and treated as though it were superfluous, and could be dispensed with without material loss. In God's estimate, at least, this book is of supreme value. In it we behold the end and consummation of all God's work and plan, the climax and outcome of all His dispensations and dealings with men; and in it every prophecy and promise, every purpose and covenant finds its ultimate goal and fulfilment. In Genesis we have the beginning of all, in Revelation we have the end and goal of all.

R. H. Boll

There never was a book penned with such artifice as this of the Apocalypse, as if every word were weighed in a balance before it was set down.

Henry More

The more I read this wonderful book, the more I am convinced that the precision of the phraseology is little short of mathematical accuracy.

Bishop Horsley

In this book all the other books of the Bible meet.

A. R. Fausset

. . . these prophecies have proved to be a mighty power in her history; . . . they have preserved the faith of the Church in times of general apostasy; . . . they have given birth to great reformation movements; . . . they have inspired confessors, and supported martyrs at the stake; . . . they have broken the chains of priesthood, superstition and tyranny. . . .

H. G. Guinness

We begin our study of that book in which all the books of Scripture meet and end. Without it, the Scriptures would be as a house without a roof, or a story without a climax and conclusion. Revelation is the *crown* of Holy Scripture as surely as the records of our Lord's death in the Gospels, and the interpretation of that event in Romans and Galatians constitute its *heart*.

While the Gospels record Christ's coming in the flesh, and Acts His coming in the Spirit, this book tells of His return in glory. The Gospels speak of the head of the church, and the Epistles of His body, but this book speaks of the union of both head and body. The Gospels have for their theme the atonement of Christ which brought our justification. The Epistles speak of this also, but spell out in greater detail the theme of sanctification, since God gives His gifts with both hands. (While justification and sanctification are distinct, they are never separate in the truly regenerate child of God. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.) The union of head and body in Revelation means glorification--corruption giving way to incorruption, mortality to immortality, struggle and weariness to rest. Thus this concluding book of Scripture sets forth judgment, resurrection, and glorification.

Every man has experienced sin as a *burden* upon him, as a *tyrant* over him, and as a *traitor* within him. Justification deals with the first, sanctification the second, and glorification the third. In Revelation, it is shown that our old nature which was legally crucified at the Cross, and subdued in sanctification, is finally to be eradicated. Sinful propensities which afflict us here, causing us to cry out, "O wretched man that I am," will soon be no more. Hereafter there shall be no cruel gap between intention and achievement, between the ideal and the real. Rev. 22:2-4; 20:6; 21:4; 14:5. No wonder Revelation is full of songs, of doxologies!

Attempting to interpret this book is like trying to empty the sea with a teaspoon. To change the figure, Revelation is full of glorious manna, full, pressed down, and flowing over in abundant measure. All the themes of Scripture are now presented in full development. While Genesis is the seed-plot of the Bible, the Apocalypse is the flower-bed. As Genesis spoke of creation, the marriage of the first Adam, the beginning of life, service, marriage, the Sabbath, sin, sorrow, death, Satan, Israel, the covenant, etc., so here in Revelation we witness the new creation, the marriage of the second Adam, the glorification of life and service, the true fellowship of souls and union with God--symbolized by marriage, the eternal sabbath rest. As the third chapter of Scripture introduced evil, so the third last chapter bids it farewell. Revelation 20 presents the destruction of Satan, sin, sorrow, and death. God's Israel will enter upon all that the everlasting covenant promised of glory and joy. It is as though we have been travelling on a golden ring and returned to where we started. But it is the return of the octave keyed at a higher pitch.

The first section of Revelation has the same relationship to the rest of the book as Genesis does to this book as a whole. Everything to come in the book is present in seed form in these first chapters. If we do our work well here, the way will be paved to understand all the rest.

What then are the themes of chapters 1-3? Christ, His nature and glory, His work. His salvation, His covenant, His kingdom, His coming, His people--these are the themes of this introductory section. Therefore, let us not look here, or in the chapters which follow, for that which God has not promised. We shall find nothing here about secular powers except as they affect the people of God. There is no allusion to modern inventions, or to anything of our culture, unless it has direct bearing on the pilgrimage of the church.

The opening section alludes to the Olivet discourse which was given to the miniature church, the twelve disciples. (For example, compare Rev. 1:7 and Mt. 24:30.) That discourse was a commentary on Dan. 9:24-27, the great Old Testament prediction about Messiah the Prince, His coming, His death, His city, His people, His covenant, and His great antagonist--Antichrist. As shown in another commentary,¹ Dan. 9:24-27 itself is an explanation of the climactic symbolic presentation of Dan. 8:1-14, a presentation reaching its peak in the key-verse of the book, "Unto two thousand evenings and mornings, then shall the sanctuary be justified," or "Unto two thousand three hundred days then shall the sanctuary be atoned for, and restored to its rightful estate."

This grand prophecy (Dan. 8 and 9) had foretold the undoing of sin, transgression, and iniquity, and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, fulfilling all prophetic vision, in order that God might return to tabernacle once more among His people. This prophecy had promised all that the ancient Day of Atonement prefigured²--judgment and abolition of sin and sinners, reconciliation between God and man with all sorrow past. The sanctuary, as a symbol of the kingdom of God, mirrored in its history the state of the covenant people. Constantly throughout the Old Testament we find it is defiled, or

destroyed, whenever Israel is untrue to the God of the covenant. With each restoration to loyalty, the sanctuary too is restored. Thus Christ, prefiguring His messianic task, cleansed the sanctuary at the beginning and end of His ministry. He Himself was the new Temple, and because His people are one with Him, they too throughout the New Testament are called the temple of God. With all this in mind, Rev. 1:12-20 and Rev. chapters 21 and 22 should be studied as the symbolic expression of the consummation of the sanctuary covenant promises. The whole earth cleansed and renewed, becomes the everlasting temple of God and the Lamb. Even the New Jerusalem is pictured as having the proportions of the Holy of Holies.

In Revelation, the same Christ who came to Daniel in exile in the ancient Babylonian world, comes to John in exile in the new Babylonian empire--that of Rome. This first chapter describes Him even as He appeared when He visited the writer of the Old Testament apocalypse. And He comes as the Prophet, Priest, and King of that sanctuary, spoken of in Daniel 8 and 9. He is the true Guardian of the temple courts, the Judge as well as the Saviour of all who walk therein. He trims the lamps, and punishes with the sword of His mouth. He is preparing His people for glory, and those who will not be cleansed must be removed from their place. Judgment begins at the house of God, and this book of judgment upon the world begins with judgment upon the church. Chapters two and three find our Priest and kingly Judge examining the professions and walk of His people, and proclaiming His verdict. All the promises made to the members of the seven churches are elaborations of the promises of Dan. 8:14 and 9:24. They have to do with the end of sin and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness.

This section of Rev. 1 to 3 informs us that trials and troubles are our lot here below. As the church lets her light shine, opposition automatically results. Christ's witnesses are called to be faithful unto death, and wherever the church is true to its commission martyrdom ensues, and the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the blossoming community till the whole earth is filled with His glory. John in this book, as Daniel in his, is the pattern for all believers. He has been faithful to the Word of God, the testimony of Jesus. All that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution, and now at the grand old age of nearly a century we find the beloved apostle on the barren rocky isle that was one of the prisons of ancient Rome. But he is not alone -- the Christ that He loves and serves arrives in glory to visit, strengthen, inform, and commission him.

This visit of Christ takes place on the Sabbath--the Lord's day. That day symbolizes the rest of Eden, the rest in Christ through dependence on His finished work, and the rest of eternity. The Apocalypse as a whole, with its fifty uses of the sabbatical number seven, is a promise of rest. Not forever will we be marked with the blemishes of the Fall, its guilt, its sweat, its nakedness, tears, and death. Not forever will the arduous self-mortification, the battles within and without, exist. Paul promised to the persecuted ones of his day the coming of the Lord "to grant rest. ... to you who are afflicted." 2 Thess. 1:7. It is particularly appropriate that in this context the Sabbath should be mentioned. Again and again, we find references to the Exodus in these verses, and the Sabbath was the sign of the Sinaitic, as well as the Edenic covenant. The covenant at Sinai, with its sanctuary symbols of grace and redemption, is still the refuge and defense of believers, since it was a representation and phase of the everlasting covenant. The Old Testament recognizes only one divine covenant, and the Prince who confirmed it on Calvary is the giver of the Patmos revelation.

The privileges of the church are all set forth in this opening chapter. Believers are a covenant people who have known their exodus from the tyranny of sin, and who now are kings and priests unto God. They have been, and are, loved of heaven, and the evidence is in their loosing from sin's chains and washing from its stains. In vv. 5,6,8, we have important allusions to the Exodus. God reveals Himself by his covenant name as He did to Moses before the great deliverance. The promises made at the foot of Sinai as the covenant was renewed are referred to. See Ex. 19:5,6. The sanctuary built at that time is now seen glorified. All this is intended to teach that the New Testament church is the new Israel, and therefore any endeavor to read the experience of modern Jewry in this book is misplaced. Modern Jewry is still beloved for their fathers' sakes, but they are Gentiles, strangers from the covenants of promise, and need to be grafted in again to the tree of spiritual Israel as all other Gentiles must. As a nation, the Jews have no special destiny. This was revoked when they cried, "We have no king but Caesar." Their Messiah previously had warned them, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a people bringing forth the fruits thereof" -- the Christian church. See Mt. 21:43. Peter, writing to Christians, declares:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy

but now you have received mercy.³

The covenant allusions found in chapter 1 are repeated and multiplied throughout the rest of the book. We shall read of the ark of the covenant, and the testimony of the covenant. The rainbow of the covenant will be shown offering encouragement to those who must live through storm and tempest. The covenant curses of war, famine, pestilence, wild-beasts, death, will figure prominently in the seals and the trumpets, and the covenant blessings of life, fruitfulness, joy, and rest will be traced in their fulfilment before we lay the book down.

It is vital we recognize the covenant motif, for the legal element of the plan of salvation is its very foundation. Legal does not mean legalistic, any more than rational means rationalistic, but it does mean that the ways of God are always according to the law of His nature—always true and righteous, altogether just. Our God is not unpredictable, changeable, and erratic. His ways can be foretold because He changes not. Righteousness, holiness—these are His basic attributes. Even His love is conditioned by these, for it is a holy love. Righteousness is the foundation of God's government, as indicated by the ark containing the law in the heart of the sanctuary. Each form of the covenant embraced promises and curses, as well as the demand for righteousness. In Christ alone, but as our Representative, the demand has been met, the curses endured, and the promises fulfilled. Thus imperfect believers can be accepted "in the beloved."

As all Israel's worship revolved around the law in the ark, so all of history has to do with the problem that God's children have rebelled against Him, breaking His law. How can He be just and yet justify sinners? This is the great theme of Scripture. Only the Cross uniting justice and love, revealing the holy God and the unholy sinner, only the Cross of God's pain meeting the demands of His righteousness solves the great problem of the universe. See Rom. 3:23-26.

Thus from the opening verses of this book, and repeated thereafter, we find legal words such as "testimony." All Christians echo the witness of their blessed Lord -- the truths He testified before men and devils in Galilee, Jerusalem's streets, and the courts of Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod. Christ witnessed a good confession and it is the church's continual task to re-echo that confession. The proclamation of the gospel, the fulfilling of the great commission, is nothing other than telling the story of the Cross. 1 Cor. 2:1,2; Gal. 6:14. This task fulfilled will bring the second advent. There can be no substitute offering to God or man.

It is because God is holy that He must judge. The privileges of the covenant bring responsibilities. This is the book of judgment. Each chapter speaks of it. Just as every chapter of Daniel spoke of the theme of vindication, so it is with this book. All apocalyptic literature speaks of the end in terms of judgment, and the prominence of this theme in the Apocalypse of the New Testament is to be expected. God's holiness must be vindicated if the universe and its myriads are to be safe for eternity. His truth, His ways, His people, all are justified by His judgments which include the unveiling of the characters of all who have ever lived, and the unveiling of every act and the motives that prompted it. Everlasting righteousness cannot prevail in the universe until the great judgment day is done, "that the thoughts of all hearts shall be revealed," and God Himself overcomes when He is both Judge and judged. Rom. 3:1-3. Through the pilgrimage of the church, God makes manifest to principalities and powers His manifold wisdom and power. See Eph. 3:9-10. We are now "a theater to the universe, to angels and to men." 1 Cor. 4:9 (Greek).

The church's message now is "The hour of his judgment is come." The gospel itself rightly proclaimed is judgment. James P. Martin comments:

The criterion of the judgment of the last day is acceptance or rejection of the gospel about Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30; Luke 19:27; 7:47; 10:16).

With Mark and Luke too, we cannot view the Last Judgment as a disconnected far-off divine event, nor as an imminent event that preoccupies all our attention and anxiety. Instead, Luke announces the divine judgment in Jesus Christ that comes as grace, offer, and promise, as the kingdom of God. We are invited to enter this rule as the *present* center of Christian life because it is the future certainty of Christian life. . . .

Because grace has come in Jesus Christ beyond measure, the judgment of God will be most severe on those who reject this grace. It will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for the city that rejects the gospel of the kingdom of God (Luke 10:12; cf. vv 13-15). Both the queen of the South and Nineveh will arise and condemn the generation that refuses Jesus

Christ (Luke 11:29-32). . . . [the following texts are from John.]

The origin of the present-ness of the Last Judgment is the death of Jesus. The hour of His crucifixion, which is paradoxically called the hour of His glorification (2:4; 7:30,39; 8:20; 12:27), is the judgment of this world, the casting out of the prince of this age (12:31). In the crucifixion narrative, John expresses this with fine irony. Pilate places Jesus on the judgment seat and then passes the sentence of condemnation on Him (19:12-16, especially the variant reading in v. 13). Thereby Pilate condemns himself.

Jesus' death as the judgment of the world not only opens up the salvation Jesus brings through His own resurrection from the dead (which fulfills in a present sense the signs of His ministry), but it also brings judgment upon the whole world so that the word and deed of Jesus becomes the absolute criterion of judgment. Indeed, Jesus Himself is the Judge, along with the Father (12:47-48; 5:22,27,30; 8:15-26). The apparent contradictions between these references are actually paradoxes that preserve the tension between present and future judgment. So certain is the divine judgment given to the Son by the Father that John can summarize his entire story of Jesus in terms of final judgment: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (3:19). Also, "he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (3:36). Nevertheless, John will insist that the purpose of the sending of the Son is not condemnation, but salvation (3:17; 12:47). Men bring condemnation upon themselves by their refusal to believe. This refusal becomes an anticipatory Last Judgment (3:18,36). The present judgment, then, is not so much an external divine sentence, but a revelation of the secrets of the heart. The last day will reveal these secrets. Jesus now stands in the world as the True Light, to lighten everyone (1:9), to give sight (8:12; 9:39), and thereby judge the hearts of mankind.⁴

Thus in the opening chapter of this book we find the word of God symbolized as a two-edged sword proceeding from His mouth. Christ promised that His word would judge all men at the last great day. Jn. 12:48. Similarly, His Cross is the judgment of the world. Jn. 12:31. As on Calvary He separated the penitent and the impenitent, so the word of the Cross ever does likewise. All men are judged by their response to the sacrificial love of God, and the last great day will only declare it. Today is the day of salvation, today is the appointed time. Today if we hear his voice let us not harden our hearts, for the hearing of the gospel brings judgment. Not so much the sin question, but the Son question is the issue. What have we done with Him?

It is important that we recognize that even in this book of judgment the gospel is still preeminent. Here is where the New Testament apocalypse is distinctive from all others. While Christ's message everywhere assumed apocalyptic categories, He Himself was not an apocalypticist. His proclamation of the kingdom centered around His first advent, and the atonement of Calvary. In Him the expected apocalyptic judgment took place in order that grace might be offered to sinners. See Jn. 12:30-31. All New Testament presentations of the second advent are grounded in the fact of a redemption already accomplished. Thus it is that the return of Christ can be "the blessed hope." Those at peace with God do not fear the coming of that Judge who has already absolved them with His gift of the ultimate verdict.

Before John tells of the vision of the priest-king with the sword of judgment, he speaks of "him who loved us and loosed us from our sins by his blood" (1:5). The love manifested at Calvary, the redemption there accomplished, must be recognized and accepted if we are to stand through the terrors of the end of the world. Christ must be known as Saviour if we are to endure His revelation as Judge. Twenty-eight times in this book, our Lord is set forth as the Lamb of God Who took away the sin of the world. Before each prophetic chain, the eye is made to rest on Him, our great High Priest. Philip Hughes reminds us of the importance of Christ's priestly intercession:

Because his priesthood is everlasting, Christ "is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:24f.). Our Lord's intercession above is his continuing high-priestly work whereby, in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst, he achieves the divine purpose of "bringing many sons to glory" (2:10). It is, as we shall see, a most important and necessary work. "So great and glorious is the work of saving believers unto the utmost," John Owens comments, "that it is necessary that the Lord Christ should lead a mediatory life in heaven, for the perfecting and accomplishing of it. . . . It is generally acknowledged that sinners could not be saved without

the death of Christ; but that believers could not be saved without the life of Christ following it, is not so much considered."⁵

Never should the second advent be proclaimed as something separate from the first. It was the first coming and its Cross which brought forensically the end of the world, and which alone through the mediating Christ above, and the mediating Spirit below, can prepare men for that event.

Obedience is a prominent theme of this first section of Revelation, as indeed all later sections as well. The Bible began without mention of faith or love, but obedience was set forth as crucial. See Gen. 2:16,17. The judicial sword of this opening vision warns all professed believers that the only sure evidence of a good root is good fruit. There is no greater deception than the idea that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. We are not justified by faith plus works, but by a faith that works. Faith is not a substitute for holy obedience, but its very foundation. Thus the Exodus imagery of this first chapter, its references to God as Jehovah, the allusion to the loosing from sin's captivity, the priest-king motif, etc. all remind us of Mount Sinai where the covenant was made with the covenant people.

The plan of redemption is not a plan of cheap grace. The Cross is not a contrivance to enable us to cherish our sins and get away with it. Christ's righteousness will never cover cherished sins. By the law and tabernacle of Sinai, the covenant people were taught that grace reigns only through righteousness, that God has to be not only faithful but just in forgiving our sins, for He is a just God and a Savior, and true and righteous in all He does. Christ Himself fulfilled all the requirements and promises of the Covenant as our Representative, and recognition of this saves from both legalism and antinomianism. "Religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude," said Barth rightly.

Thus, in the letters to the churches, the priest-king exercises His prerogatives as Judge, and His all-seeing eye perceives the disobedience of His professed people. He says repeatedly "I know thy works." Too often these works "are not found perfect before God." Sin is permitted, the first love is lost, falsehoods are allowed circulation, and the professing church by its life and works denies its holy Lord. Careless Christians are warned throughout the letters that true faith ever brings obedience in its train. Faith without works is dead, being alone.

The key verse of this entire section is Rev. 1:7: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen." Revelation is the book of the second advent, for it is this event which brings the end to sin, sorrow, pain, and death. The theme of this verse will meet us again and again throughout the book. To the churches come such warnings as, "If you will not watch, I will come on you as a thief"; "Behold I come quickly." The seals climax in the great day of His coming and the question is asked, "Who shall be able to stand?" The trumpets picture the preliminary judgments upon the world, and close with the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdom of Christ at His coming. The section after the trumpets which traces the history of the church also closes with a vision of the second coming. "Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand." Rev. 14:14. That picture is enlarged in chapter 19 thus:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses." ⁶

In the last chapter, the last words of Christ are, "Surely I am coming soon."

C. S. Lewis was right when he wrote his own convictions on this subject.

. . . it seems to me impossible to retain in any recognisable form our belief in the Divinity of Christ and the truth of the Christian revelation while abandoning, or even persistently neglecting, the promised, and threatened, Return. "He shall come again to judge the quick and the dead," says the Apostle's Creed. "This same Jesus," said the angels in Acts, "shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." "Hereafter," said our Lord himself (by those words inviting crucifixion), "shall ye see the Son of Man. . . coming in the clouds of heaven." If this is not an integral part of the faith once given to the saints, I do not know what

Modern Bible scholars have asserted the same. In confirmation of the then revolutionary viewpoint offered seventy years ago, it must be said that the New Testament is indeed inescapably and unashamedly apocalyptic in some of its basic concepts. This can be said also of its key figures such as Christ, Paul, and the writer of Revelation. Eschatology itself is no mere addendum to the New Testament but "the very fibre of the living strand,"⁸ and the type of eschatology mirrored by apocalyptic, with its content of the kingdom of God and the Son of Man, has rightly been called "the mother of Christian theology."⁹ The recent emphasis by Pannenberg in this regard is exegetically sound.

"If there is no final victory of good over evil, the kingdom of God becomes an empty dream," as T. W. Manson asserted.¹⁰ In the Christianity of preceding centuries, thanatology (the study of death) replaced eschatology. This error the New Testament never makes. It is not death which is "the blessed hope" of the believer. Over 300 times the New Testament speaks of the second coming and that refrain now reaches a hallelujah chorus in Revelation. The New Testament generation believed they were in the last days and that Christ was about to appear. They were all "adventists," and so should we be. Any Christianity without this vital truth is an emasculated thing, and if God has a message for the twentieth century it must of necessity include this basic declaration from Christ—"Behold, I come quickly."

Following the prologue of the book which repeatedly refers to Christ and His two advents, we have the initial vision. As Alford and others have recognized, this vision is the key to the whole book. As Ariadne supplied Theseus with a thread, at the very entrance of the cavern which he had to penetrate, so here John places a torch in the hand of the reader at the beginning of his search. The center and circumference of this vision has to do with light. We see Christ clothed with the sun, every part of Him beaming with celestial glory, and He walks among light-holders—lampstands—and holds luminaries (stars) in His hand. The vision thus speaks of the coming of light to displace the darkness—and this is the theme of the entire book. Christ is the light of the world. He shines through His church as it proclaims the gospel which alone can illumine the darkened soul. All that follows in this book will speak of the experience of the light-bearers, their progress, their opposition, and their ultimate triumph. The victory of the light will be imaged by symbols of conquest such as a white glistening horse, and the war against it by darkness will be portrayed by the sacrificial sword. Light and darkness will alternate throughout the visions, until we come to the city of light where there is no night, and where the Lamb is the eternal Sun.

As we now launch ourselves into the study of this superlative book, we are prepared for that task by the knowledge of what truths are to constitute the themes of this Revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself, His nature and work, His people, His covenant, His gospel, His advent and judgment—these things will be preeminent. Because the church must be tried and suffer, its dangers will be delineated—the cooling of its love, declension and apostasy, false doctrine, persecution, deceptions—all these must be spelled out in loving warning. And because the shining of the light of His true witnesses must bring a response from the darkness, that intolerant reaction of the world will be presented. Merciful preliminary judgments upon the persecuting world, as warnings to prepare for the last great day, will be sketched throughout this book till the final judgments upon the impenitent are described. Then the world as a cleansed sanctuary will echo through man and all living things the anthem "God is love."

All the warnings and the promises of this book are conditional. The very timing of the second advent, viewed from one standpoint, is conditional. Whosoever will may come, whosoever is athirst may partake of the water of life freely. Christ stands at the door of the heart and knocks, but there is something for us to do. As Phil. 2:12-13 clearly tells us, our salvation has been accomplished but we must work it out; God does everything by way of holiness within our hearts, but we must work; our destiny is assured if we continue to trust, but we are to fear and tremble lest we be seduced away from Him by our own carnality.

Only acceptance of the gospel will bring all other things needed, including the advent. Faith, penitence, righteousness, strength, missionary motivation and skill—all these are His gifts to those who see themselves as wretched, poor, blind, and naked, and therefore cry, "Even so, come Lord Jesus, come to this troubled heart today." And He will.

SECTION ONE [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 1-3)

LOVE LETTERS TO AN ARMY ON THE MARCH

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 1-3

Chapter 15

Most commentators have little difficulty in acknowledging the claim that the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven plagues, are prophetic of things that were, in John's day, yet to come. But it is another matter with the letters to the seven churches. Almost all modern commentators (with the exception of dispensationalists) deny that there is intended here prophetic reference to seven eras of church history. Consider the following typical disclaimers:

The multitude of dissertations, essays, books, which have been written and are still being written, in support of this scheme of interpretation, remain a singular monument of wasted ingenuity.¹

Only the most perverse ingenuity can treat the messages to the seven churches as directly prophetic.²

Completely excluded is the interpretation --- which even today has not yet died out --- of the falsely so-called Seven Letters as successive stages of the development of the church.³

The main reason for refusal to see prophetic significance in the church letters is the obvious one that these were originally intended for the members of seven actual churches in ancient Asia minor. John was certainly writing to *them*. What he wrote to them had to do with *their* needs, their geographical and temporal situation. It is unthinkable that they would have thought their letters to have meaning chiefly for the future.

Secondly, prophetic reference has been denied the letters on the basis that applications have frequently varied in time slots particularly in applying the the last three churches. Of course, the very progress of the years beyond the era when earlier commentators wrote, makes this inevitable to some extent.

Thirdly, it is clear from 1:1 and 1:3, plus references within the letters themselves (such as 3:3; 3:11), that both John and his readers expected the end in their own day.

On the other hand, expositors claiming that the churches are symbolic of future ecclesiastical eras are numerous and in many instances learned. From the past they include Vitringa, Henry More, Holzhauser, Sir Isaac Newton, and in more recent times -- Fausset, Tatford, Morgan, Seiss, Newell, Ironside, Pember, Pentecost, Larkin, Kelly, Ottman, Walvoord, who are chiefly dispensationalists. They constitute a minority in the history of exegesis, and some who might have been expected to teach likewise have rejected the periodic view, for example, Isaac Williams, Wordsworth, and Elliott.

Truth is not found by counting noses, but such testimony as in the preceding lines makes one wonder why so many have not adopted the prophetic interpretation of these chapters. Those who so hold claim that the distinctive characteristics of each church do fit a particular era of time, and that the succession of experience found in Rev. 2 and 3 does match the experience of the Church over the Christian era. They further point out that there were more than seven churches in Asia,⁴ and therefore these were selected because typical of situations to come. Christ is seen among seven golden

candlesticks, and holding seven stars. Obviously in this portrayal, the church universal is meant. Yet, in the same chapter and the two following, these seven candlesticks are equated with the local churches addressed. The fact that the whole book claims to be prophetic adds another argument.

Moorehead gives an apt summary of the case:

All these various churches, Colossae, Hieropolis, Tralles, Magnesia, and others far more widely known and influential flourished at the close of the first century. Now, how happens it that these assemblies so prominent and important, are passed by in total silence in the book, while those of which we know little or nothing, except in the case of two, beyond what is told us in chaps. ii, iii, hold so conspicuous a place in the Lord's messages? Why are these seven singled out and addressed, and all the rest of the whole world ignored? The only reasonable explanation is this: These seven here addressed contained in themselves the characteristic features of the the entire church in John's day, while the others did not. Accordingly, far more than local and historical interest attaches to them. These Seven embraced in their conditions, in their circumstances and in their tendencies the prophetic history of the entire Christian Body from John down to the final consummation at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, the seven churches and the messages addressed to them represent the whole church of John's time, and they likewise sketch in broad outlines its history to the end.

This conclusion is warranted by the following considerations: (1) The divine command to the Seer was to write out and send the whole Apocalypse to these churches: "What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches," i. 11. Certainly the Revelation was not intended for these Christian assemblies alone, but for all the people of God throughout the earth. (2) The book is one of symbols from the first chapter to the last, and if chaps. ii,iii, form an exception, they constitute an unaccountable anomaly. (3) The term "mystery"--"the mystery of the seven stars. . . and of the seven golden candlesticks" (i.20) -- points to the hidden meaning of the symbols, "the sacred secret signified by them" (Lyra). (4) The mystic use of the number seven throughout the book that in every instance denotes completeness, perfection, clearly indicates the symbolical character of these chapters. (5) The content of the messages contemplate the whole church and its entire history, as the repeated announcement of Christ's coming proves, ii. 16,25; iii. 3,11. (6) The appeal to "hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" attests the same truth, the language includes the whole body (cf. i:19,20; iv:1; xxii:6,16). Not a single church is exhorted, but all "the churches."

Each of the seven had marked peculiarities and characteristics features that cannot be restricted to one local assembly, for they foreshadow the like state in the church universal to the close of the dispensation. A study of their moral condition, however brief and cursory, will serve to show that their excellencies and their defects so faithfully and unsparingly pointed out by the glorified Lord cannot be applied exclusively to the close of the apostolic age. They have reproduced themselves in the professing body in all the subsequent centuries down to the present-day.⁵

The same writer later adds:

The Seven Churches do mark stages of history, but often they overlap, two or more of them covering the same period. Indeed, they are mirrors in which the condition of the universal church may see itself reflected at any stage of its existence.⁶

Gowen, who also seems a far cry from historicism, yet writes on this topic:

We have already spoken of the Seven Churches of pro-consular Asia as being chosen for their typical and representative character. The Seven is not seven mathematically but symbolically; that is, the Seven Churches represent for us the whole Church, as the Seven Petitions of the Lord's Prayer the whole subject of prayer, or the Seven Words from the Cross the whole teaching of the Crucified One. There were many other Churches in Asia that might have been named, such as those of Tralles, Hieropolis, and Colosse, but it was sufficient for the Apostle's purpose to select seven, and these representative of various aspects of the whole historical Church.⁷

This is not necessarily an endorsement of specific applications but it is pertinent. Is it true that the characteristics of the successive letters are appropriate portrayals of those elements which

predominated in later times? Let us list the churches with descriptions and the proposed dates. Few contend for exact specificity in the latter, anymore than a traveller from one city to the next can be certain of the dividing line between the two.

Says Craven:

... it does not necessarily follow that the different periods should have distinctly defined termini; it is rather to be expected that, like the colors of the rainbow, the characteristics of adjacent periods, manifestly distinct in their central portions, should blend into one another at each beginning and end.⁸

The church at Ephesus

First love lost
Apostolic church
AD 30-100

The church at Smyrna

Persecuted
Persecuted church
AD 100-313

The church at Pergamos

Faithful church but tolerates heresy
State church
AD 313-590

The church at Thyatira

Dominated by a powerful false prophet
Mediaeval church
AD 590-1562

The church at Sardis

Spiritually dying church
Reformed church
AD 1562-1790

The church at Philadelphia

Faithful, witnessing church
Missionary church
AD 1790-C20

The church at Laodicea

Lukewarm, self-righteous and materially rich
Apostate church
C20 -

Some suggest that the last four, while beginning at times above, then run parallel to the end, as different facets of the later ecclesiastical scene.

Church historian, Philip Schaff, in outlining the periods of church history suggested the following:⁹

Part I: The history of Ancient Christianity from the birth of Christ to Gregory the Great. A. D. 1-590.

[Period 1] The Life of Christ, and the Apostolic Church. From the incarnation to the death of St. John. A.D. 1-100.

[Period 2] Christianity under persecution in the Roman Empire. From the death of St. John to Constantine, the first Christian emperor. A.D. 100-311.

[Period 3] Christianity in union with the Graeco-Roman empire, and amidst the storms of the great migration of nations. From Constantine the Great to Pope Gregory I. A.D. 311-590.

Part II: Medieval Christianity, from Gregory I to the Reformation. A.D. 590-1517. [**Period 4**]

Part III: Modern Christianity, from the Reformation of the sixteenth century to the present time. A.D. 1517-1880.

[Period 5] The evangelical Reformation, and the Roman Catholic Reaction. From Luther to the Treaty of Westphalia. A.D. 1517-1648

The age of polemic orthodoxy and exclusive confessionalism, with reactionary and progressive movements. From the Treaty of Westphalia to the French Revolution. A.D. 1648-1790.

[Period 6] The spread of infidelity, and the revival of Christianity in Europe and America, with missionary efforts encircling the globe. From the French Revolution to the present time. A.D. 1790-1880.

(Square brackets are our numbering, not Schaff's)

Thus for Schaff, descriptive terms for these periods would be (1) apostolic; (2) persecuted; (3) compromising; (4) darkened; (5) reformed, but rapidly declining; (6) missionary. We of the twentieth century can add what term we wish for the church of our day. Most evangelicals feel that the state of Laodicea and the state of modern Christendom parallel well. What then shall we conclude on this matter?

First, that the critics are correct in saying that the common-sense meaning of the messages as applying to their first readers is to be preferred to all alternatives. But, of course, those who apply the messages prophetically no more deny this than they would deny that the epistle to the Galatians was appropriate for the legalism of that day, as for the legalism of Luther's era and our own.

Second, as just indicated, all the letters of the New Testament (and every book within *the* book except four are letters) were written to meet emergencies of the first century, but in the providence of God these emergencies were representative of parallel situations throughout all time. Thus Trench who opposed the period hypothesis yet can write:

These seven epistles, however, primarily addressed to these seven churches of Asia, were also written for the edification of the Universal Church; 2. These seven churches of Asia are not an accidental aggregation, which might just as conveniently have been eight, or six, or any other number; that, on the contrary, there is a fitness in this number, and that these seven do in some sort represent the Universal Church; that we have a right to contemplate the seven as offering to us the great and leading aspects, moral and spiritual, which churches gathered in the name of Christ out of the world will assume. . . . (But) though not exhaustive they give us on a smaller scale the grander and more recurring features of that life (the new life which Christ brought into the world); are not fragmentary, fortuitously strung together; but have a completeness, a many-sidedness, being selected probably for this very cause; here, perhaps, being the reason why Philadelphia is included and Miletus past [sic] by Thyatira, outwardly so insignificant, chosen, when one might have expected Magnesia or Tralles. . . . That these churches are more or less *representative* churches, and were selected because they are so; that they form a complex within and among themselves, mutually fulfilling and completing one another; that the great Head of the Church contemplates them for the time being as symbolic of the Universal Church, implying as much in that *mystic* seven, and giving many other indications of the same.¹⁰

Third, throughout the rest of Revelation we shall find portrayals that fit church history again and again. The same is true of these chapters. The reader must keep in mind the setting of these letters--they are the introduction of this prophetic book, and the entire book is dedicated to these seven churches.

Seven is a symbolic number expressing chronological, or qualitative and quantitative completeness, and thus the universal church and its leaders are here symbolized by seven candlesticks and seven stars.

Milligan cannot be accused of inclining towards the historicist view of Revelation. Therefore his following remarks have greater weight.

The Church as a whole degenerates. She repeats the experience of the old Theocracy, becomes false to the trust reposed in her, yields to the influences of the world, and eventually

falls beneath judgments as much greater than those which overtook Israel after the flesh as the position she had occupied was higher, and the privileges she had enjoyed more exalted.

Let us look at the facts of the case as they are presented to us by the sacred writer.

In doing so, we turn naturally in the first place to the Epistles to the seven churches in chaps, ii and iii. All the elements of the future history of the Church are found in one part or another of these two chapters. If the world is ever to prevail within the Church, we may be sure that we shall find traces of such a state of matters there.

Now it seems undeniable that we do so. When we consider the manner in which the Seven Epistles describe the Church in her relation to the world, there is a marked distinction between the first three and the last four. In the former the Church stands over against the world, listening to the voice of a present Lord as He speaks by His faithful apostles, meeting the severest trials without shrinking, and holding fast her Lord's name and faith at a time when persecution rages even unto death. It is true that she is not perfect. Perfection is not reached here below. There are systems of decay in the leaving of her first love, and in the existence in her midst of positive sin. Yet, taken as a whole, she is true to her position and to the demands of her great Head. She can remember from whence she is fallen, can repent, and do the first works (chap, ii. 5); and, if transgressors of the Divine precepts of purity are among her members, they are not many in number, they are only "some" (chap. ii. 14). When we pass to the second group of Epistles a striking difference is at once perceptible. With the exception of Philadelphia, the churches in the three other cities named have yielded to the influences of the world, and those who remain loyal to Christ are but the smaller portion of their members. Thyatira is thus addressed, "But to you I say, to (not as in the Authorised Version 'and to') the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, which know not the deep things of Satan, as they say; I cast upon you none other burden. Howbeit that which ye have, hold fast till I come" (chap. ii. 24,25). It is simply "the rest," the remnant, that have here maintained their faith. The bulk of the Church tolerate those who seduce Christ's servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols; nay, even when time has been given them to repent they will not repent of their fornication (verses 20,21). In Sardis a similar state of things is still more marked. "Thou hast a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy" (chap. iii. 4). Philadelphia, as we have stated, does not appear to be blamed, although even there it is not certain that failure is not gently intimated when it is said, "Thou hast a little power," and, again, "hold fast that which thou hast," i. e. thy little power (verses 8,11). But there can be no doubt as to the condition of Laodicea. There the victory of the world is almost complete; not indeed wholly so, for she is still able to receive warnings, and "any man" within her who will listen to the Judge standing at the door has addressed to him the most glorious promise made to any of the churches. Notwithstanding this the temptations of worldly wealth (verse 17) have proved in her case irresistible, and the last picture of the Church is the saddest of all. 11

But we can be more specific still. It is clear in the letters that the evils rebuked are for the most part pictured as on the increase. In the letters to the first church, the source of all decline is noticed: "Thou hast lost thy first love." It is this condition of heart which spawns all other evils. The Nicolaitans first trouble the church by their *deeds* and are only a little group, but in the second letter they have grown to a "synagogue of Satan," and by the time of the third, their deeds have ripened into false *doctrine* vitiating the church. The unlawful union between the church and the world advocated by the Nicolaitans (or Balaamites) becomes a reality to Thyatira, the fourth church. In reaction another company appears, but its reformation soon ceases, and Sardis has a name that it lives but is actually dead. As for the Philadelphians, their letter infers that they are but a tiny group surrounded by multitudes of merely nominal believers, while Laodicea presents a church with this condition intensified. The last church is the worst of all, pointing to a time ripe for large scale apostasy such as is predicted for the end of the age. See Mt. 24:10-12.

Not only is there increasing degeneracy noticeable in the course of the churches, but there is also evidence of increasing severity from Christ, indicating a gradual ripening for judgment on the part of His professed representatives. Note that to the Ephesians Christ merely indicates that He "will come." But to the Pergamites we have a stronger pronouncement: "Otherwise I am coming to thee quickly." With the believers of Thyatira, the warning of judgment is still sterner, declaring that the wicked will be cast on a bed of trial, and then her children slain with death. To those of Sardis, the warning is that He comes as a thief. As for Philadelphia, where loyalty is prominent, the synagogue of Satan is warned of

its humbling, and it is declared that the whole world is to have a fearful hour of trial. Simultaneously, we have the announcement of Christ's soon coming, as though already begun. With Laodicea, Christ represents Himself as already present, at least at the door, and in finality of appeal, predicts that the self-satisfied and self-righteous are about to be spewed out of his mouth.

It seems to the present writer that it is clear that God saw both what could be, and what would be, and that Revelation was certainly written to meet both exigencies. God is not locked within His own ideal plans but, as made clear in Jer. 18, adapts His ideals to meet the "reals." The Almighty is not frustrated by His own creatures, nor does He cease to provide them guidance when they fall short of His perfect pattern. The usual prophetic application of chapters 1-3 is much too precise, and the primary application of the messages is rarely given its right place. On the other hand, some who hastily repudiate the prophetic interpretation, pass by the important fact that the major concepts which continually reappear in the later prophecies of the book all have their seed in these letters. Who can rightly understand the scarlet woman of Rev. 17, and the significance of Babylon, if Jezebel of Rev. 2 is not closely considered? The hour of trial in Rev. 3:10 is the hour pictured in Rev. 13; 6:14-17; 9:15 to 11:18. The false prophet of Rev. 13 is first prefigured in Balaam, and the Nicolaitans of Rev. 2. This gives strength to the prophetic interpretation. We assent with Philip Mauro when he writes:

For it does appear as if there had been a succession of periods, more or less clearly marked, corresponding respectively, in a general way at least, to the conditions set forth in these several letters, and occurring in the same order; that is to say, first an "Ephesus" period, (loss of first love) immediately following the days of the apostles; then a "Smyrna" period of fiery persecution, and so on.

. . . but. . . that is certainly not the main purpose of these last messages of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to His churches. They are given us, not so much to reveal things to come, as to admonish, encourage, warn, guide, and reprove, to the end that we may pass the time of our sojourning here in fear, and may give all diligence to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, having respect "unto the recompense of the reward". In each letter there are lessons for every church and every saint. For in each the call is to every one that hath an ear, to hear what the Spirit is saying, -- not to one church in particular, but -- to "the churches" in general.¹²

We think the following summary of Seiss has much to recommend it, despite its failure to point out that God's original plan did not include millenniums of church history. We can only say that the course of time was certainly perceived by the Lord of history, though like sin itself, not originally ordained by Him. Says Seiss:

The nature of the vision in which John received these epistles, assumes that not these seven Churches alone, but in them the entire Church, is to be contemplated. . . .

These seven Churches, then, besides being literal historical Churches, stand for the entire Christian body, in all periods of its history. . . .

In the first place, the seven Churches represent seven phases or periods in the Church's history, stretching from the time of the apostles to the coming again of Christ, the characteristics of which are set forth partly in the names of these Churches, but more fully in the epistles addressed to them. There has been an **Ephesian** period—a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others, and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and Church offices. Then came the **Smyrna** period—*the era of martyrdom*, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of defection in the establishment of castes and orders, the license of Judaising propensities, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the Gospel. Then followed the **Pergamite** period, in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism gradually formed itself into a system, and the Church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft. Then came the **Thyatiran** period—the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of darkness for the truth; the age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the Church usurped the place of Christ, and the witnesses of Jesus were given to dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of the false prophetess, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation. Then came the **Sardian** period—the age of separation and return to the rules of Christ; the

age of comparative freedom from Balaam and his doctrines, from the Nicolaitans and their tenets, from Jezebel and her fornications; an age of many worthy names, but marked with deadness withal, and having much of which to repent; an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant centuries before the great evangelical movements of the last hundred years, which brought us the **Philadelphian** era, marked by a closer adherence to the written word, and more fraternity among Christians, but now rapidly giving place to **Laodicean** lukewarmness, self-sufficiency, empty profession, and false peace, in which the day of judgment is to find the unthinking multitude who suppose they are Christians and are not. . . .

Everything which marks one of these periods pertains also, in a lower degree, to every period. It is simply the predominance, and greater or less vigor, of one element at one time, which distinguishes the seven eras from each other. The seven periods, in other words, coexist in every period, as well as in succession. . . .

In the next place, the seven Churches represent seven varieties of Christians, both true and false. Every professor of Christianity is either an Ephesian in his religious qualities, a Smyrnaite, a Pergamite, a Thyatiran, a Sardian, a Philadelphian, or a Laodicean. Nor are we to look for one sort in every period, or in one denomination only. Every age, every denomination, and nearly every congregation, contains a specimen of each. . . .

I thus find the seven Churches in every Church, giving to these Epistles a directness of application to ourselves, and to professing Christians of every age, of the utmost solemnity and importance.¹³

I have taken in this chapter a position that may not be popular with exegetes on Revelation 2 and 3. In essence I am saying that the decoding of these chapters as with all other prophetic statements must begin with the contemporary situation -- i.e. the situation of those contemporary to the prophet himself. The meaning which the chapters had for that generation is the first and chief meaning of the pronouncements, if by chief we mean the significance of the words in their entirety rather than the timeless principles to be deduced from the pivotal phraseology. The only exception to this approach to prophecy is where the picture given by the prophet is obviously an ideal one of global dimensions in which case the contemporary situation evoked such but did not fill it full. (Revelation 13 is an example of this. See the comments of Beasley-Murray in the *The New Bible Commentary*, p. 1280.)

But in the preceding pages we have said even more than that. We have suggested that despite heaven's best plan that the end should have come in the first century, the omniscient God has here given messages which would have a peculiar appropriateness to the main stages of church history that would unroll because of delay in spreading the gospel. Those who see no light in this may well be correct, and this writer mistaken. But each must write from his own viewpoint and apparent insights, though both are obviously affected by the inevitable squinting associated with fallen human nature. From that defect no one is entirely free, though some I know are more free of it than myself.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 1)

Chapter 16

"The first chapter of Revelation is the Introduction or Prologue of the book, containing the ideas to be afterwards illustrated in the history of the church."¹

Revelation 1:1-3 [R.S.V. throughout]

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

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ" means first and foremost a revelation *by* Him. It is identical with "the word of God. . . . the testimony of Jesus Christ" mentioned in the next verse. But because this testimony has to do with the future seen through the lens of the first advent and the Cross, it is also a revelation *about* Jesus. The opening phrase of this book occurs elsewhere in Scripture, and is there used objectively to mean a revelation concerning Christ. See 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7,10; 1 Peter 1:7; Gal. 1:12. As Frank Staggs has written, "Jesus Christ is both subject and object—he is the revealer and the revealed."²

Note that the first word in the Greek *apokalupsis* which literally means unveiling. It is this word which has given a title to a whole genre of literature which flourished from approx. 300 B.C. to 300 A.D.³ Apocalyptic literature had its origin in times of stress and persecution, is written in prose, and is eschatological, symbolic, visionary, cosmic, and points to the vindication of God, His truth, and His people. Daniel is the model apocalypse, while not all of it is apocalyptic, for it contains much narrative. The difference between Daniel and Revelation of the Canon, and other apocalypses outside of it, is the difference between night and day. They are immeasurably superior in quality, just as the canonical Scriptures as a whole are superior to the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha.

Let it be carefully observed that the introduction to Revelation sets it forth as (1) an epistle; (2) a prophecy; (3) an apocalypse. Therefore all three must be kept in mind as the exegetical task is pursued. As in John's Gospel, Christ is still the Word of God -- He is God's thoughts made audible. No man comes to the Father except through Him, and no man has seen the Father at any time, but the only Son has revealed Him. See John 1:1,18; Mt. 11:27. In Revelation He speaks as a friend by letter, as a prophet by prophecy, and as a messenger from heaven by apocalyptic.

This opening verse alludes to Daniel when it refers to those things which must come to pass (see Dan. 2:28), and also by its mention of a revelation made by Christ through His angel. See Dan. 10, where both Christ and His angel Gabriel appear to the captive seer to unveil to him what is to befall His people in the latter days. (Dan. 10:14). Later in Rev. 1, the writer uses the expression "I, John" based on his prototype who spoke of "I, Daniel." See Dan. 8:15,27; 9:2; 10:2,7. The interpreter is thus warned from the outset that he cannot understand this book aright unless he keeps the prophecies of Daniel and his contemporaries continually in mind. It was Daniel who wrote about the sanctuary, and its worshippers and persecutors. These things will loom large in the present book. It was Daniel who was loyal to God, testifying before kings at the risk of his life, and concerning whom it is written that none could find fault "save concerning the law of his God." This Daniel lived to see the Euphrates dried up, the fall of Babylon, and his people return from captivity to a new Jerusalem. He was promised that his book would be unsealed in the latter days, and that he would stand in his allotted destiny at the end of time. Both Daniel and John are typical of those worshippers God seeks in a pagan world, men who by voice and life will bear witness to Him, His law, and His gospel.

"What must soon take place." It was God's intention that if the church proved faithful, and took His gospel to the world in that generation, the end would then come. Says Dlisterdieck:

. . . *en tachos* designates neither figuratively the "certainty" of the future, nor the swiftness of the course of things, without reference to the proximity or remoteness of time in which they were to occur. . . . it is decided (from ver. 3) that the speedy coming of what is to happen is meant. . . . The evasion that (it) . . . is to be understood "according to the divine method of computation," as in 2 Pet. iii. 8, is contrary to the context.⁴

"Signified." The Greek term means to teach by signs. See Jn. 12:33; 21:19. Thus we are reminded of the symbolic nature of this book.⁵ All names of earthly places in this book are symbols—Sodom, Egypt, Babylon, Jerusalem, Mount Zion, Euphrates, Armageddon. The same is true of all images drawn from the Old Testament such as candlesticks, wild beasts, waters, horses, locusts, lamb, white robes, palm-branches, tabernacle, ark, bowls, sealed book, stars, waters, mountains, abyss, rainbow, a woman, serpent, dragon, etc.

False exegesis frequently literalizes where it should interpret in a Christocentric fashion. Between Pentecost and the end of the world all the things of Israel used in the prophetic page apply to Christ's church.

"His servant John."⁶ As Daniel was greatly beloved, so was John, the beloved disciple. He is so well-known he needs not but to say, "John." Such would not have been true of any other John. A mere servant does not know what his master is doing, but this one who leaned on the bosom of Jesus shares His secrets. "Mysteries are revealed unto the meek. The pure in heart shall see God. A pure heart penetrateth heaven and hell." (Thomas a Kempis)

"The testimony of Jesus Christ." This testimony is equated with the Spirit of prophecy in 19:10. The terms signify the inspired messages from Jesus through the Holy Spirit.⁷ "The Word of God" in the first half of the sentence makes the meaning clear. The second term is exegetical of the first. Note that prophets are not omniscient, but if faithful bear record to what they see. They are primarily witnesses, and the rest of the book makes it plain that such is also the main task of all believers. A candlestick has no light in itself, and the church's mission is to shed abroad the light of Christ by faithful testifying of the gospel, even if martyrdom is the only earthly reward.

"Blessed is he that readeth." Here is the first of the book's seven beatitudes. Notice the rest:

14:13 -- Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth!

16:15 -- Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!

19:9 -- Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

20:6 -- Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection!

22:7 -- Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book!

22:14 -- Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates!

Bengel observes that the church has behaved as though the blessing was for those who did not read this book. No other book of Scripture has so inviting a summons to its study, but none other has been so neglected. The reading here spoken of primarily means a reading aloud to congregations, but it is made plain that the blessing is likewise for all who hear the words, provided they "keep" or "observe" them by faithful obedience. The Pulpit Commentary observes that to "keep the words we should:

(1) Seize the principles of the book, and abide in them. (2) Study its prophecies, and wait for them. (3) Learn its promises, and lean on them. (4) Ponder its precepts, and obey them. "If you know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."⁸

"For the time is at hand." The word for "time" here could be translated "crisis." The idea is identical with that expressed by Moffatt in Dan. 8:17, where his translation has "the crisis at the close," while other versions have "the time of the end." Preston and Hanson comment:

His conviction that the time is at hand is very like Jesus' own message at the beginning of his ministry 'the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1. 15). The Messiah had

already come and won his victory over sin and death, now the victory is to be completed. The lightning of his coming had been seen; now the thunder of his final triumph is to sound.⁹

God ever speaks to His people as though they will do the right thing. Compare Mt. 19:28, to be fulfilled to eleven of the twelve disciples but not to Judas. Had all who received the Spirit at Pentecost maintained their fervor, Mt. 24:14 would soon have been fulfilled and the Master returned. (Col. 1:26 is hyperbole in the same manner as Lu. 2:1 and Jn. 21:35.)

On the other hand, let it be ever remembered that the coming of Jesus is for no person more distant than the rest of his or her life-time. The timelessness of sleep in death means that the return of Jesus will seem as quick to Abel or to Paul as to the last saint martyred before the close of human probation. Says Bunyan, "If a man would live well, let him fetch his last day to him and make that his company-keeper." Only a tiny minority die of old age, the rest die from violence, or sickness, without living out their days. That person is a fool who plans to *get* ready for the coming of Christ. Sanity demands that we *be* ready this very day. If a person is right with God today, he is ready if Christ should come this day. Besides its personal application, these words point to the crisis nature of the last days, when for the church and the world destiny is decided, and decided by the attitude taken to the gospel. Will the church eschew its legalism and antinomianism and give the gospel its place? Only then can the world be reached.

Revelation 1:4-8:

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

"To the seven churches." The whole book is addressed to the congregations named in v. 11. They represent the church at all times and in all places. When John addressed them, he addressed us.

"Grace and peace from him." The salutation is the familiar one from the world of light. There can be no peace unless grace, God's active love in Christ, has been first received. The peace is not primarily a feeling, but the end of all alienation with heaven, reconciliation with our King and Judge on the basis of the finished work of Christ our Substitute and Representative (Rom. 5:1). John sets forth the Trinity as the Jehovah of the Old Testament. See Ex. 3:14. Because the Exodus redemption prefigured the redemption of the Cross (compare Lu. 9:31) which guarantees our deliverance from this world with its sin and death, God is seen here as the great Deliverer in the same manner as He presented Himself to Moses on the eve of Israel's rescue from Egypt.¹⁰ The intelligent reader or listener should be thrilled at the prospect of speedy redemption from the temptations and trials of the present, for the longest life, compared with the reward to come, is but a moment of probation. All believers may reckon heaven as cheap enough. While "Him who is and who was and who is to come" is applicable to each member of the Trinity, it is here particularly applied to the Father.

"The seven spirits." A symbolic designation of the perfections of the Third Member of the Godhead.

"The faithful witness, the first-born of the dead." Our Lord is named over 140 times in the first three chapters of this book. The New Testament as a whole uses Jesus approximately a thousand times, and Christ about five hundred. We are to remember that this closing volume is not a revelation of St. John the Divine, as many Bibles suggest in the title, but it is a revelation of the Saviour. Christ's work as witness, alluded to in v. 2, is again underlined. He is the firstborn from the dead in the sense of qualitative, not chronological, priority. With Him the great resurrection has begun. All of these titles of the Redeemer will be applied in later chapters. We will see Him in His relationships to the living saints, the dead, and to the opposing powers of earth.

So far we have heard concerning the title of the book, its author and writer, and mode of transmission, the address of the readers, and now its theme is presented. *The last part of v. 5 and the two following*

verses summarize the content of Revelation. The book will speak continually of Christ, what He is and has done, and what He is yet to do. Here we are told of His love which led Him to free us by His atoning death in order that we might have nearness to Him as kings and priests. We are promised that the freedom from sin's guilt and power, which we already have by faith will be visible and immortalized at His coming. The day of the destruction of impenitent sinners is also the day of the destruction of sin, and the glorification of penitent sinners.

The last part of verse five beautifully summarizes the significance of the atonement. "In these words the possession of complete redemption is implied."¹¹ It was not merely to show His love that He died, but in order to uphold God's law. He met its demands that we might be freed from guilt and pollution of soul. The moral influence theory so popular today is right in what it affirms, but wrong in what it denies. It sets forth sin as ignorance, as though only a better knowledge of God were needed. This is a far cry from the New Testament insistence that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin." Heb. 9:22. It is more essential to maintain the holiness of God than even to save those who have slighted that holiness. For God to forgive sinners without the Cross would be a denigration of His law. It would also be a confession of fallibility, for originally He set forth death as the penalty of transgression. In the Acropolis of the New Testament, Ro. 3:19-26, we read that sinners "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood. ... to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus." Note the three concentric circles—justified by His grace; through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God put forward as an expiation. It is the last which is the bulls-eye, and the heart of the divine plan of salvation. To all this John alludes in his fifth verse.

Verse 6 is a splendid illustration of the manner in which Revelation sums up preceding Scriptures. In Genesis, we first read of one who was both a king and a priest—Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God. In Exodus 19, we read that Israel was called to be a nation of priests, members of the kingdom of God. In Psa. 110, we learn that the Saviour to come is to be a king-priest. Now, in Revelation, we find that all the redeemed from every nation and every age have the privileges of kings and priests—dominion and service in the presence of the King of kings. Compare Rev. 5:10; 20:4. This same verse 6 is a reminder to us of the covenant formed at Sinai, where the promises of priesthood and kingship were first made. The Bible is covenant literature throughout. (The titles "Old Testament" and "New Testament" should be more correctly "Old Covenant" and "New Covenant.") It is comprised of seven covenants: (1) Edenic; (2) Noahic; (3) Abrahamic; (4) Sinaitic; (5) Davidic; (6) Christian; (7) Trinitarian, the everlasting covenant. The last is the source of all the others, the agreement within the Trinity to save man through the sacrifice of God the Son. The covenants are one, in that they all spring from the grace of God and offer salvation to sinners. They are distinct, in that some stress promise over law, and others the reverse. All were fulfilled by Christ and by Christ alone. He only kept all the specifications flawlessly, and yet paid the penalty for all human disobedience. As His people's Representative, He has implemented all the covenant blessings and offers them freely to those who will receive them. Only in the light of the covenant, a legal arrangement based on law and promise and fulfilled by Christ's atoning death, can the biblical documents be rightly read. Scripture contains both law and gospel throughout, sometimes warning, sometimes promising. Woe to those who separate law and gospel, or who fail to distinguish them, but blessed is he who discerns that both the righteousness required by the law, and the penalty for its transgression, find their fulfillment in Jesus only, and is imputed to all penitent believers.

Thus the opening passages of this final book of Scripture remind us repeatedly of the everlasting covenant by which we have been redeemed and thus point us to a salvation already achieved. The atonement of Christ at the Cross is the granite rock foundation of redemption, not our variable experience. It is objective, not subjective. Our peace rests on the shed blood of the Saviour, His achievements, not ours, or the Spirit's. Only those who understand these truths will stand for the right though the heavens fall, and be faithful in echoing the testimony of Jesus however fiercely the powers of this world rage and threaten. Martyrs are not made by supposings.

The last part of five and verse six is a dedicatory prayer. Praise is offered because of the salvation by Christ which procured a kingdom. With these two verses should be linked Rev. 12:7-11 and 11:17, which also speak of the kingdom of Christ won by His death, and fully manifested at His coming. Rev. 12 is as clear as chapter 1 that there is a vital connection between the blood and the kingdom, the latter being the fruit of the former. The glory of the gospel is that what is rightly His (the kingdom and righteousness) might be ours. Thus as Bede wrote long ago, ". . . since as King of kings, and a heavenly Priest, by offering Himself for us He hath united us to His own body, no one of the saints is

without the office of a spiritual priesthood, as being a member of the everlasting Priest."¹²

The kingdom now ours should be manifest by a present reigning in life whereby sin no longer has dominion over us. Sin remains, but does not reign in a believer. He "reigns in life through the one man Jesus Christ." Ro. 6:14; 5:17. He recognizes that because of Calvary, Satan, the world, sin, and death have been defeated. This is so for as long as he believes it, for "this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." 1 Jn. 5:4.

The priesthood of all believers, whereby each one may come direct to God and learn His will for himself, and under the guidance of the Spirit find His truth, is a much neglected theme. Believers need no hierarchy to direct their conscience, and no committees to settle for them what is truth. This liberty, whereby they are subservient to none, renders them simultaneously, but in another sense, the servant of all.

Verse 7 quotes from Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10. The Daniel passage, the famous embryo of all Son of Man discussions, speaks of the vindicating Messiah who in judgment punishes evil and rewards the good, shaming those outside the covenant, and acknowledging as His those within the covenant. Thereafter in Scripture this vindication theme is prominent. See particularly Mk. 14:62; Lu. 18:8; Mt. 16:27-28. The "coming in the clouds" is an emblem of judgment which is most appropriate for the introductory passage of this book which more than any other speaks of the judgment and the wrath of God. In Daniel 7:9-13; 8:14; 9:24, the theme is identical--the making an end of sin and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness through the judgment ministry of the Messiah. The entire book of Revelation is concerned with the consummation of these promises, as certainly as the Gospels record their initial fulfillment through the Cross. Christ is called the Son of Man eighty-eight times in the New Testament and the last occasion is in this book, namely 14:14, where He comes as Judge to reap the harvest of earth. To recognize in this phrase "the Son of Man" an emblem of judgment, as many scholars have done, is to have an important key to apocalyptic.

This promise of the return of Christ has particular force for our day. The emphasis of apocalyptic, that only divine intervention can right wrong, has its echo in over three hundred places in the New Testament where Christ's return is pledged. When Christians speak of the finished work of Christ, it is essential that they distinguish between redemption in its narrow and broad meanings. In Lu. 21:28, Christ spoke of a redemption which would draw near after the last great tribulation of earth. Without the second advent, and the translation of the living saints, and the resurrection of the dead, the Cross would be of no ultimate avail. This first chapter of Revelation, by drawing attention to Christ as priest and coming Judge and King, reminds the Christian church of glorious truths too often forgotten. Every weekly holy day (1:10) with its joyous rest points to the eternal rest soon to be ushered in by the glorious appearing of the Saviour.

The quotation from Zechariah about the weeping of all earth's nations as they look upon Him whom they have pierced, points to Armageddon when the angry multitudes of earth, intent on destroying the people of the Lamb, are suddenly interrupted by the advent of Him whom they have despised. Yet another application will be after the millennium when all the wicked meet about the great white throne. Then He who was pierced by their sins must assign their everlasting portion. The verse also indicates that some who have specially opposed the Christ, and jeered at the prospect of His return, may be raised to witness that very event.

The historical allusion in Zech. 12 concerns the weeping over Josiah who was slain at Megiddo in the seventh century B.C. That righteous king prefigured a greater One whom men cannot slay as they once did in 31 A.D. Only John uses the word for "pierced" (Jn. 19:34) in the whole New Testament. But Mt. 24:30 is alluding to the same event. Notice that to John this event is immediately on the horizon. Having named the book, and those to whom it is addressed, as well as those through whom it came, John thereupon presents the great theme of the book--the judgment return of the once-crucified Son of Man. Then those who have not mourned over their sins sufficiently to repent will weep in remorse because the time to change is past. "Even so, Amen" is a coupling of Greek and Hebrew expressions of strong approval and certainty.¹⁴

The preceding verses have referred to the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. Now in v. 8 Deity speaks once more. While "Lord" is usual in the New Testament for Christ, when used in the Revelation it more often means the Father or the Godhead as a whole. This is probably the case here, as the imprimatur is put upon the preceding promise. It is true that elsewhere in this book, "Alpha and Omega" is applied to the Son, which is not strange, for many Old Testament expressions about Jehovah are applied in the Apocalypse to Jesus.

Alpha and Omega, as the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet imply the totality of wisdom in God. All answers are to be found in Him, as surely as He embraces all time and all space. He is also the Almighty. This term occurs nine times in Revelation, but is used by no other New Testament writer. (2 Cor. 6:18 is an Old Testament citation.) It is often found in the Old Testament where the Lord God of Hosts is named, and it refers to His sovereignty over all things rather than merely His omnipotence.¹⁵ Some suggest that the "All-Ruler" would be a better translation. How comforting this title to those early Christians who could feel the net of political persecution tightening about them!

These first eight verses constitute the prologue to the book and their themes and terms are found again in the epilogue. See Rev. 22:6-21.

Revelation 1:9:

I, John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

We come now to the initial vision. Like Ezekiel and Isaiah, this prophet also sees heavenly things and the Lord Himself, as a strengthening prior to his task. Just before this vision, we have a small section of narrative which is significant. John tells us that he himself is the subject of persecution, and that he has been exiled to little Patmos (an island about ten miles by six, approximately forty miles from Miletus, and twenty-four from the coast of Asia Minor). As for Paul in his Roman prison, and Bunyan in his Bedford jail, John's captivity results in the multiplying of the good news of Christ's liberation of sinners. Caird's comment on the situation is interesting.

... It must have been Domitian's new insistence on the worship of the reigning emperor that provided the stimulus for his visions. Emperor-worship had been conducted in Asia since the days of Augustus. But John must have seen in Domitian's edict the emergence of a new totalitarianism which Christians were bound to resist, and which would therefore result in war to the death between church and state, between Lamb and Monster. The persecution did not actually come at that time because within a year Domitian had died by an assassin's knife. But that fact deprives John's vision of none of its depth and power.¹⁶

Wordsworth writes:

At the opening of this book, Christ displays a specimen of the providential Scheme which is to be revealed in the Apocalypse. John was banished by the powers of this world; but Christ uses his exile and detention in Patmos as an occasion for revealing to him the glories of His Second Coming, and for commissioning him to write what he could not now preach by word of mouth. . . .¹⁷

As in the first apocalypse Daniel the narratives were keys to the vision, so with this brief vignette. John in tribulation is cheered by the coming of the glorified Christ. Even so it is to be for the whole persecuted church. Their plight will be fully known to the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God, and the Saviour will come to place His feet on the stormy waves threatening to engulf them. The words of v. 17, "Fear not, I am. . .," are similar to those heard by John long ago when it seemed that he and his brethren were about to be swallowed by Galilee. See Jn. 6:20.

"The tribulation, and the kingdom, and the patient endurance." These elements summarize much of the book thematically. He is writing about the great tribulation which seems imminent and which is to precede the advent of Christ, and the making visible of the kingdom. Endurance will be required of those threatened with martyrdom. Charles speaks of this endurance as "the spiritual alchemy which transmutes suffering into royal dignity." If it seems that this book is not treasured as it should be, these verses suggest why. Milligan, Bruce, and others have taken pains to spell this out.

The scorn, the hatred, the persecution of the world! For such as were exposed to these things was the Apocalypse written, by such was it understood; and if, in later times, it has often failed to make its due impression on the minds of men, it is because it is not intended for those who are at ease in Zion. The more Christians are compelled to feel that the world hates them, and

that they cannot be its friends, the greater to them will be the power and beauty of this book. Its revelations, like the stars of the sky, shine most brightly in the cold, dark night. 18

In more comfortable times Rev. may be degraded to the unworthy status of a book of puzzles, a battleground for conflicting schools of interpretation, or it may be briefly dismissed as a putrid backwater, cut off from the main stream of Christian faith and life. But 'when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word*, the book becomes once more what it really is, a living word from God, full of encouragement and strength to those who find that 'all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted'. Christians in our own day who have to suffer for 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' under regimes which set themselves 'against the LORD and his anointed' have no difficulty in identifying Antichrist or in finding themselves in the company of those who 'come out of the great tribulation'. Above all, this book reminds them that He with whom and for whom they endure these things is the triumphant Lord of history, and that His victory is theirs. 19

Revelation 1:10-11:

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

We have been told about the human writer and his geographical location. Now we learn of his psychical state and the time of the vision. There is no evidence whatever for the assumption made by many that the Lord's Day here means the Day of the Lord (which would be written differently in Greek. Compare 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). All the features mentioned as to the who, the where, the how, and the when, hang together as a unity, and apply to the situation on Patmos.

There is still less evidence for the almost universal assumption of those who reject the above position (the Day of the Lord) that Sunday is intended. 20 Milligan says, "Proof is wanting that the first day of the week had yet received the name of "the Lord's Day."21 Criswell admits, "We are under no commandment to meet on Sunday."22

The Anchor Bible, after mentioning the various possibilities, declares, "However, it is very difficult to determine which is meant. Most probably the Christians would still be keeping the Sabbath, the seventh day." The author adds that nevertheless the Easter Day would have been very appropriate. We prefer the possibility she quotes as held by Strand, "the seventh day of the week," as the only one consistent with biblical usage elsewhere. Compare Ex. 20:8-11 (which calls the Sabbath the Lord's three times), Isa. 58:13; Mk. 2:28; Mt. 12:8. The first conclusive evidence for the application of "Lord's Day" to the first day of the week is found in the apocryphal *Gospel According to Peter* (9, 12, ANF, 9:8) towards the end of the second century. When we recall the tremendous changes of our own era in the last three quarters of a century, we will hesitate to equate the phrase in Rev. 1:10 with usage made that long a period after the writing of the Apocalypse—particularly when it conflicts with one and a half millenniums of biblical usage.

Neither Jews nor Christians would call Caesar Lord, and John here speaks of the sabbath in such a way as to show that Christians knew only one Lord—the Lord of the sabbath. In the vision received on this holy day of rest, John and all Christians were promised the speedy ushering in of the eternal rest, already foreshadowed by our present rest in Christ. See Heb. 4:3ff.

Revelation 1:12-16:

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

John turns to "see" the voice that called to him like a trumpet, and sees the glorified Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King, amidst seven golden lampstands. It is a vision of the heavenly sanctuary where believers are already seated in heavenly places. Eph. 2:6. Christ is first of all set forth as the "Son of Man," the well-known apocalyptic symbol of judgment, vindication, and theodicy. See Dan. 7:13. This phrase embodies all that is comprehended by Dan. 7:22,26,27; 8:14; 9:24.²³ The sanctuary is central in each visionary preface to a prophetic chain in Revelation. From it all decisions regarding activities on earth proceed, and the One deciding is the Lamb on the throne to whom all judgment is committed. See John 5:22. The Saviour, as the priestly warden of the temple courts, is dressing the lamps. He is in their "midst," in fulfillment of the promise of Mt. 18:20. Says H. M. Feret:

When a fighting regiment knows that its commanding officer is there, sharing the smoke and the heat of battle, that awareness has a far more tonic effect than a message of encouragement conveyed to the fighters by a general seated in glory in some distant palace headquarters.²⁴

In Christ's hand is a kingly scepter of gleaming stars, or is it a princely signet-ring? We are reminded of Jn. 10:27-30. What security, to be held between the hands of the Father and the Son!

The image of a candlestick for a body of believers had already been used in Zech. 4, and reflects Ex. 25:37. The separated lamps indicate the non-national state of Christian churches, unlike the theocracy of Israel. We should not fail to notice how naturally John uses Jewish imagery for Christian truth. All of Moses and the prophets has been fulfilled by Christ. He is the yea and amen to the 3,000 promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. The church is His body, and to apply the Old Testament imagery in any way other than to the Christian church and its Head is a tragic error. Too many commentaries of great exegetical skill have forgotten this when interpreting Rev. 7 and 11, and by introducing literal Israel have been guilty of hermeneutical mayhem, and exegetical confusion. Let all who read Hal Lindsey, the Scofield Bible, and volumes of similar kind stop and consider.

On v. 13, R. H. Charles writes:

. . . The fact that the articles are absent . . . is so far from being a matter of difficulty that in this context they could not be present. The Being whom the Seer sees is not "like the Son of Man," but is "the Son of Man." But the Seer can rightly describe Him as being "like a son of man." This technical phraseology in Apocalyptic means that the Being so described is not a man. . . . there can be no doubt that long before the time of our Seer the phrase "like a Son of Man". . . in Dan. vii. 13 was taken as a Messianic designation.²⁵

Milligan admonishes, "We are to think of Him as man; but what a man!"²⁶

The vision is awe-inspiring. It is full of majesty and conveys strongly what Rudolf Otto called the sense of the numinous. The long robe fits either a priest or a king, and is appropriate since Christ is both. The white garment used by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement was similar to this. See Lev. 16:4, and Ex. 28:4; 39:29. The white hair, like the Son of Man expression, alludes to the vision of Dan. 7 once more, only here the Son of Man, to indicate His divinity, has also the appearance of Daniel's Ancient of Days. Apart from the white robe, the characteristic features here point to kingly power.

Caird warns us not to over fragmentize the vision.

But to compile such a catalogue is to unweave the rainbow. John uses his allusions not as a code in which each symbol requires separate and exact translation, but rather for their evocative and emotive power. This is not photographic art. His aim is to set the echoes of memory and association ringing. The humbling sense of the sublime and the majestic which men experience at the sight of a roaring cataract or the midday sun is the nearest equivalent to the awe evoked by a vision of the divine. John has seen the risen Christ, clothed in all the attributes of deity, and he wishes to call forth from his readers the same response of overwhelming and annihilating wonder which he experienced in his prophetic trance.²⁷

One point, however, must not be missed. Our Lord's kingly power is here presented with strong overtones of judgment. The vision points back to Daniel's vision of the great Judgment Day. The searching eyes and burning feet warn that evil will be perceived and dealt with. The sword is not only a reminder of His prophetic word, but also an emblem of judgment. See 2:16; 19:21; and Isa. 11:4.²⁸ The countenance, brilliant as the sun, tells of that great day when earth and sky shall flee from His

presence. John's reaction therefore is not strange, and is a warning to all of that moment when they must face the undimmed vision of the Almighty.

Revelation 1:17-20:

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

Hoeksema summarizes the import of this vision:

Now let us try to view the whole significant picture. Christ, Who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, the Head of His ideal church, given Him by the Father, also is in the midst of His church in the world. He is her light and life. Without Him she is nothing and can do nothing. He is in her midst as her merciful High Priest, praying in her behalf and blessing her with all the blessings of salvation. He is with her as her mighty King, ruling over her by His grace and Spirit, protecting her in the midst of hateful enemies, and leading her unto victory and glory. He comes to her also as her righteous Judge, commending whatever good there is found in her, rebuking and admonishing her for her sins and weaknesses, calling her to repentance and threatening her with His wrath and judgments. It is because Christ is in the midst of His church in the world as her Judge that the church must ever reform, even though separation from a certain manifestation of her is the result. And He is in her midst as her only Prophet, giving her the stars, instructing her through His Word and Spirit, and causing her to know the things that must shortly come to pass. Look on Him, and be filled with that fear and trembling in which you must work out your own salvation! Behold Him, and be assured that the church can never perish; she is safe though all hell come raving against her!²⁹

Note the infinite tenderness of Him who is both Judge and King. Compare 3:19-20; 7:17; 21:3-4; 21:7. Thus the vision, while telling of Judgment, is also meant to be consolation and encouragement to true believers. They could not fail to recognize the mysterious Being of Dan. 7 who would take vengeance on idolatrous and persecuting empires as He vindicated His own oppressed. This opening vision reveals Christ not only as Prophet, Priest, and King, but also as the triumphant vindicating Hero, who tenderly caring for His own will lead His people to victory over the might of paganism, as Daniel had foretold. How precious that assurance must have been to the besieged city of God in the first century! The summary of Hengstenberg is admirable.

The appearance here stands in the closest relation to the matter in hand. It presents before our view those aspects of Christ's nature, which were adapted to the seven churches, and to all who are placed with them in similar states and circumstances; on the one hand to bring them to repentance, and on the other to fill them with consolation and encouragement. What he afterwards says to them in word, he prefigures to them in the first instance through his appearance -- the regular relation of appearance and word to each other in the sacred Scriptures -- so that the appearance bears throughout a onesided character. His glorious majesty, and his punitive righteousness, these are the aspects which here alone were to come distinctly into view. . . 30

Verse 18 assures us that He who has suffered death, and risen triumphantly, now has the judicial keys of death and the grave. He has taken death, that Goliath sword in Satan's hand, and used it to behead the great giant, as did David of old. He "has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light." 2 Tim. 1:10. See also Heb. 2:14. Let hell rage, and its minions threaten, but their teeth have been drawn by One greater than they. And John's readers would draw the important moral -- the greatest conquest in the universe was a conquest via pain and suffering! Why then fear the martyr's fate? To fall before Rome would be to fall into the hands of Him who is the resurrection and the life, who counts the hairs of our head, and without whom not one sparrow drops to the ground.

Today, most people die without glory. Neither flowers, poetry, nor song can cover the horrible face of the unwanted visitor. Death is a black camel which kneels besides every man's gate. The invincible reaper knocks ultimately at every door. If as yet he has not visited your family, watch the road. And those who have apparently most of life remaining should remember two things: (1) The first person to die in this world was not an old man, but his son; (2) The first twenty years are the largest half of any person's life. "One short life, 'Twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."

Verse 19 is misused by those who endeavor to find here a threefold pattern for the book. Caird refers to that endeavor as "a grotesque oversimplification," and adds that "the remaining chapters include many tableaux which can only denote events already past or present at the time when John was writing."³¹ Many years ago Mauro suggested that the verse could be rendered, "Write the things which thou hast seen, both (or even) the things which are, and also the things which shall be hereafter."³² This type of construction is found in Jn. 4:36; 7:28; 15:24. Moffatt comments that "the contents of the visions. . . consist of what is and what is to be."³³ Mounce recently suggests: "Translate, 'Write, therefore, the things you are about to see, that is, both what now is and what lies yet in the future.'" ³⁴ Usually linked with the dispensationalist stratagem with reference to this verse is Rev. 4:1, said to indicate the rapture of the church. This also will not stand, for later verses use similar language, and not even dispensationalists believe in a series of raptures. See, for example, 17:1; 21:4-10.

Verse 20 speaks for itself in indicating how readers are to proceed in interpreting the book. It consists of symbols which must be recognized as such and not be taken literally. Surely the chief reason for our ignorance of this wonderful book is not because of the difficulty of learning the truth, but because of the infinitely more difficult task of unlearning preconceived errors.

This adjunct is of the highest moment. It gives us to understand . . . *that the entire series of visions will consist of symbolical mysteries, not to be understood literally*, requiring interpretation, yet susceptible of interpretation through Biblical means. The interpretation which Christ here gives by way of example reminds us of the interpretation of the first two parables in Matthew xiii., also designed as a guide to the interpretation of the rest. ³⁵

The meaning of "angels" in this explanation has been much debated. Its usual significance in Revelation is with reference to heaven's ministering spirits, but it is not conceivable that the messages, warnings, and encouragements in the following letters are intended for such. In this instance the generic sense of messenger must be retained, but applied to all human messengers to the churches sent by divine authority. It does not mean a particular office such as deacon, elder, or pastor.

No better word could be found to so fully express the positive character of all true authority in the church, and yet to warn against merely human assumption of power by those seeking preeminence. There is no rightful authority in the church of God other than that commissioned by Christ. Its signs are regeneration, fidelity, willingness to serve as the least of all, an apt transmission of God's message. Having considered the first vision of Revelation we are ripe for the important warning of Trench regarding all apocalyptic pictures.

The description of the glorified Lord, which has not been brought to a conclusion, sublime as a purely mental conception, but intolerable if we were to give it an outward form and expression, and picture Him with hair white as wool, and the rest, may suggest a few reflections on the apocalyptic, and generally the Hebrew symbolism, and the very significant relations or difference and opposition in which it stands to the Greek. Religion and art for the Greek ran into one another with no very great preponderance of the claims of the former over the latter. Even in his religious symbolism the sense of beauty, of form, or proportion, overrules every other and must, at all costs, find its satisfaction. . . . But with the Hebrew symbolism it is altogether different. The first necessity there is that the symbol should set forth truly and fully the religious idea of which it is intended to be the vehicle. How it would appear when it clothed itself in an outward form and shape, whether it would find favor and allowance at the bar of taste, this was quite a secondary consideration; may be confidently affirmed not to have been a consideration at all; for indeed, with the one exception of the cherubim, there was no intention that it should embody itself there, but rather that it should remain ever and only a purely mental conception, the unembodied sign of an idea. I may observe, by the way, that no skill of delineation can make the cherubim other than unsightly objects to the eye. Thus, in this present description of Christ, sublime and majestic as it is, it is only such so long as we keep it wholly apart from any external embodiment.³⁶

One more thing should be said before we leave this chapter. The task and duty of the church is here made plain. The vision is a symbolic echo of the gospel commission. Like John, every believer is called upon to witness for Christ, and that witness is not the exhibiting of our own marvelous experiences, but rather the testimony of the gospel—Christ's experience on Calvary as our Substitute and Representative—an experience which abolished Satan, death, and sin forensically, and inaugurated the kingdom of everlasting righteousness. Blessed be His name for ever and ever!

EXCURSUS ON REVELATION ONE

REVELATION ONE AND HERMENEUTICS

Let us not miss the hermeneutical significance of this introductory vision of Christ, His person and work. Revelation commences with an emphasis on Christ's *accomplished* salvation, and points to the *consummated* salvation yet to occur. The Redeemer is shown among His people in the temple of God. The reader's gaze is riveted to these things, not to the political situation of the empire or any secular theme.

Views of soteriology and eschatology are usually of the one pattern. If soteriology is Christ-centered, as is the case with the apostles who see the cosmic Christ rather than "Christ in me" as the focal point, then eschatology will be Christ-centered and from the cosmic viewpoint, not something limited and literal, national, nor individual.

We pause to underline this point. The New Testament heart is the historical event of Calvary. Salvation was then accomplished. Faith looks out of self to the Savior. But all false religion is man-centered and chooses the things of sense rather than those of faith. "We would prefer," says J. E. Fison, "heroic crucifixion on our own, rather than face humdrum crucifixion with Christ. We carnally seek not the righteousness of faith, but a righteousness that can be seen, not a Christ at the right hand of God perceivable through the spiritual eye only, but a Christ within and productive of emotions, signs, and wonders. We demand the fruit before we will believe in the root. This was the issue in apostolic times, in the later Middle Ages, and remains so now, and will be in the final crisis. Beholding Calvary, God could say, "Thou O Christ art all I want," but His professed followers often seek more. Unless they see, they will not believe. Jn. 4:48; 20:27-29. The church which turned from the power of the Spirit to the power of the state during the Dark Ages also turned from an outward righteousness to an inward one. The very heart of this apostasy was opposition to the righteousness of faith alone. All outward religious forms but echoed this aversion. Thus instead of faith in the heavenly priest, visible earthly priests offered themselves. Instead of the heavenly sanctuary, every church was made a sanctuary with holy water, incense and indeed a sacrifice - that of the Mass.

Let it not be thought that this is any attack upon our brethren in the church of Rome. The religion of the pre-Reformation time was the religion of the natural human heart. By nature, we ever seek to put our personal righteousness in the place of the righteousness of the God-man. That Antichrist is at work in all of us, when we place man, sinful man, in the place of God. We cannot reproach any false religion of the past without reproaching our own evil hearts with their perpetual tendency to exalt self rather than the Redeemer. Man-centered religion leads to man-centered eschatology, a far cry from the message of Rev. 1. The religion of faith is a thing apart from the religion of sight. When Christ came offering to redeem sinners from captivity, the Pharisees were annoyed. They wanted an outward deliverance from the power of Rome. We Christians have not come to a material mountain that can be touched, but to Mount Zion in heaven, while the religion of Pharisees has always consisted of things that can be touched and seen. When Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, and His raising of it in three days, many could only think of the visible material sanctuary. But He who was the invisible stone of stumbling was also the invisible temple.

The opening chapter of Revelation speaks of truth being signified - ("sign"-ified). The Greek term, is that used by the same writer in Jn. 12:33 and 21:19. This present book is a book of symbols, symbols which only faith can interpret, faith established upon the Word of God. At the close of the chapter we are given an example which should guide us hereafter. "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." v. 20.

Those who literalize the symbols of this book, who see modern Jewry where Israel is mentioned, who look for an Armageddon in Palestine, or a drying up of the Euphrates in Turkey, or a rebuilding of the ancient Babylon or Jerusalem's temple, will miss the blessing pronounced in v. 3, for they have not heeded the warning of 22:18,19. "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and

in the holy city, which are described in this book." To fail to see that *the revelation of things to come is also the revelation of Christ, and that the revelation of Christ is also the revelation of things to come*, as declared in v. 1, is to exchange rubies for paste, and heaven for earth, and if persisted in, tragically risks the exchanging of eternity for time; for whatever gets our attention gets us!

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Rev. 2 and 3)

Chapter 17

Before giving detailed attention to the seven letters, some generalizations should be made. First, the pattern of the letters is constant for the most part, and consists of seven divisions as follows: 1.

1. **Commission:** (Address to the specific church)
2. **Character:** (A description of Christ, chiefly taken from the visions of 1:10-16)
3. **Commendation:** (Reference is made to whatever is good in the church except for Laodicea)
4. **Condemnation:** (Specific evils are pointed out to each church, except Smyrna and Philadelphia)
5. **Correction:** (Pertinent counsel for each church)
6. **Call:** (The challenge to hear. Note that the call changes place with the promise after the first three letters, as though the Spirit is now outside the church calling to those within)
7. **Challenge:** (A special promise for each church) Lange has summed up the appropriateness of the character of Christ as presented to each church:

. . . The superscriptions have the common form of Christ's self-designation (Amos i. 3, etc.); they present the various attributes of His majestic appearance as described in ch. i. The distribution of the attributes harmonizes with the churches. For Ephesus, the metropolis: the seven stars and seven candlesticks. For Smyrna, the martyr church, He that was dead and is alive again. For Pergamos, where Satan's seat is: the sharp, two-edged sword. For Thyatira, where the spirit of fanaticism is rampant; the eyes as flames of fire, and the feet like a glowing stream of molten metal. For dead Sardis: the Possessor of the Seven Spirits (of life) and the seven stars. For faithful Philadelphia: the Possessor of the keys of David, the Opener of a door to the church. For Laodicea, as for Ephesus, a more general designation of Christ, yet under the name of the Amen, who certainly fulfills His threats. The attributes also correspond with the commendations, admonitions, and threats, i.e., with the criticisms and the promises.²

Similarly Bengel has summed up the promises found in the challenge section:

In the seven epistles there are twelve *promises*. In the third, fourth, and sixth, there is a two-fold promise, and in the fifth a three-fold promise; each one of the promises being distinguished by a particular expression: I will give, I will not blot out, I will confess, I will write.--The promise to him that overcometh [conquereth] is declaratory, sometimes of the enjoyment of the most precious boons, sometimes of immunity from the extremest misery. The one is included in the other, and when a part of the blessedness and glory of the victor is expressed, the whole should be understood, ch. xxi. 7. That part is particularly expressed which relates to the virtues and deeds referred to in the address.-- Some things contained in these promises are not again expressly mentioned in the Revelation; as, for instance, the manna, the confession of the victor's name, the name of the New Jerusalem written upon the victor, the sitting upon Christ's throne. Some things bear a resemblance to what is afterwards declared concerning Christ Himself; viz. the secret name, ch. xix. 12; the shepherdizing of the nations, ch. xix. 15; the Morning Star, ch. xxii. 16. Some things are expressly mentioned again in their proper place; as the tree of life, ch. xxii. 2; immunity from the second death, ch. xx. 6; the name in the book of life, ch. xx. 12, xxi. 27; the abiding in the temple of God, ch. vii. 15; the name of God and of the Lamb on the righteous, ch. xiv. 1, xxii. 4.³

There is a significant progressiveness also in the promises which should be noted. They begin with assurances that what was lost in Eden (the Tree of Life and immunity from death) will be restored. Next there are allusions to privileges known in Israel's history -- the manna from heaven and rulership over the nations such as David and Solomon knew. Finally, the last three promises point to the future, the bestowal of eschatological justification in the judgment, citizenship in the New Jerusalem and participation in Christ's throne and His session at the right hand of God. Both threats and promises

are climactic. Fuller lists them as follows, but counts differently to Bengel:

(1) Of *threats*.

- (a) I will remove thy candlestick" (ii. 5).
- (b) "I will war with the sword" (verse 16).
- (c) "I will come as a thief" (iii.3).
- (d) "I will spew thee out of my mouth" (verse 16).

(2) Of *promises*.

- (a) "Tree of life" (ii.7).
- (b) "Crown of life." Preservation from "second death" (ii.10,11). The promise here is *doubled*.
- (c) Hidden manna. White stone. New Name (ii.17), The promise is here *tripled*.
- (d) Power over nations. Rod-of-iron rule. Breakage to shivers. Morning Star The promise here is *quadrupled*.
- (e) Sentence of worthiness. White raiment. Name in book of life. Confession before Christ' Father. Confession before his angels. (iii.4,5). Here the promise is *quintupled*.
- (f) Crown. Pillar. Immovability. Name of God. Name of New Jerusalem. Christ's new name (iii.11,12). Here the promise is *sextupled*.
- (g) Enthronement with Christ (iii.21). This promise is *sevenfold*, since enthronement with Christ is the consummation of all the twenty-one promises; *twenty-one* being the multiple of *three* and *seven*, each of which is a *perfect* number. Thus their multiple is *perfect*. These elaborate illustrations of intensified amplification disclose an unexpected literary excellence in the Apocalypse,— its *minutely artistic character*.⁴

Of the seven churches, two are given unqualified praise—Smyrna and Philadelphia; two unqualified blame—Sardis and Laodicea; and the remaining three are both praised and blamed, for their condition is mixed.

It is interesting to observe that all seven letters are written with the prospect of the second advent in view, and what that event will mean for the destiny of the members of the churches. Each church is judged ahead of time by the Lord, in order that it might not be condemned when He appears. The counsel given in each instance is intended to guarantee to all who accept it immediate readiness for the great judgment day. Similarly, the challenge is always addressed not to "*they* that overcome," but to "*he* that overcometh." We shall be saved only as individuals, not as communities. Tenney comments on the invitation to Laodicea as follows:

In the last appeal to Laodicea, the darkest and most hopeless of the churches, He says, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in" (3:20). The door is not to be opened by unanimous vote, but by one repentant individual. Renewal of fellowship and of power may come to the many through the action of the few, or, perchance, of one.⁵

It should also be kept in mind as one reads the letters that Christ ever views the condition of the church from the standpoint of its efficiency in shedding light into the darkness of the unbelieving world. He is chiefly concerned with those spiritual maladies which affect the living testimony. The light of the candlestick is even more what the church *is* than what it *does* or *says*. All we *do* reflects all that we *are*, and Christ intends that the entire conduct of believers should be such as to "show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light." Because we can only be right if in a right relationship with Him, the opening of each letter points the hearers to the glories of their Lord. It is by beholding that we become changed. Christ not only is the Great Physician diagnosing the spiritual disease, but He Himself is the cure.

One more point should be considered before engaging in detailed examination of the seven epistles. Can we discover the root of the various problems of the churches? The condemnations include mention of a loss of first love, toleration of false teachers and their teachings, spiritual fornication (worldly relationships indicated by eating foods offered to idols), spiritual lethargy ("You have the name of being alive, and you are dead" --"I have not found your works perfect"), and self-righteousness and self-satisfaction. *These ills can in each instance be categorized under either*

*legalism or antinomianism.*⁶ Legalistic, perfunctory performance of duty accompanied lack of first love, spiritual lethargy and death, self-righteousness and self-satisfaction. Antinomianism was manifested by those churches involved in heresy and worldliness. Both legalism and antinomianism can themselves be traced to the first disease named -- "thou hast lost thy first love." The mainspring of all convincing testimony to the world is love for Christ. How is it lost and found?

Lu. 7:36-47 is most instructive in this regard. It chiefly concerns two characters—one who had been antinomian (adulterous), and the other a legalist. The climax of the story about Mary Magdalene and Simon is found in verse 47. "I tell you, her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven; where little has been forgiven, little love is shown" (N.E.B.)" Mary was cured of her antinomianism by the forgiveness of her sins. Her sins were forgiven when she recognized them as "many," in contrast to Simon who felt that his were "little." Is not the story shouting the truth so vital for all Christian service — that those serve most who believe they have been forgiven most, and those serve least who think they have been forgiven least? Which is to say that the church's final service for Christ and the world in spreading the gospel will only come as a result of the deep conviction of sinfulness and grateful acceptance of the forgiving grace of Christ. See Rev. 3:14-20.

Legalism and antinomianism have their only cure in the right use of the law and the gospel. The antinomian needs the law to convict him of sin, but the legalist even more so. Only the awareness that the law reaches to the motives of the heart, and comprehends not mere outward fulfillment of the obviously religious duties, but the whole-hearted surrender of will in things great and small, things inward and outward--only this conviction can shatter the legalist, and prepare him for that forgiveness of sins which will be the springboard to service. When he learns that sin is not merely the violation of a law, but insult and damage done to the Person of the Lawgiver; when he sees that all sin is against God, and is therefore infinite in its guilt because done against an infinite Person—then there is hope for him. Then he sees he has sinned much, and consequently on finding forgiveness he will love much.

The blight on religion in every era has been primarily legalism, not blatant antinomianism. The spirit of Pharisaism is the spirit of human nature. The Pharisee was no conscious hypocrite, but had high perception of duty and obligation, and was usually conscientious in performance. What then was his problem? He lacked awareness of his sinfulness. He believed God fellowshiped with him on the basis of his piety. This is why he could take other sinners by the throat to exact every penny from them. Never having experienced forgiveness he could not forgive. The pharisaic religion lacked the essential elements of grace and mercy. They thought of God as like themselves, and therefore had no sympathy for Christ's attitude towards "publicans and sinners." But the very heart of Christianity is the forgiveness of sins. "Religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude." The pillars of the gospel are two: the badness of man, and the goodness of God. Only he who perceives both can be a Christian—one who puts no confidence in any righteousness or moral strength of his own, and therefore looks constantly to Jesus for forgiveness, wisdom and power—things never received once and for all, but only moment by moment, as conscious need creates the vacuum and faith fills it.

With this in mind, several facts stand out. The reason Jesus did not come in the first century is made plain in these letters. The seven epistles portray the church of John's day. As Ramsey writes:

Regarding these two chapters as presenting a complete picture of the visible church as she then was, we cannot fail to perceive their intimate and essential connection with the rest of the book. They set clearly before us, what it is very important should be borne in mind, in order rightly to estimate the progress of the church, and to account for her defections and reverses. They present her as she actually was at the close of the apostolic period, when fully furnished for her mighty work and started on her long career of conflict. They show her precise condition when the apostolic gifts and miraculous powers which had furnished and authenticated her testimony were withdrawn, and with the naked word of that testimony, and the sole guidance of the Holy Spirit, she entered on that course of trial and suffering so graphically and grandly described in its principles, progress and results, in this wonderful book. Here are the beginnings of all the evils that afterwards grew to such mighty proportions, and brought down such fearful judgments.⁷

The true gospel is like quicksilver-- hard to hold, easy to lose. The early church never took hold of that gospel in its fullness, and thus was never girded with fullness of power to complete its task of evangelizing the world. How can any take the gospel to the world if not clear on what the gospel is? So long as professed believers fail to see the depths of the law of God and the centrality of grace, mercy, and forgiveness in true religion, the gospel cannot be proclaimed effectively. When, like Paul,

we see ourselves as chief of sinners, less than the least of all saints, able of ourselves to do nothing; and like Mary forgiven much—only then will we be able to love God and man much, presenting the good news with broken but warm hearts, and quivering lips. Only then will men believe and be saved, and Jesus will return as promised (Mt. 24:14). This is the heart of the message of these two chapters of Revelation. It also casts light as important on all subsequent presentations of religious declension, particularly chapters 11 to 18.

Now let us look at these two chapters as the last personal messages of Jesus to His church. These letters are unique as being the only record we have of any complete addresses by Christ. Those in the Gospels are certainly abridged, but that does not seem the case with these. Furthermore, we have here the actual words of Christ, not truth as expressed through the words of an apostle. John is but Christ's amanuensis. But it is not difficult to imagine John's thoughts as he anticipates Christ's dictation:

God is about to assume His power and begin to reign (xi.17), the Messiah is on the point of coming; but first there must overtake the Church a trial of unparalleled severity, connected with the blasphemous determination of the Emperor to compel all men to worship him. In what condition are the churches to meet this hour of trial? In what condition are Christians to meet their Messiah?⁸

Anyone who turned to Revelation chapters two and three after reading the Old Testament prophets would immediately be struck by the contrast. Bengel asserted that "the epistolary form is a preeminence of the Scriptures of the New Testament as compared with those of the Old."⁹ Bernard compares the methods of two eras thus: "Thus the Prophets delivered *oracles to the people*, but the Apostles wrote *letters to the brethren*. . . .¹⁰ " With a becoming sense of privilege and awe let us turn to the most important short letters the world has ever known. Concerning them, Bengel not long before his death said, "There was scarcely anything that was so much fitted to affect and purify us."¹¹

Rev. 2:1-7:

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

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

The classic work by W. M. Ramsay, on the seven letters from the standpoint of their history, geography, and social conditions, says of Ephesus that it was the city of change. The law of its being as attested by "an extra-ordinary series of changes and vicissitudes" had been mutability. Nevertheless, it was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia, and was so situated as to have a fine harbor which made it the natural landing site from Rome for Asian travellers. For one coming from Patmos, this city was at the head of the circular road joining the seven cities addressed.

On the grounds of its greatness and the root significance of the church's grave defect, the first letter bears the name of the city which had been the site of missionary and pastoral labors by Paul, Timothy, Apollos, Aquila, and Priscilla, Tychicus, and ultimately John himself. Its special privileges were not only Christian, but commercial, geographical, and cultural. On the other hand, its temple to Diana was one of the seven wonders of the world, and was responsible for fostering that moral degeneracy characteristic of all heathenism.

Christ first commends before He censures. Would that all who read the letter might emulate Him! He praises the zeal of the Ephesian Christians and commends not only their labors, but their concern for truth, and hatred of heresy. It is significant that, in this very first epistle, false teachers are referred to. Acts 20:28-31 records how Paul had warned the Ephesian elders years before, that after his death "grievous wolves" would enter Christian communities "not sparing the flock," and speaking perverse

things in such a way as to draw believers after themselves rather than after Christ. John now tells us of the fulfillment as he records his Master's message.

The false teachers referred to as Nicolaitans (identical with the Balaamites later mentioned) were almost certainly Gnostics, believing that matter is evil, and could be dealt with either by asceticism or license. Immorality frequently resulted from such teaching, and the antinomianism here brought to view constitutes one of the two basic evils against which these seven letters warn. The other is legalism into which the Ephesian opponents of the Gnostic heretics had fallen. In the Olivet discourse, Christ had warned that the love of many believers would grow cold amid the iniquity of the pagan world and apostasy within the Christian communities. This love includes love to God and man. Compare 1 Jn. 4:16.

There should never be a time when a Christian cannot confess, "Christ means more to me this day than ever before." Christian life is like riding a bicycle—one either goes on or goes off. Growth is the chief characteristic of life, and sanctification is the deepening of faith, hope, humility, and love, as one comes into closer and closer fellowship with the Savior. But wherever the vision is diverted from Him, all truth slips out of focus, and men no longer see themselves as sinners dependent on the mercy of God. Outward religious duties can be still pursued mechanically, but the soul has departed. Only the labor of love, only the work of faith is acceptable. See Rom. 14:23; 1 Thess. 1:3. When we obey the apostolic admonitions to "consider Him," "looking unto Jesus" then the true gospel in its purity can be maintained. The nearer we come to the Master, the more sinful we will appear in our own eyes, for in the light of His purity our defects appear enlarged. While sin will lose its charms, yet the conscience becomes more sensitive, and that which would not concern the generality of men becomes occasions of grieving and repentance. Indeed, the conscience of a Christian would cast him down a thousand times a day but for the knowledge that Christ is His righteousness. Rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins, His acceptance of us despite our shortcomings, we grow in love. But the Ephesians were travelling in the opposite direction, in danger of becoming "icily regular and splendidly null.

It should be observed that Christ commends hatred for the "deeds" of the heretics, not the hatred of the heretics themselves. Men too often love the sin and hate the sinner, forgetting that with God it is the reverse.

The first promise here given is the last one recorded as fulfilled. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates" (22:14). In this first of the churches to whom the book of Revelation was addressed, we find enumerated seven marks of faithfulness—works, labor, patience, hatred of evil, zeal in detecting heresy, perseverance under persecution, and steadfastness. But all these could not save the church so long as love for Christ was lessening. Without love, all other fruit is valueless. And love can only be maintained by concentration on the Beloved.

There can be no real doubt but that this picture of the Ephesians is remarkably appropriate for the whole apostolic age. The early Church was spiritually aggressive and intolerant of error. It did not shrink back as persecution deepened. Nevertheless, the evil seed of the fruit of apostasy mysteriously developed, as busy pursuers of the good somehow neglected Him who was the best. The record of the second century testifies that the gospel of grace becomes less and less prominent after the death of John, and all the ills which inevitably follow that loss made their threatening appearance. It is a warning to the church of our day that the bustle and stir of our religion is quite unacceptable to God so long as Christ and His Cross are not made central. The vehement confessions of Paul must ever characterize any church that is truly Christian. "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). "But far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

The words of Spurgeon are worthy of our meditation:

"Thou hast left thy first love." "Is that serious?" saith one. It is the most serious ill of all; for the church is the bride of Christ, and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things. It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth; if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So, my brethren, this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with Him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life. As a church, we must love Jesus, or else we have lost our reason for existence. A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. ... It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the Great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and deliver us from it. . . . No peril can be greater than this. Lose love, lose

all. Leave our first love, we have left strength, and peace, and joy, and holiness. 12

The overcoming that is mentioned in the challenge to each of the churches should not be understood as merely ethical. The overcoming prominent in the New Testament is the relationship of faith in Christ which inevitably leads to holiness of life. But it is first and foremost a forensic matter whereby believers are counted righteous in the divine court, despite the accusations of Satan. That declaration and imputation of righteousness is not a legal fiction, for it is based on the atoning sufferings of our Representative. Our Lord's pains were not "make-believe," and neither is our righteous standing before God.

This same book speaks of overcoming "by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11) Our sins may cry shrilly, but the blood of Christ cries more loudly and effectively still. No one who trusts in the merits of Jesus can ever perish. Mistakes he will make, fall short he daily does, but the character is revealed and judged by the tenor of conduct, and the loves of the soul. None can cherish sin who cherish the wounds and merits of the Redeemer, but in this life the best must confess himself to be but an unprofitable servant, in many things offending, yet acceptable to God for Christ's sake. See Lu. 17:10; Jas. 3:2 (RSV). Mt. 6:12; Ro. 8:1; Col. 2:10; 1:26; Jn. 13:10; 17:6. Finally, the "overcoming" referred to in each letter involves the maintenance of faith till the end of life. See 2:26.

Rev. 2:8-11:

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.'

Ramsay speaks of Smyrna as follows:

The distinctive note of the letter to Smyrna is faithfulness that gives life, and appearance bettered by reality. The Church "*was dead and lived*," like Him who addressed it: it was poor, but rich: it was about to suffer for a period, but the period is definite, and the suffering comes to an end, and the Church will prove faithful through it all and gain "*the crown of life*". Such also had the city been in history: it gloried in the title of the faithful friend of Rome, true to its great ally alike in danger and in prosperity. The conditions of nature amid which it was planted were firm and everlasting. Before it was an arm of the vast, unchanging, unconquerable sea, its harbour and the source of its life and strength. Behind it rose its Hill (Pagos) crowned with the fortified acropolis, as one looks at it from the front apparently only a rounded hillock of 450 feet elevation; but ascend it, and you discover it to be really a corner of the great plateau behind, supported by the immeasurable strength of the Asian continent which pushes it forward towards the sea. The letter is full of joy and life and brightness beyond all others of the Seven; and such is the impression the city still makes on the traveller (who usually comes to it as his first experience of the towns of Asia Minor), throwing back the glittering rays of the sun with proportionate brightness, while its buildings spring sharp out of the sea and rise in tiers up the front slopes of its Pagos.¹³

The name of the city comes from myrrh and how appropriate that is! The persecuted but faithful Christians yielded a precious fragrance to God amid all their trials. This church has no rebuke. Outwardly poor, in the sight of heaven it was the richest of all. The word here translated "poor" does not mean to have nothing superfluous, but to have nothing at all. It is not the poverty of the third world, but the poverty of beggars near to death.

Christ's description of Himself as the one who had been dead but is now alive, is obviously the most appropriate for this oppressed, threatened minority. The same is true of the promise of immunity from the second death. See Rev. 20:10-14. for the nature of this death. None are promised immunity from the first, for it is the lot of all the descendants of Adam, except for those who see the Lord come. But none the less, death is a defeated foe. Its sting has been drawn. For the believer, it becomes a resting in Jesus till the morning. 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:16.

Verse 9: "The blasphemy of those who say they are Jews but are not." A Jew in this book is one who shares the new covenant made with Israel and Judah. He is a Christian. The allusion made by Christ

is to members of the local synagogue who were responsible for persecutions of the Christian inhabitants of the city. Says Mounce:

The Martyrdom of Polycarp documents this hostility most clearly. After the venerable Polycarp confessed that he was a Christian, "the multitude of heathen and Jews living in Smyrna cried out with uncontrollable wrath" (Mart. Pol. xxi.2; italics added). They then joined (although it was the Sabbath) with the mob in gathering wood to burn Polycarp alive (Mart. Pol. xiii.1). Jewish hostility to Christians seems to have stemmed both from their conviction that to worship a Galilean peasant who had died a criminal's death would be blasphemy and the apparent success of the Christians in evangelizing God-fearers and even some from within Judaism (cf. Ignatius, Smyrn. i.2). Antagonism against believers would lead Jews to become informers for the Roman overlords. In a city like Smyrna with its strong ties to Rome it would be a fairly simple matter to incite the authorities to action. 14

Ro. 2:28-29 casts light on Christ's refusal to recognize the literal descendants of Abraham as true Jews.

For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God.

"For ten days you will have tribulation." The number ten in Scripture seems to be often linked with fullness of testing. Daniel was tested for ten days (and this is the source of the allusion in Revelation); Jacob had his wages changed ten times (Gen. 31:7,41); the Egyptian plagues were tenfold; and the commandments from Sinai likewise. God Himself declared that Israel had tempted Him "these ten times" (Num. 14:22), and Job made a similar complaint of his friends saying, "these ten times have ye reproached me" (Job 19:2). God telling Smyrna that their testing was to be thorough indeed.

Here we have an excellent example of how matters introduced to the churches become the seed of later developments in the Apocalypse. Tribulation is a key theme of this book, and the present verse should be linked with 6:9,10; 11:7; 13:7,15-17, etc. Similarly the preceding verse which referred to "the synagogue of Satan" is a preview of the many later passages which warn against false religionists. Compare 11:7; 13:11-15; 14:8; 17:1-6; 18:4. The second death in v. 11 is a third example of this principle. See Rev. 20:10-14.

"The crown of life." The Greek word here for "crown" refers not to a royal crown but to the tribute of victory, a wreath or garland awarded to victors at the games. On the crest of the city's Mt. Pagos was a circle of colonnaded buildings called the crown of Smyrna. Note that Paul tells us that Christ's crown is for all, not just for a special "winner." 1 Cor. 9:23-25.

It is interesting to observe that this church, the poorest and most severely tried of all, is the only one of the seven to retain anything like its ancient significance. Today the city numbers approximately half a million inhabitants. Its modern name is Izmir. Ephesus has been moved out of its place and is but a ruin. The same is true of Sardis and Laodicea. Pergamos is no more, but a small town (Bergama) stands on the plain below it. Thyatira and Philadelphia were the smallest cities of the seven in John's day, and with the modern names of Akhisar and Alasehir have less than 100,000 inhabitants between them. Thus the modern condition of these locations is what we would have expect from the warnings of this prophetic book. In his famous history. Gibbon gives the palm to the two cities which in Rev, 2 and 3 received unqualified praise from Christ, Note his words which are significant despite the changes since his day.

In the loss of Ephesus, the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the extinction of the first candlestick, of the Revelations; the desolation is complete; and the temple of Diana, or the church of Mary, will equally elude the search of the curious traveller. The circus and three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes, Sardis is reduced to a miserable village; the God of Mahomet, without a rival or a son, is invoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamos; and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy, or courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above fourscore years; and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect; a column in a scene of ruins; a pleasing example, that the paths of honor and safety may sometimes be the same." 15

The connection between trial, material poverty, and spiritual well-being should not be missed. It is a hard lesson for all to learn that trouble is God's angel. Constant sunshine makes a desert, and the thing we need most in character development is that from which we would ever flee. While Christians have no need to multiply their troubles by carelessness, there could be no greater blessing than the ability to see mercy in misery, gain in the loss of all things. Only as the Light of the World illuminates our vision shall we perceive privilege in all hardships, gain in loss, order in confusion, and success and the wisdom of God in apparent failure. All his work down here must carry the stamp of the Cross, for the crown is not yet. When we are released from the enemy within--our congenital depravity--only then will it be safe for Providence to remove the pressures from without. The Smyrna letter has much to say to all who will listen.

It can be readily seen that the post-apostolic era in many ways duplicated the experience of the local church at Smyrna. From the days of John till the "conversion" of Constantine, the church passed through sporadic waves of persecution. While the tempest lasted, so did comparative purity of doctrine and practise compared with later centuries.

Rev. 2:12-17 :

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

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

Pergamos was called by Pliny "by far the most distinguished city in Asia."¹⁶ It was the capital of Asia, and renowned for its wealth, its literary distinction, and its idolatry. Situated forty miles north of Smyrna, and only about ten miles inland from the Aegean Sea, it was built on a cone-shaped hill which dominated the surrounding valley of the Caicus. It gave the impression of permanence, impregnable strength, and authority. Says Ramsay:

Beyond all other sites in Asia Minor it gives the traveller the impression of a royal city, the home of authority: the rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, and dominates the broad plain of the Caicus so proudly and boldly. . . .

History marked it out as the royal city, and not less clearly has nature done so. No city of the whole of Asia Minor--so far as I have seen, and there are few of any importance which I have not seen--possesses the same imposing and dominating aspect. It is the one city of the land which forced from me the exclamation 'A royal city!' I came to it after seeing the others, and that was the impression which it produced. There is something unique and overpowering in its effect, planted as it is on its magnificent hill, standing out boldly in the level plain, and dominating the valley and the mountains on the south. Other cities of the land have splendid hills which made them into powerful fortresses in ancient time; but in them the hill is as a rule the acropolis, and the city lies beneath and around or before it. But here the hill was the city proper, and the great buildings chiefly Roman, which lie below the city, were external ornaments, lending additional beauty and stateliness to it.¹⁷

The church at Pergamos was threatened by worldly compromise. It is declared to live where "Satan's throne is," an allusion to the city as the center of worship for four of the most important pagan cults--Zeus, Athene, Dionysos, and Asklepios. It was not only the first city of Asia to foster the imperial cult, but became the strongest adherent of the worship of the Caesars. As the stronghold of both pagan religion and emperor worship, it constituted an intensely difficult environment for Christians.

What made the threat the more insidious was the fact that for the church at Pergamos the worst of persecution was over. The martyrdom of Antipas is placed in the past, and there is no indication of

any present threat to match that known by Smyrna. There was a natural tendency to relax watchfulness, and the world which failed in its bullying turned to more sophisticated approaches. Thus we have reference to those with the teachings of Balaam.

As regards this new threat, the Old Testament is our guide with its record of one who had been a prophet of God but who compromised with paganism and subsequently led Israel to follow in his steps. See Numbers, chapters 22 to 25. Pergamos is rebuked for its laxity of discipline towards those advocating subtle forms of worldliness. The Nicolaitans are the same group as those advocating the teaching of Balaam. Among commentators there is a growing unanimity on this point. On verse 15, Mounce writes:

If the first four words are to be taken as a unit, it follows that the Nicolaitans are essentially the same group as the Balaamites. Both describe an antinomian group which had accommodated itself to the religious and social requirements of the pagan society in which they lived. The final "in like manner" is repetitive and further strengthens the earlier "so."¹⁸

If such writers as Mounce, Milligan, Ramsey, and Ladd are wrong, it means that Rev. 2 sets out two heretical groups, but gives only the doctrine of one, and the name of the other. But the "them" of v. 16 applies to believers in the Balaamite error, for the threat about the coming sword is the same as that given in warning to Balaam himself and finally fulfilled. See Num. 31:8. We are not to think that the problem at Pergamos was any new thing. Worldly alliances have ever been a powerful tool of evil. Before the Flood, the worshippers of God (the sons of God) joined themselves to the daughters of men (who followed the religion of Cain). Israel repeatedly erred in this manner. Examples include the family of Jacob, Israel's idolatry while in Egyptian bondage, the plains of Moab apostasy, and the backsliding during Solomon's reign. The epistles of 2 Peter and Jude refer to the error of Balaam in their warnings against apostasy. The false prophet is characterized as one who loves the wages of unrighteousness. Worldly gain through compromise is the lure that faced Pergamos and also Thyatira. The heresy is recorded because wherever companies are called out from the world to Christ, there is the ever-present temptation to return. It is the most tragic fact of church history that after Satan had failed in his offer of the kingdoms of this world to Christ, he succeeded with the same temptation offered to Christ's body in the centuries that followed.

Antipas is held before the church at Pergamos as an example to emulate. He was martyred rather than compromise. Commentators seem to take it for granted that Antipas here means a single individual, but such a conclusion is doubtful. The contextual figures, Balaam, Nicolaitans, Jezebel, certainly apply to groups, those holding the teachings like Balaam's, and those who were disciples (children) of apostates advocating idolatrous worship. As Hengstenberg points out, "All other names in the Apocalypse are of a symbolical character."¹⁹ Antipas is not to be found in history outside of Scripture. All supposed references to him in the writings of the church are of very late origin and "are pure inventions."²⁰ But any individual so prominent as to be named in Holy Writ would not have been forgotten. Simcox admits, "It is more than doubtful whether anything authentic is known of Antipas except from this passage."²¹

Most commentators, if they mention the possibility of the name Antipas having significance deride it. Yet every other name of this book has a meaning, and in a book avowedly symbolic in character, this should be expected. Hengstenberg reminds us that "There has been no want of expositors, who have viewed the name as a symbolical one. Sakerides. . . explains it as meaning one who is against all. There can be no doubt of the justness of this derivation."²² But this overstates the case. More recent scholars prefer to see the name as a contraction of Antipater, Possibly it hints at a sturdy refusal to abide by any inherited tradition which conflicted with the gospel.

Some believe that Antipas. . . stood out against all that was taking place in connection with the licentious rites and ceremonies in Pergamos, and for this reason he was martyred. Like Luther at the Diet of Worms, Antipas stood against all compromise with the world and sealed his faith with his blood. This was the fate of millions who stood out against the paganizing of Christianity during the period of amalgamation with the world and marriage with the state.

There is no authority for the assumption that Antipas means antipapal.²³

Other commentators such as Alford and Mounce ridicule the possibility under discussion, but offer few valid reasons. If the above is correct, it conveys the same idea as Jer. 20:10; 15:10, meaning one who by his fidelity seems to come into opposition with all others. See Jas. 4:4; Acts 4:19-29. It is certain that the New Testament frequently places stress on the meaning of proper nouns. See Mt. 1:25; Jn. 9:7; Acts 4:36; Philemon 11; Rev. 9:11; 17:17; 19:12, 16. When Morris discusses the identity of the

Nicolaitans, he points out that "etymologically the name combines 'victory' and 'people' and one could get roughly the same meaning from Balaam. . . ."24 Similarly, Simcox says, "... the etymology of the latter name (Balaam is doubtful, but according to a possible one, Nicolaus ['conqueror of the people'] might be an approximate Greek equivalent to it)."25

In this connection, a modern warning against spiritualization should be sounded in reverse. It is too sadly true that unwarranted spiritualizing often brings hermeneutics and exegesis into disrepute, but the law that says "take Scripture literally unless context or common-sense indicate otherwise" has to be reversed with the book we are studying. The worst excesses of commentators in this book are found in the writings of dispensational futurists. These often believe in a rebuilt Babylon and Jewish temple, renewal of sacrifice, the return of Moses and Elijah as the two witnesses, the erection of an image for worship in Jerusalem, and east-west conflict in Armageddon, with literal blood to the horses' bridle, etc. ad nauseum. Some even see in Rev. 9 a picture of modern inventions such as helicopters. In contrast, Reformed exegesis has ever recognized that this book does indeed spiritualize the people, events, and things of the Old Testament, and that, as claimed in its opening sentence, it is an apocalypse containing signs and symbols. This type of exegesis for Revelation is given to us by Christ himself in 1:20, and is found recurringly throughout the book in such passages as Rev. 17:15,9-10. In fact, we wonder how a consistent literalist can accommodate himself to this book without considerable trauma. Perception, whether mental or physical, depends not only on the amount of light, but on the condition of the eyes. Thus a bright light shining on the path of a blind man brings him no benefit. Interpreters must consistently enquire whether their presuppositions are blinding them, and putting the light out.

Preterists are liable to the same error as literalistic dispensationalists. In their eagerness to conform the interpretation of Revelation to the first century, Israel is often read as Israel, and Jerusalem as Jerusalem. Whatever can be literalized must be, say many of this school. Of course, exceptions exist. Carrington can admit that "Parthian kings are to some writers on the Apocalypse what King Charles' head was to Mr Dick."26 But consistency remains a rare jewel. Futurist Ladd rejects extreme preterist and dispensationalist positions yet concludes that Rev. 11 is a prediction of "the preservation of the Jewish people and their final salvation."27

In the present Scripture, the reference to eating food sacrificed to idols is also often literalized by commentators. But with Herder, Hengstenberg, and many others we think it more consistent to understand the expression symbolically. The symbolism, as with almost all else in Revelation, comes from the Old Testament. In this instance, it is a reference drawn from the story of Balaam. The real warning here is against idolatrous religion which heaven views as spiritual infidelity. This is not to deny the actual immorality usually present in much of pagan worship.

In verse 17, the faithful are promised hidden manna and a white stone inscribed with a new name. The former points to that fellowship with Christ which is a bread hidden from the world. See Jn. 4:32. The allusion is based on the manna hidden from sight in the sanctuary. We think Ramsay is right in his comments on the second promise.

The truth is that the white pebble with the New Name was not an exact reproduction of any custom or thing in the social usage of the time. It was a new conception, devised for this new purpose; but it was only a working up into a new form of familiar things and customs, and it was therefore completely intelligible to every reader in the Asian Churches. It had analogies with many things, though it was not an exact reproduction of any of them. Probably the fact is that the pebble is simply an instrument to bear the Name, and all the stress of the passage is laid on the Name which is thus communicated.28

But, perhaps more should be said.

Every Jew and every Christian was familiar with the precious stones on the high priest's regalia (and particularly the Urim and Thummin gems). The former had names inscribed upon them—the names of the tribes of Israel. "White" in Revelation has special meaning, always applying to heavenly things. It is the equivalent of "glorious." See Rev. 1:14; 3:4; 6:2; 19:11; 14:14; 20:11. Christians themselves are called "living stones" in the New Testament. And as for "new," that is an apocalyptic word appearing repeatedly in this book. We read of a new name, new song, new heavens, new earth, new Jerusalem. See 14:3; 3:12; 21:2. Christ thus points to secrets unspeakably more precious than the much vaunted but worthless secrets of the gnostic Nicolaitans.

As certainly as the Ephesus letter reminds us of the characteristics of the apostolic period, and the Smyrna letter of the era of persecution, so this present letter adumbrates what took place after

persecution ceased in the Roman empire. What could not be accomplished by force was now fulfilled by bribery and craft. "The wages of unrighteousness" loved by Balaam became precious to many in Christendom during the fourth and fifth centuries and thereafter. Christianity to a large extent became baptized paganism once persecution slumbered. That body espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ played the harlot with the world. Many fulfilled the meaning of the names Nicolaus and Balaam by fostering a hierarchical system giving the few a right to lord it over the many. The New Testament principle of the priesthood of all believers was lost, and with it all hope of evangelizing the world.

History tragically repeats itself, especially for those who know no history. This letter warns us that the occasion when Israel joined herself to Baal-peor was no isolated incident, but a fearful pattern of events whenever, and wherever, the gospel is not cherished. Vanity Fair awaits all pilgrims to the holy city, and if any are lured to stay, and are caught by its wiles, their spiritual strength will evaporate as on the occasion of the sundering of Samson's locks. Laodicea is yet to repeat, and on a much greater scale, the errors of Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis. The church and the world, except for a little flock, will become one in the last days of time. See Rev. 17. The most fearful warnings in Revelation are against this apostate union.

Rev. 2:18-29:

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality, and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a sick-bed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into a great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay upon you any other burden; only hold fast what you have, until I come. He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

We have before us the longest and the most difficult of the seven letters. It is addressed to that city of the seven which was the least known and the least important. The comments of Ramsay are again illuminating:

Thyatira, with its low and small acropolis in its beautiful valley, stretching north and south like a long funnel between two gently swelling ridges of hill, conveys the impression of mildness, and subjection to outward influence, and inability to surmount and dominate external circumstance.²⁹

... no city has been given by nature less of the look or strength of a fortress than Thyatira. It lies in an open, smiling vale, bordered by gently sloping hills, of moderate elevation, but sufficient to overshadow the vale. It possesses no proper acropolis, and the whole impression which the situation gives is of weakness, subjection and dependence.³⁰

The history of Thyatira is a blank. Its fate in the many centuries of fighting between Mohammedans (Arabs first, then Turks) and Christians must have been a sad one. It is one of those cities whose situation exposes them to destruction by every conqueror, and yet compels their restoration after every siege and sack. It lies right in the track of invasion: it blocks the way and must be captured by an invader; it guards the passage to a rich district, and hence it must be defended to the last, and so provoke the barbarity of the assailant: but it could never be made a really strong fortress in ancient warfare, so as to resist successfully.³¹

Located twenty-five miles southeast of Pergamos, Thyatira was a garrison city which because of its lack of natural fortifications was captured, destroyed, and rebuilt again and again. When John wrote, the city was a manufacturing center, most of whose citizens were laborers. The whole picture is a strong contrast to Pergamos, which was naturally strong and rich. But the problems of Pergamos are

found here in an intensified form. The Nicolaitans again come into view, but are even more significant in the heresy represented by Jezebel. Indeed, toleration of error is the distinguishing characteristic of this church.

The symbols of fornication, and the eating of things offered to idols, are again present. We must first enquire as to "Jezebel" herself. Is this term, as earlier suggested, a symbol, and if so, wherein does it differ from the heresy previously delineated? It must be granted that it is unlikely that anyone in a Christian church would retain a name so covered with infamy as this one.³² The Old Testament queen had been the daughter of the pagan king of Zidon. After her marriage to Ahab, the king of Israel, idolatry became widespread among the professed people of Jehovah. Nonconformists were put to death. God raised up reformers such as Elijah to protest, and withheld the blessings of rain and dew as a mark of His displeasure. Finally, after the rebuilding of the altar of the Lord, had come the test between true and false worship and the conflict ended with the destruction of the prophets of Jezebel at Megiddo. Says Hengstenberg:

... it has a great deal against it, that John should have assigned so important a place to such a woman in a book consecrated to the church of all times. Further, the analogy of Balaam leads in the same direction, as to this corresponded not a single individual in the prophet's own time, but a whole class of false teachers. Then, the mention of adulteries and children in ver. 22 and 23, with which even those who defend the reference to a "certain influential woman," have no patience; De Wette, for example, who remarks, that "her children," can scarcely be taken in the natural sense, but must mean scholars, followers. 33

J. A. Smith writes:

. . . the evil noted in the Church at Thyatira is symbolized under the name of a woman. There may be no other reason for this than that Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, was an instrument in leading the ancient Israel into the same evil practices into which, by the instigation of Balaam and Balak, the people had fallen while on their wilderness journey, so long before, and which now characterized the sect of the Nicolaitanes. As indicated below, this same disgraceful and pernicious sect has appeared at Thyatira.³⁴

This author warns us against making too much of the symbolic nature of Jezebel, but the context with its references to Balaam and the Nicolaitans forces us to accept this name also as a picture-name. Thus Milligan can say emphatically, "Jezebel is clearly a symbolical name."³⁵ "In other words, the church tolerated in her midst the evil of which Ahab's wife was so strikingly a representative."³⁶ The temptation of Pergamos became a reality in Thyatira.

We have here another striking example of the proleptic style of the Apocalypse. In the Smyrna letter, Satan had been mentioned. In chapter 12 that topic is enlarged. Here the symbol "Jezebel" anticipates the emphasis of chapters 11-18, that what was once the church of God, His Jerusalem, is to become not only like Sodom and Egypt, but also Babylon. The latter is presented as a harlot drunken with the blood of saints, and supported by the secular powers of earth. See Rev. 17. Says Fuller:³⁷

The resemblances between Jezebel and this woman are so striking and numerous, that they must be drawn by the finger of God.

- (1) Each woman is moved by pride.
- (2) Both women are controlled by self-will (Jer.50:29,31).
- (3) Each woman claims to be the head of the church.
- (4) Both women collect followers.
- (5) Each woman teaches false doctrines.
- (6) Each woman is a spiritual adulteress, and is thus unfaithful to God.
- (7) Each woman is guilty of apostasy from God.
- (8) Both women are associated with Satan.
- (9) Both women refuse to repent (Rev. 2:21; Jer. 51:9).
- (10) Both women are punished with spiritual death.

Wherein does this heresy differ from the antinomian gnosticism already twice referred to? The present threat is an exaggerated mysticism. Carrington discusses the Gnosticism opposed by John:

The law of Mount Sinai was given by the lower God, and the "spiritual," who have a knowledge of the high God, take no account of it. They are "antinomian", free from any law, perfect. Their heroes are the rebels, Cain, Korah, and so on.³⁸

This reference to the "spiritual" is based on the claims of Jezebel to teach "the deep things" referred to in v. 24. Some among the ancient gnostics worshipped Satan as the great benefactor of mankind. He had the secrets of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As the Serpent, an appropriate symbol for him was the intestines coiling in the hidden parts of the body, and it is possibly to this that Christ alludes when He reveals himself as the One that searches the reins and the heart. The abyss was thought of as his special domain, and was called "the deep things of Satan."³⁹ in this connection we should remember that the dragon of Revelation is not the fabulous monster of mediaeval times, but means no more than a snake. Compare Gen. 3:14.

The Jezebel system was one claiming a knowledge above what was written. It forsook the objective Word, and relied much on mystical experience. It claimed an understanding of mysteries hitherto hidden. Feelings and sentiments visions and dreams, impulses and promptings guided behavior rather than the law of God and the gospel of Christ. The Nicolaitans were boasting that behavior was not significant for the evil body which was soon to be destroyed. They declared that Christ had fulfilled the law, and that therefore Christians need to be restrained by it no longer. It was good to sin that grace might abound, and the deeper the descent into the depths of Satan, the more wonderful the glory of the ascent. Christian liberty thus became an excuse for the indulgence of the flesh. "Christ in you the hope of glory" was exaggerated into a spiritual pantheism whereby God was responsible for every desire and inclination and it was no longer necessary to oppose evil impulses. Quietism was advocated inasmuch as only surrender to the indwelling One was needed. The rugged Pauline distrust of the believer's sinful nature was unknown to the followers of Jezebel. Hoeksema graphically paints for us, under the guise of a mid-week prayer meeting at Thyatira, a picture of this false mysticism.

A third, and a fourth, and a fifth give their testimonies; and all witness of their personal participation in the grace of Christ Jesus and of their love to Him. But finally a strange figure attracts our attention. It is a woman of a weird and repulsive appearance. Her large, protruding eyes, sensuous lips, and morbid complexion witness of a life of sin and dissipation. She also speaks. And with a voice which sounds as if it comes from the nether world, she tells the congregation of a vision which she had in a by-gone night, and how the Lord appeared to her to reveal His truth in a dream. For she claims to be a prophetess. In her dream, so she continues, the Lord showed unto her the horrible depths of Satan, the abyss of sin and iniquity. And as they both stood on the brink of that dark and horrible abyss, the Lord said unto her: "If anyone would truly taste my grace and infinite mercy, he must actually descend into these depths, and learn to know them by experience. For the more he is able to realize the depths of Satan by actual experience, the more he will be in a condition to appreciate my salvation." She still continues to explain that she has personally obeyed, that she did descend into those depths of Satan. She committed fornication. She feasted with the heathen in their sacrificial meals. She subjected her body to the vilest service of sin. And she concludes by testifying that to her there was a great blessing in this descent into the abyss of sin. For the more clearly she realized the awful depths from which the grace of Christ redeemed and delivered her, the more fully could she gratefully appreciate the wonders of His mercy. Thus this instrument of the devil speaks in the midst of the congregation.

But what now does the congregation do? Does she cast this vile woman out, admonishing her to repent of her horrible sin? On the contrary, she listens. She is silent. She admits the possibility that this woman is actually a prophetess, though her speech directly contradicts the objective revelation of the Word of God. And many even follow her, and in harmony with her teaching they descend into the depths of Satan. Many servants of the Lord are seduced by her teaching.

How must this be explained? How is it possible that this ardent little congregation of Thyatira listens patiently to the dark testimony of this instrument of hell? In but one way: this sweet and lovable little church had gradually forgotten to apply the objective standard of God's revelation and had allowed personal experience to be the chief criterion of the truth. If they had at all made an attempt to apply the test of the Word of God to the speech and life of this woman

Jezebel, they would have detected her heresy immediately and would have cast her out if she did not repent. But they are inclined to false mysticism. And Satan, aware of this tendency in the congregation, employs a woman, who largely lives by intuition, is more easily inclined to drift away on subjective feeling and experience, and is of a stronger and more ardent emotional nature than man, to appeal to the mystic tendency in the church of Thyatira, in order to seduce her from the truth. For the same reason Scripture calls this woman Jezebel, which may be considered a symbolic name, to remind the church of her real nature. For even as Jezebel seduced the people of God of the old dispensation to the service of Baal, so does this woman lead the people of Thyatira astray in paths of fornication and vilest sin.

In short, we discover in the congregation of Thyatira a church with a tendency to false mysticism, a church which is strong in warm devotional life, but which has enthroned personal experience as the criterion for the truth.⁴⁰

Note the sharpness of Christ's threat. The bed of sin is to become a bed of suffering.⁴¹ Upon all who dally with this antinomian mysticism, tribulation will surely come. All will be dealt with according to their works. Here is the divine response to antinomianism. The law of God cannot be broken with impunity. The divine code is but reality under another name, for to go against the law is to go against reality. It is spitting into the wind. The biblical law defining right and wrong is a reflection of God's own character, and therefore it is the foundation, pillar, and keystone of the universe. "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid, we establish the law." Rom. 3:31. Does not the Cross of Christ establish the law more firmly than if every son and daughter of Adam had kept it perfectly from the days of Eden? To all who receive that law in Christ, it becomes a series of promises. "*Thou shalt not* for I have delivered you from all that." The Cross of Christ, once seen and accepted, accomplishes the double cure, healing sin's guilt and power. The shackles are sundered as soon as the burden of guilt drops. It is not possible to accept the death of Christ, and not His risen life. He who accepts forgiveness of sin thereby immediately receives dominion over sin. To accept the work of the second member of the Godhead means also the acceptance of the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Godhead. The Christian, on believing the gospel, is freed from the wilful pursuit of sin, though not from sinfulness of nature.

Antinomianism is opposed in Revelation by pungent warnings of the wrath of God in judgment. Any church today which forgets the holiness of God while expatiating upon the love of God will fail in its task. Forest fires often cause seeds to germinate which have resisted the genial rays of the sun. While religion is not a fire escape, it does present in balance the reality of law and judgment. The New Testament only refers to the Lord's Supper and baptism a few times, but repentance is called for in over seventy instances. The first word of the Baptist was "Repent," and likewise our Lord opened His ministry with the same. See Mk. 1:15. Wherever men are left in ignorance of their disease by the neglect of proclaiming the law, the cure also will be neglected as unnecessary.

This present book of Scripture has more to say on the divine wrath than any other volume of Scripture, and the warnings given in the seven epistles are given in order that "all the churches might know" that Christ searches the inmost heart, testing its motives by that holy code of love and truth which, if obeyed, becomes a law of liberty.

From this letter let us see the danger not only of antinomianism, but of a false mysticism.⁴² Any tendency to turn from the plain "Thus saith the Lord" to an inner light is fraught with peril, for doctrine and experience must be ever governed by Scripture. All other routes lead to shipwreck. Extreme doctrines of quietism, sanctification, perfectionism result when the healthy robust admonitions of the Bible are not given due weight. Only the biblical teaching of the depravity of man and his remaining sinfulness even after conversion can lead the believer to cast himself moment by moment upon the Saviour for grace and strength. While justification is by faith alone, sanctification ever calls for strenuous cooperation with Christ, not that our efforts create holiness, but they always accompany it. God alone gives holiness, but He gives it as we labor together with him. The power of the flesh is broken only when we learn from Scripture how strong the flesh always is in this life. That awareness compels a constant "looking unto Jesus," and continual feeding of the soul devotionally. Then love to God and man springs forth spontaneously.

The promises made to this church include once more the prospect of judgment. All the heathen are to be broken as an earthenware pot by a rod of iron. The saints will join Christ in His judging work. See Psa. 149:9; 1 Cor. 6:2,3; Rev. 20:4. Judging and ruling are frequently associated in Scripture, and often are synonyms. The morning star is elsewhere shown to be Christ Himself. See 22:16. What condescension that God should declare Himself our God, and give Himself to us!⁴³

As we turn to the broader field of church history, it is not difficult to find an era where the heresies depicted in this letter abounded. Once the Word of God was lost, and men sought for heaven by mystical ladders, then the law of God proved of little restraint. The Middle Ages saw a demonstration of our common human nature at its worst. Pagan religion posed as Christian, and in union with worldly government followed the course of Jezebel as of old. During those centuries the flesh was given a long rope, albeit a religious rope. Because the multitudes were ignorant of Scripture, they were left to superstition and impulse. Where the church does not depend upon the objective guidance of the Word, plus the confirming subjective witness of the Spirit, the vacuum will be filled by dangerous substitutes. And so it was.

In the Dark Ages, tradition governed religious practice, and usually it was tradition, pagan at its heart. As Jezebel wrote letters in the king's name, and sealed them with his seal, so the mediaeval church posed as speaking for the King of heaven and yet claimed His imprimatur for its new requirements. As Jezebel murdered all nonconformists within reach, so the mediaeval centuries were marked by martyrdoms and persecution which made the efforts of pagan Rome childish in comparison. Because the gospel of grace was little known, Satan the great Antichrist led men either in a weary dance of unrestrained passions, or to the doldrums of legalistic externalism.

Martin Luther said:

"Before my conversion, had you knocked at the door of my heart and asked who lives there, I would have said, 'Martin Luther lives here.' Had you come in to see me, you would have found a monk with his head shaved, sleeping in a hair shirt, under his head two tables of stone, a scourge hanging down by the side of the bed. But now if you knock at the door of my heart and ask who lives there, I will reply: 'Martin Luther no longer lives here; Jesus the Lord lives here now.'"⁴⁴

We err if the record of the past leads us to intolerance in the present, or self-righteousness based on accidents of birth and history. Protestant human nature is no better, and no worse, than other kinds, and church history records that wherever Protestantism has failed to give the Word its primacy, the results have been similar to the tragedies of the Dark Ages. The lessons that all are intended to learn from the present letter apply to the members of every church and creed, warning us that faith and obedience based on both the Living and the Written Word alone guarantee safety and joy. We should observe that beginning with this letter, the Spirit no longer calls before the promise is given, but after. This suggests that in the last four churches, most members have joined the world in its apostasy.

Rev. 3:1-6:

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

Today, only ruins mark where Sardis once stood. But what characterized the city when John addressed its first century church? We quote Ramsay once more:

Looked at from a little distance to the north in the open plain, Sardis wore an imposing, commanding, impregnable aspect, as it dominated that magnificent broad valley of the Hermus from its robber stronghold on a steep spur that stands out boldly from the great mountains on the south. But close at hand, the hill is seen to be but mud, slightly compacted, never trustworthy or lasting, crumbling under the influences of the weather, ready to yield even to a blow of the spade. Yet the Sardians always trusted to it; and their careless confidence had often been deceived, when an adventurous enemy climbed in at some unguarded point, where the weathering of the soft rock had opened a way.⁴⁵

Sardis was one of the great cities of primitive history: in the Greek view it was long the greatest of all cities. At the beginning of record it stands forth prominently as the capital of a

powerful empire. Its situation marks it out as a ruling city, according to the methods of early warfare and early kings; it was however more like a robber's stronghold than an abode of civilised men; and in a peaceful and civilised age its position was found inconvenient. In the Roman period it was almost like a city of the past, a relic of the period of barbaric warfare, which lived rather on its ancient prestige than on its suitability to present conditions.⁴⁶

This letter should be compared with that to Ephesus, and contrasted with that to Smyrna. Like Ephesus, this church has declined in love. It is more like a galvanised corpse going through religious motions, or to change the figure, like the crew of the fateful vessel in *The Rhymer* of the Ancient Mariner. Coleridge pictured corpses rising to man the ship, pull the oars, hoist the sails and steer the vessel. So it is in this church ship. In Ephesus degeneration has begun, but in Sardis it has almost eradicated the initial spiritual life. "Hence in the Ephesian letter the keynote is merely change, instability and uncertainty; in the Sardian letter the keynote is degradation, false pretension and death."⁴⁷

Criswell cites Dr. Gordon's warning to his congregation against the Sardian state.

"Ecclesiastical corpses lie all about us. The caskets in which they repose are lined with satin and are decorated with solid silver handles and abundant flowers. Like the other caskets, they are just large enough for their occupants with no room for converts. These churches have died of respectability and have been embalmed in self-complacency. If, by the grace of God, this church is alive [referring to his Clarendon Street Baptist Church], be warned to our opportunity or the feet of them that buried thy sisters will be at the door to carry thee out."⁴⁸

Contrasted with Smyrna, this church has been destroyed by having things too easy. There is no statement about divisions within, or fierce conflicts without. There is no reference to deep poverty. Constant sunshine has now made the desert. Lack of those tensions which call for faith had led to the death of faith. This church has the respectability and self-satisfaction and self-righteousness of Laodicea, but possesses a few who have not defiled their garments by spiritual decay.

It is important that we observe that the church did not *look* dead. It had a name of life, and only He whose eyes are symbolized by a flame of fire could discern its true condition. Caird sums up admirably:

Death is a spiritual state which the indiscriminating may mistake for life; and John analyses for us three of its symptoms. It is a lack of vigilance, like that which cost Croesus his kingdom, and the church must *wake up* before it is too late. It is a stain upon the white robes of faith; and since the Conquerors are later said to have washed their robes and made them white in the life-blood of the Lamb (vii. 14), we may conclude that the stain is anything which qualifies or dilutes the church's faith in the saving grace of God. But above all death means that *nothing you do is ever completed*. Small wonder that neither controversy nor persecution has disturbed this church's superficial prosperity. Content with mediocrity, lacking both the enthusiasm to entertain a heresy and the depth of conviction which provokes intolerance, it was too innocuous to be worth persecuting.⁴⁹

Again and again in history this condition has been duplicated, and sometimes on national or international scale. Fitchett speaks of such a time in his biography of Wesley and conveys to us the very essence of the Sardian state.

In some respects the eighteenth century is the most ill-used period in English history. It is the Cinderella of the centuries. Nobody has a good word to say about it. Carlyle sums it up in a bitter phrase: 'Soul extinct; stomach well alive.' . . .

The real scandal of England in the eighteenth century, the leprosy that poisoned its blood, the black spot on the shining disc of its history, is the general decay of religion which marked its first fifty years. At the point of its faith England was dying. Its spiritual skies were black as with the gloom of an Arctic midnight, and chilly as with Arctic frosts. . . .

Only by an effort of the historic imagination can we realize the condition of England in 1703. . . . Montesquieu, who studied the England of that age through keen French eyes, says bluntly: 'There is no such thing as religion in England.' . . . Christianity under English skies was never, before or since, so near the death point. Who does not remember the sentences which Bishop Butler, that gloomy, subtle, powerful intellect, prefixed to his 'Analogy'? 'It has somehow come to be taken for granted,' he wrote, 'that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. . . . Men treat it as if in the

present age this were an agreed point amongst all people of discernment; and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject to mirth and ridicule.' Betwixt Montesquieu and Butler, the great Frenchman and the still greater Englishman, what a procession of witnesses might be quoted in proof of the decay of faith in Great Britain at the beginning of the eighteenth century! And when faith dies, what else can live? . . .

Christianity cannot perish; but it came near its death-swoon in that sad age. 'There was,' says Green, the historian, 'open revolt against religion and against Churches in both extremes of English society. The poor were ignorant and brutal to a degree impossible now to realize; the rich, to an almost utter disbelief of religion, linked a foulness of life now happily almost inconceivable.' . . .

The true awakening of the religious life of the English-speaking race dates from Wesley. To say that he re-shaped the conscience of England is true, but it is only half the truth. He re-created it! It was dead—twice dead; and through his lips God breathed into it the breath of life again. . . .

The fatal thing in the religion of that age was that it had ceased to be a life, or to touch life. It was exhausted of its dynamic elements—the vision of a Redeeming Christ; the message of a present and personal forgiveness. It was frozen into a theology; it was spun out into ecclesiastical forms; . . . 50

Sardis was characterized by what the New Testament calls "the flesh." The flesh is all that human nature is apart from the influence of the Spirit of God. It does not mean our sensual impulses only, nor even our refined sins of the mind such as covetousness, and envy, and pride. The flesh includes body, soul, and spirit, and has its essence in selfishness and independence of God. The flesh can be religious without being Christian. It can engage in good works without being good. It can sing the songs of Zion, but there are no tears in its eyes. Many a well-sounding prayer comes from the lips of the flesh, but little true penitence. Indeed, it is this lack of the sense of sinfulness which is most characteristic of the flesh. Sardis was dying because of its legalism. It was Pharisee to the core. Like Simon of old, it feels it had been forgiven little, and therefore it loved little. A "Sardian" can attend a football match and shout himself hoarse, but considers it unseemly to give an "Amen" in church. A "Sardian" will never be accused of extremes, except perhaps extreme ennui. He is polished and polite but dead. None of us could delight in watching the dead body of a friend under electric influence go through the motions of a living person. We would flee its arms if stretched forth to embrace us. But what must it be to God to see a church that professes the name of Christ, yet lives like the Pharisees who crucified Him?

What is the remedy for Sardis? "Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and repent." v. 3. This is, of course, a reference to the gospel which first called them out of the world. Charles Wesley has beautifully described what that experience has been for many.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,-
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.⁵¹

To recall the conviction of sin, the burden of guilt, the fear of judgment, is salutary. But it is also necessary to remember the Word of the Cross, the message about Him who was there as our Substitute and Representative, the Good News that Christ alone is our righteousness, and that all He has done is placed to the account of believers as surely as their sins were placed to His account! Good News indeed!

The Sardians are admonished to remember their original awakening from death to life, and the profound joy and intense enthusiasm then engendered. They must remember and repent. It is significant that Scripture often links forgetting and apostasy. Thus we have such admonitions as 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 2:1; Psa. 106:13,21,24ff; Psa. 103:2.

It was not in vain that God established a whole day of remembrance. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. ..." This is the only one of the Ten Commandments that admonishes us to remember, and the world has forgotten it more thoroughly than all the rest. To remember the Sabbath would mean remembrance of the Creator. It would mean remembrance of the Redeemer who rested from his work

of redemption on that day. To dispose our thoughts as God directs, for a whole day each week, would mean continual awareness that we are creatures only, and sinful creatures at that, constantly in need of our Creator and Redeemer. This type of remembrance involves a looking unto Jesus ever and always, as our only hope now and for eternity. "Remember me," said Joseph (to the chief butler) "when it is well with you, and do me the kindness, I pray you, to make mention of me to Pharaoh and so get me out of this house" (Gen. 40:14). "Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (Gen. 40:23). We could apply to Christ and ourselves the forgotten Savior referred to by the Wise Man. "There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man" (Eccles. 9:14-15). The experience of Sardis cannot but be ours also, if we forget Him who became poor for our sakes that we might be rich.

Those who have been faithful in Sardis are described as "a few." It is said that *they* have not defiled their garments, implying that the rest of the church had. This allusion would have been readily recognized, for Sardis manufactured and dyed woollen goods. The reference implies that a large number once claiming justification had ceased to depend wholly upon Christ for righteousness. They had spoiled the status once theirs by failing to maintain the attitude that they had at conversion. Then they had given all, and taken all. But since that good beginning, spiritual drowsiness had overtaken them, leading to forgetfulness of the visions seen at conversions - visions of their own need and of Christ's sole sufficiency. As a result they had ceased to cherish the imputed merits of Christ, and in their efforts to launder their own garments they had befouled them. Mounce is certainly correct when he says, "It would seem that walking 'in white' is a way of describing those who are justified."⁵¹ All who maintain their faith in Jesus will walk in white throughout eternity. Their names alone will be confessed by Christ before His Father in the great Judgment day, while the names of the back-slidden will be erased. See Lu. 12:8. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Those numerous commentators who have seen the seven churches as prophetic have regarded Sardis as a symbol of the post-Reformation church when cold, dead orthodoxy replaced the glow of discovery. The quotation given earlier from Fitchett illustrates the appropriateness of this application. There are other commentators who view the periods of the last four churches as beginning at different times, but then continuing through to the end. It is not difficult to see that a good case can be made for this. Sardis belongs as certainly to the present as to the past. The fact that the numbers of professed Christians in the world is ten percent less every forty years indicates that the apostolic missionary spirit is unknown to most communions. Unless there is a change by about the year 2,000 A.D. Christians will be on the way to becoming as scarce as gypsies.

Rev. 3:7-13:

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens. 'I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know that you have but little power and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming soon; hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

How welcome this letter after the preceding three. The downward trend is interrupted and to some extent reversed. About the city, Ramsay writes:

Philadelphia was known to the whole world as the city of earthquakes, whose citizens for the most part lived outside, not venturing to remain in the town, and were always on the watch for the next great catastrophe. Those who knew it best were aware that its prosperity depended on the great road from the harbour of Smyrna to Phrygia and the East. Philadelphia, situated where this road is about to ascend by a difficult pass to the high central plateau of Phrygia, held the key and guarded the door. It was also of all the Seven Cities the most devoted to the

names of the Emperors, and had twice taken a new title or epithet from the Imperial god, abandoning in one case its own ancient name.⁵²

Situated on a Roman post road, and being a prominent tarrying place on the greatest trade route of the country, this city was the gateway to the eastern highlands, guarding an important pass between the Hermus and Meander valleys. Thus Philadelphians were distinctive because theirs was a missionary city, an apostle of Hellenism, whose people lived ever in dread of upheaval. Being in a volcanic region made tomorrows a matter of uncertainty. Many lived outside the city, but all rejoiced in the new name they had received from the imperial god.

In the history of the local church we read of a worthy prophetess Ammia, who flourished there between 100 and 160 A.D. Ramsay affirms that "She was universally recognized as ranking with Agabus and the four daughters of Philip, as one of the few in the later time who were truly gifted with the prophetic power. She remains a mere name to us, preserved in Eusebius's history, v., 17,2."⁵³

As the second and last of the seven churches to receive solely praise, Philadelphia has evoked Christian curiosity as to the experience of its members. Was it a church of saints in the Roman Catholic sense, or saints in the New Testament sense? See 1 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1, etc.

On the last evening with His little church the Master found that company filled with evidences of their Christian immaturity. For example, they refused to wash one another's feet. But after He had fulfilled a servant's role, and done what they would not do, He declared to that sobered family "Ye are clean" (John 13:10). Later that night, He gave voice to the famous high priestly prayer, delivering His little flock into the hands of the Father with this assurance, "They have kept thy word" (Jn. 17:6). We cannot but wonder whether some angels winced. Them? Those grumblers? Those ambitious men, so slow to believe? Kept His Word! What was the Master saying? But it is the miracle of grace whereby all who truly believe are accepted in the Beloved, complete in Him, even dwelling in heavenly places, seen no longer black but comely. For there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus by faith. With Christ they have received all spiritual blessings, and the note of their indebtedness has been nailed to the Roman Cross. Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:14. We are sure the following commentator is correct as he considers our Lord's tenderness towards Smyrna and Philadelphia:

For that they are without censure, was not because these churches were composed of sinless saints; it was not that they were not sadly burdened with imperfections, and their character sadly defaced by shortcomings; it was not because, in the individual believers that composed them, He saw no sins that grieved His holy and loving heart. But what He saw and approved was that their sins were laid on Him; they were daily taking refuge in His blood, and turning away from their own best works, were looking for acceptance only in His righteousness. Being thus in habitual communion with Him in His death and merits, they were so also in His life, and hence were earnestly engaged in the daily struggle of the spiritual warfare, and grieving over the sins that grieved Him.

This is implied in the reason here assigned by our Lord for His approval. "For thou hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name." "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience." The word of Jesus is, first of all, His word of justifying grace, that precious gospel of the kingdom that testifies to the efficacy of His blood and righteousness, for our perfect pardon and acceptance—"Christ, the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." To keep that word, is so to wrap it up in the strongest and tenderest emotions of the heart, and especially in the living tissues of a simple and earnest faith growing all around it, that it becomes a part of our very being; and "we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Then, too, will His word of authority be no burden, but precious as the shining light to the tempest-tossed mariner; "His commandments are not grievous."⁵⁴

Just as the letter to Sardis is meant to be read alongside that sent to Ephesus, the two uncensured churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, have letters which run almost parallel. They cover the same ground, point for point. Firstly, the local situation of each church is the same. Each faces opposition from those who call themselves Jews, but who really belong to the synagogues of Satan. Each church faces persecution, but the Master makes it clear that it Satan himself who is behind such onslaughts. Both churches were weak, but enabled to do exploits through their faith in Christ. In the introductory description of Him who walked among the candlesticks, the titles given contain appropriate rebuttal of Jewish statements about the Lord of the Christians. It is made clear that He indeed is the Messiah possessed of full divinity. And though the Jews had for years excommunicated the Christians from their synagogues, it is now shown that Christ alone has the key which locks and unlocks. Both letters

picture a tiny flock surrounded by fierce wolves of whom the world seems full.

The reference to the key is taken from Isaiah's account of Eliakim, who replaced the untrustworthy Shebna. See Isa. 22:15-25. Christians replace the Jews in the plan of God, though they are still beloved for the father's sakes, and sought by God. The heavenly Eliakim not only has the key to the heavenly royal household, but He unlocks all challenges below. The expression regarding the open door also alludes to the idea behind such passages as Acts 14:27; f Cor 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; and Col. 4:3--the door of missionary opportunity.

This church has great strength in Christ because it knows it has little strength in itself. It is the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, and that of the 4,000 all over again. When Christ had less to start with, He fed more, and had more left over. When He had more to start with, He fed less, and had less left over. See Mt. 16:8-10. As the church faces a hungry world today of 5,000 million people, perhaps twenty times larger than the world of the apostles does not this principle hold the key for fulfilling the missionary challenge? The greatest of all missionaries gloried in his infirmities that the power of Christ might rest upon him. See 2 Cor. 12:7-10.

The lack of numbers, wealth, and worldly acclaim, should not discourage the true church of God. Rather this lack should work in reverse as the church remembers Gideon's three hundred. Our Lord declares, "Nor by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zech. 4:6). It is His delight to thresh a mountain with a worm, to make one chase a thousand, and use two to put ten thousand to flight. His tool-chest is not like ours. Listen to its description. "For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are" (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

As modern Philadelphia faces the world, let it not make the mistakes of Philip or Thomas. One looked at the size of the problem, and said it could not be met. The other considered the human resources, and despaired. Let us rather like the small boy, take our little to the Master, and look to Him to do the rest. See Jn. 6:5-13.

Verse 10 has often been discussed. What means the promise that the faithful will be kept from the hour of temptation? Does it mean to be kept *out* of it or to be kept from harm *in* it? We think Hoeksema has it right when he answers these questions.

In the first place, the question arises: why should the church of Smyrna be cast into the midst of that tribulation and the church of Philadelphia be excused? In the second place, we may notice that the entire conception that the faithful church shall be delivered before the persecution of Antichrist comes is false and dangerous. It is false, for it is not in harmony with Scripture. Christ warns His people more than once that this hour shall come, and that they must remain faithful unto the end. Why all these warnings of tribulation, with which Scripture abounds, if they that are faithful shall not be in the hour of temptation? And dangerous this conception is, because it puts the church to sleep. The church which expects to be received in the air before the great tribulation comes does not prepare itself for the battle and for the hour of temptation. That hour shall catch her unexpectedly. And therefore, we must not labor under this illusion, but must expect to be in tribulation, and must prepare for the evil day, putting on the whole armor of God. In the third place, the tribulation which is mentioned here is pictured as coming over the whole earth; and it is not likely that the faithful little church of Philadelphia would escape the attention of the enemy. It is exactly the faithful church which must endure persecution. In the fourth place, the original may very well be interpreted to signify that the little church of Philadelphia would indeed be cast into the midst of temptation and be tried with all the world, but that in that tribulation the Lord would keep her, so that she would come out of it unharmed.

The latter is indeed the meaning. Not that the church shall be kept from tribulation is her glory and comfort. Not that she shall not meet with tribulation must be her assurance; for it would be false. But that in the midst of suffering and persecution, when the enemy rages and the temptation to deny the Lord is strong and fierce, the Lord by His grace will be sufficient to keep the church, so that she endures to the very end,--that is the meaning of the text.⁵⁵

Caird, Mounce, Ladd, Bruce, and others agree. Even more importantly, the sealing and measuring spoken of in chapters 7 and 11 are the symbolic portrayal of the "keeping" promised in 3:10.

"Keeping" does not mean "removing." Note Bishop Wordsworth's comment on verse 11. "God willeth

"all men to be saved." God has a crown for every one; and no man can lose his *own crown*, but by his *own fault*."56

The promise of being a stable pillar of the temple city, and no longer having the necessity to flee out, is particularly appropriate as we remember the earthquakes of Philadelphia and the frequent necessity for sudden flight by the people. On the reference to the new Jerusalem, consider the following:

The *old, literal Jerusalem* had been laid waste by the armies of Rome, and the literal Israel had been scattered abroad throughout the world. But Christ comforts all *true Israelites* with the assurance that there is now everywhere, in all parts of the earth, and in all ages of the world, *another Jerusalem*, a *new Jerusalem*, the Christian Sion, in which the true Israelites, wherever they may be dispersed, may find a home....

.....
In his Gospel St. John.... seems to mark the difference between the *old* and *new Jerusalem*, even by the sound of the name itself; and he appropriates the *Hebrew* form to the new or *Christian Sion*, in order to remind both Christians and Jews that the *faithful members of Christ* the son of David throughout the world, without respect to race, are now become the only *real Jews*, the *true Israel of God*.57

The missionary city fittingly pictures the missionary era of the nineteenth century which was accompanied by the great second advent movement. That era must be repeated, though contracted in time, that He with the key of David may be enabled to open heaven to all of earth who will receive His gospel invitation.

Rev. 3:14-22:

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. "I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. He who conquers, I will grant to him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Laodicea means "Judgment of the people" and the verses constitute a severe judgment by the Lord of the churches. The city was forty miles southeast of Philadelphia, and about one hundred miles east of Ephesus. Ramsay again helps us to visualize some aspects of the ancient metropolis.

Planted on the better of the two entrances from the west to the Phrygian land, Laodicea might have been expected to be (like Philadelphia, which commanded the other) a missionary city charged at first with the task of spreading Greek civilisation and speech in barbarian Phrygia, and afterwards undertaking the duty of spreading Christianity in that country. It had, however, made little progress in Hellenising Phrygia. . . Phrygia was the least Hellenised part in all the Province; as a whole, it still spoke the native tongue, and was little affected by Greek manners, in contrast with Eastern Lydia, which was entirely Greek-speaking and Hellenised (at least superficially). Why was it that Laodicea had failed and Philadelphia had succeeded in diffusing the Greek tongue in the districts immediately around, we have no means of judging. But such was the case. . . .

.... after Rome kept peace in the land, it grew rapidly. Cicero brought with him in 51 B.C. orders to be cashed in Laodicea, as the city of banking and exchange.

It was also a manufacturing centre. There was produced in the valley a valuable sort of wool, soft in texture and glossy black in colour, which was widely esteemed.

Between Laodicea and the "Gate of Phrygia" lay a famous temple, the home of the Phrygian god Men Karou, the Carian Men. This was the original god of the valley. His temple was the centre of society and administration, intercourse and trade, as well as of religion,--or, rather, that primitive religion was a system of performing those duties and purposes in the orderly way that the god approved and taught--for the valley in which the Lycus and the Maender meet. . . .

In contrast with this temple there grew up a famous school of medicine. . . .58

There is no city whose spirit and nature are more difficult to describe than Laodicea. There are no extremes, and hardly any very strongly marked features. But in this even balance lies its peculiar character. Those were the qualities that contributed to make it essentially the successful trading city, the city of bankers and finance, which could adapt itself to the needs and wishes of others, ever pliable and accommodating, full of the spirit of compromise.59

Add to what Ramsay has said here the fact that hot, cold, and lukewarm springs abounded near the city, and that a precious eye-salve was offered those with ophthalmic troubles, and we can readily see the appropriateness of the words of Jesus to the church in this place.

It is the saddest and sternest of all the messages. It comprises the solemn testimony on which the destiny of the church hangs. Modern Christianity has only lightly esteemed it, almost entirely disregarding its implications. No more terrible indictment of modern Christendom exists. The chief sin of the modern church is self-deception. It knows not that it is wretched, poor, blind, and naked. The word for poor is the same as that used in 2:9 of Smyrna, but Smyrna knew its material destitution whereas this church knows not its spiritual emptiness. Again, the word "wretched" occurs but one other place in Scripture (Rom. 7:24), as part of Paul's confession of the gap between his aspirations and his attainments. But Laodicea doesn't know there is a gap. She knows nothing about original sin, because too deeply defiled by it. And thereby hangs a most important moral.

Sin is the one thing concerning which, the more we have to do with it, the less we know about it. The deeper we go into darkness and selfishness, the less light our spiritual eye can discern, and the less our own perversion is recognized.

Years before, Christ had said, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (Jn. 9:41). This church thinks it is fine. It thinks it is rich, and wise, and righteous. But it is sick, terribly sick, even unto death. If we place together the comments of Saphir and Dalrymple we will better understand what has happened to the modern church of Laodicea. (And let it be stressed that only comparatively few have ever commented upon this letter without seeing its relevance to the twentieth century church.)

. . . prosperity is not favourable to a true estimate of ourselves; that we are never in greater danger than when our course is smooth, that health and ease and the constant occupations of life may lull us to sleep, and that we may mistake our very sloth and apathy for peace of conscience. Laodicea was the deepest sunk in self-deception, and most fully convinced that she was rich and endowed with goods, and had need of nothing.60

Is Laodicea then a victim of spiritual hallucinations? We think not. . . . What, then, is the reason that God, contemplating the condition of the church of Laodicea, sees one thing, while Laodicea, considering her own status, beholds an entirely different condition? The reason lies in the fact that God and Laodicea are really looking at two different things. Laodicea gazes upon material things. She tends to observe her achievements, which are not inconsiderable. She thinks of her missionaries at the ends of the earth. She recalls the hospitals and dispensaries which her wealth has erected and which her generosity maintains. She surveys the schools, academies, and colleges in which she purposes to lead her young people in the way that is right. She counts her printing presses and publishing houses, established to enlighten the world. She remembers her stately houses of worship, erected in many cities of many lands. She counts her membership, and analyzes her offerings. Her mind goes back to her humble beginnings, and traverses with a subtle and unconscious pride the years of growth, of progress, of attainment. It is a splendid showing. Laodicea is happy, is complacent. She has a flawless doctrine, a competent organization, a triumphant message. Who can deny these things?61

The most hopeless of sins, the most incurable, is pride and self-sufficiency. It is with Laodicea as with Sardis, and as was incipient with Ephesus--self-righteousness is its curse. It knows not that the human

heart is desperately wicked. It knows not that the condition of everyone of us by nature is as helpless as that of Satan himself. If it ever knew, it has now forgotten that the will at the Fall was given into the hands of Satan, and that man of himself lacks the desire and the power to deliver himself from the plague of self. Laodicea does not see the depths of the law--that it is required of all that every thought, word, deed, motive, and impulse should be qualitatively and quantitatively as good as Adam was capable of. That the law demands a holy sinless nature is not perceived. Instead, mere formal habits of outward religion are supposed to satisfy heaven's demands, and the merits of Christ are not cherished as indispensable for the believing sinner. Or at a higher level, some in Laodicea mistake ethics for Christianity, as though morality and redemption were the same. They look on sanctification, not as a deepening distrust of self and increasing faith, humility, and prayerfulness, but as achievement of will in rigorous outward practise. They have never heard that until they are broken they are useless, and that, if love is missing, all other fruit is valueless.

As with the religious leaders rebuked by Christ during passion week, Laodicea is missionary-minded. It is capable of compassing sea and land to make one proselyte, but it makes few Christians. The convert is in danger of becoming twofold more the child of hell as he enters upon a state of spiritual pride and satisfaction. As a convert he may become a Christian "pervert," with narrow vision condemning all who do not see exactly as he does, his own distorted thinking cherished as infallible, and likewise his consolatory traditions. His prayer in effect is, 'We are the chosen few, all others will be damned. There's no room in heaven for you; heaven can't be crammed.' He strains out gnats and swallows camels. Lists of regulations become the heart of his gospel, while he forgets to love mercy, do justly, and walk humbly with his God.

It would do all of us Laodiceans much good to study the parables of Christ, particularly the "villains" of His stories. These prove to be not villains at all, but good Laodiceans. The rich man who pulled down his barns and built greater was apparently no atheist nor blasphemer or Sabbath-breaker. Probably he taught the lesson at the local synagogue. But God called him a fool and told him to prepare for hell.

In another story those who refused the great invitation because of business or home duties are not described as commandment-breakers. Their sin was preoccupation with lesser things—an exceedingly popular and well-thought-of sin in the twentieth-century church. The prodigal son's brother, the perfect picture of a deceived Pharisee, was not in the lounge-room with his feet up, sucking Coca Cola and watching television when his runaway brother came home. No, he was out in the fields working. A worker, not a shirker was he, but lost. For God regards every man who looks on his brother with cold, critical eyes as lost. The sign that Christ has saved us is that we become lovers—lovers of the unlovely. Like Him of whom they said, "This man receiveth sinners."

Laodicea needs the eye-salve to see its sinfulness, and it needs the only remedy, the imputed merits of Christ. These always result in the fine gold tried in the fire—faith and love. The eye-salve is the anointing of the Spirit. If under His guidance we, for example, read the parables mentioned above and find the story of the man who owed his master a king's ransom we shall recognize ourselves. Ten thousand talents then consisted of 150,000 years of wages, yet the debtor promised to pay it all. How blind! He too was a Laodicean. It is only when we recognize that we cannot pay, that every day our debt grows larger, only then can the debt be met -- by Him, our gracious Creditor. Ramsey sums up the charge.

There is not one relieving trait, not one single feature upon which even the gentle and loving eye of Jesus can bestow a single commendation. Yet it has not apostatized from the truth; it is not guilty of foul heresy; it has followed no Jezebel; it is charged with no Nicolaitan doctrine or deeds; the whole is summed up in the expressive words, "lukewarm," "neither cold nor hot." For a church, or a follower of Jesus Christ, while recognizing His divine claims, His infinite love, His precious blood, His almighty Spirit, His sweet and holy service, and His promised glory, to treat it all with indifference, to be unmoved, or slightly moved by it, to manifest no warm affection, no earnest devotion, no self-denying and self-sacrificing zeal, is specially insulting to Him, and indicates a degree of insensibility almost past hope. It would be past belief, if it were not so common.⁶²

But let it be specially noted--Christ loves Laodicea nonetheless. As many as He loves, He rebukes and chastens. He died for Laodicea. The Father of the prodigal son loved the self-righteous son as well. That took greater love, Who would not rather live with the prodigal than with his brother? To the self-sufficient one, our wonderful Father says, "Son, all I have is thine, if you will take it." He knocks continuously at the door of the proud church and begs to be admitted. The wonder of it! The infinite marvel of it! That God should condescend to plead with what is only proud dust, or animated mud.

Jesus is but doing what He prompted Paul to do. The apostle could write, "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; and if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. . . . All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. . . . For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:13,14,18,19,21).

To believe in this, to believe in the great exchange that Christ took our sin and guilt that we might have his righteousness--this is what it means to buy of Christ white raiment that we might be clothed. To understand that divine forgiveness is not conditional, but that it has happened whether we accept it or not. To hear the words, "It is finished," and know that it applies to our redemption, all this is the result of the proffered eye-salve. Denney said he wished he were a Catholic priest that he might thrust a crucifix under the eyes of men and exclaim, "God loved like that!" Yes, God loved like that, and what other recourse has He, if that Cross moves us not? How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? We shall not escape, we shall die in our sins and lie forever in a crossless, Laodicean grave. Think on the moral Minear draws from an unusual story:

In his recent novel *The Clown* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1965) Heinrich Boll quite clearly addresses himself to a Christian audience, respectable and good citizens who are adept in using conventional morality and theological orthodoxy to deceive themselves about their own status. Boll's protagonist is a clown, a confessed unbeliever, who, although an adulterer by objective standards, remains an honest and faithful lover, a monogamist of high integrity. As the novelist unfolds the story of this clown and his beloved Marie, the story progressively un.masks virtually all the other characters, disclosing the truth that they (as Christians) are polygamous liars. "There are some strange unrecognized forms of prostitution compared with which prostitution itself is an honest trade" (p. 216).⁶³

Having completed our survey of these seven wonderful letters, we wish now to point out that their great lesson is the peril of legalism for the Christian church. Certainly, invading antinomianism from without is to be feared and opposed, but that peril is much more recognizable than the subtle heresy of Pharisaism which is perfectly respectable yet thoroughly mortal in its effects. Both dangers, antinomianism and legalism have to do with a wrong relationship to the law of God. It is to be blind also to the gospel, and to fail to see the right alignment between law and gospel. We wish, therefore, to summarize the scriptural truth on these matters for, as Luther declared, to rightly understand law and gospel is to find the key to all of Scripture and to open the gates of paradise.

A PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN LAW AND GOSPEL IS THE ONLY REMEDY FOR THE ILLS OF ANTINOMIANISM AND LEGALISM.

Law and gospel differ:

1. As to the manner of their revelation;
2. As regards their content;
3. As regards the promises held out by each;
4. As regards their threatenings;
5. As regards their function and effect;
6. As regards those to whom either is addressed.

1. Manner of revelation.

The law as a reflection of the divine nature is written on the heart of man by birth, for man is made in the image of God. Thus a preacher does not have to labor hard to convince listeners that they are guilty of transgressing the divine requirements. The consciences of his hearers will cooperate with the word preached to bring conviction. See Rom. 2:14-15.

But it is otherwise with the gospel. No man's conscience assures him the gospel is true. It sounds too good to be true! Only the Spirit of God can seal conviction to the heart of the listener. Not nature but preaching makes the gospel available. Rom. 16:25-26; Mt. 28:19,20; Mk. 15:15,16.

Thus we can understand how it is that all religions contain portions of the law, but only the Christian faith has the gospel.

2. Contents

The law tells us what we should do, but the gospel tells what God has done. Says the law, "This do and you shall live," but the gospel proclaims, "Live and you shall do." Says the law, "Pay me what you owe," but the gospel announces, "I frankly forgive you all." From the law we are told, "The wages of sin is death"; but the gospel word is better—"The gift of God is eternal life." Law affirms, "The soul that sins, it shall die," while the gospel responds, "But whosoever believes, though he were dead, yet shall he live." From the law comes the decree, "Cursed is every one that does not continue in all the things written in the law to do them, all the time, with all that he is and has"; but the gospel sings, "Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered." The law demands, "Make you a new heart," while the gospel promises, "A new heart will I give you." The law insists, "You must love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength"; the gospel whispers, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and gave His Son as a sacrifice for our sins." The law brings condemnation and death, whereas the gospel conveys justification and life. The law requires holiness, but the gospel provides holiness. When the law was given, 3,000 quickly died from their rebellion, but when the gospel was proclaimed in the Spirit at Pentecost, 3,000 penitents lived. The law has nothing to say about forgiveness or grace. It offers no power. Law never runs anything. It is perfect only for perfect people. The New Testament is against law as a method, but never against it as a standard. From the law comes only demands and commands, but the gospel offers forgiveness, righteousness, power, and love. See Gal. 3:12; Jn. 1:17.

3. Promises

The law promises exactly what the gospel promises, namely eternal life, but it differs in this that its promise can never be fulfilled to sinners, while the gospel's promises are specially for sinners. All the promises of the law are on conditions which we cannot meet, while the gospel's only condition is that we accept its gifts. Compare Lev. 18:5; Lu. 10:26ff. with Mk. 16:15-16; Rom. 3:22-24; Eph. 2:8-9.

4. Threats

The law is full of threats. Whenever one finds a threat in Scripture it belongs to law, never to the gospel. But wherever one finds hope, mercy, consolation, it comes from the gospel. See Deut. 27:26; 1 Tim. 1:15; Lu. 4: 16-21.

5. Functions and Effects

The law leads to conviction of sin, and to despair or hypocrisy. See Rom. 7:7-9; 2 Cor. 3:6; Ex. 20:18; Mt. 19:22; Acts 24:25. But the gospel creates the very faith it asks for, and removes our terrors, replacing them with peace and joy. See Rom. 15:13; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 2:8-10; Gal. 3:2.

6. Persons to whom addressed

The law has, as a primary purpose, its afflicting of the comfortable, whereas the gospel comforts the afflicted. Thus the law must be preached to secure sinners, but the gospel to the alarmed and fearful. See 1 Tim. 1:8-10; Lu. 4:16-21.⁶⁴

One writer has admirably summarized the matter thus:

The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been, -- just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents, -- perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized.

It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God's law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you

had not sinned.

More than this, Christ changes the heart. . . .65

It must be said again and again that the New Testament has two sets of texts on law, one set seemingly FOR law, and the other set SEEMINGLY against it. The truth is that the New Testament everywhere supports the law as a *standard* of righteousness, but everywhere condemns it as a *method* of righteousness .

When a person sees this truth of the distinction between law and gospel, the gates of heaven appear and, furthermore, they are open. The angels beckon. His heart leaps, and a joy unfathomable springs up. Until that moment he is "under law," and also under condemnation. Only when he loses the guilt of sin can sin lose its power over him. Only when he sees that he was saved 2,000 years ago in the same manner as he was lost, through his Representative — that he was lost without having anything to do with it, even so was he redeemed. Salvation is not now the sin question, but the Son question. Whosoever believeth on Him has eternal life. All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. Whosoever will may come, and he that cometh, Christ shall in no wise cast out. The gospel IS good news, not good advice. Notice how in the following passages the good news is told, and how the word gift appears repeatedly. Particularly see verses 12 and 18.

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned--sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin, for the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

*Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.*66

Note also 2 Cor. 5:14,18-21. We have paid the penalty for all our sins in Christ, our Substitute and Representative. The perfect righteousness required by the law has been procured for us and is put to the credit of all who will accept the gift.

When these passages are understood one will follow the example of Paul, who died to the law (as a method), that he might live to God. See Gal. 2:19, and compare Rom. 7:4; 10:4. Hesitate not to believe the good news, for God is indeed love. It takes a universe to hold that love, and it will take an eternity to unfold it. But right now, this moment, you are in the center of it, however much a failure, however debased. He forgives the penitent seventy times seven. He cries, "How can I give thee up? I have loved you with an everlasting love. Come unto me, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke, learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden light. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Believe, receive. There is infinite guilt in a moment's unbelief, but infinite joy in a moment through acceptance of God's acceptance of you. Come now! Live eternally in joy with the One who longs to rejoice over you with singing. Come and welcome!

One other matter should be noted before we pass from the churches of Rev. 2 and 3. Is the terrain we have covered qualitatively different from that predicted by the Author of the letters sixty years before? Is the content of the Olivet sermon and the seven epistles of the Apocalypse greatly different? Let us consider some of the parallels between the two. The Olivet discourse has for its theme the great Day of Judgment, the return of Christ. The seven letters are all written with a view to the same events. See 1:7; 2:5,10,16,17, 22,25,26; 3:3,5,10,11,12,20. The Olivet discourse warns the church regarding love waxing cold, many falling away, of false Christs and false prophets, of persecution and a great hour of trial, of unfaithful stewards, of sleeping believers, of lazy servants, and of the Master's ultimate coming as a thief. Is not this the very content of the letters as well?

Because it is so easy to read the second advent sermon and miss its significance, we wish to itemize

a few matters. First, it is a prediction that the great majority of the religionists of the time were soon to be punished as unfaithful servants. Jerusalem was to fall, and its inhabitants die or be scattered. Similarly, the trend shown in the letters to the seven churches indicate that the majority of Christendom will be spewed out of Christ's mouth as those whose first love has declined, as having a name that they live and are dead, as being wretched, poor, blind, and naked.

Second, the second advent sermon is a warning of terrible perils within the new Christian church. Many of its leaders would say in their hearts, "My Lord delayeth His coming." As a result they would lord it over the flock of God. See Mt. 24:48-51. Consider the insights of Monroe-Gibson on this passage.

As in the case of the man without the wedding garment, a single servant is taken as representing a class; and who constitute this class is made quite clear, not only by the fact that the servant is set over the household, but also by the nature of the service: "to give them their food in due season" (R.V.). The application was evidently first to the apostles themselves, and then to all who in the future should be engaged in the same work of providing spiritual nourishment for those under their charge. The very pointed way in which the parable is introduced, together with the fact that only one servant is spoken of, suggests to each one engaged in the work the most careful self-examination. "Who, then, is a faithful and wise servant?" The underlying thought seems to be, that such an one is not very easily to be found; and that therefore there is a special benediction for those who through the trying years are found both "faithful and wise," faithful to their high trust, wise in relation to the momentous issues depending on the manner in which they fulfil it. The benediction on the wise and faithful servant is evidently easy to miss and a great thing to gain.

But there is more to be thought of than the missing of the blessing. There is a fearful doom awaiting the unfaithful servant, of which the picture following gives a terrible presentation. Both offence and punishment are painted in the very darkest colours. As to the former, the servant not only neglects his duty but beats his fellow-servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken. Here a question arises, What was there to suggest such a representation to the Saviour's mind? Surely it could not be intended specially for those who were sitting with Him on the mount that day. If Judas was among the rest, his sin was not of the nature that would have suggested the parable in this particular form, and certainly there is no reason to suppose that any of the rest were in the slightest danger of being guilty of such cruelties and excesses as are here spoken of. Is it not plain then, that the Judge of all had in His view the dark days to come, when the clergy of a degenerate Church would be actually guilty of cruelties and excesses such as could not be more fitly set forth in parable than by the disgraceful conduct of "that wicked servant"?

This is still further confirmed by the reason given for such recklessness, --the evil servant saying in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming." There is reason to suppose that the early Christians expected the return of the Lord almost immediately. In so far as they made this mistake, it cannot be charged against their Master; for, as we have seen, He warns them against this error throughout the whole of the prophecy. It is plain, however, that those who made this mistake were in danger of saying in their hearts, "My Lord delayeth His coming." But as time passed on, and the expectation of the Lord's speedy return grew fainter, then there would come in all its force the temptation to those who did not watch against it of counting on the Lord's delay. When we think of this, we see how necessary it was that the danger should be set forth in language which may have seemed unnecessarily strong at the time, but which the future history of the Church only too sadly justified.

The punishment is correspondingly severe. The word used to picture it ("shall cut him asunder") is one to make us shudder; and some have felt surprised that our Lord did not shrink from the horror of the word. Ah! but it was the horror of the thing which He dreaded, and wished to avert. It was the infinite pity of His heart that led Him to use a word which might prove the very strongest deterrent. Besides how significant it is! Think, again, of whom He is speaking, --servants set over His household to give food in due season, who instead of doing this maltreat their fellow-servants and ruin themselves with excess. Think of the duplicity of such conduct. By office in the church "exalted unto heaven, by practice "brought down to hell"! That unnatural combination cannot last. These monsters with two faces and one black heart cannot be tolerated in the universe of God. They shall be *cut asunder*; and then it will appear which of the two faces really belongs to the man: cut asunder, his place shall be appointed with the hypocrites, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. . . .67

Third, both the Olivet sermon and the seven letters emphasize the need for spiritual alertness in view of the unexpectedness of the Lord's return. See Mt. 24:42,43,44; 25:1-13, and compare Rev. 3:3,11,20. In view of these things we find ample evidence that the book of Revelation is indeed but an unfolding of that which the Lord gave in seed form that last Tuesday of His earthly existence. And because we have also seen abundant evidence for the truth that "the church letters themselves are as seeds for later apocalyptic themes it is clear that we are not to look for in the coming chapters anything other than the expansion of warnings given by Christ during His earthly ministry. Berkouwer spoke profoundly when he said:

It is impossible to isolate the "hermeneutics" of Revelation from the total New Testament proclamation of the future.

Nor is there warrant for contrasting an apocalyptic element in Revelation with a narrative or reportorial element in the eschatological sayings of Jesus as found in the Gospels. Such a contrast is precluded by the Gospels themselves, which are incomprehensible without an apocalyptic background.⁶⁸

.... The signs of the times remain centered around the message of the crucified and exalted Lord.

Because Jesus Christ is the first and the last (Rev. 22:13), the eschatological proclamation is strongly Christological. It is not "a supplementary piece of information added to dogmatic anthropology and Christology," but simply their transposition into the guise of the fulfillment.⁶⁹

Too often, reflection on the signs has been cut loose from the Kingdom, their concentration-point. The results are always disconcerting. All the strongly apocalyptic words mean nothing unless they are centered in and receive their meaning from the Messiah.⁷⁰

.... Wars and rumors of wars are considered the important signs. But the primary concern is the universal spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 13:10). This preaching stands in a clearly eschatological context: "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Usually those who have catalogued the signs of the times have included this, but frequently it has been seen as just another element in the "narrative account."⁷¹

... In the last days the preaching of the gospel is the focal point of *all* the signs. In it all the signs can and must be understood.⁷²

. . . the New Testament signs do not pertain to an objective, chronological report or description, but to the deep dimensions that, in the light of the crucified Lord, determine the course of history.⁷³

These statements should be compared with the introductory materials on hermeneutics. If these principles are thoroughly grasped, interpretation of the rest of this book will not be fool-proof, but it should with God's blessing prove adequate for our needs.

SECTION TWO [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 4-7)

WARRIOR HORSES FROM THE THRONE OF THE UNIVERSE

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 4-7

Chapter 18

We have come to a new beginning, even "the apocalypse proper."¹ The first two chapters (Rev. 4 and 5) are "the fulcrum" of the book² as well as the introduction to all that follows. They constitute one of the chief partings of the way for interpreters, for as Walvoord says, at this point the decision must be made whether to accept the futuristic approach to the rest of the book. By futuristic he means dispensationalist, which considers that the rapture is indicated by the words to John, "Come up hither." Futurists who reject dispensationalism, such as Ladd, interpret the seals in principle in the same way as historicists. Concerning the first four seals, Ladd says that they picture "the character of the age and its relationship to the kingdom of God."³

Significantly the theme of these two chapters is God—the Father, the Spirit, but especially the Son. As the seer is given a vision of heaven, and not physically transported there, we will need to keep in mind that it is not heaven itself that he is reproducing, but the symbols of it shown to him. If we get lost in the drapery and minutiae of the vision, its true meaning will escape us. Not the twenty-four elders, not the four living creatures, nor the glassy sea, but the Redeemer is the focus. The chapters are a commentary on the words of the departing Christ, "Let not your hearts be troubled, *ye believe in God, believe also in me.*" Chapter 4 points particularly to God the Creator, and 5 to Christ the Saviour. Jesus is saying, "Be of good cheer, the Father Himself loveth you, and because I live, you shall live also." How appropriate this theocentric setting is for the revelations which follow—revelations of the messianic woes set forth in terrifying imagery.

It is not tragedy which humans cannot endure, it is tragedy without meaning. These chapter shout the truth that there is nothing without meaning, that there is neither chance nor accident, for God is on the throne, and with Him the One Who suffered on Calvary for His rebel children. This is a far cry from the fears of Thomas Hardy about, "The dreamy, dark, dumb Thing, that turns the handle of this idle Show."⁴ As McDowell says, "We are introduced to the great drama of the sovereignty of God." But it is more. It is the drama of redemption.

As the previous section began with a reference to the throne of God (1:4), and closed by mention of the throne of Christ (3:21), the fourth chapter presents the throne of the Father, and then the fifth reveals that Christ also shares that throne. "Throne" is one of the key-words of this book, occurring forty times out of the fifty-seven occurrences in the New Testament. Seventeen times it is found in these two chapters which introduce the rest of the book. Not Domitian, the threatened church is assured, but God is the supreme Sovereign.

"Under the shadow of thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure."⁵

Before the winds of strife are loosed, before the apocalyptic horsemen ride forth, before the trumpets are blown, before the great tribulation is pictured, we see the throne, not only of our Creator, but of Him who is also Redeemer. Thus the afflicted churches of John's day, and their successors in our time, were assured that at the heart of the universe there is neither chaos nor steel, but a heart; not

only divine but human, and full of sympathy.

. . . That heart of His is full of human sympathies, but they are the sympathies of a God, and not powerless, like the tears of a mere man. Where Jesus weeps, death itself lets go its grasp, and Lazarus comes forth. He loves you with all the tenderness, and gentleness, and warm affection of His human heart, but with all the force of that divinity to which it belongs. Trust him implicitly, love Him fervently, live for Him entirely, as redeemed unto God by His blood.⁶

For this reason, the fact that love rules the universe, these chapters are filled not only with mystery, but with song. Three great doxologies assure us that one of the main businesses of heaven is praise. When Isaiah contrasted his own stammering tongue with the adoring announcements of the angels, he knew himself to be unclean. That praise is as much a duty as prayer has not fully registered with any of us. How can one boast of perfection while praise commensurate with its Object remains a virtually unknown tongue to all of us?

Chapters 1 to 3 described the internal and external problems of the church--that church which was to make possible Christ's return by its proclamation of the gospel to all the world. Some of the lamps were portrayed as giving only a clouded flame. What then lay ahead for this church which, though enfeebled and defective, was still the supreme object of God's regard? How would it endure the trauma of battle? What is to be its destiny? And what also the destiny of the world which presses it so sorely? It is the purpose of this section to begin the answer to these questions.

The first thing John sees in this vision is a throne--but it is clearly a throne of judgment. From it flare flashes of lightning, and peals of thunder. The whole scene is reminiscent of the judgment scene in Dan. 7:9-13 where "the thrones were placed and the judgment was set." Revelation is a book of judgment, and he who forgets it loses the key to interpreting the Apocalypse correctly. The seals, the trumpets, and the bowls are all judgments (the well-known messianic woes, the birth pangs of a new world).

Again we must remind ourselves that Revelation is an enlarged Olivet Discourse. That sermon was given during Christ's judgment week. See Jn. 12:31. His discourses and acts in those last days were all characterized by judgment. The cleansing of the temple, the cursing of the fig-tree, the woes on the Pharisees, the parables concerning the destruction of the keepers of the vineyard, the marriage of the king's son, plus the inspection of the guests, the unfaithful servant cut in sunder, the sleeping virgins, the stewards giving account, and the sheep and the goats--all were permeated by the same motif of judgment. Thus the Olivet sermon is all of a piece with its setting. This enlarged edition, John's Apocalypse, likewise is characterized by the identical theme.

Neither are the topics of the Olivet sermon and the Apocalypse novel. They had been well-known for a long time. The Old Testament, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, all use again and again the same themes found in Christ's advent sermon, and His expansion of it in Revelation.

1. ". . . wars and rumors of wars."

Compare Isa. 19:2; Zech. 14:13. See also 1 Enoch 100:1-2; Testament of Judah 22:1-2; 4 Ezra 5:9; 6:24; 9:3. Note particularly the Apocalypse of Baruch 70:3-7 which reads:

And they shall hate one another, and provoke one another to fight, and the mean shall rule over the honourable, and those of low degree shall be extolled above the famous. . . Then shall confusion fall upon all men, and some of them shall fall in battle, and some of them shall perish in anguish, and some of them shall be destroyed by their own.

2. ". . . the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light."

Compare Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:15; Joel 2:2; Isa. 13:10; Joel 2:30-31; 3:15-16. See also 1 Enoch 80:4-8; Sibylline Oracles 3:83-89, 798-806; Testament of Levi 4:1; Assumption of Moses 10:4-6; 4 Ezra 5:4. The last is representative of the rest where it says: "Then shall the sun suddenly shine forth by night and the moon by day. ..."

3. "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations."

Compare Isa. 2:2-4; 45:20-22; 25:6-8; 49:6; 51:4; 55:5; 56:6-8. See also 1 Enoch 48:4-5; Testament of Levi 18:5-9; Psalms of Solomon 17:34; Sibylline Oracles 3:710-723.

4. ". . . gather his elect." Compare Isa. 11:11; 27:12,13; 1 Baruch 4:36-37; Pss. of Solomon 11:3.

5. "... the Son of man."

Compare Gen. 1:26; Psa. 8; Dan. 7:13. Because the Similitudes of Enoch is probably syncretistic, containing Christian elements, its parallels to Mark 13:26 are not here cited. 4 Ezra 13, which originated about the time of Mark's Gospel or within a matter of decades, reinterprets Daniel 7 and presents the "Son of Man" as the messianic deliverer.

6. ". . . the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be."

Mk. 13:14 with its apparent reference to a personal power standing in the holy place has been understood by a large number of commentators to apply to Antichrist. While this latter term first appears in 1 Jn. 2:18, the concept is much earlier, being traceable not only to Dan. 7:13, but also to Eze. 38-39 and other Old Testament passages. In non-canonical Jewish writings the idea is probably present in such passages as The Assumption of Moses 8:1ff; Pss. of Solomon 2:29; 2 Bar. 40:1ff; 4 Ezra 5:6; Testament of Iss. 6:1; Testament of Dan. 5:10; Testament of Judah 25:3; Sibylline Oracles 3:63ff.

It is clear that the themes of John, as well as those of Jesus, are not new, and it is likewise clear that they were chiefly themes of judgment--the judgments associated with the coming of the Messiah, and his counterpart Antichrist, and the subsequent deliverance of the elect. Particularly did "the Son of Man" figure as an emblem of vindication for God's people but punishment for their oppressors. Compare Rev. 1:7,13; 14:14; and Mt. 24:30; Lu. 18:8; Mk. 14:62.

How can a book be so full of the crucified Christ, so permeated with references to the Lamb (twenty-eight references), and yet be shrill with judgment? The ideas are not really disparate. Privilege determine responsibility, and to whom much is given, much is expected. And God has given much--in His Son. Thus the one who wrote Revelation could also write:

He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. John 3:18,19

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him. John 3:36.

It is fashionable to avoid talking of the wrath of God. Karl Barth for years neglected the theme and likewise most contemporary theologians. But this book knows no "finicky" reserve.... Moderns have forgotten that the greatest text of the Bible, the one telling us that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, also warns that all who do not respond to Him shall "perish." The sun which melts wax also hardens clay. No one can be the same after hearing the gospel. They are either better or worse--*much* better or *much* worse. Human beings in this world have choice, but with choice comes responsibility. It is this note that Revelation sounds again and again.

The fact of the judgment emphasis of this book is vital for its interpretation. As T. B. Baines put it:

The subject of this book is judgment; . . . God is revealed as the Almighty, the Eternal, the Judge of all the earth. Christ appears exercising His judicial functions, first in the house of God, and afterwards among the nations. . . it is the judgments, and not the blessings, of the earthly kingdom that are here recorded. So, too, the Church on earth is looked upon, not in its privileges, but in its responsibilities, as the house of God, at which judgment must begin.⁷

In other words, what we are reading about is a summary, dark with woe, of eschatological events. Revelation is not intended to sketch a successive outline of many centuries of light and shadow. It is almost all shadow because it pertains to the very last days. This view is not futurism nor dispensationalism--it is fidelity to the evidence of the book itself. These last events in the attenuated fulfillment have cast their shadows before, century after century, and thus the book does have significance for all ages. But it has most significance when we see in it a portrayal of the last things--things meant to accompany the universal proclamation of the gospel, a duty and privilege of the church in any and every age.

Granted therefore that the following chapters of Revelation are large with judgment, how shall we interpret the first set of woes--the seven seals? Let us first remember those to whom the vision was originally addressed. Christians of the first century were a troubled community without worldly wealth, influence, or might. And they seemed poised on the verge of an onslaught which could only result in wide-spread if not universal martyrdom. These are the people who were the initial recipients of John's

report. How does the vision of the seals have relevance for them?

Second, does John give us some clues by the literary relationships he expresses between this sixth chapter and other parts of his book? We observe parallels between it and chapters 1 and 19. In chapter 1 we found the dominant impression conveyed by the initial vision was one of light--sun, fire, lamps, stars--all were mentioned. Three times white was used to describe the gleaming figure of the Priest-King, the Son of Man of Daniel's vision, though now sharing characteristics of the Ancient of Days. Thus at the portals of the Apocalypse the theme was presented of light displacing darkness as the Lord worked through His church. Now in chapter 6 we have the conquering warrior on the white horse. The usual term for "white" in Revelation has the significance of "shining" and is often applied to things glorious. In Revelation, it is always used in relationship to heavenly affairs. Thus the vision in chapter 1, and that of 6, as well as 10, 12, and 18, all begin with emblems of light symbolizing the church's warfare against the darkness of this world. The white horse is in perfect harmony with the Son of Man with hair gleaming and glorious, the heavenly messenger of 10 whose face was as the sun, the woman clothed with the sun and stars and the moon under her feet, and the angel of 18 who caused the whole world to be brightened with his splendor. Later we shall discuss the parallel between this chapter and the nineteenth.

Another clue is the fact that the woes of the seals (and the trumpets and bowls) are covenant woes. Lev. 26 is a vital chapter for interpreting this book. Repeatedly therein we read of punishment "seven times more" for those who do not respond to God's mercies. Rev. 4:3 refers to the covenant rainbow--a reference to a covenant made not just with Israel at Sinai, but the whole world at the Fall. Some such as Ellul have even seen an allusion to the covenant symbol in the military bow in the hands of the first rider (the significance of the covenant bow in Gen. 9 is that the arrow of wrath has been discharged away from earth).

In Isa. 24:5,6, we read:

The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, *broken the everlasting covenant*.
Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;
therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.

The rainbow seen in Rev. 4:3, with its mingling on sunshine and shower, portrays God's nature of love and justice, mercy and holiness, and consequently the essence of all that happens on earth. The Christ is both Lamb and Lion; the *goel* is Redeemer and Avenger. While the white horse offers life eternal, the pale steed brings death and hell. Truth in history, as everywhere else, must speak both in terms of light and shadow. Because the visions of Revelation, as in the present instance, are eschatological, they speak much about God's judgment on evil, but we must not forget that judgment, and the coming of the Lord, *for the saints* have the brighter colours of the rainbow as well. Believers in other ages often echoed the joy of the Psalmist as he pointed to the coming of God to judgment. See Psa. 96 and compare the following:

Durham concludes his sermon at Warwick Assizes on an optimistic note, "Here's the balme of Gilead for the fainting soule, and abundant consolation for him that is opprest; 'tis doubtless a great asswagement to a Christian's misery, to think that Christ is ready to come to judgment."⁸

". . . we should love the appearance of Christ, and look for, and haste to the coming of the day of God. O why is his Chariot so long in coming! Oh that the day should be so great, and our desires so small! Shall the Marriner desire his Port? the Apprentice his freedom? the imprisoned his liberty? the sick his health? the Spouse the day of her marriage? a malefactor his pardon? a labourer his rest? an heir his inheritance? and shall not a Christian long for that day which removes every sorrow, supplies every want, and makes us like him?"⁹

We doubt not that the believers who first listened to John's book shared the same holy joy as their successors in contemplating the last great Day.

Thus far in our search for interpretive keys, we have glanced at the setting of the seals, their judgment nature, the people to whom they were originally addressed, and the use of the covenant curses. What other clues may there be?

The chief one we have so far omitted--the relationship between Christ and the book now being unsealed. One writer commenting on the inadequacies of interpretation by preterist Stuart, and historicist Elliott, wrote:

Surely, it cannot have been the sole purpose of Apocalyptic disclosures so impressive and wonderful in all the attending conditions--uniting in the symbolism employing such magnificent theophanies, with accompanying representative ministries of the universe—earth and heaven, the redeemed church and the sentient creation,—it cannot be that all this array is marshaled for any less a purpose than to set forth in the revelation given that which concerns, not a part of the human race, nor the secular history, merely, of even so vast and potent a power as the Roman Empire, but what shall be worthy alike of the scenery and the drama. Neither can we believe that the destruction of the Jewish State, though viewed as a power hostile to Christianity, assailing with persecution and outrage the kingdom of God in its New Dispensation, is all that must here be intended.¹⁰

Smith here speaks of the grandeur of the scenes introducing the unsealing of the book. We shall consider that introduction in detail in the section following. But, for the present, let us pause to think on the symbolism of the Lamb taking the book from the hand of God amid anthems of praise from all in heaven. What does this mean? Is Smith right—that it is all too grand to be merely pointing to events of limited historical importance? The doxology that marked the Lamb's possession of the scroll indicates the great significance of that event.

. . . and they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth." Rev. 5:9,10.

The theme is not the history of governments, but the redemption of the world. The sealed book has to do with all power in heaven and earth being given to the Son. It is commentary on Dan. 7:13,14,22,27, and Mt. 28:18.

The sealed book has been variously understood. The book of life, the book of the Revelation itself, the book of destiny, a testament or will, the title deed of the world, etc. Scripture itself, here as ever, is the best interpreter. The following passages are illuminating on this topic: Jer. 32:6-14; Lev. 25:13; Psa. 74:2; Lu. 24:21; Ruth 4; Eph. 1:13; Job 19:25-29; 27:13; Dan. 12:13. These passages speak of redemption as illustrated by Old Testament procedures. We do not often agree with Seiss, but he has summarized as well as any the position here adopted:

It is not ecclesiastical history, which this book is introduced to foreshow, but something to which all ecclesiastical history is only the prelude and introduction, and which the Scriptures call "*The redemption of the purchased possession.*" . . .

The word *redemption* comes to us, and takes its significance from certain laws and customs of the ancient Jews. Under these laws and customs, it was impossible to alienate estates beyond a given time. Whatever disposition one may have been forced to make of his lands, and whoever might be found in possession of them, the year of Jubilee returned them to the lawful representatives of their former owners. Upon this regulation there was founded another, which made it the right of the nearest of kin to one who, through distress or otherwise, had alienated his inheritance to another party, to step in and redeem it; that is, to buy it back, and retake it. . . .

There has been an inheritance forfeited and disposed away for these thousands of years. . . . Everything testifies that it was a high, holy, and blessed investiture. But, alas, its original possessor sinned, and it passed out of his hands to the disinheritance of all his seed. The sealed book, the title-deeds of its forfeiture and mortgage, are in the hands of God, and strangers and intruders have overrun and debased it. And from the days of Adam until now, those deeds have lain in the Almighty's hands, with no one to take them up or to dispossess the aliens.

Sin cannot vitiate any of the rights of God. Satan's possession is a mere usurpation, permitted for the time, but in no way detrimental to the proprietorship of the Almighty. The true right still lives in the hand of God, until the proper Goel comes to redeem it, by paying the price, and ejecting the alien and his seed. . . .¹¹

This is not to say that the other interpretations are far from the truth. Most of them, if not all, are included in this one. The images of this book frequently are fluid as though the author had more than one thing in mind, rather than sharp and precise. Jacques Ellul says that "a symbol is not interpreted in only *one* way (the woman = *a*, but not *b*), . . . on the contrary it includes a series of designations,

each one related to the others. . . .¹² If we are right thus far it should not be difficult to find confirming Scriptures for our overall view. These are readily available. Let us consider a few:

Lu. 22:69:

"But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." When we compare this version of our Lord's statement before the Sanhedrin with those of the other Gospels we see a difference. Here our Lord affirms that "from now on," i.e., from the time of His death and resurrection, He would be ever and continually the coming Son of Man in judgment. He applies the symbolism of Dan. 7:9-13 to a series of comings beginning in the first century and ending only with His manifestation in glory. He came at the fall of Jerusalem, and at the end of the Roman empire, He came with the avenging Mohammedans, and the French revolutionaries, and in the great Protestant Reformation. He has come in every judgment and every blessing. The cry "Come" which attends the release of each of the horses is not only a command to them, but a prayer for Christ to act in judgment. Says Milligan:

The word Come therefore embodies the longing of redeemed creation that the Lord, for the completion of whose work it waits, will take to Him His great power and reign.¹³

However we interpret the seals, the interpretation must comply with our Lord's promise that from the time of the first advent He would be continually coming in judgment.

Zech. 6:1-8:

And again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between mountains; and the mountains were mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled gray horses. Then I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" and the angel answered me, "These are going forth to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the LORD of all the earth. The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go toward the west country, and the dappled ones go towards the south country." When the steeds came out, they were impatient to get off and patrol the earth. And he said, "Go, patrol the earth." So they patrolled the earth. Then he cried to me, "Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my Spirit at rest in the north country."

Here is a prophecy of the work of restoration after the Babylonian captivity. It speaks of the calling out of a people and reestablishing them in their covenant land, and simultaneously of the judgment on their oppressors. Here is the source of the imagery of Rev. 6, and the latter must be interpreted in harmony with its source though without its limitations.

Hab. 3:4-15

His brightness was like the light,
 rays flashed from his hand;
 and there he veiled his power.
Before him went pestilence,
 and plague followed close behind.
He stood and measured the earth;
 he looked and shook the nations;
then the eternal mountains were scattered,
 the everlasting hills sank low.
His ways were as of old.
I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;
 the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.
Was thy wrath against the rivers, O LORD?
 Was thy anger against the rivers,
 or thy indignation against the sea,
when thou didst ride upon the horses,
 upon thy chariot of victory?
Thou didst strip the sheath from thy bow,
 and put the arrows to the string.
Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.
The mountains saw thee, and writhed;
 the raging waters swept on;

the deep gave forth its voice,
it lifted its hands on high.
The sun and moon stood still in their habitation,
at the light of thine arrows as they sped,
at the flashing of thy glittering spear.
Thou didst bestride the earth in fury,
thou didst crush the head of the wicked,
laying him bare from thigh to neck.
Thou didst pierce with thy shafts the head of his warriors,
who came like a whirlwind to scatter me,
rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.
Thou didst trample the sea with thy horses,
the surging of mighty waters.

This passage presents Jehovah in dazzling brightness going forth to deliver His people, and trample down the nations. Before Him goes pestilence, and plague follows. He rides on horses, and has a chariot of victory. In his hands is a bow. Sun and moon are affected, and the nation trodden down. Note the comparisons with Rev. 6.

... a text which may have been paramount in the mind of the writer is Hab. 3:4-15. This was a text read for the Feast of Weeks telling of the theophany of God from Mount Paran, on the north side of the Sinai peninsula. Yahweh appears in dazzling brightness. Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind, Hab. 3:4-5, RSV; cf. Rev. 6:8. He is said to ride on horses (Hab. 3:8; cf. Rev. 6:2, 4,5,8) and his chariot of victory. He strips the sheath from his bow (Hab. 3:9; cf. Rev. 6:2) and puts arrows into the string. He cleaves the earth (Hab. 3:9; cf. Rev. 6:12) and rivers, shakes the mountains and the deep (Hab. 3:10; cf. Rev. 6:14) and affects the sun and the moon (Hab. 3:11; cf. Rev. 6:12) when he strides upon the earth in his fury, trampling down the nations (Hab. 3:12; cf. Rev. 6:15).¹⁴

Thus the vision of the seals is not only based on the Exodus (compare Rev. 7:1-4 and Ex. 12:13), but also on later prophecies of judgment and deliverance as found in Zechariah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Joel.

The removal of the seals indicate various steps that the Lamb must take before the destiny of all men is settled, and each enters upon his inheritance for weal or woe. Because judgment is involved, this book is a record of the deeds of men as well as the title deed of their inheritance. It is likewise a will or covenant document because our inheritance depends upon the everlasting covenant and the new covenant made with the church.

The relationship between Christ and the book must not be lost sight of. Fausset is right when he says:

. . . The question (v. 2) is not, Who should reveal the destinies of the Church (this any inspired prophet might do)? but, Who has the WORTH to give man a new title to his lost inheritance?
15

Seiss speaks similarly:

Jesus is the Lion sprung from Judah. ... He hath paid the redemption price of the forfeited inheritance. He is the true Goel, who, having so far triumphed and been accepted, will also prove ready and worthy to complete His work, by lifting those long-standing deeds of forfeiture, and breaking their debarring seals. 16

The revelation of the seals has to do with the consummating of the work of redemption already legally accomplished. Nothing less than all of time, and all of mankind, are included in this revelation. As Fairbairn recognized a century ago, the symbolical contents of the sealed book cover the complete field of the militant condition of the church in all time, even extending to the finishing of the mystery of God, when the church shall enter in kingly power and glory into the possession of its lost inheritance.¹⁷

All adequate interpretation of the seals must recognize the progressive conquest of the world by Christ through His church and His providential control. The terrors unfolded must be the result of earthlings fighting that gospel which alone can enable men to possess again what has been lost. The panorama must include scenes of antagonism to God manifested towards His people, the loss of soul peace thereby, and the inevitable aftermath of violence, spiritual and physical scarcity and famine, as the Word of life is neglected or rejected, perversions of truth and practice will result in persecution,

strife of all forms, and submission to the false gods offered by Antichrist.

We will expect to hear the oppressed church crying out for redress, and ultimately the answer to that plea must also be heard and witnessed—a revelation of the wrath of the rejected Lamb. Who shall then be able to stand?

If the unsealing of the book points the way to the heavenly rest, we will anticipate that both the calling out of a people and their preparation, and the dispossession of the field now held by aliens must take place.

In the typical relations of ancient Israel, we see precisely the same twofold aim prosecuted. An elect people had in the first instance to be found; found both in sufficient numbers to occupy the destined inheritance, and in such a moral condition as might in some measure fit them for accomplishing the ends designed by its occupation. This itself required a long period of preparation, during which alternately trial and blessing, judgment and mercy, now the oppression and again the protection of the world, were brought into play. And when, through the operation of such varied and conflicting forces, the result, as regards the people, had been in good part attained, then followed the prosecution of the inheritance by judging and dispossessing the adversaries. The same, substantially, in both respects, falls to be done now by Christ in connection with his redeemed people—only with the usual differences that distinguish the relations of the antitype from those of the type. All has now to be conducted on an immensely larger scale, and in the sphere more immediately of spiritual realities rather than of sensible transactions—by means, also, of the Word and Spirit of truth, not of fleshly weapons and political arrangements.¹⁸

The one in Old Testament times who redeemed lost property or persons was called the *goel*. The term signified both a redeemer and an avenger, for in those crude times, when no police force existed, it was the near-kinsman who executed vengeance. However strange the idea may be to Westerners, the *goel* concept pointed to both redemption and vengeance. Thus in the prophecies before us we shall see Christ portrayed both as the Lamb of God, the compassionate Redeemer of the saints, and as the Lion of the tribe of Judah to the rejectors of His grace.

In apocalyptic imagery a lamb with horns of strength is a well-known emblem. Though Christ is the gentle, harmless, innocent Lamb, He is also a Warrior-King. In the seals we shall see Christ mainly as the Redeemer, caring for His own amid the outpouring of judgments. In the Trumpets (where we find no reference to the "lamb"), Christ will be seen as Avenger; before the Trumpets are blown, we are given a view of Christ as Advocate (8:4), and this also has reference to the ancient *goel* who often represented the oppressed as advocate in the gate of judgment.

All of these—redeemer, avenger, advocate—are legal, forensic terms in keeping with the many other such images in the book. Rightly used, "legal" never means "legalistic," any more than "rational" means "rationalistic." The thought is rather that all that God does is done on the basis of right. He is not arbitrary nor unfair, but true and righteous in all his judgments. The seals and trumpets portray the covenant curses as their settings refer to both these and the covenant blessings. All these involve forensic imagery. The book of Revelation, as surely as the Gospel of John, shows God's law-suit with the world, and teaches that only those hid in Christ can find justification from the accusations of the great adversary. The sealed book contains the history as well as the destiny of every man, for the judgment bestowal of inheritance will reveal our works as evidence or not of saving faith.

Lastly, consider the parallel between Rev. 6 and Rev. 19. The sequence in the first is (1) a white horse; (2) a great sword; (3) balances of judgment; (4) death and hell. In the second we also read of Him on a white horse with a sword, and He comes to judge. His vesture is that of death. Thiele has seen the comparison and writes:

Striking similarities will be noticed between the symbolism of Rev. 4-7 and that of Rev. 19 where the closing events of the great struggle against the hosts of evil are pictured. In both scenes there is a picture of heaven opened (4:1; 19:11); God is seated on His throne (4:2,9; 5:13; 19:4,6); salvation, glory, honors, and power are ascribed to the Lord (5:12; 7:10,12; 19:1); there is a noise of thunder (6:1; 19:6); God is Judge and Avenger of the blood of His servants (6:10; 19:2); the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fall down in worship (4:10; 5:8,14; 19:4); a great multitude arrayed in white stands before the throne (7:9,13,14; 19:6-8); a white horse goes forth in battle (6:2; 19:11); crowns are on the heads of the riders of the horses of white (6:2; 19:12); and there is a sharp sword for the smiting of the nations and the taking of peace from the earth (6:4; 19:15).

If Rev. 4-7 pictures God as both Judge and Warrior, Rev. 19:11 specifically mentions the fact that "He doth judge and make war." In Rev. 6:10 the question is raised, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not *judge* and *avenge* our blood?" whereas in ch. 19:2 "He hath *judged*" and "*avenged* the blood of His servants."¹⁹

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Rev. 4-5)

Chapter 19

Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong-
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.¹

Rev. 4:1-3:

After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and lo, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne! And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald "After this" is a recurring expression pointing to the transition from one vision to another. See 7:1,9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1. Note that the prophet records not what heaven is actually, but what he saw in vision. There is not a bleeding Lamb above, nor an expectant mother, or a great red dragon. These, and many others, point to great realities--most of them upon earth. But in this vision heavenly things are symbolized for our understanding and comfort.

On the open door Wordsworth writes:

Observe here the *perfect* participle, the door had been opened and was *standing open*. The veil of the heavenly Holy of Holies had been removed by Christ (Heb. x. 19,20), and heaven was laid open to the view. There is a comparison, and yet a contrast, between the heavenly Temple, and that which had existed upon earth during the Levitical dispensation, when the way into the Holiest had not yet been made manifest. Heb. ix. 8.2

"Come up hither. ..." Richardson says, "A very weird interpretation given to these words by those who refer them to "the Rapture" of 1 Thess. 4:17."³ Those who are not afraid of challenging cherished beliefs should read Ladd's *The Blessed Hope* on this subject. There is no evidence whatever that the church is caught up into heaven years before the coming of Christ in glory. This mistaken notion had its origin about 1830 in a "vision" of Margaret MacDonald and was incorporated in the strange theology of Edward Irving before it was adopted by J. N. Darby and later the Scofield Bible.⁴

In several places in succeeding chapters the church is spoken of as alive, if not well, on earth. We read of her persecutions in chapters 6,11,13, etc., and of her spreading of the gospel in chs. 6,10-11,14, etc. If this strange view of the rapture of the church is correct it makes the book of Revelation of practically no value to the church over two thousand years of perilous pilgrimage. Guinness speaks to the point:

The prophecy is addressed, as we have seen, to *Christ's servants* and to the *churches*; the ascription of praise in ch. i. 5 is evidently *Christian* praise, it is the praise of those who have been loved by Jesus, and washed from their sins in his blood. John speaks of himself as the brother, and fellow sufferer of those to whom he wrote, and John was a *Christian* confessor, a prisoner of Jesus Christ in Patmos, as much as Paul had been in Rome. He says he was in exile "for the word of God, and for the testimony which he held," which expression therefore means *Christianity*. Under the fifth seal we catch a glimpse of a company of martyrs who were slain "for the word of God and for the testimony which they held," that is, for confessing their *Christian* faith, like John; they were slain because they were Christians. White robes are given

to them, and they are told to wait till another company of martyrs should be killed *as they were*, that is as *Christians*. In chapter viii, "the prayers of all saints" and "the prayers of the saints" are mentioned; now prayer ascends from suppliants on earth, and "saints" in New Testament phraseology means *Christians*.⁵

... we observe these "saints," who are thirteen times mentioned in the Apocalypse, doing and bearing exactly what we know from other scriptures, the saints of the Christian church must do and bear in this dispensation. We find them watching, waiting, praying, enduring tribulation (chap. xiii. 10), resisting unto blood (chap. xvi. 6), resting in heaven (chap. xiv. 12,13), and at last manifested as the bride of Christ, and as the "armies which were in heaven," clad under both emblems with the "fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints"; we find them associated with the martyrs of Jesus, (chap. xvii. 6), a clear proof that they cannot be Jewish saints!"

In short, so far from the church being actually and exclusively in heaven, at the commencement of the prophetic drama of this book, she is seen on earth during its entire course. She is seen collectively under various symbols, such as the one hundred and forty-four thousand, the two witnesses, the sun-clad woman, the armies of heaven, the New Jerusalem; and her members are seen severally as "the saints." They are seen first in their sufferings, and then in their glory; first slain for Jesus' sake, then enthroned beside Him.⁶

Rev. 4:4-7:

Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads. From the throne issue flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God; and before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And round the throne, on each of the thrones, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle.

This issue of the identity of the twenty-four elders is one of the vexatious issues in interpreting Revelation. That of the four living creatures is even worse. We do not intend to spend much time on either, for they are peripheral to the main teaching of the vision. But some things can be said. This scene is presented by use of Old Testament sanctuary and temple pictures. The sea of glass is an allusion to the molten sea in Solomon's temple, the seven torches are reminiscent of the seven-branched candlestick present in a ten-fold form in the same temple, and as a single item of furniture in the Mosaic tabernacle. As already noticed, the jasper and carnelian stones point us to the High Priestly dress.

The ancient tabernacle had clustered around it in cruciform formation the twelve tribes, three of them with the emblem of a lion, three with that of an ox or calf, three with the banner of a man, and three under the banner of an eagle. Numbers 2 speaks of the four standards, each for a point of the compass. In the temple of Solomon were twenty-four courses of priesthood, presided over by twenty-four elders who represented the twelve tribes of Israel in worship. See 1 Chron. 24.

In John's vision, the elders have white robes and crowns--both emblems of victory over sin. The crowns are the conqueror's award, not those of royalty. In Scripture, angels are never called elders, not even in Isa. 24:23. Both the twenty-four elders and the four groups are engaged in priestly work. In this connection we must keep in mind Heb. 5:1, which tells us that all priests are taken from among men. As for the term, living creatures, it is a singular neuter and is a collective noun, as surely as is the word for the beasts of Rev. 13. They speak of the redeemed in the third person for they are but the representatives of that countless host yet to come. (Sinaiticus like most ancient manuscripts has "us" in 5:9, but not in 5:10. Tregelles believed it to be textually correct, but not so most subsequent scholars.) Four groups with six wings suggest twenty-four subdivisions and the elders who preside over them. As the ancient tabernacle and the temple had more than one priest, indeed thousands in the case of the temple, so the heavenly sanctuary is pictured as having a multitude of priests acting also as Christ's assistant assessors. "Full of eyes" infers numerous intelligences.

Mt. 27:50-53 and Eph. 4:8 tell us that the ascended Christ took with him a "multitude" of captives from the grave. The first-fruits sheaf consists of more than a single grain, and so with the anti-type. We who

are left to battle in a hard place can take heart that men and women of like flesh and blood have "made it" through the grace of Christ, and now represent us along with our Elder Brother, the chief King-priest and Judge.

If any prefer to think of these pictures in Revelation of triumphant saints, as proleptic symbols of the ultimate victorious church, we have no quarrel with them, but the popular presentation of weird, many-eyed cherubim representing all of creation is a less likely option. F. F. Bruce speaks of the elders as Christ's assessors discharging priestly functions, and Feuillet emphasizes that angels are not intended.⁸ Isaac Williams holds the proleptic view saying:

. . . with the Christian Priesthood of the twenty-four Elders, the natural accompaniment is the whole Body of the Elect; and agreeable to what follows of spending day and night in worship; which is more easy as explained of them than of the four Gospels, or of our Lord's attributes. In the next chapter the Four say "Amen" to the Liturgical Thanksgiving, which is the response of the congregation of the Church. And their song, together with the twenty-four, is, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred and nation." To this may be added that the word rendered "the Living Creature," as the expression afterwards translated "Beast," seems to intimate a collective body. . . . This interpretation may also be consistent with that opinion of Mede respecting the origin of these emblems in the Jewish Church, for, like the rest of the symbols, they might be introduced in Christian application; for he considers them as like four ensigns, or the four sides of the Israelite camp, as it proceeded in the wilderness .⁹

Those who draw on the cherubim or seraphim of Eze. and Isa. should note that there are marked differences between the four living creatures here and the Old Testament beings, but more importantly it should be observed that Revelation, written after the Cross, often uses Old Testament symbols in an enlarged sense. When we remember some of the other strange composite figures found in this book which make sense only when translated into familiar things, we will be less likely to literalize the four living creatures. We shall view them rather as four multitudes surrounding the throne as Israel of old, camped about the sanctuary. When one beholds a vast crowd, it is frequently their eyes which impress us more than any other feature. In this instance the wisdom and intelligence of the heavenly ministry is suggested. See Eze. 1:18.

J. A. Seiss quotes 1 Cor. 6:2,3 about the saints' judging the world, and writes:

I find, then, in these enthroned Elders, the highest manifested glory of the risen and glorified saints. They are in heaven. They are around the throne of Deity. They are pure and holy, wearing white, "which is the righteousness of the saints." They are partakers of celestial dominion. They are kings of glory, with golden crowns. They are settled, and at home in their exalted dignities; not standing and waiting as servants, but seated as royal counsellors of the Almighty. They are assessors of the great Judge of quick and dead, the spectators of all that transpires in heaven and earth, and participants in the judgment of the world for its sins, the Church for its apostasies, Babylon for her impurities, Antichrist for his blasphemies, and that old Serpent and his brood, for their ungodliness and wickednesses during all these weary ages. They are the Elders of the glorious house of the redeemed, and kings and priests in the temple and palace of the Lord God Almighty.¹⁰

Then, of the living creatures, he makes comparison with the church of Old Testament times:

In the centre of this quadrangular encampment was the tabernacle of God. with four divisions of Levites forming an inner encampment around it. It was thus that Israel was marched through the wilderness, under the four banners of the lion, the young ox, the man, and the flying eagle. These were their ensigns, their guards, their coverings, the symbols of powers by which they were protected and guided. They were parts of that divine and heavenly administration which led them forth from bondage, preserved them in the wilderness, and finally settled them in the promised land. Such at any rate was the earthly, outward, material aspect of the case. In Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, we have the same thing in its more interior and heavenly aspects. (Ezek. 1.)^{f. 11}

In verses 5 and 6, are allusions to the lamps, the laver, and the ark (throne) of the Mosaic sanctuary. The great differences suggested by the symbolism is the absence of both veils. What we have here is apocalyptic commentary on Heb. 10:19-20. Through the Cross of Calvary a new and living way into the presence of God has been revealed for sinful, sorrowful humanity. It is a way before which hangs no veil. By the sacrifice of Christ every separating barrier has been broken down and all apartments of the temple courts thrown open. "Whosoever will may come" and the assurance is that the one who

comes, however sinful, however weak, shall in no wise be rejected. Jn. 6:37.

Rev. 4:8-11:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

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

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

The chief business of heaven is praise. With us it is an almost forgotten art. We rob our Lord and we rob ourselves by our coldness of expression. Praise not only gives Him glory, but actually increases our own blessings by helping to rivet our thoughts and emotions where they are safest centered. For a discussion on the "one who was and is and is to come," see commentary on Rev. 1:8 where the expression also occurs. Note that this fourth chapter of Revelation puts its stress on God as Creator. The following chapter speaks of Christ the Redeemer. The two chapters together make a miniature Bible containing all that is necessary for salvation, and constitute a glorious expansion of Jn. 3:16.

Rev. 5:1-5:

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

See our introduction to this section for our discussion regarding the sealed book. Criswell summarizes thus:

. . . it is my understanding that the primary, fundamental, chief reference and significance of this book has to do with the redemption of God's created universe and everything in it. That book is a book of redemption. It is a book of the final acts of God, concerning the liberation of this destroyed and cursed and ruined universe. That book is a book of the judgment of God upon the alien and the usurper who has cursed this earth and destroyed it and now occupies it. That book is the book of the casting out of the usurper and the destroyer. That book is the book of the casting into hell of Satan, of the dragon, of the grave, of death, of sin. That book is the book of the redemption of the whole purchased possession of God.¹²

"In the hand." This should be "on" the hand, meaning on the palm. It is a scroll completely filled (the writing on both inside and outside suggests there is no space for more), and completely secured by seven seals. No part of it can be read (or executed) until all the seals have been broken. The angel's enquiry is meant to tell us of the vital significance of the book, and that only one of superlative worth can implement its contents. Everything depends upon the unsealing of that book. Thus John weeps. He is not weeping because the future is hidden. There have been many prophets on earth who could have helped to solve that problem. He weeps because all will not be well with the church until the redemption accomplished by Christ on Calvary has been fully applied in time and space, bringing the end of sin and the ushering in of everlasting righteousness. Thus will all prophetic vision be fulfilled, and only thus will it be possible for God once more to dwell with man. The weeping of John should be contrasted with the exultant psalm of praise found in verses 9-13. Says Beasley-Murray about this chapter:

. . . It describes the tumultuous joy of an enthronement which initiates the new era of

salvation, the age of God's long promised kingdom. The exultant tone of chapter 5 confirms the interpretation on which this commentary is based, namely that the three series of judgments are fundamentally three pictorial presentations of one reality, i.e., the messianic judgments that precede the kingdom of God. The important feature of the sealed document is not the judgments which accompany the opening of the seals, but the supreme event to which they lead. If, therefore, the scroll written within and on the back is a doubly inscribed deed, it must signify a deed which conveys the promise of the kingdom of God to mankind. Its conditions none can fulfil until there appears on the scene the Christ who is Lion and Lamb, King and Redeemer, and heaven rejoices at his achievement on behalf of man and his assumption of the throne with God as judge and king. If the scroll is a testament, it views the bestowal of the kingdom as God's covenant promise, the fulfilment of which has been made possible through the death of the Lamb of God and his exaltation to the throne of God. The chief difference between the symbols is that one employs a concept of a deed of promise, the other a covenant, but the thing symbolized is one. 13

"The lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" are titles drawn from Gen. 49:9 and Isa. 11:1,10. The Jews recognized these prophecies as messianic, and they tell us that the one born of David's line was actually His progenitor or source, being the preexistent God.

Note the expression, "has conquered." The concept of conquering is found continually throughout this book. Each of the letters to the churches includes it, and the refrain ceases only with the last reference in 21:7. Its usage is restricted to Christ and His people, except for the counterfeit Christ (11:7; 13:7). We will not interpret aright the repeated reference to conquest in 6:2 unless we see its relation to the theme of the preceding chapters, especially chapter 5 where the conquering Lamb is central.

Rev. 5:6,7:

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth; and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

John hears about a Lion from the angel, but when he turns he sees a lambkin, for such the word signifies. It is a little lamb, one freshly slaughtered but standing, for it is a Conqueror. The Lamb became a Lion by willing self-sacrifice! Is not the Spirit telling the church the only way it also can conquer? But this little Lamb has seven horns, for true love is the most powerful thing in the world, and complete love and complete power go together. The seven eyes tell of Christ's omniscience. When we read of the eyes being the seven spirits of God we are intended to understand that the death of the Lamb of God made possible the gift of the omnipresent Spirit through whom Christ is communicated to His people.

We should not miss the allusion to the lamb of Exodus in this account. We shall strike this motif (first mentioned in 1:6) repeatedly. The sealing of the twelve tribes in ch. 7 is a reference to the protection brought by the blood of the lamb at the time of the Exodus. The trumpets also echo the judgment of the Exodus. Even when we read of the call out of Babylon it is literally an "exodus from Babylon" and is intended to remind us of the past deliverances of God's ancient people from captivity in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Happy the reader who automatically thinks of Ex. 12:13: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." *It was the blood, and nothing but the blood, which brought salvation to the captives.* Whoever was under the blood was safe despite his past, despite his or her weaknesses, despite their doubts and failures. Third, it was God's estimate of that blood that brought their salvation. Not all Christians can pronounce or spell propitiation, let alone comprehend its depths. Nevertheless, if they are depending solely on the merits of the Lamb of God they have eternal life now, and none can snatch them from the protecting hands of Christ.

Revelation is the book of the Lamb. Many may jeer in these sophisticated days at what they call slaughter-house, or butcher-shop, religion. But the blood tells of a life poured forth on our behalf, of One who was our Substitute and Representative, who did not count His glory something to be cherished while we were lost. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin" for "the wages of sin is death" (Heb. 9:22; Ro. 6:23). It is not by chance that our Lord died a bloody death.

There are many ways to die without the shedding of blood, but blood oozed from seven places of His crucified form— hands, feet, back, brow, and side. It was intended to assure us that the sacrifices of ancient times had met their fulfillment, and that God's wrath against sin—the reaction of His holiness against all that would destroy—has been satisfied. Now grace can reign through righteousness. Since Calvary, it is clear that He is not only faithful, but just in forgiving our sins. Blood was continually sprinkled "before the Lord," showing that it answers the holy requirements of divine justice rather than merely possessing moral influence on men.

Had God taken a less serious view of our misdeeds than our own consciences we could never have found rest. But now, by faith, by acceptance of His acceptance through the Cross, all can have peace with God. He who made the stars and all worlds by fiat alone could only redeem sinners by His sufferings, tears, and blood. To understand that makes the surrender of faith a privilege, and brings the highest joy.

The lamb of the Exodus was slain while Israel was still in bondage. Similarly, "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life" (Ro. 5:8-10). Should we not sing more exuberantly than even the angels of heaven?

Milligan notices the significance of the position of the symbolic sacrifice.

. . . this Lamb is the central figure of the scene before us, *in the midst of the throne and of the living creatures*, and of the elders. To Him all the works of God, both in creation and redemption, turn. To Him the old covenant led; and the prophets who were raised up under it searched "what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them." From Him the new covenant flowed, and those who under it are called to the knowledge of the truth recognise in Him their "all and in all." The Lamb slaughtered, raised from the grave, ascended, being the impersonation of that Divine love which is the essence of the Divine nature, is the visible centre of the universe.¹⁴

Rev. 5:8-14:

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; and they sang a new song, saying,

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

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

The taking of the book is a symbol of Christ's exaltation and enthronement. See Dan. 7:14; Mt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9ff. We should not forget that the giving of the kingdom to the Son of Man in Dan. 7 is seen as an accomplished fact after Christ's ascension. Christ's claim to having been given all power is a reference to Dan. 7:14.

The book of Revelation constantly alludes to the festivals of the Old Testament church. Here in chapter 5 we have the Passover emphasized. The earlier chapters (1-3) represent the searching of the houses with candles to find any leaven and put it away. The taking of the book is reminiscent of Pentecost which succeeded Passover, and which commemorated the giving of the law at Sinai.

The new song suggests the new situation since Calvary. No longer does it seem that God has been careless about sin. Now it is seen why He could forgive sin in earlier centuries. It was with a view to

the atoning Cross. That Cross was the end of the world, the judgment, the destruction of Satan, and the ushering in of the kingdom of God. It was all this forensically. Only its outworking to the senses remained. By faith we rejoice in a salvation already complete and finished, though awaiting its full fruit.

As we would expect, the song revolves around the Lamb, He is worthy. His is the glory. All the qualities ascribed to Him are referred to Christ elsewhere in the New Testament. For power, see 1 Cor. 1:24; riches, 2 Cor. 8:9; wisdom, 1 Cor. 1:24; strength, 2 Thess. 1:9; honor, Phil. 2:11; glory, Jn. 1:14.

Observe that the first doxology in Revelation is in the first chapter, and is twofold--"to Him be glory and dominion." But in Rev. 4, the next doxology is threefold. "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power." The next is found in 5:13, and is fourfold--"Blessing, and honor, and glory, and might." When we reach 7:12, we find a sevenfold and final doxology. "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might."

Can we picture the significance of this heavenly scene for the little companies to whom John first sent the Revelation? It meant to those who read with faith that they were no longer a minority, and no longer without strength, or hope. All they needed was theirs in Christ. Eph. 1:3. The might of Caesar was as nothing compared with the might of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lambkin of God.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Rev. 6)

Chapter 20

Unless this chapter is linked to the preceding, its message will be lost.¹ Here is the sequence of events as the Lamb goes forth to take over the inheritance He has purchased. As Ramsey says:

It had just been shown that all things were committed into the hands of the Mediator. The sealed book He had taken out of the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne. In all the universe He alone had the right and the power to unfold and execute these purposes of covenant mercy. His undertaking this, and His investiture with supreme dominion, calls forth from the redeemed church the thanksgiving of the new song, imparts to her the assurance that she shall reign on the earth, and fills angels that minister for her, and a whole renovated creation, with joy. It only remained to show Him exercising this supreme dominion, unsealing the book, and executing its hidden purpose; and thus to reveal the general nature of those instrumentalities and processes by which the Lamb was to vindicate His claims, and secure to His own redeemed the sovereignty of the earth, having "put down all rule, and authority and power."²

The symbol of the horse points to irresistible might in war--the inevitability of the success of God's providential workings in the conflict between the gospel and the world. Note Rolls' comments.

The horse is a veritable symbol of warfare all through the Scriptures and reminds of yet another phase of evangelical enterprise. The servants are called upon to war a good warfare as soldiers of Jesus Christ, "striving together for the faith of the gospel."³

The section of the book with which we are now dealing does not express the ecclesiastical features as in chapters one to three, but the evangelical enterprise with its commission, course, character, and consummation, together with the hostile forces that would seek to frustrate its progress.

We are here given to understand that the conquests of the Gospel were not to be gained without conflict.⁴

Rev. 6:1,2:

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

Here is another *crux interpretum*, more important than that of the four living creatures but with far fewer alternatives. In its interpretation, presuppositions again play a large part, and to err here is to err in interpreting the whole of the seven seals. One's conclusions regarding the first horse usually affect one's conclusions about the second, and by then one is half-way through the apocalyptic steeds.

The oldest opinion was that the first horse represented the cause of Christ. This was taught by Victorinus, and right on down through the centuries until comparatively recent years. Now that opinion has fallen on hard times, and the great majority of recent interpreters (and dispensationalists always) see either Antichrist, or a military conqueror, such as invading Parthians. These moderns point out that it is incongruous for Christ to loose the first seal and then himself appear in the cardinal role of that seal. Secondly, it is stressed what bad company He would be in, considering the nature of His retinue, all the members of which are negative and disastrous to the world. In reply to the point that Rev. 19 uses similar imagery when portraying Christ, it is noted that there the rider has a sword, but here a bow. Besides, John is just following the pattern of wars, famine, and pestilence found in the

Olivet discourse.

Note the words of the learned bishop Carrington:

The Rider on the *White Horse*, summoned by the first Living Thing, represents the spirit of ambition and conquest, not specifically the Roman or the Parthian, as some commentators have supposed, but the "lust of gain in the spirit of Cain" wherever it may be found. History has recorded the domination of man by this spirit through century after century. *He goes out conquering and to conquer* with his *Crown* and his *Bow*. The name blazoned on his forehead is Cyrus or Alexander, Caesar or Napoleon, but the spirit is always recognisably the same. The marvel is not merely that men suffer these ambitious adventurers to ride over them; they adore them and deify them. So much so that some commentators have been carried away with the enthusiasm themselves, and held the Rider on the White Horse to be Christ. It is, of course, the lust for power, the arrogant pride of the self-made man as opposed to the Godmade man.

What follows is simple. When the Second Seal is opened, the Second Living Thing summons a *Red Horse*, whose Rider carries a Great Sword and represents wars, slaughter, and massacre.

The third is the *Black Horse*, whose Rider carries a Balance, and brings famine.

The fourth is the *Pale Horse*, literally a Green Horse, whose Rider is Death or possibly Pestilence, and with him comes the Grave--Hades,⁵

This is a typical modern exegesis. G. R. Beasley-Murray is one with whom the present writer always finds it difficult to disagree, and he speaks like the bishop.

It is extraordinary how frequent and persistent is the identification of the first rider with Christ, due to his possessing a *white horse* (cf. Rev. 19:11), being given a crown, and being victorious in mission (conquering and to conquer). But this is to play havoc with the whole scheme of John's vision. The Lamb on the throne of God opens the seals, and as he does so horsemen come forth one by one. It is a strange notion to make the Lamb one of the riders. The parallels between the seals and the eschatological discourse on the one hand and the later series of judgments in the Revelation on the other shows that all four riders initiate judgments—the first no less than the other three.⁶

But Bishop Carrington has not finished with the white horse and his rider. Note two other comments.

St. John begins with man and ends with Death. His first Rider is simply man in that simple self-sufficiency of his, supposing himself "lord of creation," imagining that he is here to acquire, to enjoy, to "get on"; that is the initial mistake, for he is really here to learn, to serve, and perhaps to suffer. He is the "natural man," the contrary of Jesus; he is the man who has fallen in all three temptations. He thinks of his rights rather than of his duties. He may have all the four cardinal virtues; but as he sits in his arm-chair and makes plans for his business, or his home, or his future, he is blissfully ignorant that he is in the world to serve higher purposes than his own.⁷

Take the Rider on the White Horse. Does he "mean" Selfishness, or Ambition, or Conquest, or what? The more we look at it the more we see that these abstract terms are only aspects of the solid spiritual truth blazoned by the symbol. The symbol is man himself in his foolish innocence, utterly confident, making a hero of himself, riding out conquering and to conquer. He does it on every conceivable occasion; he is quite sure of himself each time, and each time he makes a mess of it: the other three riders always come cantering along behind.⁸

No wonder Torrance concerning this seal says, "Can there be any doubt that this is the vision of anti-Christ"?⁹ How could one retain intellectual respectability in the twentieth century and do otherwise. Well, apparently there are some who have, and who can. They include Cullmann, Hendriksen, Ladd, Ellul, and others.

Now it is obvious that the difference of opinion on this matter is the difference of black and white, night and day. Right here, we should stop to realize that we really must not let ourselves be hypnotized as we read commentators. Obviously at least half of them are missing the boat half the time.

The objections usually made to the earliest interpretation of the first seal are not impressive. To say

that Christ could not be the one unsealing the seals and yet have His cause represented in one of them is not persuasive. Revelation is full of all sorts of incongruities that grow out of its symbolical method. Consider a lamb taking a scroll! Pieters lists other incongruities:

It is one of the characteristics of the book of Revelation that it is so gloriously independent of ordinary human logic and of any natural limitations. Here is one and the same heavenly being described as a Lion and as a Lamb. The seer is told to look up and see a Lion: he looks and, behold a Lamb! The Lamb, again, is a slaughtered Lamb, yet he lives, and takes the Book of Destiny from the hand of God. Do not ask how a Lamb can take a book. Little things like that do not trouble the writer of this Apocalypse—they do not even seem to him to call for explanation. Whatever suits him as an expression of thought is immediately made use of, no matter how impossible it may be from the natural point of view, or how inconsistent with some thing else he has just said. We shall find many cases of this kind—a star that is handed a key—a flying woman whom the Dragon seeks to overwhelm with a flood—a mortal wound that is healed, etc., etc. Hence it must be remembered that we can not reason about this book quite the same way as about other books. There is no rigid consistency about its symbols: they are extremely flexible and adjustable. The only thing the writer demands is that they shall be vivid expressions—word pictures of his ideas. That they always are. 11

As to the supposed inconsistency with the parallels in Mark 13, if the gospel proclamation is seen in seal one, have those who mention this forgotten that Mark 13 contains v. 10, which speaks of the spread of the gospel? And as for the bad company the first rider keeps, what if these were the natural results of resisting the offered blessings of God through the gospel? Lastly, the differences with Rev. 19 are only those we would expect if Rev. 6 has to do with the beginning of the Christian course and Rev. 19 with its consummation. None expect the change from the spiritual bow of the Messiah to the Judgment sword until the time that men have shown their complete rejection of the gospel. And at that time when Christ comes to conquer kings, the diadems He wears will be more appropriate than the bow.

Carrington, on the page opposite his caricature of the first seal, has these words to say, ". . . each vision is capable of two interpretations, a major and a minor. The major is poetical and spiritual; the minor is low and materialistic. We may take our choice."¹² As we look at the less favored view, there are actually many points on its side. Let us list some:

1. It is consistent with the preceding chapter where Christ is depicted as Conqueror.
2. It is consistent with the chiasmic parallel passage in Rev. 19, and in a detailed manner. Note the lengthy comment of Hengstenberg.

But for the identity of the rider on the white horse here with that in ch. xix. 11, "And I saw the heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon him is called true and faithful, and he judges and makes war in righteousness," there are the following reasons. 1. The agreement with ch. xix. 11 is of the greater moment as the *end* of Christ's war and victory there corresponds with the *beginning* here. 2. That the rider here is no other than Christ is clear from the unmistakable reference of this passage to the Messianic Ps. xlv., which is distinctly referred to Christ in Heb. i. 8. The royal dignity, the sitting upon a horse, the bearing of a bow, the going forth to fight, the fulness of victory, all, excepting only the white colour of the horse, presents itself there again. 3. The original passage for the whole first four seals is Zech. ch. i. 7-17. . . The starting-point there, too, is the prosperity of the world, the distress of the church; and the subject is the announcement of the impending judgment on the world. That judgment the prophet there also incorporates under an equestrian figure. He sees a proud rider on a red horse in the myrtle bush of a deep valley, surrounded by red, bay, and white horses. He recognises in the rider at the head the angel of the Lord, and in his attendants the angels that serve him. In that portraiture also the angel of the Lord, the Logos, appears at the head. 4. Only if Christ here appears at the head will the design and the import of the following appearances become clear. They then present themselves as means for accomplishing the victory of Christ, which they must necessarily be from the starting-point of the whole book and from the connection of the introductory chapters, in which everything serves as a preparation for an exhibition of the victory of Christ over the world. In the second, third, and fourth horses by themselves there is only a fact set forth which can be contemplated from several points of view. We take the right one only when we refer ver. 2 to Christ.¹³

We must not interpret: conquering and *so that* he conquered; but only: *conquering* and that he *might conquer*. Victory and nothing but victory!

The expression: and that he might conquer, is a substitute for the annexed infinitive absol. in Hebrew which "describes vividly unceasing progress." Ewald, # 280, b. It might also have stood: conquering and conquering, or, so that he conquered and conquered.--The object of the victory can only be the world as hostile to Christ. . . . The book with the seven seals is the book of the judgment which God suspends over an ungodly world for the deliverance of his people. This character of it must necessarily come out to view in the first vision. 14

3. "Conquering and to conquer" infers that it is true conquest that is made by this power and lastingly so, whereas all conquests made by worldly powers soon pass away. The intended destiny of this steed and rider is to conquer effectually and enduringly. This fits Christ and His cause but no others.

4. That Antichrist could be launched at us so unexpectedly and without warning is hard to believe. Bloomfield anxiously enquires:

I am well aware of the common interpretation of this verse, which claims this first horseman is a counterfeit; and the white, the bow, the crown, and the final victory should all be taken in reverse, as though they mean the opposite of what they usually mean in Scripture. When it says, "*And the four living ones said Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever,*" is that also to be taken in reverse? Are they to represent false worshippers? Is all of Revelation to be read in reverse? What kind of interpretation are we being subjected to? Nobody would see Antichrist coming out of heaven, commissioned by Christ, riding a white horse, carrying the Word, wearing a crown, and going forth to conquer, unless he had Antichrist in mind and were trying to find a place to fit him in. A straightforward interpretation, without some preconceived notion, would never find Antichrist in that verse. The inconsistency of such an interpretation is immediately apparent when you consider that there are four horsemen, and only one Antichrist. To make the first horseman a man, the others such impersonal things as war, famine, and death, is so inconsistent as not to be worthy of our consideration. If the first one is a wicked man, then the others are men, even more wicked. When you read the 6th chapter of Revelation, begin with the last verse of the 5th chapter and put the scene where it belongs --in heaven. 15

5. Not only does the Christian cause coincide with the portrayal of Christ in the previous chapter, but this whole series only makes sense if it coheres with the theme of chapter 5, and traces Christ's gathering out a people for the inheritance, and simultaneously ridding the land of those who should not occupy the space.

6. This passage is quoting Psa. 45:1-5 an obviously Messianic prophecy. See also Hab. 3:8-11; Zech. 9:13-16; 10:3,4.

7. The color white belongs in Revelation always and only to the things of heaven. Says Hengstenberg:

The *white*, ... *luceo*, to enlighten, shine, is throughout the Revelation the colour of lucid splendour, the symbolical image of glory.--Comp. on ch. iv. 4, and hence the prevailing colour in the appearances of Christ; comp. ch. i. 14, "But his head and his hair white as wool." The white horse has respect to the glory at once of his person and of his operation. 16

8. The sequence here in the first two seals exactly accords with the words of our Lord found in Mt. 10:34; Lu. 12:49-53; and 24:35ff. Thus when even Morris can say that there is nothing in this seal to indicate the gospel because the context obviously points to destruction, horror, and terror,¹⁷ we cannot but wonder whether Mk. 13:10 and Mt. 24:14 are being given due weight. We are reminded that Isaac Williams also uses the word "obvious" but on the opposite side. He says:

Thus Victorinus, Aretas, Oecumenius, and others unite in the obvious interpretation, that it is Christ going forth as Conqueror in the Apostolic preaching; and victorious against the prince of error. "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Yea, as His "goings forth have been from everlasting," even Berengaudus may be explained as seeing the type of this, when he speaks of it as His going forth after the blood of the righteous Abel, in the beginning of the world.

Here He is setting out to take His kingdom; and thus under the seventh Trumpet the twenty-four Elders give thanks, "because He hath taken His great power, and hath reigned" (chap. xi.

17).18

If we wish to disagree with Caird, Bruce, Mounce, Beasley-Murray, Torrance, Carrington, Swete, Simcox, Moorehead, Seiss, Kiddle, we must buttress our case still further. The end is not yet. It is not sufficient to mention Bede, Dusterdieck, Grotius, V. Hepp, Irenaeus, Kuyper, Wordsworth, Lenski, Milligan, S. L. Morris, Vitranga, Wishart, B. Weiss, Ellul, Ramsey, Hoeksema, Williams, Trench, Hailey, who disagree with the first group. Therefore, let us look at the key verb of the passage.

9. It is usual in Revelation for (the word translated *to conquer*) to refer to Christ or to believers. In the cases nearest 6:2, this is certainly so. See Rev. 3:21 and 5:5. There are admittedly two exceptions in Revelation in chapters 11 and 13. These do not surprise us because of the system of parody that is present throughout the book where Christ and Antichrist are often couched under similar imagery. John in his Gospel uses the word once, and again it applies to the Lord. See 16:33. Says Wordsworth:

After His Ascension, the same Christ is now displayed in this Seal as no longer riding on the *foal of an ass*, meek and gentle, but as a Mighty Warrior riding on a *White Horse*, "conquering and to conquer," and having on His head a crown, the crown of victory, . . . He has now overcome Death and Satan. He has triumphed over them by the Cross, which becomes to Him a triumphal Chariot (see on Col. ii. 15), and He rides upon it a mighty victor (see on 2 Cor. ii. 14); and He has given His disciples power to conquer (1 Cor. xv. 55,57), and has sent forth His Holy Spirit from heaven to enable them to bear His standard in triumph throughout the world, and to cast down "everything that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." (See on 2 Cor. x. 4, 5).19

10. Hendriksen is right when he says,

. . . the idea that the Conqueror upon the white horse is the Christ is in harmony with the very *genius and purpose* of the book of Revelation. We have indicated that the very theme of this book is the Victory of Christ and of his church, p. 268. Hence, again and again our Lord Jesus Christ is represented as the one who has conquered, is conquering, shall conquer. Carefully read the following passages: Rev. 1:13ff; 2:26,27; 3:21; 5:5; 6:16; 7:9,10; 11:15; 12:11; 14:1ff; 14:14ff; 17:14; 19:11; 20:4; 22:16. The idea of the Conquering Christ is as a thread running through this book from beginning to end!20

Minear sees clearly the relationship between chapters five and six, and the preeminence of Christ in both. He thus stands with Hendriksen as he writes:

The four horsemen are pictures super-imposed on the cross; they are reverberations echoing from the initial cry, "I thirst." They remind the readers that all values had been reversed and transformed by the redemptive ministry of the Lamb. . . .

. . . the usual exegesis of the four horsemen must be discarded. Commonly the horsemen are identified with that type of recurring catastrophe which strikes the headlines--such things as world wars, the latest famine in India, or the death of thousands in an earthquake in Turkey. But it is difficult to believe that the prophet John was primarily concerned with explaining such disasters or with showing how the slaughter of the Lamb released such catastrophes on mankind in general or even on the hostile Roman empire. Perhaps the usual interpretation of this vision reveals only how far we stand from John when we assume that a hurricane sweeping the Caribbean is more to be dreaded than such subtle betrayals of the Gospel as characterized the congregations in Sardis or Laodicea.21

And there we rest the case--not because of exhaustion of the evidence, but lest we exhaust the reader!

We conclude that the first seal fulfills the promise of the preceding chapter and presents the cause of the Lamb going forth victoriously, beginning the conquest of the world and gathering those who will inherit it.

Rev. 6:3,4:

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" And out

came another horse, bright red: its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

Notice Christ's words as recorded in Lu. 12:49-53. Here our Lord foretells fiery strife as the result of His gospel. Both symbols of the second seal are thus included. Isaac Williams reminds us that wherever Christ goes forth to conquer, there the serpent is always present trying to bruise His heel.²²

We may observe, that *the second Living Creature* connected with the opening of this *Second Seal*, is the Calf or Ox, which speaks of sacrifice and martyrdom, the setting forth of Christ crucified. For "dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." "The calf," says Aretas, "characterizes the sacred offerings of holy martyrs; as the former symbol was shown to do that of Apostolic authority."

Again; it is the Second Seal, the number which of itself intimates division. On the first day, the Lord's day, the light is created, the Word goes forth, clothed in the vesture of light, on the white horse: but the second day is the dividing of the waters; the separation between good and evil cannot be without strife and division.²³

We should particularly attend to the type of sword mentioned and the significance of the term "slay." The (word for) sword, in contrast to the battle-sword later named, is a sacrificial sword or butcher's knife. While used broadly, its technical meaning has to do with the sacrificial element of ritual. And as for (the word translated) 'to slay', it applies especially to victims for sacrifice. It is found eight times in Revelation, and seven of these apply to Christ or believers, and once to Antichrist in the sense of parody as mentioned earlier. See Rev. 13:3. See 5:6,9,12; 6:9; 13:8; 18:24. The fifth seal with its reference to those who were slain for the Word of God confirms this interpretation.²⁴ see also the LXX for Gen. 22:6,10.

More needs to be said on this second symbol. Earlier we have made the plea that at each step we should remember that this book is enlarging the Olivet Discourse. Now it is clear that that sermon *does* speak of wars and rumors of wars. Could they not be included in this second seal? We believe they are, but in a secondary, consequential sense only. That is to say, John is using the symbol of war, but to him it *is* primarily a symbol, while he would never deny the literal meaning of war as suggested by the Second Advent sermon. John is saying in effect, "You remember our Lord's discourse about the end time. You remember the wars He forecast. Well indeed they are coming, and they are even here. But let me tell you more--they are but the consequence of the world's resisting the Prince of Peace." We believe that Justin Smith caught the idea perfectly when he wrote:

It comprehends the whole idea of that conflict between the world-power and the kingdom of Christ among men, with the destructive attendant wars amongst the nations themselves, more or less involving that higher and more momentous struggle as taking place under the superintending providence of God, and all its issues shaped in accordance with his own purposes of mercy or of judgment, we perceive in the rider on the red horse just the symbol of a great fact, then a prophecy, now a history.²⁵

Milligan with his usual insight declares:

The very fate which men shrink from accepting in the form of a blessing overtakes them in the form of a curse. They think to save their life, and they lose it. They seek to avoid that sacrifice of themselves which, made in Christ, lies at the root of the true accomplishment of human destiny; and they are constrained to substitute for it a sacrifice of an altogether different kind: they sacrifice, they slaughter, one another.²⁶

Let it be kept in mind that John was perfectly at home writing on two levels at once. He had done so more than once in his gospel. See Jn. 12:32, for example. There are numerous instances in this present book. Carrington is forever commenting on that very fact.²⁷ We may not agree with all his examples, but we do agree with his principle. Now at this point many a modern scholar, remembering the excesses to which spiritual interpretation have been carried, will cry, "Spiritualizing!" We would thank him for the warning, but remind him that this is a book where "spiritualizing" cannot be dodged from the first chapter to the last. Otherwise what shall we do with beasts with seven heads, one of which is forever getting slain and reviving; a woman chased by a great red dragon and that within the sacred confines of heaven; a child breaking up poor heathen into fragments with a shepherd's rod; darkness falling upon the accustomed resting place of a beast; a woman riding a seven-headed monster; a Christ with a sword coming out of His mouth, riding an Arabian steed from the heavenly stables; monsters from the pit with hair like women, teeth like a lion, scales like iron breastplates, tails

like scorpions, and faces like men? We have only just begun, but we pause until we can meet the man who will persuade us not to spiritualize when we interpret this book. We venture to repeat what was said in the introduction. Whereas in most books of Scripture, we must not, *we must not*, take symbolically what can be taken literally unless common sense or context demand otherwise, in this book we must not take literally what can be taken symbolically unless common sense or context demand otherwise. Says Pieters:

We have therefore, with regard to any complete scene in the Apocalypse, two duties instead of only one, as in the ordinary books of the Bible. To illustrate, when we read of the fight of David with Goliath, we seek to see the picture set before us, the giant, the youth, the sling, the fall and death of Goliath, etc. When we have seen this, we have seen all there is to see. We may then proceed to use the story to teach courage, faith in God, the duty of slaying giants of sin in our own day, etc., etc., but this is to use the story, not to interpret it. When we see, in the twelfth chapter of Revelation, on the other hand, the scene of the fight between Michael and his angels on the one hand, and the Dragon with his angels on the other, we must equally seek to understand the passage just as it lies before us; but having done that, we must ask: "What does this symbolize?" We must take it, not as information concerning heavenly battles, but as symbolizing some fact or truth in the spiritual life or the experience of the church. It will be seen how fundamentally I disagree with such a writer as H. Bultema, who says (p. 20) "Revelation must, as far as possible, be understood literally." In my judgment, such a writer starts off in the wrong direction and the further he goes along that line the less he will understand the meaning of the book. In that canon of interpretation he shows that he has not grasped the "apocalyptic" character of the composition. He is applying to it the exegetical principle that is appropriate in other books, not here.²⁸

Milligan specifically warns regarding the seals, "They are not to be literally understood. Like all else in the visions of St. John, they are used symbolically; and each of them expresses in a general form the calamities and woes, the misfortunes and sorrows, brought by sinful men upon themselves through rejection of their rightful King."²⁹

Let us now apply this hermeneutical principle to the chapter in question. Those who take horses 1-4 as literal usually take the sixth seal symbolically. Those who literalize the first four seals gravely construe "hurt not the oil or the wine" in similar fashion, which is quite an accomplishment, especially in view of the unusual term translated "injure." They likewise take the "wild beasts" of the fourth seal literally, though the Greek has "under" and not "by," and despite the fact that this term for the beasts is identical with that found in Rev. 13, where the beasts are corporate groups of evil men!³⁰

It is not strange that some of these same expositors forget that metonymy is being used in the fifth seal, and find themselves constrained to try and defend the imperfect Christians seeking vengeance, when actually it is merely a case of the blood on the ground symbolically calling for vindication.

An old writer by the name of Wickes declined to follow most of his contemporaries in this matter and wrote as follows:

If by this red horseman we are to understand a real warrior, such as the emperors were in the wars which they waged, then on the same principle, and to make a consistent exposition, a wild beast must mean a succession of similar animals--locusts must literally be taken for swarms of locusts; and a woman sitting upon a scarlet colored beast with seven heads and ten horns, for similar objects. No commentator commits such a mistake in these instances, for the absurdity would be too palpable. These, they tell us, are *symbols*, and so to be interpreted, not referring to the same, but analogous objects. But there is the same reason precisely, wanting the gross absurdity, why this warrior horseman should not mean a literal warrior, or his taking peace from the earth, literal war with the sword. These are symbols to be interpreted on the same principle that we do beasts and locusts and horns and earthquakes and hail. If we take some as literal, we must take them all so; if we refer some to analogous objects, we must make the same reference with all. On this ground, we may at once, and with certainty, set aside all those interpretations which refer this seal to bloody wars and massacres in the Roman empire. It has no such reference.³¹

.... We have a symbol in its main features like that of the preceding seal--one of unusual dignity--a living, active agent--and drawn from the military and civil life of the Romas. The object, then, which it represents, is not to be found in that department, but in another For the same reason, also, as given under the first seal, we must go into the spiritual history of the

church, as analogous to the secular history of the empire.³²

In another place he defines a symbol as "the representation of an object not by the picture of itself, but something analogous, as the exhibition of moral qualities, by images drawn from nature. . . ." ³³

When a wild beast, then, is employed as a symbol, as in the vision of Daniel, it is not designed to represent a single one or a herd of such beasts. Seven fat and lean cattle from the river Nile do not represent cattle like themselves. A candlestick does not represent a candlestick. But these objects represent others of an analogous nature, not belonging to the department in which they themselves are found. A wild beast is a persecuting, tyrannical government, because such a government resembles a ferocious animal with a savage temper and ravenous appetite. Seven fat kine are seven years of plenty; seven lean ones, seven years of famine. A horn is a dynasty of rulers, because as the horn is the seat of power in an animal, and grows out of his body, so is a dynasty to a kingdom. A chaste virgin is a pure church. A vile harlot, an idolatrous, apostate one; and so on through the whole. Every one, also, will see, that when a symbol is taken literally, it ceases at once to be a symbol, and becomes an exact picture of the thing itself. The very idea of a symbol is, that it stands the representative of something of a different nature from itself, yet resembling it in certain points. We may therefore fix it as a great landmark in the interpretation of the Apocalypse, that when we find a symbol drawn from any department, whether of the animal kingdom, or the material universe, or the heavenly world, or from human life, it is not designed to describe similar objects in the same department, but others of analogous character in a different one.³⁴

Consistently, Wickes protests against the usual understanding of the next two seals. On the fourth, for example, he writes:

The more common interpretation of this vision is, as with the preceding, to take it in its literal sense, and thus destroy its symbolic character. . . . The fatal objection lies against this interpretation, that it takes the literal meaning instead of the symbolic; while, in addition, there is confusion introduced into the whole picture. If the red horseman with the great sword is a symbol of war and its desolations, and the black of the dread savages of famine, it is altogether incongruous to make a third distinct symbol of Death itself, destroying with the sword and famine. This was the very representation of the two symbols preceding. The destruction of course took place under the ravages of these horsemen. We do not therefore, need a separate symbol, under the fourth seal, to set forth the effects of the two that had gone before.³⁵

Wickes thus sees in the first horse a symbol of the victorious gospel preached by a faithful church; in the second horse times of dissension, strife, and hatred, as the church gradually lost the gospel; in the third horse times of famine for the word; and in the fourth the spread of the pestilence of erroneous doctrine. We suggest that he is far more consistent than those who forget the symbolic nature of the seals and proclaim as literal the emblems used. May we remind readers that in an earlier section we have pointed out that John took the key elements of the Olivet discourse and transposed them into symbols--Jerusalem became Babylon, the temple the church, the heavenly signs commotion in the earthly conflict between good and evil, etc.³⁶ This must be kept in mind when exegeting Revelation 6.

Certain it is that if we are right in identifying the first horse and its rider with the conquering gospel, then we indeed have to recognize that we are dealing with symbols from the very beginning, and we ought to be as consistent as possible. Consistency will therefore view the slaughter of the second seal not primarily as warfare, but the spirit of opposition to the gospel which indeed ultimately flowers in the spirit of restlessness, hatred, and physical warfare. Ramsey, in writing on the second seal, particularly emphasizes these results of opposition to the gospel.

This symbol represents, evidently, *all those agencies that spread discord, and division, and murderous hate through families and nations. War, with all the passions and furies that produce and follow it, with all its fearful and bloody desolations of nations, homes, and hearts; and the whole variety and multitude of inferior conflicts that divide and distract mankind, and make even the church a scene of bitter strife, so far as she is pervaded by the worldly spirit, are the terrible results of a rejected gospel of peace.* Well and fearfully do they vindicate the claims of Jesus Christ as the only peacemaker, and punish the world for rejecting Him. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." "I came not to send peace, but a sword," said Jesus.³⁷

For this broader meaning that resistance to the gospel would ultimately lead to punishment including

national strife, see Isa. 57:20,21; 19:2; Jer. 16:4,5; Hag. 2:22; 2 Chron. 15:5,6; Isa. 26:21—27:2; 34:5,6; 66:15,16; Jer. 9:16; 11:22; 14:12-15; 25:13; 46:10; 50:35-37; Eze. 5:17; 6:11,12; 21:3-5; 32:10; Mt. 10:34,35; 24:6,7.

Rev. 6:5,6:

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

The rejection of the Word and opposition to it results also in spiritual famine. That which is not gratefully accepted becomes less available. The soul becomes more and more impoverished and unrest deepens with increased hostility to those offering the Bread of life. Communities become places of tension and terror, for but few are spiritually healthy. The color of the horse suggests a state opposite to that offered by the first horse. The righteousness of Christ is a thing unknown to most. Remembering that these judgments indicate the trials of the church within and without as well as disciplinary judgments on the world we suspect that the church militant also often has little defensive covering since the robe of Christ is not valued as it should be.

We have here an excellent illustration of how John can combine levels of meaning. In a book of judgment it is not likely that the balances here mean only the weighing out of food in times of scarcity. The symbol refers us to Dan. 5:27. John is going to talk primarily about the famine of the spirit, when bread for the soul will be hard to obtain because the church has weakened upon opposition and become largely apostate.³⁸ This the black must imply, in contrast to the white in the first seal. But to John's mind, capable of holding so many images at once and interweaving them, more was probably intended. Black in Scripture is a symbol of coming doom. That color, and the image of balances, go hand in hand signifying warning of coming judgment which the sixth seal will fulfill. Ramsay gives us an illustration also of the significance of the changing colors.

The use of colour here as symbolical is illustrated by the custom of Tamerlane. When he laid siege to a city, he put up white tents, indicating clemency to the enemy. If resistance was prolonged forty days, he changed the tents, and put up red ones, portending a bloody capture. If obstinate resistance was persisted in for other forty days, black tents were substituted: the city was to be sacked with a general massacre.³⁹

Thiele has prepared a chart which illustrates this very point.⁴⁰

God's Side (Saints)

Mercy: Accepted

God's Attitude: Pleasure

Justice: Justified

Results: Victory

Horse: White

Sealing: Holiness

Heaven

Satan's side (Wicked)

Mercy: Resisted, Spurned, Withdrawn

God's Attitude: Displeasure, Anger, Wrath

Justice: Cautioned, Warned, Condemned

Results: Trouble, Woe, Doom

Horses: Red, Black, Pale

Sealing: Depravity

Hell

Thus the seals graphically show the contrasting fates of the two classes who hear the gospel. We should say at this point that the seals portray events consecutive in their incoming but contemporaneous from then on. Time after time God sends revival and the white horse goes forth conquering and to conquer. But it meets with opposition, and the spirit of unrest pervades the society involved. Then comes apostasy, and a falling away from the objective standard of Scripture. Tradition and speculation take over, and men are not fed.⁴¹ Next comes heresy, the pestilence of the soul that leads to spiritual death and hell. In earlier times Beda and Vitranga thus taught, and more recently Carpenter in Ellicott's commentary agrees. Regarding the climactic steed, he says:

The seal, therefore, gathers up into one all the awfulness of the past seals. It is the central seal, and it is the darkest. It is the midnight of sorrows, where all seems given up to the sovereignty of death. The middle things of life are often dark. Midway between the wicket-gate and golden city Bunyan placed his valley of the shadow of death, following the hint of the Psalmist, who placed it midway between the pasture and the house of the Lord (Ps. xxiii). Dante, perhaps working from the same hint, found his obscure wood and wandering midway along the road of life:

"In the midway of this our mutual life,
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray."

The darkest periods of the Church's history were those we call the Middle Ages. By this, however, it is not meant that there is any chronological signification in the seal. The vision deepens in its central scene, like the horror of darkness in the dream of Abraham. The history of the Church has not unfrequently presented a sort of parallel. The age which follows the ages of barren dogmatism and of spiritual starvation is often the age of sham spiritual life. The pale horse of death is the parody of the white horse of victory: the form of godliness remains, the power is gone.⁴²

To study the significance of the black horse the following Scriptures should be considered—Ex. 10:21-23; Jer. 4:20-28; Joel 2:1-10; Isa. 50:1,3; Heb. 12:18,19; Job. 3:4,6; Nah. 2:10; Jer. 8:20,21; Joel 2:6; Lam. 4:8-11; 5:10; Job 30:30; Jer. 14:1; Job 31:6.

The surface meaning of the picture has to do with increased prices, so that the poor must now eat barley (usually for animals) to survive. A measure was the daily ration for a Roman soldier, and a penny or denarius was a day's wages which usually could purchase about a dozen times as much wheat as here pictured. Ramsey draws the symbolic meaning:

But as the physical and material is always the figure of the spiritual and moral, and as in this case especially, the very same language is applied to both, as famine and bread have their familiar spiritual sense, as well as material, the only proper symbol of a spiritual famine and its causes, is that which represents the physical. This symbol, in its full significance, includes, therefore, the still more awful curse of a famine of the bread of life, and of the agencies which produce it; the withholding of the showers of grace, and the desolations of ecclesiastical ambition and selfishness, which operate in the natural sphere. By this scourge, all the supports of the earthly life, and all the comforts, and hopes, and joys, which sustain and cheer the heart under the burden of its cares and anxieties, and which the gospel alone can impart, are smitten—all that truly feeds either body or soul. It is a famine which consumes the whole man.⁴³

And Williams says:

Although "*the black horse*" speaks evidently of sorrow, yet it is so obviously opposed to the "white horse" that it looks like a failing in the faith; for the white horse is the symbol of that "faith which overcometh the world." This may be faith failing in tribulation. And so the Greek commentator, Oecumenius, suggests, who, in speaking of the famine, says, "The black horse may imply mourning for those who fall away from the faith of Christ on account of these chastisements. And the balance is the weighing or proving of such in those trials."⁴⁴

What shall we say of the admonition not to hurt the oil or the wine? To take it literally is ridiculous, though sober commentators by the score have done so until one wonders whether indeed it is true that much study can make one lose a sense of proportion. All kinds of rationalisation have been engaged in to literalize this figure. There is talk of Domitian's decree about the vines, of the longer roots of plants yielding these luxury foods, of their capacity for preservation, and the like. But it is not likely that our John is thinking in any of those ways. Later in the book he obviously spiritualizes the

harvest and the winepress. See Rev. 14:15-20. Plummer in the *Pulpit Commentary* looks on the oil and wine as symbols of the means of grace which in the providence of God are preserved amidst general spiritual decline. Milligan suggests:

The words are generally regarded as a limitation of the severity of the famine previously described, and as a promise that even in judging God will not execute all His wrath. The interpretation can hardly be accepted. Not only does it weaken the force of the threatening, but the meaning thus given to the figure is entirely out of place. Oil and wine were for the mansions of the rich, not for the habitations of the poor, for the feast and not for the supply of the common wants of life. Nor would a sufferer from famine have found in them a substitute for bread. The meaning of the words therefore must be looked for in a wholly different direction. "Thou preparest a table before me," says the Psalmist, "in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." This is the table the supply of which is now alluded to. It is prepared for the righteous in the midst of the struggles of the world, and in the presence of their enemies. Oil is there in abundance to anoint the heads of the happy guests, and their cups are so filled with plenty that they run over. In the words under consideration, accordingly, we have no limitation of the effects of famine. The "wine" and the "oil" alluded to express not so much what is simply required for life as the plenty and the joy of life; and, thus interpreted, they are a figure of the care with which God watches over His own people and supplies all their wants. While His judgments are abroad in the earth they are protected in the hollow of His hand. He has taken them into His banqueting house, and His banner over them is love. The world may be hungry, but they are fed. As the children of Israel had light in their dwellings while the land of Egypt lay in darkness, so while the world famishes the followers of Jesus have all and more than they require. They have "life, and that abundantly." Thus we learn the condition of the children of God during the trials spoken of in these visions. Under the second Seal we could only infer from the general analogy of this book that they were safe. Now we know that they are not only safe, but that they are enriched with every blessing. They have oil that makes the face of man to shine, and bread that strengtheneth his heart.⁴⁵

Mauro speaks similarly.

The black horse rider was not to be permitted in any part of his career to "hurt the oil and the wine". There is a great comfort in this assurance for those who are truly the people of God. It tells them that even in the days of spiritual dearth, when the giving forth of the bread of life was to be as by measure and price, the "oil" of God's Spirit and the "wine" of His joy were not to be injured; so that even to the very end of things down here, His people can always have a heart gladdened by the wine of God, and a face shining with the oil of God.⁴⁶

Observe that the one giving the order not to injure these is the living creature with the face of a man. Just as the conquering horse and rider were matched by the first living creature the lion; and the suffering church by the second the ox; so here the sympathy of the man is appropriate for the crisis designated. Inasmuch as the seals portray the holy war of the kingdom of God against the kingdoms of this world, such a meaning makes much better sense than an interpretation about agricultural advantages of the vine and the olive trees.

Rev. 6:7,8:

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

As famine follows war, and pestilence follows famine, so this fourth seal sets forth a plague which climaxes the other scourges and brings forth death. That is the outward meaning of the symbolism, and it fully accords with the literal woes foretold by Christ. John has these in mind also, and has no intention of denying them in the slightest. But in his symbolical way he intends more. He is now setting forth the truth that those who have continued to resist the white horse and his rider will harden more and more until they, being bereft of the word, will truly believe "the lie" (2 Thess. 2:9-12). Lack of spiritual nourishment (third seal) can only tend to spiritual disease. Heresy takes ready root where the Word of God is not studied and obeyed. As pestilence follows famine, so error speedily grows where truth is not sown. And error is the poison of the soul. The person who surrenders to it can never be the

same again. Heteropraxy follows heterodoxy. The downward course to eternal death has begun. Those who have not heeded the warning of the rider on the horse the color of doom—that horseman with the warning balances—pass into Hades via the tyranny of the wild beasts of Antichrist and his minions (Rev. 13). Compare Rev. 9.

The book in the hand of the Lamb includes the evidence for or against every man as to what his inheritance should be. On the one hand will be traced the acceptance of the gospel and the bringing forth of fruit in harmony with it until the soul settles into the truth spiritually and intellectually so that it cannot be moved. At that point, the believer is sealed, having kept Christ's works unto the end of life's probation. On the other hand, those who reject the gospel and who do not respond to the disciplinary chastisements permitted by Christ will harden more and more, settling into error so that they cannot be moved. It is dangerous to listen to truth, more dangerous to refuse to listen, but most dangerous to refuse to respond to it. Those who follow such a course will ultimately be marked for final judgment.

This seal shows the cumulative force of evil, and the resultant sorrows attending the rejection of God's truth. We see now that the seals are following the story of the churches to a large degree. There we found but two without rebuke, two without praise, and three in a mixed condition. We noticed the false teachers, the Nicolaitans (Balaamites), and the seed of Jezebel, permitted to teach in the congregation of the saints. Some had a name that they lived and were dead. Others thought they were rich and had need of nothing, yet actually were wretched, poor, blind, and naked. The seals have led us to that same place. Now, in the holy war, it is hard to find the loyal soldiers. Persecution and oppression have done their work, and the ranks have been decimated. Those now who stand in the popular religious courts, who have shunned persecution, have become sickly and diseased spiritually. Their souls know no rest, and they fight with each other and with God as well as against the saints.

Says Ramsey:

Death here may not be limited to the body, any more than famine in the previous symbol. It must be taken in its entire scriptural meaning, as the wages of sin. The rider on the pale horse, with his undescribed follower, is the terrific symbol, not only of physical death and the grave—that which destroys and consumes the body—but especially of that which destroys and consumes eternally the soul, and which is the fearful and final result of rejecting the gospel of the slain Lamb. So by disease or pestilence, and the beasts of the earth, as well as by the sword and hunger, spiritual plagues are indicated; the pestilence of error, that poisons the soul, and those earthly powers, political, ecclesiastical, and philosophical—falsely so called—which in the latter portion of this book, are represented as wild beasts of horrid shapes and destructive power. All diseases of the body, and pestilential errors of the soul; all the monstrous forms that worldly power, worldly wisdom, and corrupt religion have assumed, are included in the instruments by which this final scourge of death to both body and soul is inflicted upon the earth, to vindicate the claims of Jesus and His church to rule over it and in it.⁴⁷

Philip Mauro summarizes the seals thus:

Wherever the white horse and his rider have gone, in every land, the pale horse and his rider, with Hell following after, have been close behind. And the enemy has employed various destructive agencies, not only killing with the sword. *(which I take as representing the direct thrust of some "lie" such as the denial of the Godhead of Christ, or of His atoning sacrifice); but also "with hunger" (dearth of spiritual food); and "with death" (spiritual pestilence, . . . spreading like a contagious disease); and "with the beasts of the earth" (which represent the human governments, as appears from Chapter XIII, which the Devil has often been able to use with destructive effect in opposition to the gospel).⁴⁸

It has been observed that the color scheme of the horses shows a progression downward, ending in darkness and death. This is "according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2). But God's order reverses this. He finds us in a state of death and darkness, and brings us into that place where life is abundant as a river, and where there is no need for the sun, neither of the moon; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.⁴⁹

Under the symbols of the four seals we have seen the conquering gospel and war, want and death—spiritual and physical. These tell the story of the ages, showing the terrible result of neglecting the gospel of Christ, and warn us that the holy man is the only really happy man, for God and law are as necessary for every soul as the solid earth beneath our feet. Many may laugh about breaking the

commandments, but the commandments will, like the violated laws of nature, ultimately break them. Obedience to law is liberty, and only the sight of the love of Christ can lead us to spiritual sanity, and the obedience which is its glad fruit. Christ's way is the only way that will work, all other ways try to make the universe a "multiverse," and result in chaos.

Seals two to four have traced the progressive hardening of the wicked as they continue to resist the message of the white horse. They are sealed into eternal death. Such has been the course of unbelievers in all ages. As for the living wicked, their fate is indicated in the sixth seal. But what of the saints?

Both the dead and the living saints are sealed amid the terrors of the messianic woes. Many faithful unto death cry by their blood for the Lord to come and end the oppression of His children. That they are sealed is shown by the gift of the white robe. As for the living saints—they are the only ones who can stand when this planetary system dissolves. They stand, for they have been sealed into the truth intellectually and spiritually so that they cannot be moved. They wear the sign of the covenant, they have the priestly miter, they have shown their allegiance to law and gospel and God has acknowledged them as His for ever. The intelligent minds of the discerning angels who move over the world with plagues recognize the sign of the Cross, or the seal, in the foreheads of the Lord's adopted sons and daughters. The law of God is in their hearts, for they have come to Christ and found rest from sin's guilt and power. Such in essence is the meaning of the last three seals, but now let us return to particulars.

Rev. 6:9-11:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow-servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

There are only a few who refuse to see the symbolic nature of this presentation of the brazen altar of the sanctuary, and martyred worshippers. Neither should we be concerned with the criticism that the cry is unchristian. It is not the Christians, but their spilled blood that cries. And the cry is for that which is right—that evil might be seen as evil, and good as good. It is difficult to believe that from love's infinite suffering on the Cross should flow overwhelming tides of divine wrath, but the fifth and sixth seal tell us it must be even so. Wrath is but the inevitable response of holiness to evil, and the cry of the martyrs is but a reminder that God does not forget, and that every seed sown, unless extracted by Calvary from a penitent heart, must bear its terrible harvest.

We have no horse going forth in the fifth seal—no word from heaven giving the command to go. For it would be unthinkable to symbolize God as ordering the death of the saints, though it is perfectly true that it is His providence that permits the same, and for reasons of ultimate mercy. The blood of the martyrs has ever been the seed of the church. It is when men obviously love the gospel more than life that others are awakened and convinced. As we consider that we live in an age when persecution slumbers in most of the western world, we should accept the fact as evidence of religious apostasy. No one is disturbing that other lion—the antagonist of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He sleeps because we sleep.

Note that while they are vindicated by heaven through the symbolic award of the white robe,⁵⁰ they are told they must rest longer "until their fellowservants are slain." John anticipates the last great tribulation, and knows that his Sovereign Lord cannot return until evil has so matured that its world-wide fruits will testify to its nature in an ultimate way. It is this that brings the consummation. Here we are given insight into part of the reason for Christ's long delay. It is the same now as in ancient times. God could not give Abraham his inheritance until the iniquities of the Amorites was full and that took centuries! It was only when "transgressors" had "come to the full" that Jerusalem was destroyed. Hoeksema has explained the principle admirably in his statement found earlier in this book, and we suggest the reader study it again.⁵¹

This agrees with the statement in Rev. 14:15 about the harvest of the earth being ripe. See also Mk. 4:26-29. Before Jesus comes, the spread of the gospel to all the world will result in two harvests—one to life and one to death. Those who accept the gospel will have the seal of God, the likeness of Christ

made manifest by loyalty to the commandments of God. Those who reject the good news become more and more like their Satanic master. Ultimately Calvary and its antecedent scenes of betrayal and the judgment, will be repeated on a worldwide scale—not in the sense of atonement, but in the sense of opposition and lying witness and murder. The universe looking down will see the fruitage of good and evil on a scale never before possible, and then its all-wise, all-good Sovereign will decree, "It is finished." Then, when all unfallen worlds will unite with the angels saying, "Just and true are thy ways, O king of saints, for thy judgments are made manifest," Christ shall come. The "How long, O Lord?" will have been answered, and will never be asked again.

In the light of this passage, the duty of the church is clear. The great commission must be paramount in our thinking. All other things should be done only to pay expenses, and when the news has spread to earth's remotest bounds, then the reaction to it will be so strenuous, so vicious, that the polarizing Antichrist will destroy his own kingdom, and from its ashes will arise the eschatological kingdom of truth and light to stand for eternity.

Rev. 6:12-17:

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

This passage is another famous *crux interpretum*. It has been applied to the fall of the Jewish state, the end of paganism in the days of Constantine, and the fall of Rome, as well as to the last days. Hailey says it certainly means the downfall of whatever political power has been oppressing the saints of that day—meaning Rome. As Moorehead exclaims about such interpretations, "The majesty of the prediction is lost in the poverty of the fulfillment."⁵² Alford is correct when he writes:

We may unhesitatingly set down all interpretations as wrong, which view as the fulfilment of this passage any period except that of the coming of the Lord.⁵³

. . . compare again Matt. xxiv. 35, "heaven and earth shall pass away:" the whole earth is broken up by a change as total as any of those previous ones which have prepared it for its present inhabitants.⁵⁴

It is literally, 'the day, that great day.' This name, if properly considered, would have kept expositors firm here to the great verity of this part of the Apocalyptic visions, and prevented them from going into all sorts of incongruous interpretations, as they have done. . . .⁵⁵

But recognizing the time of the application of this prophecy does not solve all the problems. What is intended by the great shaking, the darkening of the sun, the falling stars, etc? Most commentators have applied these symbolically, for is not the whole book one of symbolism? Mauro and Carpenter give applications that are representative of many.

Those conditions are described by the seer in terms which, after the manner of prophetic utterances, are highly figurative. Therefore it is particularly important at this point to remind ourselves that the language of the Book we are studying is *symbolical*. Accordingly, events in political and social spheres of human affairs, as well as those in the spiritual realm, are pictured in terms of physical things and happenings.⁵⁶

. . . the sun becomes black like sackcloth of hair; and the moon becomes like blood. These being the Bible symbols of "the higher powers" which "are ordained of God" (Gen. 1:16-18; 37:9,10), it is evident that verse 12 puts before us a scene of anarchy. For the supreme governmental authority, represented by the sun, is blotted out of the political heavens. And because of the complete failure of government there is profuse shedding of blood; while repeated shocks and convulsions occur among the peoples of earth, like the tremors of a great earthquake.⁵⁷

. . . events, such as great calamities, changes, and revolutions in the world's history, are described by emblems similar to those used here. St. Peter, for example, illustrates the great spiritual revolution of the Day of Pentecost by the passage from Joel, "The sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood." Hence it seems right to regard the language here as figurative, and to bear in mind that, though its fullest application belongs to the final advent, there may be many anticipatory advents. The judgment is often rehearsed before the day of judgment; the ages of oppression end in a day of catastrophe and confusion in which the righteous laws of a righteous King avenge themselves on the law breakers; the old lights and landmarks are for a time obliterated, and feeble, but pretentious, religionists are swept off as autumn figs from the fig-tree, and the proud and mighty are dismayed; things come to a crisis, and men "are proven by the hour" of that judgment; the unripe or untimely fruit drops off, as those who have no root in themselves fall away, and as the feebly-founded house fell in the tempest (Matt. vii. 26,27). If this be so in the minor and preliminary crisis of the world, how much more so in the final crisis, which will try all.⁵⁸

Erdman is content with asking "Just what is denoted by the details of the picture it is difficult to determine. What is pictured by the earthquake and the darkened sun and moon and by the falling stars, by the opened heaven and the moving mountains and islands? Do they depict social and political revolutions and cosmic convulsions?"⁵⁹

Most recent commentators point out that while hyperbole is certainly present, what we have here is a rehearsal of the cosmic signs common to apocalyptic descriptions of the end. Charles says on this passage:

The world and its well-being depend on the faithfulness with which the luminaries of heaven fulfil their parts. The unvarying order and loyalty with which they do so was a favourite theme with apocalyptic writers. . . . When, then, the sun and moon and stars forsook this order, the end of the world was at hand.⁶⁰

Mounce speaks similarly, and points out that the reaction of the wicked described in vv. 15-17 is "an unlikely consequence if they (the prophetic signs of vv. 12-14) symbolize no more than social and political upheavals."⁶¹ Bruce links both political and cosmic upheavals and Beckwith says that "the author is here clearly using current apocalyptic language and describing great natural convulsions."⁶² Ladd in two of his books insists on the profound theology present here--the dependence of the creation upon its Creator. He points out that the Old Testament pictures the physical creation as sharing in some way man's fate and therefore also subject to judgment and in need of salvation. See his *Jesus and the Kingdom*, chapter 2, and his commentary on this passage where he says, ". . . the language is not merely political or symbolic of spiritual realities but describes a real cosmic catastrophe whose actual character we cannot conceive. Out of the ruins of judgment will emerge a new redeemed order which John calls new heavens and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1)⁶³

It is interesting to notice that the great majority who have applied the symbols of the earlier seals literally--that is, as portraying invasion, civil war, famine, pestilence, usually have balked at applying this one literally. On the other hand there are some like the present writer who would insist that as the former seals take for granted our Lord's predictions of these outward literal woes but intend a spiritual meaning for them as well, so here the actual physical reality is meant but also more.

In view of the way John uses the heavenly light bearers in chapters 8,9,12,16, it is almost certain that he has similar ideas in mind in this passage. He anticipates apostasy from the truth, an apostasy black as sackcloth of hair. He believes that the moon, symbol of the church with its reflection of truth, will endure its last great persecution, and become as blood while a multitude of its leaders become falling stars in the tempest of tribulation. Many a star we have admired for its brilliance, thinks John, will soon go out into darkness. Where we think there are fields of living wheat there will be found but chaff, and the majority of those who now appear genuine and true will prove to be base metal. That will be the hour to gather courage from the cowardice of others, loyalty from their treason, and warmth from their coldness

But John sees more. He remembers the words of the Lord about sun, moon, and stars in the advent sermon. And he knows the Lord means just what He said--the real sun, the real moon, and the real stars. If the physical universe therefore is to be disrupted, how could that event be described in terms of symbolism? It would be impossible. Hoeksema writes, "The physical universe and elements of it may be used as symbols of things spiritual and historical, but how shall the shake-up of the physical universe be symbolized?"⁶⁴ Wickes makes the same point--that some realities are beyond pictorial

representation.

. . . symbols are not *words*, but *things*, chosen to represent others, because of some resemblance. Obviously now there are some few objects to which no other resembling thing in the universe can be found, and which, therefore, cannot properly be symbolized. . . . Thus Jehovah cannot be represented by any analogous object, for "To whom will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" When he, therefore is described (ch. 4), he is represented as one of inexpressible glory, seated on his everlasting throne, and all the bright intelligences of heaven bowing before him, but no symbol of him is given.

For the same reason the martyrs, . . . are described in the fifth seal without any symbol, as "the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held."⁶⁵

The previous seals *have* to be understood to some extent at least symbolically. That necessity is not found here. Literal interpretation is very natural. We do not have expressions like Rev. 8, "*as it were* a great mountain." See the many such words in Rev. 8 and 9. They are not to be found here. The text means what it says, even if it also means more than that. If one takes the first part of the passage as applying to a social shake-up of earth's mighty men, how are we to apply the latter (the "mighty men") later in the text? Indeed those who decide for the symbolic meaning of the passage as a whole never are consistent when explaining verses 15-17.

These signs are listed about a dozen times in Scripture in connection with the great day of the Lord. They have had partial fulfillments through the ages. The greatest of earthquakes was probably that of China in the 1920's but one which made the most impact on history could well have been that of Lisbon in 1755. Between 1600 and 1850 there were, it is estimated, about 7,000 earthquakes. The same is true of the darkening of the sun and the falling of the stars. These also have happened again and again. In 1780 north-eastern America witnessed an extraordinary darkening of the sun. It gave great impetus to the spreading message of the imminent end of the world. 1833 and 1872 saw magnificent meteoric showers. Says Hoeksema:

In regard to such a shower of stars happening in the tenth century one witness testifies that it had lasted "from midnight until morning; flaming stars struck one against another violently, while being borne eastward and westward, northward and southward, and no one could bear to look toward the heavens on account of this phenomenon. One of these showers we have on record with the testimony of a witness who informs us that people were thrown into consternation and cried out to God the Most High with confused clamor. From the year 900 to about 1850 there occurred as many as sixteen of such extraordinary star showers, in as far as we have them on record. Hence, also this element has occurred time and again in the present dispensation."⁶⁶

The complete fulfillment of the sixth seal is yet future, and applies to the time of the coming of the Lord when the natural phenomena referred to become universal so that all men everywhere will witness them. The earthquake here spoken of should be linked with that of Rev. 16:16-21 where it obviously applies to the very end of the world.

The word literally means a shaking, and we do well to think on Heb. 12:26-28, and parallel Old Testament passages. But we shall only gain the most from these passages if we remember that much that is to happen literally at the advent has a spiritual fulfillment before. Before the earth is literally lighted with the glory of the coming Christ, it is to be spiritually lighted with His glory by the worldwide spread of the gospel. See Rev. 18:1. Before the great Judgment Day pictured in Rev. 20, there will be a spiritual judgment, an unseen dividing of men before the second advent, so that in that day the righteous only shall rise in glorified bodies to life eternal. We anticipate the great city, the New Jerusalem, as the capital of the earth made new, but already we are members of the holy city of the church. Similarly before the shaking of heaven and earth attending Christ's revelation in glory there is to be tremendous spiritual shaking. In that day, the church will be sifted, and as winter reveals the evergreens from other trees, so the final persecution will manifest who is truly heart and soul the Lord's. All of life's shakings with their temptation to apostasy are meant to prepare us, to root and ground us, for that final test.

May we, in conclusion, warn the reader against the traditional mindset that sees the seals as mainly fulfilled in other ages. The truth is that their major fulfillment is yet to come. When the everlasting gospel is revived, with it will come the crisis referred to at the opening of the book (1:3). The red, black, and pale horses are to ride again--very likely in our day. The persecution referred to in the fifth

seal has its ultimate fulfillment in the persecution of Rev. 13 and it will be speedily followed by the advent of the vindicating Christ (14:14).

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Rev. 7)

Chapter 21

Rev. 7:1-3:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads."

We should not fail to observe the close relationship between this passage in its context, and Mt. 24:28-31.

Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Here is the same sequence as in Rev. 6:12 to 7:3. The cosmic signs testifying that the world has become a putrifying carcass ready for the eagles of judgment, the wail of the wicked as they see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, then angelic attention for the elect of God in the four quarters of the earth.

We should also recognize that here in the opening verses of chapter 7 we have the answer to the question closing chapter 6--"Who shall be able to stand?"¹The 144,000 of this chapter are the saints who will stand amid the terrors of the last great day--they will stand unscathed because they have the seal of God in their foreheads.

This passage is a parallel to the work of God in all crises of judgment. As God segregated Noah before the flood, Lot before the fire and brimstone fell on Sodom, Israel before the seven last plagues on Egypt, Israel from Babylon, the Christians before the fall of Jerusalem, so now He will separate His own before the great day of His wrath. Compare also Rev. 18:1-4.

What we have in these verses is both a specific and a general truth. In the last days as probation closes, God will seal His own in judgment,² and protect them through the terrors of the end, but this is but an application of His general care in all ages. Thus chapter seven looks both ways. It is connected with the cry in the sixth seal, but it also anticipates the coming judgments of the trumpets. In these it is specifically said that those with the seal of God are immune. This should not lead us to conclude that 7:1-3 has taken place chronologically before the trumpets are sounded. Rather it is reminding us that what will take place on the eve of the great denouement is but an application of God's usual and continual work of marking His own for eternity. Of course, to John, the sealing was something either happening in his day, or about to happen, for the end was imminent.

This very problem of the timing of the sealing casts light also on the relationship between this group of the 144,000 and the great multitude next to be described. See vs. 9 ff. The first group are those living at the coming of the Lord, whereas the second pictures the saved of all ages. In the first group (shown to be yet on earth), we see the church militant, but in the second (pictured in heaven), the church triumphant. Thus they are two different groups viewed from this standpoint. On the other hand, in every age God has sealed His own, and thus at one time or other, all the members of the great multitude have been sealed.

It must not be forgotten that this chapter is part of the sixth seal. The closing verses of the previous chapter presented the final crisis from the viewpoint of the wicked. Now the saints of that same day

are in focus. The wheat are here being gathered into the barns, the good fish into the vessels.

Eze. 9 is the Old Testament source of this passage. Before the slaughter of the unfaithful in Jerusalem, God marks out those who sigh and cry for the abominations being done there. After the man with the writer's ink-horn has done his task, then there follow those with the slaughter weapons, beginning at the very sanctuary of God, which has become polluted by infidelity and idolatry. Preston and Hanson comment:

... in 7:3 there is a distinct reference to Ezek. 9:4, where we have a grim picture of destroyers sent by God to slay all those who had not on their foreheads a mark. From the Hebrew of this passage it appears that the mark was the Hebrew letter *tau*. In Ezekiel's time (and in John's) that letter would be written as a cross--X (Greek *chi*). Now there can be little doubt that John has this passage in mind here, and is thinking of the X of Christ's name.³

The imagery of the mark is similar to the marking of Cain, and the mark of blood on the lintels of the Israelite homes before the dreadful work of the destruction of the first-born throughout the land of Egypt. The seal is thus a symbol of preservation. In the case of the martyrs they are sealed and safe for eternity; for the saints of the last days, as probation closes, their preservation for translation is guaranteed. We have the same thought in chapter 11 under the image of measuring. But what is it that shall preserve the saints of the last day? What actually is this seal? Every believer is regarded by heaven as having the perfect image of Christ. Col. 2:10; 1:28; 3:3; Rom. 8:1, 29-30, 33-34, When we compare the hope of Paul on the eve of martyrdom, with this scene of God's Israel on the verge of the kingdom, we remember that he hoped to be found in Christ not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith. See Phil. 3:9, and compare Rom. 9:30 to 10:13. The sign of this imputed righteousness is the regenerating gift of the Spirit. Eph. 1:13; 2 Cor. 1:21-22. God justifies none whom He does not sanctify, and holiness of life can never be separated from acceptance with God. Thus Paul reminds us that "the Lord knoweth them that are his" but also "let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Tim. 2:1

The sealing here is said to be that of "the servants of our God." Thus it would be incorrect to limit it to the initial sealing of believers (Eph. 1:13), which renders them servants of God. In this present company we have a special sealing of those who already have the distinction of being God's servants, and who therefore already bear the seal of the Spirit. Acknowledged as His for eternity, they are characterized on earth by a special sign.

The seal of Rev. 7:1-3 represents a separating of God's true Israel from the world of spiritual Egyptians and Babylonians. In ancient times God separated His people by the distinctive mark of the sabbath. (Circumcision was known to other nations.) This was declared to be the sign that distinguished Israel from all other peoples. Ex. 31:12-17; Eze. 20:12,20.

We must not divorce this passage from Rev. 13 which speaks of a final polarization on earth over worship, dividing between those with the mark of the beast and those with the seal of the Creator. It has become fashionable among Christians to be more spiritual than Scripture, and to decry outward observances of all kinds. But so long as we are in the flesh, all things of the Spirit need an outward form. As surely as the New Testament presents both the Lord's Supper and baptism as seals of the new covenant, so it endorses and upholds that ancient seal of the Edenic and Sinaitic covenants which undergird the new. The sabbath was the chief seal of the Sinaitic covenant and, like any seal, it contained the name of the Law-giver, His authority or right to rule (Creator), and a description of His domain (heaven and earth). See Ex. 20:8-11.

In an idolatrous world where only a remnant acknowledge the Creator, and most idolize the creature, the sabbath is specially important. The further we are from creation, the more significant is its memorial. Those who wish to tear it from God's moral law should remember the principle "that what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Out of sixty references in the New Testament to the sabbath, only one seems to mention it in a derogatory manner, and that passage is alluding to a gnostic heresy where sacred times had been incorporated into a system of angel-worship and asceticism. Paul, as a Christian taught of the Spirit, repudiated both Jewish and Gentile regulations regarding the manner of sabbath observance, but there is no evidence he did not honor creation's memorial. That memorial was for the first man (Gen. 2:1-3), and remains for the last. For the Christian, it commemorates the gracious works of God in which the believer had no part--creation and redemption. (See Deut. 5:15; Lu. 23:56; Heb. 4:1-11; Isa. 66:22-23.)

Only those who have searched the Word know how all-pervasive is the sabbath through Scripture history. Continually it is presented, not only as the blessed day, the rest day, the best day, but also the

test day. See Ex. 16:25-30; Eze. 20:12-21; Neh. 13:18-22; Mt. 12:1-14. At the beginning and end of each dispensation, the sabbath is prominent as a sign of loyalty and distinction from the world. In the patriarchal age, its institution was made the capstone of the story of creation. As God was about to close that era, sabbath-keeping was revived in Egypt, before the redemption of the nation. See Ex. 5:5. The Levitical era began with Sinai, where the holy law was thundered forth. In the heart of that law was the lawgiver's seal.⁴ As that dispensation reached the crisis of the Babylonian era, again the sabbath was the test of loyalty. See Jer. 17: 19-27. After the return the issue remained the same. See Neh. 13. In the Christian era, we find one chapter in ten in the gospels revolving around sabbath controversies. Christ risked his life and mission to demonstrate the true nature of the sabbath, and how it should be kept. For no mere ceremonial requirement did He ever thus endanger the successful completion of His task.

At the end of the Christian era, Scripture foretells the greatest test of all, when all men must receive either the mark of the beast, or the seal of God. No doubt to the first readers of John's book, the mark of the beast was something along the lines of offering incense to Caesar. During the Dark Ages, evangelical Christians may have thought of participation in the mass as the mark of the beast. It has meant different things in different ages. But at the close of time, when prophecy reaches its final and fullest application, it is clear that the mark of the beast is a sign of idolatrous worship, in contrast to the worship of the Creator and the faithful observance of His law. See Rev. 13:16 f; 14:6-12, and our comments there, plus the preface to that section. Rev. 6:11 also points to the same crisis in 7:1 and ch. 13.

Obedience or disobedience to God is the issue soon to be settled by the entire world. In Eden, we find no reference to faith and love; only obedience is mentioned, as comprehending all else. In this last book of Scripture, obedience to the commandments of God, or disobedience, are shown to be the outward signs of relationship to heaven or hell. See Rev. 14:9-12; 12:17. Faith without works is dead, and profession of religion without conscientious observance of all the requirements of God is a counterfeit. The true gospel ever bears fruit, and that fruit is obedience to the commandments of God. In those commandments there is but one designed to be a special test. Men outwardly observe most of the commandments for their own reasons, not necessarily linked with fidelity to the Creator. Only those desirous of honoring God in full harmony with His Word, take the fourth commandment seriously. Here is a commandment which is a distinctive protest against all forms of idolatry. It concerns the invisible God, and is fulfilled by observance of a special part of invisible time. Only faith can fulfill it aright--faith in God, faith in the Word, faith in the Redeemer who completed His work of re-creation also on the sixth day and rested on the seventh. As Ramsey discusses the last crisis, he comments on this present topic.

Another particular, in which the truth we are pressing rises to view most manifestly, is in regard to the Christian Sabbath. This is, in one aspect, the most distinctive badge of Christianity. But where is the Christian Sabbath, in the fulness of its privileges, to be found and enjoyed? In what Christian parlour even, where Christian friends have casually met, can you find it? Even the way to and from the house of God is too often an occasion of Sabbath desecration, at least a proof of the utter destitution of the Sabbath spirit. "Keeping the Sabbath holy," is a thing extremely rare. Even where the open and public desecration of it is restrained by law, business and pleasure very generally only change their forms. Now the change required in the moral state of Christendom, and of the church itself, to secure a universal holy observance of the Sabbath, would involve the most radical changes in the whole habits of the civilized world.⁵

We agree with Ramsey that radical change in the habits of professed Christendom is called for, and we suggest that only when the gospel is set forth in its relationship to the whole law of God will that radical change become an option. What truths need to be stressed in the last gospel message pointing out this relationship?

First, the distinction in nature between the fourth commandment and the other nine should be closely observed. While the latter reflect the "inevitables of right behavior in a Creator-creature relationship, this is not true of the former. Only in the fourth commandment do we have something special, a deliberate creation of deliberate duty. While all rational beings should see the necessity of remembering the Creation, only divine fiat could tell us how to do it aright. Man could never have known whether a sabbath should be the fifth day, or tenth day of a series. The faculty of reason which could direct him to the "rightness" of the other commandments could not help him here. In the fourth commandment is an arbitrary element entirely fitting for a "test" commandment, for even heathen

confess the others. Rom. 2:14.

What we have preserved in the sabbath is the essence of the highest moral relationship—provision for obedience to God on the sole basis of desired fellow ship. In this God is sought only for what He is in himself, not for the securing of His gifts. Thus sabbath-observance symbolizes loyalty par excellence—a loyalty springing from love, not covetousness or fear.

The heights and depths of the sabbath institution have never been fully recognized. Here is a sign designed to enable man to "remember" the great centralities of life—who he is, and who his Father is, where he came from, why he is here, where he is going, and how to get there. Is not this the answer to the modern existential crisis? But more, it is the way to all successful living in all ages. It is but a form of Mt. 6:33 and its hierarchy principle. What a sublime act of holiness—the whole rational creation standing still, as it were, on every seventh day—acknowledging its creatureliness and dependence on Him who is the source of its life. What an institution of mercy! As Fairbairn has reminded us, it is in perfect harmony with the gospel, breathing good will and kindness to men, offering all fifty-two spring days every year, sweet memorials of Paradise for a toiling world.⁶

All acknowledge that the fact of creation is the basis of duty. In the sabbath we have symbolized the truths of creation and redemption. That first sabbath was an acting out by God of the invitation "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Man is saved from atheism, polytheism, agnosticism, pantheism, when he acknowledges this personal Creator. He learns from this sign the true element: of worship, i.e. of worth-ship. He learns that the end of life is the vision of God.

Since the Fall, the sabbath has set forth the essence of righteousness by faith--the emptying of one's own hands and depending on the work of Another—looking unto the Source of Life as the source of all else including righteousness. Adam rested *before* he worked, and those who learn of the cross by faith enter into that rest of soul which alone can prepare one for service. See Heb. 4:1-9; Deut. 5:15; Mt. 11:28-30.

The great controversy is to end as it began, with a test of obedience—a test of loyalty. The only difference between the two central trees of Eden was the declared preference of God. Thus it will be at the end of time when man chooses between the mark of the beast and the seal of God. Obedience at the risk of death will be the outward sign of love and loyalty. Jn. 14:15.

In summary, Rev. 7:1-4 parallels the time brought to view in Rev. 13:13-18, a time when all men are invited to break the first commandment by worshipping the Antichrist, to break the second commandment by worship of his image, the third commandment by allegiance to the blasphemy of this anti-God power, and the fourth by acceptance of his mark--the opposite of the sanctification implied by true sabbath-keeping. As we remember that Revelation abounds in contrasts, we will see the necessity of comparing the seal of God with the mark of the beast with as much care as we separate Jerusalem from Babylon, the virgin bride from the harlot, and the false trinity of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To interpret the 144,000 and their seal in chapter 7 without the light cast by the description of that same company in chapter 14 as the ones victorious over the beast, his image, and his mark, is to miss a major key provided by the Holy Spirit.

Let us now attend to some of the specific phrases of **Rev. 7:1-3**.

v. 1. "The four winds. . . ."Winds are the symbol of strife and this picture of restraint assures the reader that the catastrophic events mentioned in the preceding verses will not take place till God's people have been separated from the world by the gospel of God, a gospel which calls for faith in Christ and obedience to His commandments. W. Boyd Carpenter says:

In the sixth seal the winds had blown, and had shaken violently the fig-tree, causing its untimely figs to drop off; the untimely or winter figs represented those whose religious life was unequal to the strain of trial, and who failed in the crisis to which they were exposed. But is all the fruit shaken off? No. Christ had said that "if a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch;" but that those who abode in Him, purged by their trials, would bring forth more fruit, and the fruit which these bore was not a fruit easily shaken off, but fruit that should remain (John xv. 6, 5, 16). They would not be as winter figs, easily torn from the boughs, for their strength was in God: before the stormy winds of manifold trials had blown they had been sealed with the seal of the living God.⁷

v. 2. "Ascend from the rising of the sun. . . ." The sun-rising, or the east, is a Messianic metaphor, and points to something or Someone of heavenly origin. See Lu. 1:78; Eze. 43:4; Mal. 4:2. The saving

mark in Eze. 9 is the form of a Cross (the Hebrew *tau*). These now to be delivered are those to whom the Cross has become preeminent, guiding every plan of the mind and love of the heart.

v. 2: "The seal of the living God. ..." See the preface to this chapter regarding the seal. "The living God," says Mounce, is an expression that "contrasts the one true and eternal God with all the false and idolatrous gods of heathendom."⁸ See Jos. 3:10; 2 Kings 19:4,16. It is an appropriate title whenever a special work of intervention and deliverance is presented.

Rev. 7:4-8:

And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel, twelve thousand sealed out of the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand of the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand of the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand of the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand of the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand of the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand of the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand of the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand of the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand of the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand of the tribe of Benjamin.

The tribes are listed in eighteen different orders in the Old Testament and none of these orders is identical with that found in this chapter. In the present list, Dan (that tribe which was first to fall into idolatry⁹), is omitted. Ephraim (which also surrendered to idolatry¹⁰), is replaced by Joseph, and Judah is placed first because it was the tribe from which Christ came. Levi, instead of occupying the place of his birth as third, takes the eighth place in harmony with the subordination in the Christian age of the previous Levitical typical system. Viewed as a whole the grouping is in the order of closest kinship, without any violent separation of those naturally united. All the names have meaning and some have suggested that they contain a message for the remnant as follows:

(*Follow underlined phrases in right column as a connected sentence.)

Name:	Meaning: □ Rev 7:5-8
Judah	" <u>Praise</u> " (Israelites enter God's spiritual Jerusalem through the gates called "Praise." See Isa. 60:18.)
Reuben	" <u>A Son</u> " (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 8:14-17, etc.)
Gad	" <u>A Company</u> " (Rev. 7:9; 19:1,6, etc.)-- <u>of sons, redeemed and</u>
Aser	" <u>Happy</u> " (Jn. 13:17, etc.) -- <u>after</u>
Nephtalim	" <u>Wrestling</u> " (Gen. 32:24-30, etc.)— <u>in prayer</u>
Manasses	" <u>Forgetting</u> " (Phil. 3:13; Isa. 65:17)-- <u>self and the past</u>
Simeon	" <u>Hearing</u> " (1 Sam. 3:10: "Speak, for Thy servant heareth.")
	<u>God's Word</u>
Levi	" <u>Joined</u> " (Jn. 15:1-7; Acts 2:47)-- <u>to God as</u>
Issachar	" <u>Servants</u> " (Ro. 6:16-22, etc.)
Zabulon	" <u>Dwelling</u> " (Ps. 91:1; Isa. 33:14, etc.)-- <u>with</u>
Joseph	" <u>Added</u> " (2 Pet. 1:2,5-11, etc.)-- <u>joys and special blessings as</u>
Benjamin	" <u>Sons of the right hand</u> " (not "sons of sorrow ")

In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Ps. 16:11.12

This reference to Christians as members of the tribes of Israel should be a guide to us in the following chapters where characters, events, institutions of Israel frequently figure. To forget the significance of the churches of Christ symbolized by the Jewish seven-branched candlesticks and members of Israel's tribes is to go inevitably astray in interpreting this book.¹³ Such conclusions as Walvoord's, that this passage is evidence that the Jewish tribes are not really lost, are just as irrelevant as those interpretations of Rev. 11 which see in the two witnesses a prophecy of conversions among the Jews, or the return of Moses and Elijah, We would add that here again true hermeneutics demand a spiritualizing of the symbols presented by John, and it is a false delicacy which shies from applying

that special method of exegesis to certain parts of this parabolic book. Those who wish to be strictly literal in exegesis should not only anticipate 144,000 precise conversions from among the Jews, but also that such a group will receive a visible stamp on their foreheads through the ministry of a literal angel. Similarly, those who would literalize the number are forgetting that it is characteristic of this book to give numbers a symbolic meaning. 144,000 is but the extended multiplication of twelve, the kingdom number, and is a metaphor for that company which will see the kingdom come, as Christ returns as King of kings.

Yet another caveat is needed here. The reference to the east or "sunrising" must be kept in mind when we come to Rev. 16 with its allusion to the kings from the sun-rising. To read therein the Parthian warriors is again to relapse into the error of literalism in a book where such errors are forbidden. The sunrising in this book is a symbol of heaven, as surely as Christ is called the Light of the world, its Bright and Morning Star.

Rev. 7:9-12:

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

Many have equated this company with the former. Indeed it must be remembered that John anticipating the last conflict believed that the Christian church would in entirety be the fruit of the first century. Says Beasley-Murray, "It was not difficult to think of the Church in terms of the present generation, and in John's view the present was the last. Accordingly, the reference to the generation of the tribulation in verse 14 is comprehensible, if they were especial rather than exclusively in mind."¹⁴

We suggest, however, that it is best to recognize the 144,000 as the church militant facing the last great tribulation before the coming of Jesus, but the vast unnumbered multitude as the saved of all ages, that is, the church triumphant. This latter group stands "before the throne," whereas the former is on earth. One company is pictured as limited in number, but the other is unlimited. The palm branches of verse 9 suggest that we have here the consummation of all that was typified by the Feast of Tabernacles. This festival commemorated the completion of the harvest and was a grand occasion of rejoicing now that the toil was over and fruit could be enjoyed. In chapter five we had reminders of the Passover and Pentecost in the Lamb and the book. But here we have the firstfruits, and then the full harvest of the last festival of the year. Christ declared "the harvest is the end of the world" (Mt, 13:43). Says Mounce concerning the two groups respectively:

Twelve (the number of tribes) is both squared and multiplied by a thousand—a twofold way of emphasizing completeness. It refers to that generation of faithful believers who are about to enter the final turbulent period which marks the end of human history. In this scene we have "a picture of all the Christians who will remain faithful during the coming trial when the Beast appears" (Preston and Hanson, p. 84).¹⁵

The second vision of chapter 7 stands in marked contrast to the first. Instead of 144,000 there appears a great multitude which no man can number. Rather than being sealed for the impending persecution, they are said to have "come out of the great tribulation" (vs. 14). No longer on earth, they crowd the throne room of heaven clad in victor's robes and bearing the emblem of festive joy. The new vision anticipates a glorious day yet future when those who are to pass through the final persecution will enter the blessedness of the eternal state. The innumerable multitude includes far more than the 144,000 of the previous vision. All the faithful of every age are there.¹⁶

On the other hand, those who equate the two companies are at least in one sense not wrong, for in every age, God has been sealing His servants against the temptations and trial of that time. Thus Beckwith writes.¹⁷ Hoeksema takes a similar position.

. . . essentially the numberless throng and the one hundred forty-four thousand are not a different class of people, but principally the same. This is shown in the first place, by the fact that the great tribulation is one of the main ideas in both passages, that which speaks of the one hundred forty-four thousand and that which is now under discussion. In fact, both passages find their reason, the reason why they are revealed, in the coming of that great tribulation upon the church. The purpose of both passages evidently is to reveal to the church their precarious position in the world, and nevertheless their safety over against that great tribulation. The only difference is that the one hundred forty-thousand still confront that tribulation, while the numberless throng have already passed through it. It is very evident that it is the same throng: the one pictured as in the midst of the great tribulation, or rather, as standing on the verge of passing through it, and the other pictured as already having experienced it and having overcome. It is, therefore, the same multitude, only in different states, at different periods, and therefore from different points of view. In the first part they are upon the earth; in the second part they are already in glory in the new economy of the kingdom which is completed. In the first they are in tribulation; in the second they are already passed through that tribulation.¹⁸

One hundred forty-four thousand is the number of God's elect as they are in the world at any time. But the numberless throng represents the people of God of all ages added together.¹⁹

Rev. 7:13-17:

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

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The white-robed company is said to have come from the great tribulation. The scenes of the Christian era, that era described in the latter-day judgments of chapter six, constitute the great tribulation. John anticipated also a final time of trouble in the conflict with Antichrist which would involve the church here alive. These verses, 14 ff., apply to both the companies described in this chapter.

The saved have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Men may not like the imagery and prefer to substitute philosophical terms to explain salvation, but let them not call their final product the teaching of the New Testament. The blood of the Lamb is a metaphor for the death of Christ, and that death brings forgiveness of sins and imputation of righteousness to all who believe the record God has given of His Son. Soiled lives and characters are sometimes represented in Scripture as "filthy garments" (Zech. 3:1), but white robes imply the removal of guilt and the positive ascription of the merits of Christ's life and death. The Christ, who in love and grace surrendered His robe on Calvary to His crucifiers, has been doing the same all through the ages. That robe was without seam, and woven from the top to the bottom, representing that infinite righteousness which was woven in the loom of heaven for sinners. It must not be confused with our sanctification which is never perfect nor acceptable without the merits of Christ. The best we have to offer in character or life achievement is but "first-fruits" compared with the full harvest of Christ's imputed righteousness. See Rom. 8:23.

Verse 15 refers to God's sheltering of His people with His presence. The New International Version and the Jerusalem Bible translate the passage by saying that God "will spread His tent over them." As Dan. 9:24 spoke of the new kingdom in terms of the "anointing of the most holy," and 8:14 as the vindication of the sanctuary, so repeatedly in Revelation the kingdom of glory is set forth under the symbolism of the ancient tabernacle. God and the Lamb are the new temple, and in their presence the saved serve day and night, themselves pillars in the new "house." In Ex. 25:8 God had commanded the erection of a tabernacle that He might dwell among His people, and now in Revelation we see the fulfillment of the divine purpose. Instead of the hunger, thirst, heat, and other trauma of the days of

pilgrimage, the heavenly country brings an end to all tears, and the visible presence of the Good Shepherd who ever guides His redeemed to "springs of living water."

SECTION THREE *(TOC)*

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 8-11

TRUMPET CALLS TO SURRENDER

Chapter 23

The seven churches, the seven seals, are now succeeded by the seven trumpets. To the seven churches, Christ manifests Himself as *Priest*, prophet, and king; in the seven seals we see Him as *Prophet*, king, and priest; but in the Trumpets He is *King*, priest, and prophet. As Priest, He tended the lamps; as Prophet, He foretold the destiny of the church and the world; and as King,

He rules and judges. The fearful imagery now to be studied reminds us of Milligan's words:

The Christian dispensation is not effeminacy. If it tells of abounding compassion for the sinner, it tells also of fire and hail and vapour of smoke for the sin. If it speaks at one time in a gentle voice, it speaks at another in a voice of thunder; and, when the latter is rightly listened to, the air is cleared as by the whirlwind.¹

In general, this section is disappointing in most expositions. Uncertainty, vagueness, and comparative irrelevance confront the reader of the generality of commentaries. Some exegetes are honest enough to confess that they have little idea of what the trumpets are about. Pieters is frequently refreshing in his insights and frankness, and he writes:

If you ask me what all this means, and expect that I shall be able to point to something in history that corresponds to the burning mountain cast into the sea, to the falling star called "Wormwood," to the locusts from the pit, or to the terrible cavalry rushing up from beyond the Euphrates, I cannot answer. I am sorry to disappoint my readers, and sorry to appear so ignorant, but really, I do not know what these things mean.²

I do not say that these details have no meaning. They may have, and possibly the early church understood them better than we, although of this there is no proof in the extant early literature. For me they have no meaning, and I am comforted to find myself, in this respect, in the excellent company of men like Alford, Swete, and others, who either openly confess that they cannot interpret them, or silently pass them by. Alford says: "I have never seen. . . an interpretation of these details at all approaching to verisimilitude: never any which is not obliged to force the plain sense of words, or the certain course of history, to make them fit the requisite theory."³

Pieters devotes less than three pages to the trumpets, one of which is an honest avowal of ignorance, and the other two chiefly descriptive from the text itself. We commend his frankness. Other commentators spend considerable space on pointing out the individual trees, but make no sense of the forest. Linguistic details are often abundant, but interpretation is significant by reason of its absence. We think Glasson's comment says more about Glasson than John when, concerning Rev. 8, he writes:

Few commentators have been able to find much of spiritual or literary value in this chapter. We have the impression that the writer has to fill out his numerical scheme of sevens somehow; and so horror is piled upon horror.⁴

Historicist interpreters, on the other hand, often err in the opposite direction. They are amazingly detailed, and still more amazingly confident, in their expositions. If one reads Elliott, Barnes, Newton, Uriah Smith, and those who pursue a similar tack, he will be confronted with a mass of historical lore authenticating the apocalyptic forecasts. But the varied interpreters certainly do not agree, and the

range of divergence is extravagant.⁵ Let us give a few examples.

It is soon seen that the fall of Rome, and the Muslim invasions, are the favorites among historicists as fulfillments of the trumpets. But there are difficulties which must be frankly acknowledged. The fact that men with the seal of God are declared exempt from the plagues invalidates any interpretation which applies the onslaught to merely human aggression such as that of the Saracens or Ottoman Turks. It is the testimony of church history that the saints also suffer in times of war and famine. When the Revelator declares that the locusts are forbidden to touch anyone upon whose forehead the seal of God was impressed, the anger of the Muslim hordes was expressly directed against Christendom. Furthermore it is said in Scripture that the locusts did not take men's lives. This is not true of the Muslims. Neither is it correct to assert that the Muslims did no injury to trees or crops. The number of the destructive soldiery is given in Scripture as two hundred thousand thousand. Historicist interpreters have adopted various expedients to explain this number. For example, Bengel added up all the Saracen armies over a period of two centuries to approximate the figure of two hundred million. A few years ago a historicist group included the following statement in a study-pamphlet on prophecy.

Adventists have recorded views of the trumpets in various publications. However, there has been quite a general feeling that the prophecy of the trumpets was still not well understood; it is felt that even if these symbols have been correctly interpreted, these interpretations do not seem to hold much relevancy for the twentieth century. ⁶

Admittedly it is difficult to find a hermeneutic that guarantees that "hail and fire mingled with blood" must signify the work of Alaric as he led his Visigoths against Rome. The case is the same in the succeeding trumpets. Some historicist pillars are easily dislodged. For example, Rev. 9:15 is taken as a period of time involving the year-day principle. But the Greek points to a point, not a period of time. Thus, "So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of mankind." Greek scholars point out that where there is but one article prefacing a series of this nature, "the article applies alike to all."⁷ Fausset says:

The article *teen*, once only before all the periods, implies that the hour in the day, and the day in the month, and the month in the year, and the year itself, had been definitely fixed by God. The article would have been omitted had a sum total of periods been specified—viz., 391 years and one month (from A.D. 1281, when the Turks first conquered the Christians, to 1672, their last conquest, since which their empire has declined).⁸

Ramsey speaks similarly:

In the original, the definite article is used, and, literally translated, it is "prepared *unto the* hour and the day, and month, and year." The words cannot express, as they are often made to do, the period of time during which these forces were to operate, but the point of time at which they were to be developed and burst forth.⁹

See all major commentaries of the twentieth century. Modern translations also recognize this fact. Consider the following:

And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month were released to kill a third of mankind. Rev. 9:15, New International Version

So the four angels were let loose, to kill a third of mankind. They had been held ready for this moment, for this very year and month, day and hour. *New English Bible*

. . . These four angels had been put there ready for this hour of this day of this month of this year, and now they were released to destroy a third of the human race. *The Jerusalem Bible*

This means that the labored exegesis of Elliott (who applied Rev. 9:15 to a period of centuries), Barnes, Newton, Litch, Uriah Smith, and others in this area, will not do. Some, such as Litch, who have endeavored to apply Rev. 9:15 to a period, have forgotten the calendar change during this time. This calendar change meant the dropping of the reckoning of a ten-day period.

Then, as mentioned above, there is the use of Daniel's apocalyptic number of "ten thousand times ten thousand ." The figure can never be applied to armies of the past or the present. It is a figure which may fit demonic legions, but not human ones. The king over this vast horde is said to be the angel of the bottomless pit, and his name is the Destroyer. This is one of Satan's titles in Scripture, and in this setting applies better to him than all others. These are just a few of the reasons that lead some historicists and others to seek a more satisfying explanation for the trumpets than any hitherto available. Hoeksema speaks for many when he says:

We will readily admit that the interpretation of the trumpets in the Book of Revelation is very difficult. That this is true is not because the text itself is difficult to read, that there are many dark sayings in it: for that is not the case. If we had nothing else to do than merely to explain the words of the text, it would be rather easy. Little explanation would then indeed be required. But that is not the purpose of the Book of Revelation, nor of our interpretation of the book. We must not merely try to understand the text as such, but we also must try to learn the historical reality represented by and referred to in the text. If we do not attempt to do this, the book does not become real to the church of Christ, and can offer little or no consolation.¹⁰

As we approach these difficult chapters of Revelation—perhaps the most difficult in all of Scripture—let us try to reason from the clues provided in the rest of the book and by other well-known prophecies.

Few scholars doubt that chapters 10-19 of Revelation sketch the last crisis of history, and it is obvious that Rev. 8 and 9 use similar symbolism in many respects to Rev. 16, but with this difference—the plagues depicted in chapters 8 and 9 are sometimes limited to one third part of the world. Also we note from the conclusion of the sixth trumpet in 9:20-21 that this set of tragedies is intended to lead men to penitence and salvation. On the contrary, the plagues of Rev. 16 are the last, and offer no opportunity for change of sides. *Thus the trumpets point to preliminary judgments during probationary time, while the plagues will follow the close of mercy's intervention.* But are the trumpets to be interpreted as having historical and specific meaning, or as conveying only generalized pictorial expression of principles?

Other New Testament prophecies such as Mt. 24, 2 Thess. 2, seem to be specific in application despite their apotelesmatic fulfillments. Is the case the same here? Let us inquire whether predictive prophecy hitherto has warned of events which perhaps could also be the subject of Revelation chapters 8 and 9.

Prior to John's experience on Patmos, prophets had spoken of the destruction of Jerusalem, the fall of Rome (Daniel's fourth beast), apostasy in the Christian church, the development of the doctrines of demons, and also the coming of the demons themselves. The New Testament alludes to all of these. See Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lu. 21. Could these themes be the subject of the Seven Trumpets which obviously point to preliminary calamities before the close of human probation?

It is not hard to find the demons in the sixth trumpet, and the reference to hellish smoke, which tortures, but does not destroy men, as it obscures the light of God, fits well the doctrines of demons.

Are there also symbols in Rev. 8 and 9 of apostasy in the church—a dimming of the church's light, and a spoiling of its refreshing rivers and fountains of blessing? We do find such.

If our thinking is sound thus far, the rest is not difficult. Christ had foretold judgment on Jerusalem as a disaster for "dry trees." See Lu. 23: 28-31. The Greek word in Rev. 8:7 means fruit-bearing trees. The expression "the earth" or "land" while not restricted to Palestine is frequently thus applied. The analogy of the plagues on Egypt and Jeremiah's smoking mountain suggest that the nations which persecute the believers inevitably reap judgment, and that judgment falls first upon groups claiming to belong to the house of God.

With these things in mind, we turn to the symbolism of the trumpets. All that is said, however, by way of specific application of this prophecy is not intended to deny the apotelesmatic principle which will lead us to anticipate that such judgments as overtook Jerusalem and Rome, the apostate Christian world, have occurred in miniature (*mutatis mutandis*) throughout the ages. The very progressiveness of the trumpets (see Lenski) implies that the course thus traced may be as appropriate for individuals as for groups, in all places, and in all ages.

It seems to us that there are two chief errors to avoid in exegeting the trumpets. The first is to make them so vague as to be useless to the church. The second is to be so specific in application of details that the meaning of the whole is very restricted, and again almost useless. Scripture has a way of fulfilling itself over and over again. The letters sent to seven churches by Paul have had significance for the church in all ages, bearing upon her specific problems which ever recur in a fallen world. Similarly the messages of Old Testament prophets have perennially fresh meaning for all who study them, just as surely as the readers of Israel's pilgrimage find their own daily walk prefigured thereby.

We have already intimated that the seven churches had their chief application to the little groups who first received them in the first century, in what is now Turkey. But the God who inspired those messages so gave them as to make them of value to the whole church over the whole of time. Their distinctive features also seem to mirror the main characteristics of the stream of history. Let us return

to the seals for a moment to observe the principle applicable here. The white steed is ever going forth accompanied by the retinue of red, black, and pale horses. At every revival of religion heaven calls, "Come!" and the cause of Christ blossoms anew as the good news of grace is proclaimed. But inevitably such a revival is soon countered by opposition—opposition which leads the love of many to grow cold and thus fertilizes apostasy in the church. Apostasy ever spawns terrible heresies and the death of the soul. Such spiritual troubles as these are always accompanied by the outward symptoms of man's unrest and soul ambivalence. Failing to accept God's acceptance of him in Christ, the unbeliever cannot accept his fellow-man. Thus wars, famines, and pestilences are the outward shell of soul-sick society.

Now, as surely as the seven letters to the churches and the seals have recurring significance, so also do the trumpets. In one sense they run parallel with the seals from John's day to the end of the world. That is made plain by the fact that they were revealed to John as a new chain after he had witnessed the cosmic dissolution of the sixth seal. They terminate with the proclamation that the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of Christ. The lightnings, thunderings, and great earthquake symbolize the same events at the end of the seals, the trumpets, and the vials. Justin Smith summarizes the matter admirably:

It would seem, therefore, that in these successive series of visions to which the seals, the trumpets, and the vials belong, the same general period is brought under view, which is the period of the historical manifestation of the kingdom of God among men, with all which that imports. Only, in each a different aspect of that kingdom is presented, the historical element involved coming forth in greater and greater distinctness with each succeeding series of visions. The sealed book comprehends the whole, and it therefore in a sense becomes true that what is contained under the seventh seal is finally made known only as the last Apocalyptic word is spoken.¹¹

There are some very obvious clues to this section of the book, and then a number which are somewhat more subtle. Let us consider the obvious ones. First of all the symbol of the trumpet itself. Certainly its chief meaning is the rallying for war. Even when used as a summons in Israel, the trumpet was for the gathering of the Lord's army engaged in holy war. It also announced important points of time in both the daily temple liturgy and the yearly round of festivals, demanding from the worshipping host special attention. Thus this symbol is as revelatory of the nature of this prophetic chain as the candlestick symbol was : for the letters to the churches, and the seal for the series between the churches ; and the trumpets, and the temple bowl for the last plagues.¹² While the candlestick told of things entirely ecclesiastical, the seal pointed to prophetic and legal procedure, the bowls to the cessation of priestly work, and the trumpets in their chief employment undeniably point to war. While used in religious ritual for Israel, it was as a part of their organization as the Lord's army on tour of duty.

Furthermore, the trumpets are called "plagues" or "scourges." See 9:20. We are thereby told that they are punishments. And because the imagery of the first four reflect the plagues on Egypt, it is clear that these point to judgments on powers oppressing God's new Israel and impeding their deliverance. Feret sums up these matters:

In apocalyptic literature *trumpets always announce the great day of Jahveh and the release of his just wrath in the judgments on that day.* But with this announcement is inseparably associated the release of the elect and their triumphal reunion. . . .

St John is not the first, among the authors of the New Testament, to resume this symbol of the trumpet. There is a reference to it in our Lord's eschatological discourse (Matt. 24,31) and also in St Paul (1 Cor. 15,51; 1 Thess. 4,15 ff.). We are thus warned that the passage which follows will resume, under different symbolism and with a different doctrinal intention, the theme of the avenging scourges of which we have already had a foretaste in the vision of the seven seals, by means of the three dark horsemen and by the cosmic cataclysms. Whilst in the former instance these were shown as being totally within the command of the master of history, here their other purpose, namely, the punishment of evildoers and the liberation of the elect, is emphasised.¹³

These conclusions cohere with such plain passages as Num. 10:9; Joel 2:1 ff.; Jer. 4:19: ". . . the sound of *the trumpet, the alarm of war.*" Another clue can be found in the falling star which characterizes each of the major groups of the trumpets. See 8:10; 9:1. This allusion is based on Isa. 14, and is elaborated by John in Rev. 12. Error is shown to have its source in the fallen Lucifer, the

primeval light-bearer. Feret after quoting Lu. 10:18 states, "the star which is entrusted with the key of the abyss must conceal a mystery of more than cosmic significance and bring us face to face with the spiritual world. Now it is traditional in apocalyptic literature, to identify fallen angels with stars."¹⁴

From the first fall of the Angel of Light into the bottomless pit, from which he can only send forth that dense fog which obscures the light of the sun itself, to the bitterness of the water which human beings have to drink and the venomous error-thoughts of those who have not the mark of the Lamb upon their foreheads, everything fits perfectly into the first rough sketch the author has given of Satan's activity in history.¹⁵

The really infernal powers of evil (fire, smoke and brimstone) (9:17; cf. 9:2 and 21,8) all have a bearing on the crescendo of events towards the end. As we have said, this is all characteristic of the class of literature to which the Apocalypse belongs. The whole series of teachings must always culminate in some fact or other connected with the last days. Here, the sixth trumpet (the one immediately preceding the last) already shows us that there will be a vast increase of the diabolical malignance of error and deceit towards the end.¹⁶

Thus the allusions to the fallen stars which link with the account of Satans' apostasy in chapter 12 indicate that the trumpets will have much to say about the punitive effects of apostasy.

The chief exegetical keys, however, are found in the relationship between the trumpet-imagery and the original work of creation, the plagues on Egypt (already mentioned), the fall of Jericho, the ushering in of the Jubilee, the contrast between the horses of chapter 6 and those of 9, and the parallelism to the seven last plagues described in Rev. 16.

Gen. 1 sets forth historically much that is embodied as imagery in Rev. 8 and 9. Thus if this historical passage in the Bible's first book is compared with the prophetic parallel in the last book of Scripture we seem to be confronted in Revelation with the undoing of creation—the destruction of vegetation, judgments upon the earth and sea, darkening of sun, moon, and stars, and death to the inhabitants of sea and land. The Seven Trumpets picture the seven days of creation in reverse, the downfall of the world to be inhabited, a reduction to the original chaos as the birthpangs of a new world.

The plagues of Egypt find an obvious parallel with at least five of the trumpets, and suggest to us that the latter also depicts God's judgments on those who reject truth and who persecute His people. (Compare the hail, fire, water to blood, the darkness, the locusts, etc. of Exodus 7-10 with Rev. 8 and 9.) The blowing of the seven rams' horns as trumpets for seven days before Jericho's fall, paved the way for the Israelites to inherit Canaan. The Holy Spirit seems to intimate in Revelation that the Jericho of this world must also fall by the judgments of God before the saints enter upon immortality and their eternal inheritance.

Long ago Sir Isaac Newton pointed out that the Book of Revelation is couched in the imagery of the feasts of the seventh month. That is, he asserted that the Apocalypse employs symbolism borrowed from the feast of trumpets, atonement, and tabernacles as set forth in Lev. 23. The feasts of the seventh month in Israel appear to be typical of the second advent. Thus it was the blowing of trumpets, both at that particular festival and at the conclusion of the day of atonement, that after seven sabbaths of years ushered in the great jubilee years of liberty and restoration. The closing chapters of Revelation delineate the antitypical jubilee, as they picture the earth made new and the saints enjoying the liberty of God's eternity. The trumpets blown in the earlier chapters pave the way for this antitypical era of rejoicing and restoration.

So much for a general introduction to the exegesis of the trumpets. What shall we say specifically regarding the fifth and sixth of these judgments? Some of the symbolism is easily unlocked by other passages of Scripture. For example, the figure of "horses" is prominent in this vision, and it is not difficult to locate the usual meaning of this item of Scriptural symbolism. The first place that the horse appears in symbolic prophecy is in Zechariah 1, and a later verse of that book declares that the horse viewed earlier represent the "spirits of the heavens" that is angels (ch. 6:5). Rev. 6 follows the description of the heavenly throne with a presentation of God's providential dealings through angelic agencies which are depicted as horses going from heaven's courts to the world. Because of the strength and swiftness of ancient steeds, Bible seers were led to employ them as a symbol for supernatural powers in action. Elijah was taken up to heaven by "a chariot of fire and horses of fire." Elisha and his assistant pastor beheld above the horses and chariots of a besieging army "the horses and chariots" of heaven. The Psalmist declares "the chariots of God are. . . even thousands of angels" (Psa. 68:17).

None would claim, however, that Rev. 9 pictures the immediate work of the angels of God. No, these supernatural powers are the opposite number of those of Rev. 6, This interpretation is in harmony with the plan of opposites employed by the apocalyptic writer. The Book of Revelation represents the work and agencies of Satan under symbols counterfeiting the genuine work of God. For example:

The Lamb (Rev. 5:6)
The Beast (Rev. 13:1)

The trinity--Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Rev. 1:4,5)
The false trinity—dragon, beast, and false prophet (Rev. 16:13,19)

Jesus, i.e. Saviour (Rev. 22:16)
Apollyon, i.e. Destroyer (Rev. 9:11)

Keys of death and of hades (Rev. 1:18)
Key of bottomless pit (Rev. 9:1)

Jerusalem, the holy city (Rev. 21)
Babylon, the whore (Rev. 17)

Woman clothed with the sun (Rev. 12)
Woman clothed in purple and scarlet (Rev. 17)

God's seal or mark (Rev. 7:2)
The beast's seal or mark (Rev. 13:17)

The marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9)
The marriage supper of birds of prey (Rev. 19:17-20)

The faithful and true Witness (Rev. 3:14)
The devil which deceiveth (Rev. 12:9)

Horses from heaven (Rev. 6)
Horses from hell (Rev. 9)

Let us also compare the trumpets and the bowls. Their chiastic relationship suggests we can do this with profit.

1st Trumpet: The earth, chap. 8 :7, etc.

1st Bowl: The earth, chap. 16:2

2nd Trumpet: The sea, 8:8

2nd Bowl: The sea, 16 :3

3rd Trumpet: Rivers, fountains, 8:10

3rd Bowl: Rivers and fountains, 16 :4

4th Trumpet: Sun, moon, stars, 8:12

4th Bowl: The sun, 16 :85th Trumpet:

5th Trumpet: The abyss, king Abaddon, darkness, 9:11

5th Bowl: Throne of the Beast, darkness, 16:10

6th Trumpet: River Euphrates, 9:14

6th Bowl: River Euphrates, 16 :12

7th Trumpet: Voices, thunders, etc., 9:15,19

7th Bowl: Voices, thunders, etc., 16 :17,18

It is clear in both instances that Gen. 1 is in the mind of the writer thus:

Day one: The earth

Day two: The sea

Day three: The rivers and fountains

Day four: Sun, moon, and stars

Day five: Flying creatures and creatures from the abyss
(Jews often equated the sea and the abyss)¹⁷

Day six: Creatures of earth including the horse, the serpent, and man

Day seven: Climax and end, sabbath rest.

The difference between the use of the symbols in both trumpets and plagues and the Genesis originals is that what originally was created in love is now destroyed in wrath. But it is certain that we are intended to recognize the decay of the world preparatory to the new heavens and the new earth wherein righteousness shall dwell.

Having considered the available exegetical clues, let us consider this prophetic chain in general, and then specific terms. The trumpets, as with the seals, are ever sounding afresh. All the judgments of God which rejection of the gospel precipitates transpire wherever and whenever the gospel has sounded. We believe they could have all been fulfilled in the generation John addressed, but with the tarrying of the church in its discharge of witnessing to the whole world, the fulfillment of these scourges, as regards their overall time range, has been attenuated but not in such a manner as to make but one at a time operative on the earth.

As Huntingford writes:

Every one of the seven trumpets has its note of warning not only for that age to which it may seem to refer but for all ages to the end of time. The hail of judgment will destroy every barren tree. Every mountain which stands in the way of Christ will be thrown down. Even the waters of life will poison those who mingle with them the gall and wormwood of immorality and unbelief. The sun, moon, and stars will be darkened in the heaven of those who prefer darkness to light. Locusts and scorpions will ever torment those who by their own sins let loose the enemy, whom Christ has overcome for them, and bound in the prisons of the abyss. But this is no reason why the first trumpet should not announce specially the judgment of the apostate Jews; the second the fall of Rome; the third the devastations of Mahomet; the fourth the darkness of the middle ages; the fifth the natural result of all these, the revolutions caused by the reaction of the enlightened human mind against the ecclesiastical and civil tyranny of preceding ages. The prescient spirit of Omniscience looks down upon the whole scene, traces the great chain of cause and effect from the one end to the other, marks the salient points in the vast panorama of the history of Christendom, and reveals them to the prophet by a succession of pictorial visions.¹⁸

We do not have to agree with all that Huntingford says to see the value of his thesis. A large number of other expositors speak similarly. We should keep in mind the key offered by the Olivet discourse which would lead us to expect in this book all the matters there emphasized. These include judgments on the enemies of the church (such as the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the fall of pagan Rome, "the abomination of desolation"), for the second advent discourse is actually one of judgment from beginning to end. (Far too many fail to notice that Mt. 24 emphasizes judgment on unbelievers while Mt. 25, also part of the Olivet sermon, consists of judgment parables warning professed Christians.) Parallel to such specific judgments are ones more general consisting of wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilence, terrible sights and signs from heaven, and the sea and the waves roaring. According to Christ, distress of nations with perplexity would accompany these terrible omens.

But all is not cheerless. The gospel of grace is also to be sounded to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. See Mt. 24:14. Even that, however, has its dark side, for the gospel proclamation is followed by Antichrist, the abomination of desolation, originally representing Rome--Mt. 24:15f. False Christs and false prophets find their acme in him. Parallel with these false teachers comes the spread of heresy till through moral corruption and spiritual pestilence and political greed the entire globe becomes a polluted carcass ready for the vultures.

We have already noticed that the seals covered this ground in general terms, particularly from the viewpoint of the true people of God. They are, so to speak, in the eye of the storm, and see its spread from their own borders to the borders of the whole world. The seals echoed Christ's forecast of the victorious spread of the gospel to all nations, and culminate in the company gathered out and sealed

for salvation. But also they warned of the opposition to that gospel, and the subsequent loss of peace in a troubled world whose violence is an attempt to quieten its conscience—the conscience pricked and tormented by the gospel message. The third seal had pictured spiritual famine but also God's care over his own. The balances not only told of scarcity, but of increasing strictness in judgment, and thus the fourth horse carried the rider of death and scattered everywhere the disease of spiritual pestilence that leads to Hades. Then the following two seals encompassed the cry of persecuted saints and heaven's reply in the convulsed heavens, blackened sun, and falling stars—omens of the last judgment as Christ appears. The interlude of chapter 7, seen in its relationship to the last verses of six, follows the same pattern as Mt. 24:29-31.

Now the trumpets cover the same ground but from another viewpoint. Trumpets speak of war and judgment, whereas seals speak of religious mystery and legal proceedings. *We find no Lamb mentioned amidst the trumpet scenes*, for these judgments are aimed at earth-dwellers, those who have not responded to the Lamb's sacrifice on their behalf, and who have oppressed those offering the invitation of grace. The Olivet sermon still applies as a guide to this section of Revelation and we will find here all the topics previously listed. There is much good sense in Justin Smith's comments:

... as is familiar to every student of Christian history, there are in that history certain epochal outlines, each in their character, and their relation to the whole, as that we must suppose them to be the notable features of the prophecy as they are of the history. Among these are the destruction of the Jewish "state and nation," and therein the final passing away of the Judaic Dispensation; the fall of the Roman Empire, involving the destruction of the old pagan religion and pagan civilization; the great Christian apostasy, when the Man of Sin was revealed; and then that restoration of the primitive Christianity through the Reformation which has so wonderfully changed the world's face, religiously, with other and even greater changes foreshadowed. Whatever of minor incident may be included, we cannot be mistaken in assuming that in the Apocalyptic scheme here unfolded, these leading ones, so vast in themselves, and so amazing in their consequences, must surely be sought by the expositor. It is by this general outline, besides, that we shall guide ourselves most safely, and so be preserved from that bewildering complication of historical detail which has made so many of the expositions of this book mere wildernesses of speculation and conjecture. 19a

A contemporary writer, Beasley-Murray, as is his wont, takes the exegetical nettle of the trumpets with firmness. He comments, for example, on the fifth and sixth trumpets rather broadly, and more descriptively than interpretatively, but then asks concerning these two woes:

What are we to make of them? And how did John expect us to understand them? One thing is surely clear: he did not expect his descriptions to be interpreted literally. He would have been astonished, and possibly amused, to learn for example that some later readers assumed that his picture of the riders and horses in verses 16 ff. was to be taken with solemn realism. In discussing whether such creatures were ever or should be expected to stalk the earth, Schlatter answered: 'Just as the heavenly things seen by John, the trumpets, the altar, the throne, and everything he describes are parables, so the figures which he sees going over the earth will never be seen in reality.' If that be true, what then is signified by the 'parables'? It is hardly good enough to say, with Swete, that the locusts of the abyss 'represent to us memories of the past brought home at times of divine visitation, which hurt by recalling forgotten sins' (p. 118). Schlatter contented himself with laying down a broad principle: 'These visions fulfil an important purpose; for they impress on the Christian world the holy necessity and the strength of the divine execution of justice. . . . For God's grace and kingdom do not appear without judgment on fallen man, but through it.' The observation is helpful, but it does not carry us far in interpreting the detail of the visions.

Caird deals with the issue more fully. He sees in the abyss from which the locust-army pours out an indication that in God's universe there are elements still recalcitrant to the divine will. It is a reservoir of evil from which human wickedness is constantly reinforced, and which in turn is fed from the springs of human vices. It may even be viewed as 'the collective bad conscience of the race, from which come the haunting and avenging furies' (p. 119). Similarly in the monstrous army from the Euphrates he sees a symbol of the immense reserves of the powers of evil, which imperil the security of every earthly order. They are a grim reminder that in a world like ours it is unrealistic to expect that the progress of the gospel will suffice to dispel Satan's power. On the contrary we may expect a constant and even increased resistance to it till the last great battle. 19b

We wonder whether more could be said. We say this in view of John's clearly stated understanding in the second half of his book that the spirits of devils would in the last hour gather the world to war against the Lamb. Does not the chiasmic structure of the book once more assist us--when we put the fifth and sixth plagues alongside their parallel passages in the trumpets we find clear evidence of a period of great darkness being succeeded or at least accompanied by a world subservient to the spirits of devils, spirits as multiple as a world-wide plague of frogs--and represented as issuing from the mouths (cf. 9:17-19) of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. In other words, the final fling of Antichrist is brought to view in the fifth and sixth plagues, and we are convinced that the same is true of the climactic woes of the trumpets. It is significant that both mention the Euphrates--that symbol of evil and potential invasion. In this regard, it is important to remember that Rev. 11 is also part of the sixth trumpet, and it pictures the final attack on the church by Antichrist, as well as the torment, earthquake, and deaths sent to awaken the deceived multitudes to penitence. Similarly, the famous eschatological passage of Paul, 2 Thess. 2, speaks of a final world rebellion against God bringing with it the judgment and condemnation that ever accompany the rejection of the gospel and acceptance of error. Both the climactic bowls and the prophecy of Paul accord with our Lord's prediction of spiritistic signs and wonders immediately preceding His return, leading men to their last rebellion against heaven. We believe that the sixth trumpet also points to this phenomenon, and while it has had a recurring limited application, it will have its full apotelesmatic accomplishment in the last hours of earth's history.

We offer a postscript on this matter of interpreting the fifth and sixth trumpets. Revelation is ever its own best interpreter, and we should not fail to give due attention to the parallel between the sixth trumpet and the conditions sketched in Rev. 20:7-9. Here again there is a loosing, and the rising up of a great host to cover the earth, ultimately to bring tragedy because of the world's final onslaught against those who have been the messengers of grace. The number four, the expression "loosing," Euphrates, the multitude attacking, with resultant judgment and establishment of the kingdom of God found in both chapters cannot be coincidental. We submit, therefore, that it is not necessary to be as vague as is usual with commentators on the fifth and sixth plagues. The writer of the Apocalypse has not left those mysterious passages without interpretive comment, and we are cheating ourselves if we do not apply each exegetical clue we can find in the later parallel passages of John as well as the corresponding predictions of Christ and Paul. Yet another pertinent commentary on 9:14-19 is 17:15-18 where the flooding waters of Babylon and the eschatological world trauma associated with them is brought to view.

We would suggest that Rev. 9 presents a satanic work which will counterfeit the final work of the Holy Spirit which is also described in Revelation (18:1-4).

The supernatural powers of Rev. 9 come from the bottomless pit, from the abyss, the region of death. This is the opposite source from which the horses of Rev. 6 proceed. Furthermore, the powers of Rev. 9 have a king over them called Abaddon or Apollyon. Satan, the destroyer, is their king and they emanate from his domain. See Job 31:12; 26:6; 28:22; Prov. 15:11; and Psa. 88:31. The details of the locusts and horses serve only to stress certain truths regarding these demons. They are, for example, a great army as multitudinous as locusts, as malicious as scorpions, dominant as kings, intelligent as men, wily as women, fierce as lions, and resistless as soldiers in armor.

Of course, to mention evil angels or demons in this scientific age is to appear naive. Sophisticated moderns have dismissed such to a theological limbo. While this is true on the one hand, on the other we are told that "in our day largely because of the many catastrophic outbreaks of evil in the world, theology has turned its attention anew to demonology."²⁰ Certainly demons were very real to our blessed Lord, and to most who have endeavored to follow closely His consecrated footsteps. Augustine, Luther, and their spiritual kith and kin have ever confessed from the theology of their Christian experience that Satan and his band are as real if not more real than themselves, and who can forget the exploits of old Jeffrey in the Wesley household?

The testimony of Scripture is clear in the matter. Daniel, that man greatly beloved, for example, was shown that earthly events were merely the outcome of the struggle between supernatural powers (see chapter 10 of Daniel). There have been crisis periods through the ages where such struggles have entered more into the open. Just prior to the Exodus and at the first advent are typical cases. Does our present chapter suggest that once more the spiritual antagonists of men will manifest themselves prior to the blowing of the seventh trumpet, and the ushering in of the kingdom of glory?

Does the Bible as a whole suggest a great activity on Satan's part as his kingdom stumbles to its end? Consider the following Scriptures--Rev. 16:13,14 13:13; 19:20; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 18:2; 2 Thess.

2:9; Mt. 24:24. The first passage suggests that the final war between good and evil is the result of deceptions practiced by evil angels. The Greek word here used for miracles is the same as that in Rev. 13:13. Apparently many in the last generation will be led astray by deceptive signs offered by false religious teachers inspired by demons. If this is the case, it is not atheism or defiance of God that is so much to be feared, but rather counterfeit forms of Christianity such as spiritism masquerading as a Bible-based religion.

Age after age the warning of Prov. 1:24-33 has been fulfilled and God's Holy Spirit has ceased to plead with men sealed in rebellion. As men reject the witness of the gospel (Mt. 24:14, "no one heard their words"—Dostoyevsky), the witnessing Spirit withdraws, and they are left in darkness (Rev. 9:2), to become the prey of wicked spirits. Christ's parable regarding the house left garnished but empty applies here. All not occupied by the Spirit of God will become filled by the spirits of devils. In Christ's last great sermon to His church he warned that many with the light of truth would yet be lacking in the oil of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 25:1-13). Such will become the prey of evil spirits.

But what of the first trumpets? It has already been mentioned that the imagery of this prophetic chain sets forth creation in reverse, parallels the symbols of the vials, and is particularly based on the trumpet blowing about Jericho before its fall. That event was the necessary prelude to the inheritance of the promised land by the people of God.

Let us glance at popular expositions of these opening devastations.

Seiss is the classic representative. We quote from his exposition:

Here is the first touch of what fell from the censer of the Priest-Angel. I take the language as it stands. . . .²¹

The plagues of Egypt were literal realities. They were miracles of judgment, such as have never been since on earth. And if it is the design of God to repeat them on a larger scale, or to do again what at all corresponds to that which He then did, the world has yet to witness just such scenes as are literally described under these trumpets. And "as it was in the day that Israel came up out of Egypt," so it is in what John beheld under the sounding of this first trumpet. . . .

The whole picture is that of a tremendous tempest of hailstones, lightnings, and bloody products of the infuriated elements. Blood-red rains and blood-red snows are not unknown to the world. We occasionally hear of them. ... A storm of hail, and fire, and bloody interminglings, shall fall upon and envelop the world.²²

But most interpreters object to the taking of this as a literal description. If their objection is valid, they must be able to show a different meaning, and one with which we may reasonably rest with greater certainty. If earth does not mean earth, then what does it mean? And if earth means earth, then the trees must mean trees, and the grass grass, the burden is upon those who so affirm to furnish the evidence of some other meaning.²³

Seiss concludes by affirming the literal meaning of 8:7-12.²⁴

Walvoord speaks similarly:

In response to the sounding of the trumpet held by the first angel, a scene of desolation is spread abroad upon the earth caused by hail and fire mingled with blood. The judgment seems to be directed to vegetation, and a third part of the trees and all the green grass are burned. The tendency on the part of the expositors has been to read into this judgment a symbol of divine chastening, rather than literal hail and fire. The obvious parallel, however, is found in the tenth plague in Exodus 9:18-26. Inasmuch as the account of Exodus there was literal hail and fire, and the result of the judgment here is the burning up of the third part of the trees and all the green grass, there is no solid reason for not taking this judgment in its literal sense.²⁵

One notices that both writers claim that, inasmuch as the first trumpet has in the past had an analogous literal fulfillment on Egypt, there is no reason why a literal fulfillment cannot be expected again. But both writers have a problem with the element of "blood" which is foreign to the plague on Egypt. It is conceivable that hail and fire (lightning) might fall from heaven. But it is somewhat more difficult to picture these as mingled with blood coming from above. This difficulty is not, however, our chief reason for rejecting the method of exposition here adopted by Seiss and Walvoord and the multitude of their followers. It is the failure to acknowledge the symbolic nature of the book which

makes such interpretations unacceptable.

The procedure of these two commentators on the first four trumpets becomes impossible for the next two. Thus we find Walvoord saying "what John is seeing must symbolize demonic possession." He suggests that Euphrates should be taken literally, and likewise the number of 200 million. Note his words on the latter. "Considering the millions of people in the Orient, the literal interpretation is not impossible, especially in view of the population explosion."²⁶

This reference to the population explosion misses the point. John's whole world probably contained no more than the figure here. So he is using a number, the significance of which must be taken from its relationship to the world's population in the first century not the twentieth. John is declaring that the army was as numerous as all the people of the world. The same concept today would need a figure of 5000 million to express it. All talk of the warlike multitudes in Asia falls hopelessly short of John's idea.

But Walvoord is not yet through with his literalization of the passage.

On page 167, we read:

Further, the heads of the horses are compared to heads of lions out of whose mouths fire, smoke, and brimstone issue. This again is a description that might be comparable to modern mechanical warfare. . . .

Further light is cast on the character of the warfare in verse 18, where it is repeated that the third part of men are killed by the invading force; special mention is made of the means, namely, "by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths." This again seems to be a picture of modern warfare rather than of ancient weapons. This indicates that though there may be a disarmament in the early phases of the time period between the rapture and the second coming, by this time, namely towards the close of the tribulation, modern means of war are again being fully used.²⁷

We consider this exegesis to be on a par with that of other moderns who wish to read helicopters and atomic weapons, etc. into Rev. 9. Such exegetes ignore the basic principles of hermeneutics discussed in our introduction.

Seiss, as Walvoord's predecessor, speaks in the same vein. We quote him once more:

But the height and fulness of it, and its only *proper fulfilment*, remains to be accomplished in the great day to come--the Day of the Lord--the period of Christ's unveiling--when it will be literally realized in all its horrible details.

When these locusts issue from the pit, they find living among men certain people "who have the seal of God upon their foreheads," and whom they are not allowed to touch, because of that seal. It will not answer to jump at the conclusion that these were God's children in general, because it is specifically told us in a preceding chapter who they are. There is a definite number of them--144,000--and every one of them of Jewish blood.²⁸

On the same page he points out that these Jews are all virgins. He does not mean this literally as he makes clear elsewhere, but we cannot tell why not. That is, we do not see consistency in his mode of interpretation. A literal number, literal Jews, literal fulfillment of the details of trumpet six, but not literal celibacy! Did something in the context or common sense compel deviation from the accepted hermeneutic of Seiss, he could perhaps be excused, but he does not offer such reasons.

It seems to us that Seiss goes much too far in his statement about hell. Here it is. "It appears, then, that hell and hell torments are not the mere fictions which some have pronounced them. Neither are they as remote from this present world as men often dream. There is a fiery abyss, with myriads of evil beings in it, malignant and horrible, and there is but a door between this world and that." If he is speaking homiletically, it is not as difficult to grasp. But it is not easy to be sure just how much is intended to be taken literally, or how much is purely homiletic. Their own rule is, if in doubt, understand the passage literally.

Seiss was a Christian giant (though not in exegesis), and we hasten to add that many who understand the trumpet series symbolically have erred also. Seiss quotes Alford in this respect and adds a note of his own. (The section under discussion by both men is Rev. 9:5,6):

"I cannot forbear noticing the caprice of historical interpreters. On the command not to kill the men, etc., in verse 5, Elliott says, 'i.e. not to annihilate them as a political Christian body.' If, then, the same rule of interpretation is to hold, the 6th verse must mean that the 'political

Christian body' will be so sorely beset by these Mohammedan locusts, that it will vehemently desire to be annihilated, and not find any way. For it surely cannot be allowed that *the killing of men* should be said of their annihilation as a political body in one verse, and their desiring to die in the next should be said of something totally different, and applicable to their individual misery. Is it in consequence of foreseeing this difficulty that Mr. Elliott has, in the case of many important details in other places, omitted all consideration of this verse?"—Alford *in loc.*

Against this, the historical interpreters quote the command given to the Saracen army on the invasion of Syria: "*Destroy no palm-trees nor burn any fields of corn. Cut down no fruit-trees.*" But this was not the command of Mahomet or the Koran, but of Abubekr, and there is no instance of its repetition in all the Saracenic wars. The command itself shows what was the general habits of these fanatical hordes; besides, it excepted only palm and fruit trees, leaving other trees to be dealt with as inclination might prompt. It is simply absurd to speak of the Saracenic armies as having refrained from injuring trees and grass.²⁹

No doubt it is because of the valid nature of such criticisms that Willis W. Mead affirmed about Rev. 9 that it "is one of several fields in this book where the unrestrained fancy of the historic interpreter delights to perform its acrobatic feats."³⁰ But he then adds, "But there is nothing in the sacred Word to justify anything else than the most literal interpretation. These locusts are locusts, animated, demon-like engines of torture, having scorpion-like stings, with which they have power to inflict fearful torments on men during a period of five literal months."³¹

Neither should it be thought that only dispensationalists have literalized these first four trumpets. Very respectable commentators have done so. Swete, for example, says, "The first four Trumpet-blasts, like the first four Seal-openings, form a closely connected group. They describe the coming visitation as primarily affecting inanimate Nature. . ."³² Caird tells us that "the first four trumpet blasts usher in a series of natural disasters, affecting earth, salt water, fresh water, and sky"³³—(though Caird sees the great mountain of trumpet two as Rome). Mounce also suggests that the first plague "is directed primarily against nature,"³⁴ and that the trees destroyed "are probably to be taken as fruit trees, which were so important to the maintenance of life in Palestine."³⁵ However, Mounce does add in his discussion of the second trumpet that "the plague in Revelation is not to be understood as widespread pollution from volcanic action."³⁷ Nevertheless the plague affects "one third of the sea, its life and commerce."³⁸

Torrance gives only a few sentences specifically to the first four trumpets, saying that the "fire of Jesus Christ afflicts whole regions of human life, land and earth and sea and rivers and sky."³⁹ Eller, in his *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible* does not reveal much in this area, offering only one paragraph of exploration.⁴⁰ As for trumpets 5 and 6, less than a page "covers" both. This is not a criticism of Eller, or those like him, for as Homer Hailey says:

Any explanation of these phenomena which follow the trumpet sounds is generally unsatisfactory, even to the one who interprets. To interpret them literally and apply them to certain places and definite periods in history is impossible; to allegorize them leads into severe difficulties although it is clearly evident that there was symbolical significance to the consequences which followed the trumpets. To view these evils as physical calamities which occurred throughout the Roman Empire is likewise not satisfactory. It can, however, be concluded with certainty that these trumpets represent warnings of a supernatural judgment from the Almighty.⁴¹

Despite these difficulties, we believe, in view of the suggested keys of interpretation given earlier, that the trumpets, as with the seals, portray phases of the holy war between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.⁴² Says Hengstenberg:

Finally, the trumpet stands in a close relation to the excited character of war, and is peculiarly the warlike instrument—comp. Zeph. i. 16; Jer. iv. 19, xlii. 14; Ezek. vii. 14. Hence also, among the catastrophes to be inflicted by the Lord, which were denoted in general by the blowing of the trumpets, it was especially suited for announcing the tribulations of war that were impending from the Lord. Bengel: "In the prophecy is described God's war against the enemies of his kingdom, on account of which the trumpets are here peculiarly appropriate."⁴³

The trumpets are distinct from the seals in that they are directed particularly against those rejecting the gospel, whereas with the seals both parties suffered. Here God by His judgments besieges the

Jericho of this world to bring it down either by penitence or destruction, in order that Israel might possess the earth. The conjunction of "seven" and "trumpets" would have reminded John's readers of the use of both in connection with the fall of the Canaanite stronghold and also reminded them of the Jubilee.

Considering the parallel between Genesis one and these chapters, we are convinced that it is the very undoing of creation that is symbolized, and that the outward physical creation is a figure for the worldly community and its spiritual blessings. In view of the fact that the imagery here is borrowed from the plagues before the Exodus, we must recognize that in this instance also those who are oppressing God's people are being warned to free them, lest they, the captors, be destroyed. So the *goel* of Rev. 5, the Kinsman Redeemer and Avenger, is here portrayed in His second capacity. The Lamb who sheltered His own during the seals, seeing to it that His own were sealed and that the oil and the wine remained unhurt, now assumes the character of the Lion—the Avenger. Yet even His wrath is in mercy, thus only a "third part" of humanity is affected by various scourges in order that men might repent and be saved. Rev. 9:20-21.

When we remember the relationship between the trumpets and the seals we will be helped to exegete them aright. The seals foretold the opposition to the gospel offered by the white horse and its rider. It is because of this continuing opposition that the trumpets sound. They are remedial punishments. This is emphasized also by the reference to the incense prior to the casting down of the censer. That incense represents the merits and intercession of Christ—it parallels the message of the white horse. Because men have not rightly related themselves to this, Christ must stand back and permit judgment to fall.

Similarly, trumpets refer to the rivers and fountains of water, and the sun, moon, and stars—further emblems of the gospel and its blessings. Rivers and fountains are used in John's gospel, for example, for this purpose. Compare Jn. 4:14; 7:37-39. See also Eze. 47. When men do not appreciate the gospel, bitterness and darkness result. This is the teaching of the trumpets. Furthermore, to reject the gospel and the seal of the enlightening Spirit is to be left without defense in the onslaught of error from the pit and its demonic promulgators. Thus the next two trumpets assert that those who refuse the incense of Christ's righteousness, and all the blessings that flow from the gospel fountains will find life a heavy burden as the smoke of error hides the light of truth and brings confusion to the soul. The practical message is that it is safer to play with forked lightning than to reject the truth and mercy of God.

The Anchor Bible rightly tells us that "Rev. 8 shows Yahweh beginning to bring his weapons and troops into action. ... As in Isa. 42:13 Yahweh is portrayed as a furious man of war." It also points out that the reference to the flying eagle or vulture is used as a symbol of an invading army in Deut. 28:49; Jer. 48:40; Hos. 8:1; Hab. 1:8. Compare Rev. 8:13. This approach is perfectly consonant with the fact that the Revelator has drawn heavily from Joel's description of the Army of the Lord at the last day. Joel 2:4-11 reads:

 Their appearance is like the appearance
 of horses, and like war horses they run.
As with the rumbling of chariots, they
 leap on the tops of the mountains,
like the crackling of a flame of fire
 devouring the stubble,
like a powerful army
 drawn up for battle.

 Before them peoples are in anguish,
 all faces grown pale.
Like warriors they charge,
 like soldiers they scale the wall.
They march each on his way,
 they do not swerve from their paths.

 They do not jostle one another,
 each marches in his path;
they burst through the weapons
 and are not halted.
They leap upon the city,
 they run upon the walls;

they climb up into the houses,
they enter through the windows
like a thief.

The earth quakes before them,
the heavens tremble.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.
The LORD utters his voice
before his army,
for his host is exceedingly great;
he that executes his word is powerful.

For the day of the LORD is great
and very terrible;
who can endure it?

On these strange creatures Massyngberde Ford writes:

The arresting feature is the absence of the expression *ho kathemenos*, "he that sat upon," a phrase that would have been reminiscent of "he who sitteth upon the throne" in the preceding chapters and used of the riders in ch. 6. This might suggest that here there is no epiphany of God but that these horses belong entirely to the infernal realm. They stand in stark contrast to the horses of the seals which are described with simplicity and dignity.⁴⁴

Thus from the General Headquarters of heaven, the Lion of the tribe of Judah directs the strangest of armies against the rebel world--an army that includes legionnaires from hell itself, for all things, men, and devils, are under His supreme control and He does all things well for the ultimate benefit of His creatures. In interpreting these symbolic visions, the starting-point of the book in time and place must not be forgotten. The book is addressed to a persecuted church expecting worldwide devastation and onslaught from unbelievers. Thus, as Hengstenberg says, "Accordingly by the trumpets only great catastrophes can be denoted, through which destruction should be brought to the world, and salvation be first prepared for the church, and then actually brought in. The trumpets here are exciting for all-- joyfully exciting for the church, frightfully exciting for the world."⁴⁵

With these concepts in mind, it seems possible to make good sense of these chapters on the first six trumpets. Trumpet one is a clear allusion to catastrophic war on a large scale. The fire of wrath and war kindled by the holiness of God consumes and desolates. This plague has fallen again and again in history calling men to awake to eternal realities as creatures on the verge of death and judgment. Trumpet two uses the word for "as" or "like," telling us clearly that it is a symbolic portrayal. A mountain is a familiar symbol of a kingdom, and is used in the Old Testament of Babylon, the oppressor. The sea is a frequent symbol used for the nations of earth. Next, the agencies of blessing to man, streams and fountains, sun, moon, and stars (all symbols of the good offered by those to whom the gospel has come), become means of cursing. The heavenly warrior in his besiegement of the world curtails its blessings that some might see the connection between their sins and their sufferings.

The plagues of God first affect man's physical life, but after the first two trumpets we have a sequence of deepening calamities involving mind and spirit, until the day of penitence is past. Those who reject the seal of truth become subject to error and the prey of denizens of hell.⁴⁶ This, in brief, we believe is the message of the trumpets, and we turn now to their detailed exposition.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 8-9)

Chapter 23

Scripture passages which cast special light on these chapters include the following—Joshua 6:3-5; Gen. 1; Rev. 16:17,20; Amos 3:6; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16; Mt. 24:31; Lev. 25:9; 2 Chron. 29:25-28; Lev. 16:17; Num. 10:4-8; Ex. 19:19; Num. 29:1; Ex. 9:8-10,22-26; Joel 1:14,15; 2:1-16; Eze. 10:2; Psa. 62:1

The proportion of space allotted to the trumpets should be observed. Because the last three are woe trumpets, we might expect more description of them, and this is certainly true as regards the first two. The fifth trumpet occupies about twice as much space as Scripture gives to the first four altogether. When we consider the sixth trumpet, the woe preceding the final judgment of the Day of the Lord, it is briefer in descriptive content, but greater in intensity, than the first woe. Its reference to the Babylonian Euphrates, and the crisis hour of the last invasion of satanic agencies, points to chapters 13,16,17,19, where the Babylonian hosts symbolized by the Euphrates (Rev. 7:15), in attempting to destroy the faithful remnant, bring catastrophe to the deluded multitudes of earth.

The seventh trumpet is brief, when initially presented in 11:15-17, but we should understand this passage as but an introduction to the second half of the book, much of which falls within the time of the seventh trumpet. (See 14:14-16:21; chs. 18-20.) Similarly, the first six trumpets contain emblems of incompleteness such as "a third part," "five months," "a third part of men." But there is no such restriction in the description of the last trumpet. Instead, the kingdoms of the whole world become the kingdom of Christ and His saints.

In the following exposition, it will be kept in mind that apocalyptic imagery is like that of parables—not each separate item has special meaning in and of itself. Rather, the whole contributes to the impression made. In apocalyptic, the mind is informed through the eye of the imagination, and he who treats these images as though formulae will soon be lost in irrelevancies.

Rev. 8:1:

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half and hour.

The heptads of the seals, trumpets, and bowls are each marked by "cancelled conclusions," say F. F. Bruce and A. M. Farrer. ". . . the final and irrevocable judgment, which we expect to be executed in the last member of each heptad, is regularly deferred—in confirmation of the Bible's uniform witness to God's reluctance to press His 'strange work' to a full end."¹

Thus instead of the kingdom of God being ushered in with glory, we meet with silence. The interlude of chapter seven is over, but there is a solemn pause. This is in contrast to the voices and thunders from God's throne (4:5); the songs of the four living creatures and the elders, angels and of all creation (4:11; 5:12,13); the cry of the martyrs (6:10); the great shout of the redeemed multitude (7:10); and the angel's response (7:12). Says Bruce, "All heaven breathlessly awaits the final act of divine judgment." This silence of expectation (Hab. 2:20) is also the silence of prayer. Revelation constantly alludes to both the daily temple ritual and the yearly sacred calendar.

The end of the daily sacrifice was signaled by the blowing of trumpets. As soon as the sacrificial lamb was thrown upon the altar of burnt offering, the trumpets were blown. However, the sacrifice could not be made nor the trumpets blown until the assigned priest had offered incense upon the golden altar in the holy place. During the time the priest was in the holy place, the people in the court waited quietly and prayed for the coming of the Messiah. When the priest reappeared the sacrifice proceeded; the trumpets were blown and the sacrifice ended.²

Niles speaks similarly. "Thereupon fell a great silence like the half-hour silence which intervenes between the blood offering and the offering of incense in the daily liturgy."³ Particularly does silence remind us of the Day of Atonement, the only complete sabbath of the year, the most solemn time of judgment prior to the rejoicing of Tabernacles. Isaac Williams says of the "Silence in Heaven," "It is the day of the Atonement, the priest has gone into the holy place, and 'no man goes in the tabernacle till he come out.'"⁴

Rev. 8:2-5:

Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

It is vital that we remember that John records his visions as they came to him in time, and not as he may have understood their historical significance. The literary format of Revelation must be distinguished from its chronological import. The seventh seal unfolds in the seven trumpets,⁵ and the seventh trumpet unfolds in the third woe--the seven last plagues. This does not mean that the seven trumpets in their fulfillment succeed the sixth seal in time. The context shows this to be impossible, for the sixth seal brings to view the end of the world. With the seventh trumpet, and the seven last plagues, the situation is different, for we read that the seventh trumpet encompasses the wrath of God, and the plagues are said to be the fulfilling of that wrath. They are specially marked out as the "last" plagues, while the seven trumpets include earlier judgments. See Rev. 15:1.

Caird suggests that John is like a guide in an art gallery who has student stand back to receive a general impression (the sevenfold visions), and then move up to study the minutiae (the unnumbered visions). He affirms that the unity of the book "is neither chronological nor arithmetical, but artistic."⁶ Mounce says, "while there is a rather clearly discernible *literary* development, it is not intended to represent a corresponding historical development."⁷ Scott and others have pointed out that a perfectly logical apocalypse would be a contradiction in terms.

Verses 2-6 of this chapter should be compared with 15:5-8. The latter pictures the close of the temple ministry. No man can be in the sanctuary, for it is now the time of judgment. Next come the seven last plagues by which the divine wrath is ended. The situation is very similar here at the beginning of the trumpets, as there at the beginning of the plagues. But note this exception. These judgments invite men to repent, whereas the judgments of the last plagues fall when the time for repentance is over.

In Rev. 8:2, the golden censer with *much* incense and the subsequent casting down to earth of the censer with fire is reminiscent of the Day of Atonement.⁸ To Israel, that day was the close of the year's probation. Whoever did not humble himself before the Lord by abstinence from all work, by prayer, by penitence, and fasting, was cut off. On this day the believing Israelite was sealed. The blowing of trumpets at the beginning of the month had called the people to penitence, but at the close of *Yom Kippur* all was joy. In the year of Jubilee, the trumpets were blown at the end of this judgment day to mark the period of deliverance and rejoicing.

The symbolism in the seventh seal of the casting down of the censer of fire indicates a cessation of pleading, and the beginning of judgment. Christ said He came to cast fire on the earth. Those who did not respond to his "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden" became recipients of His terrible woes. Mt. 11:20-24; 23:1-39. Jn. 9:39 records the words of our Lord, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." In Jn. 12:48, He explains further, "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day."

The angel in this passage of Rev. 8:3-4 symbolizes the intercessory work of Christ. This priestly work is as essential as the Calvary offering, for without it none could be saved. While the Cross accomplished the redemption of mankind, it is essential that all men, hearing and repenting, should look to their heavenly high priest to receive the forgiveness of sins He has already wrought out for them. Those who do not afflict their souls when they hear the gospel will be cut off from the presence of God, as was their Saviour on the Cross. Compare Lev. 23:27-32; Dan. 9:26; Mt. 27:46.

Calvary was the Day of Atonement fulfilled. See Heb. 9 and 10, and Rom. 3:25. But Judgment Day is the Day of Atonement consummated. The trumpet judgments are a preview of the final judgment, and thus uses the same imagery as is connected with the plagues in 15:7,8. Those who reject the atonement of Christ are required to make their own on that day. That atonement is the second death-- a separation from God as real as Christ experienced at Golgotha. The four horns of the golden altar mentioned in 9:13, is also an allusion to the Day of Atonement. Compare Ex. 30:10. R. Way, E. Giller, and B. Brinsmead say in their work called "The Consummation": "The prelude to the trumpets comprises of 'peals of thunder, loud noises, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake' (8:5), all symbols of the consummative judgment. This awesome display is vitally connected with two other similar demonstrations in history: God's visit to Sinai (Ex. 19:16-18); and Christ's crucifixion (Mt. 27:51)"⁹

In this passage of Rev. 8:2-6, the prayers of all saints are seen as the force which moves the omnipotence of God. The prayers are those of 6:10, calling for the vindication of righteousness, and the intervention of the righteous Judge. Says Ramsey:

Mark, too, and mark it well, that there is no such thing as unanswered prayer, if it be indeed true prayer. The much incense given to the angel was to be given to the prayers of "all saints;" the cry of the feeblest and humblest one of all the praying hosts is as fully heard, rises up before God as surely, as that of the strongest and most honoured leader of the host, and exerts the same influence in shaking the thrones of iniquity, and overturning the powers of the world.¹⁰

In 5:8, the incense is said to be "the prayers of the saints." Because incense was offered at the time of congregational prayer such symbolism is appropriate. But strictly speaking the incense does not represent prayer, but the fragrant merits of Christ, which make the faulty prayers from erring worshippers acceptable. Says Lenski:

. . . All this added incense material which goes up in a great volume of smoke represents the intercession of Christ for his church (*intercessio specialis*), which adds power and efficacy to the prayers of the church. The Lord increases the sweet savor of acceptable prayer. That is why he tells us to pray in His name, and why the hearing of our prayers is so certain.¹¹

Until we perceive that our prayers ascend only if embodied in the intercessions of our great High Priest, as we rest on the merits of His atonement, we can never pray effectually. It is because we are one with our Representative by faith that He can make our wants His own. We are His body, and what we plead for in harmony with His name or character, He enacts. Sometimes our prayers bring down sore disciplines upon ourselves, and stern judgments on those for whom we intercede, because God answers not according to our words, but according to our ultimate intent. He still leads Israel by a way it knows not, but it is never otherwise than we would have chosen, had we known the end from the beginning. For the believer, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the highest trust and most weighty honor, and for the unbeliever, often his only hope of glory is to be first humiliated into the dust.

Verse 5 alludes to Eze. 10:2 and Ex. 19:16. Christ declared that He came to cast fire on the earth, and in this passage that fire is shown to come from the altar of the atonement. It is the Cross which brings the most weighty judgment upon men. All that follows in the succeeding two chapters can only be rightly interpreted in the light of this verse. The dissolutions of earth which we shall witness, the very opening of hell, the grief, torment, and death of men are all the result of rejecting the precious gift of Calvary.

Some have expressed this truth with power:

When the seventh trumpet sounds there is the ark of the celestial covenant, the woman and the little child. Thus we are led to interpret all as being the illustration, and, it could be said, the cosmic imagery, of what takes place during the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That which happened in heaven, as a spiritual event, but also in the cosmos during this venture, is a parable of the profound reality of Jesus Christ, of what has been changed, transformed in the world and in heaven by these terrestrial events. It is the breaking of the powers and of history. . . . the general catastrophic disturbance, described to us as cosmic plagues, is the allegory of the disturbance of the world, of its perturbation because of the fulfillment of this intolerable mystery of God. It is intolerable, impossible, that God in his fullness abandon himself, cease to be God and become man. It is intolerable, impossible, that God die in Jesus. It is intolerable, impossible, that a man truly dead be raised and that death be conquered. It is this triple impossibility that brings about the general upheaval of all creation and the celestial powers. If we would come to take seriously for a moment this

unbelievable mystery of the Incarnation, this cataclysm that can mean "God is no longer God, he has abandoned himself, he has delivered himself up, he has stripped himself, he has reduced himself to being only a man," then the cataclysms described in chapters 8 and 9 would appear to us benign. They are really the allegory of this incomparable, incommensurable event, and by means of them we perceive the meaning of this mysterious decision of God for the whole creation.¹²

Says Torrance:

The next thing we see in John's vision is the bitterness caused on the earth by prayer and fire. The fire of Jesus Christ afflicts whole regions of human life, land and earth and sea and rivers and sky. Everything is disturbed and flung into bitter tension by the Cross of the Lamb of God, and so the great fire that falls from Heaven to earth is called Wormwood—so embittered do men become toward the Christian Gospel, and angry when the secrets of their hearts are revealed.¹³

There is something else that happens when Christians pray in earnest and God's fire burns, and we see that in the ninth chapter. It is the opening of the bottomless pit. The Gospel always discovers the secrets of man's heart; that is why the Jews were so embittered against Jesus because the truth of the Gospel brought to light and laid bare the secret depths of their souls. They crucified Jesus, for they could not stand in His searching presence any longer. They were self-righteous people but the holy Majesty of Jesus showed them to be whited sepulchres, and they were cut to the heart and gnashed on Him with their teeth.

St. John's vision likens the Word of God to a star that falls out of Heaven and opens the bottomless pit of human nature. The Word of God alone has the key to that dark bottomless pit. What a terrible reaction ensues! Preach the Gospel and keep on preaching it, and either men are ashamed and converted or the bottomless pit is opened. Surely that is what has happened in the western world, in civilized Europe, as well as in the land of the Mau Mau, for example. The Cross of Jesus Christ has provoked such a reaction against it that all the latent evil in men has been pushed to the surface in unbelievable wickedness and bloodshed. The very bottomless pit has been opened in our midst, so that heaven and earth have been darkened with its fumes and the whole atmosphere of the world has been poisoned.¹⁴

Peter at Pentecost announced the new faith by using the prophecy of Joel about blood and fire and pillars of smoke. He thus echoed other prophets such as Malachi, who likened the coming of Christ to the appearance of refiner's fire, and His day to a day that would burn as an oven so that all the proud, and all that do wickedly become stubble. See Mai. 3 and 4.

As already mentioned, the thunder, voices, lightning, and earthquake of this passage must be linked with the first occurrence of such at Sinai. Sinai, the place of the law, is the symbol of judgment as surely as is the casting down of the censer and the blowing of trumpets (also used at Sinai). So we are compelled to see in the following descriptions evidences of the wrath of God upon those who have refused His pleadings and oppressed His messengers. See also Ps. 29:3,4; Job 37:1-5.

While we believe the trumpets to be apotelesmatic, with recurring applications through the ages as is the case with the churches and the seals, yet we must not lose sight of the linear chronological significance. When we read in 10:7 that "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished," we find an inescapable allusion to both the process and the end of the chain of the trumpets. 11:18 indicates the same when it points to the events of the final trumpet as including the anger of the nations and the coming of God's final wrath. Hengstenberg quotes Bengel and proceeds to comment on the prophetic significance of the trumpets thus:

Bengel: "Frankincense and prayer draw a great deal after it: it is acceptable, it will be heard; God then causes his righteous judgments to go forth, for a terror to the world, for the discomfiture of his enemies, and for the advancement of his kingdom." . . . --The internal connection between the fiery prayer, and the fiery indignation which is to consume the adversaries (Heb. x. 27), is shadowed forth by the circumstance, that of the same fire of the altar, with which the frankincense was kindled, there was taken and thrown upon the earth. By the first use of the fire in kindling the frankincense, it was in a manner consecrated for the second. Fire is here, as usually in the Apocalypse (comp. on iv. 5), the symbol of the holy wrath and judgment of God.--The fire, the voices, etc, have here only a typical, a prophetic character. The fulfilment of the prophecy begins with the first trumpet and closes with the last;

Rev. 8:6-7:

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

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

The incongruous mixture of symbols assures us that we are not to look for a literal fulfillment. As Lenski says:

Hail is ice, the opposite of fire. How hail and fire were mixed with blood we do not know, for the very combination of these three shows that natural hail, fire, and blood are not referred to.¹⁶

We agree with Hengstenberg's comment on the passage:

. . . John beholds concentrated in a great and fiery hail-storm the desolations of the war, which through the course of centuries constantly bursts forth anew against the world that is at enmity with God.¹⁷

The "mingled with blood" gives for both the hail and the fire the more specific determination—shews, that the storm of hail and the fire are emblems of war in its desolating and consuming property. . . .

. . . all the other plagues in this group bear a simple character, and that they have generally to do with war; and so, indeed, that the difference in the particular trumpets only consists in the diversity of the symbols. The same matter is represented in a series of manifold, frightful images, which should fill the mind and fancy with holy dread before the Lord, as going to manifest himself in the approaching war of the world.—This prophecy is not more definite than that of our Lord, "Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars," and "nation shall rise again against nation."¹⁸

Because judgment always begins at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17; Eze. 9:6; Rev. 16:2; Jer. 25:15-29), it is not strange that many have seen the destruction of Jerusalem and the devastation of Judea in this picture. Mauro refers to Deut 28:45-47 and 28:22, where God foretells what will overtake His people "at their latter end" if unfaithful. "For a *fire* is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on *fire* the foundations of the mountains" (Deut. 32:22). Passages that should be considered include Lev. 9:24 and 10:1,2,6. Another point worth keeping in mind that "earth can be translated "land," and to a New Testament reader familiar with the Old Testament, the term would be reminiscent of the land of Israel. Usually in the book of Revelation where "land" is contrasted with "sea," it implies the region of the professed people of God. 1 Thess. 2:15,16 declares that God's wrath has come upon Israel after the flesh "completely" or "for ever." See RSV footnote, and compare Gen. 15:16; Mt. 23:32; Lu. 21:23,24.

Other relevant passages on the symbolism of the first trumpet include Eze. 38:19-22; Psa. 11:6; Isa. 28:1,2; 29:1,6; Isa. 10:16-20; Jer. 11:16,17; 21:14; 22:17; Eze. 15:6,7; Zech. 11:1,6; Joel 1:19,20. We do not think it necessary to separate the apocalyptic symbols one by one as their purpose is impressionistic rather than technical description, but none the less, one cannot but be reminded of our Lord's several references to the future judgment on the dry fruitless tree of the Jewish nation. See Mt. 21:19; Mk. 11:13-21; Lu. 23:31; 13:1-9; and compare Psa. 80:8-11,15,16; 79:1-5.

Age after age, judgment has begun with those to whom much has been given. Any church claiming advanced light needs to remember that of her much will be expected, and that when the Lord does His strange work of judgment He begins with His own.

Rev. 8:8-9:

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

The Greek word translated *like* should be noted here. It is something *like* a great mountain that is

precipitated. Again we are warned not to literalize. In Scripture a mountain is used as a symbol of a kingdom or nation, and this passage is built on Jer. 51:24 foretelling the fall of Babylon the oppressor. Christians who saw in Rome the new Babylon may quickly have drawn from the imagery of the second trumpet a prophecy of the downfall of the empire even now threatening to martyr them. Had the church not grown slack in her task, the empire would have fallen centuries earlier. Relevant Scriptures for the exegesis of this passage include Isa. 2:2,3; 13:4; Dn. 2:35,44,45; Psa. 50:3; 97:3; Jer. 4:4; Isa. 10:16-18; 2 Sam. 22:9-16; Dn. 7:2,3,17; Rev. 17:1,15; Eze. 32:6; 38:21,22; Joel 2:30; Mic. 3:10; Eze. 47:9,10; Zech. 11:2-4; Hab. 1:14.

Thiele comments as follows on this trumpet:

After the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state, the next scene of judgment is one on a much broader and vaster scale, one in which a large share of the creatures in the international scene were to be involved. The second trumpet calls for some terrible, fiery, destructive force to fall into the troubled seas of the ancient world and to turn their turbid waters into blood. After the fall of Jerusalem came the fall of Rome. As the Jews had outlived their days of national usefulness, so also had Rome. Avarice and greed, lewdness and intemperance, extravagance and voluptuousness, cruelty and rapaciousness,—every vice known to demons and men,—had so weakened the moral fibre of the inhabitants of the Roman world that they were ripe for dissolution. The empire of the Caesars was doomed. The ax of divine retribution must fall. Like flames of fire from heaven came Genseric the Vandal, Alaric the Goth, and Attila the Hun, leaving in their wake scenes of ruin, desolation, carnage, and blood. Irresistible and destructive as a flaming mountain, the hordes of barbarians fell upon the peoples of Rome, till all the empire was involved in a grand and irretrievable catastrophe. Rome was gone and justice again had had its way. 19

Justin Smith speaks similarly:

When a great political power, like Babylon or like Rome, perishes, the immediate consequences are often such as are here implied. Who does not recall the social chaos, the moral anarchy, the overflow of every species of poisonous delusion, the slaughter and the general misery, which followed the destruction of the French monarchy, resulting in the revolution so memorable in history? Similar in character, though on a far wider scale, were the events following the destruction of pagan Rome. That overthrow was, as every reader of history knows, brought about by an irruption of barbarian invaders, by which, in a long series of destructive wars, the various countries embraced in the empire were overrun, cities sacked and burned, lives destroyed in myriads, and the very foundations of social order for a while torn away. The imagery in our passage represents, almost with the accuracy of literal fact, the aspect of the whole Roman world, during that long period in which the old civilization perished. . . 20

The "third part" in these trumpets is not to be pressed. It signifies limitation rather than complete devastation. God in wrath still remembers mercy, and more escape than fall.

Rev. 8:10-11:

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

The fallen star is first brought to our attention. From the very opening chapter of this book a star is used as a symbol of a divine messenger. Dan. 12:3 teaches the same. But it should not be concluded that this symbol points to a specific person. Rather it is a personification, just as is the case with the beast—the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, Balaam, Antipas, etc. Here it is implied that some bearing the responsibility of teaching the gospel have fallen from grace and returned to the world.

As the second trumpet pointed to the downfall of a political power, and used an earthly image to portray that fact, so now we have a heavenly image to point to a downfall of some from a higher level than any earthly government. Ceasing to be a source of light, the star becomes a source of bitterness and death.

Rivers and fountains are emblems of life and beneficence. See Psa. 36:8,9; Jer. 2:13; 17:8,13; Isa. 12:3; 41:18; Deut. 8:7,8; Prov. 13:14; 14:27; Joel 3:18-20; Zech. 13:1; Rev. 21:6; Jn. 4:10,11; Eze. 47:1-12; Prov. 25:26; Jer. 6:7; Jas. 3:11; Hos. 13:15,16; Jer. 50:12,38. One writer has beautifully applied the symbolism as follows:

God made Joseph a fountain of life to the Egyptian nation. . . . Every worker in whose heart Christ abides. . . is a worker together with God for the blessing of humanity. As he received from the Saviour grace to impart to others, from his whole being flows forth the tide of spiritual life. . . . 'In that day,' says the Scriptures, 'there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.' . . .21

The fountain is open for all. The weary and exhausted ones are offered the refreshing draught of eternal life.²²

The heart that receives the word of God is not as a pool that evaporates, not like a broken cistern that loses a treasure. It is like the mountain streams, fed by unfailing springs, whose cool, sparkling waters leap from rock to rock, refreshing the weary, the thirsty, the heavy-laden. It is like a river constantly flowing, and as it advances, becoming deeper and wider, until its life-giving waters are spread over all the earth. The stream that goes singing on its way, leaves behind its gift of verdure and fruitfulness. The grass on its banks is a fresher green, the trees have a richer verdure, the flowers are more abundant.

Not far from Jericho, in the midst of fruitful groves, was one of the schools of the prophets; and thither, after the ascension of Elijah, Elisha went. During his sojourn among them, the men of the city came to the prophet, and said, 'Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren.' The spring that in former years had been pure and life-giving, and had contributed largely to the water supply of the city and the surrounding district, was now unfit for use. . . . 23

The world needs evidences of sincere Christianity. The poison of sin is at work at the heart of society. . . . Nigh and afar off are souls in poverty and distress, weighed down with a sense of guilt, and perishing for want of a saving influence. The gospel of truth is kept ever before them, yet they perish, because the example of those who should be a savor of life to them, is a savor of death. Their souls drink in bitterness because the springs are poisoned, when they should be like a well of water springing up into everlasting life.²⁴

Wormwood is a symbol of bitterness through sin and apostasy. See Deut. 29:18; Jer. 9:15,16; Amos 5:7; Acts 8:23 and Heb. 12:15. Thiele comments on this trumpet as follows:

Here a remarkable, revolutionary transformation is depicted. The once pure, life-giving fountains become contaminated and corrupt as the death-star Wormwood falls upon them, and henceforth men die rather than live as they partake of the polluted waters. The pure church is a clear stream and a life-giving fountain. When the enemy enters that church it becomes corrupt. Henceforth it is a scourge rather than a blessing to men. Satan rather than Christ is in control, a savor of death unto death instead of life unto life. What history has witnessed in this regard in the past, history will again witness to a still greater degree in the future. As the Spirit of God will be withdrawn and Satan endeavors to take over complete control of the church and the world, the "man of sin" will manifest himself in a way never seen before.²⁵

This third trumpet presents the opposite of the historical account in Ex. 15 where the bitter waters were made sweet by the tree. Whenever the tree of the Cross is removed from the heart or community, only bitterness can ensue and then death.

Rev. 8:12-13:

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

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice, as it flew in midheaven, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets which the three angels are about to blow!"

The prediction here is similar to the foregoing. While the first two trumpets spoke of judgments on oppressing powers, these next two foretell the judgment that follows apostasy among the people of God. As with the preceding trumpet we have heavenly imagery here. The celestial fires image the light of God that brings life to the world.

Huntingford echoes many other commentators when he writes as follows:

God smites the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heaven of those who will not behold their light. And so it was for many ages throughout the length and breadth of Christendom. 'All these symptoms of decay,' says a writer describing the dark ages, 'were either the means or the consequences of hierarchical tyranny. This, at its earliest outset spread around it the first shades of mental darkness. In proportion as it advanced, the gloom deepened; and the hour of its culmination was the noon of night.' 'No circumstance is so prominent on the first survey of society during the earlier centuries of this period as the depth of ignorance in which it was immersed; . . . an inconceivable cloud of ignorance overspread the whole face of the Church, hardly broken by a few glimmering lights, who owe almost the whole of their distinction to the surrounding darkness.' And this was a righteous judgment on a Church blinded by pride, and avarice, and worldly ambition. 'For this cause God sent them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.' 'Those who shun the light,' says Irenaeus, 'shall justly inhabit darkness; . . . those who shun the eternal light of God are themselves the cause of their own eternal darkness.'

Thus St. John beholds the same judgment falling upon Mediaeval Christendom which Micah had threatened of old against the rulers of Israel: 'Thus saith the Lord, concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace. . . night be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision, and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.' 'I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.'²⁶

Ramsey speaks similarly:

The necessary result of the overthrow of civil governments, and the prostitution of church power, is to smite the lights of the world, when the more immediate consequences do not lead to repentance. Truth speedily becomes obscured. Selfishness, passion and worldly lusts rule the heart, and ignorance settles down upon the nations, or on any portion of them thus visited.²⁷

The darkness mentioned in this scene "anticipates the transition from divine warnings to demonic woes,"²⁸ for darkness in Scripture is often linked with supernatural evil. See Mt. 8:12; 2 Cor. 6:14,15; Col. 1:13; 2:13-15; Rev. 16:10. The eagle's warning promises that the worst is yet to be. As usual, this seven also (the trumpets), is divided into a four and a three.

Rev. 9:1-12:

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

In appearance the locusts were like horses arrayed for battle; on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lion's teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings, and their power of hurting men for five months lies in their tails. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

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

This chapter in many respects is the most graphic of all Scripture, even of all literature. It is impressionistic art at its best. Any reader of these verses senses that they have something to say of the seriousness of life and choice, and the terrible nature of sin. In some respects, the homiletics benefit us more through their reflection on this chapter than do the exegetes.²⁹ The latter often confess themselves baffled, and are content with discussion of linguistic or similar details rather than grappling with the overall concepts. Mounce says, "There can be no specific answer to the question of exactly who or what is symbolized by the plague of locusts."³⁰ Lenski writes:

If the first four trumpets have been variously interpreted, the confusion in regard to the fifth and the sixth is still greater. In fact, this confusion is so great that the few sober voices which in a measure touch the truth of the more elaborate symbolism of these two judgments are scarcely heard. One might, in the face of it all, simply give up in despair, close the book, and say nothing whatever.³¹

But some things can and should be said in the attempt to elucidate this striking prophecy. It represents the spiritual torment and death that come to those who persist in resisting the divine invitation to repent. In this chapter we read of pain like that of a scorpion's sting--intense and hardly bearable, but not mortal. Those stung will desire death, but have not the courage to bring it about because for them it would not be safe to die. Life becomes a breathing in of smoke, a scorching with fire and brimstone. Instead of sunshine there is darkness; instead of truth there is error, and because of the hardening of the soul, eternal death awaits.

Only those with the seal of God are safe. Is not the teaching here clear and as shrill a warning as a trumpet's blast? Only those marked by the Spirit of God, who have come into a right relationship with their Creator and Redeemer are safe from the influences of hell.

Further, we notice that a progression is plainly implied by these two trumpets. The first four seemed to blast man's external physical blessings and all that was symbolized thereby. But here it is made clear that the soul itself is affected. And the progression is also cosmic. Feret surely is correct when he writes:

The really infernal powers of evil (fire, smoke and brimstone) (9,17; cf. 9,2 and 21,8) all have a bearing on the crescendo of events towards the end. As we have said, this is all characteristic of the class of literature to which the Apocalypse belongs. The whole series of teachings must always culminate in some fact or other connected with the last days. Here, the last sixth trumpet (the one immediately preceding the last) already shows us that there will be a vast increase of the diabolical malignance of error and deceit toward the end.³²

Fourth, we see that the real nature of the battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness has to do with the mind. The smoke obliterating the sun from view is the obfuscation of error. Those whose foreheads (minds) are sealed are safe. But none other. What we believe is all important, if we believe indeed. But committal to error is not just a matter of careful intellectual choice. Here it is a matter of deception. A scorpion is doubly malevolent because of its deceit. Says Feret:

He looks you straight in the face, giving no hint of his hidden sting; he almost inspires confidence. Then suddenly his tail rises and strikes the unsuspecting face that lies open before him. 'And they had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails' (9,10). The locusts are false as scorpions, as false as the devil himself, and they are nourished by this same falsehood.³³

Is it not made clear in chapters eight and nine that those who refuse the gospel will not be able to refuse its alternative --the soul and body destroying alternative? Once the springs of truth are poisoned, and the light of heaven is darkened, none are well enough, perceptive enough to avoid the errors of the pit. Let us now apply ourselves to the symbols.

Rev. 9:1-5:

And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit; he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and

they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth.

Little provides an apt summary.

The star here mentioned is no physical star, but a personification. . . . The personification of the star represents this judgment as coming from God as a curse upon men. Many commentators conceive of the abyss as the realm of the dead; but the fact cannot be denied that this word as used in Revelation designates only the present abode of the devil and his angels; and the key which was given to this star was for the purpose of opening the pit of the abyss which was locked. This power to open the pit of hell and allow its infernal punitive powers of delusion to burst forth upon the earth is a divine, not a devilish power.

A falling star is a common apocalyptic symbol. The Book of Enoch uses it repeatedly. But as we have said before, John's book is not dependent upon other apocalyptic sources. He draws from a common stock, most if not all of which is found in the Old Testament. Isa. 14 is the Old Testament root of this figure. Long ago, those in fear of Babylon were promised that the destroyer of the nations would himself fall. For John there is a fall more significant than the losing of an earthly throne. In the letters he had urged believers to let no man take their crown--but it was no earthly crown. For him, falling from heaven to earth is a symbol of apostasy. A few chapters on he will use the symbol this way. "His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. . . ." (12:4).

It is not wise to try and identify the star with some arch-heretic of old, or some modern troubler of the church. Single figures stand for classes frequently in the Apocalypse. The nearest we should get to identification is the invoking of v. 11 which points to Satan himself, and therefore so to his representatives in every age. The contrast between 1:18 and 9:1 should not be missed. Christ is actually in charge of the pit of death, but there is another, the Destroyer, who claims dominion. The abyss is the same as the Old Testament *tehom*, and this reference is another indication that in the trumpets we have the undoing of creation. Ellul suggests:

. . . in chapter 9:1-12, there is even the unchaining of the Abyss, that is to say, the return to chaos, the plunge again into nothingness. Abaddon is absolute destruction, the decreation. It is the triumph of chaos, the return to what was before the Spirit of God installed order in this disorder; it is Sheol that prevails. In all we are here in the presence of the opposite of that which was the creative act of God.³⁴

The pit, to every original reader of John's book, meant the abode of Satan and his angels. In Lu. 8:31, we have a typical usage of the term. To rightly estimate the scale of the conflict here brought to view, let us remember the truth expressed by Roetzel. "In the apocalyptic materials demonic powers and principalities as well as flesh and blood are the enemy of God. In the prophetic writings God battles primarily against flesh and blood. The apocalyptic battles are of cosmic proportions. . . ." ³⁵

Let it be observed that the first thing seen after the opening of the pit is not the locusts, but smoke. This is the key to the nature of this plague. Carpenter has caught the intention of the symbolism when he says:

The first result of the opening of the pit is the diffusion of such a dense smoke that light and atmosphere are darkened. In the previous vision there was an obscuration of light arising from the smiting of the luminaries; in this the obscuration arises from causes external to the luminaries. In that the light-giving power was enfeebled; in this the light is not enfeebled, but hindered.³⁶

. . . Now, this obscuration is surely the diffusion on earth of evil thoughts and ideas, the spirit of falsehood and hate, hostility to truth, and enmity against God and man. The bright, clear air made gladsome by the sun is darkened; "all forms that once appeared beautiful became hideous."³⁷

Many commentators have recognized that satanic errors are intended by the smoke from the pit which obscures the light. Says Ellul:

What characterizes these locusts is the face of a man, the hair of a woman, and a crown of gold, the teeth of a lion, a breast and wings of iron. In other words, *mixture is their dominant trait*. But, in addition, the evil that they do they do from behind, like the scorpion. Which means that they act by the power of the lie. It is the terrible character of that which is not terrible, the seductive nature of that which is not seducing; they have the appearance of gold ("what looked like gold"). They represent the mortal and deadly reality which remains secret.

A certain number of exegetes see here in fact the power of the lie. And this is not incorrect.³⁸

This emphasis on deceptive error is made prominent in the remaining chapters of the book, and we believe the ultimate application of this passage is eschatological. But Scripture is more concerned with personal reformation than merely edification regarding the future. John knows that sin never looks like sin when we are in the process of temptation. Hooks are baited, and the great adversary is a better fisherman than any of the gospel giants. Sin approaches us as Joab did Abner, with an outstretched hand and a welcome, while the other hand is ready to thrust in the dagger. Jael brought Sisera butter "in a lordly dish," and thus does almost all evil approach us. In the twelfth chapter, it will be emphasized that Satan is not only an accuser but a deceiver. The chapter following shows a lamb-like creature which ultimately speaks as a dragon, deceiving those that dwell on the earth. It is all an elaboration of Paul's picture--"The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false (2 Thess. 2:9-11)."

Such a development is inevitable because the Light of the World has appeared. Men must either rejoice in it or try to cover its light. The bottomless pit here is secondarily an apt symbol of man's depravity. John certainly knew the story of Lu. 8:26-36 and believed in the reality expressed in Mk. 1:32. He who hears the gospel will find his potential for evil opened unless he surrenders to the Word.

The opening of the abyss and the later symbolism of the healing of the deadly wound mean the same thing. The deadly wound of Rev. 13 is not just a wound, but death. The healing is resurrection. The pit is frequently the emblem of death and the grave. See Rom, 10:7. Thus resurrection from the dead and emerging from the pit are identical concepts and ultimately fit the final revival of Antichrist. But the personal immediate significance should be noted. That man who thinks that evil in him is dead will find many a disillusionment. While gunpowder is not always exploding, it is always explosive. So it is with sin. No serpent can be measured until it is uncoiled, and no one has ever seen the full uncoiling of the evil within him. Even the Christian who has died with Christ and who has crucified the flesh with its passions, will find a resurrection of the old nature, unless by faith he continually consents to reckon it dead. When a bottle of dirty water is left still, the dirt sinks and the water appears clear. But give the bottle a shaking, and what then? Even so with many professed Christians when they are given a shaking. Only when the floods rise and the tempests blow do we discover how firmly a house is established on its foundation. We submit that John under inspiration is here using a symbol that is bottomless in more than one sense. Blessed is he that readeth. . . .

Feret has suggested that these trumpets have particular relevance for our own day. Others have the same conviction. We are the generation that witnessed Dachau, Belsen, and Buchenwald. We have known the holocaust. Our century is the only one that has seen two world wars. In our day, the priest of science has become a mad doctor inventing Frankensteins. All our inventions are two-edged swords, able to smite good or evil. Through our mass media we have unlocked the bottomless pit of filth, prejudice, and covetousness. Torrance speaks truly when he affirms that "the very bottomless pit has been opened in our midst, so that heaven and earth have been darkened with its fumes and the whole atmosphere of the world has been poisoned. . . . Out of the bottomless pit there have come also fiery horsemen bringing destruction and arson and sword to a third part of the whole earth. Ideas become ideologies and ideologies assume material shape."³⁹

The evils of hell are likened to locusts because of their multiplicity and to serpents because of *the* Serpent, the Father of lies, their originator. The locust symbol has been taken from Joel 2 where the day of the Lord was pictured as an avalanche of locusts. Is not this origin another indication of the eschatological significance of these woe trumpets? Apocalyptic is ever concerned with the end, and all else is preface. Ex. 10:12-20 is the other chief source, and there a judgment plague on the ancient oppressor Egypt is described. But as Kiddle says of John:

He is elucidating what we should call the *ethical* significance of the coming troubles, the *spiritual* values that were being determined by the last plagues. That is why he ingeniously asserts that these locusts were expressly told not to commit the destructive mischief in the natural world that they would perpetrate under normal conditions.⁴⁰

Rev. 9:4-6:

. . . they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only

those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads; they were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion, when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death will fly from them.

In this passage we should note the repetition of the "like" that appeared in 8:8. It occurs over and over from 9:5ff. Note especially vv. 7-10. This is definite evidence that we are invited to look for the reality under the symbolism, and not take the latter literally. This conviction is reinforced by the command of verse four. Ordinary locusts do not harm men, but only the vegetation of earth. In this instance, the case is the reverse. Furthermore, no locust stings like a scorpion making its prey desire death. Hailey, who in verse two recognized the symbolism as representing the darkening of the light of truth by Satan's deceptions and delusions, sees the locusts as representing "sin's own destructive force. Sin inflicts pain and culminates in the self-destruction of those involved. The sinner is actually at war against himself."⁴¹ But it is important that our generalizing does not miss the specific implied by this passage. It is when our early carelessness in sin has done its work that the bottomless pit is really opened, and we become helpless before delusion and deception from the father of lies. See Jn. 8:44. It is as the world has gotten further and further from the light of the gospel that it becomes less able to distinguish truth from error. John certainly intends to paint the gradual disintegration or "de-creation" of the world as the birth pangs of the new.

Verse 4 assures us that in every age the faithful are protected by the seal of God. All who believe are thus sealed. Eph. 1:13. The seal of Rev. 7:1 pointed to the special sealing of protection in the great day of God's wrath, but even this sealing has a recurring application in all days of God's judgments. Most commentators discussing the "five months" allude to the life span of the locust, but it is doubtful that this is actually the meaning here. No locust invasion is known to have lasted this long.⁴² This plague is complemented by the next, and therefore constitutes only half the story. Egypt had ten plagues of devastation, and it is possible that the five here intimates the half share of this first woe. The number is certainly meant like previous numbers (a quarter, a third) to indicate fragmentary rather than complete desolation. As no visitation by locusts lingers more than a short time, so God's preliminary judgments are like trumpet calls to awakening. They are calls to penitence that men might be saved.

Scorpions are usually found in dry and in dark places, under stones and in ruins, particularly in warm climates. Their sting is at the end of the tail, and has at its base a gland which secretes poisonous fluid. Always there results much suffering, and often alarming symptoms. In Lu. 10:18-20, scorpions are shown to be symbolic of demons, and in Isa. 9:15 a prophet of lies is likened to a tail. But the main import of the symbol is that the sting comes unexpectedly, not from the front of the attacker, but from the rear. It is part of the emphasis on deception.

Verse 6 uses a characteristic expression signifying great anguish. See Job 3:20,21; 7:15; Jer. 8:3; Lu. 23:30; Rev. 6:16. It is not meant to be pressed literally, any more than the context.

Rev. 9:7-12:

In appearance the locusts were like horses arrayed for battle; on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lion's teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings, and their power of hurting men for five months lies in their tails. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

It is not usually advisable to tease apart apocalyptic description, but it is clear in the present instance that some specific concepts are present in the grotesque image presented. Horses point to strength in war, crowns to a history of conquest, the human faces imply intelligence and remind us that this plague operates through fallen human beings. The women's hair has been seen as either expressing seductiveness or vitality, the scales as breastplates indicate that they are invulnerable. In Acts 26:14 and 1 Cor. 15:55 we have the same Greek word for sting as here. Joel 1:6 gives us the source for the reference to the teeth like lion's teeth, and the power to devour and destroy is taught thereby. See also 1 Kings 12:11 where a whip is likened to a scorpion because of the terrible pain involved. In v. 11 we have the principle of contrast, so often found in this book, illustrated once more. While Christ means "Saviour," his great antagonist is the opposite—a "destroyer." Abaddon is a personification of

"destruction" which in the Old Testament means either destruction itself, or the grave the place of destruction. See Job 26:6; 28:22; Psa. 88:11; Prov. 15:11; 27:20. The Greek equivalent is Apollyon. The Psalmist rejoiced that by the Word of God he was kept safe from the destroyer, but this chapter tells of multitudes who have rejected the light of the Word, and therefore are enveloped by the darkness of the Prince of lies. In *TDNT* (1:4), the article by Jeremias on Abaddon is worthy of study.

We have found before that Revelation constantly uses the proleptic method whereby coining events are anticipated and mentioned in advance. Rev. 1:7; 2:20; and 3:10 are typical instances. Already in the trumpets we have had reference to apostasy and falling stars. Shortly the history of the original falling star will be given in detail. See Rev. 12:7-9. There his hatred and deceptive activity will be elaborated, not only as an explanation of the previous chapters, but to pave the way for the understanding of the terrible things predicted in the following visions. Those who have seen in the falling star, or in Apollyon a reference to Napoleon (Bleek, Volkmar, etc.) have a faulty hermeneutic though an able imagination. We have spoken earlier on the usual historicist interpretation of this passage. It certainly does not meet the requirements of the text. No well-known exegete of the present day claims that the Muslim hordes exhaust the portrayal of John in Rev. 9. It is made perfectly clear in the text that the attackers are hurt by errors not arrows, by lies not lances, by severing truth not heads. The torment spoken of here is but an anticipation of the same said to result from the preaching of the gospel. See 11:10.

The chief clue in this trumpet is the abyss—the abode of the dead and of demons, the kingdom of the great Destroyer. We have earlier said that some homileticians have made the chapter more useful to us than have most exegetes. While not wishing to lessen the interpretation above, which has interpreted this plague as the swarming nature of error wherever the truth of the gospel is resisted, and without denying that it ultimately applies eschatologically (see ch. 13), we wish to stress that the personal existential meaning should not be neglected. Very prosaic exegetes have seen this.

We all have a minor key to the Abyss, and no commentator need look far to find the door. It would be fashionable, I suppose, to call it the sub-conscious mind; but by any name it smells as bad, and is the same reality today, as in the days when St. John prophesied. It is that bottomless sea in all our souls, from the great deep of which do arise monstrous and amazing suggestions of evil; from which arose every crime, and before it was committed looked good in the eyes of some human being. *For from within, out of the hearts of men, do all evil arguments proceed, adulteries, thefts, murders, harlotries, covetings, evil living, guile, lasciviousness, envy, insults, arrogance, folly . . . all these originate from within, says our Lord Jesus* (Mk. vii. 21).⁴⁴

Says Caird, "The abyss, then, represents the cumulative power and virulence of evil, to which all men contribute, and by which all men, whether they choose or not, are affected."⁴⁵ Leon Morris speaks similarly:

There are possibilities of evil always latent in men and in the modern world all too often we see them realized.

But John is saying more than this. There are evil forces other than those latent in men, and those other forces, demonic forces, have scope when men turn away from God. 'Such a picture etches forever on the soul one of the most terrible truths of life. It is this: whenever men go beyond their own humanity in committing their crimes, whenever they let themselves be possessed by a force of evil greater than human nature itself could conjure up, then human sin becomes inhuman, men are the offspring of beasts, and judgment lashes the soul with its most unspeakable terrors' (Love).⁴⁶

But we think Mounce's summary is a salutary caveat:

Many commentators interpret the plague as a condition of sinful life rather than an eschatological event. Hendriksen sees the description as "the operation of the powers of darkness in the soul of the wicked during this present age" (p. 147). For Hengstenberg it is the hellish spirit that penetrates the earth (I, pp. 429ff), and for Dana, the forces of decay and corruption which God will use to undermine the Roman Empire (pp. 126ff.). While the major motifs of the consummation are reflected many times throughout history, the visions of John have as their primary focus the ultimate conflict of God and Satan which brings history to its close.⁴⁷

We do not intend by our use of Mounce's statement to assert that idealist or historicist interpretations

of the fifth trumpet have all missed the mark entirely. The apotelesmatic principle of prophecy forbids that. Ramsey's following remarks, provided they are not so interpreted as to nourish modern prejudices, are pertinent in exegeting the sixth trumpet, though they by no means exhaust it.

The sin of unbelief brings the curse of error. God first smites men in all their earthly good, and their external religious advantages and comforts flowing from them. This is the lesson of the first four trumpets; unbelief brings a curse upon all the worldly good and all external privileges. But when this fails to bring to repentance, the work of judgment proceeds till unbelief becomes positive and earnest belief of a lie. Thus the prevalence of unbelief brings on the reign of superstition and fanaticism in doctrine and practice. A fallen church is given over to the reign of the crowned locusts instead of the crowned elders. An apostate church is the "mother of abominations." This is, indeed, only one of the operations of that still more general law, that men "must eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. The turning away of the simple shall slay them."⁴⁸ ... in all the history of the world there never has been so awful an exemplification of this law, and on so vast a scale, as in the apostasy of the Christian church that introduced the middle ages, and during them tormented an unbelieving world, apparently forsaken of the Spirit of God. Mohammedan and Papal delusions are both alike included under these scorpion locusts, both being the results, though in a somewhat different degree and manner, of church apostasy. Both classes of delusions were begotten of hell, and the dark smoke of the pit whence they issued was let forth upon the world by an apostate church. Almost the whole visible church, east and west, had fallen from the truth, and become the propagators of devilish error, and of corrupt and corrupting practices. It did really seem as if the church had become the very porter of hell, and had let loose upon the earth a whole host of incarnate fiends. By the doctrines of the celibacy of the clergy, of auricular confession, of saintly intercessions, and human merits, and purgatory, and especially of the Pope and bishops in the western church, and the similar claim of the eastern bishops, the door of the pit was fully opened, and there burst forth an almost infinite number and variety of poisonous errors, and superstitious and fanatical practices, and foul and loathsome corruptions, that culminated in and formed the substance of that great spiritual despotism that held the nations in bondage for ages, and that still spreads its darkening pall and its spiritual torments over deceived and degraded millions. The agency which opened the bottomless pit, was the agency or power in whose service these locust hordes spread abroad, under their king Apollyon, and whose full and complete establishment they effected. By them the peace of men was destroyed, and the torments of conscience made often insupportable. Under their pressure men were driven to endure the most cruel penances, and to inflict upon themselves all kinds of tortures. The watchings, and fastings, and hair shirts, and exposures, and flagellations, and fights with fiends--the fruit of a crazed mind--and the horrid impurities, and black and bloody crimes perpetrated in the very name of religion, were such as no summary notice, or even much reading, can give any adequate idea of, and are well represented by the torments of these scorpion locusts and their venomous stings. The self-inflicted tortures of the Hindoo devotee are often horrible enough; but they are comparatively isolated cases: in those times this misery seemed to pervade all society. These doctrines and practices had a visible personification to the immense multitudes of priests, and the numerous monkish orders, each of whom was an emissary of, and a part of, this immense despotism. They literally swarmed like locusts everywhere, and everywhere poisoned the souls of men.⁴⁹

Huntingford speaks similarly:

And so we have in this vision of the fifth trumpet a figurative description of the working of Satan, released from a condition of partial restraint, and preparing for the great apostasy from the Christian faith of the nations of Christendom. . . . The fearful judgment is running its course, 'the sea and the waves are roaring and men's hearts are failing them for fear.' The locusts are devouring the vineyard which the husbandmen have neglected until it has brought forth little but wine grapes; the locusts of socialism, communism, nihilism, intellectual pride, atheism, the deep and manifold deceits of Satan, are preparing the way for the final apostasy of the Gentiles. But these things hurt not the elect of God. They shall hurt 'only those which have not the seal of God on their foreheads.' Be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions.'⁵⁰

G. P. Trevelyan in his *Meditation on the Revelation of St John* expresses the same truth more succinctly. "We are meant to guide our lives by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, symbolized by rivers

and springs of waters. The godless world is deceived by false and worldly doctrines, poisoned by the coming to earth of Satan the fallen star. Souls of men die through these."⁵¹

Commentators differ widely in the details of their exegesis here. But one thing is certain. Those who refuse to accept the Saviour, and His protecting seal of the Spirit, will inevitably become the prey of the Destroyer. Each of us must take his choice between Jesus and Apollyon, that is, between eternal life and eternal death, between joy and anguish, sanity and madness.

Rev, 9:13-19:

Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of mankind. The number of the troops of cavalry was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. And this was how I saw the horses in my vision; the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and sapphire and of sulphur, and the heads of the horses were like lion's heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur issued from their mouths. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur issuing from their mouths.

As with the preceding trumpet the basis for this one is Joel's description of the army of locusts on the Day of the Lord. See Joel 2. Trumpet five indicated locusts like cavalry, and here in the sixth it is cavalry like locusts. In both cases the damage done by the tails is stressed. But in this trumpet the lion-like heads of the horses emitting fire and smoke and brimstone (sulphur) are emphasized even more than the wounding tails. Lions devour, whereas scorpions only sting. These demons kill, whereas their predecessors only tormented.

This trumpet marks the crisis hour which is common with the sixth in each series in Revelation. Compare the reference to the hour of trial to test the whole world in the letter to the sixth church, the dissolution of the heavens in the great day of His wrath in seal six, and the gathering for Armageddon described by the sixth bowl. Verse 15 refers to "the hour, the day, the month, and the year, until which the demonic horsemen have been restrained in the *tehom* of the Euphrates. The repeated reference to "mouths" is a proleptic allusion to the later elaborations of the final deceptions originating with the unclean spirits which come from the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. See Rev. 13:11,15; 16:13. The image of the release from restraint is similar to that which marked the beginning of the fifth trumpet when the imprisoned hordes were released from the bottomless pit. See another fulfilment in 20:7-3. This stress on the withdrawing of restraining power is akin to the healing of the deadly wound mentioned in chs. 13 and 17. It is a parody on Christ's release from Hades in resurrection power on the third day.

It is important that the climactic nature of this plague be recognized. The historicist is right in assuming that there is chronological progress in the book of Revelation. It is a progress that is in enlarging cycles rather than merely linear, but it is a real progress none the less. How else could it lead to the second advent?

The first symbol in this present portrayal is the golden altar and its four horns. The horns of the altar received the blood of the atonement. They were thus the most important part of that item of furniture. It is the blood of the Lamb which has repeatedly (though not atoningly) been shed afresh in the person of His witnesses that calls for judgment. It is an emphasis akin to 6:10 and 8:4. Too long has the world trampled underfoot the blood of the Saviour. Its rebellion is ripe and the last Judgment imminent. Soon, those who reject the atoning blood must atone for their sins with their own.

We should not equate the four angels here with those of Rev. 7. These are wicked angels held down in the abyss of the Euphrates. Remember that *tehom* often has the meaning of troubled waters, as well as the grave and hell. One commentator says that no exegete links the two sets of four angels. But here he generalizes for a few have done it, though erroneously.⁵² Swete says, "Those in c. vii. restrain the winds of heaven; these are themselves bound. . . ." ⁵³ And Beasley-Murray says, "There is, however, no other relation between them than their number and their destructive function. The four angels of chapter 7 hold back the winds. These in our passage are themselves held down. The former stand at the limits of the world these at the Euphrates."⁵⁴

The symbol of the Euphrates is tremendously important. It too anticipates the references to Babylon

which will multiply in the next half of the book. Says Fairbairn:

The scene here is laid in the Euphrates, which implies that Babylon, which stood on the Euphrates, and from which the Euphrates derives all its symbolical value and significance, has anew sprung into being. Euphrates by itself is nothing in Scripture, no more than any other river, excepting as "the great river" (here emphatically so called) on which Babylon stood, and which ministered so much to the wealth and security of the city; it is hence so far identified with Babylon, as to share with it in symbolical applications.⁵⁵

The Euphrates was the ideal limit to the land of Israel. It marked the place where sin and misery began and where the first murder took place. From the other side of this—the largest and most important river of Christian Asia—came the invading hosts repeatedly through the centuries. Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians had crossed this boundary again and again. In the eschatological pictures of the prophets the power from the Babylonian north is ever prominent. See Isa. 14:31; Jer. 1:14f.; 6:1,22; 10:22; 13:20; 25:9,26; 46:20,24; 47:2; Eze. 26:7; 38:6,15; 39:2; Dan. 11:40-45.

Ladd points out a distinction between the usage here and the Old Testament pictures of northern invaders. "The latter always envision the foreign invasion as an attack against the people of God by pagan hosts while John sees it as a divine judgment upon a corrupt civilization."⁵⁶ But we doubt if this is the whole story. As surely as the Old Testament uses the Euphrates as a symbol for an invasion against the people of God (Isa. 8:7,8), so does Revelation. Rev. 16: points to the drying up of the multitudes attempting to flood over the remnant just prior to the coming of Christ, King of kings and Prince of the kings from the sun-rising. Babylon is to make war with the Lamb, and it can only do this by attacking His body, the church. See 17:14,15.

Another clue is the obvious set of parallels with Rev. 20. In both cases we find the *abyssos* or pit,⁵⁷ which is identical with the waters of the Euphrates. In 9:14 we read of the four angels, but in Rev. 20:8, the four quarters. The myriads of myriads mentioned here in ch. 9:16 is similar to "the number of the sand of the sea" in chapter 20. And the loosing of these multitudes from the Euphrates parallels what happens when Satan emerges from the bottomless pit of death, and the wicked dead are simultaneously released from the tomb. Rev. 20 clearly portrays Satan's final attack on the city of God by the wicked of earth. In other words, after the millennium, after his resurrection, he continues what he had been doing just before the second coming of Christ—leading a murderous host against the people of God.

In Rev. 19, we see heaven opened, and the armies of God stream forth led by Him on the white horse. They are to engage in the battle of Armageddon—the destruction of the living wicked as they are about to slay the saints. The armies opposing the heavenly forces are symbolized by the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet and their multitudes. These are said to send forth from their mouth the lying spirits which dupe the nations into rebellion against the most High. That same demon-led army is indicated in the sixth trumpet. Joel 2 and 3 sets forth the same with its reference to the locust cavalry, the gathering around Jerusalem at the valley of Jehoshaphat (valley of judgment) at the time of the darkening of the sun just prior to the voice of God which delivers His remnant. (See Joel 2:30-32.)

Isaac Williams writes:

This vision seems connected with the completion and fulness of the last times; the last contest between infidelity and faith throughout the world. For it has been already shown that the number six is of Antichrist; and "the four Angels" indicate the whole world; and the number of the army is as it were infinite; all powers of evil going forth arrayed for the conflict with the good.⁵⁸

Fairbairn speaks similarly:

. . . It is the same thing substantially that is meant in chap. xvii. 16, by the kingdoms turning to hate the whore, so as "to make her desolate and naked, to eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." . . . In short, it is the devil's agents, turned by the judgment of heaven against the devil's own interest; by a beast-like instrumentality, full only of rapacity and violence, Satanic guile and wickedness assailing and subverting that which, though chiefly of Satan, had still too many elements in it of a better kind to suit the taste of the more outrageous and heaven-daring spirit that was to characterise the last times. It comprehends, therefore, the ultimate proceedings both of the beast, and of the false prophet. . . . in this part of the sixth trumpet we

manifestly have a representation of the severity to be employed in the latter days against the modern Babylon. . . .59

The fire and brimstone referred to in verse 18 are ever linked with the wicked and their fate. See Gen. 19:24; Isa. 30:33; Lu. 17:29; Eze. 38:22; Rev. 14:10; 19:20; 21:8. Thus the sixth trumpet, like the sixth seal, points to the fate of earth's rebels. The number four used in this passage is often used in symbolic portions of Scripture to indicate that which is worldwide. Thus the judgment pictured here while it affects only a third part of men nevertheless involves the whole world. Says Milligan, "*When the hour, and the day, and the month, and the year--that is, when the moment fixed in the counsels of the Almighty--come, the chains by which destruction has been kept back shall be broken, and the world shall be overwhelmed by the raging stream.*"⁶⁰ Carrington, in summary, writes:

So ends St. John's recasting of the vision of Joel, and a powerful thing he has made of it. Joel's vision, like the visions of Ezekiel, which St. John has used as a framework before, was directed against Jerusalem; but St. John, though he has had Jerusalem in mind all along, has not been thinking exclusively of her. His thought is that judgments have fallen in old times upon the nations that forgot God; judgments have fallen on Jerusalem because she forsook Jehovah and worshipped the idols of silver and gold; and he sees just how and why those judgments fall as they do. Sin is itself the executioner; and though it appears to lawless, it is controlled by those inscrutable four-square laws, so that in rebelling against God it is overruled to serve his purpose, and bring vengeance upon itself.⁶¹

Once more a note should be sounded against the misuse of these symbolic portrayals. The Euphrates here mentioned is construed literally by some, particularly dispensationalists. But it is correct to say that "the inconsistency and arbitrariness of interpreters is tested by these three names--Babylon, Jerusalem, Euphrates."⁶² Then Carpenter adds words even more significant now than almost a century ago when they were first penned.

There are not wanting tokens that a revival of the East may change the whole political centre of gravity of the world; but no such literal fulfilment would annul the infinitely more important mystical aspect of the Apocalypse. The conflict between a literal Babylon and a literal Jerusalem either in the past or the future can never vie in interest with the prolonged and wide-spread conflict between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of Belial, between God and Mammon, which is waged along the whole line of history over the arena of the whole world, and plants its battle-ground in every human heart. In every man, and in the whole world, the war is waged, as the carnal and spiritual contend with one another. It is in this war between the mystical Jerusalem and the mystical Babylon that the great river Euphrates is to play an important part.⁶³

In conclusion, we believe this trumpet points to the last crisis of the world when men will receive either the message of the gospel from the mouths of God's witnesses, or the false gospel from the "mouths" of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet through the ministry of the spirits of devils (pictured here as horses from the Euphrates pit or sea. Compare Isa. 8:6-8). Those who receive the false gospel will become spirit-possessed, and engage in battle against the Ruler of the universe, even condemning to death the non-conformist element of earth--those who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." The multitudes who have rejected the blood of the atonement, the incense of Christ's righteousness, the refreshment from the divine rivers and fountains, and the light from heavenly orbs, have no protection against the doctrine of devils, and ultimately no protection against the devils themselves. This sixth trumpet has shown a stream of horses from the pit of hell--the opposite number of the white horse which came from the throne of God in the first seal. Ultimately we must all become tied to the reality symbolized by either one or the other.

Rev. 9:20,21:

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

Ramsey comments on these verses:

How inveterate the depravity of the human heart! Though ground to powder under the

successive and crushing judgments of the Almighty, its nature remains unchanged. Ungodliness pervades every fibre of its being; it prefers the service of the devil to that of God; it persists in adoring the creature rather than the Creator, and in the folly of fixing its hopes and dependence on what it knows to be false and vain as the dumb idol of the most stupid idolater. "Madness is in the heart of men while they live, and after that, they go to the dead." "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat, with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."⁶⁴

Yet it is here made clear that the judgments of God are also His mercies. He hopes some turned on their backs will look up and cry to heaven. It is penitence, the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep of the soul, that God seeks, that men might in their brokenness find healing and re-creation. But because penitence is better evoked by the goodness of God than even his judgments and because the Cross is the wonder-working rod that can best bring the water of tears from the stony hearts, we are next to see a vision of the proclamation— the last proclamation—of the everlasting gospel.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 10)

Chapter 24

"All sad sights are relieved in the Apocalypse by the vision of Christ and peace," says Isaac Williams.¹ As between the sixth and seventh seal there was an interlude of encouragement, so here between the sixth and seventh trumpet there is a similar vision. As one comes to the end of the ninth chapter with its account of eschatological trauma for the whole world, certain questions inevitably arise. What has been happening to the church? How has it fared amidst all this? Has it been faithful to its task, and how is that task progressing? And as for the wicked, does God have nothing to say but proclamations of judgment? The present interlude answers these questions.

Too often the tenth chapter has been passed over quickly by expositors, as though merely introductory to the next revelation concerning the two witnesses. Introductory it certainly is, but of secondary importance it, as certainly, is not. Much depends on the interpretation given to the little book in the angel's hand. Many understand it as merely a renewal of John's commission, which interpretation gives an explanation of this sublime and grand vision akin to the sight of a pea rolling out of the barrel of a huge cannon after its firing. Others see the book as a fragment of the larger roll of chapter 5, and here signifying a compendium of all that is yet to be unfolded. Beasley-Murray refers to this as "about as wooden an exegesis of a vision of this book as one can hope to find."² We do agree with Beasley-Murray as to his rejection of that view (while we think his own is similarly inadequate), though we do not wish to make too harsh a judgment.

Beckwith lists his reasons for rejecting the most popular view just mentioned. He writes:

The contents of the scroll are identified by some with the oracle concerning Jerusalem, 11:1-3. Many others understand it to contain all the remaining revelations of the book, beginning with chapt. 11 or chapt. 12. ... in the latter case it is entirely distinct from the great roll of chapt. 5, whose revelations are now supposed to be ended, or it is included in that roll, forming another part of it and making known to the Seer these following oracles as contained therein. There is, however, strong objection to the interpretation of the roll as containing the subject-matter of the visions now to follow. (a) On the supposition that the revelations of the little roll are *distinct* from those of the great roll of the seven seals, the contents of the latter must end with the sixth trumpet-vision at 9:21. But the scene in the court of heaven (chaps. 4-5), when the Lamb takes the roll to break the seals, and especially the hymns of praise declaring the grounds of his worthiness to open the book, show that the contents of that roll are understood to include the consummation of the kingdom. That whole scene is inconceivable if the roll were thought to contain only two series of premessianic woes (chaps. 6,8f.) This conclusion is further established by the fact that the seven trumpet-visions, the last of which includes the end (10:6f, 11:15-18) are shown by the breaking of the seventh seal (8:1f) to be a part of the contents of the great roll. (b) The supposition that the remaining visions (chaps. 11ff.), as the contents of the little roll, are *included* in the great roll, forming as it were a book raises equal difficulty. While the contents of the seventh trumpetvisions are, as just seen, introduced in a way to show connection with the great roll, there is no intimation of a relation to the *little* roll; this roll is not mentioned afterwards. The revelations of the later parts of the book are introduced in the same way as those of the earlier parts; and there is nothing to indicate that they are thought of as giving forth on the Prophet's part of revelations imparted to him by eating the roll. In fact the figure of eating the roll is itself not appropriate to such a representation.³

But there are more positive reasons of identification of the little book which constitute stronger evidence still. Carrington is certainly correct when he declares, "This amazingly vivid verse (10:1) recalls the line out of our Lord's own Apocalypse. *But first must the Gospel be proclaimed to all the Gentiles.* Mk. 13:10. The Gospel, foreshadowed in the prophets and first proclaimed in Galilee, now reverberates through the world."⁴ This is the only interpretation that meets all the evidence of this

chapter and its parallels.

We submit that Rev. 10 is a symbolic portrayal of the final proclamation of the gospel to all the world. Our reasons are as follows:

1. The whole book is but an expansion of the Olivet discourse, which discourse makes it crystal clear that the end of all things must be preceded by the worldwide spread of the Gospel. Mt. 24:14; Mk. 13:10.
2. The emphasis in Rev. 10 is that a new epoch has been reached. What has hitherto been limited is now universal--the spread of truth, the implementing of the kingdom. Thus the angel is pictured as a mighty and resistless one. The epoch reached is that named in the book of Daniel as "the time of the end." It is vital to note that this chapter quotes from Daniel by way of word and concept. Cf. 10:5,6 and Dan. 12:7.
3. Revelation has this theme of witnessing to the gospel throughout all its chapters. The church is originally pictured as a light-bearer, next as a mighty white steed hastening through the earth, and now as an angel who straddles sea and land, taking the whole for his parish and his possession.
4. It is clearly stated that the mystery of God is now to be finished. That mystery is the gospel of the kingdom, the redeeming of earth already fulfilled by Christ's first advent, but awaiting consummation at His second. See Col. 1:25-28 Eph. 1:9,10.
5. The book being open assures us that what was once hidden to other generations, or veiled in types and symbols, has now been permanently unsealed that all might read. In Rom. 16:25,26, we read:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith. . . .
6. The book in the angel's hand, and the proclamation of the angel, must not be separated. The book and the mystery are to be equated. While only Christ could take the sealed book from the Father's hand, here John, as representing the church, can take this book, for it signifies its message to the world.
7. The allusion to the pillars of fire and the rainbow are covenant allusions reminding readers of the covenant nation's experience in the wilderness, including its election as a kingdom of priests at the covenant betrothal of Sinai. The covenant is merely the legal metaphor for the promises of the gospel. The elect who receive the covenant become its ambassadors to the ends of the earth. Mt. 28:19,20.
8. John's taking of the book and being told to prophesy points to his experience as symbolic of the church's experience. "Prophesy" in the New Testament is frequently the term for preaching the gospel. See 1 Cor. 14:1,3-5, 19.
9. The fact that the book is sweet to the taste, but afterward gives bitterness agrees with other plain Scriptures about the results of absorbing the gospel from the Word of God's grace. See Psa. 19:10; 119:103. As Ezekiel found sweetness originally in the message from God, but ultimately went in bitterness of spirit to rebels, so every messenger of the gospel has found that the commission to publicize heaven's message always leads to conflict and pain.
10. The verb used in v. 7 should not be tamely translated, "announced." The N.A.S.B. is more accurate when it expresses the Greek thus in its margin, "preached the gospel."
11. This passage is in many respects identical with Rev. 14:6,7. In both cases there is a message for every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. That message is the everlasting gospel in an eschatological setting of judgment. Both are succeeded by a revelation of apostasy and persecution.
12. The following chapter confirms this understanding. As John was asked to absorb the gospel but then experienced bitterness, so in chapter 11 the church is seen letting its light shine but experiences the bitterness of rejection, wears sackcloth, and is sentenced to death.
13. The book denominated as "small" implies a message simple and clear enough for all to read, all to absorb, and all proclaim. This would not really fit the idea that the book included the revelation of those events found in chapter 11-22. It could hardly be said that the comprehending of those is a simple, easily opened affair.
14. The succession of events in Rev. 10 and 11 is identical with that elsewhere in Revelation. The

receiving and publishing of the gospel inevitably brings trouble. Thus the witnessing churches have troubles of heresy, persecution, and the temptation to worldliness. See Rev. 2 and 3. The white horse of proclamation is succeeded by the red. See Rev. 6:2-4. The sealing of the 144,000 is followed by the vision of 200 million devils let loose on the earth. So here the eating of the word leads to persecution of the witnesses. Truth ever leads to controversy, and controversy to persecution.⁵

Because of the importance of this issue, we wish to document our conclusions from others. (See under footnote 6.)

It is not the great book of history sealed with seven seals, but a little book which is open. It is then directly readable by all. Its message has the inverse character of that of the seven thunders. The latter proclaims in a grandiose fashion a mystery that cannot be transmitted or known. The seer must not write it; but having heard, he must keep the secret. That designates the mystery itself of the Word of God, or of God, a mystery which cannot be disclosed and which, moreover, would be of no benefit to men were it to be known. For it must not be forgotten that the Word is revealed only to the extent that it is useful to man. And this distinction between the voice of the thunders and that of the little open scroll reminds us that, contrary to what certain contemporary theologians think, "All of God" is not revealed in the Gospel.

The little open scroll is very clearly this Gospel. "There will be no more delay." Now the great design of God is fulfilled: the Incarnation, which is this fulfillment, is realized. We are indeed in the presence of the Gospel.⁶

Before proceeding to exposition let us define "the mystery of God" as symbolized by the open book. Just what is the gospel that is to be proclaimed over land and sea before Jesus can return? We suggest that we have a splendid illustration of the nature of the gospel in the middle verses of this great book. We read in Rev. 12:10-11, the following:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."

Here, as in Rev. 10, is the proclamation of an event that is historical, legal, and eschatological.

It is essential to give due importance to the legal, historical, and eschatological elements of the gospel which are comprehended by this vision. Despite the saccharine pronouncements of many "gospellers" today, the word from prophets and apostles is not all light, joy, and froth. As with the rainbow it enshrines opposites—judgment and mercy, law and love, warning and promise. But for the violated moral law, the gospel would be unnecessary. Its purpose was that God might be both just and yet the justifier of the guilty. In the Acropolis of the New Testament, Rom. 3:19-26, this is made crystal clear. The blood drops of Calvary, so to speak, fell upon the mercy-seat over the law, both sanctifying anew the divine precepts and providing forgiveness for penitent transgressors.

In Scripture, God is revealed by His redemptive acts in history, all those of the Old Testament foreshadowing the culminating deliverance of the Cross. To the Hebrew, truth was dynamic and revealed in action. It was not merely a concept to be analyzed. Thus the God of the Hebrews spoke through the mighty deeds of the Creation, the Flood, the Exodus, and the overthrow of Babylon. Because of the covenant relationship, Israel knew God could be trusted. He would not act whimsically, erratically, or unfairly. The covenant guaranteed righteousness and also mercy.

The angel depicted in Rev. 10 is called "the covenant angel" by some commentators because of the associated imagery from Sinai. With thunders, and yet in mercy, He comes claiming dominion over the whole world and presenting the message of heaven. As Israel at Sinai received her commission to be God's priests to the world, so John now, as representative of the church has that commission renewed.

Because the gospel is the good news of Christ's judgment in our place and His overthrow of the world, the flesh, and the devil, it is always in essence eschatological. Calvary was the legal end of the world. All else is only postscript and implementation of what was done on the Cross. Therefore Paul uses justification as the chief metaphor of the benefits of the good news. Justification is the verdict of the last judgment proleptically, to be ratified at the last day for all found "in Christ" by faith.

In the vision before us we have allusions to the history of Israel, and particularly to the covenant peaks of that history at Creation, the Flood, and Sinai. The cloud and the thunders warn us that salvation history is on the verge of its consummation by the last judgment. In the little book we have the gospel which will decide all men's destiny as they are confronted with it through preaching.

In summary, we have suggested that the angel of Rev. 10, as is so often the case with an angel in Revelation, represents a message—this time the last message of heaven to the world, the message of the everlasting gospel which must go to all nations before the end comes. This vision is a symbolic expansion of Mt. 24:14 and Mk. 13:10, and parallels Rev. 14:6-12; 18:1-4. John, who takes the book and eats it, represents the church which is to witness before the peoples, nations, tongues, and kings of earth.

We would emphasize that this passage, if put with Rev. 6:10 to which it alludes in v. 7, explains the whole philosophy of Christian chronology. The Lord has tarried only because the Word of His grace has not echoed through all creation. He cannot return till the conflict, which began with one family in one place, expands to take in every family in every part of earth. God so loved the *world*, Christ died for the *world*, and nothing less than those good tidings being spread to as many as have been loved will suffice for heaven's calendar and clock. That universal proclamation will produce a harvest ripe for the gathering—a harvest of saints trusting wholly in the merits of Christ, and loyal unto death; and a harvest of impenitent sinners who show that they have settled permanently into error by sentencing to death those who have offered them life. In 6:10, the suffering saints were assured that when the world's cup of iniquity was full, then the people and ways of God would be vindicated by the return of Christ. This global display of the fruit of both good and evil is essential for the ending of the great controversy. It will manifest unto the principalities and powers of heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God, and thus ensure that throughout the infinite dominions of the Creator sin will not rise up the second time.

Rev. 10:1,2:

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, .

Many have suggested that this is a portrayal of Christ.⁷ It certainly embodies elements of description which elsewhere apply to Christ. Compare Psa. 104:3 for the cloud, Rev. 4:3 for the rainbow, Rev. 1:16 for the sun, and Ex. 13:21f. for the pillars of fire. It is possible that there are many layers of meaning even here, for the obvious parallel in Dan. 12:7 has led many to see an allusion to Gabriel, whose name means, "the strong one of God." Both Farrer and Charles make this identification. In another sense the figure points to the church in her last proclamation.

This description has been greatly admired by literary scholars. Criswell quotes one as follows:

Be pleased to observe the *aspect* of this august personage. All the brightness of the sun shines in his countenance and all the rage of the fire burns in his feet. See his *apparel*. The clouds compose his robe and the drapery of the sky floats upon his shoulders. The rainbow forms his diadem and that which compasses the heaven with a glorious circle is the adornment of his head. Behold his *attitude*. One foot stands on the ocean and the other rests on the land. The wide extended earth and the world of waters serve as pedestals for those mighty columns. Consider the *action*. His hand is lifted up to the height of the stars. He speaks and the regions of the firmament echo with the mighty accents as the midnight desert resounds with the lion's roar. The artillery of the skies is discharged at the signal. A peal of seven-fold thunder spreads the alarm and prepares the universe to receive his orders. To finish all and give the highest grandeur as well as the utmost solemnity to the representation, he swears by him that liveth forever and ever." Is not that magnificent? I do not know who the man was who said these words. I never heard of the author. But I would love to hear that man preach. That is real eloquence.⁸

It is important to recognize from the beginning of our exposition that the present chapter was intended to refer the reader to Daniel's closing chapters. Note the words of Kiddle:

The angel's oath is an echo of Dan. xii. 7. It fulfils a similar purpose. Both passages are an answer to the question: 'How long?' . . . The reply given by the angel in REVELATION follows

the passage in Daniel more closely than at first sight appears. We must first note John's conviction that the End will come as a fulfillment of prophecy: *then shall the secret purpose of God be fulfilled, as he assured his servants the prophets*. As we shall see in chap. xi., John believes that the 'sacred people'—that is, the Christian churches—are actually to be 'shattered' as Daniel foretold; at any rate, the most loyal and devoted of Christians are to be martyred. And after their death the seventh trumpet heralds the end of this order, and the beginning of the rule of God in the world (xi. 15ff.).⁹

Previously we have referred to the close relationship between Revelation and Daniel. It alludes to the Old Testament apocalypse over fifty times. Its theme parallels the theme of Daniel found in 8:14—the predicted vindication of holiness. The very cry of Rev. 6:10 comes from Dan. 8:13. And the oath in v. 6 of this present passage comes from Dan. 12:7. Daniel was told to seal up his book, but the present one, by way of contrast, is opened. The seer in Babylon had had much to say about the kingdom of God, and its Messiah, who would make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness, but the understanding of those matters was sealed until the New Testament age, which brought "the last things." The book mentioned in Rev. 10:1 is open—opened permanently according to the Greek original. When we recognize its embodying of the mystery spoken of in v. 7, and recall the words of Paul in Rom. 16, it becomes clear that the gospel, which existed in mystery during Old Testament times when figures and types veiled the coming glory, is now made plain by its fulfillment in Christ. And this is the glad tidings foretold through the prophets. (See v. 7, where the original word for "declared" really means "gospelized" if we may coin a word for the idea.)

Daniel had been the first to speak of "the time of the end," and he mentioned it repeatedly. That time was to include a time of trouble such as never was. Then Antichrist revived would do his worst. According to Daniel, simultaneously with the final fling of Antichrist would come the last message from heaven, one that would turn many to righteousness though involving a terrible whiplash of persecution from the world. See Dan. 11:44; 12:3; 11:45 to 12:1. All of these things are implied by the vision and wording of Rev. 10.

The cloud of 10:1 reminds us of 1:7, and the judgment coming of Christ there foretold. But the rainbow is the symbol of the covenant. In wrath God remembers mercy, and here in this interlude of the trumpets, He is offering the gospel to all sinners that they might be saved. In this covenant symbol we see depicted the promise of the fulfillment of all that the everlasting covenant had pledged. While fulfilled legally at the Cross, the covenant yet awaits its full manifestation in a glorified people in a glorified world. At the conclusion of this section introduced by the covenant angel we have the ark of the covenant. See 11:19. It is accompanied by earthquake, and lightnings and thunderings, and it is intended that we should think of Calvary. There the same events occurred, climaxed by the tearing of the inner veil, that the place of the ark of the covenant might stand revealed, assuring all that every barrier to access to God had been abolished by the death of the Lord of the covenant.

The "sun" and "fire" of v. 1 tell us more of the glory of God, and therefore the glory of His gospel. The gospel is light, as is its Author. And the Word concerning it is a fire, purging evil, or consuming the impenitent.

The little book of the divine mystery can be taken by the weakest child. Unlike the book of 5:1, this one does not require One perfect in righteousness, wisdom, and might. Whosoever will, may come. John, aware of his sinfulness, had fallen at the feet of the covenant messenger in ch. 1. Now he approaches, and takes the book as the representative of all believers. That book tells of the weakness of man, and the strength of God, the depravity of man and the goodness of God, the penalty of unbelief and the blessings attending trust. It is indeed sweet, as vs. 9-10 declare, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, because it tells of sins forgiven, guilt removed, everlasting righteousness imputed, a sure title to the skies, and the earnest of the sanctifying Spirit—the guarantor and pledge of the coming inheritance. It is vital that we be clear on the nature of this book. Says Carpenter:

. . . the book contains none of those secret things which were the contents of the former book. The closed, sealed book pointed to the hidden springs of future history; this points to what is open to all. That book was comparatively large, and filled with writing, as the visions of oncoming history were great; this book is small, and contains what all may master. These considerations forbid the idea that the book is a repetition in brief of what was in the sealed book, "or that it was the revelation of some remaining prophecies," or of some "portion or section of prophecy." The vision is a representation that he who comes armed with the witnesses of Christ's presence, comes also with that ever-open proclamation of God's love and righteousness. The little open book is that gospel which is the sword of the Spirit, the

weapon of the Church, that Word of God, open to all, hidden only from those whom the God of this world hath blinded. The fallen powers may bear the key, and let loose darkening clouds of confused thought and unworthy teaching; the outer courts of the Church may be overcast; but unto the upright there arises light in the darkness, and God's Word has risen with new light and power upon the bewilderments and glooms of the age. "Three books are associated in the Apocalypse. The first is the book of the course of this world (chap. v. 1); . . . the last is the Book of Life (chaps. xx. 15; xxi. 27). . . ; between these two comes" another book, which is the link between the other two, the ever open book of God's promises and the witness of God's righteousness and power.¹⁰

The feet upon earth and sea is but a symbol for what is plainly expressed in v. 11. The message is for all—the many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings of earth. All are welcome to come to God, and to come now. Salvation takes no longer than the hearing. Acceptance with God is as simple as accepting the open Word of promise He offers us. It has to be simple for it is extended to all—old and young, wise and ignorant, educated and uneducated, black and white, the living and the dying. That only is the true gospel which can be explained in a minute to one drifting into eternity. See Romans 10:8-13, and compare Luke 23:42-43.

Rev. 10:3,4:

. . . and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring; when he called out, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."

The best parallel to this passage is found in Jn. 12:28-30 where heaven thundered on the verge of the greatest crisis of time and eternity—the lifting up of the Son of God as our Substitute, Surety, and Representative. The thunders imply something similar here—that a great event is about to ensue—even the consummation of the kingdom of God. Note the words of Justin Smith:

The thunder-voice heard as the angel descends, is like that voice from heaven which the people heard on that day, and which testified in their presence to the character and mission of him who stood before them. These were actual utterances—words spoken, on this occasion as on that, and doubtless now as then, having reference to the mission of him whose person and office are thus recognized; with this difference, however that while our Lord interpreted the utterance, John is commanded to keep it secret. On the occasion mentioned in the Gospel, the voice from heaven, so majestic and overaweing, signalizes the near approach of an event momentous in the highest degree—the lifting up from the earth of him who as thus lifted up was to draw all men unto himself; the consummation, in other words, of the Redeemer's earthly work in his death upon the cross as the world's Saviour and his subsequent ascension to the right hand of the Father. To this Jesus had previously made allusion in saying: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." We take the utterance of the seven thunders in the vision now under consideration, as similar in its significance. The thunders signalize an epoch in the history of God's kingdom on earth; they announce new and great changes in the divine procedure as regards his kingdom, and as regards the world of men. The unfolding of the Apocalyptic scheme has now reached a point where the affairs of the world and of the church *in* the world, are about to take on a new aspect. . . . Only, now it is gospel, not law, that is to be proclaimed; though a gospel which involves with blessings for the believing and the true, judgments on a world lying in wickedness.¹¹

John is not allowed to write the details, and we are reminded that "clouds and darkness are round Him," "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." Psa. 97:2; 77:19; Isa. 45:15.

Perhaps even more should be said. The sealing of the message of the thunders is not necessarily one that is permanent. The sealing of Daniel's prophecies was to last only until they should be understood. Hengstenberg says, "We are not to think of an absolute and perpetual secrecy. Substantially, the sequel must disclose what is here shut up."¹² When God cries as a lion, He is warning the world of the importance of His message. Those who refuse it will be devoured by judgment. The thunders suggest the mysteries of the future when God's warnings shall be fulfilled. Later chapters will spell out the destruction of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet—the enemies of God and His church.

These three concepts, the warning of a coming crisis, the mysterious nature of God's dealings, the inevitability of judgment on those who do not walk with God, are all implied by the mysterious thunders. Only the fulfillment of time can demonstrate their detailed content. The loud voice like the roaring of a lion is appropriate for Him who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The gospel comforts the afflicted, but it afflicts the comfortable. To be confronted with the word of the Cross is to stand before the judgment bar of God. Indeed, it is more solemn still, because the latter event involves no burden of choice on our part. No man appreciates the good news of salvation until his soul has trembled before the God of Sinai. When a man sees the depths and heights of the law, that it requires the same perfection of us as of Adam, and that we cannot give it, that it comprehends every motive and impulse, our nature as well as our behaviour--then, if sane, he will tremble as before a roaring lion. And when the law itself makes him leave the law that he might live unto God--then he is ready for the gift of perfect righteousness, even that wrought out for Him by the spotless Son of God. See Gal. 2:16-21; 3:10-13,24-25; Ro. 7:4.

Rev. 10:5-7:

And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, that there should be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.

The word for "delay" here is usually translated "time," but it is the absence of the article that suggests a less specific sense in this verse, such as delay or continuance. These terms best fit the context of the passage. The prophetic eras of time symbolized in Daniel and in this book have run their course. Now only the advent and the kingdom of glory are lacking. This verse is the answer to the prayer recorded in 6:10. It corresponds to Dan. 8:13,14, where the same enquiry is made and answered by the promise of the vindicating kingdom of God. It also parallels Dan. 7:9-13, where the agonized course of the suffering saints is brought to an end by the judgment of God through the Messiah. See Dan. 7:22,26. Compare also Lu. 18:1-8, where the afflicted widow is importunate in urging the Judge to intervene. That story was climaxed by Christ by an allusion to the coming of the Son of Man--a very apt use of the Messianic title which signifies vindication.

This verse assures the church that the time of the end is upon her. The last work of heaven and earth--of God and Satan--of the saints and Antichristis about to transpire. The shattering of the holy people foretold by Daniel as a tragic necessity before the end--that is now to find its fulfillment. Many are to be martyred because they will not receive false worship. See Rev. 20:4. But thus the world fills the cup of her iniquity, thus Antichrist polarizes humanity, and sifts them out for Christ.

The mystery of God is the gospel--heaven's plan for redeeming the lost creation. See Eph. 6:19; 1 Tim. 3:16; Ro. 16:25-26. The gospel exists to gather out a people for God. Acts 15:14. This vision, and that of 14:6 point to the fulfillment of that mystery. Erdman writes:

By a "mystery" is meant something formerly concealed but now revealed. It seems here to denote "the whole purpose of God," the joyous solution of all the problems of history, the consummation of the divine promise of ultimate blessing for the world, which formed the gospel--the glad tidings that God had "declared to his servants the prophets."¹³

In v. 7, we have the word "declared." This is a most inadequate translation. In the Jerusalem Bible we find a more accurate rendering thus: "God's secret intention will be fulfilled, just as he announced in the Good News told to his servants the prophets." Justin Smith writes:

The word rendered in the common version "declared" . . . means *to announce glad tidings*; and is, with its derivatives, used for preaching the gospel, as in 1 Pet. 1:25; Luke 3:18, where the verb is so employed; and in both Mark and Luke, and other places, the noun, allied with it, . . . is used with the Greek verb to "announce," "proclaim" . . . The verb is used here with the accusative of the person. Alford accordingly translates, literally, "as he evangelized his servants, the prophets"; for the reason, as he states it, that "it is impossible to translate by a periphrasis without losing its force." He adds: "It expresses that God informed them [the prophets] of the glad tidings"; it being understood he says, that as prophets they published the good news . . . 14

Thus the next events, those described in the coming chapters, adjoin the time of the blowing of the

seventh trumpet, and will finish the mystery of God—His divine purposes for the world. All that both prophets and apostles had promised by their preaching of the gospel of the kingdom is about to be fulfilled.

Rev. 10:8-11:

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

John here personifies the church of God—the two witnesses about to be described. Like Ezekiel of old, he takes the divine message, though ultimately it means bitterness. His is a commission "that would have elements both of Tabor and Calvary in it."¹⁵ The next chapter will spell out in detail the sweet and the bitter.

This new epoch in world history that is to finish the mystery of God calls for a prophesying "again." To prophesy in the Christian church often meant the preaching of the gospel, and does so here as the following chapter shows. Ramsey expresses the meaning of this commission as follows:

This "again," intimates that at that time this testimony had already been widely delivered, but that it was still to be repeated. The church had, even during the first century, carried the gospel to all portions of the civilized world. The apostles, and their immediate helpers, had caught the spirit of their Lord's commission. "Go ye into all the world," No difficulties, or dangers, or opposition, arrested their progress. They went forward in the strength of their glorified King, and conquered in His name. It might seem to some that this work was almost done. The story of the Cross was everywhere made known. But no. The work must continue. Again must the word be borne by the church every where. Again, too, with the zeal, and energy, and devotion of primitive and apostolic times. From this work she must never rest. If weariness, or opposition, or want of success, tend to make her slacken her efforts, she must still hear the voice of her Lord calling, "Again," and so on from day to day, and age to age, repeat her story of love, and call the nations to bow at Jesus' feet. It is her one great mission, her never-ceasing work; no matter how often repeated, still "Thou must prophesy again," until the mystery of God be finished, and the last peal of the seventh angel's trumpet announce her labours ended, and her glory complete.¹⁶

Justin Smith is also worth hearing on this important verse:

The word, "prophesy" and "prophet," as is well known, are used in Scripture with a wider meaning than simply that of the foretelling of future events. They are used, also, in the sense of "teach," "teacher," especially in some of Paul's Epistles; and, as there is reason to believe, expressed, alike in New Testament and in Old Testament times, utterances of whatever kind under special influence of the Spirit. Consistently with this usage, it seems entirely proper to understand the word, here, as meaning, not strictly, at least not exclusively, the foretelling of things to come, but the delivery of divine messages, by divine authority, and with divine power attending and manifest. It should be remembered, also, that John, in receiving and eating the little roll, acts precisely as all other personages introduced in these successive visions do — representatively, and as symbolizing far more than concerned himself individually. Yet if the words addressed to him, "Thou must again prophesy," are understood as meaning that he had other visions to write, he seems in such an exposition, taken suddenly out of his symbolical and representative position, and viewed in his character as the medium of these revelations, and as representing in a large sense that ministry to which he himself, as an apostle, belonged—though now exhibited in the later scenes of its activity—and hearing anew the message which had been so long lost to mankind.¹⁷

The same writer sums up the essence of the revived message as follows:

The leading fact in the mighty change that has come upon the world, is that now the gospel addresses men stripped of the disguise which it was so long made to wear, and announces a method of salvation "easy, artless, unencumbered." The re-affirmation of one doctrine — that

of justification by faith—has reduced to merely learned lumber whole libraries of scholastic lore; while above all, setting aside such an immensity of doctrine of salvation by "the deeds of the body." When men began to understand, once more, that they are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of themselves, since "it is the gift of God," the whole legal system of the apostasy began to crumble; while, as one may say, just in the preaching of that one truth, the face of the world was changed.¹⁸

Thus the close of this chapter foretells the revival of "the everlasting gospel," the "faith once for all time given to the saints," wherein it is recognized "as of first importance" that "Christ died for our sins." 1 Cor. 15:3. This cosmic event of the Cross, which is the heart of the New Testament, is to be upheld before the world as never before. When Calvary is praised as the sun in the believer's sky, then many will understand that to kneel at the foot of the Cross is to reach the highest place it is possible to attain. Because this is a prophecy of the time of the end, we are to understand that soon the events of years will be compressed into hours, as things rush to their climax. A short work will the Lord make in the earth, with angels perhaps doing that which it could have been man's privilege to do. It is not strange that at several eras when God's work has been revived, this prophecy has been seen as foretelling such revivals. It has been applied to the Reformation, and to the great second advent awakening of the nineteenth century missionary era. Such applications are not wrong, but they are incomplete. This forecast, like others in Revelation, is apotelesmatic, and its full flowering belongs to the very last hour.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 11)

Chapter 25

The eleventh chapter of Revelation is both a conclusion and an introduction.¹ It concludes the first half of the book but introduces the second. Most of the key elements which are to characterize chapters 12-22 here find enunciation---the attack upon the church as it proclaims the gospel during the final crisis, the rising of the Antichrist from a state of apparent death, the real safety and ultimate vindication of believers, and the ushering in of the eternal kingdom in glory accompanied by judgments upon those who reject the gospel--all are here set forth. Because of its importance as a key to the rest of the book, of which it is also a summary, we will footnote heavily the position here taken.

The chapter has often been declared the most difficult of the book,² but as Caird has said, a faithful interpretation of its symbols in harmony with legitimate exegetical principles makes its meaning "free from any sort of ambiguity."³

To detach the chapter from its own introduction in ch. 10 is to fail in rightly interpreting it. There we read of an angel astride land and sea with a little scroll open, proclaiming that there is to be no more delay, and that the mystery of God is now to be fulfilled as predicted by the prophets. John takes the open scroll, and on eating finds it sweet to the palate but bitter upon digestion. Then he is told "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." At this point our present chapter commences, as John is given a measuring rod and commanded to measure the temple of God, its altar, and its worshippers. He is instructed--". . . do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

It seems then that the preaching of the open scroll results in the experience set forth in the eleventh chapter of John's book. Thus the bitterness indicates the suffering coming to those who proclaim the sweet tidings of the gospel. And this suffering is to be worldwide, for the message goes to "many people and nations and tongues and kings."⁴ Furthermore, it is suffering during the final crisis, for there is now to be no more delay, but the mystery of the kingdom is to be consummated.⁵ Thus we have in chapter 10 clues to the meaning of the following chapter.

The temple of God, the holy city, the two witnesses, the two olive trees, and the lampstands all symbolize the witnessing church.⁶ They witness to the truths contained in the law and the prophets (alluded to by references from the experiences of Moses and Elijah in vv. 6-7), and they, like Joshua and Zerubbabel of old, have priestly and royal prerogatives and duties. It would be impossible for "men from the people and tribes and tongues and nations" to "gaze at their dead bodies"⁷ were these two literal corpses in the literal street of literal Jerusalem. The worldwide church is signified.

The sources of this passage are basically the following:

- (1) Daniel passages, particularly 7:25; 8:13; 9:26; 11:31-35.
- (2) Ezekiel passages regarding eschatological events. See particularly chapters 40 and 37.
- (3) Zechariah passages. See particularly chs. 12 and 4.
- (4) The Old Testament narratives regarding Elijah and Moses.
- (5) The records of Christ's ministry, which indicate that He prophesied for 1260 days rejected of men, and then was crucified prior to His vindication in resurrection and ascension. We should never forget Alexander Maclaren's profound comment that "Everything of the future history of the world and of the Gospel is typified in the events of the crucifixion."⁸ Even v. 10 of Rev. 11 seems to be an allusion to the Gospel record. See Luke 23:12.

Thus this chapter gives John's understanding of what the future holds for believers in Christ. Soon

they are to enter upon the great tribulation, similar to that of the days of Antiochus Epiphanes.⁹ Those who refuse to "worship the beast and his image" will be slain by the beast from the abyss, just as those who refused to receive the mark of the ivy branch and conform to the false worship surrounding the image of Antiochus were martyred in the 2nd century B.C. "But," says John in effect, "remember you are kings and priests like Christ your Master. You will not be treated worse than He. You are to be partakers of His glory. Your inmost life cannot be touched. God has measured you, secured you, sealed you. In the courtyard of earth where the Lord suffered, you may lose this earthly life, but the life hidden with Christ in God cannot be hurt. Ultimately you will be vindicated before all in the kingdom of glory, while your oppressors must suffer judgment."

Verse 8 is of great significance. Here John tells us plainly that he is using metaphor and symbol.¹⁰ He also makes it clear that the spirit of Jewry which crucified Christ is to be the spirit of the entire world in their opposition to the church. It seems likely that the court outside the temple, referred to in v. 2 is a symbol of the Babylonian world. *Ekb* is stronger than merely "leave that out".¹¹ Elsewhere it has the thought of excommunication, i.e. casting out. Only the believers are safe, but all others are cast out. The believer's earthly life is indeed in the world, and there it must suffer from all who echo the unbelief of apostate Israel. Thus the court points to the same as "the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified." The court was the place for sacrifice and thus aptly typifies the persecuting world.

Verse 7 is similarly important. Here we find the article linked with the beast which is now mentioned for the first time. This is in harmony with John's frequent usage of prolepsis. The beast is Antichrist, as the later chapters also make clear. As in Daniel, the beast persecutes the saints because their worship is not of him. He is victorious for 1260 days, and during that time he treads down the worshippers in the sanctuary. Thus both Daniel's visions and the prophecy of Christ in Mk. 13:14 and Lu. 21:24 are referred to.¹² The beast because of its desolation of the true worship, is indeed an abomination to the seer who portrayed him. Thus later he will portray the fact that the desolator will himself be desolated.¹³ The abyss is significant in pointing to the nether world of desolation as his origin and destiny.¹⁴ He is from the abyss in the sense that Christ by His victory on Calvary has inflicted upon Satan and his representatives a mortal wound,¹⁵ and hence they have no real right to attempt to coerce the people of God. This is spelled out more clearly in the twelfth chapter, but for the present we should note that rising from the abyss is to be equated with a show of life manifested by persecution. This gives the clue to the real nature of the healing of the mortal wound referred to in chapters 13 and 17. The same theme reoccurs in the chapter on the millennium. If R. H. Charles, G. E. Ladd, and similar exegetes are correct, Satan is wounded afresh at the second advent of Christ and consigned to the grave for a thousand years. But after that time the wound is apparently healed, and as of old he goes forth to make war on the saints.

Verses 7 and 8 point to the same crisis as Rev. 13:11-18. That passage also alludes to the healing of the deadly wound of the beast, and that healing is made manifest by the beasts' renewed persecution. The reference to the slaying of the nonconformists (13:15) points to the identical situation described in chapter 11 as the killing of the witnesses. Rev. 12:17; 17:14; 16:13-16; 19:19, are all parallel passages presenting the last war made on the Lamb by the dragon as the worshippers of the Lamb are threatened and slain. Says Little:

Just as Jerusalem killed the prophets sent to her and finally put Jesus Himself to death on the Cross, so has the world today, sunken as it is in heathenism, become Jerusalem in type. The picture here is a revelation of the guilt of the wicked world, which brings on the final Judgment. The very Gospel, which is a savor of death unto death to the unbeliever; and the Church, which is figured by the two witnesses, will continue this witness to the Word until its witness is supplanted according to God's eternal decree by the witness of suffering and death, when the witnessing Church shall go the way of its Lord and Master.¹⁵

Verses 9-13 of chapter 11 point to the vindication of the martyred witnesses. In a highly symbolic portrayal God's rewarding of them is set forth. At the coming of Christ His saints will be raised. All the martyrs, as with other faithful witnesses, will now be glorified. At that time, as Christ is seen in the heavens, the wicked will cry to the mountains and the rocks "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?" Rev. 6:16,17.

The reference in v. 13 to a great earthquake indicates that the silencing of the witnessing church, marked by the world's rejoicing, is abruptly succeeded by terror. The impact of the withdrawal of the

Word and the Spirit becomes apparent.¹⁶ Society is shaken and terrified, and many die in the panic.

This terrible attack on the witnesses is mentioned also in v. 18 by the phrase "the nations raged." In that verse also the wrath of God is referred to--the final judgment and destruction of the remnant of the impenitent. The prophet affirms that now God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen. . . ." Thus the chapter which begins with the measuring of the temple, and the treading down of its outer courts, closes with its vindication. See also Dan. 8:13,14.

The third woe and seventh trumpet embodies the final judgments on the impenitent, and the advent of Christ. The sanctuary is "cleansed" or "vindicated" as judgment overtakes those who have trodden down the temple's holy things its truths and worshippers. The kingdom, procured by Christ's atonement on that day of the darkening of the sun and earthquake, is now visibly established after the repetition of the same signs. And with this event, the judgment which cleanses God's sanctuary and vindicates Him and His people, the first half of the book of Revelation closes. That judgment glorifies the law of God enshrined in the ark and brings eternal rewards to those who penitently hide their lack in the righteousness of Him who met all the demands of the law for them two thousand years ago. To this event Daniel looked forward, when, after the oath of the angel astride the water, he was told that he, with all the saints would stand in his lot at the end of the days, shining like the brightness of the heavens, and as the stars for ever and ever. Dan. 12:13,3. John's initial enlargement of Daniel's picture of the last things is now over. There is much more to come in the second half of his book.

Thus Rev. 11 sets forth in seed form all that is to be enlarged in the following chapters, and in so doing it indicates the manner in which these later chapters are to be interpreted.

Comment should be made regarding past historicist interpretations of this chapter. Scholars such as Elliott and Barnes represent ably the historicist school. They saw the war on the witnesses as having taken place prior to the Reformation, and the resurrection of the witnesses was the Reformation itself. Guinness writes:

The inquisition continued its career of persecution under its forty-four inquisitors-general till 1820, when it was finally suppressed. But as early as the *Lateran Council* in 1514 the whole of the pre-reformation witnesses to the gospel in France, Spain, Piedmont, Italy and Bohemia, by means of the sword, the rack, and the stake, *had been crushed and silenced*. In England the Lollards were extinct. None remained to witness to New Testament truth. The orator of the session, ascending the pulpit, addressed to the assembled members of the Lateran Council, the memorable exclamation of triumph:--"*There is an end of resistance to the Papal rule and religion; opposers there exist no more.*"¹⁷

*Three years and a half later on, to a day, on October 31st, 1517, Luther posted up his Theses at Wittenberg. "The voice of an obscure monk rang through Europe, like the mighty thunder peal; awakening men from the slumber of ages, and shaking to its foundation the usurped dominion of Romanism." In Luther and the Reformers the slaughtered witnesses to the truth of the gospel, risen from the dead, stood once more upon their feet before Rome and the world.*¹⁸

But in another place he makes a different application to a later time.¹⁹ By mid-nineteenth century a multitude of interpreters applied Rev. 11 in yet another way--to the French Revolution, and its opposition to Christianity. We would point out that each of these crises fulfills outlines of this apotelesmatic prophecy, but the complete accomplishment of Rev.11 must be yet future. We agree with another who was written:

Until Christ shall appear in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, men will become perverse in spirit and turn from the truth to fables. The church will yet see troublous times. She will prophesy in sackcloth. But although she must meet heresies and persecutions, although she must battle with the infidel and the apostate, yet by the help of God she is bruising the head of Satan. The Lord will have a people as true as steel, and with faith as firm as the granite rock. They are to be His witnesses in the world, His instrumentalities to do a special, a glorious work in the day of His preparation.²⁰

Rev. 11:1-3:

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

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

Hoeksema on this passage says, "If therefore, we are inclined to take these terms in the symbolical sense, and refuse to take them literally, we do so with the entire New Testament backing us."²¹ Such a statement is a protest against dispensationalist interpretation, such as that of Walvoord who says on this passage: "The Temple here is apparently that which will be in existence during the great tribulation. Originally constructed for the worship of the Jews and the renewal of their ancient sacrifices, during the great tribulation it is desecrated and becomes the home of an idol of the world ruler. . . ." ²² The author then proceeds to speak of the last three and a half years of Israel's history—meaning literal Israel. The witnesses are said to be specific persons.²³

While we recognize that many who take such positions are devout Christians, and earnest students of the Word, we feel that such interpretations make nonsense of Holy Scripture. After the death of Christ, the New Testament ignores the Temple of Judaism, except to say that its ritual is now valueless, having met its fulfillment in Christ. See Heb. 9:8-14. To say that the Temple ritual and sacrifices will be inaugurated again with the blessing of God is to deny the once-for-all nature of the Cross of Christ to which the sacrifices pointed. Not only does the New Testament fail to hint at the restoration of the literal Temple, but such a belief would make that book positively misleading. While Christ foretold the end of Jerusalem and its sanctuary, He gave no word regarding its restoration. While Paul could tell believers that they are the temple of God, neither did he ever allude to a physical temple yet to come. See Eph. 2: 20-22; 1 Cor. 3:16; Gal. 4:25,26; Heb. 12:22. The last two passages make it clear that the only Jerusalem in which Christians should take special interest is the heavenly City.

When this Revelation passage is interpreted consistently with the temple imagery to be found in the chapters on both sides of it, its meaning is clear. Chapter one had symbolized the congregation of the saints as light-bearers. In chapter seven they were the true Israel. Chapter 13 pictured them in heavenly places. In Rev. 14, the holy city is the besieged church of Christ, outside of which the attackers shall fall. While chapter 10 sets forth the gospel commission for the church; this eleventh chapter speaks of its fulfillment. The inner temple, the two witnesses, the lampstands, and olive trees, all point to the same reality--"the gossellers" of God.

Almost all commentators view the measuring spoken of as a symbol of protection akin to the sealing of chapter 7. *The Anchor Bible* gives broader possibilities as follows:

. . . there may be four explanations of the measuring in Rev. 11:1-2; for rebuilding or restoring (Ezek. 40:2--43:12, esp. 41:13,15; Zech. 2:2-8; Jer. 30:11), for destruction (II Kings 21:13; Isa. 34:11; Amos 7:7-9; Lam. 2:8; II Sam. 8:2a), for preservation from physical harm (II Sam. 8:2b), and for preservation from spiritual harm (Rev. 7:4-17; I Enoch 41:1-2).²⁴

While Massyngherde Ford favors the last possibility, Plummer has cast his vote for the first. He says, "May not the command have been given to St. John in order to direct his attention to the size of the Church of God? This is the common meaning of the expression throughout the Bible; it is so in Zech. 2:1-5. . . and it is so in ch. 21:15."²⁵ A study of the two passages referred to confirms Plummer's view of the "common meaning" of "measuring." Probably the whole truth is that measuring is a symbolic way of saying, "Give special attention to the following, separate them from all else." However, ' this broader meaning includes the thought of protection. God's special attention involves special care when the church is in focus.

In the context the witnessing remnant is seen as the inner temple (in contrast to the outer court of the temple) and others are mere professors (in the courts), or rank heathen (in the rest of the city). Hoeksema suggests:

The text tells us that there are in the bosom of Christianity the false church, the show-church, and the true church. Hence, we must never expect that all Christianity is Israel in the true sense of the word. In the end many shall fall away openly and shall identify themselves with the false church, from which Antichrist shall come. But at the same time, the true children of God must not be afraid, neither be amazed. If they should find that in the end many should fall away from the church, from the holy city, nay, from the temple proper and add themselves to Antichrist, they must not fear. For all these things must needs come to pass. Christ rules! The power of Antichrist can come only to the number forty-two. Seven times seven it cannot reach. And, as we shall see, before the darkest darkness of night Christ shall take His church to heaven, and the temple of God shall be perfected in eternal glory.²⁶

Ramsey writes that the measuring signifies the ascertaining of the precise shape and limits of the designated objects, for they alone can claim "His covenant care and protection." "It was designed to mark them as His, appropriated and set apart to His service. . . that it might be clearly understood what, and what only, had a claim on the divine protection, and would infallibly enjoy it amidst all perils."²⁷

We must ask ourselves the practical significance of this duty for the church today. Does it not suggest that what God Himself has separated, we must never let become common? The church is to be distinct from the world, the atonement must never be trampled underfoot, and the worshippers must ever remember that they are sanctified, i.e. separated to holy things. In the Torah were a multitude of laws teaching this duty. As Creation itself was characterized by separation (of sea and land, light and darkness, ordinary days from the Sabbath), so this principle must be strictly maintained by the worshipping community. Thus the laws of the Pentateuch, forbidding sundry types of mixtures. In the passage before us, the subjects of the testimony of the witness are defined, and separated from all that lies on the fringe of holy things.

Have we not here the reason for the muffled testimony of most church-goers today? They have no definite and clear perception of the realities which [must be kept separate from all others. Using the heavenly measure (Scripture), it is their duty to make certain that what is special to God is likewise to them. For believers, to measure the temple means to understand what constitutes the church of God, what are her duties, and privileges. It will include awareness as to what God has said concerning her ordinances. As for the altar of the *vaos*, was it not a place for the sprinkling of blood or the offering of incense figures of the merits of Christ's death? The altar points to the Atonement as the ground of all Christian worship and service. And the worshippers of the temple are those who rightly relate to both the sanctuary and the altar in holy faith and practice.

Verse 2 alludes to Dan. 8:10-14, the record of the Antichrist of the Old Testament, and his attack on the ancient sanctuary and its worshippers. Says the Anchor Bible:

The idea of trampling to destroy, defile, or show contempt is found in Ps. 79:1, Isa. 63:18, I Macc 4:60, II Macc. 8:2. But the texts influential on this verse are Dan. 8:13-14. predicting that the sanctuary will be trampled for 2,300 evenings and mornings but will then be restored to its proper condition, and I Macc. 3:45, reporting that "Jerusalem was uninhabited like a wilderness; not one of her children went in or out."²⁸

The first half of this chapter talks of the treading down of the sanctuary drawing its basic symbolism from Dan. 8:10, but the last half of the chapter corresponding to Dan. 8:14, speaks of the vindicating of the sanctuary and its worshippers, as symbolized by the revealing of the holy ark at the time of awards to the righteous and the wicked. Compare the two major sections of the Mark 13 Olivet discourse, verses 1-23 and verses 24-37.

Forty and two months is the first allusion to a time-period which will be repeated in one way or another in several places in the next two chapters. It also is borrowed from Daniel. See Dan. 7:25; 12:7. The Jew thought of it as subsumed under the 2300 days of 8:14. We should carefully observe that as Kiddle says, "these two passages in chap. xi and chaps. xii-xiii are plainly parallel."²⁹ That is to say, the trampling by the nations and the conquering of the beast are the same. Thus we are told in 12:17 that the ones attacked are those who hold the testimony (or witness) of Jesus, and the commandments of God, which are made light of by Antichrist. Cf. Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:13-18; 14:12.

Forty-two months is obviously a symbolic period. But why forty-two? For several reasons. This was the length of time of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, the most terrible experience of Israel between the Babylonian captivity and the advent of Christ. Secondly, forty-two was the length of the wanderings of Israel in the desert. (After two years they were sentenced to forty more). Thirdly, it is the length of the great apostasy in the days of Jezebel, when the heavens were shut for forty-two months under the judgment of God. Fourth, it is the number of the stations of Israel in the wilderness. Thus Matthew shortened Christ's genealogy in order to make it conform to Israel's pilgrimage pauses. Fifth, our Lord's ministry to Israel was one of forty-two months during which He preached in sackcloth, so to speak, as One despised and rejected of men. (In Rev. 11, the experience of the church is plainly modelled on the experience of its Head.) Forty-two months equals three and a half years, and three and a half is a broken seven, symbolic of unrest, and trouble, and persecution. The Anchor Bible has even more to say:

The number six also connotes deficit, a failure to attain the completeness of seven, while eight designates superabundance. Forty-two has two-fold symbolism. It is perjorative, since it

is the result of six multiplied by seven, i.e. "perfection missing the mark." It is also messianic, since it is the result of three multiplied by fourteen. The number fourteen is the sum of the letters which in Hebrew stand for four, six, four. *Daledh* is the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and *waw* is the sixth; thus four-six-four stands for d-w-d, i.e. David. Matt. 1:1-17 divides the genealogy of Christ from Abraham into three groups of fourteen names each. Christ is the new David.³⁰

Most commentators view the forty-two months as the symbolic expression for the whole period between the two advents. Beasley-Murray disagrees and writes:

It should further be observed that the conjunction of these passages makes it clear that the three and a half years of tribulation are not to be expanded so as to make them coincide with the whole period of Christian history. Such an interpretation can undoubtedly be extracted from verses 6 and 13ff., taken in isolation, but it does violence to John's intention. The three and a half years are the time of the Antichrist's raging (13:5), and so of the Church's exposure to his attempts to crush it out of existence (11:1f., 3-13). This does not characterize the period of the Church between the ascension and the parousia of Christ.³¹

The great bulk of Protestant interpreters since the Reformation till the twentieth century have invoked the year-day principle, and have seen the forty-two months, or 1260 days as extending for over twelve centuries of persecution by the historical Antichrist. But to John, who never contemplated centuries of delay, its ultimate meaning is the final conflict between the Beast and the Lamb, and their forces, when the mark of the beast is urged upon those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Such an application is implied in Daniel's closing prophecy where he foretells an eschatological attack on the worshippers of the sanctuary before the falling of God's vindictory judgments. See Dan. 12:7ff. However, to apply the prophecy to the persecutions of the Middle Ages is a legitimate apotelesmatic application.

Before leaving verse 2, we should emphasize again that the word *ekball* is stronger in meaning than "leave that out" of the RSV. It means "cast out" and is so used in Jn. 9:34. Milligan claims:

We are under a special obligation in the present instance not to strip the word used by the Apostle of its proper force, for we shall immediately see that, rightly interpreted, it is one of the most interesting expressions of his book, and of the greatest value in helping us to determine the precise nature of his thought. In the meanwhile it is enough to say that the employment of the term in the connexion in which it here occurs is at variance with a simply literal interpretation.³²

In a later passage he enlarges his thought thus:

Excommunication from the synagogue is in the Seer's mind, not a temporal punishment, not a mere worldly doom, but a spiritual sentence depriving of spiritual privileges misunderstood and abused. Such a casting out, however, can apply only to those who had been once within the courts of the Lord's house or to the faithless members of the Christian Church. They, like the Jews of old, would "cast out" the humble disciples whom Jesus "found"; and He cast them out.

If the explanation now given of the opening verses of this chapter be correct, we have reached a very remarkable stage in these apocalyptic visions. For the first time, except in the letters to the churches, we have a clear line of distinction drawn between the professing and the true portions of the Church of Christ, or, as it may be otherwise expressed, between the "called" and the "chosen."³³

Verse 3 describes the witnesses as "clothed in sackcloth." This should not be passed by. No church can do the work of God unless it has clear views of the demands of the law of God, and an awareness of the depths of sin clinging to every believer. A Christian indeed is "always a sinner, always a penitent, and always right with God." While he would die rather than knowingly choose a course of disloyalty to God, yet at every advance step his penitence deepens. As he draws nearer to Christ, his own imperfections stand out boldly in contrast. No deep-seated love for Christ can dwell in the heart that does not sense its own defects. Torrance speaks to our consciences when he writes:

John seems to envisage a time when the outer courts of the Church's witness will be trodden under foot by unbelievers and the Church, itself ravaged and harrowed, will be shrunken to measurable proportions. Its worshippers will be able to live and bear witness only in sackcloth. But that may be the moment of the Church's supreme power over mankind, for the

power of the Church's proclamation lies in her repentance. An unreformed Church, a Church of arrested penitence, loses her grip upon the world and quenches the Holy Spirit. However, the Church which is prepared to eat wormwood, to clothe herself in sackcloth for the sins of the world, and the more terrible sins of the Church, will have the ' keys of the Kingdom.³⁴

Rev. 11:4-6:

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth. And if any one would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; if any one would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed. They have power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

Here the symbols from Zech. 4 are borrowed to portray the witnesses. Receiving the oil of God's Spirit they shine in the darkness, as did Joshua and Zerubbabel, the priest and king of Zechariah's time. "Teachers," says Bengel, "must not be cold and dry, but filled with oil; and the church, through all her members, must appropriate the oil, so as to exhibit in their walk a lovely brightness and an attractive beauty."³⁵ These witnesses are also kings and priests. Compare 1:5; 20:4.

The powers of Elijah and Moses are ascribed to the witnesses, for these powers belong to the Word of God of which they are stewards. We see in these allusions, reminders of the great crises of the past when God worked through His ancient faithful witnesses.³⁶ The Mt. Carmel contest and the Exodus from Egypt provide the emblems here used and they reappear in the trumpets. God has always had His representatives calling on His creatures to choose Him and live. The curses precipitated by the prophets as God's agents were the curses of the broken covenant, that covenant made with all men in Eden, and renewed at the Flood, and then committed to Israel at Sinai. We are hereby reminded that the gospel, which is intended to be a savor of life unto life, becomes a savor of death if we reject it. (See Rev. 16.) This great truth has already been illustrated in the first six trumpets, where the descending fire of the altar wreaked havoc on the world of the rebellious.

This allusion to the earlier plagues of Rev. 8 and 9 is intended to tell us that the testimony of the witnesses, and the judgments of the trumpet plagues to some extent parallel each other. If we keep in mind the apotelesmatic nature of much of symbolic prophecy this truth is obvious. The church is ever witnessing and the plagues of God are ever falling upon those who reject the gospel message. The relationship between the two is a more important fact than the timing, though both are present.

Rev. 11:7:

And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them, . . .

Here is Antichrist. For the first time the beast of Revelation, the beast, comes before us in all its terribleness. It rises from death and it rises to precipitate into its own pit the worshippers of God. Rev. 13:3-7 echoes this passage. Scripture does not pause here to tell us more about this beast. Again it speaks proleptically. But this is the fulfillment of the promised bitterness of the preceding chapter. To bear faithful witness means to be ready for death. Only those prepared to go to the Cross daily can be Christ's true disciples. This short crisp summary of the beasts' attack embraces oceans of blood spilled over centuries, and again to be spilled in the last crisis. Jesus in the Olivet sermon foretold all this:

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all for my name's sake.³⁷

Strangely, the next words of our Lord after the foregoing are, "But not a hair of your head shall perish." Lu. 21:18. The same meaning is implied in this chapter of Rev. 11, when it is declared that only after

the witnesses have finished their testimony are they overcome. Nothing can touch the saints, not even a hair of their heads can be plucked out without the Saviour's permission, and for the ultimate good of themselves and the world. The saints, if living within the known will of God, are immortal till their task is done. During the Middle Ages, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. It was the sight of a heretic burning for his faith that stopped John Calvin in his tracks, and turned his heart to Protestantism. This was repeated in untold thousands of instances at each crisis of persecution. He who is faithful and who attends the funeral of every sparrow, watches his saints in the furnace. Ultimately it will be found that only their bonds have suffered, as with the worthies in the Babylon crematorium. See Dan. 3.

We err as readers, unless from even such tragic passages as this, we perceive that the relationship between heaven and earth is close and decided. The more closely we look at this book's account of divine providence, the more we shall see the open gates of heaven. Then one day we may change our geographical place, but not our company.

Some have attempted to translate "when they have finished their testimony," as "when they are finishing their testimony." But this is neither true to the original, or the divine intention. The passage echoes Mt. 24:14 and Rev. 10, and the completion of the eschatological witness there foretold. Antichrist cannot rise to possess the world until the church has engaged in her task with apostolic fervor, and with apostolic success. Lange, referring to 2 Thess. 2:6-7 writes: ". . . the removal. . . of the hindrance to Antichristianity. . . coincides precisely with the removal of the two olive trees. . . through the medium of the Beast of the abyss."³⁸ Thus, once more, Revelation is telling us that the proclamation of the true gospel to all the world is the only event postponing the coming of the Lord. All other eschatological signs are to be precipitated by that one. As for the risks involved in faithful witnessing, let us remember the comment of Hengstenberg regarding the martyred witnesses:

The overthrow is but a concealed victory, like the corn of wheat, which dies in the earth in order to bring forth much fruit. If this were considered aright, how would it banish the fear, which makes so many in our day inclined to timid concessions, which smites the shepherds, and causes the sheep to be scattered! To escape imaginary dangers these persons fall into real ones. For, only *one* danger is really to be feared, namely, that our heart be overcome, that faith, which is the innermost life of our souls, should be slain. What is said here of the witnesses of Christ, was exemplified in Christ himself. The world hated him, and yet the enemies could accomplish nothing against him, till their hour came and the power of darkness. Then only did the darkness receive power, when he had finished his testimony, and when it was good for the church that he should go away; and his death was followed by his resurrection and ascension to heaven, as is represented here in ver. 11, 12, in respect to the true witnesses. "In all circumstances God still has his glory; and if it should appear that the evil gains the mastery over the good, the evil is still very limited; it cannot break forth sooner than its time, nor rise higher and last longer than God permits it. Begin but rightly with God, and the result shall not fail."³⁹

Rev. 11:8:

. . . and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

The professing city of God, Jerusalem, has become as Sodom and Egypt. Indeed, later it will be described as Babylon.⁴⁰ The more the privilege, the greater the danger. This was illustrated by the generation which saw Christ in the flesh. Those who are not softened like wax by the Sun of righteousness, become hardened like clay. As Jerusalem slew the Son of God, here it is taught that the professing church of the latter days, under the control of political power, will persecute the sons of God. Note the use of "allegorically" or "spiritually." There is no way of dodging John's repeated emphasis that he does not wish to be taken literally.

Rev. 11:9-10:

For three days and a half men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

To be unburied was considered shameful, and the witnesses are despitely used even in death. They

lie exposed for three and half days, that is, a day for every year of their witnessing. This period is also analogous to our Lord's time in the tomb. Meanwhile the world rejoices, and enemies are reconciled, as was the case with Pilate and Herod the day Christ died. See Lu. 23:12.

We should attend to the word "tormented." Why was it that the little flock of witnesses, despite their weakness and poverty, could yet afflict the world? Because every preacher has an ally in the breast of the worldling. Every man's conscience testifies to the legitimate claims of the law of God. It is this fact that brings torment to those who hear the Word without surrendering to it. Hengstenberg has a provocative comment:

. . . the declaration: These two prophets tormented, is a touchstone, by which every one may learn, whether he fulfils his office in the right spirit and with proper zeal. So long as all speak well of us, or even let us go on unmolested, we may be perfectly certain, that we are still not in the right state, and consequently can look for no proper fruits from our operations. For he who torments not, also blesses not. The ground must first be pierced by the plough before the seed can be sown in it. But those only can rejoice in the tormenting power of the prophets, and console themselves under the pain, who are prepared with a feeling heart to be the object of hatred, who find it a torment to themselves that they must torment, and can apply to themselves what has been said of Christ, "He burns and cuts, but not as a tyrant; he does it as a true, and wise, and tender physician."⁴¹

Rev. 11:11-12:

But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up hither!" And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud.

As the witnesses are not two literal people, we need not here think necessarily of physical resurrection, though such is ultimately involved. The thought here is that of vindication, and the symbols of resurrection and ascension are used to convey that. In every age when tyranny and persecution thinks it has silenced the opposition, there comes a resurrection and ascension. The righteous may be knocked down, but they are not knocked out. The worst thing that can happen to a saint of God is a brief sleep, and then comes the morning--and God, and heaven. Ezekiel 37 should be studied in connection with this passage, to see the use sometimes made of the figure of resurrection.

In the final crisis, the voice of the witnesses shall be stilled when the task of preaching is complete, and the world has rejected the message of the church. Before that time, many individual, faithful souls may be martyred, but there are no grounds for thinking that such will be the fate of the entire church. The three and a half days are symbolic of that period of time analogous to the waiting time after the door of the ark was shut, before the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the Flood came. When the passage is applied to the ages it fits every revival of true religion, every unearthing of the Cross of Christ as the one magnet which attracts men from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, but the complete fulfillment belongs to the end of time.

Rev. 11:13:

And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The cessation of the preached Word is like the dislodging of the keystone of society. It inevitably brings a great shaking involving death to many, and terror to the rest. This giving of glory is only the response of remorse, not true repentance.⁴² In this eschatological book, while penitence is called for, never is it met with large scale response.⁴³ The hearts of men become fully set in them to do evil because in His patience God has endured them with much long-suffering refusing to execute sentence against their evil works speedily. The "tenth part" and the "7,000" are but symbols of a perfect judgment begun. As symbols they allude to the ten-fold law the impenitent have despised.

Rev. 11:14-18:

The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come. Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

"We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty,
who art and who wast,
that thou has taken thy great power
and begun to reign.
The nations raged, but thy wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
for rewarding thy servants,
the prophets and saints,
and those who fear thy name
both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers
of the earth."

At last, after the interlude of chapter 10 and 11, comes the third woe, the seventh trumpet. It brings the close of probation, the wrath of God in the seven last plagues, the destruction of the remnant of the wicked, and the rewards for the righteous. Those who have been raging are stilled, and those who were suffering are exalted. It is Judgment Day, and neither the atmospheric heavens, nor the polluted earth, nor those who have refused the grace of God, can stand the sight of His face.

We have here another "cancelled conclusion" as Farrer calls the phenomenon. All the implications of judgment day are not spelled out, for this chapter is but a shorthand summary of what another eleven chapters are to detail, and the ultimate judgment of the lost is reserved for Rev. 20. The same is true of the reward of the saints.

Rev. 11:19:

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

The parallel between the last part of this verse, and the climax to the seals (6:12f.), and plagues (16:18-21), should be observed. It is obvious that these climaxes point to the same moment—the last signs of judgment at the coming of Christ. The ark is the symbol of God's justice. It reminds all of that law given at Sinai amid lightning, thunder and earthquake. Its demands are now met in penalty by those who have refused the vicarious sufferings of the Lamb of God.

At Christ's death, after the shout of victory, an earthquake marked the rending of the temple veil and the revelation of the place once sacred to the ark. Rev. 16:17 points to the repetition of the Calvary cry, "It is finished." The intercessory ministry based on the merits of the sacrifice of the Cross terminates and the door of mercy is shut just a little while prior to the judgment plagues of the seventh trumpet. We are thus intended to mark the parallel between Christ's enduring the wrath of God on our behalf, and the fate of the impenitent who must drink that wrath for themselves.

The ark reminds the universe that righteousness is the foundation, pillar, and bulwark of all enduring existence. Its mercy-seat points to the union of love and mercy with justice, that all the penitent might find forgiveness and transformation.

On the Day of Atonement, the sprinkled blood on the ark's cover brought a new beginning for each believer, and every fifty years that event marked the beginning of the Jubilee with its freedom for slaves, remission of debts, restoration of property, and universal rejoicing.

How appropriate that the ark which followed the trumpets at the time of the compassing and downfall of Jericho should be seen here as the world topples, and the heavenly Canaan appears. As the blowing of trumpets ushered in the Day of Atonement, the Jubilee, and the opening of Canaan, so now the prophetic trumpet chain leads us to the final disposition of sin, and the consummation of the joys and privileges of the kingdom of God. As with every coronation in Israel, so in this symbolic

portrayal, trumpet peals announce the universal revelation of Christ as King of kings.

As Christ, who was the gospel incarnate drew attention to the Most Holy Place by His death at the close of the Jewish age, so should the church, His body, point to it in these last days. The most holy place, containing the law and the mercy-seat with its sprinkled blood, symbolically summarizes the everlasting gospel. That gospel is the glorious solution to the problem of how God could be just, and yet be the justifier of the sinner; how He could reconcile law and mercy. The rent veil (symbolizing the sacrificial body of Christ) and the blood drops answer the "how." Now, because of Christ our Mercy-Seat, God can be "faithful and just" in forgiving sin. The law has been honored, not slighted by the Cross, and the repenting sinner has legal right to forgiveness through the loving provision of Heaven. See Rom. 3:25-26; Heb. 10:19-20; 1 Jn. 1:9.

Furthermore, the church of today should point to the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, because it is the place of judgment. On the Day of Atonement, through the ministry of the High Priest, all Israel experienced the sealing of destiny. Yom Kippur meant the parting of the ways for professed believers--the penitent were numbered with Yahweh, but the impenitent with Azazel. Everything depended on the relationship to the blood and the High Priest. And today, before probation's close, the preaching of the everlasting gospel reins all men up before the Cross of Christ and all are judged according their response to God's unspeakable gift.

SECTION FOUR *(TOC)*

(Revelation 12-14)

DESPATCHES FROM THE CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 12-14

Chapter 26

We now approach that section which is central to the apocalypse. From 12:1 to 14:14 is what many have called the keystone of the book. It is also the introduction to the second half of the book of Revelation. Here are the seven mystic figures—the Sun-clothed Woman; the Red Dragon; the Man-child; the Beast from the Sea; the Beast on the Land; the Lamb on Mt. Zion; and the Son of God on the Cloud. Morris prefers to speak of "seven significant signs," and lists them as follows:

- a. The woman clothed with the sun (xii. 1-6).
- b. Satan cast out (xii. 7-12).
- c. War between Satan and the woman and her Son (xii. 13-17).
- d. The beast from the sea (xiii. 1-10).
- e. The beast from the earth (xiii. 11-18).
- f. The Lamb on Mount Zion (xiv. 1-5).
- g. The harvest of the earth (xiv. 6-20).¹

The central verses of the book are those of doxology in Rev. 12:10-12.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, o earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

There are 205 verses before and 207 after. Ellul, in discussing the plan of the book observes:

Thus, to sum up, we are able to comprehend the structure of the Apocalypse: there is a central axis, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (11); around this is organized in the central part (the third) the dramas of the separation of the creation from the Creator (8 and 9) and the proclamation of the gospel (10); then the Incarnation (12) and the fury of the powers as a consequence of the work of Jesus Christ (13).²

We should not however think of chapter 12 as merely the Incarnation, but as the Christ event. He was born to die. And the victory described in this chapter is the victory of His death and resurrection whereby He received the right to reign. Thus what we have in this chapter is another panoramic view of world history, but from the perspective of the reign of Christ.

In harmony with the Olivet discourse, and other presentations in Revelation, we have here first a picture of the work of God in the gospel, and then the inevitable antagonism to that gospel manifested by Satan and his followers. As the letters to the seven churches were succeeded by the seals with their emphasis on persecution, and as the first seal itself of the white horse was followed by the red horse, and a rider with a great sword, and again, as Rev. 10 with its prophecy of the worldwide spread of the gospel was succeeded by the account of the slaying of the witnesses, so in the central vision before us the order is the same. First the work of God, then the antagonism of hell. Note Heidt's comments on the opening symbol and his recognition of this warfare.

The "woman" evidently is a leading character, not a shadow figure, because more space is devoted to her than even to the Messiah; (b). Ap 12:1-18 in a very graphic way sets the scene for the rest of the book, which features the conflict between Satan and the people of God; consistency and logic would require specifications of these two poles of power, rather than introducing some third personality who is NEVER AGAIN mentioned at any point.³

The seventh trumpet (and third woe) at the close of the first half of the book was expressed very succinctly, far more so than the preceding woes. The reason for this is the proposed later expansion of its content, and that of the sixth trumpet, in this second half of the book. The judgment of the seven last plagues is the third woe, and the tribulation (the "wrath of nations" 11:18) and the judgment are the dominant themes of all the chapters to come. John had quoted from Psa. 2 in Rev. 11:18. This psalm spoke of the enthronement of the king which precipitated the wrath of the nations. It is these things which shall now be discussed.

The eleventh chapter had mentioned for the first time the rising of the beast from the pit. This too is now to be enlarged. Likewise in the same chapter we found the 1260 day period of persecution, and of these we shall read again and again in the next two chapters. As for Jerusalem, that great city where our Lord was crucified, we are left wondering in chapter 11 as to what God shall do with that apostate metropolis. In our new section, the great city comes before us under a new name--Babylon the great, later to be known as the mother of harlots, and the murderess of all the prophets. The true church in chapter 11 had been symbolized by the inner temple, the lampstands, the olive trees, and the two witnesses. Alford is certainly correct when he writes concerning Rev. 11:

We cannot understand this prophecy at all, except in the light of those that follow: for it introduces by anticipation their dramatis personae. ... If I mistake not, we thus gain much light on the difficulties of this prophecy. If it is a compendium of the more detailed prophecies which follow, opening the great series regarding God's church, and reaching forward to the time of the seventh trumpet, then its separate parts, so hard to assign on any other view, at once fall into their places.⁴

The first half of Revelation pictured the struggle between the church and the world from an external view, and in general terms covered the whole terrain. But now the second half reveals the hidden background, and in emphasizing the eschatological crisis, will necessarily be more specific. As the hidden background becomes a foreground, the church learns the reason for its tribulation--Satan's chagrin over his defeat at the Cross. All that happens is seen to be but the outward manifestation of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, good and evil, the kingdom of heaven versus the kingdoms of this world.

Satan's "henchmen" are presented in chapter 13, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the land. *Chapter 13 contains the essence of the Apocalypse, inasmuch as it elaborates as no other chapter what is involved in the last great tribulation.* This is ever in John's mind throughout the book, but he has waited till now for it: full presentation. Later chapters will give more of the details of the conflict. If we called this final conflict by the name found in chapter 16 we would not be wide of the mark. The last war is Armageddon--closing the conflict between Christ and Satan, the church and antichrist, the testimony of Jesus and the traditions and deceptions of men, the commandments of God and the decrees of one making himself as God, the true and the false gospels. Kiddle sums it up:

The prince of these unseen adversaries John depicts as a huge red dragon: the incarnate ministers of evil, known to the world as Emperors, are described in the symbol of the Beast which bears the shape of the dragon himself. As to the shape of future events in a world so governed, could there be any astonishment at persecution, any dismay at the ubiquity of evil, any consternation at the advent of worldwide plagues and portents of God's wrath? No, these things were inevitable; they were intrinsic in the mighty battle between good and evil--between the servants of God and the servants of Satan. It is this conflict which forms the subject of chaps. xii.-xiv. John's desire is to show the martyrs of the future that their part in the battle will be decisive, as it had been in the past. From the messianic people came the Child who eventually was to crush Satan and his ministers. And the messianic people must supply those who would finish the task of earlier martyrs, and raise the flood-gates of divine wrath. The whole section is pastoral in purpose, and its moral is stated outright in chap. xiv.: let no Christian shrink from the destined battle--the final issue is assured, and the fruits of victory are shown to be ineffably sweet; but the penalties of insincerity, compromise, feebleness and cowardice are horrible, almost beyond contemplation.⁵

Lest men should faint at the prospect of so grim and terrible a conflict, chapter 14 is added, showing home in glory the church triumphant. We learn of the everlasting gospel which gathered out such a glorious company who, through the imputed merits of Christ, could be found without fault before His throne. After the final three-fold warning comes the vindicating Son of Man with his harvest sickle. The Judgment is pictured--first the judgment on behalf of the saints, resulting in their ingathering to the heavenly garner, and then that of the followers of the beast. As a dramatic close, we read of the besieged holy city, and blood to the horses' bridles, as God judges the would-be murderers of His people.

Several questions are inevitably raised by these chapters. How largely has John drawn from the pagan myths, which are so similar to his picture in the first verses of chapter 12? This war in heaven--when was it, and what connection does it have with the Christ event? Why is there so much of legal imagery here--the accuser, the expulsion from court, the word of witness, the overcoming? Who is the first beast? Is it pagan Rome only, or Antichrist in a fuller sense? Who or what is the second beast? What is meant by the deadly wound? Is there some echo of the Nero myth in chapter 13? What is the mark of the beast, and the meaning of his number 666? Is the gospel of Rev. 14:6 the gospel of redemption, or just the good news of judgment and vindication? What is meant by Babylon in the second angel's message of Rev. 14:8?

We will touch upon each of these now, and add details in the later exegesis of the respective chapters.

Sources of the Vision of the Sun-clothed Woman, and her Opponent the Dragon

The most common view of the sources of this opening vision is that given by Glasson:

It is generally thought that a pagan story provides the imagery of this section. Several ancient myths (Egyptian, Babylonian, etc.) describe a monster who waits to devour a child about to be born; the child is nevertheless safely born and escapes; in some cases he destroys the monster. The story was current in the area where John lived. There is no difficulty in supposing that he adapted parts of this myth to Christian use, for dreams and visions are often built up from materials which already exist in the mind. Greek legends concerning the birth of Apollo said that his mother Leto was pursued by the serpent Python when she was pregnant. Python knew that he was fated to be slain by Leto's son. The sea-god Poseidon, however, came to Leto's help and conveyed her to the island of Delos, where she safely gave birth to Apollo.⁶

We confess that we have difficulties with this viewpoint. It is not hard to believe that John, along with many of his contemporaries, knew such stories. That he made them the basis of his Apocalypse is much harder to see. Says the Anchor Bible, ". . . it seems unlikely that a book like this apocalypse, devoted to a polemic against idolatry, should utilize pagan symbols of the faithful community."⁷ We believe Hengstenberg is correct when he affirms that "the Seer of the Apocalypse" lives entirely in holy Scripture."⁸ Beckwith affirms that as a part of a Semitic heritage, the Jews possessed legends which they put through their own crucible. From this view, Carrington's may not be too far removed. "The theory that the woman is a sun-goddess is not only not proven; if that were all, the theory might still hold the field. The whole Vision, in all its perplexing detail can quite easily be illustrated from other sources, all of them Jewish."⁹ As for Farrer, we are reminded of the account of his experience in writing *A Rebirth of Images*. He concluded that Revelation contained "a more continuous, hardheaded and systematic working-out of Old Testament themes than had been recognized."¹⁰ As a result, Farrer protested against the typical assumption that Revelation should be interpreted by reference to pagan myths. Kiddle writes that "John was not modelling his story to form a Christian replica of a pagan myth."¹¹ The same writer thinks John knows the secular stories, but sets about his own business, much as Shakespeare did in his creative use of old materials.¹² The simplest view, and perhaps the best, is that of Huntingford.

No new or unusual images are introduced in this vision, but only such as are to be found in other Scriptures. In the first place, the coining of Christ to destroy Satan is spoken of, in the very beginning of the Bible, and immediately after the fall of man, in a somewhat similar manner and under images which illustrate this passage. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Here then, we have a definite meaning assigned to the principal actors in this Allegory. The woman from whom Christ should be born, Christ Himself her Seed, and Satan His enemy.¹³ If Huntingford is correct, and we believe the evidence supports him, then

we have here also the solution to other problems such as the nature of the "deadly wound," and the Nero issue. But more on that later.

War in Heaven

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Rev. 12:7-9

The automatic way of interpreting this passage for most readers is to think of Milton's use of it, with reference to Satan's rebellion in heaven before the creation of the world. But the more one studies the passage, the more one must question that viewpoint.

The account of the heavenly battle is in its literary context a parallel to the Christ event. It is placed between the story of His ascension and the church's flight, and the later description of the dragon's renewed attack on the woman. The literary setting makes the enthronement of Christ and the victory of His people identical in time, and obviously related in theme, to the casting down of Satan and his hosts. In this connection, Carpenter sounds a warning, and makes his own suggestion, one now accepted by most commentators.

We shall fail to catch the spirit of its meaning if we insist upon detaching the passage from its context; and the more so that the structure of the chapter seems to give an express warning against doing so. The narrative of the woman's flight into the wilderness is suspended that this passage may be inserted. Could we have a clearer indication of the anxiety of the sacred writer to connect this war in heaven with the birth and rapture of the man child? The man child is born; born a conqueror. The dragon is His foe, and the powers of the foe are not confined to the material and historical world; he is a power in the world spiritual; but the man child is to be entirely a conqueror. His rapture into heaven is the announcement that there in the very highest, He is acknowledged victor; and His victory is won over the power of the dragon, the old serpent, whose head is now bruised. 14

Kiddle and Caird express the same truth aptly. "The Accuser is mentioned only as he is thrown down after the messianic triumph. The ejection of the dragon from heaven is, in fact, nothing less than a pictorial expression of the Atonement." 15

Everything that John sees in heaven is the counterpart of some earthly reality. When the victory is being won in heaven, Christ is on earth on the Cross. Because he is part of the earthly reality, he cannot at the same time be part of the heavenly symbolism. The heavenly chorus explains that the real victory has been won by the lifeblood of the Lamb. Michael's victory is simply the heavenly and symbolic counterpart of the earthly reality of the Cross. 16

When we turn to our Lord's own words, we have the best commentary on Rev. 12:7-9. When his disciples returned with joy because of their triumph over even demons, Christ exclaimed, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Lu. 10:18. And on a later occasion, foretelling his death and its results, He said, "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out." Jn. 12:31.

It is true, as we learn from 12:4 and Jude 6, that Satan did make war in heaven, and lured away many of the angels to join him in his rebellion. Possibly John does have this in mind as he writes verses 7 to 9, but it is certainly not his main purpose to link that conflict directly with the time of the Cross, whereas it is his intent to show that the church can claim victory now, because Christ's Cross has bruised the serpent's head. Satan's present activities are but his death throes.

The Legal Imagery of Rev. 12:9-11

As pointed out in an introductory chapter, Revelation has repeated and widespread use of legal terminology. For example, consider the following--testimony, witness, Satan, devil, accuser, judgment, throne, books, Son of Man, cloud, confess, deny, accuse, overcome, judge, avenge, etc. Trites says that "metaphors drawn from the lawcourt are never far from the author's mind." 17

When Massyngberde Ford comments on the casting down of Satan, she points it that the Greek term

has a judicial aspect and denotes "judicial punishment (e.g. Mt. 3:10; 5:29; 13:42; Rev. 2:10), or expulsion from the community (Mt. 13:48; John 15:6; cf. the ruler of this world being cast out in Jn. 12:31)."18

The recent monograph, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, demonstrates that it is not only Paul who uses legal language. For example, John, in his gospel, uses a forensic scheme describing the cosmic lawsuit between God and this planet.19

To begin with, the sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel are often described as 'discourse', but are rather more commonly juridical debate. The discussions of Jesus with 'the Jews' sounds like a lawsuit: indeed, the first twelve chapters have as their main theme the conflict of Jesus with the 'Ioufaiotai, who represent the unbelieving world in its hostility to God. 'This whole section', Professor Johnston has pointed out, 'has the form of a great contest or assize.' The 'argumentativeness' which Burkitt found 'so positively repellent' is an integral element in the Fourth Gospel, and provides just the context of contention and debate in which one would expect to see witnesses called and evidence presented to substantiate the claims of Christ.

These general considerations are strengthened by observing that the Fourth Gospel presents a controversy very similar to the one found in Isaiah 40-55. There the controversy between Yahweh and the false gods turns out to be a lawsuit between God and the world. God is represented by Israel and the world by the pagan nations. Similarly, in the Fourth Gospel God incarnate has a lawsuit with the world. His witnesses include John the Baptist, the scriptures, the words and works of Christ, and later the witness of the apostles and the Holy Spirit. They are opposed by the world, represented by the unbelieving Jews.20

The pivotal word "overcame" in Rev. 12:10 is also forensic. Arndt and Gingrich note that the term is used with the meaning of 'conquer in a legal action' in Aristophanes, the papyri, the inscriptions and Josephus. In Ro. 3:4, the word signifies the winning of a lawsuit, and in 1 John and Revelation the term refers to the believer's participation in his Representative's victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. In view of all of this, the triumph of the two witnesses in Rev. 11 after their 'death,' and the overcoming of the martyrs in Rev. 12 is the same reality. Because of what Christ has already done, those who believe are reckoned as overcomers by God, however tragic their earthly course may seem. Thus the Pauline emphasis on justification, or righteousness by faith, is not a step removed from the teaching of the Apocalypse on the significance of Christ's death. The whole New Testament places the legal before the moral, justification before sanctification, the removal of sin's guilt as the only basis for the removal of its pollution. See Ro. 6:14 and 5:12-19.

The Beast from the Sea (Rev. 13:1-8,17,18)

It was long customary to take it for granted that the monster from the sea is a symbol of pagan Rome. Many commentators now suggest that this position is correct in what it affirms, but wrong in what it denies. Beckwith is very balanced in his presentation. He writes:

It appears certain then, as the larger number of interpreters are now agreed, that the Beast so far as he is represented in this seven heads symbolizes the Roman imperial power, that is, the Roman emperors, as Satan' agent in his war against the saints.21

. . . Conclusive as is the evidence that the heads of the Beast are the Roman emperors in their office as Satan's agents in the war against God's children, it is however clear that this application of the symbolism does not cover the whole significance of the Beast. Activities and attributes are assigned to him which cannot be predicated of any Roman emperor in his ordinary human personality, as is also a career falling after the destruction of the Roman empire. It is true that the prevalence of emperor-worship and the practice of magic arts at the time might suggest to the author the Beast's arrogation of divine honors, and the attribution of signs and wonders to him, even if he were thought of as only a Roman emperor. But as one who, like the head wounded unto death and restored, is some time to return to earth coming out of the abyss of hell, 13:7, 17:13,15; he will be worshiped universally by all that dwell on the earth, save the followers of the Lamb, 13:8; he will receive his dominion after the seventh and last of the Roman emperors has fallen, 17:10f; he will be the central figure upon whom will fall the vengeance of eternal fire after the last pre-millennial conflict, 19:19f. In all this concluding eschatological period, the period of the woeful 3 ½ years, he is clearly more than a

Roman emperor.²²

We will take issue with some minor points in Beckwith's position, but wish to assent with him that to restrict this symbol to the Roman Empire is to err. The chief clue to the meaning of Rev. 13 is found in Dan. 7:23 Note the obvious parallels between the two chapters.

Rev. 13: Beast like a leopard with feet of bear, mouth as lion, seven heads and ten horns. vv. 1,2.

Dan. 7: Lion, bear, leopard, and ten-horned beast. Seven heads altogether. vv. 3-7.

Rev. 13: Speaks great things and blasphemies. v. 5.

Dan. 7: A mouth speaking great things. v. 25.

Rev. 13: Continues forty and two months. v. 5.

Dan. 7: Little horn makes war for a time, times and the dividing of time. v, 25b.

Rev. 13: Makes war with the saints. v. 7.

Dan. 7: Wears out the saints of the Most High. v. 21.

Rev. 13: Shall go into captivity. v. 10.

Dan. 7: Given to the flame, vv. 11,26.

John has made a conglomerate symbol that incorporates the four beasts of Daniel 7, its ten horns, and especially its little horn. The allusion to the attack on the heavenly tabernacle also links Rev. 13 with Dan. 8, where a little horn power trod down the temple of God and its host. It seems to us that it is impossible to deny the fact that John saw in the first beast a final embodiment of the persecuting powers sketched by Daniel. Let it be noted that the beast of Rev. 13 is very much like the dragon of the preceding chapter, with its seven heads and ten horns. Also let us observe that Rev. 17 declares that the seven heads are seven kings (or kingdoms—see Dan. 7:17,18,23), through which the beast functions, and that its status in John's day was that of the sixth kingdom—the one before the last. Rev. 13 points us to the final form of the beast—when the mortally wounded sixth head is revived and becomes the seventh (called eighth because that number symbolizes resurrection). Those who see in the first beast of Rev. 13 only pagan Rome are ignoring the plain statements of Rev. 17:9-14. These verses tell us that Satan's final attack comes with the seventh head when all the kingdoms of earth give their power to the beast. Thus there are crowns on the horns in 13 but not in 17. The former chapter points to the final crisis while the latter is the penultimate stage.

Those who see the geographical pimples of the Roman metropolis as the seven mountains have never seen Rome's seven hills, or have forgotten that the dragon also is represented by the same symbolism. See 12:3. John has told us as clearly as he can that his picture of the Antichrist is a picture which embodies persecuting empires of the past, present, and future. He is not interested in individual emperors of Rome. The interweaving of the lion, leopard, bear, and the little horns of Dan. 7 and 8 point to a fulfillment much greater than any human king. Let us notice some comments from contemporary interpreters.

But who is the beast of John's vision? From the verses which follow we learn that he possessed the authority of Satan (vs. 4), blasphemed the name of God (vss. 5-6), warred victoriously against the saints (vs. 7), and received the worship of the pagan world (vss. 4, 8). There is little doubt that for John the beast was the Roman Empire as persecutor of the church. It was that spirit of imperial power which claimed a religious sanction for its gross injustices. Yet the beast is more than the Roman Empire. John's vision grew out of the details of his own historical situation, but its complete fulfillment awaits the final denouement of human history. The beast always has been, and will be in a final intensified manifestation, the deification of secular authority.²⁴

Morris comments, "Many modern scholars see in the beast a reference to the Roman Empire. This seems too simple. We may well see in the Empire a preliminary manifestation of the evil that will one day be realized to the full in the antichrist. But there is much more to the beast than ancient Rome."²⁵ Hendricksen takes a similar position.

Chapter 13 shows us the agents, instruments, or tools which the dragon uses in his attack upon the Church. Two beasts are described. . . The first represents the persecuting power of Satan operating in and through the nations of this world and their governments. The second

symbolizes the false religions and philosophies of this world. Both these beasts oppose the Church throughout this dispensation; yet the apostle describes them in terms that indicate the form which they assumed during the closing decade of the first century A.D.²⁶

Farrer says concerning the first beast, ". . . he is for obvious symbolical reasons the figure of Antichrist. . . ." ²⁷ Milligan, who shies clear from any historical applications such as Nero, etc., writes:

The whole description of the beast is thus, in multiplied particulars a travesty of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. . . . Like the latter, the former is the representative, the 'sent' of an unseen power, by whom all authority is 'given' him; he has his death and his resurrection from the dead; he has his throngs of marvelling and enthusiastic worshippers; his authority over those who own his sway is limited by no national boundaries, but is conterminous with the whole world; he gathers up and unites in himself all the scattered elements of darkness and enmity to the truth which has previously existed among men, and from which the Church of God had suffered.²⁸

Milligan proceeds to assert that the beast is not Rome, either pagan or papal, but the 'general influence of the world, in so far as it is opposed to God. . . .' ²⁹ This is making too much of a good thing. It is certain that for John the beast represented historical realities more specific than merely the antagonistic world. However, Milligan's words regarding the beast being a travesty of Christ are well spoken. As such they fit the concept of an Antichrist to be manifested in history but particularly at the end of time. Ernst stresses the fact that the political meaning of Rev. 13 will not suffice, but requires the complementary consummation of a demonic eschatological power.³⁰

Some older commentators, such as Alford, see the beast from the sea as "not the Roman Empire merely, but the aggregate of the Empires of this world as opposed to Christ and his kingdom."³¹ Let us nail down as far as possible the evidence of the text itself.

1. The basic symbolism is that of a beast. This figure has been used by Daniel as the emblem of worldly political power. See Dan. 7:17,18,23.
2. The beast has seven heads and ten horns, and diadems are referred to. That powers of the world are at least included is indicated by the crowns--the insignia of earthly dominion. The names of blasphemy in the heads indicates enmity to God.
3. The reference to a mortal wound being healed is a parallel with other descriptions of the same beast ascending from the abyss of death. See 11:7; 17:8. This mortal wound is an allusion to the casting down of the dragon in Rev. 12, the fulfillment of Gen. 3:15 that the Messiah would bruise the serpent's head. This is the Old Testament source of John's imagery. Compare 12:17 and Rom. 16:20. Thus we would err if we understood the healing of the wound to be anything less than resurrection from a state of death. When we compare 13:3 with 13:12,14, we learn that the wounding of a head is the same as the wounding of the beast himself-- thus this must be a power that has no independent existence, but functions only through its seven heads. Each time a persecuting empire becomes no more (being wounded to death), it is succeeded by another--thus the resurrection of the beast. This is consonant with the portrayal of the dragon as a beast with seven heads--symbolism embracing all of earthly time. Similarly, as the two women of Revelation embrace the faithful and the faithless of all ages, we would expect the beast carrying the scarlet whore to also compass all of time.
4. According to Rev. 17:10, John is seeing the beast at the time of its sixth head. In other words, remembering the symbolism of the number seven, he is seeing it just before it rises for the last time for the last attack on the saints. Rome, therefore, is the sixth head, and for us nineteen centuries after John, it must mean Rome as presented in Dan. 7 and 8; Rome in both its phases, pagan and papal. The persecutions and martyrdoms of pagan Rome were few compared with those of Rome in later centuries. This is not to indict any now living, whatever their theological heritage.
5. According to Rev. 17, the ten horns belong to the time of the final resurrection of the beast--its seventh head phase. It will be when these ten kingdoms come into the existence and support the beast that the final tribulation for the saints will take place. This will be accompanied by signs and wonders, and the working of the spirits of devils. See 13:13-18; 16:13-16. At this time, the beast from the land is prominent, leading the world to worship the first beast whose wound has been healed.
6. Much of the description in Rev. 13 is borrowed from the description of the little horn of Dan. 7. But if the ten horns of Daniel 7 are kingdoms rather than kings, then likewise the little horn is also a power rather than a person.

7. The interpretation given above gains strength by way of default. The most prominent alternative, that which claims that the seven heads are the first seven Roman emperors, or seven forms of Roman government, will not stand investigation.

a. The fact that Satan also has seven heads and ten horns and diadems indicates that such description is symbolic of the whole range of his power manifested in all ages, not merely the time of the early Roman empire. Hengstenberg is certainly right when he says:

The blood-colour, the signature of conquest and tyranny, is common to the dragon and his earthly instrument. Now, the seven Roman emperors are far too tiny to be regarded as affording such a reflected image. There is wanting also in the most of them an essential element—hatred toward the kingdom of God, with which the four first had almost nothing whatever to do. "Nero," says Lactantius, "was the first to persecute the servants of God, he caused Peter to be crucified, and killed Paul." Tertullian also says in his Apology, "Turn up your annals; there you will find, that Nero was the first who raged against this sect, which then flourished especially at Rome." The reflection of the crown of an Augustus on the head of the red dragon would indeed be a singular anomaly.³²

b. Similarly, the "names of blasphemy" on the heads indicate virulent opposition to the true God, not merely idolatry. See Isa. 36:13; 37:10,4,6,23; 10:9,10; Ex. 5:2; Dan. 5:1, for illustrations of true blasphemy. Such does not fit Augustus or his immediate successors.

c. Rev. 17:9 declares that the seven heads are seven mountains. In scripture, mountains regularly stand for kingdoms, not individual kings. Let us underline the fact that the seven mountains do not represent tiny hills of Rome, but are declared to represent kings or kingdoms. To make the one symbol represent both the hills of Rome, and kingdoms which are in no way related, is most incongruous and untenable. When John adds "this calls for a mind that has wisdom," he is saying that the meaning is certainly not as obvious as a geographical description of Rome. Such an understanding would not require wisdom at all.

d. It is quite impossible to count but six Roman emperors up to John's time. All sorts of exegetical sleight of hand have been resorted to, but the very fact that exegetes differ so greatly in their chosen method shows the inadequacy of all of them.

e. The expression "fallen" fits empires, but not individual kings who die a natural death (such as the first five emperors). See 18:2; 14:8; 16:19, and Old Testament passages also such as Isa. 21:9; Jer. 51:8; Amos 5:2.

f. There is no way of fully accommodating the prophecies of Rev. 13 and 17 with the history of Nero.

Very many Commentators have explained these seven heads as individual kings, and supposed the one who was wounded to death to be Nero, and these last words to allude to the idea that Nero would return from the dead and become antichrist. But this idea was certainly not prevalent in this form at the time when the Apocalypse was written. Tacitus merely relates, that there were many rumours about Nero's death, and that in consequence many feigned or believed that he was alive, and that on the strength of this, a Pseudo-Nero arose in the East. The first who mentions the idea of Nero *returning from the dead* is Augustine, in explaining 2 Thess. ii. 3ff. But it is observable that Augustine does not connect the idea with the Apocalypse.³³

In the symbolism of Revelation, if a beast's head is mortally wounded, so is the beast itself. That certainly does not fit the situation of the Roman empire with Nero's death. Rev. 12:9 makes it clear that it was the atonement of Christ which wounded the great dragon, and therefore all his earthly representatives as well.³⁴

The fact that the beasts incorporated in the Rev. 13 monster were not individuals but empires, shows the impossibility of making this symbol signify a personal tyrant, and thus any such position, as well as any limitation to the Roman empire, is untenable. If we count the heads in Dan. 7, all of which represented kingdoms, the result is seven, and it may be that John also has this fact in view, though the determining factor must have been the symbolic significance of the number. The evidence is overwhelming that the beast of Rev. 13 incorporates all those worldly powers, past, present, and future, which become Satan's tool in persecuting the people of God, but it is viewed eschatologically in its final persecuting phase of the seventh head which has the support of all the kingdoms of earth.

We should carefully observe that, in Scripture, Antichrist is a genus, rather than merely an individual. All who oppose by cruelty, or counterfeit by subtlety, Christ and His church, come under this head. Though sometimes left out of the reckoning by commentators, Satan himself, in the eyes of the first century Christians, was the supreme Antichrist. So Revelation 12 paints him. Better known by the title is his chief henchman of the last days, one who will employ signs and wonders, proclaim himself as God, and precipitate a time of trouble such as never was, "the hour of trial" which will "try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10).³⁵

Viewed apotelesmatically, Antichrist applies first to pagan Rome, secondarily to the mediaeval persecutions of the state-church, and lastly to the eschatological opponents of the faithful remnant--the ten kingdoms of the whole world proscribing all believers in Christ. This final fulfillment will include miraculous satanic manifestations (2 Thess. 2:9-12; Rev. 13:13-14; 16:13-16), and its way will be paved by the influence of the second beast, a worldly power but professing the religion of the Lamb.

The Second Beast of Rev. 13

If, as we have noticed, the first beast is apotelesmatic in application, relevant to John's day and every generation since, fitting the persecuting political forces of every generation, we might expect that a similar apotelesmatic application would be true of the second beast.

Traditional exposition of Rev. 13:11 has seen the second beast as the priesthood of pagan Rome promoting the false worship of the Empire.³⁶ Many commentators have diverged from this position, and applied the symbol to the religious apostasy of the centuries after the downfall of Rome, an apostasy which led to the unholy union of church and state. Others have advanced views which while similar in principle to the two named, differ in specific application. For example, John Wesley wrote in his *Notes on the New Testament*, "But he is not yet come, though he cannot be far off. For he is to appear at the end of the forty-two months of the first beast."³⁷

Bengel wrote:

*That bewitched power and wisdom, which independent of the Word of GOD, without a Redeemer and a Comforter, is revered by many individually and collectively, having no dread of Deism, Socinianism, and Pelagianism, abusing the dogma respecting the internal Word, which would without scruple reconcile Christianity with Mahometanism itself, and moreover the perverse interpretation of the Apocalypse itself, and of the whole of the Sacred Scripture, will be favourable to the beast.*³⁸

Some things can be said with certainty.

1. The figure is that of a beast (not that of a woman), and therefore political power is indicated, though political power under a religious guise.
2. The beast is concerned with enforcing a certain type of worship. It is obviously the incarnation of the "false prophet" concept, as it persuades the world, through signs and wonders, to worship the first beast. It is the projection of the Balaam motif which first appeared in 2:14.
3. It is a power professedly Christian, for it has two horns like a lamb, though when it speaks it does so as a dragon.
4. It will claim to do the work of an Elijah, even bringing fire down from heaven as he did. Thus it comes in the guise of a reform to save the world, a reform claiming miraculous Pentecostal fire.
5. Its work is parallel to that of the two witnesses, though on the opposite side. Many have pointed out that just as the dragon counterfeits God the Father, and the beast, God the Son, so this power counterfeits God the Holy Spirit. It is the advocate of the beast, as the Spirit is of the Son. As the Spirit energizes the people of Christ in their witnessing to the gospel, so this power acts similarly on the side of evil.

Two Prophets (ch. 11) The witnesses are two prophets, leading men with stern admonition to the true God.

Land Beast (13:11ff)³⁹ The land beast elsewhere is called the "false prophet" (16:13, 19:20, 20:10), leading men to the worship of false gods, the dragon and the first beast.

Two Prophets were enabled to perform extraordinary miracles.

Land Beast performs great wonders.

Two Prophets "stand before the Lord of the earth" (11:4).

Land Beast exercises the full authority of the first beast in his presence (13:12).

Two Prophets have special power over fire.(11:5).

Land Beast makes fire come from heaven (13:13).

Two Prophets The final stage of the martyrs' testimony after their death is when the 'breath of life from God" revives them. This convinces mankind of God's supreme power (11:11).

Land Beast animates the image with the "breath of life," thereby mimicking the power of the creator God. He kills all who do not worship the image (13:15 contrast Deut. 13:5).

Two Prophets are the two lampstands and the two olive trees (11:4).

Land Beast has two horns like a lamb (13:12).

6. This power in the final fulfillment belongs specially to the last days. It makes possible the last reincarnation of the beast, and gives life to an institution similar in appearance and function to that of the beast in preceding eras.

We submit that the symbolism fits the false religion of pagan Rome, the false religion of papal Rome during the Dark Ages, and the false religion of the last days working through apostate Protestantism and democratic government to enforce religious conformity in an endeavor to save the world from destruction. In such a work a deteriorated Protestantism in U.S.A. could well lead the way. A "lamb-like" beast suggests a power professing belief in the religion of the atonement--a biblical faith, yet which does not truly hold to the essence of that faith. Only as we keep in mind the fact that Revelation points to the repetition of the crisis that marked the end of the old dispensation shall we understand the crisis which will end the New Testament era. Milligan's words are worthy of prolonged reflection.

. . . the more carefully the particulars mentioned of the second beast of the same chapter are explained, the more will it appear that the description rests upon that fanatical spirit of "the Jews" which led them to incite Pilate to the condemnation of the Christ at the moment when he himself, saying, "I find no fault in Him," sought to release Him. There may be nothing surprising in the fact that a writer who delights as much as St. John in the use of the number 3 should see especially three enemies bringing about the death of Jesus; but that, when he comes to the history of the Church, the same three should again appear cannot fail to show us how closely the fortunes of the Church are moulded upon those of Christ.

One other passage may be referred to in illustration of this point. At chap. xvii. 16 we read, "And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire. For God did put it in their hearts to do His mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished." The passage is one of the most startling in the book of Revelation, and its statement comes upon us as a result totally unexpected and unaccounted for. The harlot had been sitting on the beast, and guiding the beast in perfect harmony with its designs. The two are friends and fellow-workers. All at once the scene is changed. Defeat has taken place, and what is its effect? The bond which in prosperity had bound together the partners in wickedness is dissolved; they who had cooperated in sin fall out; the one turns round upon the others; and she who had found ready instruments in the beast and its horns for accomplishing the work to which she had spurred them on, now sees them, in the hour of their common despair, fall upon herself and mercilessly destroy her. We need not ask whether events then future, or future still, are symbolised by this language. A great principle, one often exemplified in the world, is proceeded on,--that combinations of the wicked speedily break up, leaving the guilty associates to turn upon and destroy one another. The question that at present mainly concerns us is, What are the historical circumstances lying at the bottom of the vision? And, when we ask that question, it is difficult not to think that there was one great drama present to the mind of the Seer and suggestive of his picture of the harlot's ruin, that of the life and death of Jesus. The degenerate Jewish Church had then called in the assistance of the world-power of Rome, had stirred it up, and had persuaded it to do its bidding against its true Bridegroom and King. An alliance had been formed between them; and, as the result of it, they crucified the Lord of glory. But the alliance was soon broken; and, in the fall of Jerusalem by the hands

of her guilty paramour, the harlot was left desolate and naked, her flesh was eaten, and she was burned utterly with fire.⁴⁰

The Mark of the Beast

The last verses of Rev. 13 characterize the last days as a time when Christians will be forbidden to enact the outward signs and symbols of the gospel they cherish. Instead, coercion will be used to urge them into idolatrous worship and its forms.

We have already touched upon the wounding of the first beast, and the Nero myth. Now we reach the climax of Rev. 13--the worldwide enforcement of a "mark" under pain of boycott and death, an eschatological echo of events in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. See I and II Maccabees.

The word *charagma* means an etching, or it can mean a sculptured statue or image. The first is the obvious meaning here, but the second should not be passed by, as an image is prominent, not only in the setting, but in the Old Testament source of this pericope. Rev. 13 is drawing from Dan. 3, and the death decree initiated by Babylon connected with the worship of an image. John is saying that the same situation in essence is soon to be repeated all over the world. Idolatry, of course, is the most flagrant violation of the divine law, it is prominent throughout Revelation. See 2:14,20; 9:20; 14:9; 21:8. Those who are faithful to God, and receive instead of the mark of the beast His protecting seal, are described as commandment-keepers. In contrast, the worshippers of the beast violate (1) the first commandment (for they worship the beast, v. 8); (2) the second commandment (for they worship an image of the beast); (3) the third commandment (for they prefer the name of the beast to the name of the Creator, v. 17); (4) the fourth commandment (for no idolater can rightly observe the memorial of Him who created all things). See Dan. 7:25 and note the fourfold mention of lawlessness in Paul's description of false worship at the end of time (2 Thess. 2:1-12).

To understand aright the conflict here predicted one should observe that a key word of this chapter and the next is "worship." The first conflict on earth concerned worship. See Gen. 4. The ground was essentially a religious one. So with the last conflict. All men will be divided into the worshippers of the beast (the creature, the serpent as in Gen. 3), and the worshippers of the Creator. Rev. 14:6-12 calls all to "worship Him that made heaven and earth," and warns that "if any man worship the beast," it will cost him his all.

It is the first table of the divine law which details the "who," "how," and "when" of acceptable worship. In the last days, according to this chapter, worship will be enforced of a professedly Christian ("lamb-like") nature, but it will be counterfeit worship, diverging from the precise requirements of God. Idolatrous worship will follow the traditions of men rather than the word of God, counterfeiting divine institutions, especially the seal of the divine law--the Sabbath, which protects against all idolatrous systems. See our comments on Rev. 7:1. Compare the Scripture references to the Sabbath as a prophylactic against idolatry. E.g. Lev. 19:3,4,29,30; 26:1,2; Eze. 20:16,24; 22:8,9; 23:38,39.

Gnana Robinson in his *The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath* (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Hamburg, 1975), pp. 304-305 says, "These sabbath-idolatry oppositional references are so many in number that their combination cannot be simply ignored as accidental." Many are the scholars who have commented on the distinctive nature of the fourth commandment and its special providential role. Consider the following remarks from Karl Barth, Haldane, Wordsworth, and others.

. . . this is the most detailed of all the Ten Commandments. With the second, it outwardly characterised most clearly the attitude of Old Testament man, his obedience or disobedience. Understood and grasped in its new--or rather its true--form, in its first and final meaning, it was surprisingly quickly and self-evidently seen to be valid and authoritative in New Testament Christianity as a rule which must naturally apply forthwith to the old, the new, the one people of God.⁴¹

In general, theological ethics has handled this command of God, or the one command of God in this particular application, with a casualness and feebleness which certainly do not match its importance in Holy Scripture or its decisive material significance. . . .

What does the Sabbath commandment say? It speaks of a limiting of man's activity to the extent that this is, generally speaking, his own work, his own undertaking and achievement, the job he does for his livelihood and in the service of the community. It says that, in deference to God and to the heart

and meaning of His work, there must be from time to time an interruption, a rest, a deliberate non-continuation, a temporal pause, to reflect on God and His work and to participate consciously in the salvation provided by Him and to be awaited from Him. It says that man's own work is to be performed as a work bounded by this continually recurring interpretation. This interruption is the holy day. . . .

On this day he is to celebrate, rejoice and be free to the glory of God. In this celebration, joy and freedom he will be obedient. To withdraw from it under any pretext would be disobedience. This is what the Sabbath commandment says.⁴²

The Sabbath commandment explains all the other commandments, or all the other forms of the one commandment. It is thus to be placed at their head. By demanding man's abstention and resting from his own works, it explains that the commanding God who has created man and enabled and commissioned him to do his own work, is the God who is gracious to man in Jesus Christ. Thus it points him away from everything that he himself can will and achieve and back to what God is for him and will do for him. It reminds man of God's plan for him, of the fact that He has already carried it out, and that in His revelation He will execute both His will with him and His work for and toward him. It points him to the Yes which the Creator has spoken to him, His creature, and which he has continually and at last definitely acknowledged, which He has made true and proved true once and for all in Jesus Christ. It summons him to hold to this Yes and not to anything else. And that is why it commands him to keep holy the Sabbath day.⁴³

If we link the significance of the holy day in salvation history and its eschatological significance, and if we remember that in both instances we are concerned with its relationship to the particularity of God's omnipotent grace, we shall understand at once, and not without a certain awe, the radical importance, the almost monstrous range of the Sabbath commandment. By the distinction of this day, by the summons to celebrate it according to its meaning, this command sets man and the human race in terribly concrete confrontation with their Creator and Lord, with His particular will and Word and work, and with the goal, determined and set by Him, of the being of all creatures, which means also the inexorable end of the form of their present existence. This commandment is total. It discovers and claims man in his depths and from his utmost bounds.⁴⁴

Thus the Sabbath commandment in its particularity explains all the other forms of the one divine commandment. In relation to the One who commands, it explains what is always and in all cases commanded. It does not explain this abstractly but concretely, by indicating the seventh day and the succession of sevenths (and therefore no less than the seventh part of the time granted to man) as the special time of the gracious God which it expects man to keep free for the gracious God. The concern of this particular day is indirectly that of all other days as well. This particular thing is the meaning of all the divine commands.⁴⁵

The Sabbath commandment requires of man that he understand and live his life on this basis. It thus demands of him that he believe in God as his Ruler and Judge, and that he let his self-understanding in every conceivable form be radically transcended, limited and relativised by this faith, or rather by the God in whom he believes. It demands that he know himself only in his faith in God, that he will and work and express himself only in this imposed and not selected renunciation, and that on the basis of this renunciation he actually dare in it all to be a new creature, a new man. This is the astonishing requirement of the Sabbath commandment.⁴⁶

De Quervain is only too right in this respect: "Where the holy day becomes the day of man, society and humanity wither away and the demons rule. . . ."⁴⁷

The holy day is a sign, and keeping it holy an exercise, of man's freedom before God and of the special responsibility towards Him in which he is man, the human creature. As the regular observance of a definite portion of time, keeping the holy day is the most visible and, because of this day's special meaning, the most comprehensive form of this special responsibility.⁴⁸

The fourth commandment is closely connected with the other commandments; but so far from having any Jewish origin, it is the first and only commandment announced in the opening of the sacred record, and was imposed on our first parents in their state of uprightness and innocence. It thus stands in a peculiar manner at the head of all the commandments, and involves in its breach the abandonment equally of the first and second tables of the decalogue. It is placed at the end of the first table, as the tenth is at the end of the second, as the safeguard of all the rest. *It stands between the two tables of our duty to God and our duty to man, as the great foundation and cornerstone binding both together—its observance supporting and conducing to our obedience to the whole.*⁴⁹

The fourth commandment is not as yet seen by *us* to rest on the same ground of morality as the other nine. But perhaps on this very account the fourth may be fitly said to be *better* adapted than any *other* of the Ten Commandments (of which we see the reason) to try our faith and obedience to God. We have good reason for obeying God in all that He commands. But in doing things of which we ourselves see the reason, we may be only obeying *ourselves*, and *not* be obeying *God*. Therefore Almighty God *tests* our faith by things of which we do *not* see the reason.⁵⁰

As "Lord of the Sabbath" He is supreme but He puts forth no abrogating power when he states its purport to be the good of man. "The sabbath was made for man." Mark 2:27. This is a mighty word. It looks backward—onward. It seems to say, it always has been, for man always had need. It always shall be, for man will always need. Thus Jesus decks the Sabbath with undying freshness.⁵¹

. . . requiring for its proper observance the general ascendancy of religious principles, it [the Sabbath] was specially fitted to serve as a sign of the people's faithfulness to the covenant of God. If they kept the Sabbaths of the Lord, whether in their weekly recurrence, or as connected with the annual feasts, as he required them to be kept, it would be a living and palpable proof of their having entered into the spirit of the dispensation they were under, while their neglect and profanation of the Sabbath would equally serve as a proof of their unfaithfulness. Hence the observance of the Sabbath is here so expressly mentioned in connection with their sanctification: "a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am Jehovah who sanctifies them." It was, in truth, a grand sign and evidence of Israel's being the chosen people of God. In so far as they complied with the exhortation, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," they possessed the mark of his children. And the proper observance of the Sabbatical rest being so specially designated a sign in this respect, would only have arisen from its singular importance to the interests of religion and morality. These, it was virtually said, would thrive and flourish if the Sabbath was duly observed, but would languish and die if it fell into desuetude. And for this reason the prophet Isaiah, at the close of a long expostulation with the people regarding sin, presses the dutiful observance of the Sabbath as sure to carry along with it the remedy of the evil: . . . (Isa. lviii. 13, 14). This passage may justly be taken as explanation of the sense in which the Lord meant the people to regard his Sabbaths as a sign between them and him. Such paramount importance could never have been attached by the prophet to this sacred institution, nor could it have been so peculiarly connected with the blessing of the covenant, if the mere outward rest had been all that the institution contemplated. This is what those who hold mistaken views on this subject almost uniformly take for granted, as if the people should have been properly sanctified by simply resting every Sabbath from their usual labours. The command must have had a far deeper import, and required a great deal more at the hands of the people, in order to prove an adequate sign between them and God. It must have been, and it was, intended not only to separate them from their worldly employments, but also to call out their hearts in suitable exercises of faith and love to God, and in brotherly acts of kindness and good-will toward those around them. On no other account could its faithful observance be represented as indicative of a sound and healthful state of religion generally. And we might ask, without the least fear of contradiction, if the same practical value is not attached to the careful observance of the Lord's day now by those who have an enlightened regard to the interests of religion? When this day ceases to be devoutly observed, all experience and observation testify that there never fails to ensue a corresponding decline in the life and actings of religion.⁵²

The very fact that the fourth commandment seems to the uninstructed mind of less moment than some other precepts of the Decalogue, and the breach of it a less heinous sin than the breach of others, makes it in some sort a *superior test of the spirit of obedience*. Is not a command whose supreme importance and necessity we cannot see as plainly as we do those of others a better test of our full-hearted allegiance to God than others whose necessity and importance is written on their faces? To our first parents the eating or not eating of the forbidden fruit appeared a light matter, the reason for the prohibition was not plain to them. No reason was given by God, they were to obey Him simply because He bade them. On that very account the command was a better test of their character and obedience than one whose intrinsic goodness and the evil consequences of disobeying would have been more apparent. So was this fourth commandment. It may seem to us a matter of small moment whether we keep or break it, than whether we keep or break some of the others, whether we do or do not steal, or lie, or worship idols. But the very fact that its importance and advantages may not be so immediately and conspicuously clear to us, in reality renders it a more solemn and searching test of our loyalty to our great King. There is a special warning in Scripture against him who shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, which ought to be well pondered by all, who weighing all the ten words in their imperfect balances, come to the conclusion that if they keep the other nine, they may safely disregard the fourth.⁵³

To understand this "sign" we must remember that all the world except the Hebrews had gone off into idolatry, neglecting all God's laws and also the proper observance of His Sabbath. The covenant which Israel made with him was, to be separate from all the pagans and to obey his law, so neglected by them. Now, the public observance of the Sabbath gave the most obvious, general, visible sign to the world and the Church of this covenant, and of the difference between God's people and pagans. Hence it was eminently suitable as a sign of that covenant. *The human race is still divided between the world and the Church; and holy Sabbath observance ought to be precisely such a "sign" of the Church's relation to her God now.* This simple view relieves the whole question. The general apostasy of the nations made this duty of visible Sabbath-keeping, which God enjoins on all men of all ages, a *badge and mark of those who still fear him.*⁵⁴ (emphasis ours)

Sabbath is the symbol of God's love for man revealed in Jesus Christ (Mt. 12:7). In Jesus Christ, who is greater than the temple, all people find their . . . salvation and freedom. It is this message of salvation which Jesus demonstrates in his healing actions on sabbaths. . . . These are the signs of the Messianic Kingdom (Lu. 4:16-19; 7:22). In other words, sabbath becomes the sign of the Messianic Kingdom. It symbolises the "Vollmacht", "the authority" and the love of the Messiah.⁵⁵

On his part, God, by keeping the sabbath, reveals his saving purpose for mankind; and man on his part, by keeping the sabbath, accepts the sovereignty of God and submits himself to God's will. Thus, the sabbath theology becomes identical with the creation theology, which, as H. H. Schmid notes, is the "*Gesamthorizont biblischer Theologie*". [the whole horizon of biblical theology.]

In this sense sabbath becomes the central commandment, "*das Hauptgebot*" in the O.T., obedience to which is equivalent to the fulfilment of all the commandments. We noticed above how in the early post-exilic writings sabbath is mentioned in opposition to idolatry. Thus, in Lev. 26:1f. the sabbath commandment, in oppositional combination with the prohibition of idols, is placed as a preamble for the section dealing with blessings and curses. Breaking Yahweh's statutes and ordinances is the same as profaning his sabbaths (cf. Ez. 20:13,16,18,21,24). Profaning Yahweh's holy things or his sanctuary is also the same as profaning his sabbaths (Ez. 22:8,26; 23:38f.) Trito-Isaiah^R, thus, sees sabbath as the only condition for a foreigner to join the congregation of Yahweh (Is. 56:6). Jeremiah^R demands the proper observance of sabbath as the only condition for the continued establishment of the Davidic kingship.

As sabbath symbolically stood for the acknowledgement and acceptance of the sovereignty of God, in effect, it stood for the negation of all other gods. As Israel attributed all moral and social evils to man's estrangement from his God, sabbath could comprehend all the religious and moral requirements. A man who faithfully observes the sabbath, accepts the sovereignty of God and thus walks in accordance with his will, thus fulfilling all that is laid down in the torah. In this sense, K. Barth is right when he says, "Alles, was es sonst fordert, ist in diesem Einen eingeschlossen, ist ihm unterund zugeordnet".⁵⁶ (Moreover, everything that is required, is included in this one thing, [and] is subordinated and allied to it.)

The reader should also study the significance of the Edenic temptation scenes in *Perelandra* (later called *Voyage to Venus*), by C. S. Lewis.

Let none fail to notice that the final verses of Rev. 13 picture religious apostasy in its most subtle form. It will claim a Trinity (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet), including one who provides authority, another who has been raised from the dead, and a third who points to the second, and works miracles to authenticate the system, even breathing life into idolatrous counterfeits of the true worship. The resulting congregation has its own seal or mark, an outward sign of its reflection of the character of the satanic trinity.

Not only should the image in the context be linked with the mark, but also the reference to the number of *man*, and the fact that both are linked with beast (creature) worship. The underlying motif of the inspired selection of the beast symbol is to indicate that true worship is impossible to those who are disloyal to their Creator and Redeemer. When Nebuchadnezzar recovered from the beast syndrome the record says that he raised his head, and praised the God of heaven. Beasts look down to the earth, not up to their Creator in acknowledgement of Him. It is this story of the king who became as a beast that casts light on the imagery of ch. 7 of Daniel. Dr. Morna Hooker suggests that it is a profitable line of enquiry to examine those passages in Daniel "where human characteristics are attributed to figures which in other respects are to be classified as "beasts."⁵⁷

See also H. H. Rowley's emphasis that the ignoble nature of the Gentile kingdoms was expressed by

the symbolism of the beasts.⁵⁸

Thus in Dan. 7 itself we find that the first beast "was lifted up from the ground and made to stand upon two feet like a man; and the mind of a man was given to it" (v. 4). Exactly the same idea is to be found in the account of Dan. 4 of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its sequel. In spite of the added confusion of the tree metaphor the contrast is clear: Nebuchadnezzar's mind is changed from a man's to a beast's; he lives with the animals in the fields and behaves like them, until his reason is restored. . . . What the context does suggest is that the change from a man's mind to a beast's typifies Nebuchadnezzar's loss of reason. . . . But it is the interpretation which the author gives to this change that supplies the clue to its importance. For it is made clear that the reasons for Nebuchadnezzar's downfall and disgrace were his self-glorification and pride in his own achievement (v. 30). . . . According to chapter 4, it is when Nebuchadnezzar forgets that his kingdom and glory are God-given that he loses his dominion, not only over men, but over birds and beasts as well, and is reduced to the level of the beasts.

The same emphasis on self-magnification is found in the later visions of Daniel. Thus in chapter 8 we read repeatedly of the animals and their horns that they magnified themselves. Similarly, chapter 11. . . As for the beasts in chapter 7, it is self-evident that they. . . are in rebellion against God and have seized power for themselves. This connection between man's rebellious self-sufficiency and animal life is found also in the Psalms. . . . Ps. 73:21f. . . .49:20. . . .⁵⁹

The line is to be drawn between those who worship the beast--i.e. the creature-man himself, and (1) those who will acknowledge that they are but creatures, and (2) worship their Maker in harmony with His prescribed way.

With this in mind as the background materials for the mark of the beast pericope, one is able to draw some conclusions. First, it is the nature of apocalyptic literature to stress the eschatological crises as revolving around the issue of obedience to the divine law.⁶⁰ Second, the test in the last days will not be over the commandments of the second table of the law. All unrighteousness grows out of ungodliness--that is, man cannot behave rightly towards his fellow man if he is not in a right relationship to God (see Rom. 1:18). The test is always the relationship to the first table, not the second. The whole first table revolves around the recognition of God as Creator. The commandment with which it climaxes (the only positive one of the set), is the seal of the whole. Note again the words of Meredith Kline.

Covenants, such as Exodus 20:2-17 has been shown to be, are found written in their entirety on one table and indeed, like the Sinaitic tables on both its sides. As a further detail in the parallelism of external appearance it is tempting to see in the sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words the equivalent of the suzerain's dynastic seal found in the midst of the obverse of the international treaty documents. Since in the case of the Decalogue the suzerain is Yahweh, there will be no representation of him on his seal, but the sabbath is declared to be his "sign of the covenant" (Ex. 31:13-17). By means of his sabbath-keeping, the image-bearer of God images the pattern of that divine act of creation which proclaims God's absolute sovereignty over man, and thereby he pledges his covenant consecration to his Maker. The Creator has stamped on world history the sign of the sabbath as his seal of ownership and authority. That is precisely what the pictures on the dynastic seals symbolize and their captions claim in behalf of the treaty gods and their representative, the suzerain.⁶¹

There is nothing strange about the prominence which the whole of Scripture gives to the Creation doctrine. It is the basis of all religion. Says Carl Henry:

. . . the doctrine of creation is so basic as to be the indispensable foundation for any tolerable, viable human existence. The proof of this is being spelled out in the progressive disintegration of the spirit and life of modern, homeless man. When the truth of this is clearly seen, the Church will speak about God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth with a new relevance to today's growing crowd of lonely men, to its lost and nameless, to its homeless and hopeless men.⁶²

It is the fourth commandment which is the "test" commandment. Men can outwardly observe the other nine for non-religious reasons, but this is not likely with the fourth. Its importance is seen only by those who take the biblical record seriously. Such will recognize the special sign of divine authority in this precept which gives (1) The Creator's name; (2) His authority; (3) His territory. For in six days, THE

LORD. . . MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH AND ALL THAT IN THEM IS. Had the seventh-day Sabbath been always observed, there would never have been an atheist, agnostic, or idolater. It is, next to Scripture, religion's chief bulwark. In Revelation, idolatry is the sin most denounced, and thus the relevance of the reference to the fourth commandment in Rev. 14:7.⁶³

In ancient times when men rebelled against the worship of God, idols were set up, and with them humanly devised religious times stamped with the number eight instead of seven—the beginning of the new octave. See 1 Kings 12:33.

The fourth commandment could be called the gospel commandment, since it enshrines within itself a sign or parable of the Good News. Heb. 4:3 says that those who believe enter into rest. It was on the sixth day of the week that Christ in the beginning ceased His work of creation and entered into rest, inviting men to also partake of it. Millenniums passed, and again on the sixth day of the week, the Son of God finished His work—a work of re-creation, a work of redemption. After the rending of His side duplicating the first Adam's experience, He again entered into rest, thus making that Sabbath the sign of the re-creation, as it had formerly been the sign of the original creation. Not until the first working day of the week did He rise and take up His work afresh. Since that crucifixion Sabbath all believers were meant to see in the physical rest of the seventh day, an emblem of the rest of heart and conscience that all believers may have, as they trust solely in the finished work of Christ, and cease from their own labors to gain acceptance. Mt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:3,4, 9,10.

It is not strange, therefore, to find that from the earliest times God made of His Sabbath a special test among professed believers. The first institution of religion recorded in Scripture is that of the Sabbath. That institution is the climax of the record of creation, in order that God might set forth the Sabbath as woven into the very texture of the universe. It was made millenniums before there was a Jew, and before the Fall of man. It was for the first man, that we might know it is for the last man, and for all men in between. Christ declared that "the sabbath was made for man," (the Greek has it "made for the man"—meaning the first man at the time of the "making" of all things). Adam and Eve rested before they worked, because of the prior finished work of their Creator. All subsequent activity flowed from grateful hearts. This was a paradigm for the future. Religion of the right kind has always been the celebration of grace, and acceptable obedience has always been motivated by gratitude.

In passage such as Ex. 31:12-17; Eze. 20:12,20, the Sabbath is called a sign. Sign and seal are sometimes synonymous. See Rom. 4:11. The Sabbath is one of the seals of the everlasting covenant, being the first in Eden and preserved through the ages. The institution of Sunday which tradition locates at Christ's resurrection is three days too late. All that was to be in the New Covenant had to be there before the death of Christ in order to be sealed by His blood. See Gal. 3:15 and Heb. 9:16,17.

Sunday-keeping, like the offering of Cain, is a creature-devised method of worship. It has no inherent merit to render it acceptable to God as the fulfillment of the Sabbath commandment. There is no command from Genesis to Revelation for believers to observe the first day of the week as a Sabbath or worship day. Of the eight references to the first day of the week in the New Testament, six of them refer to the same historical occasion (the resurrection) and give no injunction concerning repeated commemoration. All six merely underline the truth that Christ rested on the Sabbath after His work of redemption as He had after His work of creation. In Acts 20:7 we find the seventh reference to the first day of the week, and it is probably Saturday night as the N.E.B. and the Expositor's Bible point out. As for 1 Cor. 16:1,2 here is indeed a precept concerning the first day of the week—but it is a temporary one advising believers in a particular area to do their book-keeping on the first day of each working week in order to plan their giving on behalf of believers in a famine-stricken area. The offering referred to is one laid up at home, not one placed in a collection plate. In none of these references to the first day is any special solemnity connected with it. Neither is it given a distinguishing title. On the contrary it remains "the first after the sabbath" as the original shows. Not Sunday-keeping, but the ordinance of baptism commemorates the resurrection.

But having said that the popular day for worship is without inherent merit we wish to add—NEITHER IS THE BEST EFFORT OF A BELIEVER TO KEEP THE SEVENTH DAY SABBATH ACCEPTABLE TO GOD in view of that commandment's heights and depths. See Isa. 58:13-14. The divine promises are only for the obedient, but only One has been obedient from His first breath till His last. There has only ever been one life-long Sabbath-keeper, and that is Jesus Christ. He alone has fulfilled all the demands of the law as to precept and penalty, and His sabbath-keeping is imputed to those who believe. He never observed Sunday. Nothing in connection with a mere human invention is imputed for righteousness. Unless we are covered by the merits of Christ, our worship day, whether the seventh or the first, only brings guilt. In the last crisis, those who have heard the everlasting gospel,

yet who then persist in traditional worship without a "thus saith the Lord" will bring upon themselves the mark placed on Cain--the mark of condemnation. But at that time true Sabbath observance will be a fitting example of sanctified obedience--the fruit of justification. *To one trusting only in the Christ of the Cross, the Sabbath becomes the sign of redemption* (Deut. 5:15), the seal of the everlasting covenant (Ex. 31:16-17), the joyous weekly rehearsal of the finished work of Christ. (Lu. 23:54-56.) The observance of any day without Calvary as its spring is worthless.

At the beginning and end of each of the three great dispensations--the patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Christian, the rest day has also been the test day. See Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 16; Ex. 20:8-11; Neh. 13:15-22; Mt. 12:1-14; Mk. 2:23-28; Jn. 5:1-18; 9; Lu. 6:1-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Rev. 13:13-18; 14:6-7. In the last warning message, we find a call for men to give God glory. This is the opposite of the type of worship in Rev. 13:13-18. It means to take the place of a creature in dependence and obedience. But whenever humanly devised religion has taken the field, and tradition and human opinions have replaced the Word, then the Bible Sabbath has been neglected and opposed. The power to substantiate unscriptural times and forms has become the mark of assumed authority--the mark of the beast.⁶⁴

We should not fail to notice the relationship between the mark of the beast and his name, and the seal of God and His name. A name represents character. See Ex. 34:5-7. Those who worship the beast become like the serpent, and those who worship the Creator will reflect His character. One company will become liars and murderers, believing a lie through rejection of the truth, and through their decree, intending to slay those who offer the everlasting gospel with its Sabbath seal. While one company, like Christ, are willing to die for their efforts to save sinners, the other has a form of godliness without its power and emulate the bigoted religionists of Israel of old, who crucified the Lord of glory.

It must be emphatically stated that there is no virtue in the mere observance of a day any more than in the waving of a flag. But outside signs become significant when they truly reflect the heart attitude of those concerned. Thus it will be in the last days when the world must be polarized by its attitude to the Cross of Christ. Then, as now, obedience will be the fruit of genuine holiness. Justification without sanctification is a misnomer.

In earlier ages, the mark of the beast could well have been the test over the offering of incense to Caesar, and the idolatry of the Mass, but in the last days when creation, the very foundation of true religion is denied, its memorial becomes an appropriate test. Particularly because the fourth commandment is the "gospel" commandment, indicating rest after a finished work, is it specially significant in the final crisis, when false gospels centered in man abound.

We wish to stress that here, as with all unfulfilled prophecy, we need to be careful of dogmatism. Not all to do with the mark of the beast will be understood until the unrolling of the scroll. The mark of the beast obviously has to do with some outward form of conduct apparent to men--not mere inner invisible belief. Furthermore, it will be a concession to the creature rather than to the Creator, violating "the commandments and the faith of Jesus" mentioned in the context. See 14:12. The "mark" is contrary to the everlasting covenant of revealed religion and a counterfeit of the outward forms of "the faith once for all time delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Apparently, in the last days Christians will be forbidden to engage in all the distinctive signs of their holy faith.

Rev. 20:4 makes it quite clear that in principle this prophecy has been fulfilled again and again through the centuries of our era, but obviously the "mark" has been various, each time appropriate to the religious situation then existing. It is plain from this entire chapter that idolatry is the sin chiefly being warned against, but idolatry takes many shapes and sizes. Its essence is to substitute the creature for the Creator, or the creature's inventions for the Creator's arrangements. See our comments on "the abomination of desolation" in the Excursus following the commentary on Rev. 13.

2 Thess. 2 sets forth the same crisis as Rev. 13 and its warning is particularly against a form of lawlessness to be manifested in the "temple," i.e. the church of God. Note the reference to "the man of lawlessness" in v. 3, "the mystery of lawlessness" in v. 7, "the lawless one" of v. 8, and again in v. 9. This parallels the indications of Rev. 13 and 14 that the final conflict is to be over "the commandments of God" as well as "the faith of Jesus." See Rev. 14:9-12 Inasmuch as sanctification is the outward sign of the invisible faith which lays hold of justification, it is not strange that the professed followers of Christ should be tested with reference to obedience.

We need also to keep in mind that our Lord's ministry, particularly its closing scenes, indicates the shape of the church's experience in all times and especially the end time. False religion in His day

made great profession of loyalty to the divine law but crucified the Lawgiver. The most flagrant hypocrisy of the Pharisees was revealed by their attitude to that holy day which God had instituted to be "a delight" and "honourable." See Isa. 58:13,14 and compare the Sabbath disputes recorded in Mt. 12; Mk. 2 and 3; Lu. 6 and 14; Jn. 5 and 9. Again and again we find that "the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him how to destroy him" (Mt. 12:14), because of Christ's different interpretation and observance of the Sabbath commandment.

The insights of form criticism forbid our considering these records of the Sabbath controversies as of little significance since the Cross. According to Jer. 17:19-27; Isa. 58:13,14; Ex. 31:12-17; Ex. 16:25-30; Neh. 13:5-22; Eze. 20; Mt. 12:6-14, in all ages God has used the attitude of His people towards the Sabbath as a spiritual barometer. The outward observance of any religious form has no merit in itself, but because true sabbath-observance requires a heart and mind so set upon God, so grateful for His great salvation that rejoicing in Him and His worship for a recurring special day is privilege and no burden—therefore the fourth commandment enshrines a festival which is not only the rest day, the blessed day, and the best day, but also the test day.

Despite all that has been said here in support of devout regard to all of God's words from Sinai, we wish to emphasize that we personally abhor the legalistic, cultic snobbery which condemns those who, by force of inheritance or environment, see Christian duty differently. It remains true that every man must be persuaded in his own mind, and therefore let us not judge one another but judge ourselves rather, lest we lay stumbling blocks in the paths of others. See Rom. 14. *The essence of the final crisis is no mere ritualistic observance but absolute loyalty to the Christ of Calvary. Eden's test seemed to be over an insignificant trifle, yet on the hinge of that trifle swung the door of destiny. The last test, as with the first, may also be over what first appears trivial—but obedience to the exact requirements of the eternal God is the primary duty of all rational creatures. Only those constrained as Paul (2 Cor. 5:4) and for the same reason, are enabled to preserve the delicate balance of responsibility towards both God and man, avoiding the terrible brood of both pharisaism and antinomianism.* Another needed caveat is that it is God who tests men by the signs and seals of the everlasting covenant. We are not to do the testing. To use light on the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus as a means of condemning others is to mount the judgment seat and assume divine prerogatives. Jas. 4:11,12.

Exegetes old and new have seen in these last verses of Rev. 13 and the first verse of Rev. 14 allusions to the Day of Atonement, that day when Israelites believed their destinies were sealed. This should not be unexpected when we recall that Day of Atonement imagery is present in other passages of the book, especially Rev. 8; 11:19; chs. 13,15,17,20. Sir Isaac Newton long ago suggested:

This sealing alludes to a tradition of the Jews, that upon the day of expiation all the people of Israel are sealed up in the books of life and death (Buxtorf, in *Synagoga Judaica*, c. 18,21). For the Jews in their Talmud tell us, that in the beginning of every new year, or first day of the month, Tishri, the seventh month of the sacred year, three books are opened in judgment; the book of life, in which the names of those are written who are perfectly just; the book of death, in which the names of those are written who are Atheists or very wicked; and a third book, of those whose judgment is suspended till the day of expiation, and whose names are not written in the book of life or death before that day. The first ten days of this month they call the penitential days; and all these days they fast and pray very much, and are very devout, that on the tenth day their sins may be remitted, and their names may be written in the book of life; which day is therefore called the day of expiation. And upon this tenth day, in returning home from the Synagogues, they say to one another, *God the Creator seal you to a good year.* For they conceive that the books are now sealed up, and that the sentence of God remains unchanged henceforward to the end of the year. The same thing is signified by the two Goats, upon whose foreheads the High-Priest yearly, on the day of expiation, lays the two lots inscribed, for God and for Azazel; God's lot signifying the people who are sealed with the name of God in their foreheads; and the lot Azazel, which was sent into the wilderness, representing those who receive the mark and name of the Beast, and go into the wilderness with the great Whore.⁶⁵

Dr. N. H. Young writes:

There is a possibility that behind John's dichotomy between those who are of the mark of the beast and those who have refused it (those sealed by God), between those of Satan and those of Christ, between those found in the Book of Life and those in the Book of Doom is again the imagery of the two lots of Lev. 16. This type of exegesis is found in Philo and Origen

and, in an apocalyptic key, in Qumran. In an early second century document, which may have originated in Essene circles (the Apocalypse of Abraham), we find the imagery again used, and in an apocalyptic form similar to 1 Enoch.⁶⁶

The mark of the beast may well represent the evil force of the empire against Christendom, behind it is the lot of Aza'zel: to receive the empire's mark involves more than being classified as on the side of Rome, it is to give allegiance to Satan, to Aza'zel, the arch-fiend. . . . It explains then the apocalyptic atmosphere that it possesses in Revelation, as well as the Satanic overtones in John's usage, and the awful doom of those who possess this mark. Revelation's use of the mark of the beast thus belongs to the apocalyptic dualism which used the lots of Lev. 16 as the vehicle of their thoughts, namely, 1 Enoch, *Apoc. Ab.*, and Qumran.

That John should make such a use of the Aza'zel image as we have suggested for Rev. 20 and the "mark of the beast" texts is the less surprising when we contemplate the large place the temple imagery plays in the Revelation.⁶⁷

The Number of the Beast

Note other translations of this passage. For example, consider the New English Bible rendering. "The number represents a man's name." Rev. 13:18.

To understand these words, it is necessary to keep in mind other Scripture passages that speak about our idiomatic human expressions. See Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 11:21; Rev. 21:17. This is the point of the passage. It is not the number of a specific man that is being spoken of, but a number well-known to humans, and having a human significance. When we recall the practice of gematria as it existed in John's time, we are part way to the solution.

Cataracts of nonsense have been written concerning the mystical number 666. Almost all of it pours from thought-forms quite removed from those of John. An adequate interpretation must take into account the rabbinical currents in the Judaism of John's day which were not altogether lacking in the early church. Milligan here is on the right track.

The number six itself awakened a feeling of dread in the breast of the Jew who felt the significance of numbers. It fell well below the sacred number seven just as much as eight went beyond it. This last number denoted more than the simple possession of the Divine. As in the case of circumcision on the eighth day, of the 'great day' of the feast on the eighth day, or of the resurrection of our Lord on the first day of the week, following the previous seven days, it expressed a new beginning in active power. By a similar process the number six was held to signify inability to reach the sacred point and hopeless falling short of it. To the Jew there was thus a doom upon the number six even when it stood alone. Triple it; let there be a multiple of it by ten and then a second time by ten until you obtain three mysterious sixes following one another, 666; and we have represented a potency of evil than which there can be none worse.⁶⁸

Caird criticizes most approaches to the interpretation of 666, but offers no positive solution of his own.⁶⁹ The comments of Leon Morris are more helpful. ". . . translate 'it is the number of man' . . .",⁷⁰ The variant reading of 616 probably arose out of a partisan application, such as to Gaius, and should not divert us from the problem of the trinity of six.

Regarding the Nero solution, G. E. Ladd has voiced the doubts of many as follows: ". . . the numerical total of *Neron Kaisar* in Greek is not 666, but 1005. The problem is solved by transplanting Nero Kaisar into Hebrew, which does indeed total 666. This is achieved, however, by a slight variation in the spelling of the Hebrew word for Caesar. Furthermore, no one has explained why John, writing to a Greek-reading public, would have used the elaborate symbolism of gematria with a Hebrew instead of a Greek form of the name. It is also significant that none of the ancient interpreters of Revelation recognized this solution."⁷¹ The same writer suggests that "it is possible that the number was intended to be altogether symbolic."⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 187. The beast is also linked with the number eight. See 17:11. Numbers one to eight add up to thirty-six and the same procedure repeated with numbers one to thirty-six yields 666.

Quite early Christians perceived that the gematria approach to the name *Jesus* yielded 888, that of *Cross* 777, and that of *beast* 666. Because 8 was seen as a symbol of the resurrection (Christ rose on the "eighth" day, eight souls saved in the ark for the new world, circumcision symbolizing a new

beginning took place on the eighth day, etc.), believers saw in all false religion that which ever fell short of everlasting life, that which was an Apollyon or Abaddon—a destroyer, instead of a Saviour. 666 points to the last apostasy when the false trinity of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet will rule. Man will be under the control of the serpent—both were made on the sixth day, and such a relationship cannot bring true Sabbath rest.

The Everlasting Gospel

What is the everlasting gospel of Rev. 14:6, the last message to the world? Let us summarize. Despite a million sermons to the contrary, the gospel is not good advice! It is good news! Advice is about something I should do, but news concerns something already done, and done by someone else. The gospel is the good news that all God requires of me, for time and eternity, has already been achieved by Himself in the person of His Son, and that this achievement is credited to anyone, however vile, who believes the news.

Not all know the exact date and place of their death. Three o'clock, black Friday—Calvary. Christ represented the whole human race, and when He died, legally the whole world died. We were ruined ages before, without our personal participation, by the first Adam. At Calvary, again without our personal participation, we were redeemed by the second Adam. He was made what He was not, that we might be made what we are not. Despite our sin and selfishness, there is no need for us to try and reconcile God. He is already reconciled, and asks us, "Be YE reconciled." God is offering something—not demanding something.

My standing before God depends on my acceptance of what Christ has done, not on what I am doing. For though the law represents a perfect standard, it is powerless to impart to us a perfect standing.

"The believer is not called upon to make his peace with God: he never has nor ever can do this. He is to accept Christ as his peace, for with Christ is God and peace." "You need not be anxious about what God thinks of you, but only what God thinks of Christ your substitute." Are you "thinking that you must be free from sin before you trust His power to save? . . . Come to Jesus, and receive rest and peace. . . Jesus loves to have us come to Him, just as we are—sinful, helpless, dependent."

There are two aspects of Christ's work—that which He did *for* us which brings complete acceptance with God for every believer, and the work He does *in* us—which has nothing to do with our acceptance by God. The first is complete and is never any less at any stage of the Christian's experience. We do not fall from grace because we err. A million stumblings on the road to the New Jerusalem fail to bring the slightest whiff of condemnation. But sanctification is never complete in this life. While my standing before God depends on what Christ has done for me, and not on that which He does in me, it is also true that the second work is evidence that I have received the first. Luther declared that the Christian is "always a sinner, always a penitent, and always right with God."

The divine plan involves our complete rescue from sin—from its guilt, its power, and its presence. Our acceptance of Calvary brings the first, our dependence upon the living Christ brings the second, and His return accomplishes the last. The work is His, though received by our faith. Objectively Christ is all, subjectively faith is all.

Look back to the Cross—that brings the faith that justifies; look forward to the coming—that brings the hope which sanctifies; look upward to the throne—that brings the love which satisfies. Good news indeed!

Drawing now from the New Testament, let us spell out the practical implications of this everlasting gospel. The more we behold Christ's perfect embodiment of infinite love and truth exemplified in His every motive, thought, look, word, and deed, the more our conscience would be vexed did we not also believe that His personal righteousness is imputed every moment to foolish, erring, weak, stumbling believers. Similarly, the more we perceive of the depths of the sacred law which demands of us all that Christ was and did in His humanity, the more we would despair did not Scripture assure us that all who have surrendered their lives to the Saviour are "accepted in the beloved," (Eph. 1:6), "complete in Him," (Col. 2:10), "cleansed from all unrighteousness," (1 Jn. 1:9), and without "condemnation" (Ro. 8:1), or "separation" (Ro. 8:33-39).

Despite the fact that we strive to fulfill every known duty, we remain "unprofitable servants," (Lu. 17:10), righteous only by faith in the merits of Christ (Ro. 3:20-26), "for we make many mistakes" (Jas. 3:2 RSV), and must pray daily, "forgive us our trespasses" (Mt. 6:12). For example in the Scriptures,

though Christ could foresee Peter's disaffection (Jn. 13:36-38), and despite the fact that He also foresaw that His disciples would forsake Him (Mark 14:27), He could pronounce them "clean" (Jn. 13:10), and say to His Father, "They have kept Thy word" (Jn. 17:6). Thus the good news assures us that if we have given ourselves to Christ, we are each perfectly His child, though not a perfect child. (Hb. 12:5-7; Jn. 13:1b). While, in ourselves, we are sinners all our days, in Christ we have perfect righteousness, for "this man [Jesus] receiveth sinners" (Lu. 15:2), and God is One who "justifieth the ungodly" who believe (Ro. 4:5; 5:6).

While at every advance step in our Christian experience our penitence will deepen, and we will make the apostle's confession our own, "I know that in me. . . there dwelleth no good thing" (Ro. 7:18) our prayers will urgently ascend that the Saviour might heal the disorders of our sin-sick souls (Mt. 6:12; Rev. 8:1-4. Note that the continual ascending of the incense symbolizes the mingling of Christ's merits—necessary because of the constant commission of sin)—simultaneously we will rejoice that "Christ is made unto us righteousness, sanctification, wisdom and redemption," (1 Cor. 1:30,31; Zech. 3:3,4), and that we can never be lost while we trust in His merits.

Furthermore, while sin remains in us and ever easily besets us, it shall not reign, for once we learn that our standing before God is determined by divine grace "regardless of our success in keeping the law" (Rom. 3:28, NEB), then sin ceases to have dominion over us (Ro. 6:14). The tenor of our life is heavenward, despite manifold inconsistencies and failures. Being now united with Christ by faith, the fruit of righteousness is spontaneous (Rom. 7:4). For it is not possible for us to accept Christ's death, without also accepting His resurrection life (Rom. 6:1-12). Paul declares that the two substitutes for the true gospel (lawlessness and legalism) are invalid for the believer. Against lawlessness, see Rom. 3:31; 6:1-3,15; 7:7. Against legalism, see Rom. 3: 19-22; Ro. 10:4; Gal. 3:21,22. We cannot accept the work of the second member of the Godhead and reject that of the third (Gal. 3:14). God gives His gifts with two hands, and justifies no man whom He does not proceed to sanctify. Paul's epistles always present the finished work of Christ and then proceed to beseech the believer to make real in his life what he is already accounted to be in Christ. Thus the latter half of the epistles begin with "therefore," and appeals to holiness on the basis of the finished work of Christ (Ro. 12:1; Eph. 4:1; Gal. 5:1; Phil. 4:1; Col. 3:1). *There will be no separation between justification and sanctification in our experience, but there will be distinction, for the first is complete and perfect, but the latter being the work of a lifetime is neither complete nor perfect.* For example, Christ's work is finished (Jn. 19:30), and we have sat down in heavenly places with Him (Eph. 2:6). Yet while the believer in Christ is viewed as already arrived, already "complete in Him" (Col. 2: 10,12,13), there is still a struggle going on in his experience (1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 5:17), showing that he comes short of God's glory (Ro. 3:23) and is requiring forgiveness for sin (1 Jn. 1:8) until the second coming of Christ (Ro. 8:23).

Thus in every place where Paul mentions "the righteousness which is of faith," he means not sanctification, but that justification which is based on the finished atonement. Justification means a declaring righteous, never a making righteous in the sense of infusion of character (Rom. 1:16,17; 3:21,22; 4:11,13; 9:30 to 10:13; Gal. 5:6; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 4:5; 3:24; 5:17,18). For justification is both instantaneous and one hundred per cent, but it is not so with character development. The imputation of righteousness in justification is not a legal fiction, for when Christ died as the representative of the race, then "all died" (2 Cor. 5:14) and when He rose, all rose (Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:6). God declares us not subjectively righteous but forensically so. Justification has to do with our standing before God, not our state or present condition.

Believing this good news, that our acceptance with Christ is conditional on His perfection and not mine, we are free to work for others without feeling hypocritical concerning our own inadequacies and failures. Only this gospel offers a message for others which will inspire faith, hope, and love thus bringing that quality of life which all perfectionism strives in vain to accomplish. Is not this the approach of the New Testament, which while sketching the many infirmities of the early believers, encourages them to fight the fight of faith with the assurance of an ultimate abundant entrance into heaven?

The New Testament offers many verbal pictures of the Gospel which characterizes the new age ushered in by the Cross of Christ. These figures include ransom, reconciliation, atonement, justification, etc. The reality always transcends the figure, and the forensic understanding of justification does not imply that acceptance with God is merely a book-keeping transaction. The gift of the indwelling Spirit and the event of regeneration ever accompany saving faith. But the forensic metaphor is valuable as enabling those aware of their pollution of soul (Isa. 6:5-7) to depend upon a perfect righteousness which was wrought out 2,000 years ago and offered today as a free gift immediately available to all who will accept it. This outward and upward look accomplishes a

thousand-fold more than all sanctified spiritual navel-watching could, for it lays the glory of man in the dust and does for him what he could never do for himself. The Spirit of holiness does not speak of Himself but testifies of Christ alone and His righteousness (Jn. 15:26), and so should we. This everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6), the "faith once-for-all delivered to the saints," (Jude 3) is the theme which has inspired all revivals, and should ever prevail in Christian preaching (Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Cor. 15:3 RSV), swallowing up all other themes, for it is the heavenly message in verity, and the last hope for a hopeless world (Mt. 24:14). Far from being a new-fangled heresy, it is the very gospel foretold in Gen. 3:15 and cherished by prophets, apostles, martyrs, reformers, and the greatest evangelists of all ages.

Having looked at the ever relevant implications of the eternal gospel, let us now consider its latter-day proclamation in connection with the eschatological consummation referred to in 14:7. There must be no denying that the everlasting gospel of 14:6 is vitally linked with judgment. Because of this many have denied its identity with the gospel as presented by Paul. This, however, would be to misunderstand both John and Paul. Even in Romans, the gospel cannot be presented without strong judicial emphasis. In Ro. 1-5 judgment is repeatedly referred to. See 1:18,32; 2:1,2,3,5,12,16; 3:6,19. After all, justification, the result of receiving the gospel, is but an anticipated last judgment. Indeed, it is the ultimate verdict in advance.

Even in the Gospel of John, the strong connection between the good news and the judgment is apparent. See 3:17-19,36; 12:31-32. Every soul judges his or her self by the attitude taken to Christ and His Cross. The issue is no longer the sin question, but the Son question. In Jn. 3:16, the most well-known text of the Bible, this is made very clear. Those who refuse to believe will perish. As the gospel is preached, men either receive immediately the verdict of "not guilty" through the imputation of Christ's merits, or they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. See Acts 13:46.

Thus the final proclamation of the gospel also brings judgment. But certainly Rev. 14:6-7 is saying more. It is asserting that the gospel comes with tremendous urgency because the end of the world is near, and with it destruction for all who are outside of Christ. Particularly associated with the proclamation of mercy during time's last hour comes the proleptic word of judgment for apostate Christians. This is enlarged in the last verses of the present chapter and in the following chapters up to the end of chapter 20. As we have noticed, this entire book centers around the theme of judgment, so it is not at all strange that even the gospel is here placed in a judgment setting.

All professing Christians are intended to be warned by the Judgment hour proclamation. Before Christ's advent, the probation of all living is closed, and heaven decrees who is to be raised in the first resurrection. Rev. 22:11,12. It is important that we observe that there is no great assize at the second advent. All destinies are sealed and determined before then. With the opening of the grave the righteous ones leave their dusty prisons and rise clothed with immortality. The reward is immediately theirs without any standing before Heaven's judge and jury. Thus the righteous never face God's judgment in person. Their High Priest is also their Advocate and Judge, and He both blots out their sins and imputes His merits to all believers that they might be resurrected at the beginning of the millennium. It is otherwise with the lost. They must stand at the end of the millennium in person before the great white throne and He who sits thereon, from whose face earth and heaven flee away.

This distinction in the manner of the judgment for the saved and lost should be carefully observed. It is part of the good news that we who believe need never tremble before the Most High in the day of reckoning. We are judged in Christ before the first resurrection. There is truly judgment for believers as for all others, but they are judged by their records rather than in their persons, and Christ handles the whole affair. See Zech. 3.

Every statement about the Judgment uttered or written by an inspired messenger has been expressed in metaphor because the Judgment itself, belonging to things supernal, is ineffable. Christ's longest comment on this theme (Mt. 25:19-46), is but extended metaphor, parable, and will never be literally fulfilled. The same is true of His statement in Mt. 12:36. Because of the millennium with its resurrections of the righteous and the wicked at different times, there will not be any time when being together they hear words of separation as given in Mt. 25. What Rev. 20 gives us is a resurrection of the righteous without any judgment process at all being mentioned. Thus, being raised from the dead is the manifested verdict of prior judgment (Rev. 20:4). Yet we have 2 Cor. 5:10; Ro. 14:12; Heb. 10:30; 12:14; Mt. 12:36-37, etc.

As Ladd writes in his *Theology of the New Testament*, "The fact is that when Jesus speaks of the consummation, he always uses symbols."⁷³ So we have the celebration of the marriage, the

gathering of the harvest, angels collecting the elect, and the judgment of the servants—all symbolism.⁷⁴ When preachers and others speak of heaven's careful survey of every thought, word, and deed, as well as the prompting motives, they are speaking truly, but not literally. Heaven indeed investigates every professed believer before the resurrection, but the books are the memory of God, and the decision instantaneous according to whether a genuine trust in the merits of Christ (a trust which ever leads to obedience) is evidenced. See our further discussion on the message of Rev. 14:6-7 in the comments on those verses.

Babylon

This topic, mentioned in Rev. 14:8, will be discussed at greater length when Rev. 17 is studied. For now, we would be content with pointing out that the word occurs here for the first time in Revelation and is linked with the warning against the apostate of Rev. 13:13-18. Babylon is the great whore, and finds its opposite in the woman of purity clothed with the sun. Kiddle has told us that "Revelation as a whole might almost be called an essay in contrasts. Some of them are striking and unmistakable, like those between the faithful and unfaithful among the seven churches, between 'the woman clad in the sun' (chap, xii), and 'the woman clad in purple and scarlet' (chap, xvii), or between the slain Lamb, who is to return as messianic conqueror (v. 12, xix. 11) and the Beast who lived after being wounded by the sword (xiii. 15). . . ." ⁷⁵ This insight recognizes that Babylon represents all false religion from the beginning of time, as the woman clothed with the sun stood for true worshippers from the beginning.

The expression "that great city" in Rev. 14:8 occurs for the first time in 11:8, and there represents apostate religion which has crucified Christ. More will be found on this topic in the introduction to the sixth section of Revelation.

As we proceed to deal with some of the details of these chapters let us keep in mind that we are studying concerning the last great test Christians will experience before the coming of Christ. Eschatological truth is concerned with the ultimate polarization of the world and the vindication of God, His truth, and His people.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 12)

Chapter 27

Rev. 12:1-2:

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.

This is the opening of the second half of Revelation, a section devoted to the last conflict of the church. As in chapter 1, the central figure here is radiant with light—sun, moon, and stars symbolize the light shed by the church on the world. The first chapter of the first half of the book made the King and His kingdom prominent, but now we have the queen of the realm—the church. Other Scriptures that should be compared with these opening verses include Song of Solomon 6:10; Isa. 26:17; 66:7-9; Jer. 6:4; Mic. 4:10; 2 Cor. 11

Marriage is a prominent covenant metaphor of the Old Testament. Israel was espoused to Yahweh at Sinai, and her infidelity to the covenant is called adultery. See Eze. 16 particularly.

When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness; yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. . . .

But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by. . . .

Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! .

And I will judge you as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. . . .

Yea, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. . . .

I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD.¹

We can never hope to understand Scripture, the book of the covenant (from which its two sections are named) without close study of the various forms of the divine covenant found throughout the Word. The unilaterally originated legal arrangement with its promises, its warnings, and its seals, is an expanded metaphor for the everlasting gospel, concerning which we shall read towards the close of this prophetic chain. See comments on Rev. 14:6 in our preface to this section, and later on, on that verse itself.

The woman in this passage symbolizes the people of God as ideally viewed. It includes the faithful of all eras, not just New Testament times. The sun and stars, symbols of government, remind us of the picture of Christ in chapter 1. This figure of a woman, or women, appears nineteen times in this book, and is therefore almost as important as the Lamb. Feret writes:

We have already said that Christ is the central theme of the Apocalypse. A certain diffidence makes one hesitate to repeat the same assertion as regards the Church, yet, in reality, there is no distinction the two mysteries are fundamentally identical both in their divine origin and in their implications. The idea of the Church runs right through the book, from the letters at the very beginning, where it figures in such a human, appealing way, taken up with so many local problems, big and little, to its final emergence in the splendour of the holy Jerusalem, on which all the visions irresistibly converge. Between these two extremities we have the major symbols of the Temple, the woman, the two witnesses, and so on. . . .²

As the beast stands for many, and likewise the two witnesses, so with this beautiful figure of the woman draped in glory. It is reminiscent of Rev. 14:5, where the saints are pictured as without fault. See Ro. 8:1; Col. 2:10; Eph. 1:3. Because of the perfect righteousness of Christ the bridegroom, His bride is seen as without spot. The twelve stars are reminiscent of the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, and the crown speaks of royalty. All the woman's children are kings and priests. See 1:5. The moon itself is a symbol of the church, because it reflects the sun and witnesses to its glory. See Psa. 89:37.

The child mentioned in v. 2 is obviously the Messiah. Note that v. 5 applies to him the Messianic Psalm 2. See also Rev. 2:26,27, which also refers back to Psa. 2. More complicated explanations of the child have been offered as representing a remnant of Israel, etc. Whatever truths there may be in such interpretations, they are all subsumed under the more obvious meaning.

Rev. 12:3,4:

And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; . . .

Even the most consistent literalist has grave trouble with this scene of a terrible dragon in heaven. We must constantly remind ourselves that we are looking at signs on God's T.V. screen.

This dragon has his identity given in v. 9. He is none other than the villain of Gen. 3, the first seducer of the woman in the garden. This whole chapter expands the meaning of Gen. 3:15 about the war between the serpent and the woman, between Satan and the church. Compare Rom. 16:20.

The seven heads and ten horns will be found again in connection with the beast of Rev. 13 and 17. Red indicates his character as a destroyer, one who spills the blood of martyrs. Rev. 17:9-10 tells us that the heads represent kingdoms by which Satan has oppressed the faithful through the ages. The horns point to the kingdoms of the world in the last days, when Satan will make his final attempt to destroy Christ's followers. Note that when v. 3 refers to diadems, these are distinct from the victor's crown, and point to rulership. The only other verses referring to diadems are 13:1 and 19:12.

Verse 4 is a reference to Dan. 8:10, and it is important to realize that this chapter, and the next two, have the same theme as Dan. 8:10-14--the war on the people of God, upon the law and the truth of the holy sanctuary, and the ultimate vindicating judgment. That passage from the Old Testament apocalypse is a microcosm of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, and its elements reappear throughout these chapters. Though the little horn of Dan. 8 is primarily Satan, it also symbolizes the powers through which he works, including Antiochus Epiphanes, Rome in both its phases, and the eschatological Antichrist. Climaxing the vision of Daniel 8 is the vindication of the sanctuary (though v. 14 has no article prefaced to *qdash*, for the holiness of the One worshipped is the issue at stake), and this same theme is enlarged in Rev. 14:6-20. The casting down of the stars, both in Dan. 8 and in Rev. 12, are primarily Satan's onslaughts on the saints, but also embodies an allusion to what happened in the primeval rebellion when many angels were cast down from their first estate. See Jude 6.

In the menacing dragon standing before the woman, we see symbolized the attempt by pagan Rome to destroy the Christ child at His birth and thereafter. Verse 4 viewed in the light of its Danielic source is thus an admirable introduction to the next picture of Christ's victory which justified God, and silenced the accuser before the whole universe. (Similarly, the expansion of Dan. 8:14 in Dan. 9:24 also describes the conquering kingdom of the Messiah.)

Rev. 12:5:

. . . she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, . . .

Here is the Christ event, and while the Cross is not specifically mentioned, it is implied. The Messiah was born in order to die, and His ascension testified to the justification of the human race by the all-sufficient atonement.

Rev. 12:6:

. . . and where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

That the woman has to flee is the evidence that Satan will not be easily balked. The fight is to continue, and he hopes he will not be cheated of his prey a second time. The word "wilderness" (*epnuos*) is often linked with persecution. Antichrist has as one of his names "the abomination of desolation," that is, the idolatrous one who desolates. The wilderness here means the place of trial and certainly alludes to the Exodus experience, which provides several of the figures here embodied. The pursuit of the woman by the dragon is a reference to Pharaoh's pursuit of the Israelites; the forty-two months remind us of the forty-two stations between Egypt and Canaan; the swallowing up of the devouring waters points to the channel of dry land through the Red Sea which engulfed the Egyptian pursuers. See Ex. 15:4,5. Even the reference to eagle's wings in v. 14 is a recollection of Ex. 19:4. In this sixth verse of Rev. 12, we are assured that provision is ever made for the people of God, just as in the wilderness wanderings the bread and water were miraculously provided for Israel. While Israel feared many a time, and grumbled as often, not once were their fears or complaints justified. The answer to their need was ever at hand, as close as the Pillar of Cloud and Fire.

The reference to the 1260 days should remind us that here is another illustration of the period of the persecution of the Two Witnesses mentioned in chapter 11, and this confirms our conclusions from the Greek original that the wilderness symbolizes persecution. Hereby, the Christian is warned that he cannot hope to enter the kingdom without opposition. Because of our depravity, only trial and testing can keep us close to God. Did we have more faith, God could deal with us more gently.

This chapter is echoing the story of Israel's oppression found in Dan. 7, 8, and 11. Kiddle therefore says, "The seventh and eighth chapters of Daniel should be read as a commentary on the dragon in Revelation, as well as on the Beast (chap. xiii)."3

Rev. 12:7-9:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Alford is certainly correct when he says that "this casting down of Satan from the office of accuser in heaven was evidently connected with the great justifying work of redemption."4 Until the Cross, Satan could accuse God of forgiving unfairly. But with Calvary came the evidence that God was just, as well as the justifier of those that believe. Rom. 3:25-26 says that Christ's expiation was "to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus." Verse 11, picturing the overcoming of Satan by the saints, should never be detached from this symbolic battle of vv 7-9. It is made quite clear in Dan. 10 that, as saints fight the powers of darkness, the angels are also involved. And thus it is here. While there may be an allusion to the primeval conflict in heaven, this passage chiefly applies to the overthrow of Satan by the Cross. See Lu. 10:18 and Jn. 12:31.

Michael is a name for Christ, used here because of the Daniel source, and also as a convenience, seeing Christ was on the Cross, and therefore could hardly be represented in heaven at the same time. For the meaning of Michael, compare the following passages. Dan. 12:1,2; Jn. 5:28,29; 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9.5

The words of Torrance send home the practical implications of this grand passage, and that of vv. 10-12.

With the incarnation completing itself at the Cross the decisive battle has been won in the Kingdom of God. Spiritual evil has been utterly defeated and dethroned. Those who stake their faith upon the finished work of the Crucified can laugh at the devil and all his accusations; they can laugh at the world and all its tribulations.6

. . . the very law of God is used by guilt to drive men to despair. That is where the devil has to do with us, for the serpent actually insinuates himself into our conscience, and what a sting in his tail he has there! Here we have the locusts out of the bottomless pit and the fiery horsemen all over again. Here, too, we have the fire from Heaven. Indeed, right in the midst of our conscience confronted with God's Word, we have the whole war between God and evil, and conscience is set on fire with it and mingling with the judgments of God there are the subtle accusing voices of the devil. It is the purpose of the devil to deceive us out of our own conscience and to drive us in terror before him with his accusations.

Many a man there is at this moment tormented by this fire raging between God and the devil. On the one hand there is the Word of God speaking to him; on the other hand the deceiving tongue and the accusing voice of Satan. But listen to the words of this chapter. That dragon is cast out of Heaven, out of spiritual regions, and indeed it is only because he is cast out that he creates such a din on the earth.⁷

Kiddle makes some further suggestions about this portrayal of Satan in heaven and his ejection. ". . . his activities have reached into heaven itself, where he is the Accuser, the 'prosecuting counsel' at the heavenly Assize."⁸

In Zechariah he is more distinctively a type of malicious common informer, and the angel of the Eternal is counsel for defence; the two contend forensically for the soul of the high-priest Joshua. Here are strange notions of Divine Justice! John does much to mitigate them, however. True, the Adversary is still imagined in the divine presence, accusing men day and night *before our God*. But there is a change in emphasis. His presence may now be taken as an acknowledgement that an omniscient Judge knew the justice of the indictment of the human race--of even its finest souls. While there was yet *place. . . in heaven* for the Accuser and his angels, mankind was still frail, bound by sin, unredeemed. Although the conception itself is admittedly inadequate, the presence of Satan in heaven is essentially a vivid, objective statement of man's unfitness to consort with celestial beings. It represents the pre-messianic triumph of wrong in the universe. And this, obviously, is the ruling idea for John. For he mentions the *Accuser's* activity in heaven only in order to indicate the decisive victory won by Christ for human beings.⁹

Rev. 12:10-12:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!

These are the central verses of the book of Revelation. Appropriately, they shout the good news that Christ has conquered, and that the weakest believer is now an overcomer. Let us keep in mind that the primary meaning of that term is not ethical achievement, but judicial innocence when accused by Satan because of our sins. We are no longer under law as means of salvation. Indeed, God only intended that method for perfect beings, such as Adam and Eve before the Fall. The New Testament is opposed to law as a method, though it ever upholds it as a standard. We can let the law into our minds to guide us, but it must not be allowed to *dominate* our conscience. There the Cross must reign, giving us both peace and incentive to fulfill the law without the fear of failure. "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." Rom. 6:14.

Farrer writes:

. . . St. John is happy to profit by the ambiguity of the word 'win'. It is used of battles, it is used of lawsuits. There is an identical play on the word in Romans viii. 31-39. After his paradoxical description of the suit that justifies us in the court of heaven, where there is no longer any Satan to accuse us, the Apostle continues 'We are more than conquerors through him who loved us'. He then proceeds to describe the conquest in terms of victory over hostile circumstances and hostile spirits.¹⁰

The whole book of Galatians with its key word "liberty" is a commentary upon the thought of this

poetic passage. See particularly 2:15-21; 3:10-13; 5:1-4.

This wonderful doxology is worthy of our frequent meditation. To be assured that the kingdom of God has come, that believers have eternal life, that we already have in justification the ultimate verdict of the last judgment, that Satan is a defeated foe, that only unbelief can give him, or the world, or the flesh, and power over us--what grand themes for reflection! We overcome the foe as we appropriate the blood of Christ, the merits of Christ, the promises of Christ. As we affirm the truth of those things testified to by Jesus, hell and its minions flee. The law of God requires that we should love Christ more than life itself. Otherwise we cannot be His disciples. Lu. 14:26-27. But we cannot love Christ till we see He has loved us. Only contemplation of the Cross and its meaning can break up the fountains of the great deep, and cause the welling up of love that eclipses all fear of death, and destroys inordinate self-love.

The short time mentioned in Rev. 12 has particular reference to the time of the last great conflict. Only the tarrying of the church in fulfilling its great commission has delayed the final attack of Satan which is to precipitate the intervention of heaven by the second advent.

Rev. 12:13-16:

And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth.

Now the theme of verse 6 is renewed. "A time, times, and half a time," is borrowed from Dan. 7:25, and means the same as the 1260 days already mentioned in v. 6, and symbolized by the forty-two months of Rev. 11:2. The flooding waters are another symbol of persecution. See Isa. 8:6,7; Dan. 9:26; 11:22,44; Rev. 16:12. This symbol reaches its full intensification in the reference to the flooding Euphrates in Rev. 16, where the final onslaught of the rebellious against the saints is pictured. Compare Rev. 17:15. As the Red Sea swallowed up the pursuers of Israel, so will the flooding water of attacking multitudes be dried up on the eve of the coming of Christ. Satan's persecutions cannot damage one hair more than God sees best.

Rev. 12:17:

Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

The use of *loipoi* (rest) may infer that the church will consist chiefly of professors rather than confessors at the time of the last conflict. See the Old Testament's usage of "remnant." The faithful "last part" of Israel in each age has been small. Only a remnant holds to the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. There is no reason to change the last phrase as the RSV has done. Throughout this book the basic meaning of "the testimony of Jesus" is "the message that comes from Jesus," often via those with the Spirit of prophecy. See our discussion on Rev. 19:10. Its basic meaning is the good news of the gospel testified to by prophets and apostles. Compare "the faith of Jesus" in Rev. 14:12.

This final war is now to be enlarged upon in the following chapters, especially the thirteenth. It is the war of Armageddon—the last conflict between good and evil. Its battleground is the commandments of God, and the gospel that Jesus gave in person through His prophets. Law and gospel must never be separated, though they must be preserved distinct. The remnant are characterized by their right relationship to both. See also 14:6,12. It should be observed that the remnant church is a future entity yet to be developed by the ultimate universal proclamation of the gospel. All faithful souls in every communion are potential members of that group which will feel the storm of the dragon's death throes. This verse is a warning and a challenge, not an excuse for vain glorying on the part of any particular group of Christians. See 1 Cor.2:2; Gal. 6:14.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 13)

Chapter 28

Rev. 13:1-2:

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

This is the Antichrist chapter of Scripture, though Dan. 7,8,9,11 and 2 Thess. 2 compete with it. For John, this section of his book contained the essence of his message to the churches of which he was pastor. All preceding chapters have been but the stage setting. Here is the final crisis which is to decide the world's destiny. Though fulfilled in miniature by recurring religious persecution, the climactic application fits the last days, and only the last days.

It should not be thought that in John's time Roman persecution was already universal. Often, the extent of the early persecutions of the Christians has been exaggerated. The evidence from this book is that persecution had indeed advanced beyond the stage spoken of in 1 Pet. 4:17, where judgment at the house of God was viewed as only just beginning. For Peter, attack as yet was chiefly verbal, but the Apocalypse lives in the atmosphere of martyrdom--martyrdom which has begun in a small way (Antipas), but the threat of which hung like a pall over believers everywhere. Men anticipated that the days of Nero were about to be relived on an empire-wide scale. Bishop Robinson has summarized the evidence:

One thing of which we may be certain is that the Apocalypse, unless the product of a perfervid and psychotic imagination, was written out of an intense experience of the Christian suffering at the hands of the imperial authorities, represented by the 'beast' of Babylon. That violent persecution has already taken place and cries aloud for vengeance is an inescapable inference from such texts as 6:9f.; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20,24; 19:2; and 20:4. They presuppose that the blood of apostles and prophets and countless Christians, including some 'who had been beheaded for the sake of God's word and their testimony to Jesus', had saturated the streets of the capital itself. This of course is not the language of factual reporting; yet if something quite traumatic had not already occurred *in Rome* which was psychologically still very vivid, the vindictive reaction, portraying a blood bath of universal proportions (14:20), is scarcely credible.¹

In some form however the claim to divine honours and the setting up of the emperor's statue in provincial temples goes back as far as Augustus. Caligula indeed was actually threatening in 40 to have his image imposed upon the temple at Jerusalem a blasphemy averted only by his timely death. According to Tacitus, a statue of Nero was in 55 set up in Rome of the same size as that of Mars the Avenger and in the same shrine--'thus', in Reicke's words, 'introducing the emperor cult into the city of Rome'. It is certainly true that Domitian ordered himself to be called 'our Lord and our God' (*dominus ac deus noster*). 'But', as Bruce salutarily reminds us, 'there is no record that this precipitated a clash between him and the Christians.'²

Nevertheless, "for the seer the final battle with the 'beast' underlay everything else."³

Therefore, as we consider the beast sketched in these verses, the immediate relevance must not on any account be denied, though the final fulfillment was not yet. (See Rev. 17:9-14.) To John's readers, it was certainly Rome he was describing, just as certainly as his readers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw the Rome of their day. We must not forget that the Christian of the first century lived in eschatological time. Says Berkouwer in his discussion of the Olivet discourse:

The apocalyptic perspective is always of *present* significance. It proclaims its message of

comfort and admonition in terms of motifs and realities that are being revealed now and will be revealed shortly. So we cannot ignore this preaching by transferring its relevance to some unknown future date.⁴

This viewpoint harmonizes perfectly with the wide range of New Testament passages affirming that day to be the last hour, with the Judge at the door, the night far spent, and the day at hand. Believers knew that time was short (1 Cor. 7:29,31), and that the ends of the world had come upon them (1 Cor. 10:13). Christ Himself had come to put away sin "at the end of the world" (Heb. 9:26).

But what relevance have such verses as these in Rev. 13, if previous applications of them have been false? The answer is that previous applications were not false, only incomplete. The genius of apocalyptic symbolism is its capacity for applying to crisis after crisis. The nature of God and man does not change with time, and both the divine work among men, and satanic opposition to it, bear the same marks from age to age. May we remind the reader of Ramsey's wise words:

Now, as the symbols of this book are pictures of the church's sorrows and triumphs, and of the overthrow of the powers of the world, it arises from their very nature as symbols, and from the very nature of man and of God, which constantly secure the repetition of the same sins and judgments and deliverances, that there will be an almost endless variety of applications of which they are capable, if regard be had to specific events. Accordingly, learned commentators well read in the history of the church, have each found peculiar applications of these symbols, according as the mind of each has been peculiarly impressed, some by one, some by another event in that history, or by the peculiar and stirring events of his own times; . . .⁵

John's picture of Antichrist in this chapter includes the *two* beasts. These are complementary, and their picture fits the crisis of his own day, later times, and the last time. Rome is central in his perspective, and we mean Rome in both its phases—pagan and mediaeval. This is not to heap condemnation on any now living, any more than upon present inhabitants of the capital city of Italy. We are not speaking of, or segregating "Roman" human nature, but rather we are referring to human nature itself, which has included the "Roman." We repeat, to insist that this chapter does indeed foretell the atrocities of the early centuries and the mediaeval ages is not meant as an attack upon any people of our own time—though condemnation of unchristian *principles* in any time and place by any group is admittedly implied. Protestants particularly need to remember that true orthodoxy is the orthodoxy of love, the fruit of the spirit, not merely creedal, for the devils also believe and tremble.

How impossible it is to believe that God permitted large-scale tragedy to overtake his church without giving it warning! As surely as the Old Testament saints were forewarned concerning every great crisis such as the Flood, the Babylonian captivity, the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes, etc., so the New Testament church was not left without the consolation that comes from knowing that God has foreseen and provided. But we certainly misuse His gracious revelation if we make it the excuse for unchristian attack on any of our neighbors.

The "beast" symbol goes back particularly to Daniel, though it should be remembered that there may also here be an allusion to the Jewish belief that God had created on the fifth day Leviathan and Behemoth—one to dwell in the sea, and the other on the land. See 1 Enoch ix.7ff.; 2 Esdras vi. 49ff.; 2 Bar. xxix. 4; Baba B. 74a. The many-headed dragon is known to other parts of the Old Testament besides Daniel. See Isa. 27:1; Psa. 74:14; 104:26; Job 41.⁶

The beast is described as coming up from the sea, as did Daniel's four great beasts. We should not sharply separate this symbolism from the abyss of 11:8, and chapter 9,17, and 20. In Revelation, the abyss is clearly the domain of Apollyon the destroyer. It is the place of demons and death, and there is a linguistic tie between Apollyon and the abomination of desolation, the man of sin and the son of perdition.⁷

The ten horns and seven heads are a repeat of the description of Satan in the previous chapter. Because Satan spans the ages, we must see in the present beast one with a similar time-span. Thus to limit it to Rome, and its horns to Roman emperors, is to err. Rev. 17:9 is our guide, saying clearly that the beast is one covering all time, manifesting itself through all the oppressive kingdoms of the world. To make the seven hills in Rev. 17:9 literal, and the beast symbolic, is quite inconsistent. These hills, or mountains (which is the better rendering), are declared to represent seven kings or kingdoms (cf. Dan. 7:17,23), and therefore the actual city of Rome is not the target reference, even though an allusion to it is present. This beast is the oppressive power of the world in all ages, and John is viewing it during the days of its sixth or Roman head. We still live in that era, for the seventh head with

its united ten kingdoms has not yet come.

Hengstenberg rightly stresses the impossibility of failing to see a reference to the oppressing political giant of John's own times.

The Apocalypse was written at the time of a bloody heathen persecution which arose against Christianity. Its aim is a thoroughly practical one, being designed to comfort and animate the faint and desponding minds of believers. . . . primarily the subject of discourse must be that persecuting power, under the oppression of which the church sighed during the time then present, and such other powers as, in the nearer and more distant future, had the same root as that. And an exposition, which results in finding that only the most general account is given of the heathen persecuting power, that we can learn nothing of the fate of heathen Rome. . . . that all the details have respect to a hostile power, of which no suspicion had as yet begun to be entertained, and which was to be of an essentially different character from the one that then threatened the church with destruction--such an exposition must necessarily be false. The whole literature of prophecy presents nothing analogous to it. *Everywhere we find the prophets manifesting solicitude primarily for the necessities of the present time.*⁸

But an error as great is to limit the symbol to the Rome of the early centuries of our era. Says Williams:

As Christianity is not national or local, but universal and spiritual, as in the true Israel of God there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither Roman nor barbarian; so its great enemy, or opposing power, is not marked by national or local distinctions. He has the swiftness--he has the spotted skin, the variety of opinion and creed; he has the feline and snake-like approaches of the Grecian leopard. He has also the rude and resistless grasp of the all-devouring Persian bear. He has the loud mouth and proud bearing of the Babylonian lion. He has also the ten horns, or extensive sway of imperial Rome. For this mysterious infidelity puts on the appearance of each of these in its all-pervading character; but it passes from those old heathen dominions into a new form of seven heads, as among "all tongues, and nations, and peoples," who shall bear the Christian name.⁹

It must also be said that the supernatural elements of this picture, and the scene of worldwide involvement, point to a final fulfillment transcending all preceding applications.

The blasphemous name upon the heads is the claim to divinity. Idolatry is the sin being warned against by John. Christians must not permit any authority to replace that of God, otherwise they are guilty of idol-worship. Revelation 13, by its imagery, looks back not only to Dan. 7, but to Dan. 3, and its account of the ancient Babylonian image, and the death-decree associated therewith. Beast-worship, i.e. creature-worship, is nothing but idolatry, however served up.

The description of verse 2 is a composite one from Daniel 7. In the statement that the dragon gave the beast its power, throne, and great authority, we see a parody of the Father's bestowal upon Christ of these same privileges. Thus we are warned that the power before us is a counterfeit Christ.

This factor of parody is dominant throughout the chapter.¹⁰ The dragon, beast, and false prophet constitute a counterfeit Trinity. They, through commandments counterfeiting the divine law, enforce a counterfeit worship with counterfeit signs, a counterfeit mark, and a counterfeit number. Like Christ, it does great works for 1260 days, and like Him, it is wounded to death, but then resurrected. The very mark of Antichrist is this endeavor to reenact the mighty works of Christ. While the heart of biblical religion is the commemoration of God's unique and unrepeatable acts of redemption, all false religion endeavors to duplicate the divine achievements. The supper and the mass exactly set forth this distinction.

Similarly, wherever the essence of the gospel is lost, men minimize the truth of justification, and magnify sanctification, as though the first fruits of the Spirit within the finite human creature could ever approximate the infinite merit of Christ's imputed righteousness. To keep distinct the work of the Creator from that of the creature is primary for true religion. Counterfeit religion blends what should be distinct, and Rev. 13 warns against such subtle blending in the final work of Satan.

This entire chapter is a challenge to the church's tendency to lose the gospel and replace it with human works. It is particularly pertinent when we remember that, by the second century, the Pauline gospel was no longer understood by the Fathers of the church, and that it did not reappear until the Reformation. From this warning we should conclude that the essence of the final conflict will be the substituting of creature merit for that of the only Saviour. Man, the creature, making himself God, is

the sin of idolatry, and against that sin this chapter protests. No wonder also that the next chapter, in presenting the last warning from heaven against false religion, does so in the context of "the everlasting gospel," and the creation story (Rev. 14:6,7). We would expect that God's seal, in contrast to the beast's mark, would reflect these two key motifs.

Rev. 13:3,4:

One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder. Men worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

Here the parody is continued. The beast, like the Saviour, has a wound unto death, but revives, thus leading all men to adore it. Says Milligan on this passage:

... no successive forms of government at Rome and no successive emperors furnish a member of their series of which it may be said that it is first slain and then brought back to a life of greater energy and more quickened action. Yet without the thought of death and resurrection it is impossible to fulfil the conditions of the problem.¹¹

In the cry, "Who is like the beast. . . ?" we have an echo of Ex. 15:11. The evidence of the beast's divinity is found in its resurrection power. From age to age, as one satanic kingdom is destroyed, another rises up as in resurrection. Egypt was succeeded by Assyria, Assyria by Babylon, Babylon by Medo-Persia, Medo-Persia by Greece, Greece by pagan Rome, pagan Rome by mediaeval Rome, and soon the last head is to rise containing the kingdoms of the whole world in opposition to Christ and His church. But we err if we do not sense that the significance of this figure is far more personal than we might at first suspect. Every man has the "beast" of rebellion within himself. The abyss (existentially) is the human heart in all its depravity. Even Christians who have risen with Christ will find it necessary to continually "reckon" the old nature, and the old life as dead, or it will certainly rise again. The power of the flesh is broken only when, and as, we realize how strong the flesh is. Despite regeneration, the old nature remains. It is forensically dead, and no man is righteous any longer than he has living contact with Christ by faith. Only he who despairs of his own goodness, and trusts wholly in the righteousness of Christ has protection against himself. The gospel of righteousness by faith alone can keep the old nature in the abyss. When Luther said that Pope Self was the one he feared most, he sounded an appropriate warning for all believers. Any religion that boasts in externals, and forgets that genuine Christianity is a union of the soul with God, and total dependence upon Him for all, is the religion of Antichrist. Such religion invades even the most apparently evangelical of communions. For churches, as for individuals, it is vital to remember that "once saved, always saved" is as much a heresy as "yo-yo" religions of falling in and out of grace. Only he that endureth to the end shall be saved.¹² Thus the frequent calls "to remember" not only in the Law, but in the gospel record. See Lu. 22:19; 1 Cor. 15:2; Heb. 2:1.

Rev. 13:5-8:

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

These verses parallel the persecution described in Rev. 11. The two witnesses are here called those "who dwell in heaven." All Christians, by virtue of Christ's merits, have their citizenship in heaven. See Phil. 3:20; Eph. 2:6. The allusion to conquering is another parody of the Lamb who conquered and gained the right to dominion. See 5:5. In Dan. 7:25 and 8:10-14, we have the main Old Testament sources for this passage. Says A. Y. Collins:

If we compare Dan. 8:10-14 with Rev. 13:5b-6 we find a number of common elements. The Daniel passage includes an attack on heavenly beings (vs. 10), a rebellion against God (vs. 11), interference with the temple cult (vs. 11) and an indication of how long this situation will

continue (vs. 14). The Revelation passage refers to blasphemy against those who dwell in heaven (vs. 6), blasphemies against God (vs. 6), blasphemy against the dwelling of God (*ten skenen autou*, vs. 6), and an indication of how long the beast will exercise authority (vs. 5b).

It seems then that in Rev. 13:5b-6 the highly mythical statements of Daniel 8 are alluded to and softened.¹³

Rev. 13:5. . . an apparent allusion to Dan. 7:8 and/or 20. . . . The subsequent statements (Rev. 13:5b-6), however, do not seem to allude to anything in Daniel 7, but can be explained as a paraphrasing summary of Dan. 8:10-14; cf. 8:25.¹⁴

It was the application of these Daniel passages to the papal apostasy which helped the Reformers launch Protestantism. When one reads H. Grattan Guinness's delineation of the marks of Antichrist from Dan. 7, one has difficulty in not granting the cogency of his case—and it is the case that sustained millions even unto martyrdom, and for centuries. We quote from Guinness's summary on Dan. 7:

Let me inquire, can any one suggest any other power in which all these marks, or the majority of them, meet? They are eight in number, and definite in character. The prophecy lays its finger on the place where we are to find the great enemy—ROME; on the point of time in the course of history at which we may expect to see him arise—the division of the Roman territory into a commonwealth of kingdoms; it specifies the nature of the power—politico-ecclesiastical; its character—blasphemously self-exacting, lawless, and persecuting; it measures its duration—1,260 years; and specifies its doom—to have its dominion gradually consumed and taken away, and then to be suddenly destroyed for ever, because of its blasphemous assumptions, by the epiphany in glory of the Son of man, introducing the kingdom of God on earth.

The proof that the Papacy is the power intended is strictly cumulative. If it answered to one of these indications there would be a slight presumption against it; if to several, a strong one; if to the majority, an overwhelming one; while if it answer to all, then the proof that it is the power intended becomes to candid minds irresistible. There is not a single clause in the prophecy that cannot be proved to fit the Roman Papacy exactly, except the last, which is not yet fulfilled.

Rome, which in her pagan phase defiled and destroyed the literal temple of God at Jerusalem, in her Papal days defiled and destroyed the anti-typical spiritual temple of God—the Christian Church. Was it not worthy of God to warn that Church beforehand of the coming of this dreadful antichristian power, and to cheer her in all the sufferings she would have to endure from its tyranny by a knowledge of the issue of the great and terrible drama? Was it not right that the Roman power, pagan and Papal, should occupy as paramount a place on the page of Scripture as it has actually done on the page of history? The eighteen Christian centuries lay open before the eye of the omniscient God, and no figure stood out so prominently in all their long course as that of the great antichrist. The pen of inspiration sketched him in a few, bold masterly strokes; and there is no mistaking the portrait.¹⁵

Whether we agree with all of Guinness's points or not, and the present writer does not, it is hardly possible to be intelligent on the history of interpretation of the present passage without reviewing the orthodox historic view of traditional Protestantism. Such an interpretation, which helped to preserve Protestantism with its emphasis on justification by faith alone, Scripture alone, grace alone, and the priesthood of all believers, is not to be lightly treated. While those who hold it have often erred by lack of charity, some who have opposed it have erred by a false tolerance. Imitators of the divine character, with its love for sinners and hatred of sin, are not everywhere to be found. Let all Protestants be warned against that self-righteous bigotry which once crucified the Lord of Glory. Whatever fruit we may bear, if love be missing, all else is valueless. Simultaneously, however, a plea must be uttered regarding the failure to protest against evil. Error is never harmless, never sanctifies, and never glorifies God.

The historical application of these verses should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that they are again to be fulfilled in the days ahead, not on the scale of centuries but for "a little season," and it is this final fulfillment with which we should now be most concerned.

Verse 8, with its apparent support for predestination, has troubled many earnest souls. It must not be so read as to deny other plain passages of Scripture. The New Testament knows nothing of a fatalistic

predestination. "Whosoever will may come," is its invitation. God so loved the world that "whosoever believeth. . . may have everlasting life." We should note that the first circle, "the world," is larger than the second "whosoever believeth." God has loved all men, and Christ died for all. See 1 Jn. 2:2. He desires all to repent, and find life eternal. In Ephesians, we find Paul assuring the whole church that they were all the elect of God. See 1:4. Similarly, Rev. 13:8 is saying that God planned from all eternity to save all who respond to the Spirit and the Word. It enshrines a metaphor for the truth that from eternity God decreed that nothing would separate Him from those who, having responded to the everlasting gospel, are numbered | with the elect.

Rev. 13:9-10:

If any one has an ear, let him hear:
If any one is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;
If anyone slays with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.
Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

These words warn Christians not to respond in kind to their enemies, for to take the sword will mean perishing by the sword. Let them be resigned to the providences of God, whether captivity, or death, or life. Such resignation calls for endurance and faith.

Rev. 13:11:

Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

Evil, like good, seeks company. Thus it has been in all ages. When God sought to redeem Israel from Egypt, Jannes and Jambres rallied to the support of Pharaoh. Forty years later, when on the border of the promised land, Israel found herself menaced not only by King Balak, but by the apostate prophet Balaam.

Through the years of the judges and Israel's kings we find example after example of the same type of unholy union against godliness. When backsliding Dan conquered Laish, they sought a priest to sanctify their maraudings, and when Absalom rebelled against his father David, he had behind him the worldly wisdom of Ahithophel. In the revolt of Jeroboam, new idols and new priests were set up to stabilize the breakaway. Later still, Ahab and Jezebel dominated Israel, largely through the false prophets of Baal.¹⁶

Erdman summarizes the general meaning of the beasts of Rev. 13 as follows:

What is meant by these "beasts"? To what do they correspond? Probably to John they pictured the imperial power of Rome and the cult of emperor worship, which were united to crush the infant church. They find their counterparts whenever a despotic civil power is combined with some form of false religion. The picture will never be completely fulfilled until it is embodied in certain persons or movements of the last days.¹⁷

Hendriksen speaks similarly:

This second beast, accordingly, is the lie of Satan dressed up like the truth. It is Satan masquerading as a shining angel, 11 Cor. 11:14. It symbolizes all false prophets in every era of this dispensation. They come to you disguised as sheep, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves, Matt. 7:15. The two beasts--antichristian government and antichristian religion--work in perfect cooperation. That is ever the case. It was true already in the days of the apostles: the heathen priest was the friend of the proconsul.¹⁸

And Ladd comments:

Preterist interpreters admit that it is impossible to find any ancient historical figure who is the counterpart of the second beast. They almost unanimously see in him the priestly structure which supported emperor worship. But, as Hanns Lilje points out, the picture is largely prophetic. The symbolism of emperor worship in Asia Minor forms only the background for the vision of the second beast, whose power and influence will go far beyond anything known in

the ancient world. The experience of emperor worship provided only echoes of the terrible reality which will be fulfilled in the last days. . . . He is a parody of Christ.--religion prostituted for evil ends. The second beast had the appearance of a lamb, but his voice belied his appearance: he spoke like a dragon. That the second beast represents religion employed in support of the worship of the beast is seen from the fact that hereafter he is called the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). The first beast represents civil power, satanically inspired; the second beast represents religious power employed to support civil power.¹⁹

All these scholars are but repeating Christ's warning against false prophet as well as false Messiahs, for this verse is a reflection of our Lord's prediction We learn from it that much which poses for religion is false at its heart.²⁰

Note that what we have here is one of the dominant themes of the introductory letters reappearing. There we learned of the Balaamites. Balaam and Jezebel are the two outstanding types of incitements to apostasy found in the story of Israel. Balaam from within, and Jezebel from without, precipitated a "falling away." Now Rev. 13 reminds us that something after the order of Balaam, will transpire in the last days. A power claiming to be a prophet of God will lead many of His professed people to join in idolatrous worship as Israel did at Baal-Peor on the verge of the promised land. The contrast between the land of this verse, and the "sea" of v. 1 should not be passed by. At one level of meaning its mention implies that all the elements will combine against the faithful. But of more significance is the fact that to John's readers, familiar with the Old Testament, the earth would be reminiscent of the land of Israel in contrast with the heathen across the sea. The Jews were not a maritime nation, and believed God's blessings were not to be found in the sea. The earth God had given to the children of men, particularly His children Israel. Or so they thought. Thus the reference in this verse to the earth supports the lamb symbol, warning us for the second time that not all which poses as Christian is truly so. Says Milligan:

The plausible interpretation suggested by many of the ablest commentators on this book, that by the second beast is meant "worldly wisdom, comprehending everything in learning, science and art which human nature of itself, in its civilized state, can attain to, the worldly power in its more refined and spiritual elements, its prophetic or priestly class," must be unhesitatingly dismissed. It fails to apprehend the very essence of the symbol. It speaks of a secular and mundane influence, when the whole point of St. John's words lies in this,--that the influence of which he speaks is religious. Not in anything springing out of the world in its ordinary sense, but in something springing out of the Church and the Church's faith, is the meaning of the Apostle to be sought.²¹

Rev. 13:12-15:

It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It works great signs even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived; and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast should even speak, and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

In this prophecy, we are warned that the latter days will witness a professedly Christian power legislating in favor of a subtle idolatry, and finally condemn to death all nonconformists.

Until the pogrom in Germany during World War II, such prophecy as this seemed wide of the mark of possible fulfillment in the modern world. But history is a revelation of the depths of human depravity, as surely as prophecy warns of the same. Murder was the first fruit of sin in Adam's family, and it remains a characteristic symptom of the human disease. Rev. 13:11 has been relevant throughout the entire Christian age, but points specifically to a final tribulation launched on believers by apostates. To John, it seemed that the future would be but a replay of what happened in the days of Jesus, when the Jewish leaders who professed the one true religion, linked hands with the Roman untouchables in order to crucify incarnate goodness and truth. John is saying that this is what lies ahead. Milligan reminisces for the prophet:

He had seen the Divine institution of Judaism, designed by the God of Israel to prepare the way for the Light and the Life of men, perverted by its appointed guardians, and made an instrument for blinding instead of enlightening the soul. He had seen the Eternal Son, in all

the glory of His "grace" and "truth," coming to the things that were His own, and yet the men that were His own rejecting Him, under the influence of their selfish religious guides. He had seen the Temple, which ought to have been filled with the prayers of a spiritual worship, profaned by worldly traffic and the love of gain. Nay more, he remembered one scene so terrible that it could never be forgotten by him, when in the judgment-hall of Pilate even that unscrupulous representative of Roman power had again and again endeavored to set Jesus free, and when the Jews had only succeeded in accomplishing their plan by the argument, "If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend." They Caesar's friends! They attach value to honours bestowed by Caesar! O vile hypocrisy! O dark extremity of hate! Judaism at the feet of Caesar!²²

Because the prophecy points to lamb-like profession, and yet uses not a woman, but a beast, we should anticipate that Protestantism may yet follow in the wake of religion in other times, and forsake the power of the Spirit for the arm of the State. That bulwark of religious liberty, U.S.A., should appropriate the warning especially to itself.

This final apostasy of professed Christendom will come in sheep's clothing offering a revival like that of Elijah in the days of Jezebel. It will offer charismatic gifts of power, claiming to bring down from heaven the anointing fire of the Spirit, as at Pentecost of old.²³ But the real source of such "fireworks" will be "the spirits of devils." Compare Rev. 16:13-16, where the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are again brought to view, with their deceptive signs luring the world to the final Armageddon conflict.

This false prophet is a parody of the Holy Spirit. It points men to the beast as the Spirit points believers to Christ. It operates in the very presence of the beast, as the Spirit makes real the presence of Christ. It is a false Spirit of prophecy, imbuing followers with a false gospel, to which they witness in counterfeit of God's two witnesses, who also prophesy at this time. Its "fire" is a copy of the fire which the witnesses of heaven are able to invoke. See 11:5. False religious revival characterized by signs and wonders is here foretold—revival having the support of church and state, but yet a counterfeit of truth. When it endeavours to enforce its dictates, the dragon's roar is heard, and its hellish origin revealed. As Satan coveted God's power, but not His character, so it is ever with false religion, and so it will be in this instance. Every exaltation of the gifts of the Spirit above the fruit, or of experience above the Word, tends in the direction of this apostasy. As Calvary led to Pentecost, so Pentecost should ever point back to Calvary, for the Spirit witnesses to Christ, not to Himself.

As the days of Christ's first advent among men were days of intense spiritual activity, including a manifestation of demons on a scale never before known, so it shall be in the days ahead. As the second advent approaches, both heaven and hell intensify their appeals to men. Spiritism will become part of the false gospel that is to sweep the world. Because men refuse the truth, they will believe a lie which comes as a strong over-mastering delusion because accompanied with miraculous wonders. See 2 Thess. 2:9-12. Only those who love the gospel of Christ, and who depend wholly on His merits, will be shielded from the great error that is to take the whole world captive. The gospel based on faith alone, grace alone, the Word alone, is the best panoply for the conflict awaiting all.

The reference to the image is reminiscent of the ancient conflict in Babylon, recorded in Dan. 3. Obedience to the commandments of God is again to be the test, the commandments of the first table, forbidding idolatry. This chapter emphasizes that Antichrist leads men to transgress the first commandment by his own demand for worship, the second commandment by erection of an image, the third by blasphemy, and the fourth by its counterfeit of the finished work of Christ, offering men the false rest found in creature-worship. Not seven, the number of divine perfection and rest, but six, characterizes Antichrist, and also eight, by way of parody of Christ. See commentary on Rev. 17:11. In the reference to imparting the breath of life to the image, we have a claim to divinity in the counterfeiting of God's original gift of life. See Gen. 2:7.

The image, of course, is also a symbol, and must point to an institution and procedures which will duplicate the form and behavior of the beast power in other ages. That union of church and state which characterizes apostasy, and ever precedes persecution, is again to be made. It will be the last effort of a schizoid world to find peace through a monolithic wholeness. What politics, science, technology, and education have failed to do will finally be attempted by religion.²⁴ The way for this idolatrous structure is being paved by the latter day shrinkage of the world into a global village. In the last century, earth has entered a unique phase because of the knowledge explosion. No longer is any part of the earth remote and detached from the rest. All things are ready for the end of true democracy, as George Orwell foretold in his 1984. Arthur Koestler commented:

There are two reasons which entitle us to call our time 'unique.' The first is quantitative, expressed by the exponential increase of operations, communications, destructive power, etc. Under their combined impact, an extra-terrestrial intelligence, to whom centuries are as seconds, able to survey the whole curve in one sweep, would probably come to the conclusion that human civilization is either on the verge of, or in the process of, exploding.

He continues, "The second reason is qualitative, and can be summed up in a single sentence: before the thermonuclear bomb, man had to live with the idea of his death as an individual; from now, onward, mankind has to live with the idea of its death as a species."²⁵

Even more important than the possible issues of war are the potential results of man's peace-time activities. Here is a part of a speech made by James Wiggins, U. S. representative at the United Nations, at a plenary session on December 3, 1968: "I believe that the environmental problems. . . will appear in the perspective of years, as of incomparably greater importance to the human species than the many political dissensions to which, because they arouse such dangerous passion, we must devote such a great part of our days and nights at the United Nations."²⁶

The final report of the UNESCO conference held in Paris in September 1968 made it clear that there is "a new awareness of the loss of environment quality . . . throughout the world. Although some of the changes in the environment have been taking place for decades or longer, they seem to have reached a threshold of critical-ness."²⁷ The problems on this critical threshold include the exhaustion of energy resources, growing pollution, and the population explosion.

A rash of writers in recent years has warned society about the increasing trend to conformity, which is even more threatening in its significance than the environmental problems just referred to.²⁸ Public education more and more turns out stereotypes, and the mass media with its few primary channels contributes to the same. C. S. Lewis's warning is entirely pertinent. He has senior Tempter, Screwtape, address the College of Tempters:

As the great sinners grow fewer, and the majority lose all individuality, the great sinners become far more effective agents for us. Every dictator or even demagogue—almost every film-star or crooner— can draw tens of thousands of the human sheep with him. They give themselves (what there is of them) to him; in him, to us. There may come a time when we shall have no need to bother about individual temptation at all, except for the few. Catch the bell-wether and his whole flock comes after him.

But do you realise how we have succeeded in reducing so many of the human race to the level of ciphers? This has not come about by accident. It has been our answer—and a magnificent answer it is—to one of the most serious challenges we ever had to face.²⁹

. . . . What I want to fix your attention on is the vast, over-all movement towards the discrediting, and finally the elimination, of every kind of human excellence—moral, cultural, social, or intellectual. And is it not pretty to notice how *Democracy* (in the incantatory sense) is now doing for us the work that was once done by the most ancient Dictatorships, and by the same methods.³⁰

See also his *The Abolition of Man*, p. 77ff. Francis Schaeffer, with as serious an intent though without humor, warns moderns similarly.

For several generations the fragmented concept of knowledge and life which had become dominant was taught to the young by many of the professors in universities around the world. All too often when the students of the early sixties asked their parents and others, "Why be educated?" they were told, in words if not by implication, "Because statistically an educated man makes so much more money a year." And when they asked, "Why make more money?" they were told, "So that you can send your children to the university." According to this kind of spoken or implied answer, there was no meaning for man, and no meaning for education.

Much of the mass media popularized these concepts, pouring them out in an endless stream so that a whole generation from its birth has been injected with the teaching that reason leads to pessimism in regard to a meaning of life and with reference to any fixed values. This had been that generation's atmosphere. It had no personal memory of the days when Christianity had more influence on the consensus. Those in the universities saw themselves as little computers controlled by the larger computer of the university, which in turn was controlled by the still larger computer of the state.³¹

.... there is a danger that without a sufficient base modern science will become *sociological* science; so civil law has moved towards sociological law. Distinguished jurist and Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841-1935) took a long step in this direction. In *The Common Law* (1881) Holmes said that law is based on experience. Daniel H. Benson (1936-), assistant professor of law at the Texas Tech University School of Law quotes Holmes: "Truth is the majority vote of that nation that could lick all others." In a 1926 letter to John C. H. Wu, Holmes wrote, "So when it comes to the development of a *corpus juris* the ultimate question is what do the dominant forces of the community want and do they want it hard enough to disregard whatever inhibitions may stand in the way." This is very different from Samuel Rutherford's biblical base and from Paul Robert's painting in which Justice points to "The Word of God."³²

No wonder the author concludes:

If we as Christians do not speak out as authoritarian governments grow from within or come from outside, eventually we or our children will be the enemy of society and the state. No truly authoritarian government can tolerate those who have a real absolute by which to judge its arbitrary absolutes and who speak out and act upon that absolute. This was the issue with the early church in regard to the Roman Empire, and though the specific issue will in all probability take a different form than Caesar-worship, the basic issue of having an absolute by which to judge the state and society will be the same.³³

Thus it can no longer be said by critics of eschatology that all things continue just as they were in the long ago. Human nature truly has not changed, but the stage for its works is drastically different to any other century of time. When General MacArthur, at the end of World War II, warned that Armageddon may be at our doors he spoke more wisely than he or most of his listeners knew. Our present chapter, Rev. 13, is heaven's description of that event.

The last ascent from the bottomless pit foretold in Rev. 17 is identical with the final healing of the deadly wound in this chapter, and indicates the ultimate union of professed Christianity with the power of the state, in order to force all men to conform to its decrees. Everything here is to be fulfilled on a universal scale, and nothing should be localized or nationalized in the sense of restricting it to any single area or nation. That controversy which began with one family in one place--Eden--is not to close until every family on the face of the earth has decided for or against the Cross of Christ.

We should not miss the parallel between this image and idol, and the abomination of desolation spoken of by Christ. An abomination "standing where it ought not" points to idolatrous worship within the professed church of God. Compare 2 Thess. 2:3,4. It is an abomination that "desolates," i.e. a false religion which persecutes. This final attack on the church fulfills Rev. 6:10,11 and gives the final demonstration that the world indeed hates Christ. Then the cup of iniquity becomes full, and judgment, in mercy long withheld, now falls.

Rev. 13:16-18:

Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

It is evident from the context here that loyalty to the true gospel will be shown by obedience to the laws of God rather than the laws of rebellious man. Thus Revelation, as Daniel, sees the seal of obedience to the divine law as heaven's mark on its elect, while obedience to human law, in contrast to the divine, will constitute the mark of the beast. See Dan. 6:4-5,7; 7:25; 3:1-18. We refer the reader to the introduction to this section for our discussion on the chief symbols of this chapter, including the mark and number of the beast. The question put to Jeremiah is appropriate for the meditation of all of us. "If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you fall down, how will you do in the jungle of the Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5)

The reader should glance back to chapters 21 and 26 for their more detailed explanations of the mark of the beast. See also the following Excursus and its comments on "the abomination of desolation." The latter is but a technical name for Antichrist, indicating the chief characteristics of all in that genus from Antiochus Epiphanes to Satan. For a full comprehension of Rev. 13, one needs to study the

prophecies of Daniel, particularly chapters 7,8,11; Eze. 38,39; Zech. 14; Joel 3; the Olivet sermon in Mt. 24,25; Lu. 21; Mk. 13; and 2 Thess. 2; and Rev. 6 (the fifth seal particularly), Rev. 11,14 (especially verses 9-13,20), Rev. 17,19.

Thus the eschatological crisis is no mean theme in Scripture. Indeed Gen. 3:15 applies to it as well as to the Cross as Rev. 12:17 makes clear. Those who are too sophisticated to believe in a final crisis for the world involving false worship (idolatrous worship against the law of God) and bloody persecution, a crisis attended by supernatural manifestations on both sides, must needs reckon with the prophets, the apostles, and our Lord Christ.

Secular authors also have pointed to this conflict. Dostoyevsky, as already mentioned, in his *Crime and Punishment* gives his chief character a dream of the last world crisis. At another level entirely, C. S. Lewis has written *The Last Battle*, and we would also refer readers to Will Herberg's essay, "Christian Faith and Totalitarian Rule" in his *Faith Enacted as History*. Note the following from Herberg and consider its relevance to the chapter in the Apocalypse we have been considering.

The twentieth century is the age of totalitarianism. Not only does a great portion of the human race live under pervasive totalitarian rule, but totalitarianism emerges as a crucial problem at every level of twentieth-century life, and is largely at the source of the great conflicts--economic, political, and spiritual--that are tearing apart the contemporary world. . . . The confusion in the churches is itself a major factor exacerbating the crisis and facilitating the advance of totalitarianism on many fronts.³⁴

Direct and conscious confrontation with totalitarianism did not arise for the mass of Christians in Western Europe and America; and for the Church as such, until the appearance of Nazism as a massive power on the continent of Europe.³⁵

. . . the totalitarian State. . . is the contemporary embodiment of the illegitimate State pictured in Rev., ch. 13. . . It deifies and exalts itself; it demands a quasi-religious commitment on the part of its subjects; it runs constantly *contra legem Dei*. . . it refuses to recognize, and strives incessantly to destroy, man's personal being and his God-relationship.³⁶

EXCURSUS ON REVELATION 13 AND ARMAGEDDON

Amid the trees of exegetical details in Rev. 13 one must not miss the impact of the forest. This chapter points to the long anticipated crisis at the end of the age--the crisis which ushers in the Day of the Lord and Armageddon. Armageddon is to the church what Calvary was to Christ--the last conflict, the hiding of God's face, threatened extinction, but ultimate deliverance. This sorrowful midnight will illuminate the universe by its worldwide demonstration of the same God-vindicating truths revealed at the Cross.

The rest of Scripture in prophecy and type foreshadows this final crisis. The very first conflict among men recorded in Gen. 4 was over the issue of worship, and so it is to be in the last battle. In both Rev. 13 and 14, "worship" is the key word. Men are to choose between adoration of, and obedience to, their Creator and Redeemer, or under totalitarianism pressure yield to the popular religion of idolatrous creature-worship symbolized by the image to the beast. The compromise of the church with the world mirrored by the Balaamites and the children of Jezebel in Rev. 2 finds its ultimate fulfillment at the end of the world. Balaam is the prototype of the eschatological false prophet--the lamb-like beast which causes earth's inhabitants to bow down to the beast and its image.

Let us link together the allusions in the apocalyptic picture (Rev. 13 and its parallels), to earlier crises typical of the eschatological one.

Rev. 13:11-18 expands the "hour of trial" foretold in 3:10. It is also called "the tribulation" in Mt. 24:21,29; Mk. 13:19,24; "a time of trouble, such as never has been" in Dan. 12:1 (the source of Christ's references to the tribulation); Jer. 30:7 affirms that the trial is so great "there is none like it," "it is a time of distress for Jacob, yet he shall be saved out of it."--an expression which parallels Dan. 12:1.

The New Testament, not only Revelation but 1 Thess. 5:1-3, likens the final crisis to the fall of Babylon which was the prelude to Israel's deliverance and return to Canaan. Compare, for example, 1 Thess. 5:3 with Jer. 30:7-11 and Isa. 47:8-15 with Rev. 18:7-8. Thus the drying up of the Euphrates in Rev. 16 should not be divorced from the parallel references in Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the overthrow of Babylon. Daniel 5 portrays the same scene, sketching the peace and safety spirit in Babylon at the time of Belshazzar's feast on the eve of disaster.

Not only Dan. 5 and the time of trouble there mirrored, but also the narratives of Dan. 3 and 6 are hinted at by Rev. 13, as the beast motif of the latter refers to the Antichrist pictures in Dan. 7,8,9,11,12. The reference to Babylon's image to the beast which all must worship (13:11-18; 14:9-11) points back to the union between false religion and political force in Daniel's day when commandment-keepers were threatened with death. Daniel refused to violate conscience. Declared his enemies, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." Dan. 6:5. It is this situation magnified to world-proportions that Rev. 13 depicts in its closing verses. It is highly significant that Dan. 12:1, in speaking of the eschatological deliverance of the threatened remnant, uses the same key word found prominently in the stories of chapters 3 and 6. See the references to "deliver" in 3:15,17,28; 6:14,16,20,27 and compare 12:1. As in Daniel the narratives are the key to the prophecies, so the prophecies of Revelation find their clues in Old Testament history. This is made clear by the allusions in the apocalyptic mosaic such as in 13:14; 14:1,8,9,19,20; 15:1-3; 16:12-16 referring back to crises in the experience of ancient Israel.

Revelation 16 enlarges the 13:11-18 scene by its reference to the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. Religious wonders are seen as polarizing the unbelieving hosts of earth for the prelude to Armageddon. The peoples, multitudes, and tongues supporting Babylon are symbolized by the Euphrates which is to be dried up by the wrath of God. Such language to a Christian Jew would be evocative of a host of memories--the Exodus, with its drying up of the Red Sea, the diverting of Babylon's waters when God's anointed Shepherd, Cyrus, came from the east to deliver the people of God, and the many floods of invaders from the pagan north attacking Israel over the centuries.

The term "time of trouble," the "distress for Jacob" points back to the Genesis story of that patriarch's great trial. Jacob, when only one river from home, heard the news that his brother was approaching with murderous intent. It seemed that all his sins of the past were about to catch up with him. In fear, lest God could not shelter him because of his guilt, Jacob wrestled with his midnight visitor until, ultimately disabled, his hold of faith and earnest plea brought the blessing he sought.

When the remnant of spiritual Israel face the death decree of the beast, there will be soul-searching akin to that which came to Jacob of old. But ultimately at the advent, as forgiven but loyal sinners, they will see the face of God and be preserved because of their faith in the merits of the Atonement.

There are other Old Testament pictures which seem appropriate for understanding the time of trouble brought to view in Rev. 13. The people delivered from that test are seen as "sealed" and with the Lamb on Mt. Zion. They have the blessing belonging to all who have "kept" their garments (see 16:15). The seal on the forehead of the victors is said to be the name of the Lamb and His Father's name. This imagery is based on Eze. 9 and Zech. 3, especially the latter. Zech. 3, in a judgment and therefore eschatological setting, points up as the emblems of acceptance with God, white robes and a miter upon the forehead. The miter of the High Priest enshrined Yahweh's name. See Ex. 28:36. In the tense situation drawn by Zechariah, we have the imagery of the Day of Atonement when the High Priest as representative of the sinful worshippers appeared before the Lord on Israel's Judgment day.³⁷ It is therefore easy to see the connection between Rev. 3:10,12 (which speak of "the hour of trial" and "the name of my God"), and Rev. chapters 13 and 14.

Centuries ago, Sir Isaac Newton suggested that Rev. 13, with its mark in contrast to the divine seal, could only be unlocked by the Day of Atonement type which symbolized by its two goats and their seals the two classes on judgment day, the lost and the saved, those sealed for Yahweh and those marked for Azazel the rebel. Jacob's wrestling with the angel, Israel's pleading on the solemn fast-day of Yom Kippur, and the judgment scene of Zech. 3, all three with a common diapason, illuminate the forecast made by John in Rev. 13 as he sets forth the final polarization of earth's multitudes.

The death-decree of 13:15 echoes yet another Old Testament passage. According to the apocalypse, all "both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave" are coerced into false worship under the threat first of economic hardship and finally loss of life itself. Only in one other place in Scripture do we find a crisis of this magnitude involving multitudes in a death threat because of their mode of worship.

The story recorded in Esther belongs to the closing days of Old Testament history and concerns the threatened remnant whose worship contrasted so sharply with that of their enemies. Says the idolater Haman, who helps direct the throne of Medo-Persia: "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them. . . . let it be decreed that they be destroyed" (Esther 3:8-9). As with the similar scenes in Daniel, though on a much smaller scale, the tables were ultimately turned and instead of disaster the Jews found "gladness and joy. . . a feast and a holiday," while death overtook their enemies.

The same gladness and joy of deliverance had been Israel's recurringly since their deliverance from Pharaoh's host at the Red Sea. Rev. 15:1-4; 16:12-16 draw heavily upon this early national paradigm, as Rev. 16:21 alludes to the later episode of deliverance from the Amorites by heaven's hailstone bombardment. See Josh. 10:11.

While the name Megiddo spelled "trouble" to Israel, it also told of the unsleeping eye of God over His people. In Judges we have the first detailed account of conflict at Megiddo. The sun-worshipping Midianite hosts attacked the little flock of Israelite sabbath-keepers. God only was their refuge and strength and "the stars in their courses" fought against Sisera and his hosts, causing them to fall in the valley of Megiddo (Judges 5:19-21).

Finally, the mention of Mount Megiddo in the Rev. 16 parallel to Rev. 13 is reminiscent of the conflict between the idol-worshippers of Ahab and Jezebel and the prophet of Jehovah, Elijah at Mount Carmel. After the answering from heaven by fire, the false prophets were slain by the waters of Megiddo nearby. That conflict, like the one predicted in Rev. 13, concerned worship and the commandments of God. See 1 Kings 18:18,30; 19:14. While the word Armageddon occurs but once in Scripture, that which it signifies--the battle of the great day of God Almighty--is prevalent in both testaments. Even the mourning of all nations referred to in Rev. 1:7 is a reference to the final catastrophe and points back to the mourning when Josiah died as one of Babylon's allies.

We wish to underline the fact that Rev. 13 is a crucial chapter for Revelation because it points to a watershed for humanity in the near future and in one sense is the heart of the apocalypse. It unites threads of typology and prophecy from preceding Scriptures. What gives special urgency to this claim is the reflection of the Christ event in this chapter concerning Antichrist. The main "clue" in Rev. 13 is its reference to our Lord's passion. All prophecies in the Apocalypse reflect Him in some manner, and just as the Olivet sermon enlarges the Passion of Christ, so Rev. 13, in depicting a worldwide

Gethsemane for Christ's body alludes to the same. The real end of Old Testament times merges with Christianity's beginnings. Our Lord's ministry, especially its closing days as shown earlier, is a paradigm of the experience of His body in the last days. With Him came the everlasting gospel and the hour of God's judgment. After His anointing by the Spirit, His ministry polarized the Jewish religious world. He cleansed its sanctuary, pronounced woes on hypocritical worshippers and, by every discourse and acted parable of passion week, warned of judgment. Opposing religious bodies joined together and then united with the state to condemn him to death. His time of trouble was divided into two, with His sealing so to speak in Gethsemane when His decision was fixed irrevocably to die for the sins of the world. Then came judgment halls, plagues of divine wrath, signs in the heavens, the riven veil drawing attention to the most holy place, and finally the end. His Cross was a judgment throne as predicted in Jn. 12:31.

Rev. 11-13 draw upon this paradigm from the gospels when describing the last days, and we would err if we failed to give it true attention. See particularly 11:3 to 13:1 (with its allusions to 1260 days of ministry, rejection by the world, despite miraculous powers evinced as signs, Jerusalem the guilty city, the three and a half days of death, then the resurrection and ascension). With the crisis came the opening of the most holy place of the temple as a reminiscence of the sign marking Christ's death. The similarities are too numerous to be coincidental. Even the Antichrist is portrayed as a parody of Christ's ministry, with his 1260 days, death and resurrection, as well as his advocate, the beast like a lamb.

This Antichrist is present in our Lord's forecast of "the last things." Remembering that the Olivet sermon mirrors the future in terms of Christ's passion, His use of Daniel's title for Antichrist--the abomination of desolation--is doubly significant. Around His Cross gathered the representatives of Rome, the power recognized by the Jews as the contemporary fulfillment of those prophecies once accomplished in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. Our Lord affirms in Mk. 13:14 (and the use of the personal pronoun with the neuter antecedent is particularly significant) that the last sign will be a world-dominant power like Rome--idolatrous and persecuting, enforcing its false system of worship upon the whole world. The church--His body--is to suffer as its Head, at the hands of idolaters. It is this prophecy which John enlarges in Rev. 13 by his allusion to the formation of an image and the decree that all should worship it. This is the prelude to Armageddon. See Mk. 13:14ff., and Mt. 24:15ff., and compare Dan. 8:13; 9:26,27; 11:31 to 12:11.

Says Jeremias:

The abomination of desolation in the holy place, demanding worship and reverence, glorified by false prophets through word and miracle—that is the last great temptation. . . .38

This is the last and final catastrophe in history that Jesus sees coming. He was certain that the kingdom of God comes through suffering and only through suffering.39

Lars Hartman speaks similarly:

We encounter "the abomination of desolation" in Daniel in passages dealing with persecutions and oppression. . . . Bearing the context in mind, both in the Gospels and in Daniel (which was interpreted eschatologically), it seems probable that the symbol in question refers to some form of blasphemy which will characterize the last days. . . . Devastation will be associated with it.40

Thus modern expositors echo comments of such earlier exegetes as Wordsworth and Tanner:

Some form of infidelity and impiety will be established by Law even in the Christian church, as our Lord Himself foretells (Matthew 24:15). . . .

So will it be in the last times. The church itself will be betrayed by some in high places in her ministry, and by means of their timid and treacherous concessions and compromises it will be polluted by a form of worship which will make it execrable in the sight of God and will cause all good men to weep and hide their faces in shame and sorrow, and to forsake the courts of the sanctuary.41

The "abomination of desolation" is a formula indicating an overthrow of God's religion, a desecration of what is holy, and a dissipation and corruption of His order of worship by some great God-opposing power. This description is evidently applicable with more or less exactness to several crises in history including. . . antichrist.42

It should be noted that 2 Thess. 2 is also based on "the abomination of desolation" motif. *Thus the*

prophecy of the Apocalypse concerning the image of the beast in the last crisis is the final expansion of the warnings against idolatrous worship found from Deut. 13:1-3 onwards, and particularly emphasized by Daniel, Christ, and Paul. We, who may well be living on the eve of Armageddon, would do well to heed the warning prophetic refrain against idolatry, and in response "worship Him that made Heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water" (Rev. 14:7). That worship is exemplified in the keeping of "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12).

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 14)

Chapter 29

According to Lohmeyer, Rev. 14 is the high point of the Apocalypse. Certainly here is pictured the outcome of the last battle. The victors stand with Christ upon Mount Zion. But having given that glimpse of triumph, the seer then proceeds to present the final warning to the world about its last fatal choice. Rev. 14:6-12 pictures the fulfillment of Mk. 13:10. It places earth-dwellers in a dilemma. They stand indeed between the devil and the deep crystal sea of God. While the beast threatens death to those who refuse to worship him, heaven thunders a pause to all who contemplate submission. The fall of Babylon the oppressor is foretold in order that men might not consider it invincible. The obedient are characterized as possessing endurance and the faith of Jesus. Upon them who risk martyrdom by their loyalty, a special blessing is pronounced. Then appears the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, as He comes to garner His own and destroy their persecutors.

Rev. 14:1-5:

Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who have not defiled themselves with women; for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless.

As is usual in the Apocalypse, we are not permitted to see the trauma and tragedy without accompanying consolation.¹ Rev. 14:1-12 lets in the sunshine. It answers the questions: "Will the church survive? What has the church been doing besides suffering? What is its contribution during the last conflict?" Rev. 13 closed with the beast and its false prophet gathering about themselves a congregation including most of the inhabitants of earth. They have given this congregation their own ordinances and law, and sealed them with their own signet. In contrast, we see now the congregation of the Lamb, those faithful to His ordinances and commandments, those marked with the covenant sign of the Creator's "name" or character. Many have observed the complementary nature of chs. 13 and 14. Says Criswell:

Chapter 14 is simply the other side of chapter 13. They are contemporaneous in history. These things all happen at once, and chapter 14 is but the counterpart of chapter 13. One side is the dark description of the beast and of Satan and of the judgment of God upon those who worship the vile image. At the same time, in contrast, is this beautiful scene of these glorious ones who serve God and Him alone. In chapter 13 is the beast; in chapter 14 is the Lamb, gentle and precious, on Mt. Zion. In chapter 13 are the spurious, the counterfeit and the false. In chapter 14 are the true, the genuine and the lovely. In chapter 13 is the mark of the beast, and in chapter 14, the mark of God. In chapter 13 is the work of idolatry and the corruption of the earth. In chapter 14 is the worship of the true Lamb of God and the saints' dissociation from the corruption of the world. In chapter 13 are those who go with the beast and the idolators down into damnation and perdition. In chapter 14 are those who are redeemed from the earth and who are taken up into heaven. In chapter 13 are those that follow the beast in all of his ways. In chapter 14 are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. In chapter 13 is the number of the beast, 666, six hundred, three score and six. In chapter 14 are the one hundred and forty-four thousand, the fulness and the plenitude of the glory, the grace and beauty of God. The two chapters are side by side.²

The scene is heaven, though some commentators think that it is a picture of the church militant in the "heavenly places" of imputed standing through Christ. The reference to those redeemed from the earth and the overall atmosphere suggests that it is the church triumphant with all sorrows past.

Mt Zion is not only the emblem of heaven, but it is the symbol of deliverance. See Joel 2:32 and compare Dan. 11:45 to 12:1. While the beast stood on sand (13:1), the One he counterfeited is standing on Mt. Zion. Compare also Rev. 5:6. This company is the company of living saints who had been threatened by the last attack of the beast, but delivered by the advent of Christ.

The saved group has God's seal, and the symbol reminds one of the golden plate on the high priest's miter, on which was inscribed "Holiness to the Lord." As Dr. Charles has shown, this whole message has a sacrificial character. The word *aparch* translated "first-fruits" is literally a "sacrifice" or "gift." The 144,000 have offered themselves to God for sacrifice if necessary, rather than deny His law and gospel. "Blameless" is also a technical term, and was specially applicable to candidates for priesthood. Thirdly, the reference to lack of defilement has special meaning for a priest who had to be ritually pure before offering sacrifice. These facts show that there is more to the "seal" than protection, ownership, loyalty, etc. Those who all their Christian days have been accounted "without spot and blemish" have also that holiness "without which no man shall see the Lord." Their sanctification has been evidenced by a loyalty unto death. Their outward Sabbath-keeping has been a true reflection of a life that has ceased from practicing known works of sin. In this company is seen reflected the name (character) of the Father and the Son, for none can accept the death of Christ without also accepting His risen life. To accept the justifying ministry of the Son means to accept also the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit.

A new song points to a unique experience. Those that have lived during the last great tribulation, during the final outpouring of Heaven's judgments, have known a deliverance greater than any earlier saints have shared. Trusting solely in the merits of Christ, they have survived every temptation to apostasy amid the terrible intermingling of celestial glory and satanic counterfeits.

The reference to virginity has puzzled many. Some like Bousset, Alford, Moffatt, Kiddle, and Charles have taken the word literally, though the latter contends the expression is an interpolation. One stands amazed that brilliant interpreters could take literally this term in a book avowedly symbolic. Those same exegetes do not take the number 144,000 literally, nor the seal on the forehead, nor Mount Zion, but having strained out these gnats, they swallow a camel! How much all need to beware of commentators (including this one)! While abuse does not cancel use, every reader would do well to remember the words of Kiddle, "It is almost beyond human powers to be rid entirely of contemporary prejudice and to see beyond the distortions of environment."³ Thus it is often true that:

"Commentators each dark passage shun,
And hold their farthing candle to the sun."

But the real danger is not the lack of illumination, but the blight, which all of us who attempt to enlighten, actually bring in our ignorance. Kiddle's statement is aimed at a Bible writer, but it fits exactly each and every one who is in a teaching, literary, or ecclesiastical calling. Teachers are "one-eyed instructors of the blind," and should remember Dr. Osier's confession after taking students through a four year course, "Half of what I have taught you is wrong, but I don't know which half." As one works through hundreds of commentaries, as this writer and many others have done, it is obvious that a majority have followed well-worn tracks with little evidence of original thought. In a measure this is praiseworthy, as truth is rarely new, but it is also dangerous, for age does not make error into truth. Anyone who wishes to make sense out of Revelation will have much to learn, but probably even more to unlearn, and those who think they will never have to give up a cherished opinion should remind themselves that their spirit of intellectual conformity prepares them for the mark of the beast.

But to return to the "virgins"--or as the RSV has it, the "chaste" ones. Morris is certainly right when he says:

The answer to the difficulties seems that here, as so often, John is using symbolism. Somewhat in the Pauline manner he is viewing the church as the bride of Christ. Now Paul can say of believers, 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ' (2 Cor. xi. 2). Later in Revelation John sees 'the bride, the Lamb's wife' (xxi. 9). But the marriage is at this point future. The virgin must be chaste. So she is described as having no sexual relations at all. It may not be irrelevant to recall that in the Old Testament heathen worship is often likened to improper sexual relations. John is saying, then, that the 144,000 were not unfaithful to their Lord.⁴

This helps us also to understand that the 144,000 include more than women, whereas a literal reading of v. 5 might suggest that only men are in this redeemed group. As Lohmeyer says, the 144,000 are male in this symbolism because they are the soldiers of Christ. Cf. Deut. 23:9f.; 1 Sam. 21:5; 2 Sam. 11:11. When one notices the close proximity of a reference to the prostitute Babylon (v. 8), the last excuse for literal exegesis disappears.

These can follow the Lamb in heaven whithersoever He goes, because they have thus followed Him on earth. They have not changed their company, only their geographical location. While "first-fruits," as mentioned, means "sacrifices," the more common New Testament meaning of the "first reaping" is not to be forgotten. We read about the full harvest in vv. 14-16. The "first-fruits" symbol would be appropriate for a company of living saints translated without seeing death from "among men" at the coming of Christ. We see no reason whatever to assume with Dr. Charles that they are martyrs, despite the New Testament evidence that many will be martyred before human probation closes. See Rev. 20:4. This company is found without guile and spotless. During their sojourn on earth, this was reckoned to them through the merits of Christ. Now it is absolute. The righteousness of justification is perfect but not inherent; the righteousness of sanctification is inherent but not perfect; the righteousness of glorification will be both perfect and inherent.

Rev. 14:6,7:

Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water."

It is customary here for many modern commentators to affirm that this gospel should not be confused with the gospel of Paul. It is often suggested that here is merely a message of vindication, and one appropriate for a time when repentance is almost too late, and when preaching would be useless. We reject such an interpretation. Were it correct, it would bring John under the anathema pronounced in Gal. 1:8. The fact that the article is missing proves nothing. It is often not found when attached to something extremely well-known. Says Caird:

For whether it has an article or not, the word *euangelion* can only mean 'good news', and it is improbable that John should have thought of using it in a cynical sense. Moreover, he says nothing about the gospel being good news for Christians; this is a gospel *to proclaim to the inhabitants of earth*, the members of the worldly and persecuting society. Nor is it any casual or ephemeral news; it is *an eternal gospel*, a gospel rooted and grounded in the changeless character and purpose of God. If the angel carried a *gospel* which was eternal good news to *every nation, tribe, tongue, and people*, it is hard to see how this could differ from *the* gospel. For John really believed in the gospel: he believed that Christ had ransomed for God men from 'every tribe, tongue, people, and nation' (v. 9). This gospel had to be proclaimed if men were to have a chance of accepting it; 'how can they believe in one they never heard of? How can they hear without someone to proclaim the news?' (Rom. x. 14).⁵

And Ladd:

. . . the announcement of the end is good news, for it will see the consummation of God's redemptive purpose. Perhaps too much ought not to be made of the omission of the definite article. Paul speaks of God's gospel (Rom. 1:1) without the definite article.⁶

Beasley-Murray agrees:

Observe that it is *an eternal* gospel which is proclaimed: i.e., it has reference to the judgment and salvation of the age to come, and it has eternal validity. Such is the essential proclamation of Jesus according to the summary given in Mark 1:15. More closely related in language is Paul's reminder of his preaching to the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thessalonians 1:9f., which is couched in terms reminiscent of the Jewish monotheistic instruction given to Gentiles. This latter passage, like verse 7, contains no mention of 'the word of the cross', but like verse 7 concentrates on turning from idols to the living God and escaping the wrath to come. Paul assumes the redemptive work of Christ in that passage, and so does John in this. He knows the apostolic gospel. The focal point of this book is an exposition of it in terms of adoring apocalypse (ch. 5). Here he concentrates on the appeal for repentance.⁷

What we have in Rev. 14:6,7 is the fulfillment of Mk. 13:10 and Mt. 24:14. Here is the final proclamation of the gospel to the world, that all men everywhere might be forced to decide for or against the Cross. When the church itself sees the meaning of the Cross, then it cannot but proclaim it to the world. But, as Brunner says:

At every period in the history of the Church the greatest sin of the Church, and the one which causes the greatest distress, is that she withholds the Gospel from the world and from herself. . . . The weakness of the Church lies in the fact that she lacks this 'living Word'--that she does not know the reason for her own existence—and consequently has no real message for the present situation.⁸

Torrance declares, "That is the content of the Gospel, justification by grace alone, and that is the way in which the Gospel redeems men out of the world and its sin."⁹

The saddest fact of church history is the "hiddenness" of the gospel, and the consequent weakness of the church in speaking to the world. Yet Christ's return is dependent on our fidelity to the gospel commission. Note the very important insight of Berkouwer in the following:

It is not surprising, then, that the proclamation is a necessity (*anangke*), a requirement placed on the community on its way to eschatological fulfillment (1 Cor. 9:16). This necessity is a tempestuous impulse arising from the "already" of the present salvation. Paul admitted to being under obligation (*opheiletos*) to Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and the foolish (Rom. 1:14).

So one cannot comprehend the "eschaton" or live in anticipation of it if he ignores this necessity, this obligation. There can be no distinction in this area between the "being" and the "well-being" of the church. It is a matter of the church's very being to turn towards the world, to give without pay, having received without pay (Matt. 10:8). The tie between eschatological expectation and mission call is essential and indissoluble. *The church that fails to understand its mandate in this area inevitably becomes entangled in its own outlook on the meaning of the present dispensation. It is in imminent danger of wrapping itself up in an introverted, internal problematics that forfeits the meaning of the present dispensation.*¹⁰

And in another place, the same writer adds, "Why is there a "not yet" instead of a radical, triumphant consummation? Because Christ gives the reconciled creature *time* and *space* in order that he may participate in the harvest, not only as a mere spectator, but as co-worker."¹¹

As Christ made the worldwide proclamation of the gospel THE sign of the end, so does John in Revelation. What a lesson to many sign-mongers in the church! Again we cite Berkouwer:

The signs of the times remain centered around the message of the crucified and exalted Lord.

Because Jesus Christ is the first and the last (Rev. 22:13), the eschatological proclamation is strongly Christological. It is not "a supplementary piece of information added to dogmatic anthropology and Christology, but simply *their* transposition into the guise of the fulfillment. . . . Too often, reflection on the signs has been cut loose from the Kingdom, their concentration-point. The results are always disconcerting. All the strongly apocalyptic words mean nothing unless they are centered in and receive their meaning from the Messiah.....Wars and rumors of wars are considered the important signs. But the primary concern is the universal spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 13:10). This preaching stands in a clearly eschatological context: "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached through out the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Usually, those who have catalogued the signs of the times have included this, but frequently it has been seen as just another element in the "narrative account." ... In the last days the preaching of the gospel is the focal point of all the signs. In it all the signs can and must be understood.¹²

This makes it crystal clear that the chief obligation of the church is to understand the gospel it must give to the world. For centuries, the body of Christ has been like the Old Testament runner Ahimaaz, who had seen a tumult, but knew not what it was. He had run without a message! And so has the church, times without number, and its witness has too often been as ineffectual as that of Ahimaaz.

The three-fold message of Rev. 14:6-12 is of crucial importance for the church today. It sets forth its program, message, and destiny. It urges us to preach the everlasting gospel, and to leave it to God to proclaim, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." If we will lift up Christ and His Cross as the good news of grace and pardon, then soon all shall see One coming in

the clouds of Heaven to make an end of sin and death.

By its positive proclamation of Him who is Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, the Church is to challenge every heresy. Atheism, agnosticism, nihilism, polytheism, humanism, secularism, scientism, etc.--all are confronted with the living God and the option of pardon or judgment.

Having disavowed the concept that the everlasting gospel in this passage means only vindication, we wish now to stress that the latter meaning is present, though not primary, and it is not to be neglected. The reference to judgment in v. 7 is a promise of vindication for true believers, as false worshippers are condemned. This is what judgment implied to Israel, a continually oppressed minority. Thus, in Psa. 96:10-13, judgment is good news to rejoice over. Compare Rev. 6:9,10, where saints earnestly desire that the wicked be judged. In Rev. 18:20; 19:1-3, we find rejoicing at the judgment of Babylon. Note especially that Rev. 18:10 echoes 14:7. Both have their origin in Jer. 51:9-10.

It is important to notice the sequence in Rev. 12-14. It parallels that which is found in Dan. 7,8,9,11,12. First, we have oppressive powers symbolized by beasts. The tabernacle of God and His worshippers are trodden down. A counterfeit system of worship is erected with a counterfeit trinity, a counterfeit Saviour, a counterfeit Spirit, a counterfeit law, Sabbath, and gospel, and a counterfeit church with a counterfeit seal. This echoes Dan. 7 with its presentation of ravaging powers oppressing God's remnant, particularly the Antichrist who sets up his own law in place of God's (7:25). Revelation 13 likewise echoes Dan. 8, where the viceregent of Satan, the little horn, takes away the "continual" service of the sanctuary, and casts down its law and the worshipping host to the ground (cf. 7:25). See also an extension of the same picture in 11:31-39.

This scene of devastation in Dan. 7,8,11 is followed in each case by vindication. See 7:22, 26-27; 8:14; 12:1-13. The characteristic apocalyptic cry of "How long?" is found in Dan. 8:13. How long before God intervenes and vindicates His sanctuary, His law, His gospel, His worshippers? Then comes the promise of v. 14. Similarly in chapter 9, the first 23 verses parallel Dan. 8:13. The prophet prays for the vindication of his people and the cleansing of the sanctuary, "Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, which is desolate." "O Lord, hear; O Lord forgive; O Lord, *give heed and act*; delay not. ..." (9:17,19). Then follows the promise of vindication. The Messiah will make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting vindication. He will make atonement which will result in the anointing of the most holy--a figure for the establishment of the living sanctuary among men--God Himself. See 9:24-27.

After the flooding over the world of the armies of Antichrist in 11:40-45, Michael arises, and the persecuted saints are given eternal life, shining as the stars for ever and ever. They stand in their lot in the judgment, their names are found written in the book, and then the everlasting inheritance is given them, while the wicked are destroyed. This is the vindication, or cleansing of the sanctuary by Michael, who is also the Son of Man.

Now observe that the sequence is identical in Rev. 12-14. We have the oppressing powers of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. Antichrist does his work against the tabernacle of God, and them that worship therein. The divine law is changed, and human enactments enforced. The saints go into captivity and death. Will not God arise? That He does in Rev. 14. The three angels' messages promise vindication to the persecuted remnant. Judgment is to fall upon the apparently victorious Antichrist. But before the physical dominion of the latter is taken away, his spiritual dominion is destroyed by the preaching of the gospel. The faithful are called out of his system (14:8; 18:4), and a remnant refuse to conform to the worst earth can do against them (14:9-11). Then the vindicating Son of Man comes to pour out His judgments. We must not fail to see the connection between the hour of judgment proclaimed in v. 7 and the symbol of vs. 12 to 20. "Son of Man" is a well-known apocalyptic symbol for vindication and judgment. What we have in Rev. 14:6-20 is identical with Dan. 7:9-13, 22-27; 8:14. The oppressed saints are declared righteous and their oppressors are punished. The terms "to judge" and "judgment" in John's writings never have a neutral meaning but always point to condemnation. The remnant church proclaims to the world that unless it accepts the good news of Calvary, it must drink that cup of wrath which Christ took on their behalf.

In the closing work of God on the earth, the standard of His law will be again exalted. False religion may prevail, iniquity may abound, the love of many may wax cold, the cross of Calvary may be lost sight of, and darkness, like the pall of death, may spread over the world; the whole force of the popular current may be turned against the truth; plot after plot may be formed to overthrow the people of God; but in the hour of greatest peril, the God of Elijah will raise up human instrumentalities to bear a message that will not be silenced. In the populous cities of the land, and in the places where men have gone to the greatest lengths in speaking

against the Most High, the voice of stern rebuke will be heard. Boldly will men of God's appointment denounce the union of the church with the world. Earnestly will they call upon men and women to turn from the observance of a man-made institution to the observance of the true Sabbath. "Fear God, and give glory to Him," they will proclaim to every nation; "for the hour of His judgment is come. . . ."13

It is impossible to preach the gospel without proclaiming judgment. To hear the story of the Cross is to stand at the judgment bar of God. As Christ neared Calvary He declared, "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:31-32). Then on the Cross he divided the world symbolically by offering Paradise to a helpless penitent thief and leaving the other lost in his cursing and unbelief. By the attitude one takes to the Cross of Christ, one passes judgment on himself. Thus Scripture repeatedly links the gift of grace with the fact of judgment. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (John 3:36). ". . . It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. . . ." (Acts 13:46).

"The hour of his judgment" is not *kairos* (a fixed time), or *chronos* (time), but *ha hora* (the hour), which is a very important concept in the New Testament. Apart from its general usage it has a specific application to the Day of Atonement, both in its soteriological fulfillment on the Cross, and in its eschatological consummation at the close. It refers both to the judgment of Christ when He bore the wrath that was rightly ours, and to the judgment of all who have had the opportunity to accept His vicarious sacrifice. It refers to the time when God was vindicated by the death of His Son on the Cross, and also to the time when He shall be vindicated in the consummation.¹⁴

The following texts should be compared with Rev. 14:6--Jn. 7:30; 12:23,27,28; Mk. 14:35; Mt. 26:45; Jn. 17:1; Rev. 14:15.

Romans, the book of Scripture which has most to say about the gospel, also emphasizes the wrath of God. In that book, the good news is placed in the setting of judgment to convince us that all are judged by the gospel itself. See Rom. 1:16-18; 2:16; 3:19.¹⁵ Those who reject the mercy of God receive His wrath. Sin must be abolished, every jot and tittle of it. Either one gives it up to the Lord by penitence and confession, or one dies with it, and in it. Said Jesus, "Except ye believe that I am he ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:44).

At the advent of Christ it will be shown who has believed the gospel and who has not. Some have sent their sins beforehand to judgment, and some have not. Some have accepted the acceptance held out to them at Calvary, and some have recrucified the Son of God. As both holiness and sin yield their ripened fruit in the last days, the harvest becomes ripe. Then comes the Judgment whereby holiness shall be vindicated, as promised in the ancient apocalypse--Dan. 7:26 and 8:14.¹⁶ Now sin is ended, for transgression has come to the full, now everlasting righteousness is brought in, for all who will accept the righteousness of Christ have made their choice. Now all foretold in prophetic vision is consummated, and God returns to dwell among His people as a Sanctuary of glory. The righteous rise from the dust of the earth glorified, shining like the stars and enter their heavenly inheritance and eternal rest. These are they who were "turned to righteousness (or "justification" as it may be translated) by the tidings from the eastern heavens. See Dan. 11:44 and 12:3. Those tidings are identical with Rev. 14:6.

We should observe the logical relationship between the three messages. The first presents positively the true gospel; the second warns against Babylon's false gospel; the third points to the necessity of choice, and the inevitability of reaping what one sows. The first is an invitation, the second a warning, and the third a prophecy concerning the results. All three speak of judgment, but at different levels. Messenger one speaks in general terms--all must face judgment; first the house of God, and then all others; messenger two zeros in on the imminent judgment on all counterfeit religion; and messenger three describes the day of polarization, when men must suffer because of the verdict of Antichrist upon them, or because of the more ultimate and all encompassing verdict of Christ.

The reader should glance back at what was said earlier about the nature of the everlasting gospel.¹⁷ See the introduction to this section. Here we wish to stress that it is the reality of which chapter 13 painted the counterfeit. This gospel is Christ-centered—not beast or creature-centered. It is based on

what Christ has already uniquely accomplished, not on some tower of Babel that the beast hopes to erect. It glories in a perfect and infinite imputed righteousness, objectively found outside the believer, yet put to his account—not in some internal experience induced by signs and wonders. It is based on the Word of God, not some creature-tradition. Its faith is Godward, not manward. It looks up, not at or in. It rejects all idols of man's making, and worships Christ in the Spirit. Such a gospel is legal (but not legalistic), historical (but not old-fashioned), and eschatological (but with immediate reference). It results in all that the law could not give—the new heart, forgiveness of sins, and faith and penitence which are but the two handles of the same plough. While law cannot energize or run anything, the gospel creates energy, and motivates through faith, hope, and love. In removing guilt, this gospel simultaneously removes the power of sin. The moment the eye is riveted on the Cross, the burden is removed, and the shackles fall. The same perception that brings pardon, brings power. When one sees that his sins have been nailed to Christ's Cross, he gladly reckons himself dead unto sin. He is now resolved to crucify the sin which crucified His Saviour. The glory of the Cross consumes the dross of sin. Sin's delusion is made manifest, and the believer says concerning all that Satan offers him, "I would rather have Jesus than that." A threefold crucifixion is acknowledged—Christ's for the sinner, the world to the sinner, and the sinner to the world. See Gal. 6:14. With hands freed from climbing the heavenly ladder, one is able to help one's neighbor. Being now accepted of God, one can accept oneself and all others as well. Having been forgiven 10,000 talents, we can no longer take others who owe us one hundred pence (a millionth of our debt to God), by the throat. With Luther of old we cry, "Do what thou wilt now, Lord. Strike, if it must be, for my sins are forgiven." Even God's disciplinary chastisements are seen as mercies. With new vision we are enabled to see mercy in misery, order in confusion, privileges in all hardships, gain in the loss of all things. We can treat of woes as blessings. With Paul we shout, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Ro. 8:31).

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹⁸

Such is the heavenly reality which must be made clear to the world before the end can come. Christ on the Cross will be uplifted in such a way that men may see the sacred nature of the perpetual law, see it as indeed the bulwark, foundation, and keystone of the universe (if metaphors may be mixed to the glory of God). Men will see that God can be just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus, for the violation of the law has not been winked at, but its penalty exacted, and paid by God Himself! Thus grace reigns through righteousness. Thus God can be faithful and just to forgive our sins. Men see that as they were ruined in their first representative, Adam, without their having anything to do with it, so they have been redeemed through their second Representative, and again without their having anything to do with it. See Rom. 5:18. They see their own depravity and God's infinite love, their weakness and His omnipotence, their ignorance and His omniscience, their mutability and His unchanging holiness.

When this everlasting gospel is proclaimed, men read their own biography in the Cross. They see themselves in the naked figure of their Representative, without one stitch of the needed robe of righteousness. The flesh of Christ is the parchment of their book and the wooden Cross the table. The flowing blood is the ink, and the nails the quill. The story of their misdeeds is recorded by the pierced hands, and that of their foul, vain, and murderous thoughts recorded by the thorn-crowned brow, their wanderings by the nailed feet, and their false loves in that wounded side so near the heart. And seeing all this beholders will cry, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my heart, my life, my all!"

Now it will not be hard to "fear God (give Him due reverence) and give glory to Him," as admonished by the angel. The unconverted heart takes all glory to itself. It sees all good in itself, and focusses all love on itself. But the converted soul sees that the glory of God is his self-sacrificing love as shown on the Cross. See Jn. 12:27,28. Henceforward, the same principle must govern the believer's life—thus he gives glory to God. It is the same concept as found in Rev. 5. The Lamb became the conqueror, because in love He gave himself even unto death. Those who are to receive the seal of God will be the greatest lovers the world has ever seen—loving even those who condemn them to death, hesitating not to proclaim the good news at the risk of life. They reverence God—they give Him His place. They let God be God—not self, nor people, nor circumstances. They engage in true worship. Worship means worth-ship. Only those with the gospel know the true hierarchy of values. Only they discern the worthlessness of all things not dedicated to Christ. They count not even their lives as dear

unto themselves. But worthy is the Lamb! Nothing is of value save as it can reflect and promote the Cross. Only those who have made the principle of the Cross their own can truly worship. All other worship is sin (Rom. 14:23). As for the rest of mankind:

. . . here is the bitter irony of their lot: though they damn themselves eternally by their refusal to face the truth, one day they will be forced to face it. Sooner or later the glory they refuse to give the Creator willingly will be torn from them by the spectacle of His wrath. To worship the Beast is to commit the unforgivable sin; but it is also the quintessence of folly.¹⁹

"For the hour of his judgment is come; . . . worship him who made heaven and earth." In an age that has lost meaning because it has lost sight of the Creator, the message of Genesis will be given anew. Man is not an accidental collocation of atoms, but the child of the Most High. Life is not the punishment for the crime of being born, but an opportunity to get to know the Father and become like Him. The world that has made idols of everything that glitters is to be challenged to see in the Creator the only true God, and One who is to be honored above all else. Those who refuse to worship the Creator of heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water will soon panic when the Creator turns off the lights of heaven, and sends plagues upon earth, sea, and fountains. The bowls refer to such judgments.

Rev. 14:8:

Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion."

The numbering of this messenger, as well as the use of "following," shows that the angels, although different, still are connected together, and that their messages have respect to each other. Mounce writes, "These three are inter related and progressive."²⁰ The expression "with a loud voice" qualifies both the first and the third angel's messages, but not the second. The latter is related to the first message as the particular is to the general, and the loud voice here is unnecessary, for the message of the leading angel is still sounding. The "judgment" of v. 7 is now further delineated.

This is the first reference to Babylon in Revelation. Hereafter the theme of her destiny occupies whole chapters. Just as we had an incidental reference to the Beast in 11:7, before its complete description in chapter 13, so here we have an allusion to Babylon, before it is fully described in chapters 17 and 18. Its mention relates it to the terrible apostasy of the preceding chapter. In 17 it is made clear that Babylon the harlot is seated upon the beast, and directs its malevolence. But the same chapter warns that the ten kingdoms of the final phase of the beast shall turn upon the whore and rend her, and burn her. Similarly here, her fate is mentioned prior to the fate of the beast under the next message, as in chs. 16, 17, and 18, Babylon falls prior to the end of the beast at the coming of Christ. See 19:20. Of course, there is much overlapping between the two, but Babylon points chiefly to apostate religion while the beast symbolizes the political power which implements the dictates of the harlot. This we shall delineate in much more detail in connection with chapters 17 and 18.

In this message we have a particular application of the general theme of judgment referred to in the first message. Here is a proleptic announcement of the fall of corrupt religion, and all its adherents. Note the use of "fall," "fell," and "fallen" in the following passages--Rev. 18:21; 6:16; 11:13; 16:19; 17:10. Twenty times "fall" and cognates are used, and always with the same idea. The expression "the wine of her impure passion" is to be preferred to the expression "the wine of the wrath of her fornication." To understand this, we need to look at the Old Testament sources, Jer. 25:15 and Jer. 51:7, as well as Rev. 14:10 16:19; 19:15. The idea is that Babylon's deceptions lead the nations into spiritual fornication and its penalty--the wrath of God. Thus the wickedness of Babylon is used of God to bring judgment upon the nations as well as upon Babylon herself. Barclay suggests:

The idea is that Babylon had been a corrupting force which had lured the nations into a kind of insane immorality. The background is the picture of a prostitute persuading a man into immorality by filling him full of wine, so that he could no longer resist her wiles. . . . We might paraphrase by saying that Babylon made the nations drink of the wine which seduces men to fornication and which brings as its consequence the wrath of God. Behind all this remains the eternal truth that the nation or the man whose influence is to evil will not escape the avenging wrath of God.²¹

Babylon is the antithesis of Israel. It represents all man-made and man-centered systems of worship. These have "the number of man," and worship "the beast," i.e. the creature rather than the Creator.

Babylon began with Babel--confusion came from what claimed to be the gate of heaven. (Babel means "gate of God.") When men lost faith in God, and were disobedient to His commandments, their independence was manifested by human striving after heaven. The Babel builders made heaven too low, and their own abilities too high. They sought to make an everlasting name for each builder, but today we do not know the name of any of them. Theirs was the same spirit as that of Cain. He too aimed at heaven but trusted to his own works, having no awareness of his sinfulness.

In the last days Babylon's humanistic worship will find its acme in a substitute for God's holy day. But God's faithful remnant who refuse man-centered worship show their trust in Christ's finished atonement by observance of its symbol--the true Sabbath--that day on which Christ rested in Eden, and after Calvary.

Note that the great peril of the last days and the final temptation is a subtle one. False worship, not denial of worship, will be the test. It will be the worship by Pharisees who thank God for their good works, but who know not their own depravity, or the necessity to rely only on the works of Christ.

We must not take too narrow a view of the Babylon of the last days. Arthur Spalding writes:

The second angel's message of Revelation 14:8, connecting with the message in Revelation 18:1-4, is more than a call to come out from recreant church organizations. Babylon is confusion, a mingling of truth and error, and consequently a leaning ever to evil. The call to come out of Babylon is not merely a convocation call but an individual call. God deals not alone with churches but with men. The second angel's message is a call to God's people to separate themselves from evil that inheres in their natures, as well as from evil that is associated with ecclesiastical bodies which have rejected truth. It must be recognized that in Babylonish churches whose leaders and spokesmen have accepted errors of paganism, errors of popery, errors of atheistic evolution, there are yet individuals who by their connection with God have their lives cleansed from error. There have been and there are men of God in every church, Protestant and Catholic, who have consecrated themselves to the service of God, and have been great instruments in His hand in advancing truth and saving souls. To the extent that error still inheres in them, they are called out. But also in those who have accepted this institutional purge yet in whose personal lives there remain any dregs of disharmony with God, physical, mental, or spiritual, any taint of Babylon, the second angel and his supporting herald challenge, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins."

Rev. 14:9-11:

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

In many respects the punch-line of the three-fold message is here. The preceding two messages were only preliminary to this dreadful warning--the most severe of all Scripture. It is certainly worthwhile ascertaining what it is all about if we wish to escape this malediction.

Having read these verses, we can see the aim of the whole passage of vv. 6-12. The three angels intend to prepare men for the most widespread rebellion of creatures against the Creator that the universe has every known. The seeming omnipotence of the beast, the seductive arts of Babylon, will overwhelm the simple, unless they are fortified by a strong word from God. And here is that strong word. The beast is threatening to kill all who will not conform, but now by the present message, fear is driven out by a stronger fear. Which will you drink--the cup of the beast's wrath, or the cup of God's anger? This is the enquiry of the third angel. The drinking of wine is frequently used in Scripture for impending judgment. See Psalms 60:3; Psalm 75; Isaiah 51:17,22; Jeremiah 49:12; Jeremiah 25:15.

Kiddle warns us against misunderstanding the strong language in this passage:

This alone must be said about them: they are aimed at waverers in the Christian community, and so far from convicting John of gloating over the horrible fate of the condemned, they simply illustrate his consuming desire to drive into the understanding of the weak and wavering how great was the peril in which they stood. He spares nothing to bring out the

contrast between the lot of the blessed (in verses 1-5) and the lot of the damned.²³

To glide too swiftly over this three-fold message is certainly to err. As Alford says: "it belongs to the solemnity of this series of proclamations that a separate place and marked distinction should dignify each of them."²⁴ This three-fold message is a summary of the second half of Revelation--chs. 12-22. For the first time in history, God's judgments are to fall unmixed with mercy, for that is the meaning of "unmixed" in v. 10. The ancients often diluted their wine with water, but there will be no diluting in the final outpouring of punishment. To Babylon who showed no mercy (18:6), no mercy will be shown. There is to be a close of probation when multitudes cross that hidden line between God's patience and His wrath.

The emblems of torment--fire and sulphur, ascending smoke for ever and ever--are borrowed from Old Testament passages. See Gen. 19:24 regarding the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Isa. 34:10 for the fate of Edom. If we forget the symbolic nature of Revelation, we could easily import hell into this threat, but only if.²⁵ Neither Sodom nor Edom are still burning, though eternal fire was their lot. See Jude 7. The purpose of fire is to consume, not to preserve. Carrington says:

The literal-minded man will have nothing of this treatment of the Revelation, or indeed of the faith in general. The literal-minded believer, in his solid material way, wants his brimstone hell, and everything else according to catalogue; he thinks the book really means that, and that heaven really has those animals, just four of them and no more; he is the Fundamentalist. The literal-minded sceptic also thinks the book means exactly that, and that it is absurd; he is the mental and moral double of the Fundamentalist, only inside out.²⁶

But Milligan speaks with greater seriousness.

The words of the third angel continue the strain thus begun, and constitute the most terrible picture of the fate of the ungodly to be found in Scripture. The eye shrinks from the spectacle. The heart fails with fear when the words are read.

Can this be the Gospel of Jesus, the Lamb of God? Can this be a revelation given to the disciples whom Jesus loved, and who had entered so deeply into his Master's spirit of tenderness and compassion for the sinner?

1. Let us consider that the words are addressed, not directly to sinners, but to the Church of Christ, which is safe from the threatened doom; not to the former that they may be led to repentance, but to the latter that through the thought of what she has escaped she may be filled with eternal gratitude and joy.
2. Let us notice the degree to which sin is here supposed to have developed; that it is not the sin of Mary in the house of Simon, of the penitent thief, of the Philippian gaoler, or of the publicans and harlots who gathered around our Lord in the days of His flesh to listen to Him, but sin bold, determined, loved, and clung to as the sinner's self-chosen good, the sin of sinners who will die for sin as martyrs die for Christ and holiness.
3. Let us observe that, whatever the angel may mean, he certainly does not speak of never-ending existence in never-ending torment, for the words of the original unhappily translated both in the Authorised and Revised Versions "for ever and ever" ought properly to be rendered "unto ages of ages;" and, distinguished as they are on this occasion alone in the Apocalypse from the first of these expressions by the absence of the Greek articles, they ought not to be translated in the same way.
4. Let us recall the strong figures of speech in which the inhabitants of the East were wont to give utterance to their feelings, figures illustrated in the present instance by the mention of that "fire and brimstone" which no man will interpret literally, as well as by the language of St. Jude when he describes Sodom and Gomorrah as "an example of eternal fire."
5. Let us remember that hatred of sin is the correlative of love of goodness, and that the kingdom of God cannot be fully established in the world until sin has been completely banished from it.
6. Above all, let us mark carefully the distinction, so often forced upon us in the writings of St. John, between sinners in the ordinary sense and the system of sin to which other sinners cling in deadliest enmity to God and righteousness; and, as we do all this, the words of the third angel will produce on us another than their first impression. So far as the human being is before us we shall be moved only to compassion and eagerness to save. But his sin, the sin

which has mastered the Divinely implanted elements of his nature, which has fouled what God made pure and embittered what God made sweet, the sin which has subjected one created in the nobility of the image of God to the miserable thralldom of the devil, the sin the thought of which we can separate, like the Apostle Paul, from the "I" of man's true nature-of that sin we can only say, Let the wrath of God be poured out upon it unmingled with mercy; let it be destroyed with a destruction the memory of which shall last "unto ages of ages" and even take its place amidst the verities sustaining the throne of the Eternal and securing the obedience and happiness of His creatures. If a minister of Christ thinks that he may gather from this passage, or others similar to it, a commission to go to sinners rather than to sin with "tidings of damnation," he mistakes alike the Master whom he serves and the commission with which he has been entrusted.²⁷

The reader is advised to study the chapter "Hell," in John Wenham's book, *The Goodness of God*. He refers to those who believe in conditional mortality, and sums up their position, which he himself is prepared to seriously consider.

As to the key biblical texts, which seem so unescapable, they claim that the unquenchable fire and undying worm mean only fire which is unquenchable and worms which are undying until their work of destruction is complete. Eternal punishment has been dealt with by them in two different ways. Some argue that eternal punishment is everlasting in its effects (like the 'punishment of eternal fire' which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, mentioned in Jude 7), but not in its pains. It is an everlasting punishment, but not an everlasting punishing. Others argue that the concept lying behind the Greek word *aiōnios* is that of contemporary Jewish thought, which spoke of the two contrasting ages: 'this present age' and 'the age to come'.¹ Eternal life is the life of the age to come and eternal punishment is the punishment of the age to come. The former has been made available by the coming of Jesus and the inauguration of his reign; the latter will be administered by Jesus when, as Son of man, he utters the final judgment. Christ's reference to 'eternal life' and 'eternal punishment' is not primarily concerned with the everlastingness of the two destinies, but with the finality of what happens when the advent of the New Age is consummated. These two views are not mutually exclusive and both could be held together.

Conditionalists also deny that the highly symbolic Revelation of John intends us to picture a final state which includes continuing sin and suffering. The smoke of torment which rises for ever represents the memory of the triumph of God's righteousness, not a continuing burning of tortured flesh. As to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it is noted that the scene is Hades, not Gehenna (Hades is one day to be cast into the lake of fire), and that the passage is pictorial rather than literal. It would be precarious for any school of thought to draw literal conclusions from it about the topography of the next world.²⁸

... as far as the thesis of this book is concerned, we shall consider ourselves under no obligation to defend the notion of unending torment until the arguments of the conditionalists have been refuted.²⁹

More important than mere polemical issues is the practical significance of this passage of Scripture. On this point Spalding says:

The third angel's message is not only a demand to resist the beast and his image and to refuse his mark of a false Sabbath, lest the fearful punishment of God fall; it is a challenge to an understanding of the true inwardness of the Sabbath truth, which is God's seal, and of the opposite course of life, which leads to the receiving of the mark of the beast. To receive the seal of God demands a life in harmony with God; to receive the mark of the beast requires a character like that of the beast. No child of God, of whatever persuasion or communion, will or can receive the mark of the beast. But willful disobedience to the known law of God debases the man. If he follows a course of disobedience in body, mind, or soul, he becomes more and more like the originator of sin, and upon his mind and in his practice he will receive the mark that stamps him a child of the devil. And this, no matter what his profession or church affiliation.

Finally the world will be arrayed under two opposing banners: under one, the true Sabbath, the sign of Christ's government, will be marshaled the company of commandment keepers who by the grace of Christ have no guile in their lives. Under the other, the false Sabbath, will be arrayed those whose habitual disobedience has subjected them to the authority of God's

enemy. The nature of their lives will compel this division. But let none think that by assuming the insignia of heaven over a heart of corruption, he ensures himself with God; nor let him charge that a loyal servant of Christ, as yet unwitting of the flag of disloyalty floating above his head, is condemned of God. God is no respecter of persons. He knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. He judges righteously. And in the end He will decide: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still," and "he that is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I come quickly."³⁰

For commentary on the essence of the three angels' messages read Jn. 3:36 and 16:8-11. To believe on the Son is to be delivered from sin, and guilt, and wrath. It is to have eternal life now, and a perfect imputed righteousness. It is to possess in the present the favorable verdict of the last judgment. This is the first angel's message. But to fail to believe, to abide in Babylon, and to live by its false gospel of creature-centered worship, is to fail of true life. It means we are already fallen, already condemned. This is the second angel's message. Ultimately, that attitude means that the wrath of God, which already rests upon the unbeliever, becomes a consuming fire. This is the third angel's message.

Christ in Gethsemane and on Calvary drank the cup of God's wrath against sin. He fulfilled all the curses of the broken covenant. Those who reject His atonement must drink the cup for themselves. The phrase "wrath of God" is a covenantal expression. It points to the curse upon infidelity to the covenant of grace. See Deut. 29:18-28:

Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away this day from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This would lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The LORD would not pardon him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy would smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book would settle upon him, and the LORD would blot out his name from under heaven. And the LORD would single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the law. And the generation to come, your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, would say, when they see the afflictions of that land and the sicknesses with which the LORD has made it sick--the whole land brimstone and salt, and a burnt-out waste, unsown, and growing nothing, where no grass can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath--yes, all the nations would say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What means the heat of this great anger?' Then men would say, 'It is because they forsook the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them; therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as at this day.'

There are a number of parallels between this passage and the New Testament threat of Rev. 14:9-11. In both cases, the issue is obedience to the covenant of God. In both cases, apostasy leads to the wrath of God. Both refer to the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of the divine wrath. Both refer to false worship. But it is particularly in Lev. 26, that we find the "fury" of God repeatedly described as "sevenfold" upon those who violate the covenant. See vv. 18,21,24,28. *The Anchor Bible* points out that "if we enumerate the punishments in Lev. 26:18-24 there are seven: famine, wild beasts, pestilence, divine abandonment, desolation of the land, invasion of enemies, and diaspora."³¹ The second one, wild beasts, should remind us that both in Daniel and Revelation this symbol is used of worldly powers used of God to chastise His erring people. Thus the frequent use of the "beast" symbol in these chapters. When we come to the sixteenth chapter we will notice that the final judgments, that comprehend the wrath of God, are symbolized according to the curses listed in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 and 29.

But what shall we make of this term "wrath"? Does it imply that God is as passionate as ourselves, and capable of loss of self-control just like humanity? Our anger is usually the outgrowth of our selfishness and pride, what then is the divine anger? We must ask these questions at this point because this book has more to say on the wrath of God than any other part of the New Testament. A. T. Hanson asserts that what we have here is "a completion and crown of all that is said about the wrath in the rest of the Bible."³² Two words are used in Rev. 14 for the wrath of God--*thumos* and

orgē. The former means fiery passionate anger, whereas the second signifies a settled attitude or disposition of displeasure, and righteous indignation. Swete calls the first (found seven times in the second half of this book) "the white heat of God's anger," but we should not fall into the error of C. G. Jung and construe it as "a veritable orgy of hatred, wrath, vindictiveness, and blind destructive fury."³³ *thumos* is not the usual New Testament word for wrath. It is *orgē* that is typical. In a symbolic book like Revelation, *thumos* offers the more vivid figure, whereas Paul's concept of wrath found more apt expression in *orgē*.³⁴

Wrath in Scripture, when applied to God, is a metaphor for the inevitable reaction of His holiness to all that is evil. The Cross shows not only the love and mercy of God, but also His settled antagonism to all violation of the law of love. As Tasker says:

The permanent attitude of the holy and just God when confronted by sin and evil is designated His 'wrath'. It is inadequate to regard this term merely as a description of the 'inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe' or as another way of speaking of the results of sin. It is rather a personal quality, without which God would cease to be fully righteous and His love would degenerate into sentimentality. His wrath, however, even though like His love-it has to be described in human language, is not wayward, fitful, or spasmodic, as human anger always is. It is as permanent and as consistent an element in His nature as is His love.³⁵

Scripture does not teach that wrath is only an impersonal automatic working out of the law of retribution and reaction. Fichtner and Steahlin have shown that such a thesis is certainly not biblical. Men may hold it on philosophical grounds, but let them not claim either the New or Old Testament in support.³⁶

Alan Richardson says about the impersonal inevitable process concept, "we can rationalize the idea in that way, if we like, but it would be a mistake to suppose that the New Testament writers did so."³⁷ And Daniel Lamont writes:

It is partly true that sin brings its own penalty, but it is far from true that God has nothing to do with it, for this would exclude God from the operation of the moral law which is His own law. Such a view is a product of that disastrous modern humanism which has led to the widespread departure from the living God which we find in the world today. When God is regarded as having nothing to do with the working out of the moral law it is an easy transition to the notion that He has nothing to do with anything that happens on earth.³⁸

Nor should we think of the wrath of God as a pagan concept which influenced the writers of Scripture. Says E. Bevan:

Greek philosophy had long ago repudiated emphatically the conception common to primitive and popular Greek religion and to the Old Testament. Anger was a weak and discreditable emotion, it taught, in men, and to attribute such an emotion to a divine being was absurd and blasphemous. Deity, every novice in Greek philosophy knew as an axiom, must be *apathēs*, without disturbing emotions of any kind. The idea of the Divine anger was not something which penetrated into Christianity from its pagan environment: it was something which the Church maintained in the face of adverse pagan criticism.³⁹

Neither should any consider that the concept of divine wrath is contradictory to the belief in divine love. Emil Brunner writes:

The wrath of God under which the idolatrous, sinfully perverted man stands is simply the divine love, which has become a force opposed to him who has turned against God. The wrath of God is the love of God, in the form in which the man who has turned away from God, experiences it, as indeed, thanks to the holiness of God, he must and ought to experience. . .
40

Sinners will die, not because they are sinners, but because they have rejected the privilege of becoming sons. ". . . for God has not destined us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us" (1 Thess. 5:9,10).

Rev. 14:12:

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and

the faith of Jesus.

We found the first half of this verse in chapter 13:10. It is one linked with the situation of martyrdom. Only those who have, because of their faith in Christ, made it a habit to obey Him in all things, will endure the last great test at the risk of life itself. This verse points to the same company as 12:17, a loyal faithful body of believers called out from the world by the threefold message of 14:6-12 and who have drawn the fire of Satan as have none others on earth.

This is the second reference to "the commandments of God" in this book. John never uses the term "law" in either his epistles or Revelation. It had become too debated a term by his day. Instead, he uses "the commandments of God," "the covenant," and "the testimony"--all signifying the eternal moral precepts written on man's heart at creation, sounded anew at Sinai, and sprinkled with the atoning blood of Calvary. The great controversy between Christ and Satan was begun when Satan accused God of being unjust and tyrannous in His requirements. The controversy will end when from all nations, tongues, and peoples, will be gathered by the gospel a people who, in gratitude to God for so great salvation, are loyal to Him and His law, even at the risk of death. While God's holy law was vindicated by the Cross, this company will witness to that fact as have none others. "The faith of Jesus" here means the same as "the testimony of Jesus" in 12:17--it is the faith mentioned in Jude 3, "once for all time delivered" to the church by Jesus, and confirmed by all who have the Spirit of prophecy, such as the apostles. Lenski says:

The followers of the beast and the followers of God are direct opposites. The latter keep God's commandments, keep them as treasures, let no one tamper with them, these precious commandments which express his saving will in his Word, both gospel and law. . . . "The faith" is objective, *fides quae creditur*, and not subjective, *fides qua creditur*." The subjective idea lies in the participle "keeping." They treasure "the faith" in the sense of the doctrine which originates from Jesus.⁴¹

The three angels' messages have been of inspiration to other ages than our own. Believers in John's time saw in them a challenge and a warning—a challenge to take the gospel to the whole world, and a warning to stand firm in light of the coming storm. In the 16th century men saw here a prophecy of the Reformation, and resolved to avoid the mark of the beast (the Mass, etc.), at all costs. For many decades it was heresy not to see in Luther one of the three angels. Wycliffe and Huss were similarly honored. Certainly it is true that every reformation that has transpired in the church has been due to a revival of the preaching of righteousness by faith. Only as the everlasting, and good news of gratuitous justification has been proclaimed have men been energized to break the bonds of erroneous beliefs and practices.⁴² Says Carpenter:

The principles of Christ's gospel must undermine the world-power; the fall of some Babylon principle has almost always succeeded the age of spiritual revival. Pagan Rome goes down before the gospel. Civil freedom follows the wake of religious freedom, for Babylon belongs not to one age. Pagan Rome was Babylon to St. John; papal Rome was often Babylon to a later age. Dante, Savonarola, Tauler, Luther, felt her to be so in the days when their eyes were enlightened; but Babylon was not on the Euphrates alone: she has reared palaces on the Seine, and on the Thames, Tiber, and on the Bosphorus. She may yet erect her power in more imposing form; but faith in that gospel which is the power of God will cast her down along with everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.⁴³

As we thus review the use and fulfillment of this threefold message in history, we see afresh that the sequence of events important to God's church is always (1) Proclamation of the gospel; (2) Because the good news also means judgment to all Babylons which refuse it, therefore persecution ensues for the faithful who act as tormentors of the rebellious; (3) Ultimately this persecution climaxes in polarization which brings judgment. Men are brought to choose between the creature (the beast), and the Creator; the creature's traditions (or mark), and the seal of God's commandments; "everlasting" fire and everlasting life. This is the sequence in Rev. chs. 6, 10, 11, and 14. In our day, we look for the final consummation of this passage, the worldwide presentation of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and the resulting Armageddon.

As in the first conflict over worship, the faithful one was sealed to God forever, and the other marked as a rebel, so it is to be again. There the underlying issue was relationship to the blood. Such has always been the issue, is now, and is yet to be. At the first Exodus, those who applied the blood were sealed and safe. No questions are more important than, "Have we applied the blood?" "Have we heard the words, 'When I see the blood, I will pass over you?'" Says Carpenter:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

The previous verse quoting 13:10 has mirrored the imminence of martyrdom on a large scale. Therefore this precious promise. It may also suggest that in the coming time of trouble, those who had fallen asleep in Jesus will be counted fortunate to avoid the great tribulation in its drawn-out agony. Their Calvary, so to speak, has cut short their Gethsemane. Another possibility of interpretation is that the believer is being strengthened to laugh at threats, for He is already in possession of eternal life through faith union with the Saviour. See Phil. 1:21. This is the second beatitude of the book.

The reference to works does not imply any thought of merit, but teaches rather that what has been done in the strength of Christ, and for His glory, will never be forgotten, and will never be without fruit.

Rev. 14:14:

Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.

This verse is an allusion to the judgment scene of Dan. 7:9-13. The prophecies of Daniel were never far from the mind of the Seer of Patmos when writing, and similarly they should never be far from our minds when interpreting. The first angel's message had promised vindication to the saints, and punishment for the impenitent. This was the theme of Daniel throughout his entire book. See particularly Dan. 8:14. Each chapter had incorporated the concept of vindication, climaxing with the twelfth chapter, when Michael stood up to deliver the living saints and raise the dead. Now Rev. 14:14 presents Daniel's Son of Man (the same as Michael—compare Jn. 5:28,29; 1 Thess. 4:16) coming to harvest His own, and to punish their would-be murderers. The following verses will describe the gathering up of the oppressed threatened commandment-keepers, and the bloody slaughter of those menacing the holy city (the church). All this is very closely linked to the prophecies of Dan. 7-12. One scholar comments on the latter and their connection with the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven:

It may be very plausibly argued that Daniel 7 to 12:4 is a well knit theological unity, and Daniel 12:1-4 appears--note the notion of books opened, war in heaven, calamitous trouble--to reflect an end-time judgement scene not very dissimilar from Daniel 7:13ff. At that time enrolled believers will be delivered and a separation will apparently be made thus among the living, while verses 2-3 are apparently concerned with the fate of those who have died before the last great judgement, since the resurrection of many of these is contemplated. In short, in Daniel 12:1-4 judgement is given for the Saints who then receive a kingdom.

In sum, what the Seer of Daniel 7 sees is that the whole world system is ranged against the people of God and therefore stands under judgment. In fact, the visionary notes that the heavenly decisions have been concluded and that the world has in fact been judged. In his scenario, with the approach of the Son of Man to the throne of the Ancient of Days, the judgement process is loosed.⁴⁴

Daniel 11:44-45 pictured the attacking "abomination of desolation" (equivalent of the beast of Revelation) making a final threat against the holy mountain of Zion. The faithful would be proscribed, since it is what "utterly destroy many" in the Hebrew actually means. But 12:1 presents the deliverance by Christ, as He comes to the holy mountain of His church. Rev. 14:14,20 picture this coming, and the subsequent slaughter of all attackers "outside the city." Rev. 14:14 pictures the coming One as on a white cloud and wearing a *stephanos*.⁴⁵ The cloud is the well-known emblem of judgment. In the Olivet Sermon, it was predicted that Christ would come to Jerusalem "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30). His judges, during the last day of His earthly ministry, were told of the same event in a dramatic verbal turning of the tables in the Sanhedrin judgment hall. See Mt. 26:64. He who then was judged will now be the Judge, and those who were then judges will now be judged. All must reap as they have sowed, including Christ the Lord. Says Justin Smith on this passage:

In our Lord's first appearance in the course of these visions, he holds "in his right hand seven stars" (1:16); in his second (5:6,7), he takes the sealed book out of the hands of the angel, and breaks its seals; in the third (10:1,2), he appears under the representative form of a strong angel, clothed with a cloud, crowned with the bow of the covenant, and holding in his

hand "the little book"; in the fourth he is "the Lamb on Mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." In our present passage, he is crowned as a king, but holds in his hand the sickle of the reaper. The symbolism in each of the former cases, as, we trust, our exposition has shown, is significant. Equally so is it here. The Lord appears, now, as a King, coming forward in emphatic assertion of his sovereignty, and as such bringing the great aims of his kingdom to their consummation. For such a consummation the harvest is, always, and when the reaper goes forth with his sickle and reaps and gathers in the ripe grain, the promise of the year is fulfilled, and its work achieved.⁴⁶

As the beginning of this chapter pictured the first-fruits, now we are to witness the whole harvest. As verse 13 set forth the departing of believers, now we are pointed to the time of their reward. That reward itself will not be set forth in detail until the end of the book, but at this stage the seer comforts us by the assurance that it is One with our nature, even our Kinsman-Redeemer, who is to be the harvester. Our *Goel*, like Boaz of old, is the Lord of the harvest, and the mighty man of valor and wealth. He comes from out of the temple, where the altar of blood and incense and the golden mercy-seat reside. In that inner shrine is the ark of the covenant He has made with penitent sinners. Says Torrance:

It is precisely because His mercy is a covenant mercy, and because He executes mercy and judgment for all that are oppressed, that the final day of reckoning must come. There is no judgment but the judgment of one touched with the feeling of all our infirmities! There is no judgment but the judgment of the Cross, the altar of God's love bearing our sin and guilt! That judgment brings no fear to the forgiven or the redeemed, but is rather the day of vindication and justification and peace.⁴⁷

Rev. 14:15-20:

And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

And another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has power over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.

Now we see three more angels. These have no message for the world, because all men have already made their decision. They encourage the church by their messages concerning Christ's dealings in the judgment. The first set of three angels proclaimed judgment, but these three have to do with the execution of that dread business. The first three were under the dominion of the Lamb of Mt. Zion, the Head of the triumphant church, but these next three are subservient to Him on the white cloud.

There is a correspondence between the two sets of angels that we should not miss. The first angel had told of the hour of judgment. Similarly, the first angel here uses the same language of "the hour" having come. The reaping down at his admonition is a reaping of the Lord's people, and corresponds to the vindication promised by the first angel in its everlasting gospel.

The second angel of Rev. 14:8 foretold the fall of Babylon, and the second angel of this trio is joined by a third who tells him to gather the clusters of the vine for the press of the wrath of God. The third angel referred to, is the angel over fire, reminding us of the fire and sulphur mentioned in the third angel's message of Rev. 14:10.

We are particularly interested in the last verse which contains an additional allusion to the "abomination of desolation" motif. Here we read that the wine-press of the wrath of God is trodden "outside the city." We cannot agree with the labored exegesis of those, who, like Caird, endeavor to prove that both the harvest of the wheat and the later vintage apply to the ingathering of God's servants.⁴⁸ Rather, the evidence supports the contrary.⁴⁹ The symbolism of the vintage has been gleaned from Old Testament pictures of divine indignation against the wicked. But let us

enquire--"Why is the scene of destruction placed outside the city?"⁵⁰

Here we have another illustration of the homogeneity of the biblical eschatological themes. The time of trouble such as never was is to be launched by the "abomination of desolation" (also called the "king of the north") surrounding the holy city, according to the climactic presentation of Daniel. Then Michael comes and delivers His menaced saints. This view is similar to Joel 3 and Eze. 38-39, which also picture the attack upon the city of the saints "in the latter days." John uses the same idea in Rev. 20:8 where the final employment of this symbolism occurs. In Rev. 14:20, John comforts the church with the assurance that in the last onslaught (Rev. 13), the saints will be secure. John knew that Joel 2:32 promised deliverance from the foes gathered outside the city.⁵¹ Similarly, Joel 3 pictured a harvest in the valley of Jehoshaphat (= Judgment) which lay outside Zion. It is this same harvest which John describes as the harvest of the earth. He also applies the treading referred to in Joel 3:13. Those, who in days past have trodden down the holy city, are now themselves trodden, while the saints composing the city of God are secure. The 1600 furlongs is the circuit of "the holy oblation" of Ezekiel's vision wherein figured a mighty temple and city on the "very high mountain" "in the land of Israel."⁵² The writer of the Apocalypse applies Ezekiel's "oblation" to the worldwide church—outside of which the enemies of the church perish in Armageddon's slaughter. Thus the treading of the wine-press in Rev. 14, the bringing of the "abomination of desolation" (i.e. the king of the north) to his end, the harvest in the valley of Jehoshaphat, the feast upon the slain of Gog and Magog, and the desolation accomplished at Armageddon, all point to the same event—judgment and destruction upon those who seek to destroy the people of God. Rev. 14:20 constitutes another excellent example of the hermeneutical principles suggested as specially applicable for this book.

We pause now to summarize some convictions on these last two chapters of the Apocalypse. These visions constitute the eschatological heart of the book, and of all Scripture. The final work of Antichrist (primarily Satan himself) and Christ are brought to view, with the deceptions of the one with his counterfeit gospel, commandments, and worship; and the warnings of the Other with His true gospel, law, and worship. In one chapter we find the synagogue of Satan with its sign—a satanic character and the outward religious mark. In the other chapter we have the body of Christ and its sign—the seal of God. This latter is the reflection of His own nature of love through imputed and imparted righteousness, and its external sign is the covenant sabbath seal.⁵³

The seal in the forehead of Rev. 7:2 and 14:1 is reminiscent both of the high priest's miter, with its inscription "holiness to the Lord," and that which is thus represented—Adam's original reflection of the image of God (Gen. 1:26). The Sabbath institution consummating creation was a reminder to man that his righteous nature and character, as well as the rest of his inheritance, were all of grace, and conferred through the finished work of Another.

The central motifs of Rev. 14—worship, the commandments of God, the faith of Jesus (the gospel), judgment—all were imaged by the Mosaic sanctuary whose emblems meet us everywhere in Revelation, and which is referred to at the commencement of each prophetic chain in the book. In the Most Holy place was the Ark containing the Law, and the covering mercy-seat which received the blood drops of the propitiatory sacrifice. Together these were emblematic of the throne of God and His righteous decrees, as well as the divine answer to the sin problem—Christ's atonement.

In the "daily" or "continual" ministry of the typical sanctuary the gospel was foreshadowed. According to Dan. 8:13, this gospel would long be obscured by Antichrist, but Rev. 14:6 with its reference to the "everlasting" (or continual) gospel is a pledge of its restoration by eschatological preaching. As the end of the old era was marked by a focussing on the most holy place with the rending of the veil (typical of Christ's flesh—Heb. 10:19-20), so now at the close of the New Testament era it is God's intention that the church proclaim to the world all that is symbolized by that mysterious sanctum--the truths relating to the law and mercy-seat, the blood, high priestly ministry, and the final judgment and reappearance of Him who, having made the atonement, entered the heaven of heavens to intercede on our behalf. Only the consideration and appropriation of these data can prepare one for the crisis of Rev. 13.

The "everlasting gospel" of Rev. 14:6 is none other than the echoing of the message symbolized by the typical Yom Kippur and the rending of the temple's inner veil at Christ's death. Every barrier of access to God, including all our sin and guilt, has been removed by the atonement of Christ (Heb. 10:19-20). Now, whosoever will may come with holy boldness and assurance to the throne of grace since they are "accepted in the beloved," "complete in Him," and "without condemnation." For such, "the hour of His judgment" has no terrors, and concerning them the great Judge declares, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12).⁵⁴

SECTION FIVE

(Revelation 15-16)

AMNESTY ENDS AND COURT MARTIALS BEGIN

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 15-16

Chapter 30

Commentators as a whole are less satisfying on the Seven Last Plagues than on any other section of the book with the possible exceptions of Rev. 8,9 and 20. Most historicists have located the commencement of the plagues either in the days of Luther, or the French Revolution, and their itemized suggestions, when read in the last quarter of the twentieth century, seem like a comic strip. Other historicists who apply them to the last judgments on the impenitent in days ahead, have sometimes mingled their exegesis with fanciful and farcical interweaving of expository hangovers from the days of Bishop Newton and the more recent journalistic "yellow peril" ravings. Thus one will find extreme literalizing of Euphrates, Megiddo, kings of the east, and the like.

On the other hand, preterists like Stuart have applied the bowls to a series of judgments upon the enemies of the church with a primary termination in the decade that witnessed the death of Nero and the fall of Jerusalem, with an ultimate application to the destruction of paganism in the days of Constantine.

Dispensational futurists, as might be expected, literalize the plagues as much as possible. There will be oceans of blood, increase of temperature on the sun followed by its darkening, and ultimately the coming of oriental armies, descending upon the Middle East for the last great battle, with the plains of Esdraelon as the central point of the conflict.

Idealist interpreters err in the other direction, offering expositions so vague as to be almost valueless from a practical viewpoint. Again and again we find statements saying it is impossible to really understand what is intended by the symbols. Says Donald Richardson:

For a commentary on these woes, however, one might well read Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; or Carlyle's *The French Revolution*; or any authentic current history of affairs in Russia, Italy, Germany, or Spain. All over the world today there are men and women and little children who know what it is to gnaw their tongues in the agony of the woes which are come upon them, as the awful pall of darkness and doom settles over the kingdom of the beast.¹

Milligan, the best representative of this school, and always profitable, yet says on Rev. 16, "Upon the particulars of these plagues it is unnecessary to dwell. No attempt to determine the special meaning of the objects thus visited by the wrath of God—the land, the sea, the rivers and fountains of the waters, and the sun—has yet been, or is ever perhaps likely to be, successful. . . ." ² We are sure there is a measure of truth in this statement, but we find it too sweeping and absolute, as though suggesting the verses are not necessary. The same writer, nonetheless, offers much that is helpful in his discussion of the sixth plague.

What can be offered on these two chapters? What is their purpose and relevance? First, it should be noted that we have here the beginning of the detailed description of that judgment on the impenitent brought to view by the preceding symbolism of the vintage. Rev. 14, in its proclamation of judgment, had referred to seven figures—six of them angels. Now in the fulfillment of that proclamation, we have once more seven heavenly beings.

Let us keep in mind the sequence of the chapters in this second half of Revelation. The last verses of the first half (11:18) had spoken about the raging of nations and God's subsequent wrath. These are the chief subjects of the second half of the book. Rev. 12 and 13 sketch the raging of the nations as, under the control of the dragon (the serpent), they attack the man-child, the woman who brought him forth, and the remnant of the woman's seed. This rage was introduced in chapter 12, and enlarged as regards the attack on the woman (the church) in the following chapter. Next we would expect the wrath of God, and we find that in chapters 14-20. In general terms the judgment of God is announced and summarized in chapter 14, then delineated under the symbolism of seven last plagues in chapters 15 and 16, and further detailed in chapters 17-20, as the harlot (Babylon), the beast, and the false prophet in chapter 19, and the dragon in chapter 20, come to their end. While the first half of Revelation was general in its prophetic outlines, this second half is increasingly detailed. But *it is in chapter 16 that we have the first comprehensive picture of the execution of judgment upon the lost*. To understand the following chapters, it is vital we first rightly understand this one. It is a key which unlocks the others.

But chapter 16 has a much more important significance than merely a detailed portrayal of judgment. Milligan rightly points out that it enshrines "a supreme moment in the history of the Church and of the world." He is speaking of the final gathering on the battlefield of Armageddon. (Neither the seer of Patmos however, or Milligan, meant any event in Palestine, but the last great conflict between good and evil on a worldwide scale--the same as that brought to view in Rev. 13:11-18.) Too many have been prepared to dismiss chapter 16 idly, as belonging to the time when human probation has closed. This is to forget that the Revelator at times regresses, as well as anticipates. And in 16:13-15, there is a definite regression to events prior to the falling of the plagues. In the thirteenth verse we have the same powers, and the same evil work, described in the last half of the thirteenth chapter. Far from Charles being correct in his suggestion that verse 15 is an unfortunate interpolation, it is that verse which underlines the significance of this whole section. "Lo, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed." This warning is intended to be a shrill trumpet-call to professed believers to be ready for the imminent eschatological crisis which will place them with one army or the other, and determine their destiny forever. The verse is an allusion to Mt. 24:42-44, Christ's urgent admonition that his followers might not be caught napping. Says Minear, "Far too little has been made of this beatitude as a clue for interpreting the whole vision."³

Third, this chapter contains a glorious encouragement for the embattled church. It is the only chapter in Revelation which spells out the manner of Christ's deliverance of His saints from the attack of the armies of the beast and the false prophet. In chapter 13 we saw the church condemned to death by the world. What then? Chapter 14 assured us all would be well, but it did not tell us how. That information was left for this chapter. Because of this, the prologue in ch. 15 revolves around the imagery of the great deliverance of the Old Testament—the Exodus. Chapter 16 speaks of the greater deliverance of the New Testament age—the eschatological rescue of believers by their watching Lord (compare Dan. 12:1

Fourth, a refrain that sounds again and again in 15 and 16 is that of the vindication of God's righteousness. 15:4 is certainly not what Caird suggests, a prophecy that "the whole world will respond to the call of the gospel."⁴ Godet, Kiddle, Carrington, Milligan, Mounce, and others have rightly seen that Revelation offers no such hope. Rather 15:4 foretells the acknowledgement by all that God's righteousness has been demonstrated. He is seen not just as *hagios* but as *hosios*. Compare 16:5; 19:2. During the outpouring of the plagues, we see the blasphemy of men who refuse to repent, but become hardened more and more. The sixth plague will picture the sin-crazed multitudes thirsting for the blood of the saints, and determined to have it. It is made clear to the whole universe that sin leads to satanic character, and that true worship leads to Christlikeness. The time of the plagues is a time when all men everywhere are spirit-filled, the majority by the spirits of devils, and the remnant or little flock by the Spirit of God. There is a worldwide demonstration of the fruits of good and evil. Thus the harvest is ripe, and ready for the sickle of the holy One who has been fully vindicated by the closing traumatic, but revelatory, events of earth.

As we approach the exegesis of the seven plagues, we first wish to stress that the picture given us in Rev. 15 is that of the close of human probation. The temple is filled with smoke from the glory of God. Angels come out bearing the seven bowls of wrath, and no man can go into the temple. In several Old Testament instances we have similar situations, and in each case the cessation of temple ministry is indicated (Ex. 40:35; 1 Kings 8:10-14). The antitypical Day of Atonement is closing, and before our Great High Priest leaves the sanctuary, all destinies are decided. See Rev. 22:11-12. As Richardson

writes, "None could enter into His presence, no prayer could avail to avert the impending punishment."⁵

Thus Alford is correct when he writes: "There can be no doubt here, not only that the series reach unto the time of the end, but that the whole of it is to be placed close to the same time."⁶ For this reason the Greek is very emphatic in 15:1, and a literal translation would read ". . . seven angels having the seven plagues, *the last ones* which consummate the wrath of God." In Rev. 14:10, it had been foretold that God's final wrath would be unmixed with mercy. Now that tragic truth is to be illustrated by terrible judgments such as the world has never known in similar intensity or scope. While we have many parallels to the plagues of Egypt, and to those of the seven trumpets, never do we here find limiting statements such as "the third part." These plagues are worldwide, and they leave no room for penitence, as they fall only after mankind has committed the unpardonable sin by rejecting the last offer of mercy in the threefold message of Rev. 14. While the trumpets best fulfil the intent of the first nine plagues on Egypt, this present series of judgments coincide with the last and fatal plague on the night of the Exodus.

As we pause before entering upon exposition, we should remind ourselves again that it is a symbolic book we are endeavoring to explain. Ellul rightly says that men tip their hats to this fact, and then pass on forgetting. Is not this illustrated on every side as we study commentators on Rev. 16? While dispensationalists wish to literalize Euphrates, kings of the east, and Megiddo, as well as the oceans of blood, preterists too have done the same by talking of the Parthians from the literal east beyond the literal Euphrates. And this despite the plainly advertised truth that these plagues all belong to Babylon (18:4), and therefore might be expected to be portrayed in the symbols found in the Old Testament associated with the fall of Babylon in that era. Man is indeed like a drunken peasant who falls out of the saddle of his horse on one side or the other. While many wish to interpret the symbols of Revelation by modern events regardless of the Old Testament sources of the imagery, others err almost as much by relying more on secular history than on inspired biblical history. It needs to be repeated again and again that Hengstenberg was right in saying that the seer of the Apocalypse lives entirely in Holy Scripture. Milligan affirmed that it is doubtful whether a single figure of this book comes from a secular source. Carrington and others have stressed the same truth. But men tip their hats and pass on—to a newspaper Gibbon, or a first century history, as their key. We protest.

In illustration of our protests, and because of the centrality of the theme, we wish here to comment upon the climactic section of this prophecy—the discussion of the sixth and seventh plagues, incorporating the drying up of the river Euphrates, the kings of the east, the gathering of the kings of the whole world, and Armageddon. On this point we will speak at length because of its importance. The whole passage is a touchstone for exegetes.⁷

The first two symbols of 16:12 are borrowed from Isaiah which foretells a drought upon Babylon's waters in order that Babylon might be overthrown by Cyrus, God's Anointed, the "one from the east." Such was the preliminary to the deliverance of Israel from Babylon. The last Apocalypse thus asserts that when the ten horns turn upon the whore, "the people and multitudes and nations and tongues" represented by the waters of Euphrates cease to be her support.

Then Christ comes from the east, i.e. from heaven, as King of kings and Lord of lords. Almost all modern commentators see in this passage an allusion to the Parthians from the east, whom, according to legend, Nero would lead against Rome. It is indeed possible that this myth lies at the back of John's mind, but here again, as with Rev. 13:5, he has something more Christ-centered than that to convey.⁸ He speaks of Christ and His church, and other powers enter the picture only when they have some relationship with the people of God. "*anatole*" was a familiar symbol for the Messiah in New Testament times. It pointed to something or Someone of heavenly origin. Elsewhere the Apocalypse used the term in this manner, and it is hardly likely that a book so carefully written should change the meaning of this symbol in the later chapter.

To literalize "east" is to depart from all sound principles of exegesis when dealing with this book of metaphors. The "kings of the east" are intended as a direct contrast to "the kings of the whole world" mentioned in the same paragraph, and represent heavenly beings who come to deliver the saints, as the Median kings from the east came with Cyrus to deliver the Israel of old from Babylon. John also had in mind Eze. 43:2, which pictured the divine glory as coming from the east, ever the route of entrance to the sanctuary. These symbols are of particular interest to the student of the Antichrist prophecies, because the attacks of the latter upon Israel are often represented as a "flood." Many scholars have pointed out that Euphrates is used in Scripture as a symbol of an invading force.⁹ Daniel probably borrowed his usage of the term from Isaiah's reference to the overflowing Euphrates.

It is clear from Revelation that the Euphrates represents the multitudes supporting Babylon, and it is also clear that it is these multitudes who are gathered by the dragon, beast, and false prophet, to make war on Christ by attacking His church. Thus as surely as the ultimate foe of the church is the Antichrist of Revelation, so surely is the drying up of the Euphrates the symbol of the beginning of the end for this persecuting (desolating) power. It is vital to remember that the Euphrates and Babylon are part and parcel of Antichrist.

The "battle" mentioned in Rev. 16:14 is but another phase of the "war" referred to so often in the chapters of Revelation dealing with the Antichrist. Chapters 11,12,13,17,19,20 specifically mention it. The primary source of this motif is found in the Danielic references to the war made upon Israel by "the little horn" and "wilful king."

The symbol of Armageddon thus becomes exceedingly appropriate. It conjoins the memories associated with Megiddo with the prediction of Ezekiel that the enemies would perish "upon the mountains of Israel."¹⁰ Beckwith not only declares Armageddon to be "an imaginary name for designating the scene of the great battle between Antichrist and the Messiah," but shows that Ezekiel's prophecy about the overthrow of Israel's enemies "upon the mountains" is the source.¹¹ It is quite likely that Daniel has Megiddo in mind when he speaks of the king of the north coming to his end "between the sea and the glorious holy mountain."¹² The location fits Megiddo, across which plain floods of invading armies poured when en route to attack Jerusalem. Thus both concepts of *polemos* and *Harmagedon* link with Daniel's presentation of the *bdelygama - eremosis* as identical with the compulsion towards false worship described in Rev. 13, which chapter is also based on Daniel's imagery concerning the Antichrist of his day.

The climax of the plagues thus has to do with the drying up of the Euphrates, the coming of the Kings of the East, and Armageddon. If we are wrong in our interpretation of these, we will be wrong everywhere as regards this chapter. Interpreters have erred by forgetting that the plagues fall upon Babylon (Rev. 18:4), and that Euphrates must be interpreted in harmony with this fact. Neither symbol has anything to do with modern Turkey, or with powers from the literal east. To literalize "east" in a book so carefully written as this, a book which has already used "east" as a symbol of heaven, is to head off in an entirely wrong direction. Similarly, to construe Armageddon as having to do with a Palestinian battle is contrary to the worldwide nature of the apocalyptic figures.

Again it is made clear from the prologue (15:2-3) that this account has to do with a great deliverance like that of the deliverance from Egypt. The song sung after the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's hosts is mentioned as an introductory key to the following revelation of chapter 16, which will discuss the overthrow of latter-day Pharaohs, and the swallowing (drying up) of their host. Unless we see that this sixteenth chapter has to do with the final attack on the church, and Christ's deliverance of His people, we have missed its primary intention. The powers brought to view under the sixth vial are the powers of Rev. 13, which pass a death decree against the faithful. It is these religious activities of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet which gather the kings of the earth to make war against God by attacking His people. The passage is thus a parallel to the "war" of 17:14 and 19:19.

Writing before World War I, Swete said, "Those who take note of the tendencies of modern civilisation will not find it impossible to conceive that a time may come when throughout Christendom, the spirit of Antichrist will, with the support of the State, make a final stand against a Christianity which is loyal to the person and teaching of Christ." It is this final stand against believers that the last plagues describe, and the consequent divine deliverance.

Farrer, writing on Rev. 16, speaks of the final war, and says: But the Church provides no target for military attack; a widely spread form of police action is required for the beast's war against the saints as described in xiii. As in xi, St John is simply giving us a prediction of the tribulations and deliverance of the Church. . . . What he is symbolizing is nothing more or less than a coming of all governments into line with the Empire in 'making war upon the saints' . . . A muster against 'Jerusalem' becomes 'the battle of the great day of God Almighty'. . . .¹²

In his commentary, Carpenter also sees in the sixth and seventh plagues "the final mobilisation of the hosts of evil for an attack upon the kingdom of God."¹³ Hendriksen has the same idea.

Hence, Har-Magedon is the symbol of every battle in which, when the need is greatest and believers are oppressed, the Lord suddenly reveals his power in the interest of his distressed people and defeats the enemy. When Sennacherib's one hundred eighty-five thousand are slain by the angel of Jehovah, that is a shadow of the final Har-Magedon. When God grants a

little handful of Maccabees a glorious victory over an enemy which far outnumbers it, that is a type of Har-Magedon. When the Lord rescues little Holland from the Spanish oppressor, that is an adumbration of Har-Magedon.

But the real, the great, the final Har-Magedon coincides with the time of satan's little season. . . . When the world, under the leadership of satan, antichristian government, antichristian religion--the dragon, the beast, the false prophet--is gathered against the church for THE final battle, and the need is greatest; when God's children, oppressed on every side, cry for help; then suddenly, dramatically, Christ will appear to deliver his people. That final tribulation and that appearance of Christ on clouds of glory to deliver his people, that is Har-Magedon.¹⁴

We do not agree with J. Massynberde Ford in her interpretation of the sixth vial, but wish to quote some of her reminders as the "drying up" of the Euphrates is considered.

... on at least two occasions waters "stood still" so that the Israelites could pass over safely; in Exod. 14:21 it was the Reed Sea and in Josh. 3 it was the Jordan.

Similar miracles were predicted for the future. Isa. 11:15-16 prophesies that the Lord will dry up the sea of Egypt by the scorching heat so that it would form a highway on which the remnant of the people could return home. Zech. 10:10-12 foretells that the Nile will be dried up so that people may return from the land of Egypt. This expectation continued in nonbiblical literature. IV Ezra 13:39-47, speaking of the ten tribes captured in the days of King Josiah, says that they went to a distant land where they could keep their statutes and that the Most High stayed the springs of the river, i.e. the Euphrates, until they passed over. He predicts that the same phenomenon will occur when they wish to return to their land.¹⁵

An older commentary by A. R. Fausset speaks rather similarly.¹⁶ Morris also comments:

... in the Old Testament a mighty action of God is frequently associated with the drying up of waters, as the Red Sea (Ex. xiv. 21), the Jordan (Jos. iii. 16f.), and several times in prophecy (Is. xi. 15, Je. li. 36, Zc. x. II). 'It is possible that his mind runs also on the story told by Herodotus (i. 191) of the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, who marched into the city across the drained bed of the Euphrates; a new Babylon is to be surprised, and the drying up of the river marks the removal of the last obstacle to its fall' (Swete).¹⁷

From Glasson we read:

The drying up of the river Euphrates recalls the drying up of the sea in Exod. 14:21, though this of course was not one of the ten plagues but was to enable the people of Israel to escape.¹⁸

An older tradition envisaged a final battle when the nations would be arrayed against God (Joel 3:2; Zeph. 3:8). This sometimes took the form of a siege of Jerusalem as in Zech. 14. Psalm 2 (which Revelation 6 quotes several times) speaks of the kings of the earth being assembled against God and his anointed. This appears to be reflected in Rev. 16:14 where all the kings of the world are assembled for God's great day of battle they assembled at Armageddon (verse 16). . . .¹⁹

In summary, the last plagues point to the final onslaught of the kings of the earth upon the remnant. As in so many other passages of Scripture, the flooding Euphrates represents an invading devastating force—the multitudes of Babylon surging through the world to destroy the saints. (Note how the symbol is used in Daniel 9:26; 11:22,40; Jer. 46:6-10; 47:2; 25:9-11, 15-26; 50:33,34,38; 51:36.) Why should it be difficult to understand the waters here and their drying up, when both symbols have already been used in this book for persecution and deliverance? See Rev. 12:15,16. It is this attack that is part of the great battle of Armageddon. The other part is the destruction of the invaders by the coming of Christ, the King of kings. The "kings from the sunrising" (to use the language of Isaiah's picture of the deliverance of Israel in the days of Cyrus who was God's anointed, a shepherd, and a "righteous man from the east") are none other than the armies from heaven. Compare 19:11. "East" speaks of heaven. See Rev. 7:1 and compare Eze. 43:2. Mounce is certainly correct when he points out that the kings of the east are distinct from the kings of the whole world who will wage the final war against Christ and the armies of heaven.²⁰ Milligan, Wordsworth, and Plummer take the same position. Wordsworth's comment is typical.

And, as the great River, the River Euphrates, the glory and bulwark of Babylon, became a road for Cyrus and his victorious army when he besieged the city. . . .

And so the drying up of that spiritual Euphrates will prepare a way for the Kings of the East

(Rev. 16:2, compare Isa. 44:27,28; 45:1; Jer. 50:38; 51:36), that is, for Jesus Christ, and for His children of Light, who are faithful soldiers, and who will be permitted to share in the royal splendour of the Mighty Conqueror, the King of Glory, Who is the Dayspring from on high—the Light of the world—the Sun of righteousness, with healing in His wings (Luke 1:78; John 8:12; Mai. 4:2). May all who read these lines be of that blessed company through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.²¹

We suggest that no interpretation of Rev. 16 will be satisfactory that does not recognize its allusions to the following Old Testament types:

1. The plagues on Egypt prior to the deliverance of the Exodus. (Rev. 16 points to a final Exodus prior to the inheritance of the eternal Canaan.)
2. The protecting cloud of darkness over Israel when about to be destroyed by the Egyptians. Ex. 14:19,20.
3. The Megiddo battles of Israel's history. Judges 4 (see 5:19); 1 Kings 18:40; 2 Kings 23:29; Zech. 12:11.
4. The second Exodus, after the fall of Babylon under the attack of Cyrus. (The language of Rev. 16:12 is certainly borrowed from Isaiah, particularly 11:15; 44:27,28. See also Jer. 50:28; 51:36.)
5. Joshua's coming from the east to enter Canaan, and the invasion of Babylon by Cyrus, God's Messiah (Isa. 45:1-4; 41:2) from the east. Cf. Mt. 24:27; Eze. 43:2.
6. The conflict of Ahab and Jezebel with Elijah on Carmel (the false prophets were slain at Megiddo). 1 Kings 18:40,
7. God's destruction of Israel's attackers by hailstones. Ex. 9:23; Josh. 10:11.
8. The destruction of Babylon as sketched in Daniel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. (It must not be forgotten that all the plagues of Rev. 16 are said to be Babylon's. See 18:4.)
9. The gathering of kings to battle by evil spirits. Compare Rev. 16:13; with 13:13-15 and 2 Chron. 18:19-21.
10. The Day of Atonement ritual. Lev. 16,

On these Old Testament sources of Rev. 16, more will be said in the exposition.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Rev. 15)

Chapter 31

In the literary structure of Revelation, which must not necessarily be given chronological significance, the seventh seal unfolded in seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet unfolds in the seven last plagues. Chronologically, the parallel passages of 6:12-17; 8:1-5; 11:19 and 16:18 show that the seals and the trumpets and the plagues end at the same place, but only the first two, which border on probationary time begin at the identical moment. With the plagues, mercy has ceased to plead, and they fall upon those who have planned the attack on the church pictured in 13:11-18. This attack is the raging of the nations which belongs to the second woe, while the plagues are the third woe or seventh trumpet.

Rev. 15:1,2:

Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven last plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended.

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.

Says Beckwith:

This verse announces in a summary way the subject, which, beginning in v. 5, is carried out in full to the end of the paragraph (16:21). It forms a descriptive title of the entire section, as 17:1b announces the topic of chapters 17-19:5.1

This expression regarding the seeing of a portent in heaven came before us also in ch. 12. That chapter gave a summary of the war between the dragon (Satan) and the church. With the repetition of the same expression, the end of that war is introduced. Note the twofold repetition of the thought of finality: ". . . seven plagues, the last . . . in them is finished the wrath of God." The seven trumpets are also called plagues (9:20), but they were preliminary judgments calling men to repentance. But now has come God's unmixed wrath.

Verse 2 presents another Red Sea scene, analogous to Ex. 15 after the deliverance from Pharaoh and his hosts. God's New Testament Israel is seen delivered from its enemies, standing besides the heavenly sea which is glowing by the light of the pillar of fire. Fire is the frequent symbol of judgment, and thus it is emphasized in this verse, while not found in the previous allusion to the crystal sea. The laver of the tabernacle, which became the molten sea in Solomon's temple, is the original of this symbol. It pointed to the necessity for holiness in all who approached God.

With this verse we have the clue that what is about to be described under the plagues is another successful Exodus of the people of God. On the verge of the heavenly Canaan, God's Israel is to be delivered from Babylon, the second Egypt. Its waters will be dried up, just as were the waters of the Red Sea. As Babylonian chariots and armies are seeking to engulf those obeying the call to "come out" (18:4), Christ will appear in the eastern heavens, as Cyrus the ancient king of the east appeared at the borders of Babylon and dried up its Euphrates base. (See Isa. 44:27; Jer. 50:38; 51:36.) God's Israel will be able to stand before the coming Christ because they have been washed in the great fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. They have applied the protective seal of the blood, and know that the slaughter weapons will pass over them. The crystal sea of God's holy judgments has no terrors for them, as they are clothed with the garments of Christ's imputed righteousness. Thus they

have made themselves ready for deliverance. See 19:8. Torrance's comment is appropriate:

. . . here is the sea of glass mingled with fire. In an earlier vision we saw the same sea as clear as crystal and perfectly serene. It was the sea of humanity in perfect harmony with God, without the ripple of trouble upon its many waters. Then we saw how that sea became lashed into tempestuous fury and whipped into an ocean seething with trouble, and we saw how dread monsters emerged out of its murky depths to ravage the earth. Now we see that same sea smitten with the judgments of God, and its waters turned red with blood. It is a sea of glass mingled with fire: of glass, because the judgments of God are crystal clear and they pierce down to the dark depths of iniquity and nothing is hidden from its searching light: . . . There was a day in the Gospel story when terrified men saw the Son of God walking over the deep, and they were bidden follow Him and tread the angry waves under their feet. So here we see those that followed the Lamb wheresoever He went actually standing upon the sea even though it was mingled with fire, for they had gained the victory over its brute-infested waters and their oppressive dominion. He who follows the Lamb, he who walks with Jesus the Son of God, shall go through fire, and it shall have no power over him; he shall tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt him.²

The reader will remember that in preceding prophetic chains there is usually attached a vision of consolation. Christ among the candlesticks introduced the seven letters; the vision of the throne and the Lamb preceded the terrors of the seals; a scene of intercession by heaven's altar introduced the trumpets; and now in this place there is a glorious portrayal of victory and security by way of anticipation of what will result from the climactic woes about to be described.

As we earlier found that the symbol of the candlestick was a clue to the significance of the letters, and the symbol of the seal for that series and the trumpet for the third, so now the emblem of the bowl is highly important. The *phialē* was a broad, shallow container which could empty its contents quickly. It was used to hold incense, and also for the pouring out of libations. The expression "poured out" in Revelation is only found in chapter 36, and indicates rapid precipitation of punishment upon the impenitent guilty ones of earth. Compare Dan. 9:27. This concept of rapidity of execution should not be passed by. As Hengstenberg writes, "As compared with the two earlier groups the shortness of this, in its representation of the judgments of God, is peculiar. These follow stroke upon stroke. . . this racy shortness."³

The symbol of the libation bowl is consistent with John's following of the daily liturgy of the temple throughout the book. He has portrayed the Lamb slain, the incense offering, the trumpet blasts, and now the final pouring out of the drink-offering at the close. Carrington, Niles, Farrer, Massyngberde Ford, and others have noticed the relationship between the climactic pictures of judgment in this chapter, and the ceremonial of the temple service. We quote:

In Revelation viii, the model he is now following, the penal scattering of fiery coals was in itself an allusion to Ezekiel x. 1-7. He takes Ezekiel's vision up again now, following (it would seem) the sense of the Hebrew rather than the LXX. According to the Hebrew, the cherub reached his hand into the midst of the divine fire which burnt among the cherubim and gave burning coals into the hands of an angel clothed in linen and girt with an inkhorn, for scattering over the city since he has already used the coals of fire in viii, it is very natural that bowls of wrath to pour should be substituted for coals of fire to scatter. The substitution has a dozen advantages—it carries on the image of the cup of fury, first in the hand of Babylon a divinely permitted temptation to mankind, then in the Lord's hand the wine of his vengeance, or by transition to an associated image, a ghastly vintage flowing from the grapes trodden outside the city (xiv. 8, 10, 20). At the same time it squares with the great cup of glass, the sea filled with fiery mixture; and above all, it introduces the theme of the ritual drink-offering. The 'bowls', *phialae*, are libation-bowls. Now the libation, or drink-offering, was poured at the daily sacrifice just after the trumpets had begun to sound, so that by placing bowls in sequence to trumpets St. John maintains the sequence of ritual action which began with the slaughtered Lamb, continued in the incense-offering and passed into the trumpet-blasts. Because the drink-offering had such a position, it was the last ritual act, completing the service of the altar, and was proverbial in that connexion (Phil. ii. 17). The drink-offering, as St. Paul implies, was poured upon the slaughtered victim, burning in the fire. Because there is no bloody sacrifice in heaven, the angels pour their libations upon the terrible holocaust of vengeance which divine justice makes on earth.⁴

ekcheō. This word occurs repeatedly in this chapter but not elsewhere in Revelation. It is used in Leviticus, LXX, directing the priest to "pour out" the rest of the blood of sacrifice at the base of the altar after he has touched the horns with it; Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34, etc.⁵

The shrine is filled with the smoke of the glory and might of God and no one is able to enter. This is an obvious allusion to Exod. 40:35, where Moses cannot enter the tent because the cloud covered it and the glory of God filled it; to 1 Kings 8:10-14, where the priests are unable to enter the temple because of the cloud and the glory of God filling the house; II Chron. 7:2-3, where the priests again cannot enter the house and where the children of Israel see the fire and the glory of God coming upon the temple. Cf. also Isa. 6:4, where the temple again is filled with smoke, and Ezek. 10:3-4, where the house of God was filled with a cloud. This phenomenon occurs at strategic points in Israel's history; all instances of it are associated with the dwelling place of God and the destiny of his people. It also has eschatological import, as in II Macc. 2.6

Rev. 15:3,4:

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

"Great and wonderful are thy deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are thy ways,
O King of the ages!
Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord?
For thou alone art holy.
All nations shall come and worship thee,
for thy judgments have been revealed."

This praise points us back to the song of Ex. 15--the Song of Moses. That was the first recorded song in Scripture, while this is the last. Rev. 19 speaks of heavenly voices "crying" but angels are never said to "sing." Even Lu. 2:13-14 refers to "saying" not "singing." Music includes minor chords which mirror the sadness of a fallen world. Even most of nature's sounds--the forest wind, the storms where the oceans moan--are in the minor key. Angels belong to a different sphere.⁷ It is also the song of the Lamb, for He is the new Moses who leads His people out from captivity to Canaan. This is the only song in Revelation which approximates the Hebraic poetic form of parallelism. It draws from many parts of the Old Testament, but its theme is one--praise of the righteousness of God. Especially does Deut. 32 contribute to this paean on the trustworthiness of Israel's Deliverer.

If pain and sorrow and death are coming, it is not because God delights in such, but because "for those who plunge into wickedness, scorning the laws of God, there can be no mercy and no escape."⁸ Thus, vindication of God and His people is prominent in the last chapters of Revelation. Compare 16:5; 19:2. At the close of the great controversy, when the sanctuary of the universe has been cleansed of sin and sinners, then "from the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy" will confess that God is love.⁹ Dan. 8:14 and 9:24 will then be consummated, along with every other covenant promise that was fulfilled by Christ's death.

Rev. 15:5-8:

After this I looked, and the temple of the witness in heaven was opened, and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever; and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended.

On this new scene, the Anchor Bible comments regarding its central feature, the ark of the testimony:

Its appearance does not seem fortuitous here, for the manifestation of the ark and the tent and the altar of incense had eschatological significance. In II Mace. 2:4-8 the appearance of the tent and the manifestation of the glory of God (cf. Rev. 15:8), as at the time of Moses

(Exod. 40:34-35) and Solomon (1 Kings 8:10), were expected to mark the advent of messianic times and the restoration to dominance of the chosen people.¹⁰

Milligan similarly speaks of "the two tables of the law which. . . were God's witness both to the holiness of His character and the justice of His government."¹¹ In the previous vision where the ark was seen, it was not then called the ark of the testimony, but the ark of the covenant. The Testimony was the law of the two tables, witnessing to the holiness of God's character and the justice of His ways and requirements. With all appropriateness, "God discloses Himself, as it were, in all the majestic garb of justice—as the supreme Law-giver, about to execute His sentence on all who have flouted His eternal laws."¹²

It is significant that punishment is linked with the temple rather than the throne. Thus it was shown that the eschatological plagues fall to vindicate the church of God—His tabernacle. Old Testament prophets had foretold that the restoration of the temple would bring vengeance on the unbelieving, and vindication to the faithful. See also 19:2, and compare Dan. 7:22,26-27; 8:13-14; Rev. 6:10,11; 10:7. John is no legalist, but he has not been afraid to stress the importance of obedience to the Creator in his portrayal of the last conflict. Rev. 14:7,12; 12:17. The plagues soon to be described are punishments upon the idolatry of that latter day religion described in Rev. 13. In the word "plague," we have an allusion to the covenant threats against apostasy and idolatry found in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28. In the former passage, Israel was warned that disobedience would lead to the outpouring of the fury of God in sevenfold punishment. See Lev. 26: 21,23-24, 27-28.

This emphasis on the Testimony is also fitting in a book that recurringly used legal imagery. Here we have read of the Accuser and the Redeemer—Satan, the destroyer, and Christ, the Saviour. The testimony of Jesus has been repeatedly mentioned, and also the fidelity of God's witnesses. In such terms as wrath and judgment, prominent from ch. 14 onwards, the legal refrain grows to a crescendo. Now in the sixteenth chapter, we will read of the altar "crying out" (a legal expression meaning the demand for redress—cf. Lu. 19:1-8; Rev. 6:10), and of the just judgments of the Holy One. Simultaneously, imagery is used signifying the legal exclusion of unclean worshippers from the camp. The "sores," "the blood of a dead man," "foul spirits like frogs"—all indicate legal uncleanness and consequent separation.

The filling of the temple with smoke from the glory of God alludes to such passages as Ex. 40:35; 1 Kings 8:10-14, and imply that ministry is impossible in the temple. "The time for intercession is past."¹³ It is also reminiscent of Israel's inability to approach the smoke-clad mountain when God came down on Sinai to speak His law. "The terror of the presence when the Law was first given is exceeded by its terror when the penalties of the Law are finally inflicted."¹⁴ Part of that terror is seen in the fact that the door of probation is shut, and men have been judged for evermore. "When God's good time has come, nothing can stop final judgment."¹⁵ The time for mercy is over and God's law must now take its course." The sanctity of the law is emphasized. . . by a complex allusion to a number of Old Testament passages about the glory of the Lord." ". . . the work of grace. . . of His sanctuary has been completed."¹⁶ "Who shall not pray, with an agony of earnestness. From hardness of heart and contempt of Thy word and commandment, good Lord, deliver us?"¹⁷

COMMENTARY

(Revelation 16)

Chapter 32

Rev. 16:1,2:

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and foul and evil sores came upon the men who bore the mark of the beast and worshipped its image.

John does not always tell us who is speaking. Thus the mystery is enhanced, and men tremble the more. Note the appropriateness of the plagues that follow. Those with the mark of the beast receive a mark in their flesh, a terrible sore. Those who have condemned the saints, and ordered that their blood be shed, now are pictured as having only blood to drink. Those who have refused the light of the gospel message find that the sun now scorches them before they are condemned to walk in darkness. All that is intended by these plagues no man knows, but their overall significance is clear. *The world is outside the camp, legally unclean, and without the benefits of priestly ministry.*

Carrington, Niles, Farrer, Massyngberde Ford, and others have seen the imagery of the Day of Atonement in this section of Revelation. Note, for example, Carrington:

Just as the Seven Trumpets were modelled upon a feature of the Temple ceremonial, so were the Golden Bowls. The first act in the daily sacrifice was to kill the Lamb and catch its blood in a Golden Bowl and dash it against the sides of the Altar; but we have seen that at this point St. John has in his mind the sin-offering made for the High Priest or for the whole nation. We have already had a reference to it in the phrase *Outside the City*, and as the same thought is found in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, the thoughts of the death of Jesus as a sin-offering for the nation must have been well established. The Day of Atonement was the grand example of such a sacrifice. It had three main points:

1. Blood was sprinkled seven times towards the veil of the Holy of Holies.
2. Blood was smeared on the four horns of the Altar.
3. The whole of what remained was poured at the foot of the Altar.

We can see that the pouring out of Seven Bowls is based upon this ritual, though the effect is both simplified and magnified.

It is also reversed, for this blood, instead of bringing reconciliation brings rejection and vengeance. Instead of being sprinkled seven times towards the veil, it is poured seven times on the Land. Instead of the appearance of the High Priest with the blood of reconciliation, we have Seven Angels with the Blood of Vengeance.¹

On the Day of Atonement, whoever did not humble himself by fasting and prayer was cut off. All such were apostates. And in the chapter before us, the cutting off is done by the covenant curses. (See the *Anchor Bible* on this chapter, pp. 266-269.)

The Greek word *helcos*, here used for the sore of the first plague, is found in the LXX in Lev. 13, with reference to leprosy. See also Ex. 9:9. In Psa. 51:7, leprosy is made an emblem of sin, as certainly as it was obviously that in the sanctuary ritual. Compare Lev. 14:4-6, 52 with Psa. 51:2-7. In the Old Testament Scriptures, leprosy was sent as a punishment for sin. See the story of Gehazi, 2 Kings 5:27, and King Uzziah, 2 Chron. 26:16-21. In Isa. 1, a diseased body is the emblem of a corrupt people. See vv. 4-6.

Rev. 16:3:

The Second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

If here, as elsewhere in Revelation, the sea represents multitudes, this verse points to war. Those who have rejected the Most High cannot have peace within or without. War is but the symptom of sin. Never till sin is no more will war be no more. Those not related aright to God can never be related rightly to man. After separating from God, man killed his brother (see Gen. 4). As the spokes of a wheel grow further apart from each other, the further they are from the hub, so in human life the distance between man and His Maker is the distance between him and his brother.

"The blood of a dead man" is like the "sore" of the first plague, an indication of legal uncleanness. Stagnant coagulated blood of a corpse was defiling, and whoever touched it was not permitted access to the sanctuary. Says Little:

The outpouring of the first bowl produced virulent ulcers on the followers of the beast. The outpouring of the second bowl had still worse consequences, overwhelming them with death and enveloping them with a stench of rotting, coagulated blood so terrible that it can be adequately described only as the picture of the whole ocean reeking with rotten blood. The whole antichristian world is here pictured as doomed and as reeking with the smell of death.²

Rev. 16:4-7:

The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of water say,

"Just art thou in these thy judgments,
thou who art and wast, O Holy One.
For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and thou hast given them blood to drink.
It is their due!"
And I heard the altar cry,
"Yea, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are thy judgments!"

Those elements of society which should have been sources of life and light (once Christian but now rebellious) are corrupt through rejecting truth, and have become elements of death. Everywhere on earth there is strife and bloodshed, and the blood is that of spiritual lepers. And the angel of the water plague cries, "It is their due." Because of the death decree of Rev. 13:15, those who passed that decree are themselves doomed to die. But, first they taste blood in a way they had not dreamed of. "Unpalatable as the work of judgment may be, it is inseparable from a moral universe."³ The same writer suggests that even more terrible than the plagues themselves is the fact that the guilty are but confirmed in their impenitence thereby.

The altar of atonement cries out that the judgment is just, and thereby we are reminded that the Cross of Christ was no cheap grace method, no divine sleight of hand to delude the universe about the real nature of sin. It is the stress on the blood and the incense that shouts loudest about the heinous nature of all transgression. An alcoholic often excuses his sin until he has, when driving, run over a small child, and then realized that sin is personal and not an abstraction. Just so men shrug their shoulders about their shortcomings, until they realize that it was these things which crucified the Lord of glory. We sin, not merely against a law on stone, but against love at the heart of the universe. And the love that loves sinners must hate sin. Ultimately if the two remain together (sinners and sin) both must perish. On the other hand, when a sinner falls in love with Christ, automatically he falls out of love with sin. He may be tempted and tried, he may err, but never again while Christ is sweet to him can sin occupy the throne of his heart. The same cross that forgives sin also crucifies it. He whom we crucified took heavenly revenge by nailing our sins to His Cross and crucifying them--but He did more. He so pierced sin with implements of His love that it can never revive and conquer. Behold then the altar of the Cross confirming all the judgments of heaven upon those who have slighted forgiving love.

Rev. 16:8-9:

The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire; men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.

Men who have the mark and name of the beast curse the name of God and refuse to acknowledge Him. In earlier times they recall being tormented by the light of God as it struck their conscience. They had not *then* repented and *now* they cannot. There is unutterable guilt and folly in even a single moment's unbelief. Cannot every man foretell his own future if he will? He is making it today. To take up one end of a stick is to take up the other end as well. The action of entering a certain street determines where one will come out. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Men reap *what* they sow, they reap *more* than they sow, and ignorance of the seed makes no difference." Take heed, therefore, how ye hear. . . ."Today is the day of salvation, now is the appointed time. Today if ye hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Behold, He stands at the door and knocks. He says, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me."

With disease and war comes drought and famine. The dew and rain of physical blessing are withheld, along with the dew and rain of the Spirit. Therefore does the sun seem so terrible in its heat. Joel spoke of this time.

Joel 1:15-20:

Alas for the day!
For the day of the LORD is near,
and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.
Is not the food cut off before our eyes,
joy and gladness
from the house of our God?

The seed shrivels under the clods,
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are ruined
because the grain has failed.
How the beasts groan!
The herds of cattle are perplexed
because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep are dismayed.

Unto thee, O LORD, I cry.
For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness,
and flame has burned all the trees of the field.
Even the wild beasts cry to thee
because the water brooks are dried up,
and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Rev. 16:10,11:

The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness; men gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

The whole earth has become the throne of the beast. He rules among all nations, tongues, and peoples. As men see that the Goshen remnant (Ex. 8:22-23) stands unscathed, they hate them more and more. Inevitably they blame them for their sufferings, and it is decided to wipe out in one night the hated saints. As the Egyptians poured out in pursuit of their vanishing prey, so all over the world men will search out the company of non-conformists. Here is one thing in which all the impenitent can agree--to destroy those who have caused their pains. By men inspired by the spirits of devils, multitudes are assembled to make war on the Lamb by making war on His people (Rev. 17:14). This is the rebellious onslaught foretold by prophets of old. See Dan. 11:44; Joel 3, and Eze. 38-39. The beast, and the false prophet, and their armies are gathered together to make war. Like Esau, they

march on Jacob. Like Haman, they are resolved to silence the voice of dissent. As with Daniel's foes, they plan a lion's cage or a fiery furnace for those with whom they can find no fault, save as concerning the law of their God.

As in the days of the Head of the Church there came a final crisis, so it will be again. As men then united in unnatural combinations, agreed only in their hatred of the One who had rebuked them, so will apostate church and state unite to destroy the commandment-keepers, those who had extended to them the good news of forgiveness full and free. The scenes of the Sanhedrin and Pretorium trials will be repeated all over the earth. The Cross will be everywhere prepared. And, as death is about to be administered by flooding multitudes of attackers, a supernatural darkness, denser than the darkness of midnight, falls upon the earth. The Exodus Red Sea deliverance of long ago is about to be re-enacted.

Thus the great river Euphrates ("rushing forth" is its meaning), "the peoples and multitudes, and nations and tongues" of the harlot, rushes forth to destroy the guiltless, and is suddenly arrested by the plague of unexpected night. In vain is the hope that somehow their act of execution would alleviate their own sufferings.

At the moment of deepest crisis, when everywhere the would-be murderers are poised in bewilderment, the darkness is torn by a gleam from the east. As men watch, both fascinated and terrified, they see a small black cloud coming closer and more luminous. It is the cloud of Him who said, "Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." It is the Judge. Then is the moment of disillusionment. Now the seared conscience quivers. The only other emotion these hearts are capable of besides fear is hatred. Whom can they blame? Like Adam, they look for a scapegoat. The religious leaders! These are responsible for their plight. It had been one who looked like a lamb, who had led in those international conferences. The motivation had been religious! They remember that not atheism, nor agnosticism, nor communism had won the day, but religion! It was at the beckoning of religion that the image to the beast had been erected, and men proscribed if they would not worship. But now the veil is rent. That lamb was a dragon, a deceiving serpent. Men change their targets. Those who sought the remnant now seek their religious leaders. Remorse enlarges its appetite. A sense of terrible loss grows apace, and as the cloud draws nearer, men cry for the mountains and the rocks to cover them.

Thus the flooding river Euphrates, the murderous multitudes, is stayed, and then dried up. As of old, Israel is delivered by their enemies diverting their wrath to each other.

Rev. 16:12-16:

The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three foul spirits like frogs; for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ("Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!") And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon.

Milligan on this passage says that it points to "a supreme moment in the history of the Church and of the world."⁴ We have explained our understanding of this passage. As with the seals and the trumpets, so here. The last three of the series are separate from the first four, and belong together. Verses 13-15 are parenthetical, and point back to the preparation for the last conflict described also in Rev. 13:13-18. Seven times in Revelation do we read of *polemos*. That war reaches its last battle in the attack made on the Lamb by the attempted murder of His people. Only thus can we make sense of Rev. 17:14; 19:19; and 16:16. In this symbolical chapter, the war spoken of cannot be ordinary warfare. It has to be that between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, between penitent and impenitent sinners.⁵ If there are still some who think of Armageddon as a literal Palestinian affair, and who consider this passage an isolated one in the Apocalypse, they should study the recent work, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*.⁶

Religious powers, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, are the ones who have provoked the warfare. Spirits of devils proceeding from their mouths have whispered into men's ears, tempting them into the path of religious lawlessness. Worthy of careful reading is Collin's comprehensive statement

embracing the three apocalyptic references to this final conflict.

The vision following the sixth trumpet, however, seems to be a cryptic allusion to a battle described later in the book. The vision following the sixth bowl (16:12-16) corresponds to 9:13-21 as the sixth in a series. It also mentions angelic-demonic beings (*pneumata tria akatharta*--16; *pneumata daimonion*--16:14), who are to assemble the kings of the world for battle. These kings (at least in part) will approach via the Euphrates, which will be dried up as a passageway for them. The vision ends before the battle takes place (16:16). The fact that these spirits and kings are associated in the vision of the sixth bowl with the dragon and the two beasts of ch. 13 shows that this vision is a fragmentary description of the great battle of 19:11-21. Because of the parallels between the visions of the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl, it would seem that 9:13-21 (the sixth trumpet) is a cryptic allusion to the final battle.⁷

The symbolism of frogs reminds us of the Exodus plagues. Jannes and Jambres duplicated the marvels of Moses till the plague that followed the frogs. Then they were powerless. So here. Wicked spirits counterfeit the fire of Pentecost, performing signs and wonders duplicating those of God's witnesses. (See 11:6; 13:13-14; Acts 2:1-4; 1 Kings 18:36-38.) Thus the world is brought to Carmel again. Under the leadership of "Jezebel" (Babylon), the world contests the would-be reforms of "Elijah" who has restored the altar of worship. (See Rev. 14:6-12 and Mt. 17:11). He called down fire from heaven. And in the last days, the emissaries of the false prophet will make it appear that they can do the same. But once this peak of iniquity is reached, once the merciful reform message of God is rejected, and the messenger condemned, then probation closes for all. As Israel was segregated from Egypt before the seven last plagues, so it will be again. Once the counterfeit frogs have appeared, the door of mercy shuts. The saints flee, for it is a time of great tribulation such as never was. They do not collect anything from their homes, or go to their fields for aught. Escape is the one thought. And woe to those with child in that day. But their prayers have been answered. In the mercy of God it is neither winter, nor sabbath. Now they learn the meaning of Hab. 3:17,18; Psa. 121:5-7; 91:3-10.

In wilderness retreats, as in other centuries, they hear of the scheming of enemies. As the plagues fall, men's imprecations multiply and hatred reaches boiling point against the believers. Then the last plans are made. Men agree on this one thing--to destroy the remnant. The hour is appointed. *The hour*--there is a crisis hour for the saints as for the Saviour. There is a time of trouble for them as for Him. Those who have been caught appear before judges and magistrates, and are cast into prison, spending weary days. They think of John the Baptist, and expect to repeat his end. To their ears come the word of dreadful diseases and wars, of drought and famine. They hear that the day of their execution is decided. Then falls the darkness, a darkness that can, it seems, be felt. Murderers with plans interrupted find themselves frustrated.

What is that in the sky--that chink of light? It is growing. It is a cloud--a tiny black one, which grows lighter, whiter and more glorious. It is the Son of Man coming, with a sickle in His Hand. "This is our God; we have waited for him that he might save us. This is the lord; we have waited for him. let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. 25:9)⁸.

Rev. 16:17-21:

The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and great hailstones, heavy as a hundred-weight, dropped on men from heaven, till men cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

Signs and wonders come one upon another. Everything in nature is turned out of its course. From the angry heavens, from one clear space of indescribable glory comes the voice of God, "It is done." The repeat of Calvary's "It is finished" should not escape us. That was inaugurated eschatology. This is consummated eschatology. Those who refused that finished work are compelled to accept this. Those who would not believe that Christ was forsaken of God in our stead must now endure that fate themselves.

The fiat of God shakes the heavens and the earth. There is a mighty earthquake. Mountains shake, and there is a roar of a coming tempest. Sodom's seaports are swallowed by the roaring sea and waves. Islands disappear and mountain chains are sinking. Then comes the hail--such hail, each stone about the weight of a talent. Cities are decimated. Luxurious mansions are reduced to rubble, while prison walls are rent and graveyards yield up their treasure. The living are changed, glorified, and caught up to meet their descending Lord. What reunions! What joy! What triumph! Time is ended, and eternity has begun. Alleluia!

SECTION SIX [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 17-20)

RETURN OF THE CONQUERORS

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 17-20

Chapter 33

We now come to the detailed depiction of the destruction of the various members of the Antichrist confederacy—the harlot, the beast, the false prophet, and the dragon. Nemesis has come, and the judgment is thorough. Very prominent now is Babylon, hitherto only twice named (14:8; 16:19). But just who or what is Babylon?

From chapter 11 to 20, Antichrist fills the scene. He is the most prominent feature of the book next to Christ. As we have noted, he is a genus rather than just one individual. Just as Christ is presented before us twenty-eight times as the Lamb, but also under other guises, so Antichrist appears as the great red dragon, the serpent, the beast, the second beast with two horns like a lamb, and finally as Babylon. As Revelation is the story of Christ and Antichrist, so it is also the tale of two cities—Jerusalem and Babylon, and of two women—the pure bride clothed in glory, and the harlot robed in scarlet. These contrasts must be kept in mind as we consider Rev. 17 and 18, which, along with 16, deal with the fate of Babylon.

The most popular interpretation of Babylon has always been the city of Rome. Does not Revelation speak of "the great city which ruleth over the kings of the earth," a city which sits on seven hills? These indications, plus the persecution threat from an empire dominated by Rome, are the principal grounds for such an interpretation. We wish to question it. While not denying that Rome was in the prophetic consciousness of the seer of Patmos, we believe that by Babylon he meant apostate religion. Old Jerusalem, not pagan Rome, is the model for his symbolism. This, of course, is no new position to take. Milligan, Carrington, Alford, and the *Anchor Bible*, plus a host of others have exegeted thus, and to these writers we refer readers for minute details of the case.¹ But let us summarize some factors that must be kept in mind:

1. To interpret Babylon as the city of Rome is a gross literalism which is not consistent with the text. It is based chiefly on Rev. 17:9, "the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated." Now even the expositors who favor the view under consideration grant that Babylon as a name is not to be taken literally. Furthermore they assent that the woman is not a literal figure, nor the beast a literal beast. Neither are the heads literal mountains. Yet they have a literal city balanced on top of itself (the seven hills of Rome), though the balancing must be precarious indeed, for five of the hills have fallen, only one is, and the seventh has not yet come. And when it comes, it will only last a short time. See vv. 9, 10. Quite some geographical, and we would add expository, feat!
2. This woman is said to be destroyed by the ten horns of the beast. Thus the beast is, according to the view being reviewed, the destroyer of its own heart—the city of Rome is destroyed by the Roman empire! Again, to swallow that is another type of feat.
3. No one would ever have thought of "that great city" as Rome, had Revelation ended at the close of ch. 14. In 11:8 it is clearly stated that the great city is the one where our Lord was crucified, and in the fourteenth chapter it is outside Jerusalem, "the city," where the vintage is trodden. There has been only one city in the book thus far, and it is not Rome. Neither is there a hint in the later chapters that the great city mentioned there is a different one.²
4. The principle of contrasts should help us. As Antichrist contrasts with Christ, so does Babylon with

Jerusalem, and the harlot with the bride. So to understand one clearly, is to know the other. We do know precisely what the pure woman represents—the true people of God, the company professing the faith of Jesus, and cherishing the commandments of God. Thus the harlot must be apostate professors of Christ who have trodden underfoot the true gospel, and exchanged it for the wares of the world as it embraces new spouses—the kingdoms of this world. Thus in Rev. 14:1, Zion with her new flock is brought to view. But in v. 8, Babylon is warned against. In Rev. 18, the false city of Babylonian religion falls, but in the next chapter, the true bride and the true city come into view. As surely as the death of one is the enthronement and supremacy of the other, the first must represent the counterfeit and the second the true.

5. As Carrington has clearly shown, the book of Revelation's literary and conceptual structure is a copy of Ezekiel's. See the chart in the chapter on the structure of Revelation.

6. In Ezekiel, the early chapters lead up to the doom of the harlot, the destruction of apostate Jerusalem, and then at the end, the new Jerusalem comes into view. So in Revelation, the chapters lead up to the burning of Babylon, the whore, and then the new Jerusalem emerges.

7. The central event of Ezekiel and of Revelation is the same--the destruction of the harlot. Similarly, in the century of John, the central event had been the fall of Jerusalem.

8. In Revelation, two events are closely linked—the crucifixion of Christ, and the subsequent fall of Jerusalem. See 11:8,13,19. The order is the same in Rev. 16-18. We read a replay of Christ's last words, "It is done" in 16:17, but then comes the fall of Babylon—w. 18,19. Again the earthquake and hail of chapter 11 are present.

9. Towards the close of the Babylonian plagues (18:4), and before the words "It is done," we read of "a place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon" (16:16). In John's other major book, we read of a "place called the Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha" (Jn. 19:13). The second instance speaks of the judging of Christ before the end. Similarly, the first speaks of the judging of the faithless worshippers before their end.

10. The seven last plagues are distinctly affirmed to be Babylon's plagues. See 18:4. But they are all judgments for false and apostate religion. Those who had received the mark of the beast receive the mark of the sore. Those who have refused the pure water of God's fountains of truth now drink blood. Those who have rejected the light of the sacred Word walk in darkness after being scorched by the sun. The symbols used are ones which would make sense to Palestinians. The "land," or earth, to Israel meant their country in contrast to others across the waters. Euphrates was their ideal boundary, and Megiddo was their great battle-field. It is apostate Palestine that receives the plagues and Palestine is Babylon. In the unclean spirits going abroad could be seen the fulfillment of the prophecy of Christ that before the fall of Jerusalem, there would be false prophets and false Christs. Even the special warning in v. 16 is a warning particularly to the temple watchmen, who, if caught asleep, had their clothes set alight.

11. The woman Babylon, even in her dress, counterfeits the sacred priest. She has on her forehead a summary of what she is, as the high priest had on the golden plate on his forehead, "Holiness to the Lord." The desert and the scarlet were reminders of the high priest's special work on the Day of Atonement when the goat for Azazel with its strip of crimson wool was sent to the wilderness. The harlot's voluptuous dress is in striking contrast to the pure white of the priest's simple garment on the great Day of Atonement. Her gold and precious stones sound like a perversion of the jewels of the breastplate of the priest. The golden cup reminds the beholder of the golden vines inscribed on the gate that opened to the temple, and the sparkling stones already mentioned are reminiscent of the stones of the temple which gleamed like snow. See the contrasting gems of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21. This "lady" also has had a "ministry" of blood like the priest, but how different in nature and purpose!

12. Her punishment is not just like that of an ordinary harlot who could be stoned (remember the hailstones of Babylon's seventh plague), but she was to be burned with fire. This is the special punishment for a priest's daughter who played the whore. See Rev. 17:16 and Lev. 21:9.

13. The reference to eating of her flesh in 17:16 points to the portion of the sin-offering eaten by the priests.

14. The expression "the great city" was a well-known one for Jerusalem.

15. In the harlot city is found the blood of prophets and saints, and all who have been slain upon the

earth. See 18:24. This is a replay of Christ's words about Jerusalem. See Mt. 23:35. Rome did not major in shedding the blood of prophets, though she did very well with the martyrs.

16. If the harlot is not an allusion to apostate Jerusalem, what has happened to that central prediction of Christ's in the Olivet sermon? We have seen its other features repeatedly in this book—what about this one, the most prominent of them all?

No wonder the *Anchor Bible* says in summary: There are several further reasons for arguing that the harlot is Jerusalem rather than Rome. First, if one identifies the first beast (13:1; see third NOTE on 17:3) with the Roman empire one must argue for a different identity for the harlot: Rome cannot be seated upon Rome. Some have argued that the beast is the Roman empire and the harlot the city of Rome, but this appears to be contradicted by the text. In 17:9 the woman is said to be seated on the seven hills (equal the seven heads) and these surely symbolize the city of Rome. Secondly, Rome is never mentioned in our text, but the new Jerusalem does occur and there is great emphasis on Jewish temple imagery, etc. Further, the phrase "the great city" first found in 11:8 appears to refer to Jerusalem, not Rome, and one would expect the same identity when the phrase recurs in Rev. 18:16. Thirdly, the blood of the martyrs and the saints is found in our city (18:24) but it was Jerusalem, not Rome, who slew the prophets. Fourthly, if the beast imagery is taken from Daniel then it would seem to depict a foreign power against the Jewish nation. Lastly, the symmetry of the apocalypse might urge us to inquire whether the true counterpart of the new Jerusalem (ch. 21) is not rather the old, defiled Jerusalem, rather than Rome. This would be in keeping with the theology of Qumran.³

We have spent considerable time on this question. As Milligan declared in his Baird lecture of nearly a century ago: "To the interpretation of this picture [Babylon] the efforts of every student of the book ought to be chiefly directed. Until we understand it, all our labours in other directions will prove vain."⁴ This, to us, seems entirely true.

He who reads through this book finds that, after the seals and the trumpet he is confronted with the puzzle that these had not merely portrayed the conquest of a heathen world. Beginning with ch. 11, a professedly religious, though actually antichristian, power had entered the field, and ceased not to dominate it in later chapters till its destruction. Its identity is indispensable for comprehending the whole revelation made to the seer of Patmos. But of more practical import is the solemn warning in Rev. 18:4 that if we do not come out of Babylon we shall perish in her plagues.

One caveat is necessary. As surely as Babylon is not geographical, neither is it institutional. It is impossible to point to some distinct body in the world and say, "There is Babylon." The spirit of Babylon, of commerce with the world, of sacrifice of the things of Christ while retaining the name of Christ is not restricted to Roman Catholic or Protestant camps. It is a soul malady capable of invading the most evangelical of groups. Wherever the true gospel is not cherished, wherever the Word becomes secondary to human tradition, or the priesthood of believers to hierarchy, or principle to principal, or spirit to flesh, or Christ to self—there is Babylon.

And if our conclusion in this area seems unpalatable, let us ask whether Auberlen was right.

Our eyes are dim to perceive the sins of the Church, and of Christendom, and our own sins; and therefore it is, that we think the awful words of the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters cannot refer to the Church, but must apply to the world city. Oh that our eyes were opened, that we might see as the prophets, the apostles, the Lord Jesus himself, the Friend of Sinners, saw the Church of their times. We know that the Pharisees were not such bad men, and had a kind of zeal for divine things, and yet with what awful earnestness does the Lord reprove them. The prophets appeared mostly in the reigns of excellent kings, as Hezekiah and Josiah—and yet what powerful sermons of repentance and judgment were uttered by them. The teachers of false doctrines and seducers, with whom the apostles had to do, were not of such a dangerous kind. . . .⁵

Now as we sit back and contemplate the results of our study we are confronted with significant truth regarding the future. This world's final rebellion will not be so much antichristian as pseudo-Christian. The prophetic picture of the harlot riding the beast indicates that, as in the last days of the Old Testament age it was religious apostasy which preceded the crucifixion of Christ, so in our time it will be Christian apostasy which will precede the attempted crucifixion of the saints. Herod and Pilate became friends over the condemned Christ, and divergent elements of our world will find their catalyst in the decision to wipe out a nonconforming religious minority who are much too narrow-minded,

much too otherworldly, and much too independent in thought. But as it was the betrayal by Jewry of its Messiah that brought its ultimate destruction by fire at the hands of Rome, so it is now foretold that the first part of the last day execution of judgment will be the burning of the great whore by the kings who formerly supported her. Crime still does not pay, civil, political, or religious.

As we set about the exposition of the chapters in this section, let us remember that it is the chiastic parallel to chapters 4 to 8:1, the section on the seals and the introductory throne room scene with the dominating figure of the conquering Lamb. That scene was a judgment scene which had to do with the unsealing of the book of destiny--the title deeds to every man's eternal inheritance.

In these present chapters the conquering Lamb by judgment is taking over the lost inheritance. As the *Goe/ Avenger*, He is dispossessing those invaders who are only aliens, and who have no real right to earth, sea, and fountains of water made by the Creator for those in covenant relationship with Him. However, as the chapters on the plagues parallel the seventh trumpet and both led to the end, we must remember that these chapters are not an extension in linear events, but a further delineation of events already sketched, associated with the end.

Chapter seventeen speaks of the last attempt of Antichrist to enforce his will on all including the saints. He will ascend out of the bottomless pit, and the woman will steer him towards victory. When on the eve of final conquest, the nonconforming remnant are about to be destroyed by the flooding water of the Euphrates river (the multitudes on which Babylon sits), suddenly there comes a reversal by divine intervention and judgment. The Lamb is seen coming in the clouds of heaven with his armies on white horses, and the ten horns, realizing that they have been deceived, turn upon the whore and rend her. That whore had been pictured as drunk with the blood of the martyrs--an allusion to her death-decree of Rev. 13:15. Now she reaps what she has sown, for judgment must always begin at the professed house of God.

Chapter 18 tells the same story for the third time, now under a new figure--that of a burning city, but precedes it by a view of heaven's last call for men to come out of Babylon that they might be safe from her plagues. Then in nineteen, the multitudes of heaven rejoice over the destruction of the whore and the vindication of the saints, and the wedding feast of the lamb is announced. Simultaneously the birds of prey hold their supper on the carcasses of the armies of the beast and the false prophet. Christ has come and his opposition is no more. The millennium begins.

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 17-18)

Chapter 34

Rev. 17:1-4:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk." And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication;

Note the term "wilderness." It was the place of the virgin bride of Christ in Rev. 12, but now it is the place of the apostate religious system. The Greek term *erēmos* signifies judgement--a desolating of the whore by God. This whole chapter, like the preceding, is about judgment. Verses 1 and 16 picture judgment upon the harlot. Verses 8 and 11 present judgment upon the beast. Verse 10 brings into view judgment upon the seven heads, while v. 14 alludes to judgment upon the ten horns. We never leave the atmosphere of judicial wrath in these chapters, and all of them are but an elaboration of the vintage brought to view at the close of Rev. 14. These events are the antitype of the "cutting off" of the impenitent on the Day of Atonement.

The purpose of the present chapter is to show the special reason for judgment upon Babylon. She has allied herself to the state in order to persecute her opposite number--the faithful church. It is one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who introduces this vision to John. He does so on the eve of the outpouring of those vials, thus indicating a situation just before the close of human probation when the rebellious world, under the leadership of apostate religion, has condemned to death all nonconformists, and thus is as guilty of the blood of all the saints as if she had already shed it.

The plagues of chapter 16 are all said to be plagues upon Babylon. See 18:4. The last two had named that system by reference to Euphrates and the name Babylon itself. Thus 16:19 introduces this present chapter. As the reference to the seven angels in 17:1 links this vision with the preceding one on the plagues, so does the reference to one of the four living creatures in 15:7 at the opening of the plagues link this account of judgment with the judgment scene of Rev. 4 and 5 which introduced the various judgment series of seals, trumpets, and bowls. Again, as the seventh trumpet had been followed by visions, exhibiting the history of the virgin woman, so the seventh bowl is succeeded by chapters giving the story of the harlot.

Both Babylon and the beast have been introduced in preceding chapters, but it is now that both are explained. Specially the sin responsible for their doom--spiritual fornication, idolatry, union of church and state, is now emphasized. It is this which brings the last crisis. When a church forsakes the position of absolute dependence upon the power of God, and seeks instead the support of secular power, then its divorce from God is apparent.

We have been listing the relationships between this chapter and those preceding. We should not fail to observe in verse 1 the reference to "many waters." This too connects chapter 17 with chapter 16, where the many waters of the Euphrates were dried up as they flooded over the world in anger. These waters are explained in v. 15, and the connection there with the burning and devouring of the following verse again stress the theme of judgment. Verse 16 is setting forth the drying up of the waters under new symbols. The chapter before us has three parts indicated by the three addresses of the Angel, vv. 1, 7, 15. The first section introduces the harlot and the beast, the second explains the symbolism, and the third sketches the judgment foretold in v. 1.

Alford says on this passage, "I do not hesitate. ... to maintain that interpretation which regards papal and not pagan Rome as pointed out by the Harlot of this Vision." But this is too simplistic. As the true

church in its ideal form was set forth as a virgin bride, and did not apply to any separate church organization, so it is with the harlot. She represents all religion converted to the world—a phenomenon as possible in Protestantism as within Roman Catholicism. Says Minear:

The best procedure is not first to locate Babylon as a particular city, and then to attribute these sins to that city, but first to grasp the character of the sins, and then to infer that where they are found, there is Babylon. Where demons dwell, where foul spirits congregate, where prostitution and luxury-seeking thrive, there is Babylon.¹

There is no article prefacing "wilderness" in this passage. It is the only such instance in the New Testament. Its significance should not be exaggerated, but it could be that this wilderness is thus distinguished from that associated with the true bride of Christ mentioned elsewhere in the book.

Verse 2 uses the same symbolism found in the first place where Babylon was named--(14:8)--and sets forth Babylon's chief sin—illicit concourse with the world. Verse 3 describes the beast already well-known to us, but now it is scarlet as dyed in blood, and instead of having one blasphemous name upon its heads, it now teems with such names. The rebellion is fully ripe, and thus ready for divine intervention. Verse 4 shows the woman to be robed in the kingly robe of empire, but a robe dyed also with blood. As for the gold, precious stones, etc., these are borrowed from Ezekiel's account of the things given in love by God to his covenant people, but ultimately made subservient to the pride of apostates. See Eze. 16:11,13-17. The golden cup is chiefly significant for its contents—the abominations. This is a term for the various aspects of idolatry. Daniel's name for Antichrist is "the abomination of desolation," and Christ Himself used the term when speaking of the judgment day. See Mt. 24:15. In this fourth verse "abominations" and "fornication" are parallel, and both are concerned with the idolatrous worship characteristic of apostasy. We should recall that the New Testament speaks of covetousness as idolatry and that our Lord affirmed that what was "highly esteemed among men" is an abomination to God. He, too, was discussing covetousness, and was addressing a generation which had no outward idols. The desire to accumulate more and more possessions is the sign of an empty heart that knows not God. To possess Him is to possess all things, but to have all things and not Him is to have nothing.

Rev. 17:5-6:

. . . and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations." And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her I marveled greatly.

The term "mystery" is not part of the writing on the forehead. The RSV is thus more accurate than the KJV. "Mystery" in the New Testament has to do with matters religious, not secular, and this is another indication that the city of Rome is not really the focus of this prophecy. Compare the references to the mystery of godliness and the mystery of iniquity. See 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Thess. 2:7. Religion gone to seed is the mystery. Minear writes:

The Church has so emasculated the Gospel that it threatens no other power-structure. The Church no longer arouses hostility among the same elites and to the same degree as in the first century, but this is due not so much to a change in the operation of power-structures as to the Church's betrayal of the Gospel itself. In fact, in reading Revelation, we may discover that the prophet was alive to that very betrayal in the churches of Asia and that he traced such betrayal to Satan's deceptions. This is why he describes the Great Prostitute as he does, because he discovers whoredom among Christians themselves. This is why his parodies are so caustic and cutting: the Prostitute as a parodic image of the Church, Babylon as parody of the New Jerusalem, the Beast as parody of the Lamb, the slaves of the Beast as parody of the slaves of Christ. Such an interpretation of John brings him within the succession of the great prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, whose vocation under God was to make God's people aware of their own apostasy.²

According to Seneca and Juvenal, courtesans of the Roman world often carried a name upon their foreheads, probably on headbands. Revelation has seven other references to forehead markings, applying either to God's seal or the beast's mark. As name stands for character, so in this case--this system is characterized by its idolatrous departures from God, and its widespread influence for evil upon the whole world. To be drunk with blood is a common metaphor, known both to Scripture and secular writers. See Isa. 49:26. It indicates the prodigality of oppression, and the intoxicating effect

that it produced on the harlot.

The inscription on the forehead is to be contrasted not only with the seal of God--the name of the Lamb and his mark of the Cross--but also with the high priest's miter with its inscription "holiness to the Lord." Holiness is a synonym for separation from evil unto God, and it is this which is so lacking in the harlot. She has separated from God unto evil. "How is the faithful city become an harlot! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers" (Isa. 1:21).

The proverb "as is the mother, so is the daughter" is relevant to verse 5, and is used in the Old Testament of Jerusalem, not Babylon, in the very chapter which is the basis for the chief analogy used in Rev. 17. In harmony with this is the fact that blasphemy is not ascribed to the harlot, but to the beast. She still professes Christ, and her impiety is not open and flagrant, but that which can be rationalized. Thus the harlot is quite distinct from the beast on which she rides, though their heart-sin of separation from God is identical.

John marvels at the sight. We are told that our Lord "wondered" not at the sins of publicans, but at the unbelief of Nazareth, his own city. Similarly, He wondered at the nine unthankful lepers of Israel. In Jn. 13:22 we have the wondering of the disciples, for they had heard that one of them would betray their Lord. Judas is called a son of perdition, and the same name is given to Antichrist. See 2 Thess. 2:3 and compare verse 11 of this chapter. The word *apōleia* is closely allied in meaning to *eremos* found at the beginning of this chapter.

Rev. 17:7-10:

But the angel said to me, "Why marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition; and the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while.

New comes angelic explanation, and it is not so much concerning the woman and her strange steed. It is her connection with the beast which explains the nature of the mystery. This beast "was and is not." In these enigmatic words we have an allusion to the mortal wound, which had precipitated the beast into the abyss of the grave from which it is soon to ascend. This wound took place at the Cross when the great dragon or serpent himself was brought to nought and thus all the powers through which he operates. But sin in this age is ever reviving. The old serpent will not acknowledge his defeat. His death-throes will swirl as many into his own perdition as possible. The defeat of evil accomplished by the Cross had been anticipated by God's earlier judgments on powers which oppressed His people. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece have all come and gone. All have been wounded to death, but each successive power becomes the resurrection of the former by its persecuting spirit. Now in John's day, the persecutions of the past are about to be revived. The beast "was and is not" in the sense that there had come a lull in its fierce activities. He had received his quietus in the Cross of Christ and its proclamation by the apostolic gospel. Milligan comments, "It was under the Roman government that our Lord gained His victory."³ But soon He would rise to persecute on a worldwide scale before being slain again and returning to the abyss.

John is told that he is in the days of the sixth head--that is, he is on the verge of the beast's final resurrection--the time when he will function through the seventh head--that head which has the ten horns of the ten kingdoms of earth. "It is the last hour." 1 Jn 2:7.

Here we note the accent on parody once more. As Christ died and rose again, and thus earned the worship of all, so the resurrection of the beast from its state of death will draw the admiration of the inhabitants of the earth. All shall worship him except those who belong to Christ. Those who live by seeing rather than believing will be deceived and believe the wrong thing.

The seven heads are declared to be seven mountains, and these in turn are explained to be kings (or kingdoms, see Dan. 7:17,18,23). We err if we stop at the seven mountains. They too are symbols. They are not intended to lead us to Rome's seven tiny hills as the ultimate meaning. The angel is telling us of the persecuting powers of all the ages, and is not here concerned with the local phenomenon of the city of Rome and its geography. The theme is much vaster than that, as is

indicated by the same symbolism being attached to the devil in chapter 12. He is not limited to the city of Rome during the centuries surrounding the Christian era. Says Seiss on verse 9:

The seven hills of the city of Rome, to begin with, are not mountains, as every one who has been there can testify; and if they were, they are not more characteristic of the situation of Rome than the seven hills are characteristic of Jerusalem. ... He [the interpreting angel] does not say "the seven heads are seven mountains, where the Woman sitteth upon them," and there leave off; but he adds immediately, "and they are seven kings," or personified kingdoms. The mountains, then, are not piles of material rocks and earth at all, but royal or imperial powers, declared to be such by the angel himself. . . . The Woman is not an empire any more than the church of Christ is an empire. She rides upon empires, kings, and powers of the world, and inspires, leads, and controls them. . . . This Woman is longer-lived than any one empire. . . . Seven is itself the number of fulness, which includes the whole of its kind. The reference here is to kings, to mountains of temporal dominion, to empires.⁴

The Anchor Bible adds, much more recently:

Lohse finds that the difficulties of identity lead one to the conclusion that the meaning of the seven heads of the beast is not purely *zeitgeschichtlich*. Rather, underlining it is a very ancient viewpoint, developed in Babylon, according to which the world time is divided into seven periods, each of which is under one of the seven planets, and under a ruler. ... he sees the whole force of evil in all ages led by individuals whom the world follows and admires.⁵

It is not so important as to be able to name off the seven chief empires which have opposed the people of God, as to see the meaning of the number seven (as in the other 53 instances of Revelation). Completeness in time is the thought, and John is being warned that the last phase of iniquity is about to be launched--the last great tribulation. We are reminded again that Revelation does not presuppose long ages for its fulfillment. All could have been fulfilled in John's day, had the church fulfilled its mission (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 13:10). This fact is spelled out repeatedly in this book. Rev. 10 and 11, with the promise of the worldwide proclamation of the good tidings and the ensuing persecution tell the same story.

Rev. 17:11-12:

As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

The beast operates through one head at a time. He is here spoken of as an eighth in the sense that that number is also a symbol--the symbol of resurrection being the number following seven which signifies completeness and rest. Let us not err by supposing eight heads. There are but seven. However the seventh bears the number eight because it represents the beast in its last resurrection, that beast which has ever carried the number 8 (in parody of Jesus and his 888), and has continually, like the Phoenix, arisen from its ashes.

The ten kings, or kingdoms, constitute the last phase of the beast's power--its seventh head. They point to a worldwide confederacy in the last days, united in their opposition to the Lamb and His people, united by the spirits of devils which have proceeded from the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. See 13:13-18 and 16:13-16. They are the kings whose armies are marshalled against the Lamb and His armies. The "one hour" is identical with the "little while" of the beast's final fling.

Rev. 17:13-14:

These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

The war to be made on the Lamb is identical with the flooding of the river Euphrates. Verse 15 tells us that the waters are the subjects of the ten kings. They will make war on the church of God, as foretold in 13:13-18, 16:12, 14. In 9:15, we have a parallel allusion to the final overflowing of the powers of Babylon, which will result in pain and sorrow for worldlings, as well as threat to the believers. This is

also the time when the witnesses lie dead. See Rev. 11:8,9. Note that the armies of the Lamb are said to be "called and chosen and faithful," an obvious allusion to the true church. As Saul persecuted Christ by attacking His church, so in the last days the Lamb is attacked by the murderous onslaught on His church.

Rev. 17:15-18:

And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are people and multitudes and nations and tongues. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth.

Verse 15, as we have noted, applies to the Euphrates mentioned in the preceding chapter. As the Euphrates was the foundation of ancient Babylon, and is often used in the Old Testament as the symbol of an army invading the land of Israel, so here in Revelation that symbolism is revived. But as the flooding Euphrates was pictured as being "dried up" in 16:12, so now we read of the same event under new symbols. The harlot is to be hated, desolated, stripped, devoured, and burned. The kingdoms are of one mind, only until their final disillusionment as they see the approaching Christ in the clouds of heaven. It is then that they turn upon each other in rage, blaming each other, and particularly their leaders, for their plight.

Verse 18 uses the phrase "the great city" already found in 11:8 for Jerusalem. *The Anchor Bible* has an interesting comment here.

The image recalls IV Ezra 9:38 10:24. Here the prophet sees a woman mourning; her clothes are torn and there are ashes upon her head. She has lost her son on his wedding night, a son for whom she had waited for thirty years. The prophet reproaches her for mourning in the light of the desolation of Jerusalem, but as he looks at her, her countenance changes and becomes brilliant. Then she is no longer visible to him but instead there is a city built with large foundations. The angel then explains to the prophet that the woman whom he saw was Zion. Now he sees her as a built city (IV Ezra 10:25-49). The angel explains different details in the vision. But what is of interest for our apocalypse is the fact that the son symbolized "the (divine) dwelling in Jerusalem" (vs. 48) and his entry into the marriage chamber and his death represented the fall of Jerusalem. The importance of the IV Ezra vision is that it gives us an example of a vision in the apocalyptic era which symbolizes both the fall and the rise of Jerusalem. In the same way, Rev. 17 looks forward to the new Jerusalem in ch. 21. However, the description in IV Ezra 10:21-24 of the fate which befell Jerusalem is akin to that which we shall find in Rev. 18; see Jacob M. Myers I and II Esdras, *AB*, vol. 42 (1974), 266, 273-74, 279.5b

We have stressed that Rev. 17 focuses upon the very last things. But this should not lend us to consider that it has had no meaning for earlier ages. As certainly as Christians saw the last days in the fall of Jerusalem, so they saw them again in the dissolution of the empire, and yet again with the revolution after the Reformation against the mediaeval religious tyranny of the times. Civil arrogance and religious apostasy have been punished time and again. The principles governing good and evil are the same in all ages, and bear the same fruit.

Our other peril is to limit the chapter to fulfillments of only global proportions, and forget its meaning for individuals. Weak, puny man cannot support himself. He is only animated mud, tenuous dust, and seeks something stronger to which he can be attached. That something should be God and God only, but the foolish wandering heart of man is forever substituting idols. To fix our love and faith on anything lower than heaven, less stable than the stars, less enduring than God, is to play the harlot, and to court disaster and death. We were made for God, and to settle for anyone or anything else is not only rebellion, but folly. Who has my warmest thoughts and most devoted energies this day?

Rev. 18:1:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendour.

The previous chapter had predicted the burning of the harlot with fire. That threat is now described in its fulfillment. Note verse 8, "so shall her plagues come in a single day, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she shall be burned with fire." This is a summary of the seven last plagues which included the pestilence of the great sore, the famine and burning of the fourth plague, and the mourning coincident with all of them and alluded to in 16:9-11. But the burning is particularly to be equated, not with the preceding pains, but with ultimate dissolution—the "drying up" of 16:12. Under the figure of a burning city, that dissolution is here poetically presented. Let us not forget that this whole chapter has the same theme as the four preceding ones—judgment for the rebellious, it is the last that deals with the wicked under the figure of Babylon. The next will turn to the beast and the false prophet, and the one following that will show the fate of the dragon. Thus will all God's enemies be seen to disintegrate, and pass away, no more to be troublers of the church of God, no more to be blasphemers of heaven. Preston and Hanson draw attention to the literary quality of this chapter. "It is a magnificent chapter which rolls off the tongue in sonorous, exultant phrases when read aloud, with the refrain IN ONE HOUR sounding like the solemn and regular tolling of a bell."⁶

This first verse is parallel to the proclamation of Rev. 10:1-3, 11, and 14:6, 7. It points to the final proclamation of the everlasting gospel—but as with the preceding references in chapters 10 and 14, it is the gospel in the setting of judgment. To the inhabitants of earth it is to be made clear that to reject the gospel is to demand destruction. The offer of the righteousness of Christ—that infinite, all-sufficient gift, can only be refused with fatal

Says Isaac Williams:

Before trial and judgment there is a call and light from God: such was Noah to the world before the deluge; Lot to Sodom; Josiah to Israel, and the finding of the book of the Law, before the captivity; Daniel to Babylon and its palaces; our Lord's presence to Jerusalem before its destruction; and now, before the fall of Babylon and the evil days of Antichrist to ensue, there is, in the living and sublime imagery of the Apocalypse, the "Angel" descending "from Heaven" with "great power," and the earth illumined by his presence. The breaking forth of a flame, as it wanes, before being extinguished in darkness. The preaching of the Gospel to the whole world before the end.⁷

We should also link with 18:1 the reference to the angel ascending from the east described in Rev. 7:1. That too was a message concerning judgment soon to fall upon the earth. It also came from the eastern heavens. Rev. 18:1 is alluding to Eze. 43:3 which pictures the glory of God coming from the east to enlighten the whole earth. Before the literal splendor at the coming of Christ there is a spiritual splendor, as the Holy Spirit witnesses through the church to the glory of God. The virgins go forth with their lamps to lighten the darkness of the night, even at midnight, and proclaim to the world "Behold the bridegroom cometh."

Isaiah had sung of the same event.

Isa. 60:1-3:

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

The church in that day will have the same message as Christ gave at His first coming.

Isa. 61:1-3:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor,

and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD,
that he may be glorified.

Let it be observed that the following verse of this passage speaks of the last messengers as building up the ancient ruins, the former devastations many generations. Similarly in Isa. 58:12-14 we read:

And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.
If you turn back your foot from the sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
and call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
or seeking your own pleasure
or talking idly;
then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

The last message to the world results in a cleansing of the church sanctuary from its traditional defilements of all those errors which have darkened the gospel of Christ. The right relationship between law and gospel will be made clear, and the absolute impossibility of any man earning, with or without the Spirit, the perfect righteousness demanded by the holy law. That salvation from sin's guilt and power is a gift centered in the Cross will be the message. Law and gospel will be shown as a perfect whole, with the ethics of grateful obedience resulting from the experience of grace. While men are invited to come to Christ just as they are, He will not then leave them as they are. Acceptance of Christ brings with it the Spirit who enables the believer to run in the way of God's commandments, ever conscious that he does not do as well as Adam might have done, yet determined to be loyal even unto death. The final message will present the Atonement as finished at the Cross, though consummated in its effects by the Coming. It will uphold Christ as the second Adam who restored in His Representative capacity the whole human race to favor with God, so that now "whosoever will, may come."

That seal of the divine covenant made so prominent throughout the entire Scriptures, the Sabbath will once more be proclaimed as the outward sign of those who have entered the rest provided by the finished work of Christ. Thus Isaiah particularly mentions the Sabbath in the restoration prophecy of 58:13,14. As just prior to the Cross, Christ repeatedly made the Sabbath a test in true religion, so it will be in His last work before the end of time. Those who rightly observe God's holy memorial of creation and redemption have a regular recurring aid to sanctification which has no parallel in any other religious observance. To form the habit of focussing the mind upon holy things for a whole day does much to sanctify the whole man for the whole week. The observer of the Sabbath confesses that he is not his own, that God is His Creator, Redeemer, Justifier, and Sanctifier. He confesses that all his works are from the Cross, from the gift of rest, not towards acceptance. But in the last crisis, counterfeit religion will place its stress upon a counterfeit seal, a day commemorating the observer's own supposed resurrection in holiness, a day that belongs to the week of work, and therefore, if wrongly used, drawing attention to human rather than the divine achievement. Says Isaac Williams, ". . . in the bringing of God's people out of Babylon there will be a great light, and a putting away of this spiritual fornication and whoredom by a return to the primitive pattern."⁷ He continues:

And this surely is implied in this passage — that there will be the chasteness, the sternness, and severity of the primitive Christian, because it is opposed to those who have "waxen rich" amid the "abundance of delicacies" opposed to her adultery; sobriety to her intoxication;

poverty of spirit, contrasted with her ambition. It must be as the coming of Elijah.⁸

Rev. 18:1-4 points to the same message as Mai. 4:5,6, as the preceding quotation suggests. The very presence of the Jezebel symbol in this section of Revelation suggests that "Elijah" will also be present—one who rebuilds the altar of the Lord, and calls compromising worshippers to return to the worship of the Creator, and obedience to His commandments. See 1 Kings 18:21. This will be a work akin to that of John the Baptist who in preparing the way for the Lord's first coming did so "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk. 1:17; At. 17:11). The people proclaiming such a message will have the simplicity of life apparent in both Elijah and John for they have found the gospel to be indeed a wonderful reducer of basic problems and a pattern for life. As Elijah emphasized judgment and as John spoke plainly about three topics: sin, the Saviour, and the Sanctifier, so with the final Elijah message to the world. It will proclaim that the hour of God's judgment has come, but in pointing out the fruit of sin, it will define the root, and thus call men in penitence to the Saviour. He alone can deliver from sin, guilt, and pollution by His atonement, and His Spirit.

Rev. 18:1-4:

And he called out with a mighty voice,
"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
It has become a dwelling place of demons,
a haunt of every foul spirit,
a haunt of every foul and hateful bird;
for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion,
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich
with the wealth of her wantonness."
Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,
"Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues; . . ."

This message includes not only the first angel's message of Rev. 14, but also the second and third. Here, as in 14:8, Babylon's fall is announced, and the fourth verse foretells the plagues resulting from the wrath of God mentioned in 14:9,10. Thus Rev. 18:1-4 is but an enlargement of 14:6-12, and as the latter was followed by the scene of Christ's coming in judgment, so the former applies in time just prior to the seven last plagues threatened in its message.

Verse 2 also alludes to 16:13. The unclean spirits from the beast and the false prophet now occupy Babylon. Her union with the world has been consummated. Therefore, all who hear the gospel must separate from her before it is too late. As God called his people out of Babylon of old, and before that from Egypt, and before that from Sodom and Gomorrah, so Christ told his followers to flee Jerusalem before its fall, and now in this passage the saints are warned to be entirely separate from apostate Jerusalem of the last days. Says Milligan:

The words are in the highest degree important for the interpretation and understanding of the Apocalypse. We have already found in more than one passage distinct traces of this double Church, of the true Church within the false, of the few living ones within the Body which had a name to live, but was dead, Here the distinction meets us in all its sharpness, and fresh light is cast upon passages that may have formerly seemed dark. "Many are called," "many" constituting the outward Church; but "few are chosen," "few" constituting the real Church, the Church which consists of the poor, and meek, and lowly. The two parts may keep together for a time, but the union cannot last; and the day comes when, as Christ called His sheep out of the Jewish, so He will again call His sheep out of the Christian "fold," that they may hear His voice, and follow Him.

Having summoned the true disciples of Jesus out of Babylon, the voice from heaven again proclaims in a double form, as sins and as iniquities, the guilt of the doomed city, and invites the ministers of judgment. . . to render to her double.⁹

It is important to see in v. 4 an allusion to Mt. 24 as another evidence that Babylon here is modelled on the apostate holy city. Many scholars have seen the relationship between the flight mentioned in the second advent sermon and that called for in this passage.¹⁰ In v. 5 the expression "her sins have

reached unto heaven" alludes to the building of Babel with its mortared bricks ascending heavenwards when Babylon began. The *Anchor Bible* warns us against applying this chapter to the city of Rome.

Here, however, the text concerns Jerusalem, to whom commerce was no less important than to Tyre (or Rome), especially with regard to the temple activities. Jeremias, p. 49, cites the evidence of Zech. 14:21, which he dates between the fourth and third centuries B.C., with reference to traders in the house of the Lord of hosts, and Shekalim 1:3; 174, with reference to money changers in the temple court. There were shops on the aqueduct (*Lam R* 4:7), and the Sanhedrin appears to have been housed there for forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Many shops apparently belonged to the high priestly family. Indeed, Josephus called the high priest (A.D. 47-55) "the great procurer of money" in Ant. 20.205. Tosphta, Menahoth 13:22, 534, speaks of the temple going to ruin because of avarice and hatred. Jeremias concludes, pp. 48,49, that the court of the Gentiles appears to have been the scene of a flourishing trade in animal sacrifice, perhaps supported by the high priestly family. In the light of this one can understand both our author's abhorrence of traders (cf. also Jesus' cleansing of the temple, John 2:13-22) and the voice bidding "My people" to come out of her (vs. 4).

"My people" could not be addressed to the Romans, for it is a covenant appellation (cf. Hosea 2:23, etc.) and begins a series of words reminiscent of the covenant and/or the Exodus in the following verses.¹¹

Milligan speaks similarly:

... it must be obvious that nothing is here spoken of Babylon inapplicable to Jerusalem when we think of this latter city in the light in which the Seer specially regards it. Jerusalem was indeed neither a commercial nor a maritime city, but Rome also was no city on the sea. A large part, therefore, of the details of St. John's description is no less destitute of force when applied, if applied literally, to the latter than to the former. On the other hand, these details are more applicable to Jerusalem than to Rome, if we remember that Jerusalem supplies, in a way impossible to Rome, the groundwork for a delineation of those religious forces which are far more wide-spreading in their reach, and far more crushing in their power, than the legions of the imperial metropolis.¹²

Rev. 18:5-8:

. . . for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.
Render to her as she herself has rendered,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double draft for her in the cup she has mixed.
As she glorified herself and played the wanton,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning.
Since in her heart she says,
'A queen I sit, I am no widow,
mourning I shall never see,'
so shall her plagues come in a single day,
pestilence and mourning and famine,
and she shall be burned with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."

Note that transgressors have now come to the full. The iniquity of Babylon has reached the limit. The time spoken of in Rev. 6:10 is here. God can do no more for Babylon, except to end her eccentric, rebellious career, her misuse of the life and gifts God had loaned her. As Jerusalem was not destroyed for centuries, despite her slaughter of prophets and holy men, so God has borne long with Babylon. As Jerusalem filled the cup of her iniquity by its slaughter of Christ, and its persecution of the first Christians, so now Babylon by inciting the state to proscribe the remnant has filled her cup. Only wrath awaits those who would not accept of heaven's self-sacrificing love.

We must not misunderstand the repeated references to "double" in verse 6. As Beckwith points out, "this is a conventional expression for full requittal."¹³

See Jer. 16:18; 17:18 and the first part of 18:6. We consider such judgments as that of Preston and Hanson that "zeal for the vindication of God's righteousness and Old Testament prophecy have run away with John here"¹⁴ are quite unwarranted. They smack of the smug assurance that the western conscience of the twentieth century is so much more advanced than that of the Jew and Christian of the first century. This type of patronising spirit has likewise condemned 6:10 as an unchristian attitude—the usual literalizing error that fails to notice that we still have symbolism in this place. It is the blood that is really doing the symbolic crying, and thus the expression is poetic calling for rightful judgment. Similarly in this place, we have but the righteous manifestation of a holy wrath. A namby-pamby God, a Jesus always gentle, meek and mild, would not be adequate for this world so fierce in wickedness. This whole passage is reminiscent of Gal. 6:7,8. All can predict their own future for each person molds his own.

Note that Babylon "glorified herself" (v. 7). This is a far cry from the true believer who has resolved to glory only in the Cross of Christ. Babylon sits as a queen instead of being in the battle against evil. Like the rich fool, she congratulates herself on her riches and security, but then hears the decree of God. "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared—whose will they be" (Lu. 12:20)? Her attitude is identical with the ancient Babylonian royal boaster—"Is not this great Babylon that I have built by my mighty power. . . for the glory of my majesty" (Dan. 4:30)? To him came a similar pronouncement from the Holy Watcher—"The kingdom has departed from you" (Dan. 4:31).

Rev. 18:9-10:

And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and were wanton with her, will weep and wail when they see the smoke of her burning; they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

"Alas! alas! thou great city,
thou mighty city, Babylon!
In one hour has thy judgment come."

Walvoord mentions the belief common among dispensationalists that ancient Babylon is to be rebuilt as the world's capital during the last great tribulation. He himself suggests that "in many respects it is simpler to postulate a rebuilt Babylon as fulfilling literally the Old Testament prophecies as well as that embodied in this chapter."¹⁵ This is perfectly consistent with the usual stance of Walvoord and fellow dispensationalists. But it reduces Scripture to nonsense. We might as well expect to see a literal woman massive enough to be able to drape herself over seven mountains, or to see a beast with seven actual heads. How essential it is to flee the natural error of either literalizing what should be taken symbolically (e.g. "This is my body"; everlasting fire, etc.), and taking symbolically what should be taken literally ("Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God"). The former is the more common error. L. F. Were summarizes it aptly:

The literal east, the literal number eight with reference to Sunday, a literal king (the Pope), a literal throne, literal bread, literal "holy" water, literal altars, literal priests, literal robes, literal candles, literal incense, literal earthly sanctuaries, literal images, instead of mental images, literal interpretations of the prophecies pertaining to Israel and the anti-christ, and the literal, Palestinian "Armageddon," are all literal counterfeits of those things which are spiritually applied in the New Testament in connection with spiritual Israel.¹⁶

Of course, Were does not intend to limit the error to Roman Catholic expositors. Protestant dispensationalists have gone to greater extremes still. And our spiritual forebears, the Jews, were masters *par excellence* of the same tragic skill. Looking for a literal kingdom to conquer a literal fleshly outward tyranny, they rejected One whose mission was testified to by the Spirit. Again we quote Were:

The Jews, clinging tenaciously to the belief that the prophecies concerning Israel must be literally fulfilled through the Jewish nation, were so blinded that they did not recognise the fulfilment of those prophecies in the experiences of the Messiah and spiritual Israel. The Apostles declared: "But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath fulfilled Acts 3:18. "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." Acts 3:24. See also Acts 13:27,29,33, etc. Similarly, today, modern theologians are so blinded by the belief of a literal Palestinian fulfilment of the prophecies pertaining to Israel, that they do not recognise the spiritual fulfilment now taking place. The temple described in

Ezek. 40-48 has its fulfilment in the Christian church--the spiritual temple which the Messiah is now building, and in which He now reigns in power. Zech. 6:12,15. . . . The river of living spiritual water is now emerging from the church to bless a needy world. Ezek. 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8; . . . John 7:37-39. The spiritual latter rain is now falling. . . . The spiritual gathering of Israel and Judah is now taking place. Isa. 11:11,12. The walls of spiritual Jerusalem are now being built. Isa. 60:1-11. In the Person of His Holy Spirit, Jesus is now reigning in spiritual Jerusalem. Micah 4:~>; Joel 3:17,21; Isa. 24:23; Ezek. 48:35, etc. Satan is now endeavouring to assemble his hosts against spiritual Israel. Ezek. 38, 39; Joel 3; Zech. 14.

Had the Jews been faithful, such prophecies as Ezek. 38, 39; Zech 14; Joel 3, depicting the gathering of many nations against Israel, followed by their destruction and Israel's triumph, would have been fulfilled in their literal, Palestinian sense. Now, however, they meet their spiritual fulfilment in connection with spiritual Israel.¹⁷

We will make sense of the eighteenth chapter of Revelation, and of the rest of the book only if we remember that in this dispensation of the Holy Spirit the things of Israel now apply in a worldwide sense to the church of God, and that Israel's enemies also now have a worldwide, not a local, literal significance. John is giving us a parable here which must first be recognized as such before correct interpretation can take place. Carrington reminds us of this in the following passage:

For the whole long passage is sacrificial, and Babylon is represented as priestly. The Gold with which she is "plated" (xvii. 4) recalls the *Naos*; the purple and scarlet recall the veil which hung in front of it; the very name Babylon reminds us that it was a "Babylonish web," like the "Babylonish garment" which Achan stole at Ai, and for which he was "devoted" to burning, he and his family. The long list of merchandise in xviii. 11-13 is surely a catalogue of materials for building the Temple, and stores for maintaining it.

The picture of the priestly City as a harlot committing fornication with the surrounding kings is drawn straight from the picture of Ezekiel xvi. and xxiii.; . . . 18

Thus verses 9 and 10 symbolically express the sense of loss among the wicked, as their whole society, which has been dominated by apostate religion, rapidly deteriorates.

Rev. 18:11-14:

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

"The fruit for which thy soul longed has gone from thee,
and all thy dainties and thy splendor are lost to thee,
never to be found again!"

The order here is significant. God first, and the souls of men last. The true church has opposite priorities, and it should not be hard for any individual to decide whether he belongs to the bride or the whore on the same criterion. Neither should we fail to notice that the items listed here in Babylon also have their place in the new Jerusalem. The streets are described as paved with gold, and the foundations beneath the streets are made of precious gems, while on the sidewalks themselves will be persons in fine linen on white horses. They are willing slaves to the King of kings who has prepared for them this city. Material things are not bad--that would be the gnostic error. But selfish pursuit and idolatry of material things leads to eternal loss.

Rev. 18:15-17:

The merchants of these wares who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

"Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet,
bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!"

In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste."
And all shipmasters and seafaring men,
sailors and all those whose trade is on the sea,
stood far off.

Once more, many of the luxuries of Babylon are detailed, and concerning both lists we should think of the words of Berengaudus.

... if you carefully look into all those things enumerated, you will find that they relate to the five bodily senses, which are given to animals for the support of life, to man for the guiding of the soul therein by reason to the way of righteousness; and the enumeration of these things proves that the condemnation of the wicked will consist mostly in the riches that nourish their vices.¹⁹

Babylon's preoccupation with things (listed last in the Ten Commandments, thou shalt not covet any thing), shows her *hybris* "which is that arrogance, that comes to feel that it has no need of God. Its punishment is ultimate humiliation."²⁰

Rev. 18:18-21

. . . and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?" And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! In one hour she has been laid waste. Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more; . . .

This is another passage upon which scorn has been poured as being far from Christian in spirit. But, as Barclay has said, "There is little personal bitterness here. The people to be destroyed are not so much personal enemies as the enemies of God."²¹ It is the fulfillment of the promises of Dan. 7, 8, 9 where the saints were promised such vindication. The Cross saw the legal fulfillment of these ancient hopes, but on the second Advent consummates all. The Day of Atonement foreshadowed both fulfillments. The "no more" of this passage echoes not only Jer. 51:63,64, but Eze. 26:21; 27:36. And Jesus also, in warning the people of Jerusalem, had used the same imagery of sinking with a millstone tied around one's neck. See Lk. 17:2. Verse 24 is another echo from Jesus. See Lu. 11:50. Observe also that Babylon's fall is the presage of the rise of the new Jerusalem.

Rev. 18:22-24

: . . . and the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more; and a craftsman of any craft shall be found in thee no more; and the sound of the millstone shall be heard in thee no more; and the light of a lamp shall shine in thee no more; and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall be heard in thee no more; for thy merchants were the great men of the earth, and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

This passage is based on Jer. 25:10, a prophecy against Jerusalem and Judah. In three verses we have the refrain of "no more" sung six times. The stillness and silence of destroyed Jerusalem is alluded to. Then comes the final word about the blood of the martyrs, as though the whole land were an altar, and the burnt blood of the saints poured upon it as a libation. After that the victim is burnt as an offering to God. Carrington, seeing the backward look at the city of Jerusalem, which had been punished for her religious apostasy, and which prefigures the great judgment to come, says: "Alas such offering has now been made; Jerusalem herself has gone up to God as a whole burnt offering. . . nothing was left but the trail of smoke which marked the end of the priesthood, law and sacrifice."²²

And now, we must ask, "Why such prolonged exposure on this one theme of the judgment upon apostate religion?" The answer is that self-righteous selfsatisfied Christians think of the judgment as applying to everyone else but themselves.

Canon J. E. Fison somewhat caustically but accurately, accuses popular misconceptions regarding the judgment of refusing to allow it to do the one thing that the New Testament declares it is most designed to do--judge, not lost pagans outside the pale of the church, but the complacent, ecclesiastical souls whose entire confidence is based upon the fact that they are well within it.²³

In the same book where Leon Morris quotes Fison's comment, he himself says similarly:

The judgment will be such that none may escape it. The living and the dead are involved (2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5). Even angels are included (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). God is 'the Judge of all' (Heb. 12:23). It is the temptation of religious man to think that he will escape in such a time. He can understand such a saying as 'fornicators and adulterers God will judge' (Heb. 13:4). He can appreciate the force of Paul's dictum that all will be judged 'who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness' (2 Thess. 2:12). But he likes to think of himself as immune. . . . But the New Testament will not leave religious man to rest in his complacent smugness. It prods him wide awake with its insistence that he, too, stands under judgment. Take the saying quoted in Heb. 10:30 (Deut. 32:35), 'The Lord shall, judge His people.' This brings the matter unpleasantly close to home. And it is even worse with 1 Peter 4:17, 'the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God.' Jesus assures us that people like the scribes, with religious pretensions, 'shall receive greater condemnation' (Mk. 12:40), and James reminds us that Christian teachers 'shall receive heavier judgment' (James 3:1). Jesus tells us that in the judgment some will say, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out devils, and by thy name do many mighty works?' only to receive his sentence, 'I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity' (Matt, 7:22 f.). . . . It is worth noting that the people who will be surprised on that day are not the rank outsiders, but those who think themselves safe within the church.²⁴

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Revelation 19)

Chapter 35

This is the chapter of the two suppers--the marriage supper of the Lamb, and the supper of the birds upon the slain at earth's final battle. It is also the chapter of the wedding song of praise, in contrast to the funeral dirge in chapter 18. Chapter 19 revolves around the true church, and its union with Christ her heavenly spouse, while the previous chapter speaks of the fate of the false church, and its separation from Him.

It is appropriate that we should be confronted with rejoicing once more. At the opening of the judgment series of seals, trumpets, and bowls, there were doxologies. See 4:8 and 5:9. Now, as one of the closing events of the judgment portrayal, again we have praise. In 7:10, towards the close of the seals, we found jubilation, and again in 11:15-18 at the close of the trumpets. Similarly in connection with the seven last plagues, we also found song--this time in anticipation. See 15:3.

Thus we have a chapter that while it adds to the tragedy of the fate of the wicked, also resounds with metaphors of joy, song, and festival, metaphors which Jesus Himself rejoiced to use. See Lu. 14:8; 15:24. Blessed indeed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. All may claim that blessing if they will.

As we study the text, let us keep in mind the suggestion of Torrance:

We must understand this chapter from the contrast implied throughout between the Babylonian whoredom or harlotry and the marriage of the Lamb. It is the contrast between the Church that has remained faithful and true to the Word of God in the midst of the seductions of the world, and the false Babylonian church that has adulterated the Word of God with the word of men. The language reminds us of many passages in the Old Testament where the prophets of the Lord accused the children of Israel of unfaithfulness with wicked nations and of adulterating the worship of Jehovah with the worship of the idol gods of nature.¹

And that we might avoid the fate of those who are complacently treading a religious path to hell, let us think on the marks of the harlot compared with Christ's condemnation of certain religious leaders of old.

Harlot: "She hath glorified herself" (xviii. 7)

Leaders: "Ye are they which justify yourselves."

Harlot: "She saith in her heart, I sit a queen" (xviii. 7)

Leaders: "They love to be called, Rabbi, Rabbi."

Harlot: "She is arrayed in purple" (xvii. 4)

Leaders: "Which love to go in long clothing."

Harlot: She is "drunken with the blood of the saints" (xvii. 6)

Leaders: "Children of them which killed the prophets."

Harlot: "Having a golden cup, full of abominations" (xvii. 4)

Leaders: "Make clean the outside of the cup." "Within full of extortion and excess."

Harlot: Carried on the Beast "out of the bottomless pit," which "goeth into perdition." (xvii. 8)

Leaders: "compass sea and land to make one proselyte," and "make him the child of hell."

Harlot: "The Mother of Harlots" (xvii. 5)

Leaders: "An adulterous generation."

Isaac Williams says:

They are both "beautiful without," both "highly esteemed among men." Their characters are interwoven throughout; and the judgment of the one is the very type of the other. It has been before observed, the Harlot is nowhere said to speak blasphemy or deny the Son. The Scribes and Pharisees would never have been esteemed in man's judgment to be so bad as they are pronounced

by Christ Himself to be; though, indeed, "the children of their father the devil." Our Lord says to His disciples, "the time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service;" which implies that it will be under some species of religion that His martyrs will be slain. It has been suggested that the trials of the martyrs under Antichrist may exceed those of the primitive martyrs, not in any bodily sufferings, but by the plea of religion under which they will be put to death as unfaithful to Christ.²

Surely sin is so subtle that nothing but the breaking of the heart by the Cross can save us from self-deception. No one can see clearly till he has looked long at the figure on Calvary.

Rev. 19:1-4:

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying,
"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for his judgments are true and just;
he has judged the great harlot
who corrupted the earth
with her fornication,
and he has avenged on her
the blood of his servants."

Once more they cried,
"Hallelujah! The smoke from her
goes up for ever and ever."

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

Here is a rapid and stimulating transition which is characteristic of this wonderful book. Instead of the silence of Babylon, we have the song of the New Jerusalem. Instead of wailing, we have hallelujahs. Instead of the harlot, we have the virgin bride. Hallelujah indeed!

In this passage we see the same connection between joy and judgment that was conspicuous at Rev. 14:6,7. Judgment was always good news to the covenant Jew. It meant a revelation not of who was righteous, but of who was *in the right*. That is, who is on the right side (the side of the covenant), not who is perfect, was the issue. According to Augustine, heaven is made up of amen and hallelujah, that is, of truth and praise. Back in the twentieth verse of the preceding chapter had been the admonition "Rejoice over her, O heaven." Here is the fulfillment .

Note the connection in verse 2 between judgment and vindication. Judgment in Scripture does not suggest uncertainty on God's part as to the outcome. It chiefly refers to His vindictory action. Such action ever reveals Him as "true and just" (v. 2), that "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places" His manifold wisdom might be displayed. See Eph. 3:10. Affliction will never rise up a second time. The terrible experiment of sin, precipitated by the abuse of creature freedom, will have demonstrated its fruit. The marks of Calvary will ever testify that sin has cost God more than anyone else, and those marks will make future misuse of privilege impossible. Only the insane could ever sin again, and there will be none such in glory, for heaven brings perfect healing.

Verse 3, with its reference to "ever and ever" must be interpreted as in 14:10, in view of similar language in the Old Testament about judgments limited in duration but eternal in their effects. A God of love will not permit continual pain in a universe resounding with the anthem that God has been, is, and ever will be perfect love.

Rev. 19:5-8:

And from the throne came a voice crying,
"Praise our God, all you his servants,
you who fear him, small and great."

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying,

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our
God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb
has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to be clothed
with fine linen, bright and pure"-
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Only when God reigns can there be perfect rejoicing. And now for those who have let God reign over their hearts and lives comes the eternal union—the heavenly nuptials of which none will ever repent, or cast shame upon. We need to think upon the procedure involved in an ancient eastern marriage. First came the betrothal which was far more binding than what we call an engagement. The two were considered as husband and wife, and fidelity and ultimate consummation were viewed as inevitable, or almost so. At the betrothal, the groom paid the dowry. During the separation time between betrothal and the marriage proper, the bride prepared for the great day. Then, ultimately, the groom with others came to his bride's house to receive her, and take her to the home of the father of the groom for the feast. Similarly, the church has been espoused to Christ by faith during this age of probation. He has paid the dowry at Calvary for His bride.

While we await his coming, we gladly enter upon the work of purifying ourselves as He is pure. While we are ready for Him in one sense the moment we are espoused, in another sense we are glad of His tarrying that we might glorify Him in service and the work of sanctification. The parousia is the coming of the heavenly bridegroom. He will receive us unto Himself, and take us to His Father's house where there are many mansions. Ultimately we shall return to a new heaven and a new earth to dwell with Him for eternity. See 1 Thess. 4:16; Jn. 14:1-3; Rev. 21:1-4.

"The righteous deeds of the saints" may not be the best rendering for this passage. Says Morris:

John adds the explanation that this linen is *the righteousness of saints*. This is usually understood in the sense 'the righteous deeds of the saints' (RSV). But the word *dikaiōma* never seems elsewhere to have the meaning 'righteous deeds'. It always denotes 'ordinance', or something of the kind. 'Sentence of justification' would be much more in accordance with New Testament usage (see note on xv. 4). The plural will indicate that many individuals are involved. Such a meaning is demanded in this context by the verb *was granted*. This clothing is given to the saints. It is not provided by them. The white robes of the multitude in vii. 9, 14 were not provided by any righteous acts on the part of the wearers, but were the result of washing in 'the blood of the Lamb'. So is it here,³

Mounce looks at the passage somewhat differently.

The plural ("acts") may indicate that the bride's garment is woven of the innumerable acts of faithful obedience by those who endure to the end. This does not deny the Pauline doctrine of justification based on the righteous obedience of Christ (Rom. 5:18-19), but suggests that a transformed life is the proper response to the call of the heavenly bridegroom. Note that it was *given* to her to array herself in righteous acts: believers are created for divinely prepared good works (Eph. 2:10). Swete writes, "Corporately the whole Church is seen to be attired in the dazzling whiteness of their collective purity" (p. 247).⁴

Justin Smith gives his preference for Lange and Carpenter who, like Mounce, combine both justification and sanctification with the proviso that emphasis be placed on the former.

Lange and Carpenter prefer "righteousness of the saints"; and the former comments: "The Greek word for righteousness in this place (*dikaiōma* here used in the plural), is always a means by which justice is satisfied, or acquittal is obtained, whether it be by the performance of the right, or the expiation of the wrong (by undergoing punishment), or atonement, as the concrete unity of the doing and the suffering of that which is right." It is the same word which Paul uses in the Epistle to the Romans (as in 5:16), to express his idea of justification. "The source of these righteousnesses," says the note in Ellicott, "is divine. It is given to her to be so arrayed. It is no fictitious righteousness; it is real, though it never would have been her's but for him without whom she can do nothing (cf. John 15:4,5; Phil. 3:8-10)." The translation "righteousnesses" is perhaps preferable to "righteous acts," although it is difficult to render the Greek term by any single English word. The latter—"righteous acts"—might appear to imply that the acceptance which the saints enjoyed is occasioned by meritorious deeds of their own, which the Greek word does not ordinarily imply; whereas, not only are they "accepted in the Beloved," but their bright and pure array is here expressly said to be "given" them.⁵

One thing is certain, if the deeds of the saints are here in view they can only be declared righteous on the basis that the merits of Christ cover their imperfections, for never yet has a single saint by a single act met the requirements of the perfect law. Only perfect beings can accomplish perfect deeds, and the saints will only have the New Testament perfection of "maturity" until this corruptible puts on incorruption. All the while we are down here we need to repent of our repentance, and acknowledge that our very tears need washing in the blood of Christ. All the motives of even penitent sinners are imperfect, and in the light of the fact that the law demands absolutely perfect desires as well as acts, no man can stand before the great Judge, other than through the merits of the Saviour. See Rev. 7:9,14; 8:3; Jas. 3:2; Lu. 17:10; Mt. 6:12.

Rev. 19:9-10:

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

In verse 9, we have the benediction of the book. Verse 10 should be compared with 22:8. The angel asserts that not only is he John's fellow-servant, but a fellow-servant to all prophets who hold "the testimony of Jesus." The Apostle's work was to transmit the testimony of Jesus. See 1:2,9. Similarly, the work of the Spirit who moved this angel and every prophet was to transmit that same testimony. See 2 Pet. 1:21.

The expression "the spirit of prophecy" has always been a well-known term for the gift of prophecy which proceeds from the Spirit. Both Jewish and Christian commentators have used it thus. Whether the testimony of Jesus is to be taken subjectively (testimony from Jesus), or objectively (testimony about Jesus), has always been debated, but its first and primary use throughout this book is the former. Mounce says:

It seems better, however, to retain the subjective genitive (as earlier in the same vs.) and interpret the saying to mean that the message attested by Jesus is the essence of prophetic proclamation.⁶

Massynberde Ford has an interesting comment: "This strange sentence (regarding the spirit of prophecy) may mean that witness to or about Jesus is confirmed by the return of the gift of prophecy."⁷ One thing is certain. The parallel between 19:10 and 22:8 is undeniable, and in one case we have "your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus," and in the other "your brethren the prophets." Not only the wording here, but the setting, is very similar, and the identity of meaning in the two passages cannot be denied.

F. F. Bruce sides with the objective meaning of "the testimony of Jesus" and then on "the spirit of prophecy" he comments as follows:

The expression "the Spirit of prophecy" is current in post-biblical Judaism: it is used, for example, in a Targumic circumlocution for the Spirit of Yahweh which comes upon this or that prophet. Thus the Targum of Jonathan renders the opening words of Isa. 61:1 as "The Spirit of prophecy from before the Lord God is upon me". The thought expressed in Rev. 19:10 is not dissimilar to that already quoted from 1 Pet. 1:11 where "the Spirit of Christ" is said to have borne advance testimony in the Old Testament prophets. There too Jesus is the theme of the witness borne by the prophetic Spirit; the prophets did not know who the person or what the time would be, but at last the secret is out: the person is Jesus; the time is now.

In Rev. 19:10, however, it is through Christian prophets that the Spirit of prophecy bears witness. What the prophets of pre-Christian days foretold is proclaimed as an accomplished fact by the prophets of the new age, among whom John occupies a leading place.⁸

Both the objective and subjective meanings of "the testimony of Jesus" can be held when we remember such passages as 12:11, where confessors of Christ bear testimony to Jesus even at the risk of life itself. But the one point we must not miss is that Jesus is the central theme of prophets and all saints. The gift of prophecy is not the gift of science. Every prophet can say with John, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31). There have ever been two views of inspiration, and while one of these

has put its stress on the conveyance of conceptual content, the other includes this only so far as it is relevant for faith in Christ. Thus the first view stresses concepts, but the second stresses life. Some concepts are necessary for life, but the issue as to whether inspiration turns to spiritual gold everything it touches, or whether it is in the economy of divine miracle merely sufficient for life through faith in Christ has very practical implications. Those who hold to the former view will have a long battle-line to protect, and the effort required may be too much. The Bible is not an "Enquire-within" upon everything. No prophet was omniscient or infallible. They did a special work, the heart of which was testifying to Jesus, but they also underlined the practical relevance of the testimony from Jesus. If we settle for that, we will lose little worth contending for. If we wish to fight for more, we may lose all. Consider two more plain statements on this verse which asserts the strongest of relationships between the gift of prophecy and the message from Christ. Hengstenberg says:

The testimony of Jesus is the testimony which Jesus delivers. According to the point of view taken in the Apocalypse the testifier is always properly Christ--comp. at ch. i. 2, vi. 9. In a looser sense every true Christian has the testimony of Jesus; to be a Christian and to be a witness are coincident; comp. ch. vi. 9, xii. 17. But the witness-bearing exists in its highest degree in apostles and prophets; they are in the fullest and highest sense those, who have the testimony of Jesus.⁹

The *for* introduces the reason, on account of which the angel had spoken of a testimony of Jesus. It stands in this, that the testimony of Jesus, which alone could here be made account of, is all one with the Spirit of prophecy. That the testimony concerning Christ is at the same time the testimony of Christ, and prophecy has its source in the Spirit of prophecy--these correspond to each other. Christ testifies in the prophets through his Spirit (1 Pet. i. 11). . . . The sense would have been the same, if it had been said in the discourse of the angel himself; those who have the testimony of Jesus, that is the Spirit of prophecy.¹⁰

Beasley-Murray writes, "The testimony borne by Jesus is the concern or burden of the Spirit who inspires prophecy."¹¹

One other thing should be said. When men die for the testimony of Jesus, as 12:11 and 6:9 imply, we should recognize here the everlasting gospel. It is this to which Jesus testifies, and likewise his saints. Christ came not to teach us concerning the things of the flesh, but the things of the Spirit. His words tell of the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins, His atonement for iniquity. See Lu. 4:18 spoken at the beginning of His ministry and Lu. 24:46,47 at the close. It must never be forgotten that every Bible writer was a prophet and as Jn. 20:31 and 2 Tim. 3:16 testify", these prophetic writings have as their sole purpose to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ. Those who hold to the testimony of Jesus will not surrender the truth about God and salvation testified to by the prophets, though it is Satan's studied effort to make heaven's testimony of no effect in order that we might be unprepared for earth's last battle.

Rev. 19:11-16:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Understandably, Wilbur Smith could say on these verses, "This paragraph has always seemed to me almost too overwhelmingly glorious for exposition."¹² Nevertheless he tried, and so must we. Glasson says that, "This is one of the most detailed and vivid presentations of the return of Christ to be found in the New Testament."¹³ But it must be confessed in support of a previous warning about following commentaries too slavishly (including this one), that some have not seen the second coming here at all. Some very great commentators, such as Hengstenberg, regarded this passage as a symbolic allusion to a coming in judgment within history before the end time. The error is similar to that of those who wish to take Mt. 24:30-31 as a description of the judgment upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70, rather than

the second advent. With such expositors we can only enquire, "But how could the Bible picture the actual advent in a way that you would recognize it"? It is the coming of Christ that is central to this whole book from the first chapter onwards. Repeatedly it has seemed that the prophet's next words would present the coming, but instead a new chain has begun. Thus has the expectancy of his readers been heightened. In Rev. 14:14-16, one brief glimpse had been given, but it is only in the present place--Rev. 19:11-21--that the long anticipated event is as literal as any fundamentalist could make it. Here we have the destruction of His enemies, the beast and the false prophet and their armies, the incarceration of the first and last antagonist--the dragon, or Satan--and the eternal blessedness of the Church. These are the themes from Rev. 19:11 forwards.

Beginning at this verse, we have the best human words can do to express an ineffable event. That is why the account seems burdened with contradictions, or at least paradoxes. Christ comes to battle, but no battle is described. He has a name which only He knows, yet His name is where all can read it. His is a robe dipped in blood, though the battle has not begun. While the picture of our Lord descending the skies is majestic, the succeeding picture of the gorging vultures is repulsive. Beasley-Murray rightly comments that both pictures are surrealist.¹⁴ They tell of the greatest reality time has known since the Cross, but it is a transcendent occurrence, not merely a spatial phenomenon. Its presentation to a martyr church tells us that nothing can gird the spirits up, nothing can so inspire to fighting the battle for holiness of life, as the "blessed hope."

As the full moon attracts the tides to the coasts, so does the hope of this glorious event draw towards Christ the love, faith, hope, and diligence of all saints. About one verse in every twenty-five in the New Testament is dedicated to this theme, and every true church should be an adventist church, making this truth as prominent in its doctrinal platform as it is the New Testament.. Adventism is a heaven-going doctrine. Its first great preacher never died, but was translated to the kingdom. See Jude 14. All the apostles, prophets, and patriarchs, and kings among God's people have believed in the advent. According to their own testimony, every angel is an adventist, anticipating, as the saints, this climactic event. See Acts 1:9-11.

The Lord's prayer is an adventist prayer, for it embodies the aspiration, "Thy kingdom come." Likewise, the memorial of His death in bread and wine is an adventist service, for He of whom it speaks promised He would not more take of the fruit of the vine till His return. The first and last prophecies of Scripture (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 22:20) tell of Christ's return, and the consummation of Scripture' three thousand promises awaits that event. That reality of which Christ testified even when on trial for His life (Mt. 26:64), is one that every Christian should confess at every opportunity. Not death, but Christ's coming, is the hope of Scripture. Eschatology is scriptural as a source of hope, but thanatology is not. The complete justifying of the ways of God to men cannot be until God comes in judgment, evening out forever the hitherto rough irregularities of existence. Maranatha!

The picture in verse 11 is similar to that of Rev. 6:2. The differences are those we would expect with the passage of time. He is not now seeking to strike arrows of conviction into men's hearts. That day is past. He comes now, not with *stephanos*, but *diamademā*, for He comes now as King of kings, not merely as the Kinsman-Redeemer who overcame on behalf. He comes now, not to wage war in any protracted sense, but to judge. As Hengstenberg noted, "The description of the battle is as remarkable for its brevity, as that of Christ is for its length, quite naturally, as there can properly be no sustained conflict against him, who slays with the breath of his mouth."¹⁵ We repeat, it is the same rider as in Rev. 6, and in so carefully a written book as Revelation, it is not possible that two antagonistic characters could be represented so similarly.

Christ's first name here is that of "Faithful and True." He fulfills His promises to all who have relied on Him (Isa. 11:4,5). In Him, all the promises of God are Yea and Amen (2 Cor. 1:20). "True" points to Christ as the fulfillment of the Ideal in contrast to all lesser imperfect representations. These predicates have been used of Christ earlier in the book, and we should note at this point the beginning of the repetition of many concepts found in the first chapters of Revelation. See 1:5; 3:7,14. It is strange that we, who have so often been deceived by our own hearts, find it yet easier to trust our own imaginations than Christ's word, yet not once has He failed us. He cannot deny Himself though we often deny Him.

"Judging" and "making war" often have the same meaning in the Old Testament, and it is so here. But if some wish to distinguish them, let them see the force of the precedence of righteousness and judging to making war in this passage. What contrast to human warring which proceeds usually from irritability and pride. Wrote Bengel, "In the world one is often a judge and no warrior, or a warrior and no judge. But Christ is a judge and a warrior."¹⁶

We must not pass by too swiftly the emphasis of this passage. It is not now redemption but wrath. The eyes aflame, the sword and iron rod, the blood-stained garments, the wine press--all tell the same story.

In verse 12, His eyes read the soul, discerning thoughts and motives. We hide many things from others, and at least as much from ourselves, but nothing from Him. We use our words to conceal thought as frequently as to reveal it, but this One is the Word of God--He is God's thoughts made audible. His one little word will fell us, unless we are found in Him. He is King of kings, and Lord of lords. These two titles together in gematria amount to 777, like the word for cross, *stauros*. See the *Anchor Bible* on this passage.

When we read of a name that He alone knows, it reminds us of Mt. 11:27. "Only the Son of God can understand the mystery of His own Being."¹⁷ Proud man's chief discovery is that he does not yet know one ten-billionth part about anything. And he has not as yet started on the infinite realm of the kingdom of Glory.

Some excellent commentators have understood the blood on the robe as being Christ's blood of atonement. We hesitate to question such an insight, and it appeals much to us. But we fear it is contrary to the context of judgment and wrath. Those who say the battle is not yet fought have forgotten the nature of apocalyptic, and its frequent proleptic statements. We suspect the interpretation tells more about the irenic nature of the interpreters than about the passage. In connection with the treading of the wine press of wrath, this sprinkling or dipping is what might be expected in symbolic expression of wrath and punishment. Says Milligan, ". . . the blood, not that of the Conqueror shed for us, but the blood of His enemies staining His raiment as He returns victorious from the field."¹⁸

The Word of God title in verse 13 reminds us of Jn. 1:1-3. Only John of all New Testament writers, uses it. Possibly here the title has special reference to His judgment decrees.

Many commentators understand the armies that follow Christ to be those of the angels only. But we believe, on the basis of 17:14 that the resurrected saints speedily become part of His train. Elsewhere believers are spoken of as dwelling in heaven. See 13:6 and Eph. 2:6. Carpenter says, "The saints who have fought the good fight here, and who loved not their lives unto the death, will share in the triumph of their king."¹⁹ In this verse we have a two-fold reference to white which should remind us that in this book that color stands only for the things of God, all of which glow with glory. White is the nearest color that can express such distinctiveness. The Book of Wisdom expresses the central thought of this passage admirably:

While that night was in the midst of her swift course, Thine Almighty Word leaped down from Heaven out of Thy royal throne, as a fierce man of war into the midst of a land of destruction, and brought Thine unfeigned commandment as a sharp sword, and standing up filled all things with death.²⁰

Rev. 19:15-16: (see also prior paragraphs)

From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

To understand this passage we should refer to Isa. 11:4; Psa. 2:9; and Isa. 63:3. These pictures are images of judgment. They should not be spiritualized as though they pointed to the gradual improvement of the world through the gospel. Such interpretation, says Ladd, "does not accord with the nature of apocalyptic thought."²¹ The sharp sword points to the lethal effect of Christ's word of judgment. The iron rod speaks of the strong and unyielding nature of that same decree. And the third figure of the wine press tells of death as the penalty for sin.

Any preaching of the gospel that ignores the truth of God's hatred of sin, and the certainty of His punishment of it, is not the gospel of the New Testament. Similarly, in our desire to be ecumenical, and to reveal the love of Christ, we need also to remember that that love was a far cry from tolerance. The same lips that invited sinners, "Come unto me. . ." could also utter, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." For preachers to be tolerant of sin is to join Satan in soothing sinners to sleep, from which they will only be awakened by the fire just named. Similarly, tolerance towards errors which threaten the soul (we speak not of fine points where the most learned and devout are

unagreed) is not a reflection of the spirit of Christ, or Paul, or any inspired writer. With Augustine, let us agree on the rule of "in vital matters unity, in inconsequential matters liberty; but in all matters charity"; but let us not misunderstand that charity as indulgence of evil.

In verse 16, as the text stands, we have a mystery, despite the best efforts of ingenious commentators. What can be the meaning of a name on a robe and on the thigh? *The Anchor Bible* makes a suggestion that the words for "banner" and "thigh" have been confused, but this is based on Hebrew not Greek. But what matters most is not the place of the name, but the name itself, and that we have. If we know it now by experience of Him as King and Lord, we shall not be afraid in that great day.

Rev. 19:17-21:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked out the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

Here is what has often been called "a ghastly paragraph." Ghastly indeed, but not ghastly enough to make all readers and hearers sufficiently afraid of the fatal disease of sin. The passage reminds us that each must be either at the marriage supper of the Lamb, or the supper of the birds. There is neither neutrality or discharge in this war. The imagery is from Eze. 39:4,17-20, and portrays the fate of the attackers of Israel on the mountains of Jerusalem. It is another picture of Armageddon as verse 19 makes clear. Frequently in the Old Testament, we have the prophecy of an eschatological attack on the people of God, followed by divine intervention and punishment of the attackers. It is the same here.

This war in verse 19 has the article before it, and is the same war as 17:14 and 16:14,16. Notice the earth as it reels under the flaming eyes of the Son of God. The plagues have turned the earth into a wilderness, and now fire ravages the earth's surface, destroying the remnant of the wicked who have survived the plagues to date. The brightness of Christ's presence is more than the unbelieving can endure. Death comes hard to those who should have died a thousand deaths before, on the daily cross of the believer, but who refused.

The Bible is the most realistic book in the world. It does not err concerning the everlasting consequences of good and evil. To go against God is to go against reality. It is to spit into the wind. To do good is good for us, and sanctity is the highest form of sanity, whereas to go against the Way of Christ is to choose destruction. Holiness and happiness are ultimately linked, and so also are sin and sorrow.

Happy is the man who finds wisdom,
and the man who gets understanding,
for the gain from it is better than gain from silver
and its profit better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called happy.

(Prov. 3:13-18)

Because I have called and you refused to listen,
have stretched out my hand

and no one has heeded,
and you have ignored all my counsel,
and would have none of my reproof,
I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,
when panic strikes you like a storm, |
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
Then they will call upon me,
but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently
but will not find me.
Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,
therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
and be sated with their own devices.
For the simple are killed by their turning away,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
but he who listens to me will dwell secure
and will be at ease, without dread of evil."

(Prov. 1:24-33).

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Rev. 20)

Chapter 36

Some interpreters of Revelation wish they did not have to comment on chapter 20. Charles says it is a "constant source of unsurmountable difficulty to the exegete," and in his own inimitable way, he solves the problems by rearranging the final sections of the book. Lesser mortals cannot cut the Gordian knot in that manner, and are left with the problems still on their laps.

To start with, every exegete knows that he must upset many people whatever he says. Secondly, every exegete knows only too well what Caird says, namely that this passage "more than any other in the book, has been the paradise of cranks and fanatics on the one hand and literalists on the other." Well, how many hands does one have? Who wants to be a crank or a literalist? Anyway, the legal maxim that abuse does not cancel use may be relevant here. Even a clock that is stopped tells the truth twice a day and it is possible by the law of probability that one or two things fanatics say could have some rhyme or reason. Even they can add two and two and arrive at four. We will not therefore give up arithmetic.

Third, it is quite impossible to approach this chapter without bias. Now that is true also of every other chapter, but it is easier to veil one's prejudices elsewhere than here. We know what a certain writer is likely to say on this chapter before he says it, provided we know something about his theological stance. This is less true in the twentieth century than in preceding time,¹ but having reviewed many modern commentaries, this writer believes that the problems of bias and presuppositions have not yet died out of "scientific" exegesis.

One thing is encouraging. There has in many quarters been a change of approach to this chapter in recent years. What was unquestionable orthodoxy in the nineteenth century is no longer so. Premillennialism, though not entirely respectable, is much more so now than then. But the term for many is still a "naughty" word, because it is frequently equated with dispensationalism, and thus associated with theories such as the secret rapture, pretribulationism, etc.² It is vital to point out that such an equation is not correct—there are many premillennialists who are not dispensational futurists. We add the last word since not all are aware that some premillennialists are historicists, and others are futurists of the non-dispensational ilk.

The indispensable counters for our study include the terms amillennialism, post-millennialism, and pre-millennialism. The term millennium, of course, comes from the six-fold reference to "a" or "the" "thousand years" in Rev. 20. Of itself, the word says nothing about the nature of the time as to whether good, bad or indifferent. The prefix in the last two words has to do with the advent of Christ in its relation to the thousand year period.

Amillennialism is that understanding of Revelation 20 which does not see there any definite special period of 1,000 years. Consistent with the exegesis of most commentators of most of the book, amillennialists look upon this chapter also as symbolic. This would seem to be a strike in their favor. This group considers that Rev. 20 portrays the blessedness of present Christian experience. Christians are now in heavenly places reigning, as other Scriptures show. See Eph. 2:6; Rom. 5:17. Satan has been bound by the redemptive work of Christ, although he will be released for a little season of trial just before the second advent of Christ. Amillennialism does not teach that Rev. 20 applies to a time after the turning of all nations to Christ and his gospel.

Postmillennialists are of more than one kind as is also true of the pre's. Its oldest form is that of Augustine who believed that the 1,000 years represents the rule of the church upon the earth through its share in Christ's resurrection. The gospel of Christ is to gradually conquer the world, and when that work is done, Christ will return. In this understanding, the first resurrection is necessarily spiritual, the binding of Satan is past, belonging to the blessings flowing from the Cross. Christ's reign is now. Another form of postmillennialism is that of Daniel Whitby, who in the eighteenth century shared in the writing of the *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (1703). He taught that the "first

resurrection" would be a great Christian revival, and that the conversion of the world would follow triumph over the papacy and heathenism. This world conquest would begin the 1,000 years. During the millennium, Satan would be inactive, and the church would rule until the end of the age when, after a short rebellion of the wicked, Christ would return to establish His eternal kingdom.

In the nineteenth century, historical events seemed to favor the Whitby forecast, and it became exceedingly popular. World War II, perhaps more than exegesis, has shaken the popularity of this view, and though by no means dead, is not now widely held.

Pre-millennialism, as its name implies, looks for the coming of Christ before the millennium, as post-millennialism looks for His coming after. The oldest form of this understanding of Rev. 20 was the belief that after 6,000 years of history, Christ's coming would usher in a millennial Sabbath. At the close of the thousand years, after a final flare-up of evil, the Last Judgment would take place, and after that, the eternal state would be ushered in.

Most premillennialists today are dispensational futurists. They believe that the living believers will be caught up to Christ seven years before the second advent to avoid the great tribulation which will fall upon the Jews. The first resurrection is literal, and will occur either before the great tribulation, or immediately at the beginning of the millennium. The risen saints will reign with Christ on earth for 1,000 years. At the close of that period, Satan will be released, and deceive multitudes once more. After a short period, Christ will put down all rebellion and eternity commences.

There are all sorts of incongruities in the dispensationalist view of the earthly millennium. Note Allis' comments on this:

Those who are accustomed to think of the millennium in terms of the naive conception referred to above, as a golden age of righteousness and peace, will be surprised to find how different is the view of it held by Dispensationalists. Two brief descriptions of it will serve to illustrate this fact rather impressively. Darby tells us: "Now there are a faithful few, Satan being the prince and god of this world, going against the stream. Then Christ will be the prince of this world, and Satan bound and obedience will be paid to Christ's manifested power even when men are not converted. When this obedience is not paid, excision takes place, so that all is peaceful and happy. It is a perfect government of the earth made good everywhere. When Satan is let loose and temptation comes again, those not kept by grace follow him. I have an impression that piety will decline in the millennium; but it is founded on a figure (Numb, xxvii. xxix.), so that I do not insist on it; but the rest of what I have said is revealed. That men should fall when tempted, however sad, is nothing but what is very simple. It is the last effort of Satan."

Brooks gives us an even darker picture in his *Maranatha*: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh' and though restrained during the Millennium it will manifest its inherent depravity at the first favorable opportunity, like a tiger long caged and curbed that will bound back to its native jungle with unquenchable thirst for blood when the iron bars are removed."

The picture of the millennium given in the the above quotations is not an attractive one. It is not pleasing to think of the Messianic King the Prince of Peace, sitting enthroned as it were on a smouldering volcano; of a reign of Messiah, peaceful on the surface but seething with hate and muttered rebellion; of people yielding outward obedience because "excision" is the inevitable consequence of disobedience and opposition, since a rod-of-iron rule can only mean the "dashing in pieces" of the rebellious like a potter's vessel. When we read that "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb," we do not take this to mean that the wolf will be as eager as ever to devour the lamb and be restrained from doing so only by fear of the consequences. We naturally understand it to imply a change of nature; the ravening beast, whether the words be taken literally or figuratively, will no longer desire to devour the the lamb. "They shall not hurt nor destroy" in all God's holy mountain, for the reason that they will not want to, not because they will be restrained by *force majeure* from doing what they will want to do.³

Other premillennialists stress their opposition to dispensationalist tenets, and believe that believers will be raptured only after the tribulation at the second coming of Christ. Neither do all of this group believe in the reigning of the 1,000 years being an event on this earth. Some hold that it applies to a heavenly reign.

PREMILLENNIALISM⁴
first of appearing Christ

church age Second Coming of Christ
1,000 year rule

POSTMILLENNIALISM

first of appearance Christ
church age leads into 1,000 year rule
Second Coming of Christ

AMILLENNIALISM

first of appearance Christ
church age = 1,000 year rule
Second Coming of Christ

The battle for truth in this area will always be intense, not so much, perhaps, because of the facts of the case, but because of our presuppositions. These depend not only on the Sunday-school or seminary one has attended, but even the country into which one was born. For example, take this statement from the respected Barclay, "It [millennarianism] is a doctrine which has long since been left behind by the main stream of Christian thought and which now belongs to the eccentricities of Christian belief."⁵

Reading the above few lines would make many Americans wince. Few evangelicals of this country would write something like that. Indeed, it is even possible that hundreds could be turned away by their prejudices from *The Daily Study Bible Series* because of this single statement which they would be tempted to label as "uninformed and biased." Which fact underlines the problem that, while my "doxy" is orthodoxy, yours, of necessity, is heterodoxy.

Many wish that a few great names could solve the problem for them. But there are great names on every side. No one could read Berkouwer without sensing his towering stature in theology. He is an amillennialist. So were most Reformation expositors. On the other hand, that theological giant Jonathan Edwards, like Matthew Henry and the later Thomas Scott, was a postmillennialist (and so with the Princeton theologians, the Hodges and Warfield), while almost all Edward's contemporaries—that is, the Christian leaders of colonial America—were premillennialists, including Increase and Cotton Mather, Samuel Sewall, Timothy Dwight, etc. Across the water, Bengel and John Wesley held premillennial views. But the main names of relevance for the predominant American stance are names which would only arouse prejudicial antagonism in some other quarters of the globe. I refer to J. N. Darby and C. I. Scofield. In strong contrast to these last two names is that of G. E. Ladd, who has done much to make premillennialism of a different stamp acceptable to many modern scholars. If we wish to ask for the old paths, and enquire of the early church fathers, they were chiefly on the side not only of the angels, but of modern Americans. Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Julius Africanus, Victorinus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Lactantius were all premillennialists.

With these few illustrations we can but add the conclusion of one reviewer of the subject who declined to settle the issue. "Equally devout Bible scholars and theologians in times past—all seeking to honor the Lord Jesus Christ and to submit themselves to the authority of the Word of God—have disagreed on the subject. In our own day, sincere students of Scripture have immersed their minds in the prophetic texts and have arrived at different conclusions."⁶

This would seem good enough to lead us to throw in the sponge and let it lie. Why should pygmies strive where giants have failed? But there are problems with that attitude. The chapter is in the Bible and something must be said about it. Besides:

Eschatology is not a mere appendage to the Christian faith. Rather, it is at the very heart of our faith, and we cannot do justice to the Bible's picture of the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ without relating Him to the total picture of God's redemptive work, including the "last things." Contrary to the way we often think, Jesus Himself is the most important of the "last things." Or we might put it another way: The Bible, especially the New Testament, is an eschatological document throughout. We are coming to realize that *eschatology determines our entire approach to the Bible and that we must begin with eschatological concerns before we can make sense of the Bible.*⁷ [emphasis ours]

Instead of trying to hide my personal prejudices by an engineered "detached" look at the subject, I propose to set them forth, seeking to give some exegetical support for at least the most important of these. Then we will work into the chapter itself.

1. This writer believes that many have rejected premillennialism because of popular extreme views on the topic. Swallowing Hal Lindsey's eschatological views is for many a much harder project than John's digestive task in Rev. 10. The gross sensate views of many of the church fathers have always been distasteful even for those who reject the opposite error of gnosticism. The fact that there might be an intellectual *via media* has apparently not occurred to them.

2. The amillennialist position is strong where it rejects the weaknesses of popular premillennialism. Consider the following quotations. Says Hughes:

It is said that one verse in thirty of the New Testament relates to the second coming of Christ. Yet not one verse refers to a millennial reign upon earth! Not even the mystical and symbolical "thousand years" of Revelation, chapter 20, hints at this earthly Utopia.

The late Dr. T. T. Shields. . . said: "The New Testament is silent as to the setting up of an earthly Jewish kingdom, the return of the Jews as a people to Palestine, the rebuilding of the temple, and the whole millennial program as allegedly prophetically described—that *the whole thing is utterly devoid of New Testament authority*. It is not to be found explicitly or implicitly in the teaching of our Lord or His Apostles. I venture to assert, indeed, that the teaching of the entire New Testament is to the contrary" (*The Gospel Witness*, Feb. 9, 1939, p. 3).⁸

But exegetically, it is impossible to sustain amillennialism. We agree with Erickson's summary:

. . . amillennialism has a realistic philosophy of history. Its view of what is to come and where history is going fits well with recent developments and discernible trends. The amillennial view allows for either a deterioration or an improvement of conditions, teaching neither that the entire world will be converted prior to Christ's return nor that world conditions will inevitably grow worse.

When we consider the specific tenets of an argument for amillennialism, however, we find some difficulties. One major cluster concerns the exegesis of Revelation 20.⁹

We would refer readers to the books of George Eldon Ladd for his discussion of the weaknesses in the dispensationalist positions. Ladd is certainly correct in affirming that "if one can make anything of language at all, no distinction can be made between the parousia, the apocalypse, and the epiphany of our Lord."¹⁰ But to reject dispensational errors need not force one into the amillennialist or postmillennialist camps, as Ladd himself shows. Ladd, of course, is no amillennialist, but what he has seen regarding dispensationalism, most amillennialists have also seen.

3. The premillennialist position is strong where it rejects the exegetical weaknesses of both amillennialism and postmillennialism. By premillennialist, we mean one who believes in a literal millennium bounded at each end by a resurrection from the dead, and introduced by the second advent of Christ. We do not mean the dispensationalist position, or even the views of those who hold that the millennium must be fulfilled on this earth. Erickson¹¹ in the first two pages of his discussion on premillennialism six times makes the assumption that this millennial stance automatically involves a reign on earth. Bruce, Hailey, and others have noted that Rev. 20 says nothing about an earthly reign. Many are the assumptions of us all, and here lies the basic cause of exegetical error.

4. We might expect that the eschatological book of the New Testament would be more detailed in some areas than the rest of Scripture. Therefore, the usual objection that the New Testament is not elsewhere capable of the interpretation premillennialists give Rev. 20 is not particularly strong. Furthermore, it must be remembered that many have been glad of any excuse not to make the book of Revelation their study. Thus there is a great deal of ignorance concerning its contents and meaning. Indeed, until 1844, all that was known on eschatology was a very small "all." Someone has said it could have been written on a postage stamp. We mention 1844 because that is the year the term eschatology entered literature.¹²

We think with Beckwith that the spiritualizing of Rev. 20 has been partly due to an ignorance of the real nature of apocalyptic. But perhaps there is more. Not all have observed that the New Testament distinguishes between the dispensation of the Spirit, and the age to come ushered in by the second coming of Christ. As a rough rule of thumb it can be laid down that where Jesus is visibly present, rather than where the Holy Spirit is the immediate teacher, many other matters also become visibly present, rather than merely spiritual. L. F. Were has suggested:

In earlier chapters we have shown that the *literal* application belonged to the days of *literal*

Israel: to the days when the *literal* glory of God was manifested, and things were upon a *literal, national* basis. In this "dispensation of the Holy Spirit," the things of Israel apply spiritually. Later, in the eternal kingdom, where the *literal* glory of the Lord will be revealed again, things pertaining to Israel will be literal.

The principle of the triple application enables us to "rightly divide the word of truth." This triple application of the prophecies cause all things to fall into their respective places, in—

(1) The *national* kingdom of God, in the time of the *literal* economy: centred in Jerusalem, and pertaining to the land of Israel.

(2) Christ's *spiritual* kingdom: centred in spiritual Jerusalem, the church, and embracing the world.

(3) Christ's eternal kingdom: with His seat of government literally centred in the New Jerusalem.¹³

Some illustrations of this principle are the following:

NATIONAL ISRAEL

1. Kingdom of Priests, Ex. 19:5,6
2. Literal Zion. 50:2; 2:6.
3. Enemies Literally Gathered Against Israel. Isa. 8:7,8; 36:1,2,37; 54:15,17; Ezek. 38,39; Zech. 12:3,9; 14:1,2.

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

1. Kingdom of Priests, 1 Peter 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6; Rev. 4:4; 5:10.
2. Spiritual Zion -the Church. Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13; Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:6-8; Isa. 59:20; Rom. 11:26; Psa. 2:6.
3. Enemies Spiritually Gather Against the Church Isa. 54:15,17; Rev. 14:20; 16:14,16; 17:14; 19:19; Zech. 12:3,9; 14:1,2; Ezek. 38,39; Joel 3, etc.

AFTER CHRIST'S RETURN¹⁴

1. Kingdom of Priests, Rev. 20:4; 3:21.
2. Eternal Zion. Rev. 14:1; Psa. 2:6.
3. Enemies Literally Gather Against the Saved Within the New Jerusalem. Rev. 20:8,9.

Or, more simply one may apply the era between Cross and Advent and the era after the Advent to the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant respectively.

After the millennium, the literal "holy city," new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bridge [sic] adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2), will descend to the place prepared by God, in the locality which, at one time, was the literal land of Israel. Compare Rev. 21:2 with Zech. 14:2. Then, literal things of the eternal kingdom will be centred in the New Jerusalem as, similarly, the literal things of national Israel had centered in old Jerusalem. During the Christian era, the church--spiritual Jerusalem--is the centre of spiritual things. The millennium is the dividing line on earth between the spiritual things centring around spiritual Jerusalem--the church--and the literal things centring around the literal Jerusalem. Just as the terminology of national Israel is employed to describe the church, so the language descriptive of the New Jerusalem is also applicable to the church: it is applicable to the church now, during the kingdom of grace, but after the millennium it is applicable to the literal New Jerusalem.

Before the Millennium

Church is the bride. Jer. 6:2; 2 Cor. 11:2; Ephes. 5:23-32; Rom. 7:1-4.

After the Millennium

"Bride adorned for her husband." Rev. 21:2.

"The bride, the Lamb's wife." Rev. 21:9,10.15 (The city)

Compare the comments of Preston and Hanson who assert that while John intended that the fact of his millennial city should be taken literally as a future manifestation, its description has also present relevance expressing the privileges of the church in the here and now.¹⁶

Of course, if one interprets even Rev. 21 and 22 of the present era, then this paradigm collapses, but we suggest that the natural conclusion on reading these chapters is the correct one--they point to the

eternal state. But Milligan's viewpoint is not without value. No part of Scripture belongs only to the past, present, or future. It is all relevant, in principle, to all times. That is why the amillennialist can make a good case. Christ did chain the devil at His first advent, and His kingdom was then established, and Christians have been reigning ever since. See Mt. 12:28; Rev. 12:10; Eph. 2:6. But recognizing these truths in Rev. 20 certainly does not suffice to exegete that chapter adequately. Similarly, to recognize that in the description of the new earth is the consummation of present blessings, does not deny that the reader can discern his immediate blessings from the description there, but it does deny that such discernment empties the verses of their full store.

We have also assumed in our pattern that it is a real City that is brought to view in Rev. 21:2,9ff. This is not the conclusion of most commentators. Ladd, Simcox, Beckwith, and Lange should be read on this point. For example, Beckwith on 19:7 says:

The vision of the Bride in her glory is given in 21:9-22:5, where, however, the figure of the bride is transferred to the new Jerusalem. As Jerusalem and the people of Israel are frequently identified in speech. . . , so in the Apocalypticist's vision of the renewed world, the people of God and their capital city, i.e. the Church and the new Jerusalem, are so closely connected that the figure designating the one may be transferred to the other.¹⁸

Concerning the new Jerusalem, the American Editor of Lange's work writes:

Concerning the hypothesis that the New Jerusalem will exist as a great City, it may be said: 1. There are many things in the description that have their most natural (their normal) application to such an abode, as is evident upon the bare perusal. 2. This application is supported by the following considerations: (1) A material dwellingplace is as necessary for resurrected saints as was Eden for Adam, or Canaan for Israel. (2) It should occasion no surprise if the same loving care that will raise and glorify the body should prepare a fitting and glorious abode for it. (3) It should be regarded as no strange thing if He who prepares for the body should grant us an inspiring, though general, description of its future abode. (4) On the contrary, the giving of such a description would be but in accordance with Jehovah's dealing with Israel before leading them into Canaan, and in continuation of the information given us by the Prophets concerning the Palingenesia, and especially by the Apostle Paul, Rom. 8:20,21.¹⁹

We believe this meets the most natural reading of the text. The beloved city is said to be "the camp of the saints," during the millennial crisis. Similarly, in Rev. 21-22, it is seen as their home. A material dwelling-place is just as necessary for the resurrected saints as Eden was for Adam, or Canaan for Israel. See Heb. 11:10,16. If God plans to raise and glorify our bodies, why should it be surprising that He shall also provide a beautiful abode as well? We conclude the city is as real as the new earth, although inevitably it is described in symbolic terms. The things of the eternal state can only be communicated to us in pictures, and this is what John has done. The reason that commentators have seen in the new Jerusalem the church is because the church is indeed in the New Jerusalem. But the Scripture distinguishes between the inhabitants and the city, and most commentators have failed to do just that.

It will have been noticed that the paradigm suggested aids exegesis. For example, before the coming of Christ, the beast could be described as one that "was and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition" (Rev. 17:8). This fitted precisely the Antichrist of the ages, comprehending persecuting world kingdoms, and with the fall of each receiving a deadly wound for a time but later rising. But the complete fulfillment of the symbolism is found in Satan himself. Wounded to death (Heb. 2:14) at the Cross, yet forever rising to persecute, he will receive his quietus again at the second advent. This Rev. 20:1 describes. The pit is the desolate earth for 1,000 years, a fine large graveyard indeed! But at the end of the thousand years, when the wicked are raised, then Satan is loosed--his mortal wound healed again, until he finally goes into perdition as described in Rev. 20:10.

Similarly, as the impenitent on a worldwide scale made war on the saints, God's holy city established all over the globe, before the second coming, so at the end of the millennium that war will be repeated. Gog and Magog (as in Eze. 38,39) again surround Israel (this time localized in the Holy City which has descended from God and is hovering just above the earth waiting for its cleansing by fire). And again by the appearance of Christ, they are brought to naught. Thus Armageddon takes place on both sides of the millennium, the first gathering being against the symbolic city of God (during the dispensation of the Spirit), but the last gathering taking place against the literal city (during the new era where with the appearance of Christ sensible realities appear, rather than what is only discerned by faith).

May we list now our reasons for "literalizing" the first resurrection of Rev. 20? To establish the latter establishes premillennialism.

1. As Ladd says so well:

The phrase "they came to life again" is the translation of a single Greek word, *ezesan*. The crux of the entire exegetical problem is the meaning of this word. It is true that the word can mean entrance into spiritual life (John 5:25), but it is not used of any "spiritual resurrection" of the souls of the righteous at death. The word is, however, used of bodily resurrection in John 11:25; Rom. 14:9; Rev. 1:18; 2:8; 13:14; and most commentators admit that this is the meaning in vs. 5

"The rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were ended." If *ezesan* in vs. 4 designates spiritual life at conversion, or life after death in the intermediate state, we are faced with the problem of the same word being used in the same context with two entirely different meanings, with no indication whatsoever as to the change of meaning.²⁰

2. *Anastasis* is here translated "resurrection," and the same word is used thirty-nine times in the New Testament always to mean the resurrection of the body. Other words are used to denote a spiritual rising from death to sin.

3. No Christian doubts that the second or general resurrection described in v. 12 will be literally realized. It is therefore difficult to suppose that the first will be of a different kind.

4. Resurrection must be the same in nature as the death. E. g. in Eze. 37, the death and resurrection is national relating to the Jews; in the parable of the prodigal son, the boy who was dead socially and morally becomes alive again socially and morally. It is explicitly said in Rev. 20 that many who rise in the first resurrection were beheaded literally and physically. Therefore it must be conceded that they are resurrected physically. Since they were not dead in a spiritual sense their resurrection cannot be viewed as spiritual in nature.

5. Inasmuch as those resurrected are said to be those who prior to that time were blessed and holy, this group had already had their spiritual resurrection prior to this event.

6. "Souls" often in Scripture applies to persons living in the flesh. Acts 7:14; Acts 27:37; 1 Pet. 3:20, and as for "souls of them" compare 1 Sam. 25:29; Gen. 46:15,18,22,26; Rom. 2:9,10.

7. Paul elsewhere expresses his hope to "attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:11). If all good and bad were resurrected at the same time, it would be impossible to escape the resurrection. The Greek is literally "the out-resurrection from among the dead." Olshausen says that "the phrase would be inexplicable if it were not derived from the idea that out of the mass of the dead some would rise first."

8. Some, including Tregelles, have translated Dan. 12:2 as follows: "Many from among the sleepers of the dust of the earth shall awake; these shall be unto everlasting life; but those [the rest of the sleepers who do not awake at that time] shall be unto shame."

9. Other phraseology indicates two resurrections--"the resurrection of life," Jn. 5:29; of "everlasting life" Dan. 12:2; "of the just," Lu. 14:4; "a better resurrection," Heb. 11:35; "the dead in Christ," 1 Thess. 4:16; them "that are Christ's at his coming," 1 Cor. 15:23--the context shows in each place that the resurrection mentioned is separate from that of the wicked.

10. 1 Cor. 15:23 suggests a definite order in the resurrection. The word "order" is *tagma*, a military term which means band or regiment. The apostle sees widely separated bands with each man in his proper regiment or division. The Greek word *eita* "then" does not mean immediately after. Mk. 4:28; Gal. 2:1.

11. The use of *zao* elsewhere in Revelation shows that it means "revived," "lived again," in reference to the body which had been dead.(Rev. 2:8; 13:14; 20:5.)

12. In the phrases "first resurrection," and "second resurrection," a discrepancy as to time is implied. Any great change from a degraded and wretched condition, temporal or spiritual, may indeed be figuratively called a resurrection, a restoration to life, i.e. to happiness; but it would be out of the question to name it a first resurrection. This implies of necessity a comparison with a second, in which the first must be like the second in kind.

13. Similarly, *e anastasis* emphasizes not only relation to a second, but its own transcendent

importance. Rev. 20:1-8 is a definite link in a chronological chain of text and it is thus descriptive of events to follow the second advent described in Rev. 19.

14. The analogy of eastern marriage where the groom comes and takes the bride to his father's house for feasting has relevance for Rev. 20, as well as Rev. 19. The millennium will be in heaven, not on earth.

15. In no case does the Bible speak of the resurrection of anyone but the righteous when Christ comes.

No wonder then that Alford penned the following well-known words:

It will have been long ago anticipated by the readers of this Commentary that I cannot consent to distort its words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy. . . . Those who lived next to the Apostles and the whole Church for 300 years, understood them in the plain literal sense; and it is a strange sight in these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence of antiquity, complacently casting aside the most cogent instant of unanimity which primitive antiquity presents. As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain souls lived at the first, and the rest of the dead lived only at the end of a specific period after that first,--if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave;--then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain: but if the second is literal, then so is the first, which in common with the whole primitive Church and many of the best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive as an article of faith and hope.²¹

Let us now consider the chapter in detail keeping in mind its gospel message that the cross bought resurrection life for all men. Only those who despise the gift are raised to that judgment and second death they themselves have invoked.

Rev. 20:1-3:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.

We believe that Ladd is correct when he says on this passage:

A key issue in our understanding of the millennium is whether chapter 20 involves recapitulation, looking back from the end to the whole history of the church. In chapter 12, it is unmistakably clear that the passage looks back to the birth of Messiah. However, in the present passage, no such indication is to be found. On the contrary, chapters 18-20 appear to present a connected series of visions. Chapter 18 tells of the destruction of Babylon; chapter 19 tells of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet; and chapter 20 moves on to tell of the destruction of Satan himself--a destruction accomplished in two stages. Antichrist, the false prophet, and Satan form an evil triumvirate, and are closely linked in chapter 13 (see also 16:13 where they are mentioned together in a single verse).²²

It is vital that we see the natural sequence of this passage to the preceding picture of the second coming of Christ. It is that coming which seizes the devil and binds him. At the coming of Christ, the saints are gathered up, and the remnant of the wicked are slain by the brightness of Christ's presence. The earth becomes a lake of fire, and then a graveyard similar to its condition at the beginning of creation week. *Abussos* of v. 3 is used in the LXX for "without form and void" of Gen. 1:2. Compare also Jer. 4:20,23-27; Isa. 24:1-3. Thus Jn. 14:1-3 is fulfilled and, in harmony with the eastern marriage analogy, the bride is taken to the Father's house.

This introductory picture of the chaining of Satan enshrines another Day of Atonement allusion. Lev. 16 speaks of the sending away of the scapegoat to Azazel in the wilderness. Azazel is certainly a name for Satan.²³ W. Robertson Nicoll, in commenting on Rev. 20:1, alludes to the "fettering of

Azazel" and to "divine restraint" placed upon that "evil spirit."²⁴ in 1 Enoch 9f. we read of a divine command to Raphael to "Bind Aza'zel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness; and make an opening in the desert. . . and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and his face that he may not see light." Later we read of him being cast into the fire on the day of judgment that the earth might be healed of the fallen angelic corruption. In 1 Enoch 55:3ff. ;the seer is told that angels will cast the demons into the chasm of the abyss. Chains of iron and bronze are to be used for the binding. Compare also Isa. 24: 121-23 and Dan. 7:9-11.

We believe that by failing to observe the centrality of the sanctuary and its services in the scenic backdrop of the visions of Revelation much has been lost. The usage made of the Day of Atonement is particularly important because of its judgment implications both as regards the Cross, and the judgment connected with the Advent. When we couple together the separation made in Rev. 13 and 14 between the lost and the saved as represented by those with the mark and the seal (referring back to the casting of lots on the Day of Atonement to symbolize the two companies in Israel respectively associated with Azazel and Yahweh) with the final separation in Rev. 20, the judgment overtones of Yom Kippur are very evident. Paul, in Rom. 3:25, sets forth Christ and His Cross as that mercy-seat which was central on Atonement Day. Every man's final destiny is determined by his attitude to Christ's atonement.

Because the 1,000 years is no longer in the waiting time of the saints when a veil lies over the future, there is no necessity to consider this period a symbol. As to the matter of the loosing of Satan, this will be discussed at a later point in this chapter.

Rev. 20:4-6:

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

As we have noticed in the introduction to this chapter, there is no adequate way of denying the representation by this chapter of two literal resurrections, one at each end of the 1,000 years. Lilje rightly concludes that "the modern rejection of chiliasm is usually based on dogmatic considerations, not biblical exegesis."²⁵ Even the expression "the souls of" means no more than it does elsewhere in Scripture--"the persons." The martyrs are mentioned as the vanguard of the saints, not to suggest that only martyrs are raised. There is nothing in the text to indicate that the reign is on earth. Says Mounce, "it contains no specific indication that their reign with Christ takes place on earth. . . ." ²⁶ He says further, "since the text remains silent about the occupants of the thrones, it may be wise not to go beyond suggesting that they may be a heavenly court (as in Dan. 7:26) that will assist in judgment."²⁷

Judgment being committed is reminiscent of Christ's promise in Mt. 19:28. Judging and reigning are often equivalent in the Old Testament. Possibly here, more is implied. It is important that we should enquire regarding the theological purpose of the millennium. Is it not in order that all God's creatures might see the perfect justice of His ways before the impenitent are destroyed forever? Phil. 2:10,11; Eph. 3:10; Rom. 14:11; Rev. 15:3,4 and 16:4 suggest this. Indeed, it is hard to conceive why God should have permitted sin to mature and endure if He had not had from the beginning some such prophylactic purpose in mind. Eze. 38:14-16 says that the divine purpose in permitting the Gog and Magog rebellion is to vindicate the holiness of God. This view is confirmed by what follows in the present chapter. It is after the wicked are given life again, and use it in attempted murder, that the great Judgment Day takes place, making manifest the counsels of all hearts, making visible that which had taken place in the darkness, and plain what had been obscure.

The second death is that which follows the judgment of v. 10. Those born twice will die but once, but to be born only once means to die twice. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:7). It was the firstborn of Egypt who suffered in the final plague. And how can a man be born again in order that he might not die twice? "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

so much the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn. 3:14,15). It is the vision of Calvary contemplated that brings the new birth, and with it everlasting life. Henceforth one is theologically speaking non-inflammable.

Rev. 20:7-10:

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Evil almost looks indestructible. Says Caird:

The myth of Gog enshrines a deep insight into the resilience of evil. The powers of evil have a defence in depth, which enables them constantly to summon reinforcement from beyond the frontiers of man's knowledge and control. However far human society progresses, it can never, while this world lasts, reach the point where it is invulnerable to such attacks. Progress there must be, otherwise God is neither Lord of history nor Lord of creation. But even when progress issues in the millennium, men must remember that they still have no security except in God. This is, in fact, the mythical equivalent of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone, which teaches that from start to finish man's salvation is the work of grace, and never at any time his own achievement.²⁸

The first thoughts of the resurrected ones are identical with their last before death--murderous. As such they are open to the deceptions of Satan, who tells them they can take the camp of the saints that has descended close to earth. The reference to Gog and Magog is an excellent illustration of how the New Testament applies on a worldwide scale that which was local in the Old Testament. Here the threat predicted against literal Israel materializes in an attack on all the redeemed. It is Armageddon once more--Armageddon, not only in the attack but in the defense. Christ appears on a throne high and lifted up, and the judgment takes place as the multitudes are poised, hypnotized by what they see. Verses 11-15 only amplify the last part of verse 9 and all of 10.

Rev. 20:11-15:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Here is Judgment Day. The righteous come not into judgment in this sense. They have been judged in Christ their advocate, for judgment began with them (1 Pet. 4:7; cf. Jn. 5:24; 1 Jn. 4:17). Milligan writes on this passage:

Does it present us with the picture of a general judgment or of a judgment of the wicked alone? There is much in the passage that leads distinctly to the latter conclusion.

1. The whole vision is obviously an enlargement of what we have already met under the seventh Trumpet, when it was said that "the time of the dead to be judged came." In both visions the persons spoken of as "the dead" must be the same; and they are clearly distinguished in the earlier vision from those called "Thy servants the prophets," the season of whose "reward" was come. With this corresponds the fact that in the writings of St. John the words "to judge" and "judgment" are always used, not in a neutral sense, but in one tending to condemnation.²⁹

The "books" mentioned in the passage are clearly books containing the record of evil deeds

alone. When it is said that "books" were opened, and that "another book was opened, which is the book of life," the "books" are distinguished from the "book." It harmonizes with this that the book of life is not opened in order to secure deliverance for those whose names are inscribed in it, but only to justify the sentence passed on any who are cast into the lake of fire.

4. The general teaching of St. John ought not to be lost sight of in considering this question. That teaching is that the eternal condition of the righteous is fully secured to them even in this life, and that in their glorified Head they have already passed through all those preparatory stages on their way to everlasting blessedness at the thought of which they might otherwise have trembled. In Him they have lived, and overcome, and died. In Him they have been raised from the dead, and been seated in the heavenly places. All along they have followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and everything that befell Him has in principle befallen them. We cannot say, in the Johannine sense of the word, that Christ has been "judged;" and therefore "judgment" cannot be predicated of the members of His Body. To these last "judgment," we have already seen, "was given" at the time when they entered on their millennial reign; and, with the result of this judgment (for that is the true meaning of the original) in their hands, it is impossible to think of them as judged again.³⁰

Now the books are opened. The searing pages of memory are turned within every sinner and, in a way we know not, revealed to the universe. It will be revealed that they have fought against self-sacrificing love. Deceived by Satan, they have hated righteousness and loved iniquity. The Cross, that was for their sakes, has become to them as something obscene. In the attitude taken towards Christ, every soul has passed judgment on his or her own self. The memory of mercies extended, pleadings, warnings—all flood back. The insanity of sin is revealed, that insanity which had become incarnate in the lost. There is weeping and gnashing of teeth—the sign of people demented. Unto God shall every knee bow, and every tongue confess. The angels hear Him cry, "How often would I have gathered you, and you would not. . . O that you had known the things that belonged to your peace!"

The picture of the throne here should be contrasted with the throne of 4:2. Lacking now are the rainbow of promise, the lightnings and thunders of warning, the seven lamps symbolizing the pleading Spirit, the celestial pavement of the crystal sea on which to stand. Similarly, the songs and praises of chapter 4 are not found here. This throne is stark and symbolizes doom and eternal loss.

The agony is not prolonged any longer than is needed for universal memory. Fire descends from Him who is love. The same book which speaks of God singing in His love over His people, also says that "in the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth." Zeph. 3:17; 1:18. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. By the fires of God, death and the grave are also "consumed." Death, be not proud.³¹

SECTION SEVEN [\(TOC\)](#)

(Rev. 21-22)

THE SPOILS:

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE AND THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 21-22

Chapter 37

We come now to an introduction to a conclusion—a teaspoon's worth of commentary upon passages sketching the ocean of infinity. Ours is but a passing reference in time to the soon-coming eternity. The task is beyond humanity and like Job we are constrained to lay a hand over our mouth. Only a few reflections will be offered.

The Bible speaks of three worlds: the world that then was, the world that is, and the world that is to come. See 2 Pet. 3:7-13. One cannot but be reminded of the many similarities between the end of the first world and the beginning of the second, and the end of the second and the commencement of the third. In Noah's day, the warning of the end was given by a faithful remnant to the multitudes who had forsaken the God of their fathers. Probation closed for the antediluvians, and simultaneously the believers were safely sealed in the ark of divine provision. Next came judgment, a storm of wrath, but the people of God were safely sheltered in a home above the submerged world. After resting on a mountain-top, the saved emerged to inhabit the new earth.

So it is to be again. The remnant of the woman's seed will warn the Babylonian world by the messages of Rev. 14:6-12. Then probation will close, sealing all men into their eternal destiny. After the seven last plagues, the faithful will be lifted above the doomed world, safe in the camp of the saints, the beloved city. At the close of earth's millennial sabbath of judgment, during which the globe has existed as a great cemetery, the redeemed return to earth in the new Jerusalem, issuing from it to reign over the whole new world, as Noah's family came from the ark long ago.¹

The glorious presentation in Rev. 21 and 22 of the new earth is a magnificent conclusion to Scripture. It is John's inspired painting, and his undying melody—a true story about eternity that never suffers for the re-telling. A sceptic once proposed that it must have been a matter of great difficulty to begin the Bible. The obvious answer, of course, is that given millenniums, the human race combined could not have devised a better introduction to Scripture than the majestic opening of Gen. 1. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Similarly the conclusion of Scripture has equal grandeur and appropriateness.

Often it has been pointed out that it is as though the reader of the Bible has been travelling on a golden ring, and ultimately in Rev. 21 and 22 returned to where he began—a new world. Instead of the marriage of Adam and Eve, here we have the union of the second Adam with His bride. Instead of a day followed by a night, we read of a day that shall know no night. The garden Paradise of old is now replaced by a garden-city unlike all the cities of time. Once more we see the tree of life, and again those who partake reflect the image of God, and walk besides crystal streams. But now all testing and trial is over. As the third chapter of Scripture had introduced Satan, temptation, sorrow, tears, the curse, and death, so the third last chapter (Rev. 20), ushers all these out of the universe forever. No shadow or blight rests upon a single atom of the earth made new, or its inhabitants. It and they are God's new creation. Love, truth, glory, peace, harmony, joy, health, and all the other values for which the church has lived and died, now find their eternal consummation.

As we leave the stormy seas of Rev. 20, and enter the calm harbor of chapters 21 and 22, it is like

turning from Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* to his *Swan Lake*.

Now we see the fulfillment of Daniel's ancient oracle regarding "the anointing of the most holy" (9:24). That allusion to the dedication of a holy temple has its final application in God's infinite condescension as He tabernacles among the saved. He who walked with Adam and Eve in Paradise, and pilgrimaged with His redeemed through the wilderness and the Galilean hills by means of the ancient sanctuary and the incarnation, now forevermore is the visible King, Brother, and Friend. God Himself is thus the Temple of the new earth.

Much of the language of these chapters is borrowed from Isaiah's picture of the restoration after the Babylonian captivity. That ancient deliverance by the kings of the east was the symbol of a greater redemption, and the return to Palestine imaged the final return of the saved to their eternal home. Other sources used by John include Ezekiel's closing pictures, and the promises found in the early chapters of the Apocalypse itself.

Others have written more graphically and helpfully on the chapters before us, and we quote them. Says Caird:

All through the long story of God's assault on the old corrupt order, there have been intimations of immortality: the promises to the Conquerors, the white-robed multitude, the triumph song of Moses and the Lamb, the wedding feast of the Lamb and his bride. The clouds of glory have hung low over the camp of the true Israel in their wilderness wanderings. Now at last John stands on Pisgah and surveys the promised land. In some ways this is the most important part of his book, as it is certainly the most familiar and beloved.²

Beasley-Murray is similarly appreciative:

Now follows the unveiling of a new order not subject to the ravages of time. It is, in Farrer's words, 'the last of the Last Things and the end of the visionary drama'. Nothing more than this can follow, beyond the attempt to explain it.

It is characteristic of John's prophetic style that he has compressed his vision of the transcendent order for which creation and the history of man has prepared into a single paragraph consisting of about a hundred words.³

... it is inexpressibly joyful, for here are depicted the ultimate goal of the suffering Church and the only reward which Christ's confessors really want, namely, God himself in the company of all who love him. Since this vision is set on the far side of the last judgment, that company is greater far than the Church. The vision therefore, may be viewed as the climax not only of the book of Revelation, but of the whole story of salvation embodied in the Bible. The comfort of the church, as it faces the contest with the forces of the Antichrist, is nothing less than the realization of God's purpose in creation.⁴

Scroggie tells us the significance of the last word of Scripture.

Ever present in this world are right and wrong, truth and error, light and darkness, holiness and sin, righteousness and iniquity, heaven and hell, Christ and Satan; and these are in unceasing conflict with one another. Too often it appears that the forces of evil are triumphant, and the Devil seems to dominate in the world. It is when this view is depressing us that we should read again the Revelation, and see that Babylon crashes to destruction; that the Beast and the False Prophet are cast into the lake of fire, and that Satan is thrown into the Abyss. Not wrong, and error, and darkness, and sin, and iniquity, and hell, and Satan triumph at last, but right, and truth, and holiness, and righteousness, and heaven, and Christ.

The head which on earth was crowned with thorns, will be crowned with many diadems. 'The Kingdoms of this world will, ere long, become the Kingdom of our LORD and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever'.

The final vision is not of Athens and its intellect, nor of Babylon and its luxury, nor of Rome and its power, nor of Paris and its fashion, nor of New York and its commerce, nor of London and its splendour, but is of the New Jerusalem which stands for character. Harlots, and beasts, and pseudo-prophets, and demons, locusts, and frogs, and serpents are all swept away, and the once-slain Lamb is on the throne of the universe, at last and forever triumphant.

This, then, is the Epilogue of the Unfolding Drama of Redemption History, which began in a

Garden, ends in a City, and between the two there stands a Cross; a Cross by which the tragedy of the Garden has been transformed into the triumph of the City.⁵

COMMENTARY [\(TOC\)](#)

(Rev. 21-22)

Chapter 38

Rev. 21:1-4:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

The third chapter of Scripture introduced Satan, sin, sorrow, the curse, and death. Rev. 20, the third last chapter, bade farewell to all of these. That chapter unveiled the secret realities of faith and unbelief. By their murderous attack on Him who had raised them from the dead the wicked testified that eternal death was both their deserts and choice. That they were unchanged, that they were one with the great Destroyer, was made fully apparent. Once this was aptly demonstrated, sin no longer had any reason for its existence and it became no more. And with it went the curse, death, and sorrow. The earth again became *abyssos*, without form and void. From its ashes, God now calls forth order and beauty (the Greek word for "new" here means "renewed"), life and song. The millennial Sabbath is over and once more God regenerates. The promise that the meek shall inherit the earth is fulfilled. This is no ethereal inheritance. Scholars in all ages have seen this, but particularly in recent years because of the restoration of the Hebrew view of nature and man. Says Ladd:

The apocalyptic hope contains also a theology of nature. The apocalyptic language in Matthew 24 about the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars, the shaking of the powers of heaven, is language which cannot be taken with wooden literalness; neither can it be dismissed as merely symbolic, poetic language. It is vivid language meant to indicate the fact that judgment must fall upon the present natural order not to accomplish its dissolution but that out of judgment might emerge a new redeemed order. Paul says that the whole creation must be delivered from its bondage of decay to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8:21).¹

These two last chapters depict the consummation of the plan of salvation. They speak of a real world, though one necessarily set forth under metaphors from the Old Testament. All the covenant promises are now portrayed as fulfilled, and the Edenic life is seen restored.

The old atmospheric heavens and scarred earth surface pass away, and with them the sea as we now know it. There is no reason to believe that there shall be no sea at all in the new world, but it will not be as now--a threat, a danger, a separator.

The capital of the new earth, already inhabited by the saved, descends from heaven.² That descent towards earth had been pictured in the previous chapter. It had ridden like Noah's ark above the flood of fire which devoured the old world. Jewish apocalyptic had much to say about a new Jerusalem coming in glory, but its seed was in the Old Testament itself, particularly such passages as Dan. 8:14 and Eze. chs. 40-48. Daniel had foretold that judgment on the desolating powers of sin would result in the cleansing and vindicating of God's sanctuary. When Gabriel interpreted this, he spoke not only of the end of sin, and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, but also of the fulfilling of all prophetic vision, and the anointing of a "most holy." The last expression pointed to God tabernacling once more with His people as of old. See Ex. 25:8. The verses before us tell of the reality thus forecast. God comes to dwell with men, and with His coming, every tear is dried, and every bitter memory by some magic alchemy becomes sweet. Lev. 26:12, the covenant promise reiterated throughout both Testaments, now finds its consummation.

Rev. 21:5-8:

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "it is done! I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."

Verse 5 reminds us of 2 Cor. 5:17, using as it does some of the same words. That which took place spiritually under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit is now fulfilled in deeper dimensions with the visible reign of the Son of God. He Himself is now present as at the opening of the Apocalypse, echoing some of the words then given. Once more John is commissioned to write, being assured that all who read and heed will inherit all things. The thirsty are assured of acceptance and refreshment. To drink is to become an overcomer. God requires nothing that He does not Himself provide for the believer. To look at the Cross is to find strength for the conflict, and joy in the battle. We can do all things required of us through Christ who strengthens us.

Those who are yet idolaters (and every sin is but a form of idolatry), lack the seed of eternal life. The "cowardly" are the ones who fear men more than they fear God. It is a relevant warning, particularly at every crisis of persecution. Those who are redeemed from the old Egyptian bondage of sin find all the commandments of God now to be promises. "Thou shalt not. ..." They have been saved from all such. The sins here listed are not those of unsought failures, and regretted lapses, but the sins of apostasy. From the Psalms, one learns that mistakes do not put one outside the covenant, but to forsake the God of the covenant deliberately is another thing. See Psa. 40:8-12; 39:7,8; 51 ;32.

Rev. 21:9-14:

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The purpose of these verses is not primarily to give a literal representation of the New Jerusalem, but to present its transcendent reality in such a manner as to arouse the longing to be there. Everything that is said, tells us also about its inhabitants. They who have been the light of the world are now to dwell in a radiant city which needs no sun. Those who have been walled about in perfect security by the Holy Spirit are now safe forever more within the walls of God's house. They can never forget that they are there solely because they accepted the covenant made with the twelve tribes, and the message of the gospel through the twelve apostles. Their foundation lies in the apostles and prophets who themselves built upon Christ the great foundation.

Rev. 21:15-21:

And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal. He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth camelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl,

and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

The city is pictured as a perfect cube, reminiscent of the holy of holies where the length, breadth and height were equal. The wall's thickness has the number associated with the sealed saints. Compare Rev. 7:1-4 and 14:1. The jewelled foundations are of the same components as the high priest's breastplate. They also are the symbols of the zodiac, but in reverse, to show separation from things pagan. With foundations of jewels, gates of pearl, and streets of gold, it is altogether such a city as makes one's mouth to water, and one's heart to pant. And these symbols themselves are but tawdry compelled with the gems of God's love and wisdom to be shared with us throughout eternity. That city is the only safe bank for our present small hoard of wealth, for down here thieves break through and steal, and moth and rust corrupt.

Rev. 21:22-27:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Here is the city without a church, for the whole city is God's temple. Glory and purity characterize it. Reviewing the characteristics of the city we note its heavenliness, revealed by heaven and by heaven brought down to earth; its divinity (v. 11), having the glory of God, with the Father and the Son and the Spirit as its temple; its security (vv. 12-14), foundations, walls, angels at the gates are all symbols of release from anxiety and care; its symmetry (v. 15), everything is appropriate in size and position; its amplitude (v. 16), the walls stretch over 1,500 miles and it lies foursquare—a challenge to all to comprehend what is the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of God's love; its costliness (vv. 18-21), all that men value most contribute to it, but it is the pearled gates that remind us that all the glory came through pain.³

Some have wondered at the reference to "the nations." Caird, Barclay, and others have seen here the hope of universalism, but the context surely does not support this. All who cling to abominations will not be forced into heaven. The key to the puzzle, as Beckwith points out, is that John has taken over from the prophets many figures of speech from the Old Testament, with their mingled series of promises applying to various times. These two chapters are a marvelous fabric of the ancient promises now set forth as fulfilled.

The Lamb's book of life has been mentioned recurringly throughout Revelation. See 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15. To be in the Lamb's book of life means that we are "in Christ" and vice versa. It means that we have passed from death unto life by faith in His merits. To be in His book is to be in His mind and heart. We can never be forgotten nor neglected. He that touches us touches "the apple of His eye." The verse read as a whole makes it clear that those in the Lamb's book cannot practice evil. They would rather have Christ than all that the world, the flesh, and the devil can offer. Justification is distinct from sanctification, but it is never separate. God gives His gifts with both hands, and justifies none whom He does not sanctify.

Rev. 22:1-5:

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Water, food, light, and God Himself are the great needs of all, and all exist in abundance for the saved. The first three are the emblems of the fourth. He is the embodiment and the source of all. With

God is the fountain of life, for He only has inherent immortality, life in himself. In Him is light and no darkness at all. The waters clear as crystal from his throne symbolize the perfect untainted blessings that flow from His goodness. In this life, we need water for cleansing, and for refreshment. Both symbolize man's spiritual needs. In this life, all we receive is but a drop by the way, but in the life to come we will be enveloped in the sea of the divine goodness (Rom. 8:23).

The blessings of the first Paradise are now restored. So we see the tree of life--but not now a single tree--rather, as Ezekiel pictured it, avenues of trees on both sides of the river of life. See Eze. 47:12. Says Simcox:

... we should probably translate, "Midway between the street of it and the river, on this side and on that": "i.e. there is a "street" or boulevard on each side of the river, and parted from the river by a sort of quay, in the midst of which is a row of the trees. It can hardly be meant that there is a single plant of the tree, as in the old Paradise (Gen. ii. 9), . . . 4

"The healing of the nations" does not imply the existence of sickness in the new world, but implies that all our lack in the old world will now be made up.

The fact that the tree yields a different kind of fruit every month indicates that the usual cycle of gradual production will be by-passed. It "expresses the absolute triumph of life over death."⁵ But the chief joy of the new environment is expressed in verses 3 and 4. We shall see and worship Him who has loved us from before our birth, and who guided our feet when we knew Him not.

In the divine name on the forehead we have a reflection of Gen. 1:26 and Ex. 28:36-38. Adam was made originally in likeness to God's character, and now this likeness through glorification has been restored. This was imaged by the high priest's golden plate bearing the words "holiness to the Lord." The seal of God (Rev. 7:1) pointed to the same ultimate blessing of the final restoration of the image of God. When a man was made in the likeness of God, then the Sabbath was introduced, and since that time the second has ever been a sign of the first. Compare Eph. 4:23-24 and Heb. 4:1-10 with Gen. 1:26; 2:1-3.

"The Lord God will be their light" should read "The Lord God will shine upon them." It is an allusion to the ancient benediction of Num. 6:25. In the prospect of reigning with Him for ever and ever we see the fulfillment of the promise in Rev. 3:21. It is a fitting conclusion to the dazzling vision of the city of God.

Rev. 22:6-7:

And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. And behold, I am coming soon." Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

Now begins the epilogue of the book which must be compared with the prologue of 1:1-11. Let us note the parallels.

1:1 Revelation of Christ sent by angel; "things which must shortly come to pass";
22:6 Angel sent to show "things which must shortly be done."

1:3 Blessing on those who heed;
22:7 Blessing on those who heed;
22:18,19 Warning to those who do not heed, who add or subtract.

1:4-6 Greeting to the Churches;
22:16 Exhortation and testimony to the Churches.

1:7,8 "Behold, he comes"; Alpha and Omega.
22:12,13 "Behold, I come quickly"; Alpha and Omega.

1:9,10 Opening Setting; 22:8
Concluding Setting.6

As Strand points out, these parallels occur largely, but not entirely, in reverse sequence.

2:7 The tree of life 22:2
3:5 The book of life 21:27
2:11 The second death 21:8

3:12 The New Jerusalem 21:10
3:12 God's name written on His people 22:4
3:21 The throne 22:3
3:14 faithful and true 21:5
2:7,11,17,26; The overcomers 21:7
3:5,12,21

Many have pointed out that the sentences of this last section seem disconnected and abrupt. But this also is an artistic feature. What we have here are epigrammatic statements summing up the great ideas of the book, particularly those of certainty and imminence. The prophecies are sure and their fulfillment is soon coming. Christ's last words are words of warning because we are so prone to forget and wander.

There is within most of us a tinge of rebellion at the promise, "I am coming soon" when we know that it was made so long ago, and yet He tarries. We have previously shown that the tarrying is our fault, not His. A church that truly knows the gospel cannot but share it with the world, and the delay in the fulfillment of the great commission indicates that most who worship do so ignorantly, and thus are unable to fulfil the mandate of heaven. But He cannot come until it is fulfilled, even if ultimately He must finish the work and cut it short in righteousness through angelic ministry.

It is even more essential to sense the existential significance of our Lord's warning about time. That person is a fool, and in a dangerous place, who does not ever bear in mind the shortness of this present life in comparison with the next, and the suddenness with which death can come. No man's tarrying for Christ exceeds a lifetime, and what is that but a watch in the night, a tale that is told, grass that grows up and soon withers.

Rev. 22:8-9:

I John am he who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

Here is a repeat of 19:10. The best of men err, and err repeatedly. Conversion is no guarantee against failure. It was the Peter who opened the door of faith to Jew and Gentile who backslid at Antioch. See Gal. 6:2. And yet, in this instance, how natural to be overwhelmed as John was. But the Lord who rebukes us, continues to walk with us. See Lu. 9:55,56.

Rev. 22:10-12:

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done.

Verse 11 bears the form of a fiat. It seems to mark the close of human probation. In essence it says, 'Very soon the door will shut and no one will be able to change sides.' *The Anchor Bible* comments, "The message is strange. It appears to mean that the time for repentance is no longer available."⁷ The verse is citing Dan. 12:9 which in the LXX reads that the prophecy is sealed until men shall have chosen their course. "The culmination of iniquity in the kingdom of Antichrist and of righteousness in the testimony of the saints being the preconditions of Christ's advent, it is possible to wish for the fulfillment of the conditions, that the end may come."⁸ It is but another way of expressing that the harvest is "ripe" and ready for the Lord of the harvest and vintage to appear. See Rev. 14:14-20 and 6:10,11. Caird says of verse 11, "A plain call to the reader to put his life in order while there is still opportunity for change."⁹ And Erdman says, "The deliberate choice of each man has fixed his unalterable fate."¹⁰ Mounce says, "The time arrives when change is impossible."¹¹

In thus reminding all that there is a point of no return, and that either one grows in grace or deteriorates until a permanent hardness is reached, the angel touches a solemn note. Compare Lu. 13:25-27 and Heb. 6:4-6. Swete and Ladd also take the position of the previously cited commentators, adding to the testimony of Scripture that our Lord's pleadings and intercessions will have an end. The

ministry of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary will cease as our great King-Priest decides the destiny of all living.

Rev. 22:13-15:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.

Adam and Eve lost their robes of light when they sinned, the outward sign of the departure of the indwelling Spirit. Thus depravity ensued. Because of inherited guilt and corruption (Ro. 5:18), all have stained their robes. We are forever weaving, and we are forever staining, that robe which is to be inspected by the Judge. See Mt. 22:11. Jer. 2:22 and Zech. 3:3 underline the seriousness of every man's plight. There is but One who can wash our robes, and by union with Him through faith we are said to fulfill the vital task. To cleanse by applying blood seems ridiculous, as the preaching of the Cross appears folly to the worldly. But only Christ's shed blood can be the double cure of sin's guilt and power. We must have recourse to that blood constantly, as our garments are constantly defiled by the inevitable falling short of even the best of believers. 1 Jn. 1:8; Rom. 3:23; Mt. 6:12; Lu. 17:10. Those who refuse to wash remain "dogs and sorcerers. . .," etc. Verse 14 is the seventh and last beatitude, and it underlines the central truth of Revelation that access to God is ever only through the merits of Another. Our reward comes because He alone is righteous, and imputes His character to all the penitent.

It is important that we note the word "loves" in verse 15. Speaking the truth is a very difficult thing, for it requires more knowledge than any of us have. A lie can be told by a glance, a word, an intonation of the voice. Even facts may be so expressed as to convey a false impression. All meaningless phrases and expletives, all deceptive compliments, flattering phrases, exaggerations, misrepresentations, evasions, and inadequate expressions of reality are all forms of lying. But it is the loving of sin that leaves the soul without pardon. What we love is the most important thing about any us. If we love aright, our inevitable deficiencies are not accounted to us, but we remain "complete in Him" and "accepted in the beloved" and without condemnation. See Col. 2:10; Eph. 1:6; Rom. 8:1.

Rev. 22:16:

"I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star."

It is the true King of Israel, the long-promised Messiah, David's Lord and David's Son, the star that was to arise out of Jacob, the day-star from on high, who now speaks in this revelation.

Rev. 22:17: T

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let him who hears say, "Come." And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.

The gospel word "come" is sounded some five hundred times in Scripture and it is sounded not for the whole or the worthy, but for the thirsty and the beggarly. This Man still receives sinners. He goes to be guest with him that is a sinner. And once we publicans have heard, we too must proclaim the invitation to others — let him that heareth say "Come." Coming is believing, and believing is receiving. See Jn. 1:12. The gift is "without price" like all gifts. Does this surprise us? Are not all the best things beyond price?—the sunshine and the rain, the smile of a friend, or the embrace of a spouse. We have a special word for one who sells her love. What do we make of God if we think His favors are to be brought? Let us rather believe that while we are worse than we have ever dreamed, He is better than we have ever imagined. Come. Man was lost by taking. He is saved the same way. "Take the water of life. . ." "Take, eat, this is my body." "Drink ye all of it."

Rev. 22:18-19:

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

This warning particularly applies to the Apocalypse, but it fits all of Scripture. With this chapter, the canon of Holy Writ closes. Those who had seen the revelation of God in the flesh and have given their testimony accordingly, seal the divine revelation for all time. Nothing since the testimony of those who saw the dying and resurrected Christ can be included within Scripture. The gifts of the Spirit have not ceased, but even their fruit is not canonical. We must not imperil the once for allness of the revelation through Christ. Heb. 1:1. All else is to be tested by it, and that which tests is more precise than what it tests. Absolute infallibility in matters of saving faith is only to be found in the Word of God. That Word is the sole arbiter of doctrine, the only rule of faith. Nothing else should be heard as authority from the pulpit. While we thank God for the words of spirit-filled men and women over the centuries, none of them stand equal with, or are authoritative commentary upon, that Word which was given "once for all time" in the first century of our era. Jude 3. We "take away" from the Word if we allow anything else to occupy its place, or to reign over it. We "add" to it if we urge as tests that which it does not urge.

Rev. 22:20-21:

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

The last prophecy as the first (Gen. 3:15) is of the return of Christ, the "blessed hope" which alone can buoy the spirits up amid gloom and trial. One thing only we need to be ready for that event--"the grace of the Lord Jesus." Grace and gift are the same word. When we believe on the Saviour and accept as done for us personally all that He did, then we have the gift of grace--the righteousness of Christ unto eternal life, "unto all and upon all who believe."

As Luther meditated on the sinfulness of his own heart and the wonder of the grace of Christ, he avowed, "If I look at myself, I do not see how I could ever be saved, but if I look at Christ, I do not see how I could ever be lost."

Thus the believer can raise himself up through faith alone and gain a comfort that is sure and firm; and he need not grow pale at the sight of sin, death, the devil, or any evil. The more the devil attacks him. . . the more hope he acquires in the midst of all these terrors and says: "Mr. Devil, do not rage so. Just take it easy! For there is One who is called Christ. In Him I believe. . . He is your devil, you devil, because He has captured and conquered you, so that you cannot harm me any longer, or anyone else who believes in him." The devil cannot overcome this faith, but he is overcome by it.¹²

Give this book of Revelation a primary place in the mind, and the Christ it reveals will possess us, guide us, use us, and redeem us "for his righteousness ' sake."

For the saints the book had been written; to them it had been spoken: they alone can keep it. Let no man who is not in Christ imagine that the Revelation of St. John is addressed to him. Let no man imagine that, if he has not found Christ already, he will find Him here. The book will rather perplex and puzzle, more probably offend him. Only in that union with Christ which brings with it the hatred of sin and the love of holiness, which teaches us that we are "orphans" in a present world, which makes us wait for the manifestation of the kingdom of God as they that wait for the morning, can we enter into the spirit of the Apocalypse, listen to its threatenings without thinking them too severe, or so embrace its promises that they shall heighten rather than lower the tone of our spiritual life. Here, if anywhere, faith and love are the key to knowledge, not knowledge the key to faith and love.¹³

How appropriate that the closing expression of the Apocalypse, its benediction should be about grace. The whole Bible has grace as its theme. Grace gave us life, extended our probation when we deserved death, provided a Saviour and a Sanctifier. Grace forgave our sins through the Cross, wrote the divine law on our hearts, and indited the three thousand promises. It has sustained us through conflict, and strengthened us for service.

Our only hope lies in the grace of God, but that grace is a shoreless ocean whereof all may drink. It is a boundless atmosphere which all may breathe an inexhaustible store of delectable food of which all

may partake. This grace is sufficient for you, whoever you are, whatever you are, whatever you have been whatever awaits you. Grace is God's inextinguishable love for the unlovely, His mercy for those who have been merciless, His forgiveness for those who have been unforgiving, His care for the uncaring, His strength for the strengthless, His purity for the impure, His righteousness for the unrighteous. By accepting this grace and being transformed thereby, the weakest and worst of us can triumphantly proclaim with the apostle:

What then shall we say to this?
If God is for us, who is against us?
He who did not spare his own Son
but gave him up for us all,
will he not also give us all things with him?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?
It is God who justifies;
who is to condemn?

Is it Christ Jesus, who died,
yes, who was raised from the dead,
who is at the right hand of God,
who indeed intercedes for us?
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation,
or distress,
or persecution,
or famine,
or nakedness,
or peril,
or sword?

As it is written,
"For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.
For I am sure that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Ro. 8:31-39)

Amen!

APPENDIX ON AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND TEXT OF THE APOCALYPSE

[\(TOC\)](#)

Authorship

While a few scholars such as E. Stauffer believe that the five Johannine writings are from one author, and that author the apostle John,¹ the majority believe the issue must remain an open question.² It is not possible to prove the identity of the John of Rev. 1:4,9, with any other John of the New Testament.³

Until the end of the 18th century the Apocalypse was generally ascribed to the apostle John, but the following century saw many scholars opposing this primitive tradition. The great difference in language and style between John's Gospel and the Revelation was the chief reason for this dissidence. Furthermore, an increasing number viewed the fourth Gospel as non-apostolic.

In recent years there appear to be hints of another possible change of tide in critical opinion. Otto Piper has written as follows in a noteworthy article:

Andererseits sind die Argumente gegen die Tradition in neuester Zeit beträchtlich geschwächt worden, seitdem Forschern für einen gemeinsamen Verfasser der J. und des JohEv eingetreten sind. Dass die Behauptung der Unvereinbarkeit der beiden Bücher stark übertrieben ist, ehrt ein Vergleich der Sprache. Beide haben gegenüber dem Übrigen NT eine ganze Anzahl zentraler Begriffe gemeinsam. . . .⁴

But he concludes: "Zusammenfassend wird man sagen dürfen, dass die Bestreitung der apostolischen Verfasserschaft der J. noch eine Reihe ungelöster Probleme enthält."⁵

We think that for the present there is nothing to add to these conclusions by Piper regarding the matter of authorship.

Date

It is quite clear from the book that it was penned during a period of persecution for the infant church.⁶ Thus most critics have chosen either the reign of Nero or that of Domitian as the time of composition. Against the former date is the fact that the writer obviously considers the church to be in serious danger of complacency and worldliness, beyond that which Paul warned against in this time.⁷ Arguments based on passages such as Rev. 17:9f., and 17:11 are not conclusive as the divergent interpretations testify. A number of early writers such as Irenaeus assert with definiteness that the book originated at the time of Domitian.⁸ The fact that the threat of increasing pressure towards emperor-worship is alluded to throughout Revelation indicates at least that the book was probably written at some time during the last third of the century, and that Domitian's reign was a likely occasion.

In summary:

Die verschiedenen Versuche, aus dem Buche selbst Indizien für das Datum zu finden, beruhen zT auf fehlerhafter Exegese, zT sind die angezogenen Stellen nicht eindeutig genug. Immerhin lassen die Erwähnung des erneuten Erstarkens der jüdischen Feindschaft gegen die Christen und die Hinweise auf--Christenverfolgungen darauf schließen, dass die Schrift, wie schon Irenäus annahm, gegen Ende der Regierungszeit Domitians (+96) geschrieben wurde.⁹

Text

Despite the fact that "the Greek text of Revelation is more uncertain in some respects than that of other books of the New Testament,"¹⁰ yet it raises "few major problems."¹¹

The vast majority of the more than 1600 variants are minor in character, consisting of the usual differences in word order, the addition or omission of articles and connectives, synonym substitution, and the "correction" of the writer's grammatical "errors." Thus there does not exist any real question regarding the significance of any given sentence or paragraph which a better text could solve.¹²

Furthermore, it must be said, that despite the massive learning and equally massive imagination of R. H. Charles there are no good grounds for assuming dislocations or rearrangements of the original text.¹³

(See last page of this volume for information on how to order further copies of this book, or other books by the same author.)

FOOTNOTES FOR VOLUME TWO [\(TOC\)](#)

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Desmond Ford, *Daniel*.
2. The only other passage besides Lev. 16 which combines "transgressions," "sins," "iniquities," "atonement," "the most holy place," is Daniel 9:24.
3. 1 Peter 2:9,10.
4. James P. Martin, "The Last Judgment," *Prophecy*, ed. Amerding and Gasque, pp. 197-99.
5. Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (herein after referred to as *Hebrews*), p. 351.
6. ch. 19:11-14.
7. C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night*, p. 93.
8. H. R. Mackintosh.
9. E. Kasemann.
10. T. W. Manson, *The Teachings of Jesus*, p. 284.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. Archbishop R. C. Trench, *The Epistles to the Seven Churches* (hereinafter referred to as *Seven Churches*), quoted by A. Pieters in *Revelation*, p. 102.
2. H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. ccxiii, quoted in A. Pieters, *Revelation*, p. 103.
3. Theodore Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Vol. I, p. 207, quoted in A. Pieters, *Revelation*, p. 103.
4. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 56.
5. W. G. Moorehead, *Revelation*, pp. 46-8.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
7. Herbert H. Gowan, *The Revelation of S. John the Divine* (hereinafter referred to as *Revelation*), p. 15.
8. "Revelation," ed. E. R. Craven in J. P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures—Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical*, trans. and ed. by Philip Schaff (hereinafter referred to as E. R. Craven "Revelation"), Vol. 12, (second division), p. 141.
9. Cited in Gary Cohen, *Understanding Revelation*, pp. 57-8.
10. Archbishop Trench, *Seven Churches*, quoted in Lange's *Commentary on Revelation*, vol. 12 (second division), pp. 139-40.
11. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, pp. 176-79.
12. Philip Mauro, *Patmos*, pp. 138-39.
13. J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, Vol. I, pp. 142-45, quoted in Thiele, "Revelation," pp. 37-8. ". . . the Prophetic Spirit has, out of the synchronistic coordination of the seven Asiatic churches, indubitably made an ideal succession which, in its beginning and end, is at the same time unmistakably historical. For Ephesus is manifestly a picture of the Church toward the end of the apostolic time, whilst Laodicea pictures it as it shall be in the last time, according to the fundamental traits of that time, as predicted Matt. xxiv. 37, sqq. And thus individual attempts at exposition, conceiving of the seven churches as historical periods, may be worthy of notice; in any case, the ideal foundation, the prophetic view of a spiritual world-historical process of development, such as we have sketched above, must be retained." E. R. Craven, "Revelation," p. 139.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 24. See also p. 18. "The basic ideas of the whole book are embedded in chapter one." Frank Stagg, "Interpreting the Book of Revelation," *Review and Expositor*, lxxiii, vol. 3, Summer, 1975, p. 336.
2. *Ibid.*

3. "Apocalyptic literature was first so called after the best known member of the genre: the New Testament Apocalypse or 'The Revelation to John' (as it is entitled in RSV). The extension of the term from the particular to the general is apt, for the Revelation to John exhibits the essential feature of all apocalypses--the 'unveiling' to a human being by divine or angelic power of things not normally accessible to knowledge." F. F. Bruce, "A Reappraisal of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," *The Revival of Apocalyptic, Review and Expositor*, lxxii, No. 3, Summer, 1975, p. 305.
4. F. Dusterdieck, *Revelation*, p. 96.
5. "The great fault of the interpretation of the Book of Revelation has been, and still is, to take figurative language literally; and this has led to manifold errors and even to contradiction of other plain passages of Scripture." C. H. Little, *Revelation*, foreword.
6. See appendix on authorship, p. 751.
7. "An important clue to the existence of a fixed tradition of Jesus' *logia* was found in the expression 'the testimony of Jesus.' Our investigation has demonstrated that 'Jesus' in this expression is the subjective genitive, in which case John is speaking of an entity derived from Jesus. This entity was one which men 'held' -in similar fashion and terminology as the Jewish tradition was 'held.' It characterized their lives and was the cause of much persecution. Moreover, the people of Asia Minor to whom the letters of Rev. 2 and 3 were addressed were exhorted to hold fast to the teachings which they received. They were told to 'remember how they received and heard, and to keep it.' The proper object of these verbs was shown to have been the teachings from and about Jesus." Louis A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse*, p. 222-23.
8. A. Plummer, "Revelation," *The Pulpit Commentary*.(hereinafter referred to as "Revelation"), p. 10.
9. Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 54.
10. "The commission given here to St. John resembles that given to Moses; and it will be seen that the Apocalypse presents a continuous series of typical analogies between the Church of Christ, whose future fortunes he reveals, and the history of the Israelitish Church led by Moses out of Egypt, in its pilgrimage through the wilderness, toward Canaan, the figure of heaven." C. Wordsworth, "Revelation," p. 167.
11. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 7.
12. Cited by I. Williams, *The Apocalypse with Notes and Reflections* (hereinafter referred to as *Apocalypse*), p. 10.
13. "The frequent citations in this, the first chapter of the Apocalypse, from the ancient Hebrew Prophets, especially from Daniel and Zechariah, are doubtless designed to lead the reader to regard the Apocalypse as a sequel to, and continuation of, Hebrew prophecy, and as dictated by the same Spirit Who spake by its mouth. And since the Apocalypse is the last prophetic Book of Holy Scripture, it may be regarded as the consummation of all God's prophetic Revelations to the world." C. Wordsworth, "Revelation," p. 168.
14. Says Beckwith on this passage, "The Exordium closes fittingly with a solemn announcement of the Lord's coming, the thought of which underlies what precedes, though not formally expressed. The whole future foretold in the book centers in the parousia, a distinct announcement of which is therefore to be expected in these opening words. These verses have been called the Motto of the book, as summarizing its central theme." I. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, pp. 256-57.
15. See *TDNT*, III, p. 915.
16. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 23.
17. C. Wordsworth, "Revelation," p. 168.
18. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, pp. 11-12.
19. F. F. Bruce, "The Revelation to John," p. 631.
20. The only "name" given to Sunday in the New Testament is "the first day of the week." It is not given any sanctified title, nor are there any admonitions regarding its observance. "The fact that Sunday is specifically referred to in the New Testament as *mia sabbaton* (literally, 'the first of the sabbath') should raise serious questions about the wisdom of identifying Sabbath and Sunday. The New Testament clearly designates Sunday as a day other than the Sabbath." Robert A. Morey, "Is Sunday the 'Christian Sabbath'?" *Baptist Reformation Review*, first quarter, 1979, No. 1, Vol. 8, p. 17.
21. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 3.
22. W. A. Criswell, *Revelation*, vol. 5, p. 66.

23. The Apocalypse sets forth in dramatic imagery what Romans presents in didactic prose. Note the following from Roetzel. "The belief that the righteous will be vindicated in the judgment was related to a yet more significant theme—that God himself will be vindicated. Since apocalyptic is not primarily anthropocentric but theocentric in emphasis, the task of judgment is to reveal and to establish the sovereignty of God and his right action as much as it is to vindicate the righteousness of his people." *Judgment in the Community*, p. 35. "This survey of the concept of righteousness in apocalyptic shows that this literature is not, as is often claimed, writings of despair but books of hope. Russell rightly says: 'Behind the eschatological hopes of the apocalyptists was the deep set conviction that the righteousness of God would at last be vindicated, that good would be rewarded and wickedness punished.' The apocalyptists looked forward to the time when the promises made to ancient Israel would be fulfilled and God's righteousness would be vindicated." *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37. "Other materials from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha parallel the justification-of-God theme in Paul. Romans does refer to the relationship of righteousness to man; however, this righteousness is a righteousness which comes from God (i.e. as God's vindicating action) and this obedience is an obedience which is a fitting response to God's saving work. In Romans 1:17-3:20 the central issue apparently is theodicy. . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 76. "No longer need judgment in Paul be understood in purely individualistic terms; rather, it applies to the whole inhabited world. No longer does Paul's central question appear to be 'How can a man get right with God and thus escape the impending judgment?' but rather 'how is God's righteousness vindicated so that all men are manifestly without excuse, unable in any way to impugn God's judgments of men?' Through his Gospel, Paul answers, God is vindicating his righteousness. For repentant sinners God vindicates his righteousness through his saving action, but for those who impugn his justice and reject his Son, God's Gospel is wrath and fury." *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

24. H. M. Feret, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 61.

25. R. H. Charles, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 27.

26. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 15.

27. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 26-27.

28. "The judicial, punitive Power of God's Holy WORD, as an instrument of His retributive justice and indignation on the guilty, for their disobedience, is displayed in the Apocalypse in awful characters, see ii. 12, 16, and particularly xix. 15. 21. This attribute of God's Word is carefully to be observed, as serving to explain some Visions in this Book which would otherwise be obscure, and particularly xi. 3-6." C. Wordsworth, "Revelation," p. 170.

29. H. Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, pp. 43-44.

30. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, pp. 97-98.

31. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 26.

32. P. Mauro, *Patmos*, p. 41.

33. J. Moffatt, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. R. Nicoll, vol. 5, p. 347.

34. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 82.

35. J. P. Lange, quoted in Joseph Tanner, *Daniel and the Revelation: The Chart of Prophecy, and our Place in It* (hereinafter referred to as *Daniel and the Revelation*), p. 274. 1

36. Archbishop Trench, quoted in "Revelation," ed. E. R. Craven, p. 106.

37. J. E. Fison, *The Christian Hope. The Presence and the Parousia*, p. 32.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1. Merrill C. Tenney, *Revelation*, pp. 50-51.

2. J. P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 12, p. 114.

3. Ernest M. Bengel, quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 113-14.

4. Samuel Fuller, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (hereinafter referred to as *Revelation*), pp. 86-87.

5. M. C. Tenney, *Revelation*, pp. 68-69.

6. What James P. Martin says of Matthew applies to all of Scripture, but especially the New Testament. "Matthew always has two perversions in view, both of which arise from a basic misunderstanding of the place of the law in Christian life. These perversions are: complete rejection of any validity to law (antinomianism), and assertion that the law in the sense of casuistic legalism is absolutely central to Christian life (legalism).

According to Matthew (Sermon on the Mount, especially in 5:16ff.), the gospel saves us from both perversions." "The Last Judgment," in Amerding & Gasque, *Prophecy*, p. 194.

7. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, pp. 122-23.

8. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, pp. 18-19.

9. J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon on the New Testament*, vol. 4, *ad loc.* Rom. 1.

10. Thomas D. Bernard, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, p. 156.

11. E. M. Bengel, quoted in Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 121.

12. Charles H. Spurgeon, quoted in Taylor G. Bunch, *The Seven Epistles of Christ*, p. 123.

13. W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (hereinafter referred to as *Letters*), pp. 42-43.

14. Robert H. Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 92-93.

15. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, V. VI, Ch. Ixiv., p. 229.

16. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, v. 30.

17. W. M. Ramsay, *Letters*, pp. 281, 195.

18. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 98.

19. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 144.

20. *Ibid.*

21. W. H. Simcox, *Revelation*, p. 58.

22. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 144.

23. Taylor G. Bunch, *The Seven Epistles of Christ*, pp. 152-53.

24. Leon Morris, *Revelation*, p. 62.

25. W. H. Simcox, *Revelation*, p. 59.

26. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. 165.

27. George Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 151.

28. W. M. Ramsay, *Letters*, p. 304.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

32. ". . . she stands for one or more who, as Jezebel of old seduced Ahab from the true worship of God, encouraged disloyalty among Christians." Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 65. "The name Jezebel is doubtless a symbolical one, like Sodom and Egypt (xi. 8), and Babylon, as used in this book. . . ." C. Wordsworth, " *Revelation* p. 177.

33. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 158.

34. J. A. Smith, "Revelation," *An American Commentary on the New Testament* (herein after referred to as "Revelation"), pp. 54-5.

35. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 54.

36. *Ibid.*

37. S. Fuller, *Revelation*, p. 91.

38. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. 103.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

40. H. Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, pp. 102-3.

41. The diseases consequent on literal harlotry are represented as a warning of the consequences resulting from spiritual fornication. In like manner, fire, the punishment of whoredom (Levit. xxi. 9), is, in the Apocalypse, the penalty of the harlotries of the corrupt Church (xviii. 8)." C. Wordsworth, "Revelation," p. 177.

42. "... mysteries, or deep and therefore secret things. . . can be understood only by *batea* with evident allusion to the common views of the heathen respecting their mysteries, e.g. the mysteries of Eleusis, &c. The heretics here stigmatized undoubtedly pretended to a deeper, i.e. more profound knowledge of Christianity than others." Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 483.
43. "The conquerors are to share in Christ's Messianic rule (verse 26f. quoting Ps. 2. 8f.) and to be given THE MORNING STAR who is Christ himself (22. 16); that is to say, in the later imagery of ch. 19. 7, they will be married to the Lamb." Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 65.
44. W. A. Criswell, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 183.
45. W. M. Ramsay, *Letters*, pp. 44-45.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 369.
48. W. A. Criswell, *Revelation*, pp. 88-89.
49. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 48.
50. W. H. Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century*, pp. 11-15.
51. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 112.
52. W. H. Ramsay, *Letters*, p. 45.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 399.
54. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, pp. 171-72.
55. H. Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, pp. 132-33.
56. C. Wordsworth, *Revelation*, p. 179.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
58. W. H. Ramsay, *Letters*, pp. 415-17.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 422-23.
60. Adolph Saphir, *The Lord's Prayer*, p. 319.
61. Gwynn Dalrymple, "The Church of Laodicea," in *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 14, 1933.
62. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, pp. 179-80.
63. Paul Minear, *I Saw a New Earth* (hereinafter referred to as *New Earth*), p. 226.
64. See C. F. Walther's *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, especially pp. 6-20.
65. E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.
66. Rom. 5:12-18.
67. J. Monro Gibson, "The Gospel of St. Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, pp. 349-52.
68. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, pp. 243-44.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 60.
2. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (hereinafter referred to as *Revelation*), p. 60. Note this is different from the shortened form "Revelation" by the same author. The former is a book, the latter an article.
3. George Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 102.

4. Thomas Hardy, *The Dynasts*.
5. "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," by Isaac Watts (second stanza), quoted by Daniel Russell in *Preaching the Apocalypse*, p. 113.
6. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 310.
7. T. B. Baines, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (hereinafter referred to as *Revelation*) , p. 1.
8. William Durham, *Maranatha, the Second Advent, or, Christ's Coming to Judgment*, p. 32, cited in Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation, Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660*, p. 38.
9. Robert Purnell, *A Little Cabinet Richly Stored with all Sorts of Heavenly Varieties and Soul-Reviving Influences*, p. 425, cited by Bryan W. Ball, *op. cit.* , p. 92.
10. Justin A. Smith, *Epistles*, p. 96. Fairbairn affirms the same. "It is clear from this, that by the opening of the book something more must have been meant than the mere disclosure of its contents; it must have involved, besides, the personal appropriation of these, with a view to their actual accomplishment. Nothing else could have created so gigantic a difficulty. It is clear, also, from the designation of Christ on that occasion, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Root of David, that the book must have respect to a work of war and conquest—a work in which heroic energy and lion-like strength should require to be put forth, and that too for the purpose of vindicating the peculiar honour and blessing secured in covenant to the house of David. What, then, was this? No other than the universal possession and sovereignty of the earth, the right to reign over it, to its uttermost bounds, in the name of the Lord (Gen. xlix. 9, 10; Num. xxiv. 9; Ps. ii., xxii., etc.) The book, therefore, with which none but this royal personage could intermeddle, was, in other words, the book of the inheritance—laying open the way by which the possession must be made good." *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 402. Says Paul Minear, ". . . the work of all four riders should be dealt with together as various description of a single set of consequences released by the Lamb's victory." *New Earth*, p. 74.
11. J. A. Seiss, *Apocalypse*, V I, pp. 267-80.
12. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation* (hereinafter referred to as *Apocalypse*), p. 260.
13. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 87.
14. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," *The Anchor Bible*, p. 102.
15. A. R. Fausset, "Revelation," *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical*, V, VI, p. 67.
16. J. A. Seiss, *Apocalypse*, V I, p. 280.
17. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 404.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 403-04.
19. E. R. Thiele, "Revelation," p. 105.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER NINETEEN

1. J. R. Lowell, cited in T. F. Glasson, *The Revelation of John* (hereinafter referred to as *Revelation*), p. 10.
2. C. Wordsworth, *Revelation*, p. 181.
3. Donald W. Richardson, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (hereinafter referred to as *Revelation*), p. 51. Weird as it may be, the great majority of fundamentalists in the western world believe it. "The Scofield Reference Bible of 1917, followed by Lindsey, puts the Rapture at Revelation 4:1 when the first voice tells John to 'Come up hither.' Why not have another Rapture at Revelation 11; 12 where the same thing is said? The New Scofield Reference Bible of 1967 retains this theory, but with great caution that says only that this view 'has been taken.' Such caution is wise, since Lindsey finds no passage to support this view." Dale Moody, "The Eschatology of Hal Lindsey," p. 275.
- "J. N. Darby, C. I. Scofield, and millions of their followers, including Hal Lindsey, have put this human and unfounded theory in the place of the plain teaching of the Bible. Not one verse in the Bible teaches it. If so, let Lindsey speak. Jesus spoke and said 'after that tribulation' (Mark 13:24-27)." *Ibid.*
- ". . . it is argued that the absence of the word 'church' after the vision of the risen Lord in the midst of the churches in chs. 1-3 is evidence that the church is raptured at 4:1. Why not argue that the church has no place in the new heaven and the new earth, since the word church does not appear in chs. 21, 22? The word church appears in the vision about the church, but synonyms are found frequently during the Tribulation, e.g. saints, brethren, my people." *Ibid.*, p. 277.
4. Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-up*, p. 37ff. But Professor F. F. Bruce warns against the simplicity

of our assertion here. More research is needed as to the origin of the partial rapture theory.

5. H. Grattan Guinness, *The Approaching End of the Age*, p. 134.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.

7. D. Russell, *Preaching the Apocalypse*, p. 111.

8. "The Christian readers of the Apocalypse, in coming upon the word PRESBYTEROI, would not be at all inclined to think of angels, because in the Scriptures angels are never referred to by that title (not even in Is. 24:23, according to our opinion). On the contrary, however, it would be entirely natural for them to imagine a sort of privileged elite of the saved in heaven, very much like the picture of the presbyters grouped around the bishops." A. Feuillet, *Apocalypse*, p. 87.

"Michl sees angels in the figure of the four living creatures of 4:5-8 and the seven spirits of 1:4; however, he insists that such is not the case with regard to the 24 elders of 4:4, 10; 5:6, 7, 11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4. He develops this point in his fine work *Die 24 Alttestes in der Apokalypse des hi Johannes* (Munche, 1938). He admits that white robes could pertain to angels as well as to men; however, he insists that nowhere in Scripture do we find men crowned and seated on thrones. The elders of the Apocalypse must be glorified men; their white robes and golden crowns symbolize victory. Furthermore since they are clearly distinct from the martyrs and from the multitude of the redeemed, they must be none other than saints of the Old Testament.

"P. Benoit considers Michl's position 'quite likely,' in his very complimentary review of it in *RB* 1940, pp. 282-84. Wikenhauser follows it in his commen tary. Earlier, Skrinjar had arrived at partly the same conclusion, in *Viginti quattuor Seniores*, in *VD* 1936, pp. 333-38 and 361-68. We too have taken a similar position in *Les vingt-quatre vieillards de l'Apocalypse*, *RB* 1958, pp. 5-32, and reproduced in *Etudes Johanniques*, Bruges-Paris, 1962, pp. 193-227 (English edition *Johannine Studies*, New York, 1964)." Pace Bornkamm, *TWNT*, tome VI, articles on *PRESBY.*, pp. 668-70.

9. I. Williams, *Apocalypse*, pp. 66-67.

10. J. A. Seiss, *Apocalypse*, p. 105. 283 11. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

12. J. A. Criswell, *Revelation*, III, p. 56.

13. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 123.

14. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 80.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY

1. "The prophet is seeking to describe the repercussions, the echoes, the continuing effects of the passion story. What kind of conflict reached its climax in the slaughter of the Lamb and had its resolution in his victory? Several affirmations can be made. The vision deals with a struggle which is as firmly anchored in historical experience as is the cross; yet the struggle is also as universal in its range as the whole creation. Its origin is the creative work of God, its goal the praise of God by every creature. It is a conflict so hidden by the cross that victory is seen and shared only by those who join in the doxologies (ch. 5). Those who worship the Lamb are plunged into the same conflict. For example, each of the four horsemen symbolizes sacrifices elsewhere made obligatory by Christ for his followers. He had come to bring a sword, not peace: he had called on them to renounce all their possessions. Unless they carried their crosses they could not join his company." Paul Minear, *New Earth*, p. 78. . .

"In chapter four the basic question is 'What makes God worthy to receive glory, honor, power?' ; the basic answers being provided by the hymns (4:8-11). In chapter 5 the basic question applies to the Lamb. No doubt is left concerning his credentials. In chapter 6 and 7 the key question is then applied to fellowslaves and brothers. It is simply another way of asking the questions raised in the seven letters: who will prove that they have ears to hear? Who will become victors? And the basic answer is the same: those who remain faithful to God's purpose and verify it. Those who, like the Lamb, are holy, true, and patient through every ordeal and temptation. Are they worthy? Will they earn the right to receive God's brand on their foreheads, the mark of God's true slaves?" *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

". . . The Lamb himself will either approve or reject those who have pledged their allegiance to him. In either case, his action in breaking the seals (notice the unflinching repetition of 'the Lamb' in the first sentence of all seven) is a function of that victory by which he proved his own worthiness. His conquest then had become the criterion of true victory now (6:2). He continues to take peace from the earth and to bring a sword which turns men against one another (6:4). The conflict can only be resolved by the loyal endurance of those who fully understand the mode of Christ's presence within it." *Ibid.*, p. 81.

2. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, pp. 311-12.
 3. Charles Rolls, *The King's Own Honors Roll*, comment on Rev. 6:2.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
 5. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, pp. 124-25.
 6. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 131.
 7. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, pp. 127-2
 8. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.
 9. T. F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, p. 52.
 10. O. Cullmann marshalls the reasons for his opinions as follows: "First of all, we must note that the description of this first rider has no connection with the sinister aspect of the other three. On the contrary, he is rather a radiant figure; he is seated upon a white horse, and when we remember that white is always represented as a Heavenly quality, it makes us question the theory that this first rider, like the other three, also had to pour out an eschatological plague upon the earth. Even the crown with which he is adorned gives him rather the air of a force for good. Finally, it is said of him: 'He came forth conquering and to conquer.'" But the verb 'to conquer' (in Revelation) does not carry with it the negative sense of 'conquering by violence', but, on the contrary, it describes the quality of God's action. Therefore it is very improbable that, as is usually said, this first rider must mean some military power, like Rome or Parthia. To me this seems out of the question, because this rider would then have the same task as the second rider who sits upon a red horse; of whom it is said explicitly: 'To him it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another.'
- "Who then is this first rider? This becomes clear when we compare this passage with the similar passage in Rev. xix. 11 ff. in which a rider on a white horse also appears. There the explanation is given: 'Behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon, called Faithful and True. . . and his name is called the Word of God.' In other words, it is his task to proclaim the Gospel to the world. This must also be the mission of the first rider, and indeed it fits in with his description. What then has the preaching of the Gospel in the world in common with the task of the other three riders? It also is a divine 'sign' (or 'promise') of the end, and, as a final offer of salvation, it runs parallel with all those horrors, which are indeed connected with the evil in man. Further, in other passages in this book the necessity for the summons to repentance before the end is emphasized. In xi. 3 the 'two witnesses' are mentioned (Elijah and Moses) who prophesy. In xiv. 6-7 is the picture of the angel with the 'eternal Gospel', who addresses a final appeal to repentance to 'every nation and tribe and tongue and people'" *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* (hereinafter referred to as *Background and Eschatology*), eds. W. D. Davies and D. Daube, pp. 415-16.
- In his article "Eschatology and Missions in the New Testament," Cullman shows that the relationship between the white horse of the gospel proclamation and the coming of Christ is also found in many other passages of the New Testament including Rom. chs. 9-11; Mk. 13:10 ff.; Mt. 28:19,20; Col. 1:22-29; 2 Thess. 2. After discussing these passages Cullman adds:
- ". . . for the fundamental insight of faith that the missionary enterprise is the work of God, which his servants are carrying out during the final period of this age, in which we are living. For this final period is a time of grace, which God in his mercy has granted us for repentance. This view springs out of the nature of New Testament eschatology." *Ibid.*, p. 420.
- ". . . it greatly intensifies the responsibility of man in view of the eschatological period of grace, and finally gives the Church its peculiar commission, namely, in God's name to carry the Gospel to all nations. This is the eschatological saving work in the period between the resurrection and the return of Christ. From every point of view, this was, theologically speaking, a deep and fruitful conception, which, alas! was soon forgotten, and only sporadically reappears as a missionary motive." *Ibid.*, p. 421.
11. A. Pieters, *Revelation*, pp. 112-13.
 12. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. xix.
 13. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, pp. 251-53.
 14. *Ibid.*, pp. 252-53.
 15. Arthur E. Bloomfield, *All Things New*, p. 115.
 16. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 252.
 17. L. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 104.

18. I. Williams, *Apocalypse*, p. 84.
19. C. Wordsworth, "*Revelation*," pp. 188-89.
20. W. Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, p. 116. ". . . reference to Matt. 24:14 renders it more probable that it is the Word of God, the Gospel of the Kingdom, that is here meant. The horse, being white, symbolizes the holiness of the Word of God. In the statement that this horseman was equipped with a bow, the meaning is simply that this warrior was prepared for conflict lying before him and that no enemy can possibly escape the deadly aim of this weapon. And in the further statement that a crown was given to him, the meaning is that victory is victor even before an arrow has been shot. The use of the two expressions that follow, 'conquering and to conquer,' emphasizes the conquering career of the Word of God both in its progressive course and in its finality." C. H. Little, *Revelation*, p. 65.
21. Paul Minear, *New Earth*, pp. 82-83.
22. In their comments on Rev. 19, Preston and Hanson write: "Here as elsewhere in Revelation John regards the persecution of the Christians as the final sign. . . ." *Revelation*, p. 119.
23. I. Williams, *Revelation*, pp. 86-87.
24. "The colour of each horse answers to the mission of the rider. Cf. Matt. x. 34-36. The white horse of the Conqueror is soon followed, through man's perversion of the Gospel, by the red horse of bloodshed: this is overruled to the clearing away of the obstacles to Christ's coming kingdom. The patient ox is the emblem of the second living creature, who, at the opening of this seal, saith, 'Come.' The saints, amidst judgments on the earth, in patience 'endure to the end.'" A. R. Fausset, "*Revelation*," p. 677. C. Wordsworth agrees. "To cite the words of the ancient Greek Expositors (in Caten. p. 265), 'In this Seal we see a prophecy of what we ourselves have seen fulfilled by the Martyrs of the Church; the Power here represented wields a sword, and takes away peace from the earth, according to Christ's own language, 'I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword'" (see Matt. x. 34).
- "This is the Exposition which all the ancient interpreters have given of this seal. Satan has already been declared by Christ Himself to be the Author of Persecution (see ii. 10). Christ rides on a horse that is white like light ; but the Enemy rides on a horse that is red like fire. The same word is applied to the Dragon, Satan, who persecutes the woman, the Church; see below, xii. 3. The rider has in his hand a sword , the instrument of persecution, and used in Scripture as the symbol of it. Thus St. Paul asks, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' (Rom. viii. 35). And the Apostle, writing under the guidance of the same Spirit who inspired St. John, adds, 'Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.' The Apostle and other martyrs were enabled to conquer him who rode on the red horse, and wielded the Sword of Persecution; they conquered him by the blood of Christ (Rev. xii. 11), Who ever rides on the White horse, and went forth conquering and to conquer. "This Exposition is further confirmed by what is said under the fifth Seal (v. 9)." C. Wordsworth, "*Revelation*," p. 189.
25. Justin A. Smith, *Epistles*, p. 96.
26. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 91.
27. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, pp. xix, 88, 126, 130, 133, 154, 208, 215, 313, 333 ff. 349, 389.
28. A. Pieters, *Revelation*, p. 68.
29. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 90.
30. See Paul Minear, *New Earth*, p. 75.
31. Thomas Wickes, *Exploring the Apocalypse*, p. 76.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.
36. See "Excursus on the Apocalypse and Christ's Olivet Sermon," vol. 1, where it discusses in detail the transposition of such subjects.
37. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 316 (emphasis ours).
38. Says C. Wordsworth, "We must adopt here the opinion of the Ancient Interpreters, who say that the present seal represents a season of spiritual scarcity, a famine of the Word of God (Amos viii. 11), a leanness of the soul (Ps. cvi. 15). The prohibition to the Rider, 'Hurt not thou the oil and the wine,' a

prohibition proceeding from the midst of the four Living Creatures, who adore Christ, is a restraint on the evil design of the Rider who would injure the spiritual oil and wine, that is, the means of Grace, which had been typified under those symbols in Ancient Prophecy (Ps. xxiii. 4, 5), and also by the words and acts of Christ, the Good Samaritan, pouring in oil and wine into the wounds of the Traveller, representing Human Nature. . . "Revelation," p. 190.

39. W. M. Ramsay, *Letters*, pp. 58-59.

40. E. R. Thiele, "Revelation," p. 105.

41. Many have suggested that the symbolism of the third seal comprehends the merchandise of holy things by apostate Christians. Mauro, for example, comments: "That we have here something directly in contrast with the gospel itself, is clear; for black is just the opposite of white. Furthermore, the gospel freely gives the bread of life, while here is something that sells the prime necessities, both for rich and poor, at fixed prices. The gospel brings blessing for all; but here is something that would 'hurt' the oil and the wine, if not restrained by divine command." *Visions*, p. 213.

One should compare with the present Scripture, Hos. 12:7 and Zech. 4. Mauro applies the latter as follows. "The correspondence between this vision and that of the black horse is remarkable, and all the more so because of the specific differences in detail—in one case a woman, in the other a man; in the one an ephah, in the other a pair of balances; in the one case the going forth being by means of wings, in the other by means of a horse. There is, of course, instruction to be had by noting these specific differences; but our concern at present is with the broad meaning of the vision. So we call attention to the one more feature only, namely the destination of the ephah, the land of Shinar, where a house was to be built for it, and where it was to be established upon its own base.

"Shinar is, of course, the mystical city Babylon of Revelation XVIII, 'that great city', in which the ultimate development of Commercialism is seen, and which is to be so terribly overthrown. There is where the ephah is enshrined, so to speak; that is to say, where the temple of Mammon is built by its devotees. Now the proper business of the true Israelite is, and always has been from the Exodus onward (Ex. 15:2), to build a habitation for Jehovah." *Visions*, pp. 18,19.

". . . the system described in Chapter XVIII, under the symbol of a great commercial city, which is the outcome of the mission of the black horse and rider has attained to full development in our day. And in that light we can also see clearly the significance of the fact that the list of the merchandise of that great city begins with 'gold and silver', and ends with 'bodies and souls of men'. The list embraces also 'wine and oil and fine flour and wheat' (Rev. 18:12,13)." *Visions*, p. 221. Says Edward Huntingford, "That was an evil day for the Church of Christ on which her ruler grasped the great imperial sword of Rome; but it was worse for her when he became a merchant of his spiritual wares; selling to the highest bidder that bread of life, that oil and wine of the Spirit of which the prophet said of old, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.'

"Well may the once 'goodly horse' of the Church, still the war-horse of the conquering religion of Jesus, be black; when he who sits in the seat of Christ and speaks in His name has become a merchant! Then was there a famine in the land. But 'not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.'

"'Passing rapidly from a condition of distress and persecution to the summit of prosperity, the Church degenerated as rapidly from her ancient purity. . . covetousness, especially, became almost a characteristic vice.' 'He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.' 'Will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread?' 'They are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.'

"'Anxious for the wool of the sheep, and not for their salvation. . . seeking not the correction of morals, but the extortion of money.' 'Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise, said the Lord to those who sold doves; meaning the priests who sold the gifts of the Holy Spirit,' says Isadora, the disciple of Chrysostom in the fifth century. So early had the sin of avarice made black the Church of Christ!

"But the evil was foreseen and predicted, and so confirms the foundations of our faith by proving the veracity and inspiration of those who foretold it all. 'I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock,' 'Men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, regarding godliness as a means of getting gain.' 'Through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.'" *The Apocalypse with a Commentary* (hereinafter referred to as *Apocalypse*), pp. 157-58.

Rolls takes the same position. "One of the darkest records in church history has been the incursion of covetous methods into the sphere of religious activities. Simon is the first mentioned as concluding that money could buy the secret of blessing Peter and John were bestowing (Acts 8:20). The work of Christ

meets every requirement of the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God, and He is to receive the utmost of compensation.

"The gifts of righteousness and life signified in the white horse are obvious benefits, 'forasmuch as the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,' whereas the black horse indicates, that spiritual resource for maintenance is invisible and hidden, and must be revealed (1 Cor. 2:9-11). When Christ ascended up on high He gave gifts unto men. His lavished generosity in spiritual things was as free and full as in material things. He intended that the com, wine and oil, signifying sustaining strength, satisfying joy, and spiritual grace, should be alike free to all. At a very early age, there were imposters, men of corrupt minds with a spirit of avarice, who became a menace to the very nature of evangelical truth. As the centuries advanced, these things became more prevalent, and under the manipulation of certain leaders, all the benefits and blessings of the Gospel were sold. Payment varied according to the character of the privileges sought, and the nefarious traffic soon became a business that deceived the souls of men. (Cf. Rev. 18:13).

"This divinely sanctioned function of breaking the Bread of Life to men, of ministering the wine of joy with the glad tidings of pardon, and of making known the oil of spiritual enrichment and indwelling, was developed into the sevenfold snare of sacerdotalism. For sake of brevity, let us tabulate the manner in which priestcraft pretended to intervene for all who desired any spiritual privilege and advantage.

1. Baptismal regeneration - The child - Priest - Church
2. Traditional interpretation - The learner - Priest - Bible
3. Confessional - The sinner - Priest - Pardon
4. Confirmation - The believer. - Priest. - Spirit
5. Benediction. - The needy - Priest - Blessing
6. Holy Eucharist - The disciple - Priest - Christ
7. Intercession (inc. prayers for the dead) - The departed - Priest - Heaven

"Under this pretentious system, no child could enter the fellowship of the Church apart from the priest. No learner could obtain a true understanding of the the teachings of the Bible, no sinner or repentant saint could secure pardon, no believer could receive the Spirit, no case of need could obtain blessing, no disciple could independently feed on Christ, the Bread of God, and there could be no intercessory prayer for the distressed.

..

" One point ignored by commentators is that Greek here translated "balance" is used both in the LXX and the New Testament for "yoke," either in its proper or metaphorical sense. When the word means a balance, it is joined to other words, thus making its meaning clear. Certainly, its primary significance is "yoke," as every other usage in the New Testament shows. (See Mt. 11:29,30; 1 Tim. 6:1; Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1.) Only when contextual words signify the act of weighing can it mean a balance.

The metaphorical use of this term (such as we might expect here in a symbolic book) can be found in Acts 15:10 and Gal. 5:10, and applies to legalistic observances. Is it not clear from church history that the first century attempts by Pharisees to yoke men by outward forms and traditional observances were often repeated in later centuries? Whenever the glory of the gospel of grace faded, a yoke of legalism replaced it. At such times men offered to barter the things thought necessary for eternal life. We believe John clearly saw and intended the ambivalent meaning of this term. In a book absolutely crammed with meaning, and that meaning often in more than one layer, such words were specially valuable.

42. W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, p. 86.

43. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 317.

44. I. Williams, *Revelation*, p. 89.

45. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, pp. 93-95.

46. P. Mauro, *Visions*, p. 224.

47. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 318.

48. P. Mauro, *Visions*, pp. 228-29.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

50. The white robes given before the advent represent justification and vindication. These believers, of course, were justified the moment they believed, but the present allusion suggests that in heaven's sight those hated and slain by the world were adjudged as righteous eternally at the end of their life's course. Heaven's judgment bar bestows justification—full and complete—the eschatological verdict for those who have endured to the end. The sequence of thought in 6:10-11 is identical with that of Dan. 8:13-14. But in Rev. 7:9,13 and perhaps 19:8, we should go further and see in the white robes the restoration of the glory that was Adam's in Eden. Preston and Hanson comment: "R. H. Charles maintains that the WHITE ROBES

so often associated with the glorified martyrs in Revelation mean their resurrection bodies. There is a good deal of evidence that in Jewish circles (apocalypses like 1 Enoch and the Ascension of Isaiah) and Christian ones (Matt. 13.43; Phil. 3.21), the resurrection body was conceived as a body of light or a body of glory. The thought probably goes back to Ps. 104. 2. Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 81. Compare also Zech 3 where the initial significance of the white garment is justification but ultimately glorification. This illustrates the contention of L. F. Were and some others that blessings which will be materially realized at the second advent have a prior spiritual fulfillment during this present dispensation of the Spirit.

51. See page of this manuscript, vol. 1.

52. W. G. Moorehead, *Revelation*, p. 73.

53. H. Alford, "Revelation," p. 996.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 997.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 998.

56. P. Mauro, *Visions*, p. 235.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

58. W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, p. 90.

59. C. R. Erdman, *Revelation*, p. 81.

60. R. H. Charles, *Apocalypse*, vol. II, cited in G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 138.

61. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 162.

62. Isbon T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 528.

63. George Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 108.

64. H. Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, p. 237.

65. T. Wickes, *Exploring the Apocalypse*, pp. 58,59.

66. H. Hoeksema, op_ . cit. p. 239.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1. "This interlude (7:1-17) thus becomes the climax of the whole vision. It discloses the outcome of the very struggle in which the churches are engaged. This is God's answer to the cry of both the martyrs and their opponents; it gives the heavenly verdict on the earthly ordeal (*thlipsis*) (7:14)." Paul Minear, *New Earth*, p. 75.

2. Says C. H. Little, "'The seal of the living God' is God's heavenly means for sealing his believing people as His own forever." *Revelation*, p. 73. The seal is a judicial pronouncement paralleling the bestowal of a white robe and miter in the judgment scene of Zech. 3. The timing is identical with Rev. 15:1-8. The result is that the holy and righteous remain so forever. See 22:11.

The earnest of eternal life, the gift of the Spirit, accompanies justification which is the verdict of the Last Judgment in anticipation. Only at probation's close (the time brought to view in Rev. 7:1-3), in the final judgment proclamation as Christ ceases His work as intercessor, is justification ratified for eternity. While "well begun is half done," "better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." Only "he who endures to the end shall be saved." Thus the final judgment is to show who has trusted "to the end" solely in the merits of Christ. Or to put this truth in theological language—the events of inaugurated eschatology find their complement and counterpart in consummated eschatology. Neither phase should be dwelt upon to the exclusion of the other.

In its broadest sense the seal of God is not only heaven's protection of the saints by judicial acquittal but also the symbol of the outward signs of the everlasting covenant, which makes that acquittal possible--the covenant sealed with the Sabbath seal in Eden and at Sinai, and also by baptism and the Lord's Supper in the Christian era. Without embracing that covenant, none has eternal life. See Eph. 2:11-22. But only the pharisee makes the mistake of thinking that it is the outward signs which save. Heb. 4:1-11 tells us that the reality of Sabbath-keeping is faith in the finished work of Christ--the trust which purges guilt and brings rest to the conscience. In Rom. 6 the reality of baptism is found in that continual reckoning of oneness with Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection which yields a life renewed in holiness. As for the Lord's Supper, Jn. 6:53-63 indicates that such is the symbol of a daily feeding by the heart upon the merits of Christ's sacrifice. While ideally God wills that all believers should embrace both the reality and the outward forms of His covenant, it

must ever be kept in mind that the former and not the latter is salvific. Thus the thief on the Cross was never baptized, and neither have the majority of God's children observed the seventh-day Sabbath of Scripture. In our own time we witness true believers such as the members of the Salvation Army who do not practise the Lord's Supper as ordained by Christ. We do not question for one moment their saved estate if they are relying solely on the merits of the Saviour. Yet it is the will of God that all who come to know of the true forms of the covenant seals should embrace them as public pictorial proclamations of that reality which is union by faith with the Crucified One.

3. Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 99.

4. Says Meredith G. Kline, "Covenants, such as Exodus 20:2-17 has been shown to be, are found written in their entirety on one table and indeed, like the Sinaitic tables, on both its sides. As a further detail in the parallelism of external appearance it is tempting to see in the Sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words the equivalent of the suzerain's dynastic seal found in the midst of the obverse of the international treaty documents. Since in the case of the Decalogue the suzerain is Yahweh, there will be no representation of him on his seal, but the Sabbath is declared to be his 'sign of the covenant' (Ex. 31:13-17). By means of his Sabbath-keeping, the image-bearer of God images the pattern of that divine act of creation which proclaims God's absolute sovereignty over man, and thereby he pledges his covenant consecration to his Maker. The Creator has stamped on world history the sign of the Sabbath as His seal of ownership and authority. That is precisely what the pictures on the dynastic seals symbolize and their captions claim in behalf of the treaty gods and their representative, the suzerain." *Treaty of the Great King*, pp. 18-19.

5. James B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 346.

6. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*,

7. W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, p. 167.

8. Robert H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 167

9. Joshua 18.

10. Hos. 4:17.

11. We have hints here of the special opprobrium with which Revelation views idolatry. It is seen as the supreme sin, as true worship of the Creator in spirit and truth, and truth is the characteristic sign of genuine Christians. See Rev. 13:13-18; 14:6-12; and compare the warnings against idolatry in the seven introductory letters and their echoes in 19:20; 20:4; 21:8; 14:6-12; 22: near the close. Revelation, like Daniel and other apocalyptic literature has loyalty to the law of the Creator as the ever-recurring test for the Israel of God. Compare Dan. chs. 3, 6, and 7:25, and the allusions to the abomination of desolation which was idolatry at its worst. The idolatrous abomination is central not only to Daniel but Mt. 24; Mk. 13; 2 Thess. 2; and Rev. 13. The Sabbath and all it symbolizes of God's unique work in creation and redemption was, and is, the main bulwark against idolatry in all its forms ancient and modern.

12. Louis F. Were, *The Certainty of the Third Angel's Message*, p. 195.

13. ". . . for John, as for all the N.T. writers, Israel cannot be limited to Jews by race alone. The new Israel is the Christian Church; it is indeed only Christians who now have the right to call themselves Jews, God's chosen people (see 3:9. . .). Hence when John writes in verse 4: I HEARD THE NUMBER OF THEM WHICH WERE SEALED. . . OF ALL THE TRIBES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, he must be telling us something about the Christian Church. Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 83. Says W. Milligan: ". . . under a Jewish figure, they include all the followers of Christ, or the universal Church. . . We have not yet found, and we shall not find in any later part of the Apocalypse, a distinction drawn between Jewish and Gentile Christians. To the eye of the Seer, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one. There is in it neither Jew nor Greek. . . . Under all the six Seals, accordingly, embracing the whole period of the Gospel dispensation, there is not a single word to suggest the thought that the Christian Church is divided into two parts. The struggle, the preservation, and the victory belong equally to all. . . . It is the custom of the Seer to heighten and spiritualize all Jewish names. The Temple, the Tabernacle, the Altar, Mount Zion, and Jerusalem are to him the embodiments of ideas deeper than those literally conveyed by them. Analogy therefore might suggest that this also would be the case with the word 'Israel.'" *Revelation*, pp. 118-19.

14. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 145.

15. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 168.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

17. Isbon T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 540.

18. Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, p. 267.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

1. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, pp. 108-9.

2. A. Pieters, *Revelation*, p. 128.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29.

4. T. F. Glasson, *Revelation*, p. 59.

5. We are reminded of G. K. Chesterton's statement, "Though St. John the evangelist saw many strange creatures in his vision, he saw no creatures so wild as one of his own commentators."

6. R. Way. E. Giller, B. Brinsmead, "The Consummation," p. 146.

7. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 367.

8. A. R. Fausset, "Revelation," p. 685.

9. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 405.

10. H. Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, p. 300.

11. Justin Smith, *Epistles*, p. 118.

12. "The seal is the emblem of an event still hidden, but divinely decreed. The trumpet is something more than the mere revelation of an event that is to happen in the future; it is a manifestation of will which calls for a speedy realisation. Lastly, a vial poured out is the image of a decree as identified with its execution. There is, therefore, an evident gradation from one of these emblems to another." *Godet's Studies*, p. 305.

13. H. M. Feret, *Apocalypse*, pp. 113-14.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

16. *Ibid.*

17. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 208.

18. E. Huntingford, *Apocalypse*, p. 176.

19a. Justin Smith, *Epistles*, p. 118.

19b. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, pp. 166-67.

20. G. C. Berkouwer, "Satan and the Demons," p. 73.

21. J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, p. 191.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

25. J. F. Walvoord, *Revelation*, p. 153.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

28. J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, p. 209.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

30. Willis W. Mead, *The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, p. 128.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29.

32. H. B. Swete, *Revelation*, p. 110.

33. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 112.

34. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 185.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.* p. 186.
38. *Ibid.* p. 187.
39. T. F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, p. 74.
40. See V. Eller, *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible*, p. 128.
41. Homer Hailey, *Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 218-19.
42. "John is dealing not so much with a philosophical analysis of nature or history as with an appraisal of the forces released by prayer and with the ultimate vindication of those prayers. To ignore this setting is to ignore the prophet's purpose." Paul Minear, *New Earth*, p. 93.
43. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 334.
44. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," p. 150.
45. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 333.
46. Says C. H. Little, "The best explanation of the four trumpet blasts describe in this chapter is, that they are religious delusions sent by God in punishment of those who take pleasure in unrighteousness and will not receive the truth of the Gospel unto their salvation (cf. 2 Thess. 2:11-12). God's patience and long-suffering having reached its limit, destructive delusions are sent upon those who loved the ways of unrighteousness and found their pleasure therein." *Revelation*, p. 83. On the fifth trumpet he writes: "This is a figurative picture of the blotting out of the light of truth from men's minds and a darkening of their understanding and all their thinking. This hellish curse is sent by God upon men because of their persistent neglect of His Word of truth, which alone could save them. In the second verse a vast increase in the evil is described. . . . By God's own command, no harm is allowed to be inflicted by these hellish delusions upon any of those who are His by faith. They will strike all despisers of God's Words, but leave true believers unscathed." *Ibid.*, p. 89.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

1. F. F. Bruce, "The Revelation to John," *New Testament Commentary*, p. 629.
2. Douglas Ezell, *Revelations on Revelation*, pp. 48-49. 3. D. T. Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible*, p. 63.
4. I. Williams, *Revelation*, p. 132.
5. See W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 133.
6. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 106.
7. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 178.
8. Dr. Norman H. Young in his unpublished thesis called, "The Impact of the Jewish Day of Atonement upon the Thought of the New Testament," says, "The only day that the specially compounded daily incense was offered in a censer as well as on the golden altar was the Day of Atonement; on no other occasion was it permitted to burn this special incense in a censer. This explains John's conflation of the altar and censer in the incense offering which he mentions in Rev. 8:3. The reference to trumpets at the introduction of the chapter is a further indication that we are in the midst of Day of Atonement imagery, for trumpets were the means of announcing New Year and the coming judgment of the Day of Atonement. Even more pertinent, on the Day of Atonement itself trumpets proclaimed the Year of Jubilee, the day of release and restoration (cf. the seventh trumpet Rev. 11:15 ff.). Thus the prayers of the people of God for salvation are answered by an act of divine judgment and deliverance, and this is portrayed by John by means of Day of Atonement symbols." pp. 367-68.
9. R. Way, E. Giller, B. Brinsmead, "The Consummation," p. 147.
10. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 360.
11. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (hereinafter referred to as *Revelation*), p. 270. Another has written, "A daily and yearly typical atonement is no longer to be made, but the atoning sacrifice through a mediator is essential because of the constant commission of sin. Jesus is officiating in the presence of God, offering up His shed blood, as it had been a lamb slain. Jesus presents the oblation offered for every offense and every shortcoming of the sinner. "Christ, our Mediator, and the Holy Spirit are constantly interceding in man's behalf, but the Spirit pleads not for us as does Christ, who presents His blood, shed from the foundation of the world, the Spirit works upon our hearts, drawing out prayers and penitence, praise and thanksgiving. The gratitude which flows from our lips is the result of the Spirit's striking

the cords of the soul in holy memories, awakening the music of the heart. "The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor, who is at God's right hand, presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned.

"Oh, that all may see that everything in obedience, in penitence, in praise and thanksgiving, must be placed upon the glowing fire of the righteousness of Christ. The fragrance of this righteousness ascends like a cloud around the mercy-seat." Ellen G. White, *1 Selected Messages*, p. 344.

12. J. Ellul, *Apocalypse*, pp. 68-69.

13. T. F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, p. 74.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

15. E. W. Henstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, pp. 340-341.

16. R. Lenski, *Revelation*, p. 274.

17. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 341.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

19. E. R. Thiele, "Revelation," p. 168.

20. J. Smith, *Epistles*, p. 121.

21. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 227 f.

22. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 454.

23. E. G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 233-34.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 229-232.

25. E. R. Thiele, "Revelation," p. 170.

26. E. Huntingford, *Apocalypse*, pp. 169-70.

27. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, pp. 375-76.

28. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 188.

29. Consider, for example, the usage made of the trumpets in the following statements by a well-known devotional writer. "And it is because Satan can most readily control the minds of those who are unconscious of his influence, that the word of God gives us so many examples of his malignant work, unveiling before us his secret forces, and thus placing us on our guard against his assaults.

"The power and malice of Satan and his host might justly alarm us were it not that we may find shelter and deliverance in the superior power of our Redeemer. We carefully secure our houses with bolts and locks to protect our property and our lives from evil men; but we seldom think of the evil angels who are constantly seeking access to us, and against whose attacks we have, in our own strength, no method of defense. If permitted, they can distract our minds, disorder and torment our bodies, destroy our possessions and our lives. Their only delight is in misery and destruction. Fearful is the condition of those who resist the divine claims and yield to Satan's temptations, until God gives them up to the control of evil spirits." *Great Controversy*, p. 517. "God's people, exposed to the deceptive power and unsleeping malice of the prince of darkness, and in conflict with all the forces of evil, are assured of the unceasing guardianship of heavenly angels. Nor is such assurance given without need. If God has granted to His children promises of grace and protection, it is because there are mighty agencies of evil to be met--agencies numerous, determined, and untiring, of whose malignity and power none can safely be ignorant or unheeding.

"Evil spirits, in the beginning created sinless, were equal in nature, power, and glory with the holy beings that are now God's messengers. But fallen through sin, they are leagued together for the dishonour of God and the destruction of men. United with Satan in his rebellion, and with him cast out from heaven, they have, through all succeeding ages, co-operated with him in his warfare against the divine authority. We are told in Scripture of their confederacy and government, of their various orders, of their intelligence and subtlety, and of their malicious designs against the peace and happiness of men." *Great Controversy*, pp. 513. "A terrible

conflict is before us. We are nearing the battle of the great day of God Almighty. That which has been held in control is to be let loose. The angel of mercy is folding her wings, preparing to step down from the throne and leave the world to the control of Satan. The principalities and powers of earth are in bitter revolt against the God of heaven. They are filled with hatred against those who serve Him, and soon, very soon, will be fought the last great battle between good and evil. The earth is to be the battlefield--the scene of the final contest and the final victory." *My Life Today*, p. 308. "If only they could see the determined efforts of Satan to eclipse by his hellish shadow every ray of light that would come into the mind and heart of persons now dead in trespasses and sins! O that they would awake from their torpor as the whole world will soon awake by the trumpet of God, which will announce His appearing! . . . Satanic agencies are always warring for the mastery over the human mind, but the angels of God are constantly at work, strengthening the weak hands and confirming the feeble knees of all who call upon God for help." *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, VII, p. 923.

"The coming of Christ will take place in the darkest period of this earth's history. The days of Noah and of Lot picture the condition of the world just before the coming of the Son of man. The Scriptures, pointing forward to this time, declare that Satan will work with all power and 'with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.' His working is plainly revealed by the rapidly increasing darkness, the multitudinous errors, heresies, and delusions of these last days. Not only is Satan leading the world captive, but his deceptions are leavening the professed churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. The great apostasy will develop into darkness deep as midnight. To God's people it will be a night of trial, a night of weeping, a night of persecution for the truth's sake. But out of that night of darkness God's light will shine." *Prophets and Kings*, p. 717. "Christ will never abandon those for whom He has died. We may leave Him, and be overwhelmed with temptation; but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life. Could our spiritual vision be quickened, we should see souls bowed under oppression and burdened with grief, pressed as a cart beneath sheaves, and ready to die in discouragement. We should see angels flying quickly to the aid of these tempted ones, forcing back the hosts of evil that encompass them, and placing their feet on the sure foundation. The battles waging between the two armies are as real as those fought by the armies of this world, and on the issue of the spiritual conflict eternal destinies depend." *Prophets and Kings*, p. 176. "Where the message of divine truth is spurned or slighted, there the church will be enshrouded in darkness; faith and love grow cold, and estrangement and dissension enter. Church members center their interests and energies in worldly pursuits, and sinners become hardened in their impenitence.

"Had they received the message from Heaven, humbling their hearts before the Lord and seeking in sincerity a preparation to stand in His presence, the Spirit and power of God would have been manifested among them." *Great Controversy*, pp. 378-79. ". . . Christ's followers are to look upon Satan as a conquered foe. Upon the cross, Jesus was to gain the victory for them; that victory He desired them to accept as their own. 'Behold,' He said, 'I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you.' Luke 10:19." *Ministry of Healing*, p. 94.

To us, as to Peter, the world is spoken, 'Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' Thank God, we are not left alone. He who 'so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,' will not desert us in the battle with the adversary of God and man. 'Behold,' He says, 'I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you.' Luke 10:19." *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 173. (Ellen G. White is the author of these quotations.)

30. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 198.

31. R. C. H. Lenski, *Revelation*, p. 285.

32. H. M. F6ret, *Apocalypse*, p. 121.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

34. J. Ellul, *Apocalypse*, p. 74.

35. C. J. Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community*, p. 28.

36. W. B. Carpenter, *Revelation*, pp. 117-18.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

38. J. Ellul, *Apocalypse*, p. 75.

39. T. F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, p. 75.

40. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 156.

41. H. Hailey, *Revelation*, p. 226,230.

42. Some have applied the "five months" according to the year-day principle, and usually in connection with the Muslim invasions. Such interpretations have the defects mentioned in our preface to this section, and all involve very dubious historical phenomena. Josiah Litch, for example, followed Gibbon in selecting July 27, 1299, as the beginning date of the "five months"--supposedly the time of the battle of Bapheum. Modern historians locate that event years later. No doubt in the providence of God, such applications, though erroneous at times, led some thoughtless worldlings to stop and consider the fact of divine foreknowledge, and turn to the study of Scripture, but as exegesis they are quite inadequate.

43. Says H. Hoeksema, ". . . we may also from the outset discard the interpretation which finds in these locusts the symbol of an army of men. This explanation constitutes, indeed, one of the favorite interpretations, especially of those interpreters who explain the Book of Revelation as being historically and successively fulfilled in the course of time. These locusts, so they say, are the symbols of the hordes of the Mohammedans that flooded parts of Asia, North Africa, and southern Europe in the seventh and eighth centuries of our era. In detail, these interpreters find in the description given of these locusts the picture of these Saracens as they rose from the East and swept the entire northern part of Africa, as well as the southern part of Europe, constituting an awful scourge upon the countries which they conquered.

"But there are elements in the words of our text which simply make such an interpretation an impossibility,--elements which I find that these interpreters simply ignore and overlook. First of all, what does it mean that these locusts have their power in their tails? That seems to constitute an essential element in the passage we are now discussing. Yet this cannot be sufficiently explained on the supposition that they are the symbols of the Moslem army, or, in fact, of any army of human beings. Still more, the text makes the important statement that the people who have the seal of God on their foreheads must be left untouched. But was it not especially against the Christians that the fury of the Mohammedans raged? Or can it be said of any army in the world that they ever make a distinction between the people of God and the people of the world, and refuse to do the former any hurt? Still more: these locusts receive the command that they may not kill, but simply hurt men for five months. Granted now, for a moment, that it is permissible to take these five months in the symbolical sense, every day of them constituting one year, so that the entire period might be calculated as being one hundred fifty years, was it ever beheld of an army,--that of the Moslems surely not excluded,--that they did not kill, but merely hurt the enemy? Surely, all these objections,--facts so plainly and so emphatically mentioned in the passage,--are simply insurmountable. These locusts are not the symbol of an army of men.

"Both these possibilities being ruled out, there is practically but one possibility left. And that one is indeed in harmony with the entire passage, as well as with the Scriptures in general, namely, that these locusts form an infernal army of demons let loose by Satan for a certain definite purpose." *Behold He Cometh*, pp. 314-15.

44. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. 164.

45. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 119.

46. L. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 126.

47. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 197.

48. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 393.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 394-95.

50. E. Huntingford, *Apocalypse*, p. 174.

51. G. P. Trevelyan, *Meditation on the Revelation of St. John*, p. 30.

52. A. Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 121.

53. H. B. Swete, *Revelation*, p. 121.

54. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 163.

55. P. Fairbairn, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 419.

56. G. E. Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 135.

57. "The word *abyssos* is used in the Greek Old Testament of the deep waters (Gen. 1:2; 7:11; Ps. 107:26). It is also used of the depth of the earth (Ps. 71: and came to designate the realm of the dead. So Paul asks, 'Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)' (Rom. 10:7). It is the abode of the beast or Antichrist before he appears on earth (Rev. 11:7) and will be the temporary prison of Satan during the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 10:3). It is also sometimes represented as the home or else the place of imprisonment of demons (Luke 8:31)." G. Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 130.

58. I. Williams, *Revelation*, p. 156.
59. P. Fairbairn, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, pp. 420-21.
60. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 151.
61. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, pp. 167-68.
62. W. B. Carpenter, *Revelation*, p. 127.
63. *Ibid.*
64. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 417.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

1. Isaac Williams, *Apocalypse*, p. 170.
2. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 171.
3. Isbon T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, pp. 578-79.
4. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. 169. See also C. H. Little--"In the last verse John, who had digested the little book and identified himself with its contents, is enjoined to prophesy and carry its gracious message far and wide, wherever the peoples of the earth may be found. This is in full accord with the Lord's own words: "And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).
5. One commentary has caught the spirit of this passage admirably, seeing its relationship to the final test over obedience in the prophecy of Rev. 13. "The controversy has waxed stronger and more determined from age to age, and will continue to do so, to the concluding scenes when the masterly working of the powers of darkness shall reach their height." Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, VII, p. 971.
 "The angel's position, with one foot on the sea, the other on the land, signifies the wide extent of the proclamation of the message. It will cross the broad waters and be proclaimed in other countries, even to all the world." *Ibid.*
6. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse*, p. 78. Says Carrington, "This figure represents the whole process of God's Revelation. It is the Word of God which came to the prophets of old; it is the message which they gave the world with such remarkable continuity and purity; it is the gospel of Galilee in which it all culminated; it is the propagation of that gospel by Christian evangelists, and its enrichment and explanation by Christian prophets. It is the whole gradual evolutionary process now seen as complete. It is the Logos: the aggressive working of the divine.
 "The Angel. . . raised his Right Hand into Heaven and swore by the eternal creator that there shall be no more time. The three and a half 'Times ' of Daniel (xii. 7) are over.
 "It is the mark of the Christian primitive gospel wherever we find it. An end has been reached; a beginning lies before us. The time is fulfilled; the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel, is the message of our Lord in St. Mark. This is the same message with further elaboration: In the days of the Blast of the Seventh Angel, whenever he sounds, the Mystery of God is fulfilled, according as he gave the Gospel to his servants the Prophets. All they foresaw, all they foretold, all they groaned for, is on the point of coming true." *Revelation*, p. 174. Fairbairn says, "The book is called little, much for the same reason that faith, even in its mightiest operations, is compared to a grain of mustard-seed, because it is small and insignificant in the estimation of the world and in the eye of sense, as compared with the gigantic and obtrusive forces it has to contend with, and the vast results it must achieve. It is simply the gospel of the grace of God, which becomes, in respect to those who cordially embrace and own it, the word of their testimony. This is the one grand weapon of the Lamb, the sword that goeth out of His mouth to bring the people under Him, or else consign them to destruction as finally impenitent. This, believingly received, and confessed and handled by a faithful church, is the chosen instrumentality by which the tide of evil in the world is to be turned, and the inheritance rescued from the power of the adversary." *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 423.
 "The gospel is 'the wisdom and power of God unto salvation.' Accordingly, the angel had in his hand a little book open, beautifully symbolizing this very gospel. The book is open; the truth is no longer shut up in types, or shut out from the nations, but fully revealed, and freely offered to all the world." J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 423. Lenski adds, "We hold that this entire vision or scene is a unit with every item being an integral part of the unit. The main point is the booklet, the open Word or gospel, which was given as good news already to all of God's prophets and which tells how God will complete his mystery of salvation through Christ when time reaches its end. This is to be made known to all the world." *Revelation*, p. 322. See also Farrer

Revelation, p. 124.

7. Says Hengstenberg, "The other angel (understood most easily in relation to the angels who blew the trumpets), can only be Christ. For everything that is said to characterize this other angel applies only to God, who can be no angel, and to the reflection of his glory, Christ. We cannot suppose with Zullig, that Jehovah had communicated to the angel his proper insignia, for these are not communicable. It would, indeed, have been contrary to the divine word. 'I will not give my glory to another'--a breaking down of the limits between the Creator and his creature, for which no analogy is to be found in the whole of Scripture. It must, at any rate, have been very carefully and expressly pointed out, that the glory was altogether of a borrowed kind. But there is no trace whatever of this. Further, the operations of the angel belong only to Christ. The planting of the right foot on the sea, and of the left on the earth, as certainly belongs to Christ, as it is to him and not to an angel that God has put in subjection the future world (Hebr. ii. 5), as certainly as the dominion of the world must be possessed by the Lord and his Christ (ch. xi. 15). It would have been presumption for a created angel to come forth thus. Nothing but the oath of God, or of one connected with him by oneness of nature, can secure for the church, what requires here to be secured for her. Scripture never attributes to angels such depth of insight into the divine decrees, that their authority could be a perfectly secure one for the church--comp. 1 Pet. i. 12, and Rev. v. 3." *Revelation*, vol. 1, pp. 376-77.

8. W. A. Criswell, *Revelation*, vol. 3, p. 196.

9. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 172.

10. W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, pp. 134-35.

11. Justin Smith, *Epistles*, pp. 142-43.

12. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 386.

13. C. R. Erdman, *Revelation*, pp. 98-99.

14. Justin Smith, *Epistles*, pp. 98-99.

15. W. Heidt, *The Book of the Apocalypse* (hereinafter called *Apocalypse*), p. 78.

16. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 432.

17. Justin Smith, *Epistles*, p. 147.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

1. T. S. Kepler says on this chapter: "... a key to the book's basic meaning. It acts as a sort of prologue which interprets all to which the remaining chapters of the book are leading." *The Book of Revelation*, p. 117. Preston and Hanson introduce their comments on the section 10-11:13 by saying, "The whole parenthesis seems to be intended to prepare us for the ultimate appearance of the Beast." *Revelation*, p. 87.

2. "Chap. xi. is at once the most difficult and the most important in the whole book of Revelation. ... in many respects this chapter is the key to John's central theme. ..." Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 174. "The chapter is extraordinarily difficult to interpret, and the most diverse solutions have been proposed." Morris, *Revelation*, p. 144. Josef Ernst characterizes this chapter as belonging to the darkest and most difficult portions of Scripture. See *Die Eschatologischen Gegenspieler in der Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, p. 124.

3. Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 133-34.

4. Rev. 10:11.

5. Rev. 10:6-7.

6. "The first figure that we meet with in this chapter could scarcely be plainer; nothing save a lapse into the misapprehensive literal conception could, from this passage, ch. xi. 1,2, draw the conclusion that the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing at the time of these visions. The Temple has always been a symbol of the visible form under which the Kingdom of God has appeared, i.e. the Theocracy at first, and later, the Church. ..." Lange, "Revelation," *Commentary*, XII, p. 223.

There is no absolute necessity for the theory that John here incorporated an oracle of a Jewish prophet, uttered during the siege of A.D. 70, with reference to the inner courts of the temple. Caird says that "there has been a remarkable amount of scholarly support for the idea," but he adds, "In spite of the eminence of its advocates this theory must be judged improbable, useless, and absurd: improbable, because, once the outer court had fallen to the army of Titus, not even the most rabid fanatic could have supposed that he would be content to occupy it for three and a half years and leave the sanctuary itself inviolate; useless, because,

whatever these words might have meant to a hypothetical Zealot, they certainly meant something quite different to John twenty-five years after the siege; and absurd, because of the underlying assumption that John could not have intended these words to be taken figuratively unless someone else had previously used them in their literal sense. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that, in a book in which all things are expressed in symbols, the very last things the temple and holy city could mean would be the physical temple and the earthly Jerusalem. If John had wanted to speak about them, he would have found some imagery to convey his meaning without lapsing into the inconsistency of literalism. But in fact John regarded the Jews as the synagogue of Satan, and was not interested in the preservation of their religious institutions." *Revelation*, p. 131. Caird is certainly right in the Christians meaning he ascribes to this passage. We include his long quotation because of its exemplification of the hermeneutical principles suggested prior to our exposition. Caird sees clearly that the church has taken the place of literal Israel, and he likewise is strongly aware of the symbolism employed throughout which, though based on the tangible things of literal Israel, is now applied spiritually to the church.

Caird echoes Kiddle to some extent, for the latter too assures his readers that the conjecture of sources being employed here is impossible of demonstration. "Can we then believe that John was so far removed from reality as to insert a meaningless passage into his Apocalypse? Surely not. He was writing for Christians in days of extreme urgency, when every word was precious." *Revelation*, pp. 174-75. See also Morris, *Revelation*, p. 144. The reasons adduced by these writers may suggest that the great majority of recent commentators have climbed too precipitately upon the contemporary "bandwagon" of exegesis in this matter, when asserting an original reference to the literal temple from a non-johannine source.

Feuillet stresses that the theory that the writer of Revelation has incorporated a separate Jewish document has not been demonstrated, and he proceeds to show that the symbolism of the Temple should not be interpreted in a Jewish sense.

". . . qu'elle n'a pas ete suffisamment de'montre'e. . . la signification de l'ensemble du chapitre est chretienne. En particulier, la preservation partielle du temple de Jerusalem, dont Jesus avait annonce la ruine totale, n'est pas a interpreter, comme on l'a fait, en un sens juif; le langage symbolique est utilise" implique un sens Chretien." "Essai D'Interpretation Du Chapitre XI De L'Apocalypse," *NTS*, IV (1958), p. 184. [that it has not been sufficiently demonstrated. . . the import of the whole of the chapter is Christian. In particular, the partial preservation of the temple of Jerusalem, of which Jesus had announced the total ruin is not to be interpreted, as some have done, in a Jewish sense; the symbolic language used implies a Christian meaning.]

"A la suite de Swete, Alio, Lohmeyer, Charles, Wikenhauser, etc., nous croyons en outre que le temple de Jerusalem, dont doit etre epargnee la partie interieure avec 'ceux qui y adorent,' ne peut etre ici qu'une figure et ne saurait etre pris au sens propre. Il est impossible de le faire si Jean Ecrit apres 70. Et meme, a. supposer que le morceau soit ante"rieur a cette date, comment l'auteur de 1*Apocalypse eut-il pu aller a l'encontre de la parole de Je"sus: du temple ' il ne restera pas pierre sur pierre qui ne soit renversee. . . ?" *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.

[Following Swete, Alio, etc., etc., we believe, moreover, that the temple of Jerusalem, of which the interior part must be preserved with those who worship there, can only be a figure here, and cannot be taken in the literal sense. It is impossible to do so if John writes after 70. And even supposing that the fragment is before that date, how can the author of the Apocalypse contravene the word of Jesus; "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down?"]

This endorsement of these early statements by Feuillet does not imply endorsement of the exegesis offered for other symbols by him. He is inconsistent, and believes the measuring has to do with merely converted Jews. To him, those measured are the Jews spoken of in chapter 7. If Feuillet understood by "Jews" Christians only, and not necessarily converted Israelites, he would be on firmer ground. Commenting on 11:1, he can say regarding the measuring of the worshippers with a reed, "Un tel langage montre clairement que nous sommes en presence d'un pur symbole: l'auteur ne s'interesse qu'aux authentiques adorateurs du vrai Dieu, et non a la construction mate'rielle." *Ibid.*, p. 185. [Such language clearly shows that we are in the presence of pure symbol: the author is only interested in authentic worshippers of the true God, and not in the material building.]

These words represent exegetical sanity, but Feuillet departs from his own premises and makes a similar error to Beckwith who also wishes to drag in literal Israel while interpreting this chapter. One's convictions about Paul's promise of penitence and conversion yet to be seen among the race which crucified Christ is not to be made the basis of exegesis of this chapter. Lagrange has erred the same way, applying this chapter eschatologically to events in Palestine and in special connection with literal Israel. Josef Ernst sees that the contemporary-historical interpretation of 11:1-2 is not necessary if the meaning assigned by John to the tribes of Israel in Rev. 7 were understood. John symbolizes what Paul plainly states in Gal. 3:28-29; 6:16; Rom. 2:28-29.

Lohmeyer emphasizes the adaptation by John of the things of Israel to the world-wide Christian church.

Before setting forth this view he declares concerning the Wellhausen view of an embodied Jewish oracular fragment that: "Diese Ansicht scheint nicht genügend begründet." Lohmeyer, E., and Bornkamm, G., *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (hereinafter referred to as *Offenbarung*), p. 88. [This view does not appear adequately founded.]

And later this thought is repeated, "So wird es nicht mehr notwendig, c. 11 durch Annahme von Interpolationem oder Zuweisung an verschiedene Quelle verständlicher zu machen. ..." *Ibid.*, p. 90. [So it will no longer be necessary to make chapter 11 more understandable through the assumption of interpolations, or assignment to various sources.]

It is necessary to recognize his viewpoint on this matter, because elsewhere he speaks of Jewish traditions John has incorporated, but by such he means not the Wellhausen oracle, but chiefly those of the Old Testament, such as found in Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. In interpreting 11:1-2 he says, ". . . es ist dann möglich und notwendig, sie auch als christliches Orakel zu verstehen. 'Der Tempel' und 'die in ihn anbeten' sind dann die urchristlichen 'Glaubigen'; und das 'Messen' bedeutet nichts anderes als das 'Versiegeln' in 7:3-8. . . . Dann aber sind diese Verse eine Art 'pneumatischer' Interpretation und Adaption der ezechielischen Vision. . . . Damit ist dann auch eine sachliche Verbindung zwischen 1 f. und 3-13 angedeutet." [. . . it is then possible and necessary to understand it also as a Christian oracle. "The temple" and "those worshipping in it" are then the primitive Christian believers, and the "measuring" means none other than the "sealing" in 7:3-8. . . . But then these verses are a type of spiritual interpretation and adaptation of the Ezekiel vision. Thereby is indicated an objective connection between 1f. and 3-13.]

He points out that whereas Rev. 11 at first glance seems to speak of Jerusalem as the "show-place of the Antichrist and of his triumph over the witnesses, 12 f. "wissen nichts von solcher Lokalisation." *Ibid.*, p. 89. [. . . know nothing from such localization.] The seer recognizes, says Lohmeyer, that the beast out of the abyss represents the unbelieving world, and that his appearance "nicht an Jerusalem gebunden." [(is) . . . not bound to Jerusalem.] *Ibid.* "Um einen Ausgleich dieser widersprechenden Vorstellungen, einer jüdischpartikularen und einer universalen handelt es sich in dieser Vision. . . . So gibt die alte jüdisch-urchristliche Erwartung und sie gilt auch nicht. Es ist notwendig von ihr zu reden, und doch hat sie nicht mehr die Bedeutung, die man früher an sie knüpfte." *Ibid.* [This vision is concerned with a balancing of these contradictory concepts, one particularly for the Jews, and the other universal. So there is the old Jewish early Christian expectation, and it also is invalid. It is necessary to speak about it, and yet it no longer has the meaning which one earlier attached to it.]

This viewpoint is much more homogenous with the whole trend of Revelation than that of Lagrange who wishes to retain literal Jerusalem in the eschatological picture. See also Kiddle, *Revelation*, pp. 175-80, who is closer to Lohmeyer, Morris, and Caird, and who protests against such views on the conversion of the Jews as expressed by Charles, Beckwith and Lagrange, et al. Caird says, ". . . the outer court, and the holy city, no less than the temple, symbolize the church in part of its existence." *Revelation*, p. 132. He also refuses to accept that Jerusalem is to be taken in its literal sense, and affirms rather the application to the whole Roman world. He says, ". . . the gloating crowds are not restricted to Jews; they are the inhabitants of earth. The ancient world had no Cook's Tours capable of assembling in Jerusalem the international audience John here envisages."

"Our conclusion about the city incidentally confirms what we have said about the witnesses. If the witnesses were two individual Christians, the city in which they died would have to be a city in the narrow, literal sense; and this hypothesis leads, as we have seen to a *reductio ad absurdum*." *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Morris shows exegetical good sense when he writes, "It seems to me important that the whole section (1-13) is to be taken symbolically. It is plain enough that the sanctuary of verse 1 is symbolical, but most expositors proceed to take the witnesses and the holy city literally. Then difficulties multiply. They are fewer when we see all as symbolism and a coherent pattern emerges. John has already used the lampstand symbol and explained that it refers to churches (1:20). Thus it seems best to take the witnesses as symbolizing the witnessing church or some part of it. . . . What John is doing then is outlining the function of the witnessing church. Its lot will be hard, but its eventual triumph is sure." *Revelation*, pp. 144-45.

7. See Caird, *Revelation*, p. 138, and particularly Kiddle (*Revelation*, p. 176) who says, "What a strange phrase to use of the death of two individuals, though they have been divinely protected--'make war on them and kill them' (a phrase which is quite natural and appropriate in the similar and, as we hope to show, parallel passage in xiii. 7, where the Beast 'wages war' on the saints in general). Stranger still is what happens after their death. This was no parochial affair of interest only to the small circle of those who had been obliged to listen to their unpleasant prophecy, or had witnessed their slaying by the Beast; no ordinary event calculated to attract the attention of their own local city. It was nothing less than universal in its significance. The whole world was moved--John stresses the fact three times over. . . . The whole world is concerned, the whole world gazes at their bodies (though John says nothing to suggest that they come to the City to do so--that would be awkward indeed!). . . ."

8. A. Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, vol. 6, bk. 2, p. 308.

9. ". . . he (John) was writing in a time of supreme and urgent crisis. . . . he was passionately convinced that the Church was about to face the great Distress of ruthless persecution. . . ." M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 178. See also Preston and Hanson; *Revelation*, p. 89; Glasson, *Revelation*, pp. 68-70; Farrer, *Revelation*, pp. 128-30, et al. Note Farrer's rebuttal of those who wish to read literal Jerusalem into the chapter's application. "St John cannot be deeply interested in what happened to Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Evidently the end of the world was not implicated in the event, as it had looked like being. . . . St John is too far away from the event, and his Church is fighting on a different front. He hurries on into a description of the position of the Gospel in the intermediate age between the fall of the Holy City and the coming of Antichrist; that is to say, in the time of St. John." *Ibid.*, p. 130.

10. "Sehr lehrreich ist das Wortchen trveuyatikais . . . das wohl nur nach 1 Cor. 2:13 f. zu erklären ist. Aber hier ist, anders als bei Pls, das 'pneumatische' Urteil auf das konkrete Verhältnis zu 'Jerusalem' angewandt; es begründet die Scharfe des Gegensatzes, aber ebenso auch die Tiefe der Verbundenheit mit dem Judentum, weil :es das Recht zu einer 'pneumatischen' jüdischer Tradition gibt. . . . Darüber hinaus liegt in dem Wort vielleicht eine Andeutung, dass die Bilder der Ape 'pneumatisch' zu verstanden sind. Das ist nicht unwichtig für die Frage nach der 'Bildlichkeit' der apokalyptischen Visionen."¹ E. Lohmeyer and G. Bornkamm, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 93. [Very instructive is the little word thveuyatikdis . . . which is probably only to be explained according to 1 Cor. 2:13f. But here, as distinct from Paul, the "spiritual" verdict is employed regarding the concrete relationship :to Jerusalem; it establishes the pungency of the contrast; but equally also the Jewish tradition exists. Beyond that, perhaps there lies a hint that the pictures of the Apocalypse are to be understood "spiritually." That is not unimportant for the question of the "pictorial representation" of apocalyptic visions.]

11. See Feuillet's extended discussion on this point. "Essai D'Interpretation Du Chapitre XI de L'Apocalypse," *NTS*, IV (1958), p. 186.

12. The relationship between Dan. 8:13; Mk. 13:14; Lu. 21:24; 2 Thess. 2:4 and Rev. 11:2 is intimate. In each instance an anti-God power menaces the sanctuary and its worshippers. The very language of the first reference has been incorporated into the last. While Rev. 6:9-11, with its references to the sanctuary, martyrdom, the cry for vindication and its answer, may also point back to Dan. 8: 13,14, the presentation of Rev. 11 is much more particular and less general.

Revelation 11 is part of the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. As such it is somewhat analogous to the similar interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. We think the remarks of Farrer on this latter passage also have bearing on the former which certainly has to do with the final proclamation of the gospel on the eve of Antichrist's final rising, and thus is related to Mk. 13 and 2 Thess. 2. "St John's way of saying that Antichrist cannot be manifested, nor the end come, until the Gospel has been preached to all nations (Matt. xxiv. 14) will be to say that the predestined number of the elect must be stamped with the Name, before the persecution of Antichrist gives them the opportunity to merit their eternal reward. St Paul reminded the Thessalonians that a caretaker power, or person, delaying the accession of Antichrist, was a part of the Christian scheme (2 Thess. ii. 6-7); Antichrist cannot come 'until this power is out of the way.' In spite of all that has been written to the contrary, the most natural interpretation of St Paul is that which follows the lines of Revelation vii. An angel of God, or a commandment of God (it is all one) restraining the appearance of Antichrist, holds sway until the apostolic mission has run its course; then 'the obstacle will be removed.'" *Revelation*, pp. 105-6.

Josef Ernst is representative of most modern commentators when he links Rev. 11 with Mk. 13:14 and 2 Thess. 2. A connection with Dan. 7, 8, 9, 11 is also made by equating the beast from the abyss with the beast from the sea in Rev. 13, and tracing the genealogy of the latter to the portrayal of Dan. 7. See *Gegenspieler*, pp. 123, 125-27, 132.

13. Rev. 17:3. Beckwith says, "The wilderness is taken by many com. to be typical of the utter destruction to which Rome is to be reduced." *Apocalypse*, p. 692. Beckwith himself does not agree with this application and contends that "the actual destruction of Rome, or the desolation following, is not exhibited in this vision. . . ." *Ibid.* However, it is difficult to understand how such a position can be taken in view of the plain statement in v. 16 that the harlot is to be made desolate, and the similar allusion in 18:19 "in one hour she has been laid waste." Moses Stuart comments, ". . . desert, appropriate to symbolize the future condition of the beast." *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 675.

14. The demons looked on the abyss as their home. See Luke 8:31. Paul's solitary use of the term applies it to the abode of the dead. Rom. 10:7. All other New Testament usages of the word are found in Revelation where it appears as the habitation of beings hostile to God and His Church. The angel of the abyss is called the Destroyer. See Rev. 9:11. See H. A. Kennedy, *St Paul's Conception of the Last Things*, p. 121 ff. In Job 28:22 it is "the pair and forerunner of Death." Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 119. This is the original *Abgrund* of Semitic mythology.

15. C. H. Little, *Revelation*, p. 107.
16. Says C. H. Little, "There can be no greater catastrophe than the removal of God's Word from the world." *Revelation*, p. 114.
17. H. Grattan Guinness, *History Unveiling Prophecy*, p. 111.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 466.
20. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 594-95.
21. H. Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, p. 365. Say Preston and Hanson, "In his book 'the temple' can only mean one thing: the Temple at Jerusalem had been destroyed. It means 'the temple of the body,' and that body is the Body of Christ, the Christian Church. It is a belief often to be found in the New Testament; cf. Mark 14. 57-58; Jn. 2. 19-21; 1 Cor. 6. 19-20." 22. J. F. Walvoord, *Revelation*, p. 176. 23. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
24. J. Massyngberde Ford, "*Revelation*," p. 176.
25. A. Plummer, "*Revelation*," p. 288.
26. H. Hoeksema, *op. cit.*, p. 373.
27. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, p. 453.
28. J. Massyngberde Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
29. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 189.
30. J. Massyngberde Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
31. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, pp. 200-01.
32. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 172.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 174-75.
34. T. F. Torrance, *Apocalypse*, p. 87.
35. Quoted in E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 399.
36. "The picture of the two prophets in chapter 11 stands in sharp contrast to the pictures of false prophets in chapters 2, 3, and 13, even as it includes an instructive parallel to the picture of Christ in chapter 5." P. Minear, *New Earth*, p. 96.
37. Lu. 21:12-17.
38. J. P. Lange, "*Revelation*," p. 225.
39. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol 1, pp. 401-02.
40. Say Preston and Hanson, "The city which in Ps. 48.2 is called 'the joy of the whole earth' has become one with the traditionally wicked cities of the Old Testament, because it has crucified its Lord (cf. Wisdom 19.14 ff.)." *Revelation*, p. 90.
41. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 404.
42. Says C. H. Little, ". . . we have a description of the effect of this catastrophe upon those that were not destroyed by it. Of them it is asserted that they were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. This must not be misinterpreted to mean that they repented of their sins and became converted, and that consequently the majority of this spiritual Sodom and Egypt saw the error of their ways and became believers and were saved. This is impossible in view of the fact that the Word has departed from them and the Holy Ghost has withdrawn His gracious presence. Men can never by their own powers believe in Jesus Christ or confess Him as their Lord." *Revelation*, p. 114.
43. Preston and Hanson say, "THE REMNANT expresses remorse, not repentance (cf. 16. 15-17, and also Jas. 2.19)." *Revelation*, p. 90. Elsewhere they say, "In John's view the division between black and white is absolute. The effects of the judgments on the ungodly is akin to that of the plagues on Pharaoh." *Ibid.*, p. 31.
". . . there is no question of any general 'conversion' of mankind in the last days. Men will give glory to the God of heaven when it is too late for their own salvation--when they are compelled by overriding terror to recognize that the true Lord is Christ and not Antichrist. Remorse and not repentance is their true condition. The scene should be compared with that in vi. 15-17, where the terror of men is equally an acknowledgement that at last they have understood God's omnipotence and the approach of inexorable judgment." M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 20'

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

1. L. Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 156-178.
2. J. Ellul, *Revelation*, p. 50.
3. W. G. Heidt, *Apocalypse*, p. 85.
4. H. Alford, "Revelation," p. 85.
5. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 212.
6. T. F. Glasson, *Revelation*, pp. 72-3.
7. J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, p. 188.
8. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 52.
9. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. 203.
10. A. Farrar, *A Rebirth of Images*, p. 7.
11. *Revelation*, p. 216.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
13. E. Huntingford, *Apocalypse*, p. 134.
14. W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, p. 160.
15. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 232.
16. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 153-54.
17. A. Trites, *Witness*, p. 162.
18. J. Massyngberde Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 206. She says further, "As Le Frois, *Woman Clothed with the Sun*, p. 157, asserts, 'in the Apocalypse the judiciary nature of chapters 4-20 leads one to expect the same judiciary meaning for the word. But this is evident in its occurrence in the figure of the vintage (14:19); the figure of the millstone thrown into the sea; Babylon sentenced (18:21); the binding of the dragon who is then thrown into a pit (20:3).' The legal sense is continued in the use of the word 'accuser,' Gr. *kategor*, of 'our brothers' in vs. 10; this word is used of one who accuses another before the judgment seat." *Ibid.*
19. A. Trites, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
21. I. T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 395.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 397.
23. Say Preston and Hanson, "Most of the incidents in this chapter can be paralleled in Daniel, on which the chapter is plainly modelled. A Beast rising from the sea, the description of the Beast, the blasphemies which he utters, all come from Dan. 7. The setting up of an image for all men to worship is no doubt an echo of Nebuchadnezzar's image in Dan. 3." *Revelation*, p. 35. 24. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 251.
25. L. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 165. 26. W. Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, p. 144.
27. A. Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 151.
28. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 224.
29. *Ibid.*
30. J. Ernst, *Gegenspieler*, p. 133.
31. H. Alford, "Revelation," p. 1044.
32. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 74.
33. H. Alford, "Revelation," p. 1044.
34. This application does not deny that John entertained, also an allusion to Nero, but we contend that his main application is not thus superficial. Commentators have too readily followed Bousset in this matter. The interwoven parody present throughout the presentation of Christ's opponents suggests that we should look for an event overtaking Satan himself similar to Christ's reception of a mortal wound. Indeed, it is the same

event, and is symbolized also by the casting down to earth of Satan (Rev. 12). "The smiting of the head is not simply an historical allusion. ... it rests on Scripture. Because the serpent has attacked the woman, he is flung down grovelling on the earth, to carry on a feud with the woman, which is continued between his seed and the woman's seed: the serpent (in himself, or in his seed?) shall have his head ambushed, the woman's seed, his heel (Gen. 3:13-15). We have witnessed the fulfillment of this oracle point by point; and now that the serpent takes up the feud with 'the rest of the woman's seed' through the instrumentality of his own 'seed,' the beast, we are not to be surprised to see that the head of the serpent's 'seed' is smitten." A. Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 153. Farrer has so many concepts unique to himself, we might not be persuaded by his exposition here, did he stand alone. However, commentators well-known for their sobriety of exegesis have affirmed similarly, despite the majority trend in favor of Nero. Even were it not so, the facts in and of themselves cry out. To rise out of the bottomless pit is, to John, the symbol of resurrection. It is identical with the healing of the wound of death. Compare Rev. 11:7; 13:3; 17:8; 20:1-3, 7. Wherever we read of a rising out of the pit in Revelation, the renewal of a desolating policy by a resurrected power is spoken of. It is this very fact of the renewal of persecution which proves the resurrection state of the beast to those whose names are not written in the book of life. "... the beast has already once existed and will again come up out of the abyss--i.e. the world of the dead (cf. ix.lf., 11).. The antichrist and his kingdom are a power which had already appeared once in history had then disappeared, and at the end of the times is to appear again in life. This is a fundamental thought of early Christian prophecy. . . The same thought is expressed, xiii.3,12,14 in the statement that one of the seven heads of the beast had received a mortal wound, which healed again. This means that the beast itself had received a death-stroke, and had come to life again. . . ." Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 440.

"By the death of Nero, or any other one of the emperors, before the time of Revelation, the continued existence of the Roman kingdom had never been questioned much less had it ever ceased to exist. . . If a Caesar dies, there is another Caesar who immediately lives and reigns." "The idea, however, that the representation of the revivification of the fatally smitten beast or of one of its heads. . . rests upon the myth of the return of Nero, is irreconcilable with the history of this myth. . . . The notion, which arose soon after the suicide of Nero and at first among his heathen admirers, that he had not died, but had fled to the Parthians, and would return from that country to Rome to take vengeance on his enemies and to assume the throne again, existed unchanged until the beginning of the second century--namely, until the time when it was no longer probable that Nero, who was born in 37 A.D., was still alive." *Ibid.*, p. 443. "Moreover, the interpretation of the number 666 as the alleged Hebrew form. . . of the name of Nero. . . is extremely improbable. Revelation was written for Greek Christians, for whom it would be necessary to translate a Hebrew name. ..." *Ibid.*

Guthrie discusses the Nero myth and the interpretation derived from it and then proceeds as follows: "But does the Apocalypse itself really demand this? The Beast with the mortal wound which has now been healed (xiii. 3) may be illustrated by the current Nero myth, but in its later forms that myth involved Nero returning at the head of a Parthian army to recapture his lost throne, with the consequent destruction of Rome. Yet there is no reference to Parthians either in chapter xiii or xvii. The Beast represents the embodiment of evil, a conception quite comprehensible without recourse to a Nero myth, which, according to Tacitus, had become a 'joke' (*ludibrium*) by Domitian's time. Moreover, since the Apocalypse represents the Beast as returning from the dead, this could only refer to Nero after a period when the idea that he had not really died had ceased to be believed because too great an interval had elapsed since his supposed disappearance." *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 953-54.

The first Christian writer to refer to the returning of Nero from the dead was Augustine. But he does not link this in any way with the prophecies of Revelation. See *Civ. Dei*, xx. 19.3.

Paul Minear points out that twice in Revelation the wound is assigned to the beast itself, and that a wound inflicted on a former rejected ruler is not a wound on the empire. Furthermore to the prophet John "this mortal blow which affected the sea-beast injured the dragon as well. ... A mortal wound simultaneously destroyed the authority of head, beast, and dragon by terminating the blasphemous adoration by men. It is difficult to maintain that Nero's suicide fulfilled such specifications." *New Earth*, pp. 250-51. He also says, "The cure also impelled men to worship the dragon by the greater devotion and fear which they accorded to the beast. Now there is absolutely no evidence that the rumored resuscitation of Nero actually had such effects as these." *Ibid.* Minear places great stress on the fact that *plēgē* translated "wound" in Rev. 13 is everywhere else translated "plague." Therefore, he concludes that the wound is as elsewhere the symbol of a divine punishment. "The wound was a God-inflicted plague which simultaneously destroyed the authority of the head, the beast, and the dragon. It was a wound from which the beast could recover only by using deception, by succeeding in that deception, and by making absolute his blasphemous claims to ultimate power over human destiny." *Idid.*, pp. 253-54. Minear then makes the same application of Rev. 12 as does Farrer, making the Atonement the infliction of the deadly wound. "Such an interpretation is in line with other New Testament descriptions of the war between the servants of God and 'the principalities and powers'. ..." *Ibid.*, p. 254. Texts such as Luke 10:17-24; 11:14-22 and Col. 2:15 support this view. Minear, of course,

rejects the application of 666 to Nero, and we consider that this rejection as elaborated by Zann, Lohmeyer, *et al.*, is a watertight case. While Bousset's work on the Apocalypse was tremendously important as showing the relationship between the book and the times, a good case was somewhat spoiled by being overdone. This has resulted in retarding progressive exegesis of Revelation. On the issue of the Nero interpretation, see also Lohmeyer's commentary on Rev. 17 which is prepared to grant allusions to the Nero legends, but chooses to interpret on the basis of apocalyptic symbolism rather than from history. He may overdo this, as he overdoes his emphasis on the sevenfold structure, etc., of the book, but his case is worthy of study. Loisy, on the other hand, follows Bousset closely.

It may be necessary, in order to do justice to all the facts, to keep in mind that John sometimes works on more than one level. It is possible to acknowledge that the seer is aware of and employs the legend of Nero without being committed to the position that sees in such allusions the full meaning of his references. The safe place to begin all attempts at interpretation in depth is with the local historical application which was immediately apparent to both, John and his readers. Thus Rigaux says, "Il nous semble donc probable que Jean a connu et employé la légende de Néron rédivivus dans sa description de la Bête. Rien ne prouve cependant qu'il ait cru à la légende. C'est même fort improbable. Tout est symbole dans la description des bêtes." *L'Antechrist et l'Opposition au Royaume Messianique dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament*, p. 353. [It seems therefore probable that John has known and used the Nero *redivivus* legend in his description of the beast. Nothing proves, however, that he believed in the legend. It is even strongly improbable. All is symbol in the description of the beasts.]

Articles on the topic include, P. Minear, "The Wounded Beast," *JBL*, LXXII (1953), pp. 93-102; B. Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," *NTS*, X (1963-64), pp. 133-39; C. Cleman, "Die Zahl des Tieres Ape. 13,18." *ZNTW*, II (1901), pp. 204-23.

35. "Es ist sicher auch nicht zufällig, wenn man immer wieder versucht war und versucht hat, eine bestimmte geschichtliche Gestalt als den A. anzuprangern.- Ob nicht dieses Wort--man denke an den Wechsel von Sing, und Plur!--vielleicht eher eine Art Chiffre ist, ein Gattungsbegriff, eine Umschreibung deiner Typs, immer wieder konkretisiert und aktualisiert in den Epochen zwischen der Auffahrt und Wiederkunft des Herrn?" L. Coenen, "Antichrist," *TBNT*, i:30. [It is also certainly not coincidental, in view of the repeated attempts and temptations to expose a particular historical figure as the Antichrist.--If this word is not--one thinks of the change from singular to plural--perhaps rather a form of cipher, a notion, a paraphrase of a type, repeatedly concretized and actualized in the epochs between the ascension and return of the Lord?]

"Antichrist. . . strictly defined, a mythical demonic or demonic-human adversary of Christ who will appear before the Second Advent. . . . More broadly, the term is also applied to a historical or mythical potentate who wages war against the faithful." N. Rist, "Antichrist," *IBP*, I, p. 140. 1 Jn. 2:18.

"The human Antichrist stands, alas! for the recurring Antichrists the world has seen. For the upsurge of sin in the human heart is fundamentally the same in all ages, and leads to the same sorts of character. The common sins that are in all our hearts, and all around us, are very much what they were in ancient days. And the rarer forms of sin in the overweening pride and ambition of men who attain power, but who lack humility, are also very much the same in the hearts of those who harbour them. Hence, just as the lustful and violent of one generation much resemble the lustful and the violent of another, so the Antichrist of one generation resembles the Antichrist of another." H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic*, p. 174.

Says Simcox, "The inference seems to be, that in these 'many antichrists' there have been partial and typical fulfilments of the prophecies of the Antichrist, in whom they will find their final and exact fulfilment: just as the various Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament have found or will find their final and exact fulfilment in Christ, while many of them were partially fulfilled--some of them even suggested--by events which came to pass in the day of the Prophets." *Revelation*, p. lxvi. He continues, "Thus it seems necessary to look for a completer fulfilment of the prophecy than any that has yet been seen, while yet it is possible to point to a fulfilment that, to some extent, corresponds with the prediction even in the minutest details. We may thus recognise a common element of truth in both the 'preterist' and the 'futurist' schemes of interpretation. Just as the 72nd Psalm is recognised as setting forth the greatness of Solomon's, 'in type,* by such Emperors as Nero and Domitian, 'in truth' by the Antichrist of the last days, and as a prophecy of Christ's victory over both enemies, the type and the antitype." *Ibid.*, p. lxix.

36. "In the second Beast we have a religious, as in the first a civil, power; he is a *pseudoprophētēs* (xvi. 23, xix. 20, xx. 10), who claims a spiritual power which he does not possess, and misinterprets the Divine Will in the interests of the persecuting State. Some ancient interpreters saw in him the Christian ministry turned to unworthy uses; . . . Such men may be in the background of St John's thought, but the immediate reference is rather to the pagan priesthood of his own time. . . ." H. B. Swete, *Apocalypse*, p. 169.

37. J. Wesley, *Notes on the New Testament*, p. 704.

38. M. E. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, vol. 5, p. 308. (emphasis his)

39. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 253-61.
40. W. Milligan, *Lectures*, pp. 66-68.
41. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 111:4, p. 49.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
49. Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 699.
50. Bishop Wordsworth, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. 1, p. 272.
51. Henry Law, *Christ is All*, p. 101.
52. Patrick Fairbairn, *An Exposition of Ezekiel*, pp. 218-19.
53. Rev. Thomas Hamilton, *Our Rest Day--its Origins, History, and Claims*, pp. 111-120.
54. R. L. Dabney, *The Christian Sabbath*, pp. 24-26.
55. Gnana Robinson, *The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath-A Comprehensive Exegetical Approach*, pp. 422-24.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 413-14.
57. M. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark*, p. 15.
58. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*, p. 194.
59. M. Hooker, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16. See also A. Farrer, *St. Matthew and St. Mark*, p. 17.
60. See H. H. Rowley's *The Relevance of Apocalyptic*, pp. 22-23, 51, 183-89, and compare Dan. 1, 3, and 6.
61. Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, pp. 18-19.
62. Carl F. Henry, *Christianity Today*, Jan. 5, 1962, p. 3. Henry spells out why he thinks the doctrine of creation is so basic. "Creation means that God is the true home of man's spirit. When man loses this knowledge he is a lost man, unable to take bearings to determine where he is, or where he should go. "With the loss of this knowledge, man also loses the knowledge of self. Not knowing of whom he is the son, he knows not who he is. Like Socrates, he thinks himself now divine, now demonic. Estranged from his father, he is a stranger to himself.
- "That God is Creator means also that beyond the universe is a reality rightly called Father; that behind all the loneliness of lost man is a transcendent, seeking love. By creating the world, God reveals that he is fatherly, an out-going, self-giving God, who willed that there be another alongside him with whom he wills to share his divine existence and life, his divine joy and beatitudes. Knowing that he was created to participate in the life of God, man regards existence as an expression of the mercy of God. Existence is no longer a curse, the universe unfriendly. The child knowing his origin declares, 'This is my Father's world, ' and sings, 'It is good to be here, it is great to be alive, and the best is yet to be. . . .
- ' "if this doctrine is not central, nonetheless it is basic to the Christian faith, and stands therefore first in the Apostle's Creed. It is so basic that neither the Cross nor the Resurrection have meaning without it for the Cross means the end of the old creation, and the Resurrection means the regeneration of all things, the recreation of the old into a new heaven and a new earth." *Ibid.*
63. *The Anchor Bible* says of the writer of these verses, "He has made it clear in chapters 13,14, that the sin is idolatry." p. 255.
64. *The Christian Sabbath* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: The Catholic Mirror, [1893] pp. 29-31. [FRS No. 30; original editorials, FRS No. 125.];
- [p. 29] "The Catholic Church for over one thousand years before the existence of a Protestant by virtue of her Divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday. We say by virtue of her Divine mission because He [who] has so called Himself 'the Lord of the Sabbath,' . . . commanded all, without exception, 'to

hear His Church' under penalty of being classed by Him as 'the heathen and the publican.' . . .

"But the Protestant says: How can I receive the teachings of an apostate Church? How, we ask, have you managed to receive her teaching all your life, in direct [p. 30] opposition to your recognized teacher, the Bible, on the Sabbath question? . . .

"[p. 31]. The Protestant world at its birth found the Christian Sabbath too strongly entrenched to run counter to its existence; it was therefore placed under the necessity of acquiescing in the arrangement, thus implying the Church's right to change the day, for over 300 years. The Christian Sabbath is therefore to this day the acknowledged offspring of the Catholic Church, as Spouse of the Holy Ghost, without a word of remonstrance from the Protestant world."

Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, *Kanon und Tradition* ("Canon and Tradition") (Ludwigsburg: Druck und Verlag von Ferd. Riehm, 1859), p. 263. German. [FRS No. 72]:

"The Council [of Trent] agreed fully with Ambrosius Pelargus, that under no condition should the Protestants be allowed to triumph by saying that the council had condemned the doctrine of the ancient church. But this practice caused untold difficulty without being able to guarantee certainty. For this business, indeed, 'well-nigh divine prudence' was requisite—which the Spanish ambassador acknowledged as belonging to the council on the sixteenth of March, 1562. Indeed, thus far they had not been able to orient themselves to the interchanging, crisscrossing, labyrinthine, twisting passages of an older and newer concept of tradition. But even in this they were to succeed. Finally, at the last opening [see editor's note] on the eighteenth of January, 1562, all hesitation was set aside: [Gaspar de Fosso] the Archbishop of Reggio made a speech in which he openly declared that tradition stood above Scripture. The authority of the church could therefore not be bound to the authority of the Scriptures, because the church had changed circumcision into baptism, Sabbath into Sunday, not by the command of Christ, but by its own authority. With this, to be sure, the last illusion was destroyed, and it was declared that tradition does not signify antiquity, but continual inspiration." *Ibid.*, p. 888.

The Augsburg Confession (1530), part 2, art. 7, "Of Ecclesiastical Power," trans. in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1919) Vol. 3, pp. 63,64.

"[p. 63] Besides these things, there is a controversy whether Bishops or Pastors have power to institute ceremonies in the Church, and to make laws concerning meats, and holidays, and degrees, or orders of ministers, etc. They that ascribe this power to Bishops allege this. [p. 64] testimony for it: 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; but when that Spirit of truth shall come, he shall teach you all truth' (John xvi. 12, 13). They allege also the examples of the Apostles, who commanded to abstain from blood, and that which was strangled (Acts xv. 29). They allege the change of the Sabbath into the Lord's day, contrary, as it seemeth to the Decalogue; and they have no example more in their mouths than the change of the Sabbath. They will needs have the Church's power to be very great, because it hath dispensed with a precept of the Decalogue.

"But of this question ours do thus teach: that the Bishops have no power to ordain any thing contrary to the Gospel, as was shown before." *Ibid.*, p. 889.

Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Readers of *The Christian Baptist* I (Feb. 2, 1824), 44, 45, in reprint of 1848, 7 vols, in one. [FRS No. 88]: "[

p. 44] Either the law remains in all its force, to the utmost extent of its literal requirements, or it is passed away with the Jewish ceremonies. If it yet exists, let us observe it according to law. And if it does not exist, let us abandon a mock observance of another day for it.

"'But,' say some, 'it was changed from the seventh to the first day.' Where? When? and by Whom? No man can tell. No it never was changed, nor could it be, unless creation was to be gone through again: for the reason assigned must be changed before the observance, or respect to the reason, can be changed! It is all old wives' fables to talk of the change of the sabbath from the seventh to the first day. If it be changed, it was that august personage changed it who changes times and laws ex officio--! think his name is DOCTOR ANTICHRIST. ..." *Ibid.*, p. 891.

Vincent J. Kelly, *Forbidden Sunday and Feast-Day Occupations*, p. 2. Copyright 1943 by the Catholic University of America Press, Washington:

"Some theologians have held that God likewise directly determined the Sunday as the day of worship in the New Law, that He Himself has explicitly substituted the Sunday for the Sabbath. But this theory is now entirely abandoned. It is now commonly held that God simply gave His Church the power to set aside whatever day or days, she would deem suitable as Holy Days. The Church chose Sunday, the first day of the week, and in the course of time added other days, as holy days." *Ibid.*

65. William Whitla, Sir Isaac Newton's *Daniel and the Apocalypse*, pp. 315-16.

66. N. H. Young, "The Impact of the Jewish Day of Atonement upon the Thought of the New Testament," (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Manchester, 1973), p. 363.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 365-66.
68. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 325.
69. See G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 174-76.
70. L. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 174.
71. G. Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 186.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
73. *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 205.
74. Preston and Hanson comment, "We have, then, in verses 14 and 18-20, a picture of the judgment of Christ. It is closely connected with the picture of hell which it follows and may be looked on as a fuller explication of the part which the Lamb plays in that scene. The figure is that of the vintage, and the vintage, like the harvest, is a symbol throughout the Bible of one of the deepest truths that the Bible has to convey: 'by their fruits ye shall know them'. Good must go on producing good, and evil, evil, till both have become perfectly obvious-and that becoming is called the judgment." *Revelation*, p. 104.
75. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 25.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

1. Eze. 16:8,15,32,38,59-60,62-62.
2. H. M. Feret, *Apocalypse*, p. 137.
3. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 226.
4. H. Alford, "Revelation," p. 1038.
5. See W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 205, and E. Hengstenberg, *ad loc.*
6. T. F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today* (hereinafter referred to as *Apocalypse*), p. 64.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7.
8. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 231.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 231-32.
10. A. Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 146.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

1. J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 230.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
4. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, p. 246.
5. J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation*, pp. 28-29. Preston and Hanson comment, "In all this John is not merely indulging in bizarre and fantastic speculations. He is concerned with matters of fundamental importance for the history of the world and the understanding of the way in which God deals with man. With truly inspired insight he has laid bare for us principles of life which prove themselves true again and again in the course of world history. The profound thought which lies behind these tremendous pictures is that man is made to worship some absolute power, and that if he does not worship the true and real Power behind the universe, he will construct a god for himself and give absolute allegiance to that. It seems indeed that John goes further than this, and asserts that man will always tend to worship some sort of Trinity and to adore some sort of Incarnation, even if he rejects the true Trinity and the true Incarnation." *Revelation*, pp. 96-7.
6. "The dragon theme may be classed as almost universal in mythology. ..." "The Ras Shamra Texts. . . record Canaanite myths of the period from 1700 to 1400 B.C. A section of one text tells of the fight of Anath and the dragon. At one point Anath shouts:

'I have destroyed the Sea-Dragon. . .

I have destroyed the winding serpent,
Shalyat of the seven heads,
I have destroyed the underworld dragon,
beloved of El.'

"In another of the texts ("Baal and the Waters"), we learn of the sevenheaded Lotan, the very name from which the word 'Leviathan' in the Old Testament is derived. . . . Two words which describe Lotan and Leviathan are identical in two languages. They are *brh*, usually translated 'swift' or 'gliding,' and *qltn*, usually translated 'crooked' or 'tortuous.'

"A cylinder seal found in Tell Asmar in Mesopotamia shows a seven-headed dragon being subdued by two deities. . . . This is the type of monster which raged against the prevailing gods in Canaanite mythology, the Leviathan to which the Old Testament alludes." Howard Wallace, 'Leviathan and the Beast in Revelation,' *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 1948." Quoted in E. R. Thiele's, "Revelation," pp. 254-55.

"It must be noted that several Old Testament words are basically related to Leviathan. One is *tehom*, a word designating primeval chaos. While it is not personified, it is mentioned in Job 41:31,32 as being the dwelling place of Leviathan. . . . *Yam*, 'sea,' is more than a mere body of water in many passages; it is an active force, probably reflecting the old myth of the struggle between order and chaos. . . . Leviathan dwells in the sea. *Rahab*, a sea monster, can be equated with Leviathan in several O.T. passages (Job 9:13; 26:12; Isa. 51:9; Ps. 89:10). . . .

"Drakon, 'dragon,' is the usual Septuagint rendering of Leviathan. Only once is Leviathan translated *ketos*, 'sea-monster' (Job 3:8). From Rev. 13:1 on, the beast and the dragon are used interchangeably, as are Leviathan and Rahab and Tannin in the Old Testament. It may also be noted that *abyssos* is the Septuagint rendering of *tehom*, the watery deep.

"The war in heaven between the dragon Michael and his angels (Rev. 12:7-12) . . . is an echo of the war in which Tiamat and her hordes were defeated by Marduk and the gods in the Babylonian Creation Story, and in which Baal of Canaanite lore fought against the rebellious waters. Yahweh destroyed Leviathan in the dim past The primeval struggle between Yahweh and the powers of chaos is transformed in the Christian context into a struggle between God and Satan. . . .

"The last part of chapter 19 and the first part of chapter 20 picture the overthrow of the beast and his armies. 'The dragon, that ancient serpent who is the Devil and Satan' in Rev. 20:2 is bound and thrown into the bottomless pit. The *abyssos* and its relation to *tehom* is again indicative of the whole Leviathan strain, in which Leviathan is the representation of the restless forces of chaos. . . .

"Leviathan. . . in Isaiah 27:1 and subsequent Apocryphal and Rabbinical writings blossoms out into a magnificent and terrible symbol of evil and disorder. Leviathan is the source for the usage of the beast, *therion* and the dragon, *drakon*, in the Revelation to John. In this N.T. apocalypse, the conflict between good and evil is pictured in intense form, and the figures of the terrible beast and the red dragon go down to defeat in the cataclysmic battle which results in a new heaven and a new earth." *Ibid.*, p. 256. See also A. Y. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 164-65.

7. It is well-known that New Testament terminology was influenced by the Septuagint. ...All this has relevance for interpretation for the beast from the sea and the abyss (which represents the same reality. Compare 9:1,11; 11:7; 17:8 with 13:1). Antichrist in Rev. 13 is the same as in Dan. 7:25; Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14; 2 Thess. 2:1-12. It has appeared in history, and is yet to appear at history's end.

8. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 2, pp. 58-59.

9. Isaac Williams, *Revelation*, pp. 226-27.

10. Preston and Hanson's comment is appropriate though we reject the Nero theory. "As we study the details of this chapter there is one astonishing feature which gradually becomes apparent: Satan has produced a parody of the divine dispensation. The Dragon, the First Beast, and the Second Beast (each of the last two proceeding from the one before it), correspond to the Trinity. Nero *Redivivus* is Satan Incarnate. There is even a death and resurrection in the death and return of Nero (cf. 'the Lamb that had been slain'). Even more, Satan produces a world church, with certain marks of its own to distinguish its members from the rest of the world (verse 16), cf. the sealing of the faithful in 7. 3. Finally, it is worth observing that just as the divine dispensation is called a 'mystery' in 10:7, so there is the 'mystery of iniquity' which belongs to the Roman Empire (see 17. 5)." *Revelation*, p. 96.

11. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 221. P. Minear writes, ". . . the word that is translated as wound--*plēgē*. When one studies the appearances of this term in the Apocalypse, he discovers two things. In the first place, while the RSV translators have chosen the rendering "wound" in chapter 13, every other occurrence of *plēgē* (twelve in all) is rendered by the English word "plague." In all these other contexts, the plague is an episode in that war in heaven which overarches the conflicts on earth between the dragon and the messianic

community. It is divinely ordained and messianically-administered punishment for sin. It is a drastic punishment that spells death in the prophet's vocabulary; such a wound is always mortal." *New Earth*, p. 253.

"This death, than , was much more than the suicide of a human emperor. It was the plague of death released through the Messiah in his own crucifixion and exaltation." *Ibid.*, p. 254. 'He shall bruise your head' is the prophecy which John the prophet saw to be fulfilled in Christ's wounding of the Serpent." *Ibid.*, p. 259. C. H. Little agrees. His commentary on Rev. 17:8 says, "In the words 'and is not' the reference is to the deathblow inflicted upon him by the exaltation of Christ, whereby he was so completely crushed that he was thrown into the abyss, from which it seemed that he would never rise again." *Revelation*, p. 176.

12. See R. Shank's excellent discussion of perseverance in *Life in the Son*.

13. A. Y. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, p. 163.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

15. H. Grattan Guinness, *Romanism and the Reformation*, pp. 42-43.

16. See W. A. Criswell, *Revelation*, vol. 4, p. 115.

17. C. R. Erdman, *Revelation*, p. 111.

18. W. Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, p. 180,

19. George Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 183.

20. "At the end, Satan's attack must be launched from a beachhead within the Church, where the earth-beast not only carries on priestly activities but displays the credentials of a prophet. The readers are called to discern the criteria which will enable them to separate the lamb-like beast (13:11) from the Lamb himself (14:1)." P. Minear, *New Earth*, p. 119.

21. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 230.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-31.

23. See P. Minear, *New Earth*, pp. 118-19; 124-27.

24. "The present trouble represents the disintegration of the sensate form of Western culture and society, which emerged at the end of the twelfth century and gradually replaced the declining ideational form of medieval culture. For the } past four centuries it has been dominant. In the period of its ascendancy and climax it created the most magnificent cultural values in most of the compartments of Western culture. During these centuries it wrote one of the most brilliant pages in human history. However, no finite form, either ideational or sensate, is eternal. Sooner or later it is bound to exhaust its creative abilities. When this moment comes, it begins to disintegrate and decline. So it has happened several times before, in the history of a number of the leading cultures of the past; and so it is happening now with our sensate form, which has apparently > entered its decadent stage. Hence the magnitude of the crisis of our time." P. A. Sorokin, *Crisis of our Age*, pp. 28-9.

25. Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, p. 322.

26. Quoted by Hugh Montefiore in *Can Man Survive?* p. 19.

27. *Intergovernmental Conference of Experts on the Scientific Basis for Rational Use and Conservation of the Resources of the Biosphere*, IV, 18, 9a, p. 5.

28. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* motif has become known through *The Lonely Crowd*, by David Riesman; *The Organization Man*, by William H. White, jnr., *The Fountainhead*, Ayn Rand.

29. C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, pp. 145-46.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 51. "I would not—Hell forbid!—encourage in your own minds that delusion which you must carefully foster in the minds of your human victims. I mean the delusion that the fate of nations is in itself more important than that of individual souls. . . .

"But now for the pleasantest part of my duty. It falls to my lot to propose on behalf of the guests the health of Principal Slubgob and the Tempter's Training College. Fill your glasses. What is this I see? What is this delicious bouquet I inhale? Can it be? Mr. Principal, I unsay all my hard words about the dinner. I see, and smell, that even under wartime conditions the College cellar still has a few dozen of sound old vintage Pharisee. Well, well, well. This is like old times. Hold it beneath your nostrils for a moment, gentledevils. Hold it up to the light. Look at those fiery streaks that writhe and tangle in its dark heart, as if they were contending. And so they are. You know how this wine is blended? Different types of Pharisee have been harvested, trodden, and fermented together to produce its subtle flavour. . . All said and done, my friends, it

will be an ill day for us if what most humans mean by 'religion' ever vanishes from the Earth. It can still send us the truly delicious sins. The fine flower of unholiness can grow only in the close neighbourhood of the Holy. Nowhere do we tempt so successfully as on the very steps of the altar." *Ibid.*, pp. 155-57.

31. Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* pp. 205-6.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-57.

34. P. 242.

35. P. 251.

36. P. 252.

37. A. Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, vol. 4, book 2, pp. 281-84.

38. J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, p. 128.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

40. L. Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted*, p. 152.

41. C. Wordsworth, "Revelation," p. 62.

42. J. Tanner, *Daniel and the Revelation*, p. 56.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

1. John G. Gager in his *Kingdom and Community*, discusses Revelation (see pp. 49-57 and speaks of a "pattern of alternation between symbols of victory/hope and of oppression/despair." A. Y. Collins proposes that the structure of the Apocalypse "moves from visions of persecution/threat to those of salvation/victory." See pp. xv.

2. W. A. Criswell, *Revelation*, vol. 4, pp. 137-38.

3. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, pp. 268-69.

4. Leon Morris, *Revelation*, p. 177.

5. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 182.

6. G. Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 193.

7. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 224f.

8. E. Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, p. 565.

9. T. F. Torrance, *Apocalypse*, p. 115.

10. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, pp. 132-33.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 250-51.

13. Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 196-97.

14. R. Way, E. Giller, B. Brinsmead, "The Consummation," p. 190.

15. "Contrary to the view of some, *orgē* (wrath) in Paul is closely related to and serves as a function of the righteousness of God. As such, righteousness has a double character. Salvation and condemnation, deliverance and punishment are all functions of God's righteousness. This suggests that Romans 1:17 and 1:18 are closely related and not juxtaposed, as is often assumed. The close relationship is supported by *gar* and the repetition of the verb *revealed* in 1:18. That 1:18 cannot refer to the era before Christ as the time of wrath seems evident from Paul's reference in 3:25 to God's patient endurance. The revelation of God's wrath, then, is not mere prerequisite to the proclamation of the Gospel to show man's need of salvation, but is part of the Gospel itself. As Karl Barth rightly says, it is good news that God acknowledges man's sin and is doing something about it." Calvin J. Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community*, pp. 79-80. "The similarities between the apocalyptic and Pauline concept of wrath are striking. ; In both wrath is a function of God's righteousness (Jub. 36:10; Rom. 1:17 f.). In both the wrathful judgment is corporate (1 Enoch 5:6f., 84:4; 92:9, 103:7 ff., etc.; Rom. 1:18-3:20). In both an outpouring of wrath comes on the Last Day (1 Enoch 91:7; Rom. 2:5 f.). In both God shows his forbearance by holding back his wrath (II Baruch 59:6, 48:14, 17; Rom. 2:3-5). In both God's wrath falls on men who act as if they are Lord (Jub. 5:6; Rom. 1:18-32).

"In spite of these similarities the differences are considerable. As it is true of judgment, so also it is true that wrath in apocalyptic literature is poured out primarily on the heathen (1 Enoch 92:9), and apostate Jews (1 Enoch 91:7). In 1 Enoch 5:9 the elect are promised that they 'will not die of (the divine) anger or wrath. 1 Redemption is promised to the righteous but terror and dismay are in prospect for the wicked at the end of the world (1 QM 3:28). 'Eternal perdition' awaits those who live 'in the spirit of error' (1 QS 4:12). In II Baruch 59:6 even the delay of God's wrath means he shows special favoritism to Israel. Paul on the other hand sees God's wrath in a more universalistic sense. Being a Jew exempts no one from the claims of the Gospel; being a Gentile allows no one to plead ignorance (Rom. 1:18-3:20), nor does being a Christian in some ontological sense offer any protection from the wrath. It is rather those sinners who respond in believing obedience to God's Gospel who know God's vindicating action as grace instead of wrath (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10, 5:9). It perhaps is more correct to say the Christians are exculpated from the wrath than that they are excluded from it.

"Paul also differs from the apocalyptic writers in his understanding of eschatological wrath as a present possibility. It is clear in the apocalyptic writings that even though God's wrath is manifested in history, this historical manifestation merely anticipates the future Day of Wrath. There was also a growing tendency to speak less and less of wrath as a present historical possibility and to speak more and more of wrath on the Last Day. To Paul, converse the Last Day is already proleptically present and its final manifestation stands in the imminent future." *Ibid.*, pp. 81-3.

16. The original of 8:14 has no article and may be translated "then shall holiness be justified (or vindicated)."

17. C. H. Little gives the essence when he writes, "This Gospel is here called 'everlasting,' or 'eternal,' because it is unchangeable, being forever the same. The fact that this angel has this eternal Gospel to proclaim 'to those that sit on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people,' designates it as a universal Gospel, a Gospel that is to be preached to every creature. Here we have a fulfillment of Christ's own prediction in Matt. 24:14." *Revelation*, p. 144. 18. Rom. 8:35, 37-9. 19. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 280.

20. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 272.

21. W. Barclay, *The Revelation of John* (hereinafter referred to as *Revelation*), vol. 2, p. 111.

22. A. W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 134. 23. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, pp. 280-81.

24. H. Alford, "Revelation," p. 1053.

25. Preston and Hanson comment, ". . . in the last resort continual opposition to God's love means spiritual annihilation; the personality as such ceases to exist. Its fate is destruction. Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire (20:14), and fire annihilates. Pictures of eternal torments which have been popular have gone far beyond any Biblical evidence and are mostly contrary to it." *Revelation*, p. 33. Later they add, ". . . we must remember that John cannot possibly have meant literal fire and literal brimstone in verse 10. Most intelligent people will admit that his language throughout the rest of his work is symbolical (e.g. in his descriptions of heaven). It would be totally unfair to take him literally here, and here only. Fire and brimstone are the traditional symbols for the fate of those who persistently reject God." *Ibid.*, p. 102. 26. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. 66.

27. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, pp. 245, 250-51.

28. John Wenham, *The Goodness of God*, pp. 36-7.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

30. A. W. Spalding, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-85.

31. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," p. 255.

32. A. T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, p. 159.

33. C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, p. 125.

34. See *TDNT*, V, p. 422.

35. Tasker sums up the biblical evidence thus: ". . . until the final 'day of wrath', which is anticipated throughout the Bible and portrayed very vividly in the Revelation, God's wrath is always tempered with mercy, particularly in His dealings with His chosen people (see e.g. Hos. xi. 8 ff.). For a sinner, however, to 'trade' upon this mercy is to treasure 'up unto (himself) wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God' (Rom. ii. 5)." R. V. G. Tasker, "Wrath," *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 1341.

36. See articles on "wrath" in *TDNT*, and R. V. G. Tasker's *The Biblical Concept of the Wrath of God*.

37. Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, p. 76.

38. Daniel Lamont, *God the Redeemer*, p. 7.
39. E. Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, p. 210.
40. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, p. 187.
41. R. C. H. Lenski, *Revelation*, p. 439.
42. J. I. Packer, *Introduction to Buchanan's The Doctrine of Justification*. (Banner of Truth edition only).
43. W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, p. 181.
44. W. J. Dumbrell, "Daniel and the Function of Old Testament Apocalyptic," *The Reformed Theological Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, Jan-April 1975, pp. 16-17.
45. The lack of the article here is not significant, for any word which has the force of a proper name may stand thus. Because this figure is said to be like a son of man in contrast to the angels in the same vision, it could be none other than Jesus. Two of these symbols are reminiscent of Him who sat on the white horse wearing a *stephenos* (crown) in the first seal. But instead of a bow, he now has the sickle for probation has closed, and all men have been sealed for eternity. The *stephenos* is in sharp contrast to the crown of thorns he once wore when judged in our place.
46. Justin Smith, *Epistles*, pp. 206-07.
47. T. F. Torrance, *Apocalypse*, p. 120.
48. *Revelation*, pp. 189-95.
49. "In the vision of the vintage which now follows, vv. 17-20, the principal feature, as in its original, Joel 3:13, is contained, not in the ingathering of the grapes, but in the treading of the winepress. The crushing of the grapes in the press, and especially the staining of the feet and garments of the treaders with the red juices, the 'blood of the grapes'. . . became a familiar figure for the utter trampling down of enemies and furious vengeance. Hence this symbol of God's wrath visited upon the wicked; cf. Is. 63:2-4. . . cf. Joel 3:13; Lam. 1:15; Rev. 19:15. The meaning of the second vision is clear; it pictures not the judgment as a whole, but God's vengeance visited upon the wicked. It is then not parallel with the first, which. . . figures the whole judgment, as it affects the righteous and the wicked alike. We have in the two visions, as often with the author, first a general fact or statement, then a detail or part. . . ." Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 663. See also Morris, *Revelation*, p. 85. Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, pp. 155-56; Farrer, *Revelation*, pp. 165-68, *et al.*
50. "The vintage is trodden outside the city. St. John accepts the symbolism of Joel. Joel describes under the metaphor of a ghastly vintage a battle in which the nations, attacking Jerusalem, are smashed outside the walls. St John no more supposes the act of judgement to be confined within the valley of Jehoshaphat than he supposes the blessed harvest to be reaped in a field of barley on the Judean hills. The value of the phrase 'outside the city' is that it links Joel's prophecy with the last chapters of Isaiah and Zechariah respectively, both of which describe a final slaughter of enemies outside of Jerusalem." Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 167. Beckwith reminds us that "A final assault upon God's people by the assembled forces of their enemies, and the overthrow of these, are the common predictions of the apocalyptic writings. . . and this event is thought of as taking place near Jerusalem. The Apocalypticist appears to have this tradition in mind in the use of the words 'without the city.'" *Apocalypse*, pp. 664-65. This is nearer the mark than Morris's more general application. *Revelation*, p. 186. Kiddle would have us believe that the city mentioned is Babylon, but he has missed the allusion to Old Testament passages about the final slaughter outside Jerusalem. Carpenter is more accurate when he says that those who fall "have refused the defence of the true city and sanctuary." *Revelation*, p. 604.
51. See Beckwith, *Revelation*, p. 665. R. H. Charles differs with Beckwith regarding the issue of whether the earthly or heavenly Jerusalem is meant. He says in contrast to Kiddle and Beasley-Murray, "There can be no question as to the identity of 'the city.' It is not Rome (for its destruction has already been announced in the hearing of the Seer in 9) but Jerusalem. It is, moreover, most probably not the earthly Jerusalem but the heavenly Jerusalem which is to descend from heaven to be the center of the Kingdom of Christ for the 1000 years. . . If xiv. 14, 18-20 is a proleptic summary of xix. 11-21 only, then the city referred to might then be the historic Jerusalem, or rather its ruined site; but if this is a summary of xix. 11-21 and also xx. 7-10, then the city can be none other than the city that came down from heaven--the seat of the Messianic Kingdom." *Revelation*, II, p. 25. We think Charles is mainly right, but wrong in his reference to "the historic Jerusalem, or rather its ruined site." John by the holy city means the church, at least in all references prior to chapter 20. Whether in picturing a subsequent era to the Parousia, when faith gives place to sight, he replaces the emblems of ancient Israel by more material representations is another question.
52. See. Eze. 40:2; 45:1-5; 48:9f.
53. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," and without holiness no man will be enabled to resist the

lures of Antichrist. This holiness is first of all imputed, for only Christ's perfect merits meet all the demands of the divine law. When received by faith, the righteousness of Christ breaks the dominion of Satan. 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 6:14.

54. One writer has beautifully summarized the relationship of the ancient Day of Atonement and the rent veil to the believer's present privileges and hopes.

"With a rending noise the inner veil of the temple is torn from top to bottom by an unseen hand, throwing open to the gaze of the multitude a place once filled with the presence of God. In this place the Shekinah had dwelt. Here God had manifested His glory above the mercy-seat. No one but the high priest ever lifted the veil separating this apartment from the rest of the temple. He entered in once a year to make an atonement for the sins of the people. But lo, this veil is rent in twain. The most holy place of the earthly sanctuary is no longer sacred.

"All is terror and confusion. The priest is about to slay the victim; but the knife drops from his nerveless hand, and the lamb escapes. Type has met antitype in the death of God's Son. The great sacrifice has been made. The way into the holiest is laid open. A new and living way is prepared for all. No longer need sinful, sorrowing humanity await the coming of the high priest. Henceforth the Saviour was to officiate as priest and advocate in the heaven of heavens. It was as if a living voice has spoken to the worshipers: There is now an end to all sacrifices and offerings for sin. The Son of God is come according to His word, 'Lo, I come (in the volume of the Book it is written of Me,) to do Thy will, O God.' 'By His blood' He entereth 'in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.'" Heb. 10:7; 9:12. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 757.

"As in the typical service, the high priest laid aside his pontifical robes, and officiated in the white linen dress of an ordinary priest; so Christ laid aside His royal robes, and garbed Himself with humanity, and offered sacrifice, Himself the priest, Himself the victim. As the high priest, after performing his service in the Holy of Holies, came forth to the waiting congregation in his pontifical robes, so Christ will come the second time, clothed in garments of whitest white, 'so as no fuller on earth can white them.' He will come in His own glory and in the glory of His Father and of all the angelic host who will escort Him on His way." Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 33. "Still bearing humanity, He ascended to heaven, triumphant and victorious. He has taken the blood of the atonement into the holiest of all, sprinkled it upon the mercy-seat and His own garments, and blessed the people. Soon he will appear the second time to declare that there is no more sacrifice for sin." Ellen G. White, "With Power and Great Glory," *Signs of the Times*, Apr. 19, 1905.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY

1. Donald W. Richardson, *Revelation*, p. 101.

2. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 265.

3. P. Minear, *New Earth*, p. 148.

4. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 198.

5. D. W. Richardson, *Revelation*, p. 99.

6. H. Alford, "Revelation," vol. 4, p. 696.

7. L. F. Were, an Australian preacher and writer, probably did more work in this area, and to better effect than any other of his generation. See his *Certainty of the Third Angel's Message*, etc.

In his book, *The Woman and the Resurrected Beast*, pp. 90-92, Were clearly shows that Rev. 17 is the explanation of the sixteenth chapter. Our quotation is an illustration of the very successful manner in which Were made the Bible its own expositor. "Observe by the following comparisons the same powers, the same conflict, the same judgments, and the same results are mentioned in both chapters, and observe too that Rev. 17 contains the enlargement or explanation of the symbols and events mentioned under the 6th and 7th plagues.

Rev. 18:4,8. The seven last plagues "her [Babylon's] plagues".

Rev. 17:5. Deals with God's judgment on Babylon.

Rev. 16:12,19. The 6th and 7th plagues are both poured out specifically on Babylon's river and upon Babylon herself.

Rev. 17:1; Jer. 51:13. The waters of the Euphrates.

Rev. 16:12. The waters of the Euphrates.

Rev. 17:1,15. The waters of the Euphrates here explained to be the peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues who have previously done Babylon's bidding, now turn and hate Babylon and make her desolate, This shows what is meant by the drying up of the waters of the Euphrates mentioned in

Rev. 16:12. Rev. 16:12. The waters of the Euphrates dried up--the great event that commences the complete destruction of Babylon.

Rev. 17:15,16. After having interpreted the waters of the Euphrates upon which the whore sitteth (v. 1) to refer to the nation: and people who did her bidding, and having brought us to the time of the drying up of those waters, the very next verse (15) naturally passes on to deal with what is meant by the drying up of those waters--the nations and people ceasing to support and obey the whore, but instead they hate her and make her desolate. U

Rev. 16:13. The uniting of the three divisions of Babylon.

Rev. 17:10-13, 17; 2 Thess. 2:11. The uniting of the three divisions of Babylon.

Rev. 16:14. Deceived into uniting by miracles.

Rev. 17:17; 19:19, 20. Deceived into uniting by miracles concerning the mark of the beast.

Rev. 16:14. Spirits of devils working miracles to deceive concerning the mark of the beast.

Rev. 17:13,14,17; 13:14; 2 Thess. 2:9-12; Matt. 24:24. Spirits of devils work miracles thus bringing about unity among the three divisions of Babylon.

Rev. 16:14. Thus 'the kings of the earth and of the whole world' are ;led to make war against God Almighty. 'They find that they have been :fighting against God' (*Great Controversy*, p. 640, by Ellen G. White).

Rev. 17:14. 'These', by giving their power and strength unto the beast, 'shall make war with the Lamb' ('in the person of His witnesses', Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 7, p. 182.) In Rev. 1:8 Jesus claims to be 'the Almighty'.

Rev. 16:16. They are thus gathered . to their destruction--'Armageddon' means 'the mountain of slaughter', referring to the destruction of all the wicked who will have joined in the united war against the remnant.

Rev. 17:14. 'And the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings'--in contrast to the king of Babylon "a king of kings" (Dan. 2:37).

Rev. 16:17. God's voice, saying, 'It is done' brings us to the time when the unity of Babylon is broken up.

Rev. 17:17: 'For God hath put into their heart to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled'. When God says, 'It is done', all that has been written concerning the work of the forces of Babylon will have been fulfilled, just as all to be fulfilled by Jesus had been fulfilled when Jesus cried out on the cross, 'It is finished'--note John 19:28-30.

Rev. 16:19. 'The great city [Babylon] was divided into three . parts.'

Rev. 17:16. Babylon's unity broken up when the waters of the Euphrates are dried up, i.e., when the religious leaders, terrified by the display of God's almighty power, confess to their deceiving of the people, the people turn and rend them."

8. On the commonly received interpretation of the passage Ladd says: "Many commentators assert--as though it were a self-evident fact in the text--that the 'kings from the east' represent the Parthians who now invade the civilized world under the leadership of Nero *redivivus*. This, however, is sheer speculation." *Revelation*, p. 213. However, we view Ladd's own interpretation (regarding "the pagan hordes") as just as speculative. This type of interpretation came into modern favor when journalists "puffed" the "yellow peril" about the turn of the century. While it is true that John interweaves some current myths of his day into his work, and may here have the Parthians in mind, it is even more true that the main source of his imagery is the Old Testament. As in the case of Christ's teachings where for every local allusion several Old Testament references can be found, even so it is with the author of Revelation. Older commentaries were wont to point out that the language of Rev. 16:12 has been drawn from expressions in Isaiah having reference to Israel's deliverance from ancient Babylon. For example, note that the phrases "from the east" (Isa. 41:2; 43:5; 46:11) and "from the rising of the sun" (Isa. 41:25; 45:6; 59:19) are each employed three times in Isaiah in connection with Israel's redemption from the captor nation. Similarly, the drying up of Euphrates is there mentioned. See Isa. 44:27. Milligan has expressed himself at length upon this matter, and should be closely studied. He says: "Probably no part of the Apocalypse has received more varied interpretation than the first statement of this Bowl. Who are these kings that come from the sun-rising is the point to be determined; and the answer usually given is, that they are part of the anti-Christian host, part of those afterwards spoken of as the kings of the whole inhabited earth, before whom God dries up the Euphrates in order that they may pursue an uninterrupted march to the spot on which they are to be overwhelmed with a final and complete destruction. Something may certainly be said on behalf of such a view; yet it is exposed to serious objections.

"1. We have already at chap. ix. 14, . . . been made acquainted with the river Euphrates; and, so far from being a hindrance to the progress of Christ's enemies, it is rather the symbol of their overflowing and destructive might.

"2. We have also met at chap. vii. 2 with the expression 'from the sun-rising,' and it is there applied to the quarter from which the angel comes by whom the people of God are sealed. . . . it is not easy to think of anti-Christian foes coming from a quarter described in the same term.

"3. These kings 'from the sun-rising' are not said to be a part of 'the kings of the whole inhabited earth' immediately afterwards referred to. They are rather distinguished from them.

"4. The 'preparing of the way' connects itself with the thought of Him whose way was prepared by the coming of the Baptist.

"5. The type of drying up the waters of a river, takes us back, alike in the historical and prophetic writings of the Old Testament, to the means by which the Almighty secures the deliverance of His people, not the destruction of His enemies.' *Revelation*, pp. 269-70.

A. Plummer says similarly. "The 'kings of the east' are certainly the forces ranged on the side of God. Many writers see an allusion to Christ and the saints. The sun is a frequent figure of Christ in Scripture (of. Mai. iv. 4; Zech. iii. 8 and vi. 12 LXX; Lu. 1. 78 also ch. vii. 2; xii. 1; xxii. 16). The kings of the east may thus be identified with the armies of ch. xix. 11-16." "*Revelation*," p. 395.

To be consistent in applying the literary principle of parody which John continually uses is a safeguard against erroneous interpretations. He makes even Christ's enemies to speak for Christ in so far as he described them in terms reminiscent of Him. Thus many commentators point out that, "... Die Worte: 'es war und ist nicht und wird wieder sein' klingen wie eine demonische Nachaffung des Gottestitels; 'der war und der ist und der kommt!'" Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 145. [. . . The words: 'it was, and is not, and will come again' sound like a demonic counterfeit of God's titles: 'he was, and he is, and he comes'. . . "] Similarly the principle of contrast whereby John places the beast against the Lamb, and the whore against the woman clothed with the sun, and Babylon against Jerusalem, also makes for safety of interpretation. In Rev. 16:12, this principle is used by John to place "the kings of the east" in opposition to "the kings of the whole world." It is not an instance of parody. Such cases are clearly shown to be such by their context.

9. Euphrates is first referred to as *nhr* in Joshua 24. The word itself means a stream, sea, flood, or river. Many verses describe the Euphrates as the boundary line between Israel's land and Babylon. See Joshua 24:2-3, 14-15; Gen. 15:18, etc. See Isa. 8:7,8 as a typical example of the use of the word with reference to a catastrophic invasion by Assyria. The same symbolism is used by Daniel and by John. See Dan. 9:26; 11:40 and Rev. 12:15-16. Thus it is not unlikely that the writer of Revelation by his reference to Euphrates in Rev. 16 points to the same war as mentioned in 17:14. The waters are distinctly declared to be "people and multitudes and nations and tongues" who are hostile to the people of God. Rev. 17:15.

10. See Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 324. Farrer sums up the symbolism aptly: "The spirits bring the kings to Har-Megedon, that is, Mount Megiddo. No such mountain name was ever current. Megiddo is a town on the southern side of the Esdraelon Plain, the nearest of known cities to the foothills of Carmel. 'Mount Megiddo' would have to designate Carmel. . . . St. John wants to refer to Megiddo and to Carmel in one breath. Ahab, a renegade Anointed, or Antichrist, and husband of Jezebel (see ii. 20) 'sent unto all the children of Israel and gathered the prophets' of Baal and Ashtaroth 'together unto Mount Carmel.' . . . there to try their strength against the Lord God of Elijah, and to perish by the sword. And . . . Ahab was himself to perish likewise on the day when a lying spirit in the mouths of false prophets enticed him and his allies. . . . The author of Chronicles transfers the exact circumstances of Ahab's death to the death of Josiah. He defied a true warning, he fought against God. . . he was shot by archers at Megiddo. . . . There was a great lamentation for him. . . . The lamentation of Megiddo appears to be taken up by Zechariah. . . where 'all the families of the land mourn', because they have 'looked on him whom they pierced'. Now we know from Rev. 1:7 (cf. xi. 9) what St. John made of this text. So in sum, Mt. Megiddo stands in his mind for a place where lying prophecy and its dupes go to meet their doom; where kings and their armies are misled to their destruction; and where all the tribes of the earth mourn, to see him in power, whom in weakness they had pierced. For there the stars in their courses fight against princes, and the flood of destruction sweep them away (Judges v. 19-21)." *ad loc.*

11. H. B. Swete, *Apocalypse*, p. 257.

12. A. Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 177.

13. W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, p. 196.

14. W. Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, pp. 196-97.

15. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," p. 273.

16. See "Revelation," pp. 707-08.

17. Leon Morris, *Revelation*, p. 197.

18. T. F. Glasson, *Revelation*, p. 92.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

20. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 298.

21. C. Wordsworth, *Miscellanies, Literary and Religious*, vol. 1, pp. 437-38.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

1. Isbon T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 673.

2. T. F. Torrance, *Apocalypse*, pp. 126-27.

3. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 142.

4. A. Farrer, *Revelation*, pp. 173-74.

5. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," p. 260.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

7. W. A. Criswell, *Revelation*, vol. 3, pp. 82-83.

8. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 306.

9. Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, p. 678.

10. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," pp. 257-58.

11. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 262.

12. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 311.

13. F. F. Bruce, "The Revelation to John," *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 656. Mounce, Little, and others agree.

14. M. Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 314.

15. L. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 191.

16. R. C. H. Lenski, *Revelation*, p. 462. See also G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 200.

17. Dr. C. J. Vaughan, *Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, cited in W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, pp. 266-69.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

1. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, pp. 261-62.
2. C. H. Little, *Revelation*, p. 161.
3. F. F. Bruce, "The Revelation to John," p. 656.
4. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 271. P. Minear comments on verse 15 thus, "They are at the point of falling asleep. Christ threatens their drowsiness with his own thief-like coming. Christ wants them to realize where they are standing, precisely between the call to battle and the assembling of the soldiers. The issue is whether they will answer the frog's call or the Messiah's. For them neutrality is impossible. If we assume that the rest of the paragraph deals only with forces external to the Church, the interjection makes no sense. But if we adopt the opposite assumption—that the paragraph deals with forces which penetrate the internal life of the Church—the interjection makes full sense." *New Earth*, p. 149. He continues, "It is located at a highly dramatic moment, between the sixth and seventh items in the series and between the call to battle and the response. There could not be a sharper contrast between blessedness and the work of the demonic spirits. The saying reveals the terrible danger in which the unsuspecting Christian stands." *Ibid.*, p. 150.
5. C. H. Little says, "V. 16 gives an account of the gathering together of the antichristian powers for the great battle against Almighty God. The subject here is without doubt the three unclean spirits just described as like frogs. The battle itself is not here described; but the name of the place of this gathering together is given in the Hebrew as Armageddon. This does not denote a geographical location, but refers to the great battlefield against all the forces of evil in which will occur their final and utter defeat. This battle on the divine side is described in 19:11 ff." *Revelation*, p. 167.

6. By A. Y. Collins. See p. 37 particularly.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

8. **Isa. 51:11-16:**

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

"I, I am he that comforts you;
who are you that you are afraid of man who dies,
of the son of man who is made like grass,
and have forgotten the LORD, your Maker,
who stretched out the heavens
and laid the foundations of the earth,
and fear continually all the day
because of the fury of the oppressor,
when he sets himself to destroy?
and where is the fury of the oppressor?"

He who is bowed down shall speedily be released;
he shall not die and go down to the Pit,
neither shall his bread fail.

For I am the LORD your God,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—
the LORD of hosts is his name,
And I have put my words in your mouth,
and hid you in the shadow of my hand,
stretching out the heavens
and laying the foundations of the earth,
and saying to Zion, "You are my people."

Isa. 51:21-23:

Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted,
who are drunk, but not with wine:

Thus says your Lord, the LORD,
your God who pleads the cause of his people:
"Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering;
the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more;
and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors,
who have said to you, 'Bow down, that we may pass over';
and you have made your back like the ground
and like the street for them to pass over."

Mai. 3:17:

"They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him."

Psa. 27:5:

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon a rock.

Isa. 26:20-21:

Come, my people, enter your chambers,
and shut your doors behind you;
hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past.
For behold, the LORD is coming forth out of his place
to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity,
and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her,
and will no more cover her slain.

Isa. 30:29,30:

You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and tempest and hailstones.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

1. For example, Little asserts: "It is a serious mistake to take Babylon as a symbol for Rome, as is done by many commentators. Such reference fails completely, as this Babylon embraces the whole world. From of old, Babylon has been a symbol of human greatness in antithesis to divine glory. It is employed here in opposition to Zion, the city of God. This Babylon is the antichristian city or empire built up by the two beasts and the demons from the abyss, exerting its evil power in all fields of human culture and authority, paving the way for the glorification of humanity as over against God, and thus leaving no room for Christianity and sentencing it to death." *Revelation*, p. 146.

2. Says Andre Feuillet, "If our exegesis is correct, the words of 11:8, "where their Lord was also crucified" besides being fully supported by the manuscript tradition, are perfectly in place, insofar as, in the first prophetic section of the Apocalypse, the great city condemned by God is not Rome, but incredulous Jerusalem." *Apocalypse*, p. 61.

3. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," pp. 285-86. An older commentary writes: "The woman sitting on the seven implies the Old and New Testament Church conforming to, and resting on, the world power, the seven world kingdoms. Abraham and Isaac dissembling as to their wives, through fear of kings of Egypt, foreshadowed this. Cf. Ezek. xvi. and xxiii., on Israel's whoredoms with Egypt, Assyria, Babylon; Matt. vi. 24; xxiv. 10-12, 23-26; Col. iii. 5, on the New Testament Church's harlotry--viz., distrust, hatred, treachery, party divisions, false doctrine." A. R. Fausset, "Revelation," p. 712. P. Carrington adds, ". . . the words here [into the Desert] link this Vision with that of the Woman in Heaven, with which it forms so striking a contrast. We can see this at once when we set the particulars side by side.

The True Israel

The False Israel

The Bride	The Harlot
The Mother of the Messiah	The Persecutor of the Messiah.
Persecuted by the Red Dragon	Seated upon the Scarlet Beast
Clothed in heavenly glory	Clothed in worldly luxury.

This contrast has been noticed by commentators; but they do not see how impossible it makes the

identification of Babylon with Rome. The first figure later on reappears as the New Jerusalem; this one must be the Old Jerusalem. . .

"In any case, Rome cannot fairly be described as a Harlot, though she may very fairly be symbolised as a Beast. It is true, as Dr. Charles points out, that Nahum calls Nineveh a Harlot, and Isaiah calls Tyre a Harlot; but this is done casually; it is not the characteristic symbol of a heathen city. As against these two texts, we find that all through the prophets, beginning from Hosea, faithless Israel is called a Harlot or False Bride; it is to be found everywhere." *Revelation*, p. 276. ". . . the Heads belong to the Beast, not to the Woman, and therefore identify him, not her." *Ibid.*, p. 285. "For the whole long passage is sacrificial, and Babylon is represented as priestly. The Gold with which she is 'plated' (xvii. 4) recalls the Naos; the purple and scarlet recall the veil which hung in front of it; the very name Babylon reminds us that it was a 'Babylonish web,' like the 'Babylonish garment' which Achan stole at Ai, and for which he was 'devoted' to burning, he and his family. The long list of merchandise in xviii. 11-13 is surely a catalogue of materials for building the Temple, and stores for maintaining it.

"The picture of the priestly City as a harlot committing fornication with the surrounding kings is drawn straight from the picture of Ezekiel xvi. and xxiii.; but when he tells us that her lovers will execute her punishment, St. John does so in priestly language, They shall hate the Harlot, and make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh, and burn her with Fire. The eating of the flesh is obviously connected with the sin-offering in which the flesh was eaten by the priests." *Ibid.*, pp. 287-88. "It may appear to us that too much is made of the greatness of Jerusalem; but this is only because it does not fire our imaginations to-day. Jerusalem was perhaps more impressive than Rome. It had its marble temple roofed with gold; and no doubt the palaces of the priests were in the same style. It carried on commerce with the whole world. It was the oldest city in the world with a conscious and continuous history; and what a history! It had faced the archaic empires of Egypt and Babylon; it had come into real power and importance by defeating the successors of Alexander the Great; the leadership of Rome, the New York of its time, was a mere episode. Throughout that long period of time, the whole tract of man's history, as far as it really counts, she had been the elect of God; God had chosen her, and her alone, out of all the nations of the earth; the rest of the earth was in darkness. Now all that glory was to perish.

"It meant far more to a Jew than the fall of Rome; the Jews had seen many Romes pass by and decline into the shadows and oblivion of hell." *Ibid.*, pp. 289-90.

4. W. Milligan, *Lectures*, p. 181.

5. Carl. A. Aubertin, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelations of St. John*, pp. 286-87.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

1. P. Minear, *New Earth*, p. 151.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

3. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 287.

4. J. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 391-92.

5a. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," p. 281. See our discussion regarding Rome and Nero in the introduction to section four (p. 512 . ff.). 5b. *Ibid.*, pp. 292-93.

6. Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 115.

7. I. Williams, *Apocalypse*, p. 345.

8. *Ibid.*

9. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, pp. 306-07.

10. The practical and immediate meaning of verse 4 is suggested by Barclay. "Swete well points out that this cry and challenge do not involve a coming out at a definite moment. They imply a certain 'aloofness of spirit maintained in the very heart of the world's traffic' They describe the essential apartness of the Christian from the world. The commonest word for the Christian in the New Testament is the Greek *hagios*, whose basic meaning is different. The Christian is not conformed to the world but transformed from the world (Romans 12:2). It is not a question of retiring from the world; it is a question of living differently in the world." *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 152.

11. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," pp. 301-02.

12. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, pp. 310-11.

13. I. T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 715.
14. Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 117.
15. J. F. Walvoord, *Revelation*, pp. 262-63.
16. L. F. Were, *The Certainty of the Third Angel's Message*, pp. 78-79.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
18. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. 287.
19. Quoted in I. Williams, *Revelation*, p. 363.
20. W. Barclay, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 154.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
22. P. Carrington, *Revelation*, p. 294.
23. L. Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment*, p. 64.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-64.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

1. T. F. Torrance, *Apocalypse*, p. 154.
2. I. Williams, *Revelation*, p. 372.
3. L. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 227.
4. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 340.
5. Justin Smith, *Revelation*, p. 262.
6. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 342.
7. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," p. 312.
8. F. F. Bruce, *The Time is Fulfilled*, pp. 105-06.
9. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 255.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
11. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 276.
12. Wilbur Smith, "Revelation," p. 1091.
13. T. F. Glasson, *Revelation*, p. 109.
14. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 278.
15. E. Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 257.
16. Cited by E. Hengstenberg, *Ibid.*, p. 261.
17. H. B. Swete, *Apocalypse*, p. 252.
18. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 356.
19. W. Boyd Carpenter, *Revelation*, p. 224.
20. Quoted in I. Williams, *Apocalypse*, p. 385.
21. G. Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 256.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

1. ". . . the dominant tendency in the Church has been to equate the millennium with the life of the Church, and to regard the first resurrection as the death to sin and rising to righteousness characteristic of the life of the Christian community. But this was before apocalyptic literature was understood." Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 123.
2. "Historical Pre-Millennialism has an honourable history reaching back to the first century, but many make the false assumption that the deviations of Dispensationalism have always been part of the Pre-Millennial

system of eschatology." Dale Moody, "The Eschatology of Hal Lindsay," p. 276.

3. O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, pp. 240-41.

4. Chart taken from Amerding and Gasque, *Handbook of Biblical Prophecy*, chapter "Evangelical Alternatives," by J. R. Ross, p. 120.

5 N Barclay, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 191.

6 J W. Montgomery, quoted in Amerding and Gasque, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

7 J R. Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

8 A Hughes, *A New Heavens and a New Earth*, pp. 209-210.

9 Millard J. Erickson, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

10 George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, p. 69. 1

1. M. J. Erickson, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-2.

12. See Alan Richardson's *Dictionary of Theology*, art. "Eschatology."

13. L. F. Were, *The Certainty of the Third Angel's Message*, p. 311.

14. Taken from *ibid.*, pp. 312-13.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 315-16.

16. See Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, pp. 132-33,48,77,90,142. See also W. Milligan, *Revelation*, pp. 126-31, and consider the following from the same writer. "In the new Jerusalem, therefore, we have essentially a picture, not of the future, but of the present; of the ideal condition of Christ's true people, of His 'little flock' on earth, in every age. The picture may not yet be realized in fullness; but every blessing lined in upon its canvas is in principle the believer's now, and will be more and more his in actual experience as he opens his eyes to see and his heart to receive. We have been wrong in transferring the picture of the new Jerusalem to the future alone. It belongs to the past and to the present. It is the heritage of the children of God at the very time when they are struggling with : the world; and the thought of. it ought to stimulate them to exertion and to console them under suffering." pp. 373-74.

17. "Now it is quite true that John did mean at least the fact of his Millennial City to be taken literally. . . ." Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, p. 133.

18. I. T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 726.

19. E. R. Craven, ed., "Revelation," *Lange's Commentary*, p. 390.

20. George Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, pp. 265-66.

21. H. Alford, "Revelation," p. 1088 ff.

22. George Eldon Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 261.

23. S. R. Driver comments, "An evil spirit, supposed to dwell in the wilderness. The word occurs only here in the Old Testament. . . . The rendering scape-goat, derived through Jerome from Symmachus, is certainly incorrect; it does not suit v. 26, and implies a derivation opposed to the genius of the Hebrew language, as though Azazel were a compound word. . . . Moreover, the marked antithesis between for Azazel and for JHVH, does not leave it open to doubt that the former is conceived as a personal being." *Book of Leviticus*, p. 81. Says Dr. M. M. Kalisch, "There can be no doubt whatever that Azazel is a personal, a superhuman, and an evil being--in fact a wicked demon. . . . It was approved of by early Christian writers who identified Azazel with Satan (*Origen*. C. Cels. VI. 43, p. 305 ed. Spencer; *Iren. Adv. Haer.* I, 12; *Epiphan. Haeres XXXIV.* 11), and by many later and modern scholars."--*A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 328, 329. J. Russell Howden comments, "The goat for Azazel, as it is sometimes misleadingly translated typifies God's challenge to Satan.

"Of the two goats, one was for Jehovah, signifying God's acceptance of the sin-offering; the other was for Azazel. This is probably to be understood as a person, being parallel with Jehovah in the preceding clause. So Azazel is probably a synonym for Satan." *Sunday School Times*, Jan. 15, 1927. Says E. W.

Hengstenberg, "The manner in which the phrase 'for Azazel ' is contrasted with 'for Jehovah, ' necessarily requires that Azazel should designate a personal experience and if so, only Satan can be intended. If by Azazel, Satan is not meant, there is no reason for the lots that were cast. We can then see no reason why the decision was referred to God, why the high priest did not simply assign one goat for a sin offering, and the other for sending away into the desert." *Egypt and the Books of Moses*, pp. 170-71. "And one lot for Azazel' (Lev. xvi. 8)--It seems impossible to dissent from the opinion that 'Azazel, ' instead of being a name

for the (e)scape goat, is the name or title of an evil Being, opposed to Yahweh, to whom the live goat on the great Day of Propitiation was sent. Admitting so much, it still remains to enquire into the meaning of this very peculiar but impressive ceremony of sending the live goat to Azazel. Assuming that Satan is represented by Azazel--and there does not appear anything else which biblically we can assume—it is most important to observe that there is here no sacrifice offered to the evil spirit."--J. B. Rotherham, *The Emphasized Bible*, vol. 3, p. 918. "On the goat lots are to be cast, one for Jehovah, and the other for Azazel. The translation dismissal in the R. V. mg. here (cf. removal in A.S.V. mg.) is inadmissible, being based on a false etymology. What the word meant is unknown, but it should be retained as the proper name of a wilderness demon." *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, p. 289.

24. *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 5, p. 471.

25. Quoted from R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 358. Simcox writes, "If the question be theologically open, it appears that, as a matter of opinion, the literal sense is to be preferred: 'when the literal sense will stand, that furthest from the letter is the worst.' Can anyone honestly say, that Satan has been bound during the time (already far more than a thousand years) that the kingdom of Christ on earth has already existed? that he deceives the nations no more till the present dispensation approaches its end in the days of Antichrist? It is far easier to hold that he will be bound for a long time (probably more rather than less than a thousand literal years), after Antichrist has been overthrown, but before the actual end of the world. "As with the Millennium, there is the question whether the First Resurrection is to be understood literally. In fact, the interpretation of these words, literally or otherwise, is the turning-point of the Millenarian controversy. "The plain meaning of the words is, that after the overthrow of Antichrist, the Martyrs and other most excellent Saints will rise from the dead: the rest of the dead, even those finally saved, will not rise till later. But at last, after the Millennium, and after the last short-lived assault of Satan, all the dead, good and wicked, will rise. "Now no Christian doubts that the second or general Resurrection described in v. 12 will be literally realised. It is therefore very harsh to suppose that the first is of a different kind. Such is, however, the view which since St Augustine's time has been usually adopted by Catholic theologians." W. H. Simcox, " *Revelation*," p. 237.

26. ". . . it contains no specific indication that their reign with Christ takes place on earth. ..." R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 351

27. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

28. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 257.

29. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 356.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

31. For those who may still have doubt regarding the correct exegetical approach to this chapter, the testimony of A. Reese may be of help.

"I have had to lay aside a plan dealing with the complete victory in modern exegesis of the plain, literal interpretation of Rev. xx. 1-6; even an abridgement of it has had to be omitted. I can only hope for leisure to write a tract showing the revolutionary change of attitude in the exegetes of Germany, Britain, and America to the vision of the millennium. Here one can but make the arbitrary statement that the postmillennial interpretation of Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and the majority of the Church's theologians ever since, is now as dead as Queen Anne, and just as honorably buried. Though one remembers seeing an American theologian, clad in medieval armour, contending valiantly for the faith--'on the grave thereof,'

"Peake's commentary on the Bible says that the figurative or allegorical interpretation is 'dishonest trifling,' and 'playing with terms,' which is excessively severe. Dr. Beckwith, in a commentary that reminds one again and again of Alford's great work, says of the non-literal interpretations: 'Recent scholars are very generally agreed in rejecting such interpretations as impossible' (p. 738). The voice of modern scholarship is fairly represented in the verdict of Dr. S. D. F. Salmond in his great work, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality* (p. 352):-

'However the circumstance is to be accounted for, and however it is to be related to the general teaching of the New Testament, it must be admitted that this remarkable paragraph in John's Apocalypse speaks of a real millennial reign of Christ on earth together with certain of His saints, which comes in between a first resurrection and the final judgment.'

"Dr. Salmond's testimony gains in weight from the consideration that he resists the millennial interpretation all through his exposition of the Scriptures. But when he comes to the classic passage he lays down his arms.

"The same setting-aside of the figurative or allegorical interpretations from the hoary past is to be found in *The Century Bible*, *The Cambridge Bible*, *The Cambridge Greek Testament*, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, *The International Critical Commentary*, and in Peake's Hartley Lecture series. In Germany it is the same story; Bousset in the Meyer series; Holtzmann-Bauer in the *Handkommentar*, Lohmeyer in the

Handbuch, Weiss-Heitmliller in the Seriften, Theodor Zahn in his own series, and Adolph Schlatter in his Erlauterungen--all proceed upon the presupposition that the figurative interpretations have passed away. So also the N.T. Theologies there. (Peine, Holtzmann, Schlatter, and Zahn.)

"In one or two cases the writers rationalize; but the argument is unaffected. It is conceded that the Apocalypse presupposes that the Lord will begin to reign in power at His Coming.

"Not only that; the world's scholarship is telling us that Paul has the doctrine of a kingly rule of Christ. . . between the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the absolute End, when the Son gives up the sovereignty to God; there is agreement between Paul and John, except that Paul is silent on the length of the Messianic reign. This is substantially the position taken by Johannes Weiss, Schmiedel, Lietzmann, Bousset, Bachmann, and Schlatter respectively, in the series mentioned above. There is no space even to quote the verdict of H. J. Holtzmann to the same effect, after surveying German and foreign exegesis and theology on the great passage in 1 Cor. xv. 22-8 (*Lehrbuch der Neutest. Theologie*, vol. 2, p. 228). There is less need to do this since there are two or three works in English that give the gist of German exegesis; first *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, by Dr. Albert Schweitzer (chap. v. 'Eschatology'); the second is Peake's paraphrase of that passage in Paul, in his Commentary. Cf. Thackeray's *The Relation of St. Paul to Contemporary Jewish Thought*. Dr. Peake, it may be said, was quite frigid on programmes of the End; indeed, in his *Plain Thoughts on Great Subjects* (pp. 118-121) he discusses the necessity of surrendering (to the Anthropologists) the whole conception of the Second Coming; though he makes the valuable admission that 'the reappearance of Christ in bodily presence on earth involves no more difficulties than His departure from it.'" Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pp. 306-07.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

1. The writer is indebted to Henry Bartsch for this insight.
2. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 261.
3. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 305.
4. *Ibid.*
5. W. G. Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*, p. 412.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

1. G. E. Ladd, "Revival of Apocalyptic in the Churches," *Review and Expositor*, p. 265. Ladd continues, "Both the Old Testament (Isa. 65:17; 66:22) and the New Testament (II Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1) speak of new heavens and a new earth as the final dwelling place of the redeemed. The biblical idea of redemption always includes the earth. Biblical thought sees an essential unity between man and nature. The earth is not merely the indifferent theater on which man lives out his life but is an expression of the divine glory. The Bible nowhere holds forth the hope of a bodiless, non-material, pure 'spiritual' redemption as did Greek thought. The earth is the divinely ordained scene of human existence. Furthermore, the earth has been involved in the evils which sin has incurred. There is an interrelation of nature with the moral life of man; therefore the earth must also share in God's final redemption. The human heart, human society, and all of nature must be purged of the effects of evil that God's glory may be perfectly manifested in his creation. In a real sense of the word, the world participates in man's fall. The world is affected by man's sin. The world was designed to reflect the glory of God and to provide the setting for happy human existence; 'the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and even the fish of the sea are taken away' (Hos. 4:3). The divine judgment falls not only on man but on the world; but beyond judgment is redemption—a new creation." *Ibid.* Says W. Milligan, "Many may doubtless think that such a hope is too earthly, too material, to be suited to the spiritual nature of the Christian dispensation. They fear that it has a tendency to withdraw us from Him who is in 'spirit, 1 and who must be worshipped, if He is to be worshipped acceptably, in spirit and truth." But any such apprehension is at variance with the fundamental fact of our Christian faith, the incarnation of our Lord, and is little less than the revival of the old Manichean heresy that matter is essentially evil. Two errors have existed, and may exist, in the Church upon this point. We may strip the Gospel of its spiritual element, and may reduce it to a system of outward and material forms, or we may strip it of its material element, and may resolve it into a vague and shadowy mysticism. Both are the errors of extremes, and it would be difficult to say which has wrought most havoc in the Church. If the one was disastrous in the days of the supremacy of Romanism, the other is hardly less disastrous now. To the false and spurious spiritualism which it engenders we owe not a few of the most serious misconceptions of the present time with regard to the person of Christ, the Church, the Sacraments, and the purpose of redemption as a whole." *Revelation*, pp. 355-56.

2. Simcox comments, "This is the new Jerusalem of which the earthly city is an imperfect copy; see on iv. 6, vi. 9 for the heavenly Temple. While this world lasts, this true Jerusalem is above (Gal. iv. 26); and we only know its nature from the earthly copy of it, before Christ came, and the spiritual approach to it (Heb. xii. 22) since. But in the days here described, it will be realised on earth in all its perfection." *Revelation*, p. 191. He continues later, "The new Jerusalem is on earth, though on the new earth: this does not therefore prove that the heavenly temple of xi. 19 & c. has ceased to exist. But He Who dwells from all eternity in that Temple will dwell to all eternity in the new Jerusalem; and will dwell there so manifestly, that there will be no need of an earthly figure of that Temple to symbolise His presence, or aid men to realise it. . . ." "Notice that the new Jerusalem is not the only inhabited part of the new earth, but only its centre and capital, as the earthly Jerusalem was in chap. xx." *Ibid.*, p. 198.
3. D. Thomas, "Revelation," *Pulpit Commentary*, pp. 539-40.
4. W. Simcox, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-02.
5. G. E. Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 288.
6. K. Strand, *Interpreting. . . Revelation*, p. 45.
7. J. Massyngberde Ford, "Revelation," p. 368.
8. A. Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 368.
9. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 284.
10. C. Erdman, *Revelation*, p. 178.
11. R. H. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 393.
12. Works, 26:162. See also *Ibid.*, p. 164.
13. W. Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 390.

FOOTNOTES FOR THE APPENDIX ON AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND TEXT OF THE APOCALYPSE

1. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 40-41.
2. "All that we can say with fair certainty is that the book was written by a Christian named John, who was for a time banished to the island of Patmos." Glasson, *Revelation*, p. 4. Kiddle's statement is well-known: "No subject of Biblical studies has provoked such elaborate and prolonged discussion among scholars as that of the authorship of the five books of the New Testament which are traditionally ascribed to 'John' (the Fourth Gospel, the three Epistles of John, and Revelation). And no discussion has been so bewildering, disappointing, and unprofitable. The student who attempts to follow the innumerable lines of enquiry is soon caught in a maze of conflicting arguments brought forward to support the rival theories, and invariably finds himself unable to reach any definite conclusion concerning the authorship of at least some, if not all, of the books concerned. In fact, it is quite impossible to determine the authorship of any of these books from the available evidence." *Revelation*, p. xxxiii. Kittmel says: "We know nothing more about the author of the Apocalypse than that he was a Jewish-Christian prophet by the name of John. For he cannot be identical with John the son of Zebedee, if the son of Zebedee died as a martyr long before the end of the first century. ..." *Introduction*, p. 331. Preston and Hanson agree. They ask the question, "Who wrote Revelation?" and reply, "The answer must be simply--John." *Revelation*, p. 23. Despite this uniformity of opinion, some recent scholars seem to have second thoughts about the possibility of improving upon mere "John" as the answer to the quest. See Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 4-5; Farrer, *Revelation*, pp. 1-3. Caird thinks that the weight of the evidence is against the common authorship of the gospel and the Apocalypse but records his conviction that the language difference is not decisive. Farrer, characteristically, is more thorough-going in voting for the Apostle. Leon Morris believes the evidence for Kummel's objection to be scanty, and inclines towards Stauffer's position. See Morris' *Revelation*, pp. 25-34.
3. But see Morris, *Ibid.*, p. 27 f.
4. Otto Piper, "Johannesapokalypse," col. 829. [On the other hand the arguments against this tradition in recent times have been considerably weakened since scholars have argued for a common author of the Apocalypse and the Gospel of John. The assertion of the incompatibility of both books is strongly overstated and gives too much credit to the comparison of the language. Both have over against the remaining N.T. a whole number of central ideas in common.]
5. *Ibid.*, col. 830. [In conclusion, one may say that the argument regarding the apostolic authorship of the Apocalypse still contains a series of unresolved problems.]
6. Rev. 1:9; 2:13; 2:10; 6:9; 3:10; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 16:6; 20:4. 7. See Rev. chs. 2 and 3. 8. Adv. Haer. v.

30:3. 9. 0. Piper, *op. cit.*, col. 830. [The various attempts to find evidence for the date rest in part on faulty exegesis, and in part on the fact that the cited passages are not clear enough. Nevertheless, mention of renewed strengthening of the Jewish animosity against the Christians and the indications of Christian 82b persecutions discloses that the text, as Irenaeus already assumed, was written around the end of the rule of Domitian (+96).] Cf. D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 949: "although the main purpose of the book may be considered apart from the question of date, this question is not unimportant in the quest to ascertain the precise historical background, nor is it entirely irrelevant for arriving at a satisfactory interpretation of the book. The most widely held view is that this Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian, more precisely towards the end of that reign, i.e. AC 90-95. . . ." See also Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 34-40; Ktimmel, *Introduction*, pp. 327-29; Preston and Hanson, *Revelation*, pp. 25-27; Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 5-6, *et al.*, all of whom agree with the preceding references. A. Feuillet believes that the book was written in Domitian's reign but issued as though produced in the time of Vespasian. See NTS, IV (1957-58), p. 183 ff. The position of C. C. Torrey regarding authorship during the days of Galba is not widely held today. See his *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven, 1958), p. 58 ff. Despite all that we have said, we wish to emphasize that the dating of this book is not a closed question. J. AT. Robinson's recent work, *Redating the New Testament* is worthy of study in this regard.

10. M. Rist, "The Revelation of St John the Divine" (IB), XII, p. 357.

11. G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. v.

12. "It is surprising how seldom these divergencies create any serious doubt about the sense intended, or affect the English rendering." Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 51. "On the whole, the text of Revelation is fairly certain. A majority of the variants appear to deal with the curious solecisms in which the book abounds . . . ; scribes from time to time endeavoured particularly to correct the author's grammar in the matter of gender, number, and case of noun and adjective, and in that of mood and tense of the verb." J. W. Bowman, "Revelation, Book of," *IBP*, IV, p. 70.

13. Similarly there are no certain grounds for holding that the book contains fragments of other works incorporated into its own structure. Such theories are handicapped by "overprecision and arbitrary canons of literary criticism," according to Moffatt. See Introduction to the *Literature of the New Testament*, p. 491. According to Kiddle, "... many other unhelpful and unnecessary theories, and the unconvincing attempts to mutilate the text which commonly accompany them, can be avoided when John's mind and purpose are correctly understood." *Revelation*, p. xxxii. For a very thorough discussion of such questions, see Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, pp. 216-39. 324

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